Edward Carpenter's Queer Ecology of the Everyday

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'Tell me how to climb back into the world again?'[1]

The correspondence between Edward Carpenter and Kate Salt (wife of Henry Salt, pioneer of animal rights and vegetarianism) spanned decades. They discussed everything from buying jam jars and furnishing a cottage to reincarnation and queer desire. It was in her letters to Carpenter that Kate Salt disclosed her diverse and intense feelings — for Carpenter, for literature and music, for other women. In 1884 Henry and Kate Salt had left Eton (where Henry was a master) for a cottage in Tilford, Surrey, to put into practice their principles of vegetarianism and simplicity. Their frequent visitors in the 1880s and 1890s included Carpenter and George Bernard Shaw (both of whom played piano duets with Kate) and other leading socialists such as Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling, and Beatrice and Sidney Webb, such that Tilford became a kind of rural hub of socialism. So Kate Salt's letters to Carpenter are not simply the writings of a 'disciple' (as Carpenter's followers were often described) but of a woman who herself lived by the same principles of self-sufficiency and sustainability with as much rigour and dedication as Carpenter did.[2] I mention Kate Salt here, not only as a reminder of the diversity and inclusivity of socialist subculture in the late nineteenth century — where, as Diana Maltz puts it, domestic lifestyle was central to political identity[3] — but to establish from the outset that Carpenter's intimates and associates demonstrated a *queering* of what Kirsten Harris calls the discursive practices of *fin-de-siècle* socialism, intertwining 'the visionary and the spiritual, the practical and the everyday'.[4]

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[1] Kate Salt, letter to Edward Carpenter, Edward Carpenter correspondence, Sheffield Archives, MSS 355–62, 29 August 1918.

[2] Biographical information on Kate Salt remains scant, but see Ruth Brandon, *The New Women and the Old Men: Love, Sex and the Woman Question* (New York: Norton, 1990), pp. 243–48. Sheila Rowbotham's magisterial biography of Carpenter, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London: Verso, 2008), also contains numerous references to Kate Salt throughout.

[3] Diana Maltz, 'The Newer New Life: A. S. Byatt, E. Nesbit and Socialist Subculture', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 17 (2012), 79–84 (p. 80).

[4] Kirsten Harris, 'Poetry and Fin de Siècle Socialism', *Literature Compass*, 13 (2016), 724–34 (p. 725).

Edward Carpenter is still perhaps best known as an early campaigner for gay rights whose openness about the pleasures of same-sex relationships — both in his life and his writings — challenged his contemporaries to embrace and explore their sexuality. As an increasing number of scholars have recently written, however, Carpenter's interests were wide-ranging and sometimes challenging to reconcile: he was a socialist who had a lifelong interest in spirituality, studying Hindu and Buddhist texts (and travelling to Sri Lanka and India to pursue these studies); he was a denouncer of imperialism who could also perpetuate the racism of his day in his published writings;[5] he was anti-Darwinian but a believer in human perfectibility through evolution; and he was an advocate for vegetarianism and animal welfare who, by his own admission, sometimes ate meat. All of these tensions were also evident elsewhere in late nineteenth-century socialism: while a trailblazer in many ways, Carpenter also exemplified the pluralism of the movement where new ideas jostled with the old and the struggle to put into practice cherished ideals inevitably resulted in a less than perfect realization, or some degree of disillusionment (or both). One has only to contrast Carpenter with Shaw to gain a sense of this complexity: both men were vegetarian proponents of rational dress but the two were also widely divergent in many ideas and identifications (not least their sexuality) and pursued markedly different forms of socialism as a result.[6]

Shaw also expressed an antipathy for the kind of rural life practised by Carpenter at Millthorpe and the Salts at Tilford.[7] After purchasing a small parcel of land at Millthorpe near Sheffield in the early 1880s on which he established an orchard and market garden, Carpenter combined rural self-sufficiency with socialist campaigning, espousing his vision of

> the sturdy Simplification and debarrassment of daily life by the removal of those things which stand between us and Nature, between ourselves and our fellows — by plain living, friendship with the Animals, open-air habits, fruitarian food, and such degree of Nudity as we can reasonably attain to.[8]

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[5] See Leela Gandhi's exploration of Carpenter's anti-colonialism and understanding of radical kinship in *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

[6] The exemplary account of Shaw and Carpenter as competing forms of socialist masculinity is Ruth Livesey's 'Socialism, Masculinity, and the "Faddist" Sage: Edward Carpenter and George Bernard Shaw', in *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain, 1880–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 102–31.

[7] Shaw wrote a portrait of a visit to the Salts published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* as 'A Sunday on the Surrey Hills' (28 April 1888, pp. 2–3) where he described the lack of creature comforts and dire weather conditions in scathing terms and articulated his desire to return to London as quickly as possible.

[8] Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams: Being Autobiographical Notes* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1916), p. 208.

As Ruth Livesey stresses, however, Carpenter's asceticism in diet and dress cannot be separated from the liberating potential he ascribed to desire and sexuality, grounded in the male, labouring body (p. 110). It is, then, what I would call a *queer* asceticism: one that takes the radical simplicity associated with self-*denial* and recasts it as self-fulfilment or self-affirmation; it reorients the normative cast of asceticism away from a goal — transcending the claims of the body, say — and instead tends towards other, more open-ended orientations of action and feeling.[9] It is not, then, about transcending the body but celebrating and responding to it by stripping away the trappings of 'civilization' so that a new, aestheticized form of bodily awareness may arise. And it is not the individual body that is the focus here but the body in kinship or intimacy with others similarly attentive to the urgencies of corporeality. This means that even though Carpenter explicitly celebrates the sensations and desire of the male body, women like Kate Salt found in his writings a liberatory permission to acknowledge the sensory richness of the bodily practices expressed in their own everyday lives.

In his writings as in his life, Carpenter sought to synthesize his ideas about the evils of industrial capitalism with the pleasures of a simple life and same-sex desire such as in *Towards Democracy*, a long Whitmanesque prose poem (first published in 1883 and revised and expanded in successive editions), which was revered as life-changing by many like-minded Victorian radicals. As Kate Salt wrote to Carpenter in 1890: 'I think it is the most important book of our time; — but no words could say for me how, personally, I love and worship it, and find in it my highest creed and hope and ideal.'[10] *Towards Democracy* is one of those historical texts that is difficult to read now; difficult, that is, to understand how it could have inspired people to change their way of life, to idolize Carpenter, and make pilgrimages to meet him. Although M. Wynn Thomas has recently described *Towards Democracy* as an 'angrily confrontational, radically anti-capitalist text', the affect and range of this work exceeds this classification.[11] Indeed, at first glance, its dated, purple style and almost casual racism alienate a twenty-first century reader, however sympathetic to anti-capitalism she may be. What remains striking, however, is the way that the excess of allusions, emotions, symbols, and historical and cultural scope in *Towards Democracy* builds an immersive sense of interconnectedness — across time and space, nature and culture — at the same time as its exclamatory style conveys an urgency about the present. It speaks of the connection of bodies, things,

[9] For extended discussion of 'orientations' and 'tendencies' in a queer context, see, for example, Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 56–58.
[10] Sheffield Archives, MSS 355–3, 16 December 1890.
[11] M. Wynn Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections: Whitman U.S., Whitman U.K.* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), p. 174.

places, actions, and feelings in networks that always already exist and that represent the utopian promise of what Carpenter calls democracy. Stacy Alaimo has recently written about the 'exuberant pleasures of thinking with, and feeling with, an abundantly, uncontainably queer world', and I think that this captures something of what Carpenter's first readers found in *Towards Democracy*.[12] It was its excess and instability that contemporary readers found so exciting, liberating them from the conventions that constrained their lives and hinting that things could be otherwise. That things *already were* otherwise.

The kind of socialism espoused by Carpenter has been criticized for its high-minded, utopian bent but, unlike other dedicated socialist campaigners of the period (such as William Morris), Carpenter's ideals were enacted at the micro-level of daily life. Carpenter, like the Salts, *lived* his principles, eschewing what he called 'the lace-curtain dispensation of suburban life' for a simpler existence: growing his own food, making clothes and other essentials, recycling or reusing what he could (like Henry Salt, who cut his academic gown into strips to tie up his runner beans), and embracing the health benefits of the natural environment of the countryside.[13] Both Kate and Edward take pains in their letters to describe the minutiae of daily life and the pleasures they each derived from their simple cottages, as in a letter in late 1890 (the same one in which she expressed her feelings about *Towards Democracy*), where Kate delighted in how her cottage challenged the expectations of visitors:

> My room is still a supreme satisfaction to me, — and a supreme perplexity to my visitors, who variously plead for just one rug, or just one picture, or at least some window curtains, though they heroically pretend to be comfortable without arm-chairs. It's great fun to see the suppressed shiver as they glance over the chilly expanse of walls and floor; but they find consolation in my cookers, ranged on shelves over the mantel-piece, and in the cosy look of the reddened hearth. But there are more things in my room than strangers can see; the walls are not so blank as they believe them to be; the chairs and tables are not really so bare.[14]

Reading the Kate Salt/Edward Carpenter letters alongside Carpenter's other writings reinforces the significance of the everyday in understanding

[12] Stacy Alaimo, *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 6. I do not mean to dismiss the significance of racism in *Towards Democracy* which, while seeming to embrace a range of cultures, retains a disturbing antisemitism. Unfortunately, this aspect hardly distinguishes Carpenter's writings from other progressives of the time who could similarly be charged with racist or eugenicist tendencies.
[13] Sheffield Archives, MSS 354–49, 31 August 1897; Rowbotham, p. 97.
[14] Sheffield Archives, MSS 355–3, 16 December 1890.

both his ideas and his appeal to contemporaries who, like him, wanted to live, think, and *feel* differently right here and now, and not after the revolution. As Kate Salt put it, there was more to the ordinary 'than strangers can see': a new way of seeing, like a new way of living, that offered an opportunity to enrich daily experience, once the conventions of middle-class domesticity were set aside.

In this article, then, I want to consider the place of the everyday in Carpenter's work through the concept of queer ecology, which draws on queer theory to challenge and expand the possibilities for pleasure, experience, and relationships that occur in the interactions between human and non-human agents, as 'shaped by the production of nature and space around us'.[15] The simple mode of everyday life based on a more direct relationship with the natural world, as described and advocated by Edward Carpenter and Kate Salt in their letters, was one that foregrounded desire, pleasure, and other intensities of experience that had the capacity to transform the everyday. If, as Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson have argued, 'desire is always surpassing the frames established for it, and a queer politics of desire allows us to become open to what exists beyond the discursive frameworks that have been established for these experiences' (p. 37), the kinds of queer attachments that Carpenter and Salt cherished — to people, places, animals, things — enmeshed their daily life in networks of unexpected connections. What might look to outsiders like austerity or asceticism was experienced as a promiscuous plenitude of experience and opportunity. In what follows, I will examine selected passages from Carpenter's wider work in order to tease out what an 'uncontainably queer world' might look like in Carpenter's terms and thus to bring together aspects which have tended to be treated as distinct: namely, Carpenter's queerness and his ecological consciousness.

Desire, encounters, and an ecology of care

In the introduction to *Prismatic Ecology*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes about how the 'haptic entanglement of body and world' requires an 'ecotheory beyond green' (his book's subtitle).[16] Carpenter's writings about the everyday — his letters, essays, and autobiography — begin from his immersion in the materiality of life, creating just such a sensory, tactile entanglement

[15] Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, 'Introduction: A Genealogy of Queer Ecologies', in *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, ed. by Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 1–47 (p. 37).
[16] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Introduction: Ecology's Rainbow', in *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory Beyond Green*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), pp. xv–xxxv (p. xxiii).

with the world that in turn gives rise to an expanded understanding of the co-production and interrelation of human and non-human agents within diverse environments. Carpenter's work evokes but refuses to be contained by typically irreconcilable binaries like body and soul, the spiritual and the sexual, the transcendent and the ordinary, and it is through the centrality of the perspective of the everyday, I will argue, that he was able to articulate his most radical ideas about the agency of the material and what Gay Hawkins and Emily Potter have called the 'ecological entwining [that] is at the heart of beingness, or thingness'.[17]

That Carpenter's queer ecology of the everyday was inescapably concerned with materiality — with the stuff of everyday life, and everyday life as stuff — is readily apparent in the following extract from his essay 'Simplification of Life', a passage full of everyday things like coats, dogs, manure, potatoes, sheep, fields, and hearthrugs:

> When my coat has worn itself into an affectionate intimacy with my body, when it has served for Sunday best, and for weekdays, and got weather-stained out in the fields with sun and rain — then, faithful, it does not part from me, but getting itself cut up into shreds and patches descends to form a hearthrug for my feet. After that, when worn through, it goes into the kennel and keeps my dog warm, and so after lapse of years, retiring to the manure-heaps and passing out on to the land, returns to me in the form of potatos for my dinner; or being pastured by my sheep reappears upon their backs as the material of new clothing. Thus it remains a friend to all time, grateful to me for not having despised and thrown it away when it first got behind the fashions. And seeing we have been faithful to each other, my coat and I, for one round or life-period, I do not see why we should not renew our intimacy — in other metamorphoses — or why we should ever quite lose touch of each other through the aeons.[18]

Although Carpenter's writing can be florid, and resonates with literary or biblical allusion, here (with the possible exception of the final sentence), the writing is itself everyday, workmanlike: there are few adjectives, and the diction is basic. It is a simple account of a simple way of life. As befits an essay called 'Simplification of Life', it is also Carpenter at his most practical and his essay goes on to detail how much it costs to feed a household, how much land needs to be planted to do so, how much time it takes, and what

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[17] Gay Hawkins and Emily Potter, 'Waste Matter: Potatoes, Thing-Power and Biosociality', *Cultural Studies Review*, 12.1 (2006), 104–15 <https://doi.org/10.5130/csr.v12i1.3417> (p. 109).

[18] Edward Carpenter, 'Simplification of Life', in *England's Ideal and Other Papers on Social Subjects* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey, 1887), pp. 79–99 (p. 96).

comprises a healthy diet (lots of fruit and porridge, if you are wondering). In doing so, however, Carpenter insists on the plenitude within simplicity and grounds sustainability in the everydayness of things and ecosystems. It is the opposite of what Allan Stoekl has recently described as a form of the 'contemporary sublime', sparked by discussions of sustainability in the twenty-first century:

> There is an infinite regress of calculation: the carbon footprint of a tomato will have to take into account not just the inputs of water, fertilizer, land, and fuel used in the planting and the harvest, but the carbon footprint of the tractor, the farmer's boots, the cows that gave their lives to make those boots, the hay that fed those cows, and so on forever. We are dwarfed by calculations that are necessary, that tower over us. [...] We experience awe before the sheer task of calculating sustainability.[19]

In Stoekl's account, sustainability overwhelms us; by contrast, Carpenter domesticates sustainability, bringing it within the frame of ordinary experience and actions, even as he also summons up a temporal dimension that far exceeds our own mortality.

There is a paradox here and in much of Carpenter's writings. He is interested in transcendence but he never 'places himself above the contingent world of social matter'.[20] Instead, he emphasizes 'the productivity and resilience of matter', its potential to exhibit agency, and the relationship between 'the material details of everyday life' and the wider realms of the socio-economic and the ecopolitical.[21] In this way, some continuities between Carpenter's ideas and other forms of vitalism towards the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century may be detected. As Jane Bennett explains: 'Central to this [modern] form of vitalism was the idea that "life" was irreducible to "matter," that there existed a life-principle that animates matter, exists only when in a relationship with matter, but is not itself of a material nature.'[22]

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[19] Allan Stoekl, '"After the Sublime", After the Apocalypse: Two Versions of Sustainability in Light of Climate Change', *Diacritics*, 41.3 (2013), 40–57 (pp. 44–45).
[20] I borrow here Sara Ahmed's phrase describing Husserl: in contrast to how I am delineating Carpenter's position, Ahmed has critiqued Husserl's desire to 'bracket' the everyday, domestic world as extraneous to intellectual attention (*Queer Phenomenology*, pp. 32–33).
[21] Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, 'Introducing the New Materialisms', in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1–43 (p. 7).
[22] Jane Bennett, 'A Vitalist Stopover on the Way to a New Materialism', in *New Materialisms*, ed. by Coole and Frost, pp. 47–69 (p. 48).

Perhaps the best illustration of Carpenter's debt to this form of vitalism can be found in a concept he called 'Exfoliation' (borrowed from Whitman, a point to which I will return). Carpenter rejected a 'mechanical' view of evolution (i.e. Darwinian), where change occurs in response to external factors, 'as an unconscious or accretive process', for what he described as 'a true evolution — a true *unfolding* of a higher form latent within'.[23] As Livesey explains, Carpenter's ideas here, influenced by 'his own selective interpretation of Lamarck', also need to be framed within the context of the late nineteenth century when such neo-Lamarckian ideas were popular among those seeking a positive account of social change derived from the evolutionary transformation of the body (Livesey, pp. 113–14). Every change, Carpenter writes,

> is felt first as a desire gradually taking form into thought, pass[ing] down into the bodily region, express[ing] itself in action (more or less dependent on conditions), and finally solidif[ying] itself in organization and structure. The process is not accretive but exfoliatory — a continual movement from within outwards. (*Civilisation*, p. 138)

As Carpenter says, this process is 'continual': from desire, to action, to organization, only to be 'thrown off like a husk' in due course, when desire again manifests in response to internal stimulus and some form of prompting from external conditions (*Civilisation*, p. 138).

The imbrication of body and mind/consciousness that Carpenter described in this process of 'exfoliation' — as 'a continual unclothing of Nature' — was also fundamentally connected to his philosophy of naturism:

> Life indoors and in houses has to become a fraction only, instead of the principal part of existence as it is now. Garments similarly have to be simplified. How far this process may go it is not necessary now to enquire. It is sufficiently obvious that our domestic life and clothing may be at once greatly reduced in complexity, and with the greatest advantage — made subsidiary instead of erected into the fetishes which they are. And everyone may feel assured that each gain in this direction is a gain in true life — whether it be the head that goes uncovered to the air of heaven, or the feet that press bare the magnetic earth, or the elementary raiment that allows thro' its meshes the light itself to reach the vital organs. (*Civilisation*, p. 36)

Moreover, exfoliation not only explained changes in humans and human formations but in non-human forms of life as well:

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[23] Edward Carpenter, *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure, and Other Essays*, 13th edn (London: Allen and Unwin, 1914), pp. 137, 130, emphasis in original.

> There is a force at work throughout creation, ever urging each type onward into new and newer forms. This force appears first in consciousness in the form of *desire* [...]. As each new desire or ideal is evolved, it brings the creature into conflict with its surroundings, then gaining its satisfaction externalizes itself in the structure of the creature, and leaves the way open for the birth of a new idea. If then we would find a key to the understanding of the expansion and growth of all animate creation, such a key may exist in the nature of desire itself and the comprehension of its real meaning. (*Civilisation*, p. 140, emphasis in original)

As is implied here, Carpenter did not exempt animals from this process:

> For everywhere among the animals there *is* desire, of some kind or another, obviously acting; and if in man, by our own experience, desire is the precursor and first expression of growth, is there any reason why it should not also be so among animals? [...] Who shall say that the lark, by the mere love of soaring and singing in the face of the sun, has not altered the shape of its wings[?]. (*Civilisation*, p. 135, emphasis in original)

We may well feel that questions about a lark's love are far from rhetorical (and I will come back to the issue of animals later), but for now my interest is in the centrality of desire in Carpenter's account, the crucial work it is doing in his theory, as the 'key' to 'the expansion and growth of all animate creation'. Carpenter does not posit change as a response to biological need or even to something like a Freudian drive, but rather to desire (which he elsewhere describes as 'a feeling — a dim want' or 'a new impulse') (*Civilisation*, pp. 133, 144). Further, 'the culmination and completion' of desire is 'love'; and 'what is Love?', Carpenter asks. It is 'desire for the human form':

> In our bodies it is a desire for the bodily human form; in our interior selves it is a perception and worship of an ideal human form, it is the revelation of a Splendor dwelling in others, which — clouded and dimmed as it inevitably may come to be — remains after all one of the most real, perhaps the most real, of the facts of existence. Desire, therefore, [...] is seen to be the desire and longing for the perfect human Form. May it not, must it not, be the same thing in animals and all thro' creation? (*Civilisation*, p. 141)

Carpenter's conclusion that desire is a yearning for an ideal form of being that is realized in the human seems at first glance simply to reinstate the chain of being in which the human represents the apex of creation. But I want to suggest that this contention — that exfoliation finds its telos

in human perfection — contradicts the internal logic of exfoliation as Carpenter has established it, announced from the epigraph of his chapter taken from Whitman's *Specimen Days* which refers to 'Creation's incessant unrest, exfoliation'. Rather, it seems to me that Carpenter's exfoliation resembles what Claire Colebrook has termed 'queer vitalism' in which 'life tends towards difference, creating further and further distinctions'.[24]

Alongside Cartesianism, Colebrook reminds us, existed another tradition that emphasized 'the world's immanent spirit, its striving towards the good, and the contribution of every living being in its difference and specificity towards the efflorescence of the whole' (p. 79). Where Colebrook parts company with this expressive tradition and turns instead to Deleuze, however, is in rejecting a grounding unity or single substance that produces these diverse entities with a multiplicity of viewpoints. Instead, she argues for what she refers to as 'the *queer* nature of Deleuze's vitalism': 'Every body in this world is possible as an individual because it gives form and specificity in time and space to a potential that always threatens to destabilize or de-actualize its being' (p. 80, emphasis in original). Further, the potential for variation in each body 'is actualized not by the decisions that body makes but by the encounters it undergoes' (p. 80). The task, Colebrook writes, 'is not to see bodies in their general recognizable form, as this or that ongoing and unified entity, but to approach the world as the unfolding of events' (p. 83): life, desire, and the body are all produced through encounters with other lives, other desires, other bodies. Such an understanding of vitalism

> challenges the idea of a single, unifying, productive and fertile life force whose proper trajectory is fruition, expansion and revelation [...]. That is, the vital is not that which springs forth from itself to synthesize, unify and produce its world; it is receptive in its feeling of that which is not itself, often yielding nothing more than the isolated or punctuated affect of encounter. (p. 89)

Turning to Carpenter in the light of this observation, then, we can see that while he explicitly formulates the concept of a life force that strives towards the realization of an ideal form of life, what he so often seems to articulate is in fact a kind of queer vitalism similar to Colebrook's delineation, where it is the *particular* body in a *specific* time and place encountering the material that brings about change — unpredictable in advance, uncertain in outcome — for both parties, and beyond. And this change triggers heightened affect, captured by Carpenter in the terms in which he described his coat as 'a friend', that is connected in 'an affectionate intimacy with my body'. It is

[24] Claire Colebrook, 'Queer Vitalism', *New Formations*, 68 (Autumn 2009), 77–92 (p. 83).

precisely a *relationship* with his coat, established by a pattern of encounters over a long duration of time, which in turn leads to other relations, other encounters, all of them transformative. Here, it is not a striving towards an ideal form, an achievement of perfection, though; rather, it is a process of degradation, of decomposition.

In her wonderful study of waste, Gay Hawkins describes how, in the narrative of modernity, 'dumping waste is an expression of contempt for nature [...]. Humans establish their sense of mastery over and separation from a passive desacralized nature by fouling it.'[25] Hawkins continues:

> Waste makes us feel bad, its presence disgusts and horrifies us, it wrecks everything — in these familiar sentiments badness is located in the object that disrupts purity rather than in the relation between the person having the affect and the object. In the quest to purify, [...] waste has no generative capacities, only destructive ones. (pp. 9–10)

In contrast to this characterization of waste, for Carpenter, waste *is* generative: it contributes to life in changing and diverse forms, it creates relationships and networks, it transmits feelings. Coat as compost is understood in terms of intimacy and fidelity by Carpenter, not disgust. Waste, we might say, makes Carpenter feel *good*.[26]

Hawkins and Potter have also been critical of some environmental discourses which seek to redeem waste by envisioning an 'ideal, ecologically sustainable world [where] nothing is wasted and biological processes of decay are nothing more than a necessary step in the cycle of renewal and regeneration'. Such an approach, they argue, fails 'to take notice of waste as matter' (Hawkins and Potter, p. 104). It 'idealizes nature as a transcendent entity excluding any relation to the immanent realm of bodies and dirt' (Hawkins, p. 10). We can see how these ideas are complicated in Carpenter's coat passage. It does portray a 'cycle of renewal and regeneration', but it also gives sustained attention to 'waste as matter' and does not flinch at the uncomfortably close juxtaposition of manure and potatoes. Carpenter's coat-compost-potato assemblage shows what Hawkins and Potter call 'the ethical force of the thing [...] its ability to pose questions to us' (p. 113). 'When we encounter waste as things', they contend, 'the affective energy that can accompany this [can] be the impulse for new relations: a motivation for a

[25] Gay Hawkins, *The Ethics of Waste: How We Relate to Rubbish* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 8.

[26] See also, Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*: 'For myself I can truly say that the Waste Paper Basket stands as a signal of one of my greatest pleasures; and that when I feel depressed (which is not very often) I go about the house and hunt up *things to destroy* or give away — after which ritual act I feel ever so much better and happier' (p. 165, emphasis in original).

different ethics, a sudden inspiration for a new use' (p. 113). Understood in this way, Carpenter's coat is an actant: itself undergoing profound changes, it has efficacy, it does things, it makes a difference, it produces effects as well as affects.

Feminists have long talked about an 'ethics of care', but here Carpenter seems to be outlining an *ecology* of care, one that starts from the ground up — quite literally.[27] But, in doing so, he sees the coat working in conjunction *with* the human (and the non-human like the sheep, the dog, and the potatoes). In recognizing the coat as actant, then, Carpenter does not see it as at odds with himself, even as he recognizes the special value of its contribution to life and other ecological networks. But, the new materialist or animal studies theorist might counter, Carpenter speaks *for* the coat, he *assumes* it is grateful to be disassembled and destroyed, grateful to be of use to human interests. As James Gregory has explored, the problem of anthropocentrism preceded Victorian forms of vegetarianism and, during the *fin-de-siècle* period, not all vegetarians shared the same view of the non-human.[28] Examining the same period, Leela Gandhi divides those interested in animal welfare, for example, into those who were primarily concerned with legislative reform of the treatment of animals, premised on the superior moral obligation (and capacity) of the human, while others (like Carpenter and Henry Salt) were motivated by 'achieving an improved affective relationship between the human and animal worlds' (Gandhi, p. 87). Even Carpenter, though, could assume the primacy of the human, as owner and initiator of these processes, as is stressed throughout this passage where he writes of *my* coat, *my* dog, *my* sheep, *my* dinner.

So is Carpenter guilty of the kind of anthropomorphism that assumes the dominance of the human over the non-human and a stewardship of nature that takes us straight back to Eden? Yes and no. As Jane Bennett has argued, we may 'need to cultivate a bit of anthropomorphism — the idea that human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature — to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world'.[29] 'A touch of anthropomorphism', Bennett concludes, 'can catalyze a sensibility that finds a world filled not with ontologically distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but with variously composed materialities' that form connections and relations and, in turn, impact on other connections and relations (*Vibrant Matter*, p. 99). In the case of Carpenter, one can find examples in which he refers to 'the kingdom of the animals' being 'below'

[27] Perhaps, most notably, Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
[28] James Gregory, *Of Victorians and Vegetarians: The Vegetarian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Tauris, 2007), p. 99.
[29] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. xvi.

the realm of the human, but when he turns his attention to the *detail* of mundane observation and experience these sharp divisions start to break down and challenge the hierarchies on which they rely (*Civilisation*, p. 150).

We can see similar tensions between a vital materiality and a more traditional view of nature in a curious passage from *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure* (1889) concerning fruits and vegetables:

> It may be noted, too, that foods of the seed kind — by which I mean all manner of fruits, nuts, tubers, grains, eggs, etc. (and I may include milk in its various forms of butter, cheese, curds, and so forth), not only contain by their nature the elements of life in their most condensed forms, but have the additional advantage that they can be appropriated without injury to any living creature — for even the cabbage may inaudibly scream when torn up by the roots and boiled, but the strawberry plant *asks* us to take of its fruit, and paints it red expressly that we may see and devour it! Both of which considerations must convince us that this kind of food is most fitted to develop the kernel of man's life. (p. 38)

Contradicting twenty-first century arguments concerning the ethics of veganism, here Carpenter contends that eating cheese is *more* ethical than cabbage as the production of dairy products does not involve 'injury to any living creature' — at least, on the Millthorpe scale of production (clearly, Carpenter could not have imagined the industrial agriculture of our own time). The cabbage, for Carpenter, has some kind of moral claim on us — it calls to us if we would but hear it 'inaudibly scream'. There is almost a Levinasian view of the vegetable in this passage, if an uncanny one: could there be such a thing as a face-to-face encounter with a cabbage? Further adding to the strangeness of this passage, Carpenter implies that fruits *want* to be eaten, while vegetables do not, blurring aesthetics and ethics in the proposal that the beautiful is the good (to eat).[30] The radicalness of Carpenter's vegetable philosophy is, however, also undercut by the implicit assumption in this passage that animals consent in some form or other to sharing resources with humans and that, in networks with non-human agents, human development still takes priority. Carpenter's lack of consistency is troubling in a prophet, a status he always expressed ambivalence about, but is very much a factor in the 'messiness' of everyday life, where ethics and principles collide with the contingencies, conflicts, and desires of human and non-human agents. In his autobiography, Carpenter candidly acknowledged the contradictions and shortcomings in his own practices. Unlike Henry Salt, for instance, Carpenter's vegetarianism was

[30] It is worth noting that strawberries were the main crop at Millthorpe (Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p. 137).

not absolute: he notes that he was appointed President of the Vegetarian Congress at Manchester in 1909, 'notwithstanding my own occasional derelictions from the ideal standard'.[31]

An extended passage from *My Days and Dreams* concerned with animals provides a fascinating example of the complications concerning desire, humans, and animals in Carpenter's queer everyday. In the chapter titled 'Millthorpe and Household Life', Carpenter describes establishing Millthorpe as both a market garden and a household, a process in which Alfred Fearnehough (a scythe-maker Carpenter had initially befriended in Sheffield and with whom he had lodged for a time) was central. When Fearnehough and his family eventually left Millthorpe, George Adams and his wife and two children moved in with Carpenter in a similar arrangement, by which time Carpenter was openly enjoying sexual relationships with men (and had met Adams through his friend George Hukin, with whom Carpenter was initially involved). So Carpenter writes about the life at Millthorpe — farm work, domestic labour, family relationships — in a very matter-of-fact way for what was, certainly at the time, a very queer household, mixing sexes, generations, classes, forms of desire, and affection. All of Carpenter's sexual relationships, as far as we know, were with working-class men and his writing often depicted the muscular, labouring male body in highly eroticized terms. When Adams and his family left Millthorpe after five years, George Merrill, whom Carpenter had met by chance on a train, moved to Millthorpe where the two men established a domestic life lasting thirty years, described by Carpenter in idyllic terms. George, Carpenter tells us, kept house 'better than most women would', and

> soon picked up the necessary elements of cookery, vegetarian or otherwise; he carried on the arts of washing, baking and so forth with address and dispatch; he took pride in making the place look neat and clean, and insisted on decorating every room that was in use with flowers. (*My Days and Dreams*, pp. 161, 162)

But in the midst of this chapter, we are also given the life of Bruno, Carpenter's beloved dog, framed and contained by Carpenter's same-sex relationships. The blurring of lines between animal and human relationships could be interpreted as a radical reconfiguring of intimacy that encompasses human and non-human subjects. On the other hand, the juxtaposition of relationships with working-class men (who worked with

[31] Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p. 264. For a fuller account of his vegetarianism and his dislike of 'making any absolute rule in the matter', see *My Days and Dreams*, pp. 100–01. Interestingly, Sheffield was one of the enduring centres of the vegetarian movement in Victorian Britain (Gregory, p. 54). Gregory's *Of Victorians and Vegetarians* provides a comprehensive account of the breadth and complexity of Victorian vegetarianism.

and for Carpenter) and relationships with animals could signal a more troubling association, reminding us how easily the lower classes could be linked with animality (and animal sexuality) in middle-class Victorian consciousness.

So here is Bruno's story which shows that, at Millthorpe, even the pets were queer:

> There is something strangely touching in the fact that dogs […] from their intense devotion to their so-called 'masters' […] are severed and alienated to some degree from the natural loves of their race — at any rate on the affectional side. I think Bruno nourished in his heart a strange susceptibility to beauty. His amours with other dogs were only of the ordinary kind; but he cherished for a certain white kitten a positive adoration. The kitten was certainly beautiful — snow-white and graceful to a degree — and to Bruno obviously a goddess; but alas! like other goddesses only too fickle and even cruel. When Bruno arrived on the scene, the kitten would skip on to the vantage-ground of a chair-seat; and from thence torment the pathetic and pleading nose of the dog with naughty scratches. Again and again would Bruno — wounded in his heart as well as in his head — return to his ineffectual suit, only to have his advances rejected as before. At last he had to abandon this quest, but it was curious that a year or two later he fell in love with *another* white kitten in much the same way and with much the same result. (*My Days and Dreams*, p. 155, emphasis in original)

We learn far more about Bruno than any other animal at Millthorpe or, indeed, the plants and trees on which the livelihood of the smallholding depended, but the fact that Carpenter devotes more space to his dog than to some intimate human relationships is hardly exceptional in British social life: what could be more ordinary than an anecdote about a beloved pet (in which, of course, the pet turns out to be *extra*ordinary)? Even Carpenter's earlier observation that he and Bruno 'fell in love with each other' at first sight is within the bounds of ordinary pet obsessions. Nonetheless, there is something in this story about Bruno and the kitten that, for me, eludes easy explanation. Carpenter may frame it in terms of the dog's aesthetics and ethics (prior to this passage he has also talked about Bruno's 'conscience') but it is primarily a story of desire, attraction, cruelty, devotion, obsession, and power that disrupts a series of cultural binaries: black and white, dog and cat, male and female, adult and juvenile. (And I might add that, in the following paragraph, Carpenter relates what he calls 'the most curious and pathetic part of this story': many years later, a neighbour's cat 'fell in love with' Bruno and would sleep overnight in the kennel with him, between the dog's paws, and was found there the night Bruno died (*My Days and Dreams*, pp. 155–56).)

Bruno's story is described in terms of human feelings but is not confined by these categories. This is not a simple instance of what Kelly Oliver calls 'animal pedagogy': 'using animals, the animal, and animality to teach us about men, the human and humanity'.[32] It is a sketch of someone who Carpenter loved, alongside others in this chapter, but Carpenter does not elaborate further on their relationship or even relate other anecdotes about himself and Bruno together. Bruno does not become an extended topic for reflection in the way that Michael Field's dog, Whym Chow, did.[33] Like Derrida's cat, we might say, this is a story about *this* specific, 'irreplaceable living being that one day entered' Carpenter's space and required the philosopher to acknowledge that unique irreplaceable presence (and it is, indeed, tempting to wonder if Carpenter, the renowned naturist, ever stood naked in front of his dog).[34]

Stacy Alaimo argues that 'queer animals dramatize emergent worlds of desire, action, agency, and interactivity that can never be reduced to a background or resource against which the human defines himself' and, like contemporary work in queer ecology, Bruno's story pushes the boundaries of conventional binaries of sexual identity, desire, and difference, so powerfully connected to dominant understandings of a natural world anchored in a fundamental divide between human and animal (Alaimo, pp. 60–61). 'The idea of queer nature', Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands writes,

> highlights the fact that other-than-human nature is filled with sexually diverse interactions, which clearly expose the fallacy of any idea of an evolutionarily or ecologically-sanctioned nature-telos of ideal, gender dimorphic, reproductive sexuality against which all other forms can be measured and found deviant or pathological.[35]

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[32] Kelly Oliver, *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to Be Human* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 8.

[33] See Sarah Parker, *The Lesbian Muse and Poetic Identity 1889–1930* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), pp. 50–51, on the significance of their dog in the poetry of Michael Field for negotiating the queer relationship between Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper.

[34] Jacques Derrida, 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)', trans. by David Wills, *Critical Inquiry*, 28 (2002), 369–418 (pp. 378–79). In this article, Derrida famously described his own everyday experience of being seen naked by his cat 'in my bedroom or in the bathroom' (p. 378): 'it can look at me. It has its point of view regarding me. The point of view of the absolute other, and nothing will have ever done more to make me think through this absolute alterity of the neighbor than these moments when I see myself seen naked under the gaze of a cat' (p. 380). Carpenter seems to imply a similar view of a cat as a 'being-there-before-me' when he talks about a cat as a 'whole' being (*Civilisation*, p. 21).

[35] Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, 'Queering Ecocultural Studies', *Cultural Studies*, 22 (2008), 455–76 (pp. 458–59).

Bruno and the cats feature alongside human relationships in the queer pastoral of Millthorpe where differences are not reconciled or erased in/by love and community but where they are emphasized, where the stimulus for love and relationship derives from such differences as they unfolded, with no guarantees, certainties, or definitive outcome or goal. 'What is natural to Bruno and what is the result of living with humans?' is ultimately a question that is no easier to answer — or even perhaps productive to ask — than 'what is natural to Carpenter and what is the result of living with animals (and vegetables)?'.

Conclusion

Carpenter's everyday, then, was fittingly queer in a number of ways. It was an everyday brimming with desire that — unlike the desire he explains in 'Exfoliation' as always directed towards a higher goal — refracted and connected objects, animals, humans, and other forms of vital materiality in ways that were contingent, unforeseeable, and transformative but also *ordinary*. It was an everyday where so-called settled life at Millthorpe was always based on encounter, whether with the open air and the earth beneath bare feet (subject to all the changes of seasons and weather), with the animals of the household and beyond, with the stranger who met his gaze on the train and then followed him home to Millthorpe, or with the many uninvited guests who flocked to Millthorpe to meet and eat with their prophet. Carpenter described the 'instreaming energy' that would result from the 'life of the open air, familiarity with the winds and waves, clean and pure food, the companionship of the animals' in a way that coincides with what Jane Bennett calls 'joy as an animating energy generated in part by affection for a material world experienced as vital and alive'.[36] And it was this sense of joy as energy, energy as joy, which, I think, Carpenter communicated so powerfully to others.

Carpenter could, however, be candid about the difficulties of daily life. Long hours working the land and attending markets made it difficult to find time for writing; the rigours of constant hospitality robbed the Millthorpe residents of quiet time and intimacy; socialist campaigning took him away from home for lengthy periods; and the conflicting demands and cross-currents of desire led to misunderstandings among friends and lovers. In the letters between Carpenter and Kate Salt, the two often spoke about problems of mind or body, the trials of friendship and desire. Writing in the late summer of 1918 — a time when personal hardships were unavoidably framed by the long war and when Kate was at a particularly low ebb, she

[36] Carpenter, *Civilisation*, p. 36; Jane Bennett, 'The Force of Things: Steps toward an Ecology of Matter', *Political Theory*, 32 (2004), 347–72 (p. 363).

asked her friend to 'tell me how to climb back into the world again?'.[37] The image of 'climbing' back into the world evokes a sense of the physicality and tactility implied by the kind of everyday life with which Kate Salt and Edward Carpenter were familiar: to live with an intensity and authenticity that they had not found in their middle-class upbringing or the patterns it had laid down for their life trajectories meant, for them both, a sensory and material engagement with the world as they encountered it, as they shaped it, and were reshaped by it in turn.

[37] Sheffield Archives, MSS 355–62, 29 August 1918.