

INTERVIEW WITH DONNA HARAWAY

August 27, 2019

This month, Yesmar Oyarzun and Aadita Chaudhury interviewed Donna Haraway about her presentation at the 1994 conference, the Anthropocene, advice on paper presentations, and more. The following is a transcript:

Yesmar Oyarzun (YO): So, I'll just start, dive right into questions. And the first one is: at the 1994 4S conference in New Orleans you gave a talk called "Never modern, never been, never ever: Some thoughts about Never-Never Land in science studies," which is a fabulous title- and some of that has been lost to history- but can you tell us a little bit about the paper?

(0:27)

Donna Haraway (DH): Well I tried to reconstruct the paper. I actually wrote that one, which is unusual for me, but I think that the, you know, there were some Demons of Revenge because it's disappeared from all of my files, but I do remember that it was a kind of engaged friendship with Bruno LaTour in particular and his very generative little book *We Have Never Been Modern* which I, as well as many other people, learned a great deal from. And Bruno had become both a friend and a colleague and a kind of a, not a frenemy exactly, but a person to tussle with, a person who I love dearly and I think (uh, you know) we both really valued- I *know* we both really treasured each other's friendship and it was very warm and very affectionate and also intellectually a kind of um, some very interesting frictions between us. And that this paper was my resp-, you know, "Some thoughts about Never-Never Land in Science Studies" was my engagement with Bruno that said "Yes, this is for a long time now you have been completely tone-deaf to intersection feminist theory, to feminist science studies, to non-Western thinking, in spite of an occasional example in your writing. You continue to draw on particular kinds of (?) scholarly sources, a sort of masculinist, individualist, war as the fundamental trope, and you (ruin?) what you're setting out to do." You can't do the kind of (vanity and ?? modern) and propose what he now call love of the earth. Love, I think Bruno was working toward very much in 1994. Do you need your practices and network-based thinking about knowledge making including the sciences unless you engage with the other social movements that are at the root of science studies, most certainly including intersectional feminist science studies- the kind that I think Patricia Hill Collins, and myself, and Sandra Harding, and Evelynnn Hammonds, and Leigh Star, and and and... And I think that at that time in Bruno's work (not true now, he's made some really big changes), at that time in Bruno's work he systematically did not cite any of us. People like Leigh Star and I and others were quite angry about the masculinism of it all and I, that paper was... I tend to work with laughter as my fundamental method and it's a genuine laughter at the absolute absurdity of all of us making these claims that sound like we actually know something. And you know the laughter is also a very serious method that tries, without thinking that I myself or any of us are innocent of the very things we're criticizing, a kind of an invitation to somehow join with each other in something better than what we've already done. And I think that the exploration of the device of the fantasy of being

modern, with Bruno is an early think piece that's not turning into an English sentence. Bruno thought early and deep about that, but I really felt that his citation was, um, indicated a kind of brain damage, if that makes sense. So, you know, I think Bruno took it in a kind of angry, friendly vain, and we have remained very, if anything, ever deepening friends, but this has been a tussle for decades, this particular issue.

(4:37)

Aadita Chaudhury (AC): Okay. Basically I wanted to ask you about your talk from that year, which was described as "the star performance" and when you really, you know, took the STS world by storm. Did you think, at the time, that you were making a serious field-disrupting intervention?

(4:59)

DH: Well, of course not and I still find it hard to get my mind wrapped around that. Although, I do know now, and I knew a little bit then, that when I speak in public performance, there is a kind of charismatic performance that goes on that sweeps people into some kind of shared emotional and intellectual experience and I don't know how it happens. But I think as we get older we each kind of learn what our gifts and weaknesses are and I, I knew that that, um I knew that that was how I worked even then and I was happy to use it as I could. And I thought, in spirit, that particularly in that period, Adele Clarke and Leigh Star and Evelyn Hammonds and me and Sandra Harding, I particularly in that period- and Lucy Suchman (my god)- [saw] that we were a "we" in some profound sense. We were coming into a power that we had created for each other and sustained for each other and it's not that in some way we were in profound opposition to the men in our field, we weren't, but that there was a kind of intersectional feminist power going on that I felt like several of us were performing by the mid-90s and bringing people with us.

(6:32)

YO: And so one of the few terms that I will steal from the software industry is "disruption" and part of what made that moment so important and so powerful and memorable is that it was a moment of Disruption where you were able to challenge big ideas that were widely accepted at the time and ones we kind of championed and not questioned. And so what current mainstream or mainstream STS ideas should we be challenging right now?

(7:07)

DH: Well I know. I mean, that's a thing. Anna Tsing is my close friend and colleague and you know, *Mushroom at the End of the World* is to die for. And anyway, Anna and I were doing a joint gig recently and we joked with it. You know, you know something about something and you put it out there for a public and then you get lots of questions about other things you know nothing whatsoever about and you have to pretend like you do. And so I feel a little bit like that. That said, and I have lots of opinions about this question. I think that we live in very scary times, profoundly scary times of a kind of resurgent, racist, misogynist, nationalist, murderous world in which the forced migrations of so many human beings are almost uncountable and the forced migrations of the more-than-humans as well; the forced homelessness; the forced destruction of pathways and ports and welcome; the forced destruction of refuge. And there has never been a time where forced [?], trying to understand other times of forced migration and genocide, and the role of the sciences in that, the ongoing role of the sciences in militarism. But I don't- that's not my fundamental focus here. I think that it's very important to try to

understand what we've inherited, "we" meaning Earthlings, and what is unprecedented, And science studies, along with just about everybody else, I think every serious person certainly ever serious scholar needs to be paying serious attention, again going back to Bruno, his landing on Earth, that most recent book of his (most recent one I've read since I started this engagement with him) is his ferocity and attention and urgency around the dilemma of massive formations of people in power and practices have, or an active denial what it would actually take for us to share this Earth in some way that is for flourishing and ongoingness. And I'm avoiding the word "sustainability" because it's so contaminated, but it's not a bad word. It's this kind of ongoingness, committedness to sharing this Earth. There are astonishing forces arrayed in active denial and we three all live in Trumplandia right now, and so we wake up in the morning to an offer to buy Greenland so we can exploit fossil fuels and uranium, to a removal of the rule that limited the incarceration of migrant children, to the dismantling of one more conservation measure, to on and on. We wake up on a daily basis and I mean I have deep friends and former students in Brazil who write me about Bolsonaro, and we can look at Turkey, and Hungary, and for that matter France. On and on we go. You know I just got back from Columbia where my colleagues and friends are in still hope, but deeper and deeper worry that the hardwon, flawed, but real peace agreement with the FARC that muted the paramilitaries for a time is unraveling and there is heightened danger. And I think science studies has a great deal to offer in this, including thinking hard about what constitutes safety, what constitutes order for some people and [?] people, how to work with what we've got, but also how to design and think and develop practices with each other. And science studies scholars, as a group, are oftly good at knowing how to describe, theorize, work with, offer an understanding of practices, both old and new. And so I think we should just get on with it.

(11:54)

AC: And I think this is a really great place to ask you the next question, understanding that science studies has a place, an emergent place, in the global order of knowledge making and knowledge-based practices. In 2016, you published your two most recent books, *Manifestly Haraway* and *Staying with the Trouble*, and in them, you refer to this moment that we're in as part of various "-cenes", so the Capitalocene, the Chthulucene, etc., where others have been using "Anthropocene." Would you say that you're calling for a complete turn away from Anthropocene discourse or are you somebody who is adding to it or challenging it?

(12:41)

DH: I thought a lot about that. I wish the term had never been invented, but it was, and it has been adopted by many communities of practice. It does a huge amount of work. There is no, I think it would be foolish to pretend that one, a person situated such as I am could operate without that term. And I'm always a little of a both-and kind of girl. I want the litter to get bigger rather than produce a kind of prohibition on something and kick it out of the litter. And I'm interested in other ways of thinking of events, time-space we're in where it channels a thick present, not an instantaneous one, a present of indefinite boundaries. [?] Clearly, if I had to choose between Anthropocene and Capitalocene, I would choose Capitalocene because I think it makes it very clear we're talking about a real system that was invented about 500 years ago (that's a horrible cartoon version), but it's not all the time everywhere and it's not all of the people swept into capitalist practices and modes of value creation and value extraction. But a serious understanding of the Capitalocene in the way Jason Moore does is absolutely necessary. And then Anna and I and colleagues in Denmark thought we had invented the term "Plantationocene," but I know because there were [?] feminists and African American feminists who pointed out ferociously that how dare we use that term without bringing Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter back into the conversation that we alluded to slavery- I anyway I think I'm more guilty about this than Anna- alluded to

slave gardens because I knew they were very important, but I didn't cite the named scholarship of the folks who had done the work. Or that the Plantationocene is choosing somehow, that is, not just the word but the conceptual understanding of the absolute, fundamental, Earth-changing worlding of (thickly) the Atlantic-based slave trade and all that it brought with it can't be named this, of forced labor and substitution, and displaced plants and broken ties of generations. See I think what characterizes the Plantationocene is the breaking of care of generations, that what human beings and other-than-human beings are robbed of is the capacity to take care of their children, or the breaking of generations so as to extort, to force them into systems of reproduction rather than generativity and the [?] of production are the apparatuses for creation and extraction of value and the plantationocene was a fatal invention. So, for example, you guys probably also read the amazing series in the New York Times last week or in the last couple of weeks, uh "1619" [?] in relation to the importation of hereditary forced West African slavery into the continent to the English colonies. Their was a piece on the plantation that was really really important and I think it should be required reading for everybody. From a science studies perspective, what this piece was doing was explicating [?] showing how many critical technologies, this thing called [?], were invented, and practiced, and consolidated, in the period of Caribbean slavery, Brazilian, Caribbean, or in the period of slavery in that area, in that worlding: double-entry book-keeping, the hierarchies of wards and punishment in labor camps, the particular kinds of relocation of labor so it's never home, the state can define family, the breaking of family. Anyway, I think thinking with the plantation really is really important. And there's a way in which the Anthropocene, and the Capitalocene, though they kind of acknowledge it while rushing right over it and also don't emphasize the absolutely contemporary issues of plantations, most certainly (I mean, obviously) the oil rigs, the deforestation and then supposed reforestation, even carbon budget credits even with the devastation of human beings and other-than-human beings. [?] So Chthulucene from mythology, again a little freakish, not the Chthulu of Lovecraft

but from an evocation of the earth, the critters of the earth. The Chthuluscene is not over and it's not safe, it's not innocent, but it's also not... There's a way in which Plantationocene, Capitalocene, at a time of critique, the Chthulucene is a time of embracing, being embraced by the ongoing generativity of things. All of these words make a hash out of what, I would call it, a serious ethnographic sensibility. I think we talked about this at the conference in Santa Cruz a little bit. For example, climate change is a concept, Anthropocene is a concept, is a southern importation or less hostile, certainly in the circumpolar north who have perfectly good idioms, languages, conceptual apparatuses, historical reflections for dealing with changes in refraction, of stars, changes in the sea ice, the changes in weather organized around the concept of "cilla" or breath, translated that.. these translations don't work. What would it take for the southerners (Canadians, United Statesians) and the northerners to form serious contact zones with their conceptual apparatuses in a way that really lets [?] participate? To really look (at the issue on its face?) and identify who is in the most trouble, be they human or nonhuman. So all of those words don't even begin to discuss things. Some people don't have the words for the emergent categories, indigenous and non- and more-than-indigenous other persons.

[Video switches to different panel orientation]

DH: You guys have switched orientations.

YO: Yes, you are too.

DH: But you didn't actually switch because you're in different places. Oh well, never mind.

YO: I will be presenting at 4S for the first time this year and 4S is also creating better avenues for undergraduate participants to present their work and so do you have any advice for us first-timers who may still be working out the kinks in our presentations?

DH: Oh well, first of all, what are you presenting on? I was curious what your work is.

YO: Sure! So um, I'm presenting on work that I did actually in my masters which is a slightly different type of what I'm working on now, but the presentation is called "Race, Modernity, and Hospitality" and it's a play on hospital and hospitality. I studied international clinical volunteerism in Tanzania.

DH: Oh, where?

YO: I'm sorry?

DH: Where? International volunteers where?

YO: Oh, um in Tanzania.

DH: In Tanzania. Okay, really interesting. And Aadita, are you presenting this time too?

AC: Uh yeah.

DH: What on?

AC: This is my, actually an early dissertation draft, an early dissertation chapter draft. It's going to be about modes of attention and boundaries of ecosystems when it comes to wildfires.

DH: Ah, are you paying particular attention to wildfires in like Alaska, California, Indonesia? Where are you?

AC: Um, I'm currently based out of Toronto, but I did much of my fieldwork in California which is why I was in Santa Cruz.

DH: Did you do any fieldwork last summer?

AC: Uh, not last summer. I actually did all of my fieldwork this year. And, yeah, so I've been thinking about fires, both in ecosystems and outside of ecosystems and the discrepancy of the attention and the modes of attention through which they are filtered and brought forth into the public imagination. That's one of the things that I'm looking at and thinking about. So modes of attention that is entrained when it comes to fire ecologist when they pay attention to the Earth and sort of forensic ways that they reconstruct fires.

DH: Well, I don't exactly have any advice. It's more like my own experience was when I just leapt into what I really cared about, I just did it. It worked because I made it a point very fiercely in my career that if I didn't care about, I didn't write about it; and if I didn't care, life is too short; that finding those points of generativity with and for each other; and forgetting about saying whether it is part of a masters or a dissertation or what have you. Who cares? Rather, leap right into the stuff because that's what matters, that "I'm really passionate about the questions of hospitality that affect international volunteers in health type situations, particularly in East Africa" or "the wildfires that have been burning across so much of the world, most certainly practically all of North America, from [?] to [?], from California to Yellowstone and then down to Zion or right not Zion, but the Grand Tetons. There wasn't a single minute without smoke. And remembering the history of fires that slammed this land that I'm on right this exact minute when they the Amah Mutsun were doing controlled burns and the whole thing with fire. I think of *Born in Flames* too, that little film back when um, mind is blanking on the filmmaker, but you can probably put... Anyway, so my only advice for you and everybody else is that real my only advice is for you and

everybody else is not to tell people where you are professionally particularly unless they ask or what this is part of was part of. "The questions that interest me in this situation are..." You know, go for it. And this also goes back a little bit back to the Chthulucene question from before. I continue to take seriously that little piece I wrote in both friendship and some friction with Sandra Harding that's situating what we know so as to be accountable and responsible for it. And then another kind of little add on is that actually the last book I wrote was the alliance with Adele Clarke and Michelle Murphy and Kim TallBear and Ruha Benjamin and Chia-Ling Wu, and Yu-Ling Huang, and I have this awful feeling I'm leaving someone out, called *Making Kin not Population* which grew out of a 4S presentation where, collectively and from very very different points of view and some real disagreement in our group and some important friction in our group, we felt that we just had to raise again outside boundaries and parameters, the question of human knowledge: distribution, unequal extractions. We had to learn to do it in an anti-racist, non-misogynist, non-Malthusian way because if not us then who? So I feel that way about a lot of our work: if you're not going to do it, then who will?

AC: Yeah I guess in this context, and this touches on pretty much everything we've talked about so far, what do you see as the future of STS, specifically feminist STS? And do you see it as contained by the academic world or going beyond it? And how does this 4S conference and how *can* 4S as a society in general shape this future.

DH: Well it's never been contained by the academic world, but the academic world is a very important... I've never been one to diss scholarship and teaching and, you know, research and the space that universities make and the reclaiming of public universities and holding them to account especially. Private, so called "private" ones too also are heavily subsidized but that's another set of issues. I feel that university-based scholarship and teaching and mentorship and camaraderie remain really important. And intersectional feminist science studies has never been restricted to that space. Quite the opposite. It's always been highly permeable. And many of us have felt that our largest job was to make available the resources of the university to groups with fewer resources. Not all of us feel that way nor do we have to, but to be in connection with the kinds of knowledge-making and action in other communities of practice— be they policy or water defenders or international volunteers or— that being that having attachment sites in other communities really matters. And I think science studies, as a whole, has been pretty good at that. And I think feminist science studies, in particular, has been especially good at it and will continue to be. And I have an origin story about that: science studies, not just feminist science studies. It's not the Edinburgh School and the whatever what have you. It's in activities like science for the people, and activities against chemical and biological warfare, and the Boston Women's Health Collective. Those are *my* origins as a science studies scholar and that *way* predated the official, you know the really important scholarly work, for example by Steve Schankman and other really really wonderful man scholars. I'm not dissing it at all, but I've got a pretty strong sense about how science studies have also and have always been found in many communities of practice. By the way, there's one other little piece of that and that goes back to your question earlier about do I, a 75 year old lady, have any advice and that is: hold on to your peers, the writing groups, the ways you mentor each other. Hold on to your cohort and those collegialships and friendships even if they get really quite difficult. Don't let them dissolve into antagonisms or indifference. Those are the most important lines of sustenance in the next few years. It's gonna come from your cohort. Your mentors are well and great. If you're lucky, you'll have really great mentors but the folks who really are gonna matter the most are your cohort. This is a great place to hook up.

YO: Thank you so much. This is a great conversation and I think it's going to be very helpful for new and old 4Sers, or returning 4Sers in the future and in light of this conference. And so thank you so much for sitting with us and yeah.

DH: And while you're in New Orleans be sure to say hello to Tania Perez and Lucy Suchman for me and others too, but I'm not going to get to be there and I'm missing all my friends.

YO: We will miss you at the conference but thank you for phoning in for us.

DH: And thank you for the interview.

AC: Thank you for your time.

DH: Bye.

*Companions in
Conversation*

The following conversation took place over a three-day period, May 11–13, 2014, at the home of Donna Haraway and Rusten Hogness in Santa Cruz, California. During the previous week, both participants had been involved in conferences referred to during the conversation—Cary Wolfe in the conference *Sciences and Fiction*, organized by the Center for the Study of the Novel at Stanford University, and Donna Haraway at the conference *Anthropocene: Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, organized jointly by Anna Tsing and colleagues in the anthropology department at the University of California at Santa Cruz and in the Aarhus University Research on the Anthropocene (AURA) network in Denmark.

C Y B O R G B E G I N N I N G S

CARY WOLFE: I want to talk about the original context—in whatever way you would like (intellectual, institutional, political)—of the two manifestos, and how that shaped not just the composition and motivations behind the pieces, but also their reception, because obviously a lot of things have changed since 1983, but a lot of things have changed since the “Companion Species Manifesto,” too.

I thought that might help us explore the afterlife of both of these pieces as they bear upon work that people are doing now. So let's start there.

DONNA HARAWAY: Let's start with the "Cyborg Manifesto." I was asked by the *Socialist Review* West Coast Collective, along with several other folks who had identified in various ways as socialist-feminist, Marxist-feminist—a fairly broad understanding of what those formations meant—in the early Reagan years, (we were in the early '80s then) to write a few pages envisioning what was possible, where to move, how to move now, in this conjuncture of what we subsequently look at as the Reagan-Thatcher years. You could no longer not know that the '60s were well and truly over, and that the great hopefulness of our politics and imaginations needed to come to terms with serious troubles within our own movements, within our larger historical moment. What did we think about it? The "Cyborg Manifesto" emerged partly from that invitation. Also, I was asked to prepare a paper, as delegate for the *Socialist Review*, to a meeting in (then) Yugoslavia of the New Left and post-New Left, of the Eastern European and Euro- and American parties. At that meeting I met extremely interesting other Marxist-feminists, as well as other folks attending and working at the conference. We experienced a kind of immediate bonding over issues of who was doing the Xeroxing and who was doing the

Companions in Conversation

speaking—those kinds of things, old-fashioned feminist issues that never go away.

The manifesto grew out of these multiple immediate contexts, but more, it also grew very much out of a sense of being a child of WWII, growing up with a brain educated by Sputnik—that is to say, the fact that the United States was in competition in the space race with the Soviet Union, that produced such things as the National Defense Education Act and textbook revision in the sciences, across the biological sciences and indeed in the social sciences. (My friend Susan Harding is writing about MACOS, Man a Course of Study, the fascinating middle-school curricular reform that came out of the same social conjunctures.)

I had just moved in the early '80s to Santa Cruz, from teaching at Johns Hopkins and before that at the University of Hawaii. The Applied Physics Laboratory at Hopkins and the Pacific Strategic Command in Hawaii made me see the military industrial complex as it is embodied, embedded, in elite research apparatuses and in real places. (There's much more to say about how teaching at Johns Hopkins shaped me, for example, learning the history of the School of Hygiene and Public Health.) I was personally shaped by the embedded institutional and political apparatus of these complex formations of capitalism, militarism, imperialism, and more. Baltimore was also where, with Nancy Hartsock, I experienced a vital Marxist-feminist collective, as well as the Baltimore Experimental High School, where

Companions in Conversation

my lover and later husband, Rusten Hogness, taught and where I came to read and embrace the anarcha-feminism of Marge Piercy. It was a very important period of time for me. I was teaching and learning the history of science, and that has remained very important to me.

And before that, Hawaii. I landed in Hawaii as a biology graduate student from Yale who was riveted by the way that biology is culture and practice, culture and politics, material natureculture—you know, phrases I formed later, but approaches that I was already deeply involved with. And then, in Honolulu, I was married to a gay man, Jaye Miller, who remained the friend of my heart all of his life. But obviously marriage was a bad idea—what were we doing? I decided we were engaged in a fairly innocent form of incest, we were sort of brother and sister—I don't know what we were doing (*laughs*). There we were, from Yale and, you know, in Honolulu, you land on what looks like the New Haven Green, and you understand that this is the Yale–New Haven Green all over again, heir of those of Protestant formations, the Congregationalists, the missionaries, the sugar families, the commercial and religious and political apparatus of American Protestant hegemony. There we were: plantations, colonialism, racial formations, the Pacific Strategic Command in the middle of the Vietnam War, sexual and kin and gender experimentation, vital social movements, including the resurgence of Hawaiian sovereignty movements—all of it, and all of it materially built into the land.

Companions in Conversation

The “Cyborg Manifesto” is a kind of coming together of understanding that I had been formed, as who I am in the world, out of these large and small, intimate and huge matters—way too big to comprehend but lived in the intimate tissues of your own friendships and politics and love affairs and so forth of post-WWII American hegemony. Lived particularly in the forms power took in information-saturated culture, information science-saturated culture and politics, in Command Control Communication Intelligence (C³I). C³I was central to the McNamara plan in the Vietnam War—the particular cybernetic rationalization of war, much of which was run from Hawaii, during the very period of indigenous Hawaiian sovereignty movements, struggles for feminism and reproductive and sexual freedom, and land and labor struggle movements, both Hawaiian and not, with the hotel industry following the movement of plantation agriculture out of Hawaii and the great expansion of the tourist industry. I was formed as a person out of all these things.

And I was and remained always profoundly in love with biology, the critters, the ways of knowing. All of this made me ever more aware of how the way we know the world, including ourselves, is situated historically in particular apparatuses for knowing, so that we know ourselves as a system—an information system, as a system divided by the division of labor. We know ourselves as a heat engine, we know ourselves as a telephone exchange. . . . These things are never mere metaphors—

Companions in Conversation

we really are historically crafted in these knowledge practices. These things may be made, but they are not made up. So the “Cyborg Manifesto” was an effort to come to terms with these converging, even imploding ways of understanding being in the world and being responsible in the world. I was writing as a feminist, a Marxist, a biologist, a teacher, a friend, whatever, at a certain historical moment.

cw: One of the fascinating things to me about the “Manifesto”—and I’m not exaggerating when I say this—is that I’m not sure I can think of any single document in my academic life that has been taken up more variously, let’s just say (*laughs*), by more different audiences (just staying within academia), for more different purposes, than the “Cyborg Manifesto.” And in that way, it’s a document with a different kind of life in many ways from the “Companion Species Manifesto.” And that’s also a product of when the piece was published and famously tracing—you’re right, *at that moment*—those boundary breakdowns that you identified . . .

DH: . . . and recompositions.

cw: And recompositions. But I also think (and this sometimes falls out of some of the more, you might say, futuristic appropriations of the “Manifesto”) it involves how you constantly circle back in the piece to embed all of this in the incredible transformation in the sciences at that time (as you put it, the understanding of biological entities in cybernetic terms as now being “not optional”).

Companions in Conversation

DH: That's right.

cw: But you also embed these plate-tectonic shifts in that discipline, and in cultural studies and feminism as well, within much longer stories, such as "the God-trick" that we're all familiar with.

DH: And in many ways, the sister paper to the "Cyborg Manifesto" is "Situated Knowledges."

cw: Right.

DH: But staying with the "Cyborg Manifesto," I didn't have the language then for saying these things this way, but critique was never enough, because love and rage are the affects, are my affectual relationship to being in the world in this time/space warp in which we find ourselves *now*—whatever you want to call it, this thick and fibrous *now*. How to truly love our age, and also how to somehow live and die well here, with each other? Also, the manifesto was shaped by the ongoing looping through a particular moment of women-of-color feminism, and the call to account by Chela Sandoval and others, of the overly white feminisms of many of "our" visions and understandings, many of *my* formations, of that period. The "Cyborg Manifesto" tries to live with and be accountable to racist formations in and out of feminism, accountable to the deep troubles of socialism in and out of formal Marxist analysis, and so forth. I needed somehow to stay with a nonsimplistic and always troubled sense of being within a politics and being for some worlds and not others.

Companions in Conversation

REFIGURING IRONY

cw: Right. And yet I do think that one of the things that opened the “Cyborg Manifesto” to so many different audiences is a really, really important term in the piece, and that’s the term *irony*.

DH: Yes.

cw: And that’s also very early-’80s.

DH: Yes, non-self-identity . . .

cw: Right, that’s also a very located term in the history of literary criticism of the period that we’re talking about. But I think that the balance in the piece between all of these—between the heartfelt, deep, visceral commitments that you’re voicing right now and being able to maintain this kind of ironic stance in relation to the figure of the cyborg, I think that . . .

DH: . . . that mattered.

cw: Well, I think what it did was to open the “Cyborg Manifesto” to a much broader audience doing many different kinds of appropriations that actually had nothing to do with feminism or Marxism or biology in the minds of the appropriators.

DH: Absolutely right. And, it opened it up to communities of practice, so that it’s taken up by performance artists and many others. I had no idea. I mean, I certainly wasn’t deliberately

writing to those communities, but subsequently, because it was taken up, I've met people engaged in collaborative work of all sorts. And now I do write to and with those audiences. I probably wouldn't today call what I was doing *irony*, in part because the word has this complicated history. But every act of syntax is also a kind of fierce joke on our desire to clarify, to control, to know, to identify. But by the time you reach the end of a sentence, you've said at least six things that aren't true and you don't hold, but to get to the end of the sentence you don't have any choice. You can't simply say what you mean—that's not how language works.

cw: Right, and irony was shorthand for what you would develop as a much more thoroughgoing vocabulary involving lots of the figures that you use in the "Companion Species Manifesto."

DH: Right, absolutely. Well, and remember that when I wrote the "Cyborg Manifesto," I was a brand new faculty member in the History of Consciousness program at UC Santa Cruz, this very interesting formation. I was still trying to learn of lot of contemporary theory in the human sciences, mostly new to me, using words in sentences just to see if I could, like I was in grade school again. In many ways the "Cyborg Manifesto" was trying out some of the knowledges that hadn't been mine that I was getting from my colleagues and the graduate students in the program, and that came to be part of poststructuralism and deconstruction in various ways—some of the theories of Jakob

Companions in Conversation

von Uexküll and Roland Barthes and many others. That paper was also my coming to locate myself in my new playground.

cw: Right. In a set of new discourses . . .

DH: And I made a whole lot of mistakes that turned out sometimes to be kind of happy mistakes. Some of them I made on purpose, because I didn't want to use the stuff the way others seemed to be using it. And some of it was that I really didn't understand and made mistakes that ended up being interesting.

cw: Everybody, of course—especially given the history of your career—everybody thinks of the “Cyborg Manifesto” as a key document in the whole history of feminist thought. But less so in socialist thought. And that has to do, I think, less with what you wrote than with all the overdetermining forces of reception inside and outside the academy that really changed the fortunes of Marxism and socialism within the academy, which up to that point was still a very, very robust tradition. As we've talked about before, Fred Jameson was the first reader on my dissertation, and looking back I now see—and I've told this to many people—that in a way he is, ironically enough, the last European intellectual.

DH: It is ironic, isn't it?

cw: An intellectual of a certain tradition.

DH: Well, I read *The Political Unconscious* at about the time that I wrote the “Manifesto,” too. Foucault was by then an old friend, but not yet Jameson.

Companions in Conversation

cw: Yes, and so, to think about how the fortunes of these things we write depend upon these much larger and quite institutional forces, not just intellectual formations.

DH: Well, and you know, the East Coast *Socialist Review* collective hated the “Cyborg Manifesto” and the Berkeley-located Bay Area *Socialist Review* [SR] collective embraced it, largely because of Jeff Escoffier, who was a really lovely man, deeply political, and a great editor. The manifesto caused immediate controversy at SR, and it caused immediate controversy within feminisms of many kinds, not least because it adamantly refused an anti-science-and-technology stance or vocabulary. My cyborg would have none of that, but it also refused to be a blissed-out technobunny. It refused a nothing-but-critique approach to the vast things that the heavens know needed serious critique (and still do). The nothing-but-critique approach was a temptation in some crucial domains of feminism and New Left socialism. The “Cyborg Manifesto” was a deliberate in-your-face NO to that relation to science and technology, and that caused controversy from the get-go.

cw: Right, and that circles us back to the figure of irony in the piece, but it also accounts for the extremely long life of the “Cyborg Manifesto” in terms of its own relevance. Had you hewed to either of those narratives being held by the people that you upset, the “Cyborg Manifesto” . . .

DH: . . . would have had its moment.

Companions in Conversation

cw: Exactly. Would have been a nice essay, and so on.

DH: But it remains disturbing, and it remains disturbing to me.

cw: Yes.

WORKING TOWARD UNKNOWING

DH: Because it's actually a paper about "both/and," "yes/and," "no/but," "no/and," etc. It is a figure and a paper, a mode of working, and a statement of "Best I can tell, this is not just the way I work, this is how worlding works." And that both/and—but never in a kind of easy way; it's not additive—this kind of meeting each other across serious oppositional difference doesn't resolve into some kind of dialectical resolution. None of the cognitive technologies I inherited has ever been solace enough for that feeling that if you reach the period of the sentence, then you have moved into a precious place of "unknowing," through the relentless pressure of saying and feeling yes/but, both/and.

cw: That's another reason that the piece has had such longstanding relevance: when I go back and read the piece—and this connects you to characters like Foucault and others doing work in continental philosophy at that time, but also to different kinds of pragmatism in North America (mainly of the Left variety)—it was actually a rethinking of what politics is. What do we mean by "the political"? You

Companions in Conversation

could say, “What is political theory?” except part of the force of your point is that *political theory* isn’t the term we want either, because we’re really talking about these practices of constitution, as you would say in your later work. You have a much larger vocabulary for talking about getting on in the world with others, or staying with the trouble, and so forth.

DH: Yes, that we all keep thinking together.

cw: Yes, and so a huge achievement of the piece—and it’s one that you can’t just unilaterally make happen by being intentional about it (hence the importance of how the piece is written, its figural quality)—is that it created this echo chamber or seed bed (to mix my metaphors) for thinking about what “the political” is, which took another twenty or thirty years to fully get out into the world and hook up with other efforts that were going on elsewhere but were still constrained under labels like “socialism.”

DH: Yes, no question. Or feminism, or antiracism.

cw: Or cybernetics, for that matter.

DH: Heaven knows . . .

cw: And so one of the achievements that would not have been possible without this kind of stance—as we said, *irony* is one word, but there are other ways of talking about it—is that it opened up a space in which those aspects of the essay could be taken up and developed by others.

Companions in Conversation

DH: And were.

cw: In a million different directions.

DH: I still get these emails from high school kids saying, “This was assigned to me, I don’t understand it. Would you please explain it?” I mean, high school kids, oh my god! (*Both laugh.*) Mostly, I try to answer those emails, at least a little.

cw: Right—how long do we have here (*laughing*)?!

SITUATING COMPANION SPECIES

cw: I want to move on and talk for a bit about the “Companion Species Manifesto.” Eventually I want to come back to both of the manifestos side by side to talk about how they’ve ramified in related but also very different ways into something that a lot of people are interested in right now—namely, biopolitical thought. But before we do that, I wanted to turn to the “Companion Species Manifesto” and ask you the same kind of question—and you talk about this explicitly in the piece—about the contexts of its composition, the motivations behind it, some of which I know were personal, some of which were political and institutional, but also, again, the context of its reception, because it’s a very different moment in feminism, in academia more broadly, in cultural studies, and so on. There still wasn’t what we now call “Cultural Animal Studies” or “Human Animal Studies.”

Companions in Conversation

DH: Or “Multispecies Studies.”

cw: Or Multispecies Studies, which was well on the way to being composed and cobbled together, but . . .

DH: . . . it didn’t quite exist yet.

cw: Yes, exactly.

DH: Well, like the “Cyborg Manifesto,” the “Companion Species Manifesto” is situated in a historical conjuncture that is felt deeply personally and is simultaneously much more than personal. It is part of a *reworlding*—that science fiction term has been very important to me. It seems to me that it is a term necessary for ordinary thinking, way beyond whatever counts as science fiction, these reworldings. So the “Companion Species Manifesto” comes at a point of no longer being able to write or think without asking, Who are we here? What are we? Who and what are “we” that is not only human? What is it to be companion species at this historical conjuncture, and so what? Who lives and who dies, how, and so what? Here, in this conjuncture?

And *companion species* for me never meant just companion animals, although companion animals are among them, but, rather, the name was at least, like the cyborg, spin-outable, it could be spun out, like silk out of a spider’s abdomen, multiple strong silk threads. We are companions, *cum panis*, at table together. We are those who are at risk to each other, who are each other’s flesh, who eat and are eaten, and who get indigestion,

Companions in Conversation

who are, in Lynn Margulis's sense, in the symbiogenetic conjuncture of living and dying on Earth. We are in a systems world, as in the "Cyborg Manifesto," but more alert to *sympoietic* systems (not self-making, not autopoietic), making-in-symphony, making-with, never one, always looping with other worlds. And *species*, the relentlessly oxymoronic quality of a word that is both the ideal type, the coin, the *specie*, the money, the biological entity, the science fiction species, the detail that's a species of something else. *Species* is an inherently incredibly complex word; it just explodes with its incongruous multiple meanings.

cw: We could talk about the Norman O. Brown connection here (*laughs*).

DH: Yes, well, I mean, a multispecies *Love's Body*, heaven help us! (*Both laughing.*)

So, species is way more than my dog and me playing, *and*, simultaneously, it is me playing with my dog and being undone and redone by that. I found myself with this flaming talented youngster of another species, two weekends a month and several hours of training every week in addition, playing a game that neither of us invented, flaming through these sports fields in California in, of all places, the fairgrounds, with the NASCAR races and the railroad tracks, the quinceañera fiestas—the parties for the fifteen-year-old Latina girls—and in the fairgrounds, talk about being in the middle of California social, agricultural, industrial history! In the middle of the history of the expansion

Companions in Conversation

of the United States nation as it marches across conquered territory. I dare you to find a more potent place for being at risk to each other than the fairgrounds (*laughs*).

cw: In all senses of the word! (*Both laughing.*)

DH: Truly! Playing our game, me and my dog and my friends and their dogs, and trying to figure out who this “we” is that we become-with each other. Truly, who is this “we”? And it’s simultaneously a moment when many of the ecofeminists and deep ecology people and animal rights people are making a claim on *us*. Composing a “we,” too. They’re composing, or proposing, a really important kind of question: Are we together here or not? I mean, what is the “here” and who are the “we,” where critters are at stake to us and to each other? And they are at stake in the *Animal Industrial Complex*, which, remember, was Barbara Noske’s term from the early ’80s, around the period when the “Cyborg Manifesto” was composed. You know that because you were already beginning to work, had been working for years, at this intersection, or implosion—what’s the right metaphor, after all?—of the questions of the flourishing of human and nonhuman critters in their entanglements.

cw: Yes, and at that point that was largely regarded, at least when I started, as nonserious work.

DH: Absolutely. Nobody took this stuff seriously, in universities anyway. Well, in fact, I gave a precursor of the “Companion

Companions in Conversation

Species Manifesto” as a talk for the Cultural Studies Colloquium on my campus around 2002. A friend of mine, who has remained a close colleague and friend, came up and said, “I absolutely loved that talk, it was fantastic, but I hope you know that unlike the ‘Cyborg,’ this won’t take off.” Well (*they both laugh*), I don’t know if that turned out to be very prophetic. (*Still laughing.*) It’s not like *companion species* takes off as such as a term, at this conjuncture, this worlding, or whatever it is we call it—“animal studies,” “multispecies studies,” “companion species studies.” The question of the human/animal divide in all of it—well, the *multiple* divides, because they’re not single divides—the question of the comings-together and the dividings of those who share (and bear) vitality and mortality, of those of us who are mortal creatures on this Earth in this historical moment: this has taken off in ways we could not imagine even a few years ago.

cw: Yes, and that sets a fundamentally different tone in the “Companion Species Manifesto” from the “Cyborg Manifesto.” There’s a sense of finitude, a sense of mortality. A palpable sense of the presence of life and death that’s in a different register from what you get in the “Cyborg Manifesto.”

DH: It’s in a different register, and the tone of the writer is much more personal and vulnerable. The narrative voice in the “Companion Species Manifesto,” the “I” in that work . . .

Companions in Conversation

cw: Yes, a lot of people read the “Cyborg Manifesto” very much in the mode of performance, and that’s very different from the voice you get later.

DH: It’s a different voice. There are folks who asked, “Why did you drop your feminist, antiracist, and socialist critique in the ‘Companion Species Manifesto’?” Well, it’s not dropped. It’s at least as acute, but it’s produced very differently. There’s a sense in which the “Companion Species Manifesto” grows more out of an act of love, and the “Cyborg Manifesto” grows more out of an act of rage.

cw: I don’t think you drop the critique at all. In fact—and we’ll talk about this in a minute—I think what happens is that what your friend called “socialist, antiracist, and feminist commitments” are sustained, but they’re retooled within a context that I would call more thoroughly biopolitical.

DH: I hope that’s true.

cw: And that’s a very different context from command-control-communication-intelligence and the military industrial complex, and the notes that you were sounding in the “Cyborg Manifesto.” Not that those things go away, obviously, but . . .

DH: . . . they are configured differently.

cw: They ramify differently, I would say. They’re made flesh differently, as you would put it in the “Companion Species Manifesto.”

Companions in Conversation

One point of contact—and this is a deep subterranean connection between the two manifestos—is that a lot of people have noted, celebrated, how the manifesto begins with this kind of deep tongue kiss between you and Cayenne.

DH: That soft-porn moment. (*They both laugh.*)

cw: Famous or infamous—call it what you will. Everyone I know loves it, but that's the crowd I hang out with (*laughing continues*). . . . But, you know, something that people miss—that in the heat of that moment, if you will, is easy to miss—is that the manifesto also begins immediately with the figure of the immune system.

DH: Yes, it does.

cw: And it begins with the question of race.

DH: And conquest. It's absolutely about inheriting the histories of indigeneity and race.

BIOPOLITICAL WORLDINGS

cw: That's right. And so to put it this way, at this moment in the history of the kind of work that we do, to talk about race and to talk about immunity is to automatically be in a biopolitical discourse. And when you remember that the fundamental logic of the immunitary mechanism in biopolitics is essentially the logic of the *phar-*

Companions in Conversation

makon, what are we back to? We're actually back to irony. We're back to a retooling and exfoliation of what was going on with the term *irony* in the "Cyborg Manifesto."

DH: And the whole question of emergent natures/cultures in the "Companion Species Manifesto" is about the dilemma of inheritance, of what have we inherited, in our flesh.

cw: Right.

DH: And, you understand, "Ms. Cayenne Pepper continues to colonize all my cells—a sure case of what the biologist Lynn Margulis calls symbiogenesis."

cw: Right.

DH: So if the "Cyborg Manifesto" is looking at the couplings of cybernetic systems and organisms, the "Companion Species Manifesto" is saying, "Wait a minute, the entity that we are is the outcome of a symbiogenetic doing." We are sympoietic systems; we become-with, relentlessly. There is no becoming, there is only becoming-with.

cw: Right. And it's also a logic of both/and, as irony was in the "Cyborg Manifesto." The way I think of it is that if you take the opening that irony made possible in the "Cyborg Manifesto" and then you make it fleshy, you make it evolutionary . . .

Companions in Conversation

DH: Yes. And note, Cayenne and I, in the most literal sense of the term, before you get to the second paragraph of this little quote, look how we are linked in becoming-with each other: it's clear that one of us has a microchip injected under her neck skin for identification, one has a photo ID California driver's license. We are subject to state regulatory identification apparatuses and biopolitical identification apparatuses and surveillance; the microchip injected under the neck skin is a direct thread to the "Cyborg Manifesto." I remember deliberately writing it that way. So we're working from the beginning within the biological/biopolitical discourse of canid/hominid, pet/professor, bitch/woman, animal/human, athlete/handler: the questions of these multiple configurations of who and what we are in a Foucauldian sense of discourses, discourse production. The material semiotic ferocity of that.

cw: That reminded me of a great piece by the bioartist Eduardo Kac. He injects an animal identification microchip under his skin, but as the piece gradually takes different shapes, what you find out is that he has Jewish relatives who were killed in the camps.

DH: Whoops.

cw: Exactly. And so something that started out as one type of piece . . .

DH: . . . becomes quite another . . .

Companions in Conversation

cw: . . . type of piece—talking about driver’s licenses, forms of identification and surveillance, and that sort of thing.

DH: Right, and this does, too. It looks like it’s just sort of a light joke. But pretty quickly, because she’s a U.S. herding dog, since her ancestors are the dogs who worked to develop the agrobusiness ranching practices of the U.S. West after the Gold Rush, she and I are children of conquest. From the beginning.

cw: Right. Unambiguously so.

DH: From the beginning. And the question of whiteness is right there from the get-go, the question of living on both Native and Californian land, palimpsestic layerings of sovereignties, are there from the get-go. So that deep kiss is quite literally a deep kiss.

cw: Oh yes.

SIDEWINDING SYMPOIESIS: MAKING KIN

DH: And it’s deliberately nongenital—not only did we actually do the kind of kissing so described, and we didn’t do anything else (*laughing*)—but in addition, it is deliberately—now I am speaking as a biologist, one of the voices of that book—this kiss was deliberately about lateral transfer. It was a commentary about the tree-based lineages that overemphasize the notions

of DNA, linear transmission of DNA as “the book of life,” and from the get-go that little soft-porn statement is saying, “Nonsense.” You know, the first name mentioned is Lynn Margulis’s.

cw: One of the fascinating things about the book is to step back and remember how it begins and ends. Everybody remembers the kiss, but the book ends with the hilarious scene between Cayenne and Willem: 35-lb. Cayenne the Aussie and 110-lb. Willem the Great Pyr having this utterly nonreproductive, dysfunctional, and funny sexual intimacy. So one of the strong and easy-to-be-missed—and yet very biopolitical—aspects of the book is that the book begins and ends with nonreproductive sex.

DH: And on purpose! And with Norman O. Brown’s *Love’s Body*, and with Charis Thompson’s term *ontological choreography*, in the historical conjuncture where who “we” are, whoever this “we” is, in this thick now, ontological choreography is both what makes us who/what we are and also what we must engage. We must engage—must dance—ontological choreography if we are to live and die well with each other in the troubles. For many reasons, some of them in the “Companion Species Manifesto,” my slogan these days is “Make Kin Not Babies!”

cw: One of the things that that final scene—

DH: I’m glad you find it funny. I still find it hilarious!

Companions in Conversation

cw: Oh yes, I think it's incredibly funny, and it reminded me of—and every time I've used this example with students, it always takes them a second to get to the existential biological math—maybe my favorite line by Vicky Hearne, from an essay (I think) called “A Walk with Washo: How Far Can We Go.” Vicky says the surest sign of how intelligent Washo was occurred when she saw her in a tree masturbating to a copy of *Playgirl* magazine. (*Both start laughing.*) You can sort of see the wheels turning with the students when you tell them this (*more laughter*). But it's what would become the great “scandal,” which now is not news but was then in biology.

DH: It's still news, alas . . .

cw: . . . of nonreproductive sex, and how that becomes a gateway to these other, much more complex phenomenological lifeworlds that do and don't overlap between different species.

DH: People had gotten used to, way too easily, concepts like *aggression* and *competition* being used with other critters, as if they were technical terms, just as if they weren't extraordinary anthropomorphisms, but would react very badly if questions of desire or labor or friendship were raised. That's a passage about desire, and it's not about us.

cw: No. And this is where I think *play* actually circles back to the opening of the book and is so important—not just in your work but as a general topic for further investigation—because a major prob-

Companions in Conversation

lem in biopolitical thought has been that it essentially becomes what a lot of people have called a discourse of “thanatopolitics”; it becomes a discourse of the body as “bare life” being exposed directly to violence.

DH: Forced life, forced death . . .

AFFIRMATIVE BIOPOLITICS
AND FINITUDE

cw: Right, and so what a lot of people have tried to think about is what an affirmative biopolitics would look like, to use Esposito’s term. But the problem with a lot of those efforts has been to typically fall back into a kind of uncritical affirmation of “Life,” capital L. It’s as if you took Foucault’s famous statement “Resistance is on the side of life,” and you put it on an LSD tab and handed it to everybody (*both laughing*) . . .

DH: . . . and simultaneously dressed as the Borg queen and wore a placard saying, “Resistance is futile” (*still laughing*) . . .

cw: Right, and so (in Esposito’s case), working in an Italian, Catholic context as a philosopher of “Life,” you see what I mean. One of the important ramifications of the “Companion Species Manifesto” is very much its contribution to the question “What would an affirmative biopolitics look like that was not simply an uncritical affirma-

tion of 'Life,' capital L?" as this kind of flat ontology of positively valued concatenations of *élan vital*. And so the importance, not just of play, as the book opens, but also of joy.

DH: And also of questions of shared authority, the training chapters in there, the questions of nonmimetically experienced suffering and achievement. The "Companion Species Manifesto" doesn't deal with questions of dying nearly as much as the stuff I'm writing now does, partly because of the inescapability of needing to think better about extinctions.

cw: Right . . .

DH: Extinctions and exterminations and genocides. The "Companion Species Manifesto" is not fundamentally a work that deeply inhabits those biopolitical matters. But an affirmative biopolitics cannot be a pro-Life politics.

cw: No, no, not in—

DH: In the United States context, folks react immediately when you say, "I am *not* a pro-Life thinker." The resonance of the abortion struggles is of course immediate and on purpose. But I think an affirmative biopolitics is about finitude, and about living and dying better, living and dying well, and nurturing and killing best we can, in a kind of openness to relentless failing. I am a resolute, non-pro-Life feminist. And affirmative biopolitics is probably a pretty good phrase for that, but it won't work

Companions in Conversation

as a slogan! There was a pretty good slogan for the “Cyborg Manifesto” that Elizabeth Bird came up with—“Cyborgs for Earthly Survival.” But I don’t have a comparable slogan for what I agree is the affirmative biopolitics of the “Companion Species Manifesto” that insists it’s about being mortal and finite together in our absolutely nonmimetic difference. It is about significant otherness. Maybe it can be the slogan from a sticker the ecosexual artist Beth Stephens and her spouse, Annie Sprinkle, gave me: “Composting is so hot!”

FORCED LIFE, DOUBLE
DEATH, HOLOCAUST

cw: I think this is a place where there is a crossing, or at least a friction, a rubbing up against, between ecological thinking (you mentioned extinction earlier), what you might call an ecopolitics, and biopolitics. Because one of the interesting problems that you’ve talked about, and Derrida has talked about, and a lot of people have talked about, is parsing the differences between these terms *killing*, *death*, and *letting die*.

DH: Right.

cw: And the extent to which these are and are not the same kind of violence.

DH: And then the terrible violence of making live. Eric Stanley, who did a dissertation in History of Consciousness, was particularly ferocious. He's a very strong pro-animal person, a subtle and wonderful thinker, who made me think much more about the violence of making live when the possibility of living well is actively blocked. The vast machines of forced life for purposes of extracting value, for purposes of slaughter. The multiple forced-life machines are perhaps the greatest source of violence on our planet, if one's talking about the other critters. And the forced life of the supermax prisons, too. The multiple machines of forced life that Eric wrote about—finding necropolitics insufficient for thinking about the problems of biopolitics.

cw: Right. I wonder if in that light—and this is something I wanted to ask you anyway—if you would change a little bit the view that you expressed in the “Companion Species Manifesto,” about this *figure* (if that's the word we want here, and who knows if that's the word we want?) that a lot of people have used, not least of all Derrida, of a “holocaust,” actually, of nonhuman life that some people have associated with the sixth great extinction event of the planet, and others, like Derrida, have used to talk about the killing of nine billion animals per year in North America for food.

DH: Probably more than that. If you consider invertebrates and fish, it's way more than that.

Companions in Conversation

cw: A whole lot of animals are not included in that number. Of course, Derrida is quite aware of the complexities he's walking into here, being an Algerian Jew, which is interesting in itself. The whole status of Jewishness and of "writing as a Jew" is very interesting and complex . . .

DH: Right, and his never having been properly "human" within the Western philosophical canon.

cw: That's right.

DH: Jews have never been "properly" human.

cw: That's right, and so I wonder if that analogy still works—because you pretty stridently come out against it, for reasons that I understand, in the essay . . .

DH: I would do a lot of that differently if I were writing it now. For one thing, Marco and I would not be heading out to Burger King before our training sessions at the animal shelter! (*Laughter.*) I've changed in my politics in relationship to the questions of industrial animal agriculture. And I am still not a pro-Life activist. I think that's an exterminationist position. I think the question of working lives, including killing for food and killing for market, remains potent and necessary. Besides that, working animals matter; their actual work deserves respect. I think I am engaged in an affirmative biopolitics. Well, there's a long conversation to be had there, but I have definitely, without

Companions in Conversation

question, moved from 2003 on these matters. And the question of the animal holocaust and the questions of animal genocide . . . first of all . . .

cw: . . . both through killing and through letting die . . .

DH: . . . and forcing to live . . .

cw: . . . yes, making live . . .

DH: . . . making live in vast numbers in order to kill. Making live in appalling conditions in order to kill in appalling conditions—for profit. The question of capitalism cannot be left out of this.

cw: No.

DH: *And* the question of the still-ongoing vast expansion of the human population, and what counts as wealth in this human population. So I have changed since I wrote that stuff. I've always—then and now, but even more now—felt that we need more than one word at a time, and we need to be careful how we situate these words in relation to each other. When I talk and write about these things, I follow Deborah Bird Rose and Thom van Dooren and the other Australian Extinction Studies people who ask what it means to live in a time of exterminations and extinctions. And I've added to that multispecies, human and nonhuman, genocides. What is it to live—in extended time, you can date these things variously, but it's not an arbitrary matter—in an extended time of extraordinary surplus killing and surplus

Companions in Conversation

dying? In what Debbie Bird Rose calls times of “double death”? Death is not the problem, but cutting of the tissue of ongoingness is the problem. What is it truly to live responsibly in times of exterminations, extinctions, and genocides? Add holocausts to that list. And add extraordinary increasing human burdens and numbers. And I would add that the human–animal divide does not sort into those words; you can’t sort humans and animals into piles with those different words; this is a multispecies affair.

cw: No, and the biopolitical point is that those kinds of species distinctions are not constitutive of the problematic.

DH: They’re not constitutive of the problematic, which does not mean that the specificities of different critters don’t matter in making judgments.

cw: Right. They matter all the time.

DH: That’s exactly what matters—the concretenesses are exactly what matter. So yes, I would write differently about “holocaust” and all its kin. I engage a little bit in the “Companion Species Manifesto” in the problems of factory ranching, the Animal Industrial Complex, but I would be stronger in that part of the “Companion Species Manifesto” if I were writing it now. And remember how strong Barbara Noske and Carol Adams and others were twenty years before I wrote about any of this.

Companions in Conversation

cw: We're back at this point to what I think is a very well-articulated commitment of yours, not just here but in your other work of this period, that looks forward to the biopolitical context, and the designation by race or species as making killable but not murderable. And here, I think you and Derrida, perversely enough, are the perfect couple, because the point for both of you is that the ultimate fantasy is to think that you can step outside this violence that you're implicated in . . .

DH: . . . and neither of us thinks that you can . . .

cw: And so the question does not become just "killable but not murderable," and it does not become just "Thou shalt not kill," but it becomes, as you put it, "Thou shalt not make killable." It's on that specific terrain that I think there is an opening that has yet to be fully worked through, a crossing between biopolitical thought and ecological thought, because part of what animates your work in light of that commitment is to say, "Look, if the issue is 'Thou shalt not make killable,' then it's not about escaping killing or escaping death. It's about what posture or what stance does one take toward life."

DH: Toward *this* killing . . .

cw: Toward *this* killing or this life in its specificity . . .

DH: Toward *this* living and dying, *this* nurturing and killing . . .

cw: . . . in its specificity . . .

DH: . . . in its more-than-doubleness . . .

Companions in Conversation

CROSSING BIOPOLITICS
AND ECOPOLITICS

cw: That's right. And so it seems to me that one of the ways this question expands in many different directions, in terms of the crossings of biopolitics and ecological thinking, is also by bringing into the conversation the question of "letting die," because a point that you've made, and that Derrida makes very strongly, is that "our" entire way of "life" is predicated on the violence of a *massive* "letting die"—not a direct killing, not an execution, but a truly massive letting die alongside of practices that are quite clearly making killable but not murderable, like factory farming.

DH: And alongside an apparatus to "make immortal" a small fraction of the human population, if possible . . .

cw: . . . right, ever smaller and ever more "immortal" . . .

cw: . . . through whatever fabulous, fantastic techno-fix—that actually has shaped too much of our medical system. But let me say something about this another way. This is a very complex nexus of questions . . .

DH: You're not just kidding. You pick up one thread and you're aware of six you just dropped. But this crossing of the biopolitical and the ecological—another place, it seems to me, that this is in our conversation right now around making killable has to do with questions of species recovery plans and habitat regen-

Companions in Conversation

eration plans and various ways of engaging in ecological restoration, ecological recovery, species recovery, and so on—these very complicated and never innocent, very important but also very fraught engagements. There was a talk at the conference this past weekend around a dilemma involving some of the islands off the coast of California, where removal of so-called *invasive species*—itself a term that “makes killable,” the very use of the term *invasive species* makes killable, whether you’re talking about immigrants from Central America or rats and cats on an island. “Invasive species” is, literally, a powerful way to make killable. So consider an island world, where ground-nesting birds and many other critters cannot continue the tissues of their ongoingness and are undone by these rats and cats. Some people just want to call them “species out of place.” Well, that’s true, there’s a truth in that. And there are a lot of things you can call them, there are lots of euphemisms: “species removal” . . . cw: . . . “species relocation” . . .

DH: . . . and I said to this really sensitive biologist/ecologist who gave this talk, “Well, look, this seems to me very similar to the question of a woman who knows that she is pregnant and cannot carry the child to term, where she knows she is killing. Why do we pretend to ourselves that this is not an extirpation, a killing? What sort of innocence is this? What does it enable not to know/admit that we are killing? The being, human or not, should not be made killable, *and* killing is sometimes the most

Companions in Conversation

responsible to do, is a good thing to do, even—but never an innocent thing to do.” How can we really live in noninnocence, because I really think we must?

I don't think we have a chance to live responsibly insofar as we are pro-Life. The search for innocence is exterminationist. I think we need pro-ongoingness in our mortality, not pro-Life. And judgments are made about that island ecosystem—judgments that are flawed and historically specific, and for some critters and not others, and for some people and not others. And killing ensues. Why not admit, “I am in fact going to engage in deliberate killing. . . . Every rat and every cat on this island I will kill to the point of local extermination, and I will not name it with euphemisms or dress it up with an excuse, and I will still say this is what I *should* be doing, and simultaneously, I am *not* innocent. These killings, these deaths, these particular critters, matter.” That's a little bit of what I mean by “not making killable”—that in order to be *for* some ways of living and dying and not others, in order to be *for* the ground-nesting birds (in this example), in order to be *for* the partial recovery of this island's plant, animal, and microbial ecosystems, I/we must kill. But I'm not going to hide behind terms like *invasive species*. I am not going to make killable. I am going to argue *for* this worlding in an interrogative way that asks, Is this “us,” is this a “we” that we will cast our lot with? Or not?

Companions in Conversation

HUMAN INHERITANCES :
ANTHROPOCENE AND CAPITALOCENE

cw: And that brings us back in a really unsettling way to the questions we were talking about earlier around *human* population. Because a pointed way—and you know that this goes back to debates that have been going on since the '60s and '70s—to put the question would be simply to ask, “Would you say exactly the same thing about members of the species *Homo sapiens*?”

DH: Why would we want to? The devil in the situated details.

cw: Precisely so, because if indeed within the biopolitical problematic—or the ecological problematic—species isn't constitutive of the problematic, then the first hand that has to go up is, “Uh, well, if we want to talk about—let's just call them 'destructive species'—then we need to start with . . .”

DH: “Let's go to the top of the current list,” which is exactly what made it “the Anthropocene.” The Anthropocene gets its name from making that the head of the list. . . . The Anthropos is the destructive “species”—Man, once again, the “species.”

cw: Right.

DH: And that's also what's wrong with the figure of the Anthropos. It's not a “species act”; we're not doing this as a “species.” What is happening that gets called the *Anthropocene* is a situated complex historical web of actions—and it could be, could

Companions in Conversation

have been, otherwise. But people forget that, partly because of the power of the word. People really believe that the human species is doing this thing, as an act of human nature. And it's simply empirically not true.

cw: Well, that's the funny thing about the term. I participated in this huge event in Berlin on the Anthropocene last year—this huge, hypercurated, European thing. It was great because a lot of people who were there were great, but one of the things that came into focus was precisely this problem about the term that we talked about this morning: that for half the people it's the ultimate posthumanist term—in the sense of utterly decentering.

DH: In some ways it is.

cw: And for the other half of the people it cuts exactly the way you're describing.

DH: And then for the *other* half of the people, since we have many halves . . . As I said this morning, I don't have to choose just one term. If I did, it would be *Capitalocene*, and that figures the subject differently. And it's at least as interesting for those for whom it might be the ultimate posthumanist term—*Capitalocene*, I mean. It could satisfy some of the same needs, but it will cause different troubles. Response to the Capitalocene demands systemic change located in flesh-and-blood, situated, complex histories.

Companions in Conversation

cw: Well, it certainly doesn't take a single species and bring it front and center, knowing Marx's analysis.

DH: Capitalism isn't just a species act. And Capitalocene asks something else. Capitalism obviously isn't just one thing. It's obviously a very complicated *historical system* phenomenon, among other things; it has many histories and unevennesses in time and space. And you can't date it from the middle of the eighteenth century with the steam engine. The plantation system is surely more fundamental; it is ongoing, too (think of current oil palm plantations and associated destruction of mixed forests and their human and nonhuman lifeways). You cannot run the debate about what the Anthropocene means between the deep ecologists, on the one hand, who put it with the invention of agriculture, or even with Pleistocene human hunters, or the appearance of *Homo sapiens sapiens* on the planet, or something, and, on the other hand, fossil fuel-using humanity with the internal combustion engine, and following.

The Marxist political ecologist Jason Moore does a nice job of getting us started on this. You cannot even begin to think the complexity of capitalism as this earth-making thing without going to the trade zones in the Indian Ocean in the fifteenth century, the many world-making trading zones and wealth accumulation zones and inventions of plantation agriculture, and the moving of plants and animals and microbes and people around, and the deforesting of the river basins in the sixteenth

Companions in Conversation

century. You cannot even begin to touch this question with the binary time problem that emerges almost inevitably when people talk about the Anthropocene. Either you're talking about the past two hundred years, or you are talking about, you know, the dawn of the species. And then you get this fight between the deep ecology-oriented people and the folks who are worried only about the fossil fuel economy. This will not do. The complexities of time and space are ill done that way. And Capitalocene does a better job on that point. *And* it asks which populations of animals, plants, and peoples—and microbes (since, let's face it, the questions of fermentation and disease are fundamental in the history of capital, big time—tell me about WWII without fermentation!)—anyway, the players in Capitalocene are, at a *minimum*, situated plants, animals, humans, microbes, the multiple layerings of technologies in and among all this. If you think the Capitalocene, even in a remotely smart way, you're in a whole different cast of characters compared to the Anthropocene.

cw: One thing that we talked about earlier, that I do think is of interest in the term *Anthropocene*—and this actually brings us back to the “Companion Species Manifesto”—is that everything we've just said invokes not just, on some level, the radically ahuman and unthinkable time scales of geological time that are invoked by the Anthropocene, but also the temporal asynchronicities that obtain (and you can think of those generationally or however you want) be-

Companions in Conversation

tween these different kinds of biological and technical forces and their developments, that are stitched together to create what you are calling Capitalocene.

DH: You can speak those things in the Anthropocene, but you *must* speak them in the Capitalocene.

cw: Right.

DH: Those asynchronous and distributed over time and space forces and complex system-property ways . . .

cw: That's one reason we're not back to . . . the Sublime!

DH: We sure aren't! (*Both laughing.*) Partly, I think, the *Anthropocene*—for various reasons, good and bad—the term got popular, and it got popular with the scientists, too, and it got popular with the geologists. And, mind you, it's worth remembering that the people who proposed this term, which is only around the year 2000, the first person to propose the term is a biologist in the Great Lakes who studies freshwater diatoms, right? And he's looking at biogeochemical processes. The whole term *ecosystem*, the very word *ecosystem* also comes out of freshwater lake ecology, and grasslands ecology, too, which I think is interesting. And it comes out of biogeochemical processes, in part through the linkage with the Russian biologists who *invent* the term *symbiogenesis* in 1910. The Russian biogeochemists in my life come to me through my thesis adviser G. Evelyn Hutchinson.

Companions in Conversation

Anyway, what I'm signaling here is that the biologist who invented the term *Anthropocene* and then joins (no surprise here) with an atmospheric chemist—they are worried about the bleaching of the coral reefs from heat and acidification. Their focus is very earthy, very fleshy, very much about biopolitics, ecopolitics, extinction, all that. And others also worry about the bleaching being possibly partly due to a bacterial *vibrio* infection, an infectious event with the same group of critters (bacteria) that cause cholera, on the one hand, and that are involved in developmental signaling in some ecological evolutionary developmental biology symbioses. Eugene Stoermer and Paul Crutzen focus on the bleached coral reefs, and they're consumed by the anthropogenic, human-caused processes that are written in the rocks, the waters, and the atmospheres. And the geophysical unions form working groups to figure out if the stratigraphic evidence is sufficient to rename the epoch by straight-up standards of their profession. Is the Anthropocene a boundary event, like the K-Pg boundary separating the Cretaceous from the Paleogene Period (Scott Gilbert's idea), or is it an epoch or an even bigger geohistorical category?

This is a conversation we need to be having. So I don't want to toss out the baby with the bathwater, you know; I wish that because the term *Anthropocene* carries so much else besides what they intended, I wish that it hadn't been their term. But it is their term, and I hope that when the working group makes its report in 2016 the geologists adopt *Anthropocene* as an official

Companions in Conversation

term. We will need to continue to operate within this discursive materiality as well as others that name our urgencies better in key respects. I think Capitalocene should have strong discursive materiality among us, but there are no institutions to do that. You can't even talk about capitalism in the United States. You can't say the word without being read the riot act—I mean truly, it's an unspeakable word most places!

cw: This goes back . . .

DH: Even if you're a capitalist, you can't say the word *capitalist*.
(Both laughing.)

cw: Right, right, you're just talking about "economics," you know, as if that's taken for granted.

DH: My friend Chris Connery points out to me that the Chinese talk about capitalism all the time (and the ongoing Cold War). And if ever anybody was in the middle of a capitalist revolution, it's China. In a lot of ways, even with less formal freedom of expression, everyday political talk among the Chinese is *way* richer than among us (even though in other ways, it's not).

cw: Which wouldn't be hard! (Laughs.)

DH: Well, it wouldn't be hard. But on the other hand, the killing of the Left in China—Left discourse in China—is tragic. But then there's little enough Left discourse here either. Anyway, though, enough about capitalism for now.

Companions in Conversation

ORDINARY BIOPOLITICS

cw: I wanted to come back to something, maybe slightly less depressing, but also on a smaller scale, that has to do with talking about the biopolitical dimensions of the “Companion Species Manifesto.” It’s about joy and play and about quality of attention, and the kinds of responsibilities that that involves with the creatures in question. What I’m thinking of—you mentioned this to me several years ago, and it comes up in the “Companion Species Manifesto”—is the passage about the “metaretrievers.” (DH *laughs*.) You write Vicki Hearne this letter, and you’re talking about metaretrievers and taking Cayenne down to the beach.

DH: Roland and Cayenne both.

cw: This activity that you recount would now be, as I understand it, illegal.

DH: But practiced.

cw: Illegal but practiced. And so here is the question I want to ask. You talk about how the term *companion animal* emerges from a very historically identifiable complex of medicalization and academic institutional life. And there are other cognate terms that we could think of, that we probably don’t like a whole lot, that come out of this same biomedical, biopolitical context (as Foucault would call it). What I want to think with you about—and your work gives us a vocabulary to do this—is how this kind of increasing regulation

Companions in Conversation

and medicalization of how human and nonhuman creatures interact (all in the name of enhancement and security, of course) is in fact part of a much larger biopolitical fabric. And to make sense of this, we have to change what we think “politics” is. To come back to the beginning of my question, one thing you do in the manifesto—both in how you start it and how you end it, but in other ways, too—is to make it clear that these aren’t just theoretical questions about what biopolitics is: these are part of the same fabric of life . . .

DH: . . . these are very ordinary . . .

cw: . . . and mundane, but also very death-by-a-thousand-cuts . . .

DH: . . . but also joy-by-a-thousand-cuts . . .

cw: . . . at the same time, because the flip side is also true: your dogs have literally historically unprecedented access.

DH: And unprecedented wealth.

cw: They have access to forms of veterinary care and quality of food and all sorts of things.

DH: Our chicken coop is bigger than the shanties that many people are living in, in the megacities of the world. Or tents for refugees in war zones. I know this . . .

cw: And so one thing I’m interested in on an even deeper level with these developments—and this does take us back to our discussion at the beginning of the manifesto and its beginning with the immunitary paradigm . . .

Companions in Conversation

DH: . . . both inheritance and the immunity system . . .

cw: . . . is that all of this seems to be part of the fabric in which, at least at Rice—I don't know how it is at Santa Cruz—outside of every elevator on campus there are Purell dispensers mounted on the wall . . .

DH: . . . and now they say they are “antibiotic free” and “alcohol only.” There's a whole discourse evolved in those little pumps.

cw: Right. So we have that, and we have a crazy number of signs that I see that say, “Please pick up after your dog”—not because nobody likes to step in dog shit but because “dog waste transmits disease.” And at the same time we have this explosion of things like food allergies and various kinds of autoimmune disorders . . .

DH: . . . and a completely epidemic-friendly global industrial food system.

cw: And so what the “Companion Species Manifesto” does—and in ways that I do think inherit some of the work of the “Cyborg Manifesto”—is to put together a vocabulary for helping us to understand that, look, these aren't just little embarrassing or annoying “ethical,” “lifestyle” issues; these are actually part of a larger political seismic shift—in the name of “making live,” in the name of “enhancement,” in the name of “security”—

DH: This is part of biopolitics . . .

Companions in Conversation

cw: . . . that is actually enfeebling . . .

DH: . . . and are provocations to thinking.

cw: Yes. I wonder sometimes. I think back on kids of our generation, and I think, well, maybe we were better off without this enhancement. I tell my students, “You need to eat more dirt!”

DH: Anna Tsing, whom you know is a very close friend and who-I-want-to-be-when-I-grow-up kind of colleague . . .

cw: Yes, she must be incredible to talk with about this stuff.

DH: . . . she told a little story the other night when we were getting ready to have dinner and watch bad TV—we were talking about dogs, and we were talking about Cayenne’s habits. Since we’re in a drought, we’re not flushing the toilet very often. Her habits of drinking out of the toilet bowl have become a bit of a household problem.

cw: *(Both laughing.)* “Come give Mommy a kiss!”

DH: We were laughing about the sheer materiality of living together, just the sheer thisness of it, and the absurdity of it and the forgiving each other for stuff. And Anna says, “Well, I did my fieldwork originally on the island of Borneo among a group of people who were agriculturalists during that period—deforestation has since undermined their ways of making a living significantly—they traded a lot with the local Muslim populations.

Companions in Conversation

They were a very complex part of a very Indonesian fabric.” And she says, “But, you know, in fact there were a lot dogs around, and the dogs were in and out of the houses, and they’re pretty much living independent dog lives, but fairly closely associated with the people, too. The dogs hung out with kids a lot. You know,” Anna said, “the dogs were the diapers. The dogs ate the baby shit. And this was absolutely expected of them. It helped keep the houses clean. Nobody had access to cotton diapers, much less synthetic-fiber diapers. The dogs obviously totally enjoyed it, the babies clearly loved it, and none of the adults seemed to think there was the slightest thing wrong with it—quite the opposite. The dogs ate baby shit.” Now I guarantee that this is not going to be a popular way to deal with the diaper waste in the landfills in the United States (*laughing*). But it does kind of make one recontextualize these questions of sanitation, security, waste, and biopolitics and biotechnologies.

cw: The overhygienization—and in biopolitical thought, this takes us all the way back to Foucault: the overhygienization and . . .

DH: . . . and the misunderstanding of historical multispecies life . . .

cw: . . . within an immunitary and autoimmunitary context, all in the name of a form of well-being modeled on class- and race-based notions.

Companions in Conversation

CRITTERS ARE ECOSYSTEMS

DH: All in the name of well-being. The apparatus of biomedicine, and the apparatus of immunology in microbiology, grew up in a framework, in a colonial institutional framework, of getting rid of the enemy and managing the subordinate. Sterilization, exclusion, extermination, transportation, so on and so forth. Biomedicine did not grow up in “How do you cultivate assemblages that maintain multispecies, culturally diverse, ecosystem health?” There is a truly tectonic shift going on these days in biology and medicine and microbiology across the world—unevenly, way too slowly—but no critter on this planet is left out of this—in some really deep ways that are affecting experimental practice, clinical practice, and so on—critters are understood to *be* ecosystems. If you’re serious about enhancing the health of some ecosystems rather than others, you’ve got to think in an ecosystemic way. Which associates/companions should be here, and which should not? Which critters are always disease causing in an extremely serious way, where we really need to find ways of excluding those guys, and which other guys are actually really good at excluding the ones you don’t want? And so forth. Because you literally can’t sterilize; the hand-sanitizer thing is a bad joke. The main point is that insofar as biopolitics is concerned, this question of ecosystem assemblages is the name of the game of life on Earth. Period. There is no other game. There are no individuals plus environments.

Companions in Conversation

There are only webbed ecosystems made of variously configured, historically dynamic contact zones. With the help of my colleague-friends Karen Barad and Scott Gilbert, sometimes I name this intra-active and diffractive complexity GeoEcoEvo - DevoHistoTechnoPsycho sympoiesis! The series expands and folds back on itself . . .

cw: . . . as the former Santa Cruz professor Gregory Bateson reminds us. I do think it's in this context that one can excavate a deep line of connection between the two manifestos, terms like *companion species* (and some of the other terms we've been talking about), and essays like "Sex, Mind, and Profit," "Situated Knowledges," your essay on the immune system, "Promises of Monsters," "Virtual Speculum," and so on. In a way, those essays plus the two manifestos become a kind of virtual book in their own right. Their lines of connection to the "Companion Species Manifesto" are a little harder to recognize just because the surface of the text is so different, but in a fundamental sense, the underlying theoretical dynamics that connect them . . .

DH: . . . they're deeply braided . . .

cw: . . . haven't fundamentally changed. It's how they ramify these issues in different ways.

DH: They both tell technology stories, evolution stories. They both tell stories of intimacy and pleasure. Both manifestos are

Companions in Conversation

engaged in all these forms of storytelling, but the balance is different, the foreground/background is different, the genre is different.

cw: And I think the stakes are different in the sense that the sites on which those same dynamics play out are different. That's why I loved the way that the "Companion Species Manifesto" ends with the fascinating discussion of the Sato street dogs in Puerto Rico.

DH: Yes.

cw: That's a great example of how we may be talking about "the same" theoretical dynamics, but how they ramify geopolitically and culturally is very different.

DH: This was an attempt to emphasize questions of race and national power in dogland. And many other things. And also make plain the diverse biopolitics of humans and dogs. I was fascinated in the *Sato* dog story in Puerto Rico by accounts of street people taking care of street dogs. Also care by people who weren't street people, but still living hand to mouth. Their practices of relationship with street dogs deserve to be foregrounded, storied, protected, and respected. The image of the "forever home" in Massachusetts, and always being "rescued"—really "rescue" discourse took over "adoption" discourse in dog life in the United States, too—is very problematic. That every good dog is a rescued dog is, among things, a colo-

Companions in Conversation

nialist discourse. I wanted the *Sato* piece to complexify this particular international adoption story, without making international adoption, of dogs or people, the enemy.

cw: And that happens, those kinds of pressure points emerge constantly, even closer to home. We were talking earlier about Katrina and Houston and New Orleans; those issues came up around the discursive status of the “refugees” from New Orleans coming to Houston. . . . Well, hang on a minute, maybe we need to think about a more responsible way to talk about what’s going on here and the position these people are in and what they’ve been through.

DH: Among other things, being called “refugees” makes them not-citizens.

cw: Exactly.

DH: And of course, in very significant ways, the way the rebuilding of New Orleans has proceeded has continued to exclude them as much as possible.

THE PRACTICE OF JOY: MAKING KIN

DH: I want to go back to two things that we touched on before we go any further. One of them has to do with the question of joy, and the importance of the practice of joy in living our mortality with each other. If we are to develop political vision, if we

Companions in Conversation

are to develop some sense of living and dying with each other responsibly, including responsibly to “the troubles,” I think the practice of joy is critical. And play is part of it. I think that engaging and living with each other in these attentive ways that elaborate capacities in each other produces joy. In the conference on Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet, Deborah Bird Rose called this thing “the bling of life,” and then she called it “shimmer.” She was talking about the way some of her teachers, in particular her Aboriginal teachers in Australia, called it “shimmer” (that was the best way she could translate it). And she was thinking about this in relation to the question of the flying foxes in Australia and their fruit trees, and the obvious sensual pleasures of the flowers and the bats and how they move toward each other, in what Natasha Myers and Carla Hustak call this sensual loquacious involuntarily momentum of life. This is a biological discourse, among other things. And I think it’s really important to participate in this bling of life—to be able to be attentive to and be able to describe the shimmer.

cw: As we were discussing earlier, I think this is a crucial resource for the specific juncture that biopolitical thought is at right now, which is trying to say what an affirmative biopolitics would look like. And I think part of the problem, for work in “theory,” is that when you start talking about things like joy and play, you’re marked as if you’re automatically not talking about politics in some serious way.

Companions in Conversation

DH: And I think quite the opposite. I don't think we can even begin to understand what it takes to be political in these times without this.

cw: No—and I think this is also a deep point of connection between your earlier work and the “Companion Species Manifesto.” To me this is a huge inheritance and resource and legacy from feminism, and aspects of the women’s movement and feminism that *were* about joy and *were* about affirmation . . .

DH: . . . and queer politics. . . . And never only domination.

cw: Yes, and I want to talk about queerness in a moment.

DH: I think that the politics of pleasure were thought, developed, practiced, proposed as *public* practice most vividly in queer movements.

cw: I don't know what your feeling is about this, but I felt that when you wrote the “Companion Species Manifesto,” one of the reasons you moved away from the figure of the cyborg . . .

DH: . . . they're in the same litter . . .

cw: . . . yes, they're in the same litter, but as you suggest in “The Companion Species Manifesto,” you opted for this other figure of the companion species because the figure of the cyborg was not queer enough for the work you wanted to do then.

DH: Yes, I think that's true.

Companions in Conversation

cw: It may have been “theoretically” queer . . .

DH: And also not intimate enough, though plenty intimate . . .

cw: But you put your finger on it a second ago when you used the word *pleasure*.

DH: Yes.

cw: It’s the connection between queerness and pleasure—which moves us into an affective register that draws on the nonreproductive sex and intimacy and joy with which the book begins and ends.

DH: The nonheteronormative, as it got labeled in really an unfortunate combination of syllables (*laughs*). . . Now, repeating myself, I just say, Make Kin Not Babies!

cw: Those are resources for doing two things: not just thinking affirmative biopolitics but—to go back earlier in our conversation—thinking about kinds of ethics and politics that have typically been taken as not having a lot to do with each other, namely, biopolitics and ecological thinking. Part of it is that ecological thinking, up until pretty recently (thanks to people like you, but there are other people doing this work) has often smuggled back in—even in the name of biodiversity—a lot of the reproductive discourses that are not queer enough.

DH: That’s all certainly true, although I also need to say, “Yes, but.” I think of ecological politics, from as early as you want to

Companions in Conversation

get—with Val Plumwood, for example. Ecological politics for me doesn't do that, through and including Thom van Dooren today.

cw: Right, but the lineage you're invoking is precisely the one that's needed.

DH: Of course, it's not an adequately well-known lineage, but it deserves to be. If a mainstream journalist is going to write his or her story and they want a little backstory, they're not going to know *that*, but they need to.

TELLING STORIES ,
CULTIVATING RESPONSE-ABILITY

DH: Here's another little story I wanted to tell while we're still on biopolitics—and then I want to go to religion, actually, or wherever we go next, but we need to get to religion. But we were talking about the huge change in the way that we live with our cats and dogs and parrots and chickens and whatever (and understanding that having a parrot is already a very iffy thing to be doing ecologically and in other ways). Anyhow, the point is that we live with our critters differently. They are family members, kin, in a way that was not imaginable even in the 1950s, with Lassie et al. And of course, for better and worse, they acquire not just the right to health but the obligation to health, a very dubious acquisition! They are within biopolitics, like it or not.

Companions in Conversation

cw: Compulsory making live.

DH: Compulsory making live. The apparatus of biomedicine, pet medicine—they are in this apparatus big time. And it's pretty expensive. But I often think in terms of little stories or tiny details or tripping over something that opens up into huge worlds, where thread by thread by thread, as you spin from some tiny thing, you are relooping together the worlds that are required for living and dying *here*, with these details. Okay, so I'm living with an elder dog now, Cayenne, and one of the things that happens to older spayed female dogs (and postmenopausal women) is that their urinary sphincters become lax, and they begin leaking. And there's a drug, phenylpropanolamine, that is routinely prescribed that works pretty well to tighten up their sphincters so that they can continue to live indoors and, among other things, sleep on the bed, because nobody wants to sleep in the wet spot.

But phenylpropanolamine (PPA), an angiotensin, tends to increase blood pressure. Cayenne developed a heart-valve problem that made increasing peripheral blood pressure a bad idea. We want to keep peripheral blood pressure at a low level, pull the pressure off the heart, delay or maybe totally prevent congestive heart failure. Okay, so she's involved in a whole diagnostic regime with a canine cardiologist thinking about this. The canine cardiologist proposes a drug to me—that white gel capsule on the table in front of you. She says, “Here is what Cayenne should be taking now, and you can experiment and find

Companions in Conversation

the lowest dose that works and go back up if you need to. And it's pretty effective. It's no longer made by the big pharmaceutical companies that used to make it; you have to get it from this small compounding pharmacy down the road here." And you feel like you're all of a sudden back in the early twentieth century, you know, before CVS, the small family compounding pharmacy, with a mortar and pestle in the back. But the reason they're doing this is that the high-priced molecules are no longer made by the big corporations if they're no longer profitable, okay?

But the drug in question, in this little white capsule, is a thing called diethylstilbestrol, or DES, and all of a sudden I had to hold my breath and hope she realized she was talking to a feminist of a certain generation, who had grown up in the women's health movement, within which prescribing of DES to pregnant women, supposedly to prevent miscarriages, had created terrible heritages of cancers in the adult children, reproductive malformations in both male and female children, on into the third generation. This was a *terrible* drug involved with a terrible scandal—big Pharma not releasing data, not responding to existing data, etc.—and it took a sustained women's health movement to expose it all. I also knew, because I'm interested in these things, that this drug had been developed in the animal industrial complex as a drug to promote weight gain in food animals. And on and on we go.

I knew a lot about these estrogen mimics, and both natural and synthetic estrogens, in both human *and* animal medicine

Companions in Conversation

and agriculture, and I was once again in the midst of extremely complex extractions of value from bodies—biopolitical, capitalist, Anthropocenic, whatever you want to call it. I was in the middle of the trouble with this little white gel capsule from my local family-owned compounding pharmacy that also sells homeopathic remedies. *And* DES is carcinogenic in dogs, too, albeit probably not in the doses and time schedules contemplated for Cayenne.

So you're always doing a balancing act with drugs. I said, Okay, I'll try this drug, and it turns out that all that is needed is a *very* low dose. But giving the dog of my heart this pill landed me in needing to write a DES manifesto, to go along with my own history with Premarin and pregnant mare's urine and all the cruelty and culpability in that terrible story. Cayenne and I were bonded in all the woes of female mammals, but for us in the historically situated land of biomedicine and biopolitics. I called the paper "Awash in Urine." It brought me back to the strong presence of American Jewish women in the women's health movement. It brought me back to the whole history of *which* women were brave enough to speak up, to make cross-gender, cross-race, and cross-species alliances, and to the racial/ethnic differences in feminism of that period. This little pill—my dog eating that little pill—brought us back into biopolitics with a vengeance.

cw: That reminds me of what I think is one of the smartest things that Roberto Esposito has said about biopolitics, which is that it

Companions in Conversation

doesn't operate at the level of "the person." It doesn't operate even at the level of "the body"—it operates at the level of what he calls "flesh."

DH: Yes.

cw: The level of what he calls "being-in-common." For biopolitics—you were talking about the extraction of value—species distinctions are not constitutive.

DH: They are not constitutive, they are *used*.

cw: They are used, and that extraction of value then ramifies differently for different people of different genders, of different races, of different species. But species itself is not the driver.

DH: No, it isn't the driver, nor is race the driver. I think "flesh" does something else, including making the shared tissues of race and species patent.

cw: But this makes you wonder why it took so long for people to realize that, with all the discourse about race, and race being so central to everything we've been talking about, you can't talk about race without talking about species.

DH: No, you certainly cannot.

cw: As I've often said, it's not for nothing our scholarship is called the "Humanities." It's amazing how long it took us to realize what is actually just a straight logical extension; I mean, we're not talking about a fancy two-step to get from race to species, and vice versa.

Companions in Conversation

COMPOST, NOT POSTHUMAN(ISM)

DH: As you know I've never been happy with the term *posthumanism*. *Posthuman* we both find absurd.

cw: Right.

DH: But I've never rested easy with the term *posthumanism* either; I'm in alliance and disalliance.

cw: Yes, sure.

DH: I love your book, I love your analysis, and I understand how necessary posthumanism is, and practically all my friends are doing creative and necessary thinking under that sign, but I just can't. It was Rusten who said, "Well, it's not posthumanism, it's compost!" (*Both laughing.*) If you're in need of a slogan, "It's Not Posthumanism, It's Compost!" "It's Making Hot Compost! Compost Is Hot!" (which is Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle's phrase). Which then brings—and this is again Rusten—he says, "It's not humanities, it's humusities. It's *humus*." (*cw laughs.*)

Etymologically, the human is rooted in *humus*. Too many tones of "human" go to *homo*—which is the "bad" direction—but then there's "human" that goes to *humus*, which is the "good" direction. Not to be too simplistic about it. (*Both laugh.*) There's being part of the making of the soil and the earth and the *humus* direction, and there's the phallic "man" in the *homo* direction. (*cw laughing.*) There's the ever-parabolic

Companions in Conversation

tumescence and detumescence of *homo* in *that* direction of “humanities,” but there are other possibilities in the humusities. So my slogan becomes “Not Posthumanist But Compost” (*both laughing*). I’m implicated in posthumanities, too, of course; I published *When Species Meet* under that sign, after all!

(Many deep breaths and some well-aged Scotch later . . .)

FOLLOWING FEMINIST THREADS

cw: Earlier, we left off talking about how the two manifestos ramify differently as individual documents, but how they also have pretty deep and unexpected connections that we tried to draw out, that bear on much of the contemporary interest in biopolitical thought, and even a little more broadly, biophilosophy and ecological thought.

DH: And bio-techno-political thought. The cyborg keeps making me remember the necessity of including—without assuming collapse into each other—the organic, the technical, the human and nonhuman, the many sorts of things that just don’t resolve into binaries and are absolutely in what Marilyn Strathern might call relations of partial connection.

cw: Right. And in my mind there are really two main strands of biopolitical thought that we touched on earlier: one of a sort of Agambenian flavor, which is much more resolutely interested in—

Companions in Conversation

in a very Heideggerian style—ontotheological questions and interested in the issue of sovereignty. And then there's the other strand that involves you and Foucault and also what I was trying to do in *Before the Law* in using some of the work in systems theory, including people like Luhmann, to actually extend and radicalize Foucault's work.

DH: Which is a strand I feel much more connected to than the Agambenian line. I find some thoughtful threads in the Agambenian arguments; I also find various problems. But they don't matter a lot to me; they're not really my problem, if you will. The kinds of things you work on and the braids that you are doing are not the ones I'm doing, but I am deeply involved in them. And there's a third line of the biopolitical for me, which really does come through feminist lineages at their deepest. Some in the academy, some not. Some deeply involved in questions in ecological feminism, some located in questions of health, some tied to questions of race, some in questions of our relations to other sentient critters, the animal worlds, also plant, microbial and fungal worlds.

There are many threads that themselves aren't the same, but from early on I think my thickest thread—though I've been very much involved in these other literatures and these other discussions—the ones that infuse all my thinking are first of all biological, including the systems thinking that comes through Lynn Margulis.

Companions in Conversation

cw: *Bio bio- . . .*

DH: Lynn Margulis, G. Evelyn Hutchinson, the biologist that is Gregory Bateson (that part of Gregory Bateson)—the systems theory that is important to me comes to me through that work, and then through the Macy conferences—Evelyn Hutchinson was a participant at one point—and the frog’s eye/frog’s brain work, and so forth. All of that really was where I came to systems theory, through biology. And then the work of Barbara Noske and Val Plumwood and other ecological feminist thinking, and the work of people like Deborah Bird Rose. You know, my lineages are truly, deeply feminist. And my citation of other feminist writers—mostly women but not all—is not a politically correct move; it really is where my thinking comes from. These are the people I think with.

cw: Right. And that’s one of the reasons that another crucial resource, coming out of feminism, and going way way back, as you know, has to do with not being afraid of what’s now being called an “affirmative” biopolitics, an affirmative sense of mortal connection with other forms of life. And then eventually, beyond that, realizing that within itself the feminism lineage needed some pretty radical queering to draw it away from biological ideas of reproduction and so on.

DH: There were also other strands within feminism. But yes to the need to interrupt the hypercritical, hyperventilating with critique.

Companions in Conversation

cw: I think that's why as a thinker you can be open to cross-species relations in a way that a thinker like Foucault never could be.

DH: Absolutely. Because another part of that was from the get-go an unembarrassed thinking with and through the love of nature: there is an affirmative feminist biopolitics, an affirmative relationship to worlding, to visions of the world and inhabiting the world that needs other critters. There is root feminist thinking here that is pretty well read out of the citational apparatus of most of the academic discussions.

CATHOLIC FEMINISM, CATHOLIC
SEMIOTICS: THE NEGATIVE
WAY, IN THE FLESH

cw: On this note, I wanted to circle back to what in fact could be construed as a kind of Agambenian aspect of your work—although obviously a very complicated one (and not Heideggerian in the way that Agamben's certainly is). And that has to do with something that you don't shy away from talking about at all in the "Companion Species Manifesto" (quite the contrary): your Catholic background and your ongoing negotiation and navigation of Catholic thinking and what it's made available to you. I'm actually interested in *two* aspects of that, but the first—and this is the most conspicuous instance—has to do with what you call in the "Companion Species Manifesto" the "negative way of naming" or the "negative way of knowledge," which you also sometimes call a form of love.

Companions in Conversation

The second aspect—which you talk more about and is probably easier for readers to grasp—is this repeated motif of “the word made flesh.” I want to hear you talk about this a bit, because “the word made flesh” pulls us in an opposite direction from “the negative way of thinking,” as it’s understood in negative theology. How does this relate you in a different way to thinking about biophilosophy, to thinking about life?

DH: And worlding within the finite, especially SF worlding—speculative fabulation, science fact, speculative feminism, science fiction.

cw: Yes, but how do those two strands relate and disrelate against the background of the bigger question, this Catholic thing?

DH: Well, those are two key strands. You know, folks who grew up Catholic and took it seriously the way I did went to Catholic schools, were deeply involved in it. I was really a believer and a practitioner for many years past adolescence. It was never a kind of trivial “Oh yeah, I went to Catholic school, and it really didn’t mean much.” Some folks experienced it that way, but that’s not how I experienced it, at all. It really shaped me, profoundly. And some people who fall away from that . . . First, the idea of “falling” away, are called “lapsed” or “fallen” Catholics, right? There’s a whole joking culture about that, and Catholics can tell jokes about Catholicism they won’t let anyone else tell. My hatred for the Church is probably much fiercer than that of people who were never in love with it.

Companions in Conversation

That said, I stopped calling myself and letting anyone else use the term *lapsed*, and I rather like the locution of *secular Catholic*, partly because of Susan Harding's influence and her insistence on the extraordinary importance of various modes of Protestantism in the formation of the American state, plus the situated co-constitution of religion and the secular. She is writing very provocative stuff right now about the Protestant secularists of both the Evangelical sort and the Enlightenment and scientist sorts, the extreme importance of Protestant formations to both of these—one acknowledged, one not. She tracks the tug between the contemporary Evangelical Protestant secularists, the secular Protestants, and the secular separatists. The secular separatists are those who really want to put into law and enforce the separation of church and state at every imaginable opportunity, schools being the main battleground. Anyway, Susan has really influenced my thinking.

I think of myself as a secular Catholic, *not* a part of the secular separatist Protestant scene, even if willy-nilly I have little choice about participating as an American. I am not a Richard Dawkins type of character, waging war against “irrationalism” (of course, he's British, so it's a little odd to bring him into the American context). But I approach religion out of quite a different formation.

MATERIAL SEMIOTICS: EATING WHOM?

DH: First of all, there's the material semiotics of Catholicism, which is the word-made-flesh part. One could say, for a moment, that the secular secularists—especially the secular Protestants of the European streams—developed the semiotics of the separation of the signifier and the signified, of the absolutely arbitrary relationship of the signifier and the signified, of the inability of the word to touch the flesh. This is the profound break with the sacramentalism of Catholic theology, which I think is embedded in what became the dominant mode of semiotics in the American university, quite different from Charles Peirce's semiotics, it must be said. (Remember, it is Peirce's semiotics and aspects of American pragmatism that shaped both Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers, both my close colleague-friends.) I think the traditions embedded in American pragmatism, although I don't imagine that their inspirations are Catholic, are compatible and were helpful for me. But the implosion of metaphor (and more than metaphor), of trope and world, the extraordinary tentacular closeness of processes of semiosis and fleshliness, sets me up at the level of both affect and cognitive apparatus for being suspicious of the division between the human and everybody else. And the division between mind and body within the human. It just sets me up for being really unhappy with those splittings and great divides, at a level of my most fundamental formation as a person in the world.

There's no question that explicit Catholic practice and inti-

Companions in Conversation

mate experience mattered. The powerful experience of first eating Jesus when I was seven years old—terrifying, wonderful, amazing. It was a practice and an experience of a very deep kind, at levels of visually vivid nightmares, fierce daylight plans, intense loves, relentless questions. And there is no question—again at the level of both affect and cognitive apparatus, the various purifications and sortings of the world, two by two, you know, nature/culture, biology/society, mind/body, animal/human, signifier/signified, nyeh-nyeh/nyeh-nyeh—I just really was never any good at all of that. That has deeply influenced who I am as a writer.

cw: Yes, and in one of the first things I wrote in so-called Animal Studies—the piece on *The Silence of the Lambs* that I wrote with Jonathan Elmer—I tried to zero in on how that is connected precisely to questions of flesh and of animality and of species through the figure of Hannibal Lecter. I mean, you talk about eating Jesus . . .

DH: Oh my.

cw: Lecter is a laboratory for all of the Enlightenment discourses that would, in bad faith—and he precisely outs the bad faith—

DH: Doesn't he ever.

cw: . . . of all these modes of separation and clean conscience. As so—

DH: That's a perfect example.

Companions in Conversation

cw: As we put in the essay, Lecter's position is not "I eat animals and not therefore humans"—he does not believe in that sacrificial substitution. His logic is, "I eat animals and therefore humans." So monstrosity . . .

DH: Oh boy . . .

cw: . . . is always nearby when you're talking about—

DH: And there's no question that there's something about eating that outs this stuff particularly powerfully. "The Companion Species Manifesto" is deliberately working off of oral tropes: the first kissing scene, and the root meanings of companion, *cum panis*, with bread, at table together. I am deliberately working with questions of ingestion, digestion, indigestion.

cw: The importance of "messmates."

DH: Gestation, or *gestión*, bearing and carrying on, now not from the point of view of the uterus, but gestation from the point of view of eating, in substance this consubstantiality of eating and being eaten, which is different from the consubstantiality of either reproduction or generation. It just is.

cw: Yes.

DH: For me, the incarnation and sacramentalism were overwhelmingly about a shared meal, in and of the flesh. Carnality is seriously Catholic. Both cyborgs and dogs, both manifestos, bear witness to that!

Companions in Conversation

cw: You know, in a way, “conventional” Christianity ends up being kind of piggy-in-the-middle on this—because, actually, Derrida ends up where you end up, but from the other end of the equation.

DH: He’s coming at it as a Jewish Algerian, remember.

cw: So he’s the crazy Jew and you’re the crazy Catholic! (*Laughing.*)

DH: And Derrida had raised the question of sacrifice *way* more radically than I ever could have done it—I couldn’t have even imagined the depth with which he got the structure of sacrifice, right? Derrida taught me—it’s Derrida who led me to pose the problem as not “Thou shalt not kill” but “Thou shalt not make killable.” We somehow must come to terms with these questions without the structure of sacrifice. It’s not like we can just not inherit the structure of sacrifice—you don’t have a choice of just setting these things down; you can’t just set your burden down. But the question of sacrifice: for example, in science, the killing of the animal in the laboratory is still called “sacrificing.” The only reason in industrial meat agriculture it’s not called “sacrifice” is that the language is slightly secularized, but it’s still practiced and perceived that way, it must be said. I think that Derrida’s understanding and ability to communicate the depth of the trouble around the structures of sacrifice, beginning with Isaac, or before, and marching right through the Eucharist . . . (*laughs*)

Companions in Conversation

cw: We'd have to come up with a new name for you, because if Derida, then, is "bad" (read: Algerian; read: Muslim, Jew), then what would the equivalent on the Catholic side be? (*Laughing.*)

DH: (*Laughs.*) Well, I'm not sure, but I know where I went—and this will take us back to Isabelle Stengers in a minute. But insofar as I would acknowledge a—um, oh, I don't know—the word *religion* is a truly weird one here.

cw: Yes.

DH: Because the whole category of religion is invented as a modernist category.

cw: Yes, it is so foreshortened.

DH: It's a modernist category in the same way that both "science" and "culture" also are. And we know its history. That said, where I am most, I don't know, at home—I am drawn toward the Earth religions, partly toward the Wiccan, and, with Stengers, toward Starhawk's practices, but especially toward the great, old and new, ongoing chthonic ones under and of the Earth. For me, it's not Marija Gimbutas's Great Mother. I've never been much attracted to the Great Mother worlds, although I think they are fascinating, the many stories about the invention of patriarchy on the destroyed body of mother goddess, and so on.

That said, when I say I am a creature of the mud not the sky,

Companions in Conversation

I mean I am an entity given to the powers of Earth. I am terran. I am not astralized, not in awe of the chief gods and single gods, I am a terran. In league with the entities of Terra—Gaia is one of them, but Gaia is a bit of a problem if you go from Hesiod on, the *Theogony* on. By the way, I reread passages of the *Theogony* when I was thinking through some of these questions, and the hairs on my arms rose from the beauty of the language. And I was only reading it in a modern English translation, right? The power . . . I was just *stunned* by the beauty of the language. Wow. That said, Hesiod gave Gaia a cleaned-up lineage to ground the Greek pantheon and the Olympiad. Gaia is, shall we say, heteronormalized. That's not quite fair (*laughing*). She's still plenty queer (*still laughing*). But there is a kind of a heteronormative quality of the post-Hesiod Gaia that is hard to swallow.

cw: A little domesticated.

DH: Too much tamed. And I am much more interested in the lineages, or better webs, of Gaia that are not funneled into what becomes the Olympiad and the Greeks and the Romans and their Europeans. I am really interested in an older, wilder Gaia, in the Gorgones, the Nagas, Pachamama, Oya—in more and other than Gaia. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Déborah Danowski organized a meeting in Brazil around *Os Mil Nomes de Gaia*/The Thousand Names of Gaia—terran, global, heteroglot, finally unnamable. These names don't necessarily evoke or in-

Companions in Conversation

fluence each other; they may or may not be in historical, political, and cultural context; some are, some aren't. But I want to cast my lot with the ongoing, unfinished, dreadful powers of the Earth, where the risk, terror, and promise of uncategorizable mortal ongoing can still be found, and my Catholicism in the end went *there*. And I think that's kind of a natural turn—it's a naturalistic turn, among other things. The dreadful chthonic ones aren't transcendent, they aren't gods, they aren't omniscient beings, they aren't fixed entities, they aren't objects, they don't call for religions, much less beliefs. These are names of powers—or maybe the unnamings of fixed powers—and this gets me to the negative way of naming.

cw: Well, this is what I was going to come back to, because if all of this takes you back toward the mud, and back toward the dirt . . .

DH: . . . with the pigs and their peoples and carnalities, the ones the Monotheists truly couldn't handle (*laughing*) . . .

cw: . . . I mean, I think to talk about the word made flesh and to talk about Catholicism is first and foremost to talk about the word as fetish. If I think back over the length of your career, you have coined a lot of very powerful terms.

DH: I prefer them to words that granulate in your hands.

cw: But a lot of these terms have a kind of fetishistic power, I think, for a lot of people.

Companions in Conversation

DH: Knowing and not knowing the collected knowledges, the investments of desire . . .

cw: Right, and there are a zillion of these terms.

DH: And as soon as you fix them, or singularize them, then you're involved in idolatry and, in a way, fetishism. Besides, you never have a correct love, because love is always inappropriate, never proper, never clean—that's deep in my writing.

cw: Yes, and so I think the word made flesh is a way of marking a relation to doing, let's say, biophilosophy and technofeminism, queer biophilosophy, as a writing practice.

DH: I think that's true.

cw: But here's the interesting thing—

DH: But before you go to that, the word made flesh: you know, John's is not one of the synoptic gospels. The "word made flesh" is a very problematic phrase.

cw: Yes. Yes, it is.

DH: And so, I know that. And so I'm using it with a kind of . . . I'm using it and not using it at the same time, again tied into the fetishism question. . . . But you were going somewhere else.

THE NEGATIVE WAY OF NAMING

cw: Well, what I was circling back to is that then one has to ask—and this I think is really fascinating—one has to ask, What is this “other” (so to speak) commitment, which is to a structure familiar to us from negative theology, of the negative way of knowing? And you actually use the term *theological*.

DH: Absolutely, I read the theological works in question as a kid in college, just absolutely enamored.

cw: Right, but to me—and maybe you’re coming at this from a different direction—but to me, the negative way of naming . . .

DH: . . . is in a generative friction with . . .

cw: . . . or it doesn’t necessarily direct you away from Earth, but it directs you toward a kind of knowledge that can never be made manifest in flesh. Are you using it that way, or differently? What’s underneath that?

DH: A little differently from what you just said. I understand the suspicion or just flat-out contradiction that you’re asking me about.

cw: Oh, I don’t think it’s a contradiction, and I can tell you why in a minute, but go ahead.

DH: Here’s how I think about it. It’s not that the word is made *manifest* in flesh. It’s that semiosis and flesh are—what?—not

one, not two . . . what can we say next? It's not that something is made manifest in something else at some level deeper than symbol. Well, what's that? There's some more radical structure of identity/nonidentity; there's some more radical structure of nonidentity here that is profoundly materialist. And that's a problem for names. The minute you name something like that, you have misnamed it. The minute I name the chthonic powers, I have, by the very name itself, committed a kind of fixing of a fetish, a kind of idolatry. I think that this is where the *ouroboros* swallows its tail. I think that by going into the mud, into this proliferation of words—I think my proliferating words and figures themselves are flesh and do a lot of things. But what they can't do is stay still as a conceptual apparatus that makes most philosophers happy, and so they end up saying, “*Mere meta - phor,*” and I think, “Give me a break, guys. This is not mere metaphor, this is actually an enactment of, among other things, corporeal cognitive practice.”

cw: Right, well, this is why I mentioned fetish earlier, because the first thing about the fetish is that it materializes something that is beyond the site of materialization. But it's not—and this comes back to the “negative way”—it's not a given beyond, and it's not a fixed beyond, and it's not an antecedent beyond.

DH: Well, the negative way is a mode of thought that was originally developed in relation to the question of God.

cw: Of course.

Companions in Conversation

DH: The definition of God . . . any effort to produce a positive theology of God fails from the get-go, because God exceeds all possible specification; all possible names are from the get-go defeated because of the exeedingness of that which cannot be named. And you can't have an object without a proposition, so you call it that which cannot be named, which is already wrong. Even *that's* wrong. The infinitude of this, the infinitude of the nonpositivity.

cw: Oh no, that makes perfect sense to me.

DH: Well, it makes perfect sense to me, too, but I assure you that we're in the minority! (*Laughter.*) Well, transpose that, when the problem isn't any more God or Being, or infinity, it's actually finitude and mortality. The negative way of naming in theology was developed around the problem of infinity. I think for me the problem is, well, the binary opposite—you know, which is sort of embarrassing to say because, well, you can readily see why (*both laughing*). I mean, you laugh when this happens to you; language does this to you.

cw: Of course! But you know, when you were talking earlier about your interest (and this is before you were talking about Gaia) . . .

DH: . . . the chthonic ones . . .

cw: Yes, but I think the way that I see the negative way, negative naming, functioning in your work is that it's going to insist on a distinction between what you're doing and the idea of some kind of finally holistic Mother Earth.

Companions in Conversation

DH: Absolutely. You will not come together from two, or many, into one, because that is precisely the idolatry that the negative way tries to block.

cw: That's right. And so, to me, here we actually circle back to what seems a very deep connection between your work and later-generation systems theory of the kind that Niklas Luhmann is doing, because Luhmann once said that the closest thing to the second-order systems theory he does is the negative theology of Nicholas of Cusa.

DH: Well, okay.

cw: And I actually think that, for the very same reason, what you're calling in your work the word made flesh is a kind of materialization of something that's also radically not present because it's bigger. But it's not bigger in the sense of "Oh, you can point to it and grasp it."

DH: It cannot be dealt with indexically, it cannot be dealt with holistically, it cannot be dealt with representationally. I mean, I think the negative way is a terribly serious injunction to, among other things, humility.

cw: Yes. Yes.

DH: It was like that question at the conference over the weekend. What do you do when your tools hit the wall? The negative way is constantly asking the question, What do you do when your tools hit the wall? When I say that I'm a creature of the mud, I am *of* the mud—forget the word *creature*—I am *of* the mud, the muddiness is ongoing. The worlding, the sympoiesis . . .

Companions in Conversation

cw: . . . the muddling . . .

DH: . . . truly, I am muddling, and I am in the muddle (I used that in a lecture title recently; *muddle* is a fascinating word). So “muddling along” is taken as the definition of not thinking, when it’s quite other than that. So I think we’re in a *ouroboros*, snake-swallowing-its-own-tail kind of moment with this commitment to semiotic fleshliness, which I am saying instead of using John’s “word made flesh” because I want to get away a little bit from the particular track that took, theologically. The semiotic fleshliness, what I ended up calling “the material semiotic,” the semiotic material, the inextricability of it.

cw: You want to get away from the done deal theologically.

DH: Well, I want to get away from the Hellenism through which John comes down to us. I want to get away from that particular theological tradition. And in the mud, or in the muddle, full of tentacular ones, including *ouroboros*, the snake is always swallowing its own tail. That *can* be taken as a figure of a great completion.

cw: As a figure of holism, yes.

DH: But it shouldn’t be. Among other things, the snake—well, we’re going to have problems of excretion in the end because there’s another hole! I mean, we’ve got another hole operating here! As soon as you take the snake seriously, then you can’t use

Companions in Conversation

that as a figure of holism. But you *can* take it as a figure of a certain way that the material semiotic, the fleshly semiosis, meets the negative way. There is a kind of *ouroboric* quality, keeping in mind that you can't have the figure of the whole Earth, whether it's whole Earth of NASA, and of a certain kind of (misinterpreted, Latour argues persuasively) Lovelockean Gaia hypothesis about the living Earth. You cannot have the whole Earth either way, either from the older traditions or from the more space-age formulations.

cw: And that's precisely why you can neither be utopian nor dystopian.

DH: No.

cw: Because what's at stake—this is, to me, a very strong point of contact between what we've been talking about in your work and the kind of stuff Derrida does—what's at stake is futurity and *making* futurity.

DH: I agree with that.

cw: Precisely because it's not about infinitude in some way.

DH: It's not about past-present-future.

cw: No. And so that brings the emphasis back to this kind of dynamic process of materialization.

Companions in Conversation

DH: I agree with that, and I love Derrida in just this way. And you're one of the people who give me Derrida, who make me need and want to read what I would probably otherwise just say, "I already know this. There. I'm sure it's great." (*Both laughing.*) But what I really *do* read . . .

cw: . . . but I'm reading about cephalopods right now!

DH: . . . *I'm* reading about cephalopods right now, goddamn it! (*Both laughing.*) And not only that, I am reading Ursula LeGuin again, and I get so much from her! Truly, with every bit as much nuance and depth. She and I just had this little email riff together today around the storying and caring of Earthlings, and she wanted to put "music-ing" in there. And so on. Without dystopia or utopia. Her kind of "always coming home." And remember *The Word for World Is Forest*, where at the end of this book—that the blockbuster film *Avatar* did such violence with and didn't even deal with the intellectual property rights around—anyway, that's another issue around LeGuin's story. But at the end of *The Word for World Is Forest*, the indigenous leader says that we can no longer pretend that we don't know how to murder *each other*. LeGuin, like Derrida, cannot rest in, cannot have the solace of, a utopic future. I turn to what Deborah Bird Rose would call with her Australian Aboriginal teachers and interlocutors, somehow being response-able in the thick present, so as to leave more quiet country to those who come after; you're facing those who came before. Anyway, I've learned

Companions in Conversation

from many writers that resonate with Derrida. *And* I have high stakes in citation apparatuses, since Derrida gets cited *a lot*, as a theorist, and Ursula le Guin, kinda never. I have straight-up old-fashioned feminist stakes in citing accurately where I get my ideas. In brotherly love with Derrida, but not from him (*laughing*). My sisters rock!

cw: Although he would probably accept her income on her novels, I would guess (*laughing*).

DH: Well, but you see where I'm at; I'm joking about this a bit, but I had an elite education, too. I was reading the medieval theologians, I was reading Heidegger, I was reading Jaspers, I was reading biology, and James Joyce. I mean I have a perfectly elite education, thank you, thanks to Sputnik. My Catholic girl's brain got educated, as opposed to my being a pro-Life activist mother of ten, because I became a national resource after Sputnik. My brain got valuable, and so I got this crazy education instead of being an Irish Catholic pro-Life activist.

cw: So you're a Sputnik Catholic!

DH: I'm a Sputnik Catholic! I mean, there was a branch point, and that branch point wasn't about me being a neat person or something. It was about—I became a national resource, at a certain moment in the Cold War (*both laughing*). Very humbling!

cw: I think that's a great way to frame it, and I think this a great aspect of your work, and we could actually say more—and maybe you

Companions in Conversation

do want to say more—about that. I think that irrigating and aerating this force of the Catholic in your work is something we've done with your work, but, you know, you're not the only one, as you've pointed out. I mean, there's Isabelle Stengers, there's Latour.

DH: Hey, the Catholic thing turned out to be kind of big!

cw: It makes me want to say, "Hey, what's going on here?!" (*Laughing.*)

DH: Whoa! (*Laughing.*) Wait a minute, the Jews and the Catholics are truly taking over! I think there's something to that. I think the Protestants ran out of steam, thank God, and none too soon. I'm kidding, of course.

cw: But it is kind of an interesting phenomenon.

DH: But we haven't even begun to talk about, we have not touched the extraordinary calling to account from none of the above, thank you—the thinkers of various indigenous traditions who are also in the written record, and we can no longer ignore them. The folks out of these traditions are themselves reworking their current and past heritages, not to mention thinkers from globally diverse Islam and . . .

cw: . . . that would be another manifesto . . .

DH: This is a really big deal: we have not even begun to talk about the other great literate traditions, thank you very much. We are being very parochial and we are acknowledging it, right off the top.

Companions in Conversation

cw: Yes, we are.

DH: That said, the Catholics and the Jews are taking over! (*Both laughing.*) At last, and thank God I'm here at the time! (*Laughing continues.*)

C O S M O P O L I T I C S ,
C O M P O S I T I O N , C O M P O S T

cw: Well, I wanted to maybe wrap up by asking . . . We mentioned Isabelle. As I've told you, one of my favorite moments in the *Cosmopolitics* project that we did in the *Posthumanities* series in translation is her engagement of Richard Dawkins's attack, essentially, on religion and the kind of cosmopolitical response that she offers to that, which I think is really—

DH: It's so fundamental.

cw: It's really remarkably thoughtful, very nimble, but I also think it's very powerful and very pointed in places. And I wanted to ask you—we've been talking about philosophy, we've been talking about theory, we've been talking about issues that involve certain kinds of audiences with certain kinds of expertise and not others, which is a real issue, as we have learned from your work and from lots of people, in terms of political effectivity and making social change. I wanted to ask you a question that I really don't have an answer for. What would a cosmopolitical response look like to the fact that in the United States at the moment, apparently 50 percent

or more of the people in the country believe in Creationism? And probably those same 50 percent or more say that global warming doesn't exist. What is the cosmopolitical response to the situation in which half the country believes this and thinks that the other half is crazy and vice versa?

DH: And vice versa.

cw: I think this is a huge question.

DH: No, I couldn't agree more. I think it's urgent, and it's only one of a deck of cards of questions that are linked in this kind of structure, so . . .

cw: . . . so where do we begin?

DH: I think that there are some places to start, and I think there are some people who have started, and with whom we must connect and enlarge and think. And I'd start with Isabelle's "not so fast." The pluralist imagination has always imagined that if you could just get people to sit down at the same table together and they could just talk to each other for long enough, they would somehow come to understand each other well enough that they could make decisions in the common good. That's the fundamental democratic liberal pluralist model, which is clearly broken, and, you know, who could not have a soft spot in their heart for that model? We know its problems, but losing it is not a small problem.

Companions in Conversation

So Isabelle, in her cosmopolitical thinking, makes us pay attention to this: what about the folks who really want to say, “Not me, thank you, not your table, count me out. You may think you’re endlessly inclusive, but frankly, count me out, and not so fast.” I think that’s a little bit the structure of what we’re looking at here. There are many sides of this fundamental split. There are misidentifications of very important kinds. For example, on the global warming/climate change complex. Susan Harding is one of the people who insists that a lot of folks who say this is a conspiracy, or that this isn’t happening, or maybe that “God wouldn’t let that happen” and Providence will provide, or they’re “science deniers” or whatever—a lot of these folks, what they’re really mad at is Big Government, and a particular sense that Big Government has always screwed us over, and Big Science has always screwed us over. Of course, these same people may be accepting some sort of major agricultural subsidies. Think how subsidized the economy of Kansas is, for example, with federal dollars. But Susan says that all this gets ascribed to a fundamentally religious thing when a lot is going on, and it matters to be precise about what’s happening. And then, within these matters it is important to notice—let’s take Kansas again—the “creation/care” people, who are really upset at the failure of the ethical obligation of stewardship as Christians and are working very hard on such things as the better care of animals and not screwing up the climate. Raise “evolution” and they’re out the door, but raise questions of good stewardship and you’ve got a practical conversation going on.

Companions in Conversation

So why raise all the questions at once? Why not be willing to disaggregate what you're so sure of? Me, I'm a scientist—I'm really very sure about the evolutionary history of life on Earth. And I'm really very sure that the climate modelers are more right than wrong. You know, I'm really pretty sure of a lot of things, because I think, in Bruno's sense, the networks are very strong. This stuff holds against strong tests. Well, people like me, which is half the country, need to be willing to disaggregate a bit and engage what Isabelle in her cosmopolitical thinking will call an "ecology of practices." Okay, here we are in the Central Coast of California in a big drought. Let's think about water. Let's not think about water by saying in your first sentence, you know, "caused by global warming." Some people are going to think that, and some people, not. . . . What we're worried about together in our communities is water. That's already hard enough.

cw: Let's start with a problem that we all agree we share.

DH: We all share this problem, and we all have very different ideas about what to do about it. That's already hard enough. That does not mean the science is not settled on climate change, or that relativism reigns; it does mean learning to compose possible ongoingness inside relentlessly diffracting worlds. And we need resolutely to keep cosmopolitical practices going here, focusing on those practices that can build a common-enough world. Bruno says this, too. Common is not capital C "Com-

Companions in Conversation

mon.” How can we build—compose—a better water policy in the state of California and its various, many parts? How can we truly learn to compose rather than decry or impose?

cw: And I have to ask—and we’ve talked about this over the past couple of days in terms of the very important term “we”—who’s the “we” here (which to me is a term of audience)?

DH: And there are people who put their body on the line and say, “I don’t want to be part of this process.”

cw: That’s right. And also it’s in turn a question, often, not of theory but of rhetoric. And if you don’t pay attention to audience and to rhetoric—and I’m speaking now partly based on my experience as an animal rights activist twenty, twenty-five years ago—one thing you learn very quickly is that if you can’t use a different rhetorical toolbox with different audiences—

DH: You’re not very good at what you do . . .

cw: . . . then you’re never going to get anywhere.

DH: Well, if you can’t use a different rhetorical approach and get a different toolbox, then you don’t care very much about the animals. And perhaps also, a different *ontological* approach, attuned to different compositions, different worldings.

cw: That’s right. And this is where I find Isabelle’s work more useful than Bruno’s.

Companions in Conversation

DH: I think Isabelle's thinking is very radical.

cw: I think she has a better ear—not just a better ear but maybe also what you could call a better sensibility for just how nimble and supple and, as you say, sort of hesitating and self-questioning these rhetorical issues are.

DH: There's a huge overlap between Isabelle and Bruno in this, too.

cw: Oh, of course, huge.

DH: They have been in deep, thick, loving exchange for years.

cw: Of course.

DH: That said . . .

cw: They do different kinds of work.

DH: They do different kinds of work, and also they draw from different communities of practice in their thinking—and this is where I think Isabelle is drawing from the work of Starhawk—not just Prigogine, Deleuze, Whitehead, and—

cw: I'll tell you who else she and I talked about the last time I saw her: William James.

DH: Absolutely. James is terribly important to her.

cw: And Pragmatism. I told Isabelle, "I think of you as, first and foremost, a pragmatist thinker."

Companions in Conversation

DH: I'm sure she accepted that.

cw: She not only accepted it; she said, "This is a philosophical resource and tradition that we don't have in Europe that is really, really important to me, and I had to come to people like James, but more broadly the pragmatist tradition, to get there."

DH: Yes. So look: Deleuze, James, and the traditions of practice, she is interested in *practices*. So she's not interested in Wicca as religion: she's interested in the practices that gather up and make worlds. All three of those—Deleuze, James, and Starhawk—are illustrations of partial differences between her approach and Bruno's. I think they appreciate this in each other. There's this huge overlap that they share around questions of actor-network—well, semiotics. "Actor-network theory" is much too reductive.

cw: Semiotics in the most general sense.

DH: And semiotics in the Peircean tradition. Actually in that sense, Bruno and Isabelle converge around inheritances from pragmatism. I think Bruno has been resistant, for diverse situated reasons, to certain of the resources that are important for thinking in the present mix. Foucault is one of them; Marx is another. The entire feminist tradition has been another, but I see that changing now. Bruno has become much more aware of feminist thinking, and curious, but it's been very hard for him actually to *use* the work in his own arguments and figures. He

Companions in Conversation

cites the work more richly now, but actually *using* it is just beginning. But why? I don't entirely understand this history. I consider him a serious friend as well as interlocutor. At one time, he was seriously upset with me for what he called (or Jim Clifford actually called) the "kitchen-sink syndrome." Because I want everything, I end up putting it all in! (*Both laughing.*) But he's a more careful thinker! Perhaps in less of a muddle.

cw: I actually would not say that he's a more careful thinker, but I know what you mean.

DH: You know what I'm saying.

cw: I know what you mean, and my guess is that people would agree with you. I mean, for me, thought practices are writing practices—as you said, they're practices of materialization. If there's no other lesson in twentieth-century philosophy, that's the lesson.

DH: Yes.

cw: That's why Heidegger says things like "the world worlds," and that's why we get the entire lineage of thinking that we do.

DH: Absolutely.

cw: And that's why we get you treating what most people call "signifiers" as fetishes in "the word made flesh."

DH: Yes, I'm doing something different.

Companions in Conversation

cw: So to me, you're just doing something different from Bruno.

DH: Tremendously interlaced, but also quite different.

cw: Theoretically interlaced, but actually as a practice quite different.

DH: As a practice, different work. But watch for a minute Bruno's work at the Sciences Po in Paris, and his AIME project, and Isabelle's work with GECO, the *groupe d'études constructivistes* in Brussels. Both of them have been really engaged—in the writing and also more than that. For example, in Bruno's case, in engagements in theater practice, projects with earth scientists, engagements in new ways of trying to pull together worlds that make a difference. There is a way in which Bruno's practice has been, in my view, very much in the right sort of muddle. And Isabelle's, too. And it shows up also in the writing of their collaborators, students, and associates. It shows up in their projects. I think that Bruno in Paris and Isabelle in Brussels have been important in nurturing many kinds of generative work. I feel like we are in a string figure game with each other.

cw: And you're holding down the Catholic fort in North America!
(Both laughing.)

DH: Or at least in Santa Cruz!

Companions in Conversation

THE CHTHULUCENE FROM SANTA CRUZ

DH: I want to end our conversation with the seed of a “Chthulucene Manifesto.” *My Chthulucene* is the time of mortal compositions at stake to and with each other. This epoch is the *kainos*(-cene) of the ongoing powers that are terra, of the myriad tentacular ones in all their diffracted, webbed temporalities, spacialties, and materialities. *Kainos* is the temporality of the thick, fibrous, and lumpy “now,” which is ancient and not. The Chthulucene is a now that has been, is now, and is yet to come. The Chthulucene is a relentlessly diffracted time-space (remember Karen Barad on quantum fields). These powers surge through all that are terra. They are destructive/generative and in no one’s back pocket. They are not finished, and they can be dreadful. Their resurgence can be dreadful. Hope is not their genre, but demanding response-abilities might be. Terran forces will kill fools who provoke without ceasing. Killed but not gone, these fools will haunt in tentacular ongoing destruction.

The chthonic powers, both generative and destructive, are kin to Latour’s and Stengers’s Gaia. They are not mother; they are snakey gorgons like the untamed and mortal Medusa; they do not care about the thing that calls itself the Anthropos, the upward-looking one. That upward-looking one has no idea how to go visiting, how to be polite, how to practice curiosity without sadism (remember Vinciane Despret and Hannah Arendt). In the Anthropocene (a naming I have come to need, too), the

Companions in Conversation

chthonic entities can and do join in accelerating double death provoked by the arrogance of the industrializers, supertransporters, and capitalizers—in seas, lands, airs, and waters. In the Anthropocene the tentacular ones are nuclear and carbon fire; they burn fossil-making man, who obsessively burns more and more fossils, making ever more fossils in a grim mockery of Earth's energies. In the Anthropocene, the chthonic ones are active, too; all the action is not human, to say the least. And written into the rocks and the chemistry of the seas, the surging powers are dreadful. Double death is in love with haunted voids.

The chthonic ones can and do infuse all of terra, including its human people, who become—with a vast motley of others. All of these beings live and die, and can live and die well, can flourish, not without pain and mortality, but without practicing double death for a living. Terran ones, including human people, can strengthen the resurgence (Anna Tsing's kind) of vitalities that feed the hungers of a diverse and luxuriating world. The Chthulucene was, is, and can still be full of "Holocene" resurgence—of the ongoingness—of a wild, cultivated and uncultivated, dangerous, but plentiful Earth for always evolving critters including human people. Mixed and dangerous, the Chthulucene is the temporality of our home world, terra. All of us who care about recuperation, partial connections, and resurgence must learn to live and die well in the entanglements of the tentacular without always seeking to cut and bind everything in our way. Tentacles are feelers; they are studded with stingers; they taste

Companions in Conversation

the world. Human people are in/of the holobiome of the tentacular, and the burning and extracting times of the Anthropos are like monocultural plantations and slime mats where once forests, farms, and coral reefs flourished, which were allied to fungal materialities and temporalities in very different ways.

The Anthropocene will be short. It is more a boundary event, like the K-Pg boundary (Cretaceous–Paleogene boundary), than an epoch. This is Scott Gilbert’s suggestion. Another mutation of the thick *Kainos* is already coming. The only question is, Will the brevity of the Anthropocene/Capitalocene/Plantationocene “boundary event” be because double death reigns everywhere, even in the tombs of the Anthropos and his kin? Or because multispecies entities, including human people, allied in the nick of time with the generative powers of the Chthulucene, to power resurgence and partial healing in the face of irreversible loss, so that rich worldings of old and new kinds took root? Compost, not posthuman.

The Chthulucene is full of storytellers. Ursula LeGuin is one of the best, in everything she wrote. Hayao Miyazaki is another: remember *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. And then go to the Inupiaq online game *Never Alone*. Watch the trailer! <http://neveralonesgame.com/>

With these storytellers, my next manifesto is “Make Kin Not Babies!”

Companions in Conversation