

When Species Meet

A discussion of *When Species Meet* by D J Haraway; University of Minnesota Press, MN, 2008, 423 pages, US \$75.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper (£46.50, £15.50) ISBN 9780816650453, 978081665060

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Interdisciplinary conversations on interspecies encounters

Jamie Lorimer Department of Geography, Kings College, London

Gail Davies Department of Geography, University College London

To kick-start discussions in advance of the 2008 RGS - IBG conference we gathered a group of geographers to engage with Donna Haraway's latest book *When Species Meet* (WSM). The following contributions resulted from this gathering and the subsequent conversations and connections it generated at the conference, where we conjoined a multidisciplinary crowd¹. These events were peopled by sympathetic audiences who warmed immediately to the text. We revelled in its creativity, sincerity, and curiosity, and our conversations fast drifted towards celebratory hagiography. Such an account would be much deserved, though not we felt greatly desired. Instead, in the pieces that follow, we have tried to get into character, emulating Haraway to riff on and off the book, running (away) with concepts, making connections, and offering provocations in a style that aimed for reciprocity. There is so much treasure in the book that we hoped to offer a little in return. Donna Haraway was kind enough to accept these offerings and to respond, further fleshing out her figure of the companion species.

The six riffs that follow are diverse but not atomistic; they are linked by shared themes and concerns - three of which are worth foregrounding here. The first is - perhaps inevitably - a concern for space, place, and the difference these make to inter-species inter-actions; where species meet matters as much as when. This is by no means an omission from the book, but contributors draw out the importance of attending to the complex space - times and nonproximal connections realised in Haraway's encounters. Second, there is a linked concern to take Haraway's lively and relational ontology along paths that lead away from intuitive and benign encounters between stable, coherent, and large mammals. Here we learn of microbial companions

¹ Details of these conference sessions can be found at http://www.ggy.bris.ac.uk/hpgrg/species_meet_mingle.pdf. Gail Davies would like to thank the ESRC, grant number RES-063-27-0093, for their support of the programme of work on 'Biogeography and Transgenic Life' which was a key context for the organisation of this conference session and reading group.

that are not species, parasites that are not companionable, and modes of becoming that unsettle the identity and practice of the breed.

Underpinning this challenge is a shared desire to critically engage with the normative emphasis Haraway places on response-ability as a curious mode of engaging with nonhumans. The third shared concern, then, is how should we encounter and live well with others who are not at all like us, and might actively dislike us? Here authors sympathise with her emphasis on shared suffering, in place of the arcane abstractions of bioethics, as a guide to responsible conduct, but wonder at how to stretch it to pesky, monstrous, or bacterial companions? Reflexively, what does Haraway's critical praxis imply for our own research methodologies and politics? Productively the book poses questions, even as it provides some timely answers.

The spirit of reciprocity that runs through the pieces is expressed in the links each author makes with ongoing work in and around the disciplines in which they are based. Perhaps, the strongest connections identified are with more-than-human and nonrepresentational geographies and philosophies, where a concern for the character and consequence of nonhuman difference has become central. These fields share thinkers, methodologies, and concepts with WSM and we anticipate that it will be enthusiastically consumed and digested, providing fuel for creative moulding and future application.