

Rendering Cruelty in Art and Politics In conversation with Sue Coe

 www.animalliberationcurrents.com/rendering-cruelty-art-politics/

Sue Coe one has long been the single most recognizable artist dealing with animal liberation politics and one of the few to draw explicit connections between animal oppression and capitalism. In work that has spanned decades, she has forced readers to consider the horrors of animal subjugation and inspired many activists to re-think the role of class struggle in the movement. Her most recent collection of art supports a movement call to action: *The Animals' Vegan Manifesto*. The works are inspired by graphic novels of the 1930's and are in the tradition of Goya, Kollwitz, and Groszand. Dedicated to animals liberated from slaughterhouses, the 115 black-and-white woodcut illustrations span an enormous range of ideas, contexts and interpretations. As is often the case with Sue's work, many images are troubling and provocative.

*All images are from *The Animals' Vegan Manifesto*; ALC questions are in bold.

This is now your 7th book. It is a fantastic collection of work.

I would, of course, like to start with the ideas that went into it. It comes out at a particularly alarming period in American politics, published this past January on the eve of the inauguration of Donald Trump. Animal liberation has not yet established itself as a viable politic within the left, a left that now finds itself under both a continuing and renewed siege. There are serious questions as to where or even whether there may be an opening for animal liberation struggles to coalesce into a viable political bloc. In light of this, releasing a work of this kind becomes especially urgent.

What was the creative process like over this recent period – were you anticipating some of these questions?

I have always understood that this time period is the fifth and final stage of capitalism, which, in its death throes, will become particularly dangerous to all life. Animals as a class of beings are facing extinction. What's alarming is Clinton would not have lifted a finger for animals either, it would have been business as usual. Animals and those humans who speak for them are in the same struggle as any other social justice movement in history. In the US we have a president who calls women fat pigs and dogs, migrant workers rapists and drug dealers, calls lawyers and judges un-American, blames African Americans for police violence, journalists are called liars, military force was used to remove American Indians from their sacred land – again — and he wants to ban Muslims. This is month one, month two he will go after senior citizens. He and his cohorts, have a blanket condemnation and loathing for anyone not a white billionaire.

He has accidentally unified us. The forces of oppression create the resistance and animal rights activists are everywhere, existing within all his target groups. It may spell different radical strategies, other than corporate welfare. Animal exploitation has always been incorporated into the politics of the right, in the form of the meat industrial complex and big pharma, now animal rights will be joined to the Left.

The book is based around a manifesto, but the actual statement is very concise – in fact quite understated – for a manifesto. Can you expand a bit on the meaning of the statement? What are you hoping to achieve with it?

Hah! I wrote so many different manifesto versions! None worked. I have reams of scrapped ideas. At the suggestion of an animal rights lawyer friend, I went back to the Massachusetts Bay Colony for the language of the first welfare laws. I tried to adapt the sophisticated language of the communist manifesto, then the American Constitution.

Nothing worked. It would have been a pastiche. In my mind the entire time was Orwell's Animal Farm manifesto and the Beasts of England song: that the old boar taught the farmed animals to sing. He told them they were all going to die and they had to resist.

Orwell organically unified the Left with animal rights and much as I tried, I couldn't improve on what he wrote. Orwell didn't manipulate animals like glove puppets. His critique of the Left goes much deeper than that. There is a scene where the liberated farmed animals walk into the kitchen of the farm house and see hanging body parts of animals, they carry them outside for a burial. Then the scene of the donkey, written with great poignancy, desperately running after the knackers truck containing the worn-out cart horse who was told he was going to the hospital. The donkey in Animal Farm was the knowledge. Donkeys live long lives, so he saw what happened to generations of farmed animals. In my book there is a donkey, and the animals win. They stayed equal in the struggle, no one became more equal. They achieved a world of non-violence. In the end, I tried to get as close to what I think an animal would say to us. It's so simple!

My intent is for the 'reader' — the book is all images that are meant to be read — to go vegan. To see that animals have their own agency, sense of justice (they escape slaughterhouses all the time) and speak for those who cannot.

Readers will find some familiar themes in this collection. You have been uncompromising in dealing with the visual depictions of mass animal slaughter in a very direct ways. The topic is horrific and overwhelming, but you do not hide the visceral impact of that reality, or make any particular attempt to gloss over it with the use of stylistic or conceptual artistic devices.

At the same time, the footage of slaughterhouses, rendering plants, undercover cruelty investigations – and graphic images generally – are becoming not just ubiquitous, but the subject of increasing criticism. The criticism is directed at the potential desensitizing impact of this imagery on activists and questions whether it has genuine use-value as an organizing tool.

Do you feel a sense of conflict about this? As an artist, do you have a sense your own impact on readers – and have you detected any change in reader's reaction over time?

My work is essentially reportage, going places where a camera is not allowed and recording what I see. Most of my work history has been working for newspapers and magazines covering stories or recreating events. When Biggie Smalls was shot, I recreated the scene, as close as possible for a publication. Same with any event deemed as news. Along with covering the AIDS pandemic and HIV within the prison system, night court, sweat shops etc., making that work for mass media publications.

There was zero interest from the media in covering animal exploitation, so I went feral, and did that work on my own and got it published myself. Eventually, "non-commissioned" animal work became my full time job. I may go back to other subjects – and certainly am going to address Trump regime – but the animal work is my mission.

If people are bored or turned off by images of, say, refugees being washed up onto beaches, then too bad.

It's incredibly hard to gain access to slaughterhouses or any of these concealed industries. There are volunteers right now, rescuing animals or picking up bodies on beaches, they are on the front lines. This is not about ratings or treating the viewer gently, it's about the victims, and the massive injustice perpetrated, it must be relentlessly covered until it stops. Animal activists know what is going on. My images are to help support them. Other people think they can choose to be indifferent and the filter of art is a useful veil to present the reality. It opens up a chance to have a dialogue where the viewer asks questions and is more open to the challenge of change.

I know my work does work as an activist tool. Am continuously adjusting my approach, fine tuning, based on what works and what doesn't work. Something I consider to be 'good art' may not be activist art. Activist art may not be good art. It's always been a balance of form and content throughout history of art.

If I was in a slaughterhouse, it's not as devastating. Am used to being in slaughterhouses, and can turn off that part of my brain, to do the drawings. If live footage of animal abuse lands in my email, am I not prepared, I find it



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break in slaughterhouses. The animals will be waiting in pens outside. An animal inside, may be still alive in a restraining pen, which is a steel box.

Since I started writing this, hundreds of thousands of animals have been slaughtered. All of us should be aware of the illusion of safety given to some, whilst so many, are not safe. I think the real question is how that footage is being used, is it being shown to raise money for a single issue campaign? Is it being used to raise money for vet treatment of an individual? Or is it being used to promote the abolition of all animal use? The strategic danger of course, is to criminalize individual slaughterhouse staff as the 'other' or the anomaly, with the message that there can be a humane way to murder others. The latter message is quite sinister and leads us down the path to fully automated slaughterhouses with no staff, and cameras in an endless loop recording the silence of animals being tipped into gas chambers.

There is a particular work that depicts a pig dressed in striped pyjamas that recalls the garb prisoners were forced to wear in places like Auschwitz. You have used this kind of imagery only on occasion, but it is placed somewhat conspicuously near the beginning of this book and includes text that explicitly references Nazism as a normalized experience for animals. Some artists that focus on animal liberation, such as Jo Frederickson, use these kinds of images a great deal, but many other artists consciously avoid invoking them.

There is a considerable intellectual tension regarding the use of terms such as “holocaust”, “slavery”, “genocide” and others when interpreting the politics of animal liberation or articulating the character of the violence done to them.

There is a lot at work here: properly interpreting actual politics, the sensitivity of potentially erasing the histories of certain ethnic groups, the fear of somehow diminishing the uniquely *human* political experience. It also speaks to the very ability to articulate certain *possibilities* for social change. But at the same time there is also a critical semantic weakness, in that even these kinds of terms somehow fail to adequately grasp the political dimensions of animal's oppression, the industrial scale of atrocities, the intimacy of human involvement in them and the intersections with other systems of oppression.

How do you navigate these sensibilities and interpret these kinds of “semantics of oppression” as they relate to other species?

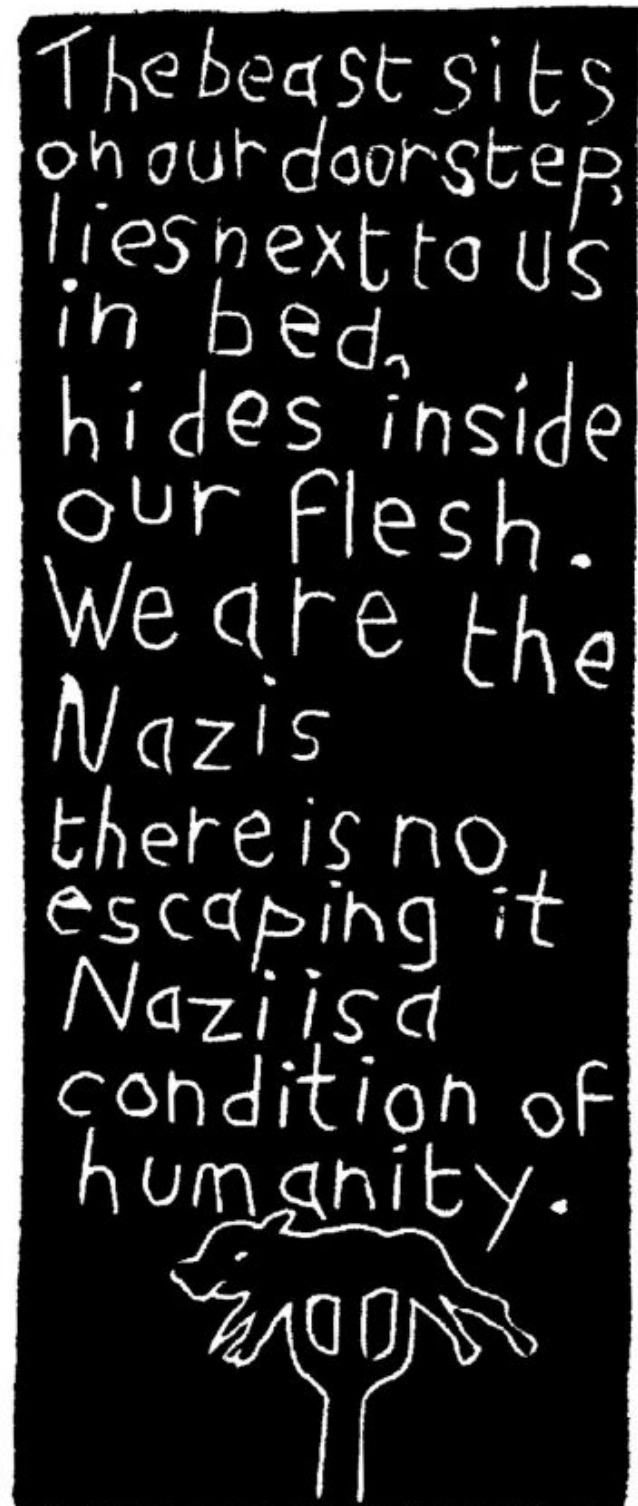
I have a German book, somewhere, published in the 1930's and republished, translated into English, with an introduction by Goring. The book is promoting the modernization of slaughterhouses, making them more efficient. The Germans were proud of their hygienic and efficient slaughterhouses and the British meat industry was impressed and wanted to keep up. The introduction explains that Hitler youth were put to work, collecting the tails and manes and hooves of animals for use in industry, making them more efficient. What was formerly discarded as waste was being used. At the same time, the German Government was deciding that animals owned by Jewish farmers were 'unclean' and were not to be rendered.

The mechanization of death, was well underway, before the human Holocaust. Napoleon, for example, created the first mobile slaughterhouses to feed the troops, and then large municipal slaughterhouses.

In image making, everything is like something else, if art was only about original concepts, the canvas would be blank or abstract splatters and not be accessible.

I would employ the imagery of animals dressed in work camp pajamas, very, very sparingly and carefully, and in context. Fascism is not German – the comment next to the image makes clear our day to day complicity. The slaughterhouse is our house. If we reject speciesism then we will not be the silent. If we accept and normalize breeding other persons just to murder them, then we are capable of any atrocity. How many times have we heard of violent crime, being described thusly: “they behaved like animals”? We know what happens next.

The history of revolutionary art, anti-fascist soviet art for example, depicts the Enemy as sharks, wolves, snakes, predators to be annihilated. If we, as animal activists refer to farmed animals being raped to extract semen or force semen into cows or pigs or turkeys, is that appropriate terminology, when women and girls are raped? It's certainly a concept people can extend to understanding the animals plight. It gets the message across. Every depiction of animal exploitation is seen through the lens of a human-centric experience. Our range of communication in describing the slaughter of all animals, ourselves included, is so limited. Which is the problem. The human mind just



Animal Farm Fascism

cannot conceive of it. I don't have a clear answer to your question, except to veer on the side of not re-victimizing others to make a point. But am not the art police either.

Some of your works have distinct elements of surrealism to them, even displaying a kind of psychedelia. Although a bit complicated, surrealism has a long association with radical politics going back to Breton and Peret. But like other “movements” in art, it becomes superseded by others and its influence and meanings change over time. It doesn't seem an accident that your images seem to engage with and continue this tradition. Can you tell us a bit of what you were thinking here and how you reinterpret the surrealist tradition for a modern political artist in the context of animal liberation?

I have never looked at the Surrealism movement. Now you have made me interested in investigating it! When the printing press was invented in the time of the Reformation, the most popular broadsides apart from the Bible were World Upside Down woodcuts. These images portrayed a world where the power relationships were reversed. It shows us that the artisans and peasants had a keen and insightful view of both class struggle and animal lives. These broadsides continued to be popular into the 19th century in all European counties. They would depict men in harness dragging carriages of horses, men, breast feeding babies, fishes holding a rod and hook, fishing for humans, stags hunting humans, trees with their roots to the sky, churches loosened from gravity falling off the earth, pigs roasting humans on a spit. They were the “alternative facts” of the day and allowed the peasant some freedom of speech to take on injustices without being punished by the state or the church. Grandville, the French caricaturist, continued this tradition into the 19th century with his little drawings of animals in human clothes, depicting humans in zoos being gawked at by animal crowds and insects in gentlemen's attire. He died in poverty in an institution (the fate of most artists) and his wife made hair curlers out of his drawings. But his illustrated books remain. Have always thought his small drawings were more interesting than most ‘important’ French painters.

I'd like to return to the idea of “agency”. Interspecies communication, the notion of animals as social & cultural agents — and the idea of certain groups of non-human species having a kind of political agency — is just beginning to gain political salience. It appears to be guided by some elements of European and Australian Critical Animal Studies – meaning it is getting academic treatment ahead of activist practice. This stands in sharp contrast to much of the activist community, where other species are tacitly viewed as a kind of undifferentiated, monolithic “other”, whatever values are superimposed on them.

You have highlighted the important insight that a genuine understanding of animal agency can tell us a great deal not only about other animals, but about ourselves as human beings – socially and culturally. This speaks to where we ultimately need to orient some of our political efforts. There are several images in the *Manifesto* that deal very consciously with this. They can be interpreted in various ways by readers, but can you give us some hints as to what at least inspired them?

Humans are not intelligent enough to understand other species. Possibly generations of dogs have made the most effort in understanding us, but it's been thousands of years of labor on their part, as we are not fast learners. Am sure they would prefer to abandon the quest if the conditions were right. Remember the playing card test Leaky gave to his prospective primate researchers? He was interviewing applicants for the study of orangutans, chimpanzees and gorillas. He put the cards down on the table and then took them away and asked each applicant what they remembered. The applicants that remembered that cards were stained and bent and torn and described the condition of each card, as well as the symbols on the card, were Goodall, Birute and Fossey. Did their gender effect their recall? Possibly. They were not compelled to name the King of Hearts, Seven of Clubs to prove their memory. He hired them. Animals as perceived by humans, fall into ‘biological Thatcherism’ (Midgley) or a kind of reductive Darwinism where each action is presumed to be genetically linked to survival. Or even worse: as clocks, mechanisms with no agency whatsoever. Animals study and observe us all of the time. Their day-to-day survival is based on knowing and predicting of our actions. Most of us are oblivious to animals, as anything other than property. Our observations of our own species are distorted by the impulse for power and control.

Part of animal agency, I think, is their very bodies are evolving as a resistance to our rule: jumper viruses that can

leap to different species; BSE in cow brains does not fall within a category of a life form as a prion, becomes lethal to us; avian influenza contains the genes from 'factory farmed' hogs – it's a type of rebellion/agency on a cellular level. As birds are such a diverse species, the virus can never fully take hold with them. Farmed animals being fed antibiotics, which function as a growth hormone is making our species increasingly vulnerable to infectious diseases like antibiotic resistant TB. Nature abhors a stand. We survived because of species variety which diminishes every day. Our crimes against other animal persons, exacerbated by the economic system of capitalism, are inconceivable. They are only partially glimpsed and then helped by the genes of non-humans. In our skin, we detect day and night by fruit fly eye genes, the fly is a part of us. We are less important in the scheme of things, than a fly or a worm or bee. Blake pointed that out, hundreds of years ago, without the power of an electron microscope.

There is almost no light pollution where I live, so was sitting outside one night looking at the stars and heard a coyote yipping quite close to me, which is not unusual. Could see him or her in the starlight. What was unusual, was also sitting close to the coyote was a large bear, also singing but in bark sounds. They appeared to be sitting side by side looking up at the night sky and singing together. They could have been old friends, or learning different sounds from each other, don't know.

There seems to be a large and increasing number of artists engaging with the *ideas* of animal rights and liberation, but fewer who would describe themselves as actively engaged in animal liberation *struggle*. It stands as both a commentary on the state of the animal liberation movement and a testament to your own intellect that you are one of the few – perhaps only – such artist that is politically committed to socialism and openly declare these commitments in your art.

Can you tell us a bit about how you were “radicalized”? What are some of the key interconnections that you see between these movements?

Animals are oppressed as a class. Early connections were made by the first Labour Party, between pit ponies and miners and child labor. All were small enough to work in narrow tunnels, and then small enough to dig trenches and fight in WW1, killing other working class people from different countries. 99% of all horses and donkeys were taken from field labour to war labour. Connections were made between the Suffragettes and animals and the working classes and vivisected animals. The poor realized the bodies of their loved ones were going to be dug up for research by medical students and protected graves by fencing. They identified with animals used in research. The working poor were treated like animals.

It would be unusual of someone from my generation and background to not be on the Left. At University one would be hard pressed to find a professor who was not a Marxist, and anyone from the working class would identify with the Labour Party. I came of age when for the first time, sons and daughters of the working, lower middle class gained entry into Universities. It was a brief window of the government providing grants for education that was a 100% paid for. Resistance and forming and joining Unions was the norm. Then along came the Thatcher revolution of monetarism, from the Chicago School, Friedman, Pinochet, Regan et al, and ruthless union busting. Monetarism morphed into neoliberalism and the degradation of all life in the name of profit and 'growth' – the state of the world today.

~~It would be irrational to assume that an animal's right to live unmolested by our species can be protected within the~~





Insects and Flowers

economic system of capitalism. Animals are destroyed by the trillions – for profit. Corporations have legal personhood and the absolute right to make profit at the expense of anyone else. The most successful mental colonization of the human mind is that this can never be questioned or changed – it is sacrosanct. If capitalism is ever threatened, then freedom is expendable. The age of enlightenment cannot be vanquished quite so conveniently: we do have science, we do have art and we are capable of turning this around. Galileo was tortured to say humans were at the center of the universe, but the truth was out. We do have alternatives, and as much as capitalism depends on wars and destruction for profit they are incapable of stopping the tide of extending rights to all beings. It's as inevitable as climate change. The capitalist class only has as much power as we allow them. The crime is economics and the time for change is very soon.

Yes, there are an increasing number of cultural workers representing animal liberation. It's difficult to evaluate how many globally, or how this awareness is linked to other social justice movements, without being anecdotal. The increasing numbers of vegans in populations would suggest to me that people are making the social justice connections, rather than solely focusing on 'humane treatment' of farmed animals as property and indirectly enabling

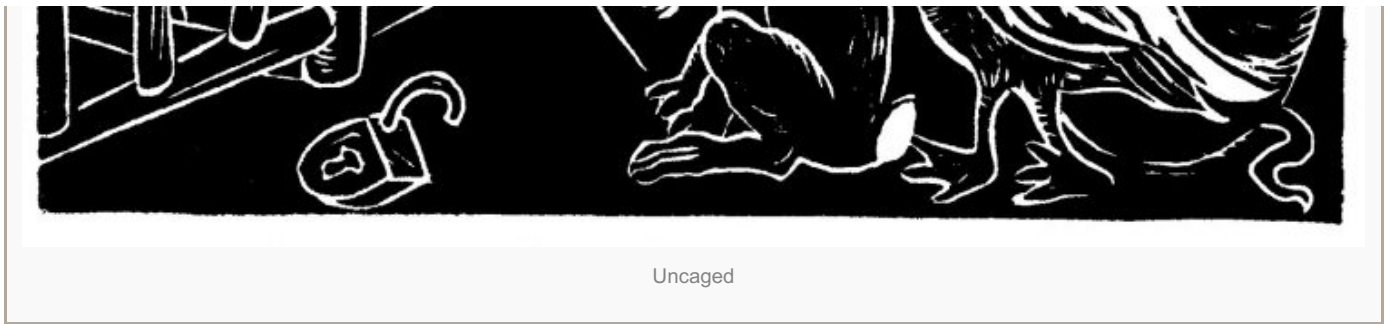
the meat industry to continue.

All of us feel such a great tearing disappointment when people who are aware and engaged with the political struggle of resistance, yet continue to be oblivious and exploit animals by eating their bodies. The sore temptation, in reaction, is to embrace identity politics, to exist within the comfort of our own kind. This is an understandable reaction to the isolation of struggling in a hostile world, where the majority have a forced indifference to animal suffering.

Yet as a humility lesson we have all been guilty of this at some point in our lives – not being able to walk in another's shoes, or hooves or paws or fins or feathers. Animals do not have the luxury to disengage from our species. There is no safe place for them. Out of the discomfort can come a greater awareness of how to become a more effective voice for animals, how better to link all the social justice movements. It's called the *struggle* because it's very hard.

My own strategy, despite all these words, is to use culture to communicate. Art can reach across maps, without the desire for power and control over others. It works both ways, I look at art and can be changed.





Let's talk about that change. The animal liberation movement – to the extent we can discern it – has arguably had the worst social record for the ways in which it has operated under the *de facto* primacy of liberal individualism. We are failing at both questions of solidarity and questions of political orientation.

Animals themselves are no more than a literal commodity; and their subjection is such that they have actually played a fundamental historic role in capital accumulation. But just as liberating labour from the commodity form is the basis of liberation for workers under capitalism, the case of animal liberation presents a massive concurrent problem of liberating real lives from the commodity form. The fundamental class struggle between capital and labour – and definitions of “social” ownership – need to be moved to the centre of animal liberation strategy.

The best examples of political art are where the reader is challenged on multiple levels where there are contradictory layers of understanding. Where there are not necessarily clear answers, but more questions. You have captured some of the contradictions of capital accumulated on the backs of animals and illustrated some of the class privileges it confers.

I'd like to take a closer look at a couple of works of yours that require a higher degree of responsibility on the part of the reader. These images speak to the kinds of politics that must necessarily emerge for revolution to be viable.

This would normally be an unfair question for the artist, but by *reader* here I am meaning *activist*: you must have at least some hopes for – if not high expectations of – readers here?

The images you reference describe the wealthier nations feeding food grain to farmed animals who in turn are consumed by humans, who have sufficient access to calories without resorting to murdering others. The ‘others’ in these images are the poor who are starved by a western diet and the non-humans who are murdered. Humans thrive on starch based diets, potatoes, corn, rice, sorghum. We know a plant based diet can feed 7.5 billion people, its water and land efficient, does the least harm. To invest in and subsidize animal agriculture is criminal on many levels.

No one has yet examined the over-production of animals as products – the mountains of cheese and oceans of milk that are thrown into landfill, the billions of male chicks thrown away like garbage. The monetary value of surplus, the profit of, say, buying pharmaceuticals to put into animal feed, make this insanity viable for capitalism. Capitalism never collapses by producing less, it collapses under the weight of surplus, and like a balloon it cannot stop itself from expanding.

Art propagates ideas. The idea in those images is to point out that a ‘western diet’, which heavily subsidizes animal agriculture, starves the world, is my answer to, “why don’t you care about humans, as much as animals?”. Art doesn’t have a right or wrong answer and it can always be misread. The viewer decides what has meaning for them, what could be useful for them. I know from experience, ‘my’ art, has created thousands of vegans, and younger artists will come along and create millions more. Within the realm of art as a tool to propagate ideas, the work must achieve a level of technique to convince the viewer to look at the sincerity of the content, and it can be both sincere and contradictory too. I trust the craft of culture to deliver a message of positive change, whether it's Brecht, or

Goya, or Charlie Parker.

Labor produces all wealth, that wealth belongs to the laborer. But certainly the animal body has been critical to wealth accumulation. Animal bodies have created empires of wealth for the human species, their bodies have been stolen for thousands of years, now on an industrial scale, to which most humans are seemingly indifferent. We have a learned passivity in the face of injustice. It becomes almost hot-wired, not to step too far into another's shoes or hooves.

Animal activists have given their efforts and sometimes their freedom and very lives to save animals, but have been



removed from having much voice in the strategies to defeat animal exploitation. What should have been a clear message of non-violence by going vegan has been compromised by the dominant voice of the 'humane economy'. This is business marketing absorbing niche markets created by activism and then expanding them by promoting individual consumer choice untethered from social justice, which is profitable to corporations. For animal activists to stress consumer choice, to combat the control corporations wield, is feeble. It's not even consumer choice, as manifested by a boycott of all animal products, but creating diversionary niche markets of "happy meat". These strategies are not accidental. At this stage, forty years on, they are not even naïve – but a deliberate undermining of the philosophy of animal rights, which the meat industrial complex has fully embraced. We have become the product to be manipulated. How to have community solidarity, with such self (animal)-defeating and confused strategies, is a challenge to be understood and met.

Most animals born into this world will be murdered by human hands. Those hands will be from all cultures and creeds. There is a sickening universality to speciesism. But that is not an excuse to throw the baby out with the bathwater: to suggest a poverty-stricken person in Bangladesh killing a fish to get enough calories for their families to survive is somehow the moral equivalent of billion dollar corporations, JBS, or Tyson, or Shuanghui and their investors, and their consumers, of the industrial scale violence – that is not a strategy that will change anything.

The modern animal rights movement came of age simultaneously with the deliberate crushing of organized labor. Unions funded the Labour Party – no unions, no Labour Party. Labour was forced to rely on the compassion of the middle classes. In the US the unions invested worker's pension funds, in stocks that directly exploited other workers. They became invested in the continuance of their own exploitation. What should have been an organic thread of solidarity and future progress, withered on the vine. Most, but not all, modern animal philosophers of note, were educated by a concept of a liberal progressive society that could provide health care and education, a living wage, which was essentially 'humane'. They were a product of their time, which underestimated the powers behind Thatcher and Regan and Pinochet, etc. If the enemy did not appear costumed as a Nazi, corporations could become more benign, we could 'meet people where they are at'. This was at best, naïve, I don't want to suggest a worst motive, because I have no access to individual motives, we can only analyze the results. These progressive expectations, which were formed from the 1930's, did not keep pace with sheer force of the revolution of the right. There is uneven development, as there always is.

Since we started this interview the Labour Party in the UK has made massive gains, based on the clear strategy of rejecting New Labour. Funnily, one of the most three 'googled' questions 'is Corbyn a vegan?'. He certainly has been involved with animal activism since the beginning of his political career. The Tories have been forced to create allegiances with crude reactionary forces, which will be their undoing, to remain in power. For the first time in decades there is a mass realization that "socialism" will provide the resistance to corporate murder. In the US, Trump and his regime is floundering, thus becoming increasingly viscous and irrational, despite their controlling all three branches of Government. This is certainly not capitalism's last gasp, and there is certainly the real threat of authoritarianism- but it's not inevitable. It's up to all of us to prevent that happening, whilst we still can.

The rise of the Right is often explained as some kind of aberrant pendulum, that could swing back all by itself, not an outcome of global monopoly capitalism that must keep expanding to survive and will stick that pendulum on the right, by force. Global corporations constantly and relentlessly fund the crushing of socialist ideas and solutions in every area of human society, education, science, the arts, whilst simultaneously killing off all life. Yet for all their power, they cannot defeat class struggle, they cannot change reality, and make the earth flat, only adapt their illusion of reality, to exert fear and more profit for themselves. We are entering another time, of both the worst, and the best. We have one more chance to align the abolition of all animal use, with the struggle to defeat the crime of capitalism. I say one more chance, because climate science appears to suggest time ran out the day before yesterday. But grassroots animal activists are so accustomed to being on the outside, dreaming the impossible, whilst practically rescuing animals, we are very well equipped to continue on under the worst circumstances.

The notion of pre-figurative politics is one that is absent from this collection and maybe much of your art in general. The *pre-figurative* – or roughly the notion of practicing the kind of politics we envision as an inspiration for organizing outward – is a common left tendency (even fetishized in various sects on the left!). We both understand that the liberation of animals requires an unprecedented cooperative struggle directed at institutional change. This includes ways we have not yet come to grips with or even yet imagined.

Is this an idea you have entertained, or am I simply failing in my own responsibility reading your work? Have you ever put out a such challenge to the movement? To say that the conversation on animal liberation needs to include a detailed vision what kind of future we want – and how we actually create that future, rather than the kinds of wishful thinking that dominates so much of contemporary “animal justice” discourse?

There are the really the difficult political questions at stake here and they have no easy answers. It is also hard not to phrase them as pseudo-questions: how do we get out of this mess? Where do you we go from here?

We don't know exactly where the railroad track switches are, to stop this train hurtling over the cliff. Even if we believe we have located the right switch, we may not achieve the desired result. Activism gives meaning to the life of the activist. Animal activists especially, are so sensitive to all the data of species extinction, the suffering of all animals, we drown in despair and frustration, grasp at straws, yet we will continue on, because we don't have a choice. Animals as a class, cannot give us a pat on the back, put their snoots and beaks in our ears and whisper that this or that strategy of industry collusion for bigger cages, and welfare standards for happy meat, which enables animal exploiters to continue on for yet another murderous decade. Our unique contradiction as animal activists is that the most oppressed are not leading their own resistance. Refugee animals, the named few who are saved, do speak to us, but they are monetized, hijacked as ambassadors, ‘for the good of the others’ – their voice is fragmented, made individual by our power and control and they are still property. The survivors, have been shifted over to different, more benign owners. The struggle for animal liberation is not any harder than any other social justice movement, but it does have more gaping openings for a lack of critical thinking.

My task as an artist is to show the crimes of capitalism and the disintegration of the bourgeois world, make a visual record. I would be inept at ‘tractor art’. It is too comforting for the viewer to think there is a happy ending before fully digesting the fact that we are living within – and as a species are responsible for – an extinction event. As a movement we are still in an early educational stage. But my work is not directed at the movement. It is directed at the mass of people who are willfully ignorant of exploiting animals.

There is an impetus, and even need, to create works such as you describe, but art cannot do other people's work for them. It cannot provide happy endings and faux victories. Crudely, I define those works as ‘art therapy’ – not art for change. It's necessary for activists to have their labor shown in art, to not be made more invisible. But it has to be





Meat Starves Children

done in such a way that demands the viewer actively participate in the struggle, not assume someone else is doing it for them.

The Communist Manifesto and Capital did not have Part 2 – after the end of capitalism, what next? It was impossible for Marx to write such a thing, with any conviction. Any utopian ideal, as a replacement system to capitalism, has its origins within religions not science.

William Blake used his work to posit alternative realities that exist alongside us. He truly believed Angels were sitting in trees speaking to him. He believed in the French Revolution too. The German Expressionist Beckmann who was in the trenches in WW1 said “my art gets to eat here”. Goya wrote in his secret sketch books of Inquisition torture, “I saw this”.

Who could describe politics better than Yeats? “The falcon can no longer hear the falconer, the center cannot hold...”

As I am artist, am biased of course, but the enormity of the crime against other animals, against the poor, can only be described by art. When Yeats was asked to do a ‘war poem’ by the Government, he asked what could he possibly say to a politician?

Art functions on a level that maybe only animals understand, because their lives *are* the art.

Banner image: Self-portrait at 5 AM

The Animal's Vegan Manifesto is available from O/R books: www.orbooks.com/catalog/animals-vegan-manifesto-sue-coe/

Sue Coe @ Graphic Witness: www.graphicwitness.org/coe/enter.htm

Sue is represented by Gallerie St Etienne: www.gseart.com/Artists-Gallery/Coe-Sue/Coe-Sue-Biography.php