



FIGURE 5.1. *Crazy Cat*, Heather Fraser

5 Rainbows, Flags, and Bridges

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1 of this book, we introduced the idea of a queer menagerie and suggested that it entails a methodological, theoretical, and political commitment to putting human and animal lives 'on display' alongside one another to achieve a specific end, namely, to highlight the effects of anthropocentrism. A queer menagerie, then, when applied to the lives of animals and the LGBTQTNB humans they interact with, requires focus on the operations of power that produce anthropocentrism as logical and intelligible. In other words, it doesn't simply suffice to identify anthropocentrism in, as is the case in this book, LGBTQTNB communities. Rather, it requires a broader focus on how anthropocentrism is constructed and perpetuated through a broad range of intersecting forms of marginalisation. In this chapter, we focus on some of the diverse forms that anthropocentrism takes in the lives of LGBTQTNB humans. We specifically argue that anthropocentrism is evident when humans disregard animal lives or treat human lives as more important where some humans treat the lives of other humans as less than human and where some humans treat the lives of both animals and other humans as material for appropriation.

To ensure our focus on anthropocentrism, in this chapter, we start by looking at how inequalities in regard to animal and LGBTQTNB human lives are understood and responded to. In some respects, our focus in the first section is reminiscent of a poem recited by Marsha P. Johnson, a trans woman who was actively involved in the Stonewall Riots and in ongoing attempts to campaign for the

rights of LGBTQTNB people. The poem, written originally by Jimmy Centola, includes the following stanza:

And now everybody done forgot who done what and why and how
and you know, sometimes when I pass one of them gay bars where
I see my brothers or sisters having a good time and turning it out in
all their liberated glory and I see hanging right over that bar a sign
what says “No Drunks, No dogs, No drags.” Can you imagine
comparing me to a dog? Well honey, I just want to break
right down.

The line ‘no drunks, no dogs, no drags’ is repeated twice in the poem, and signals resistance to equating humans with animals. This is of note, given as we outlined in Chapter 1, sometimes LGBTQTNB rights claims are made through comparison with the lives of animals. For Centola and Johnson, by contrast, the comparison between humans and animals is resisted due to the broader context of LGBTQTNB liberationist narratives in which it is suggested that ‘brothers and sisters’ specifically have forgotten who led the charge in fighting for equal rights. Trans women in particular are often left out of community narratives of LGBTQTNB rights campaigns, and the specific work that such women have undertaken in fighting for equal rights (Riggs, Pearce, Pfeffer, Hines, Ruspini, White, 2019). Resistance to human/animal analogies, then, is resistance to the dismissal of trans women’s activism. In the first section, we take up some of the specificities of LGBTQTNB animal activism by examining how both trans women and drag queens have engaged in activism in regard to animal lives.

In the second section of this chapter, we turn to consider how narratives about ‘nature’ circulate within LGBTQTNB communities. Specifically, we are interested in how histories of the Pride Flag contain within them recourse to claims about ‘nature’, and how this sits somewhat uneasily alongside more recent calls for the Pride Flag to be updated to better reflect the intersectionality of LGBTQTNB communities. Continuing with our theme of nature, we then conclude the second section by exploring accounts of Radical Faeries, groups of primarily white gay men who make recourse to claims

about nature to authenticate ideas about a gay spirituality and sense of community. In exploring the lives of Radical Faeries, we focus closely on how colonisation, appropriation, and anti-urbanisation intersect. The final analytic section in this chapter then takes up the topic of appropriation through another lens, this time looking at the ends to which appropriation serves, sometimes for the better of LGBTQTNB people, and sometimes to the detriment of a broader intersectional focus. Specifically, we first examine the appropriation of First Nation narratives in accounts of the death of an animal, and we then counterpose this with animal and LGBTQTNB human rights being claimed in the face of resistance from the religious right. Unifying these two accounts of appropriation is the symbol of the rainbow—one that holds particular significance for LGBTQTNB communities.

ANIMAL ACTIVISM

Widely recognised for its global animal activism efforts, *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals* (PETA) has long utilised well-known faces, such as celebrities, to front its campaigns. With the mainstreaming of drag culture, such as through the television show *RuPaul's Drag Race*, drag performers have been recognised by PETA as providing an opportunity to share the message of animal activism to LGBTQTNB audiences. Drag performers such as Sharon Needles (see Figure 5.2)—the winner of *Drag Race* season 4—and veteran drag performer Lady Bunny (see Figure 5.3) have both appeared in campaigns for PETA, as can be seen in the images below.

Figure 5.2 draws upon the widely recognised depiction of Sharon Needles as a 'spooky queen', associated with Halloween and all thing ghoulish. In this advertisement, human limbs refer to Needles' ghoulish form of drag; however, the broader message refers to the consumption of animal flesh by humans. The statement 'eating shouldn't cost an arm and a leg' plays on its double meaning: the more common use of the expression refers to the idea that an item shouldn't be too expensive; however, in the context of the advertisement, it also refers the fact that (human) eating shouldn't come at the expense of the

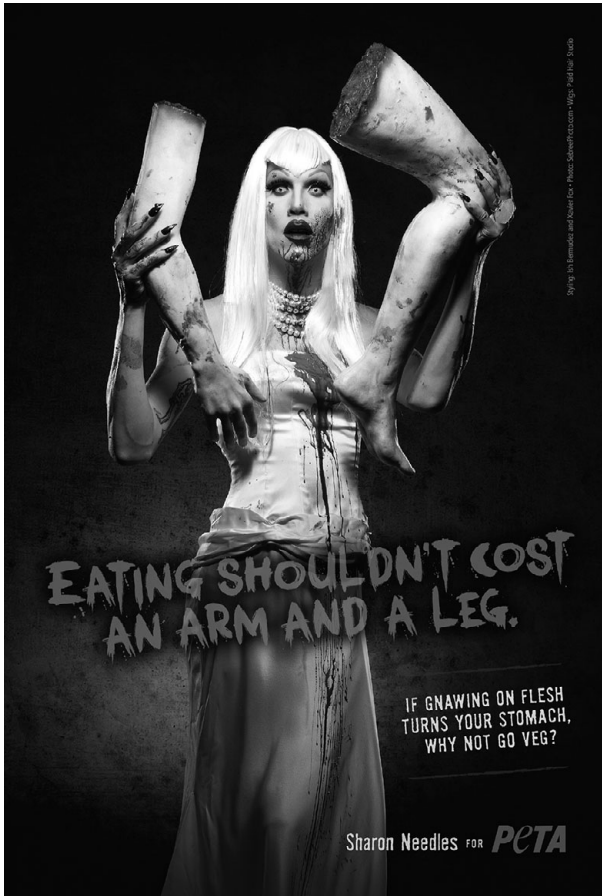


FIGURE 5.2. Sharon Needles for PETA, image courtesy of People for the Ethics Treatment of Animals

limbs and bodies of animals. Figure 5.3, featuring Lady Bunny, more explicitly speaks to the abuse of animals as part of human–carnivore diets. As the text in the box states, ‘The Colonel’s “secret recipe” is cruelty to animals, such as painful debeaking and scalding birds alive.’ This image draws upon the fact that Lady Bunny is widely known as a camp queen known for telling bawdy jokes. In the image Lady Bunny is both the ‘big bright package’ that contains ‘dirty little secrets’, but she is also the holder of another ‘big bright package’ (i.e., the bucket of chicken) that contains secrets of animal cruelty.



FIGURE 5.3. Lady Bunny for PETA, Image courtesy of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

The phenomenon of *RuPaul's Drag Race* has spread beyond its original context of the United States, with iterations of the programme now airing in the United Kingdom, Canada, Holland, Brazil, New Zealand, and Thailand. In the case of the latter, episode 11 of the second season featured a runway challenge in which the queens were required to dress in a way that represented the image of the white elephant. Historically, the white elephant in Thailand represented wealth and the ruling class, with monarchs gifted white elephants as

a sign of their power, and as a harbinger of peace and prosperity (Jensen Brown, 2014). At the same time, however, a white elephant, as a symbol of wealth and prosperity, could not be put to work. As such, a white elephant was both a blessing and a curse: white elephants marked out the ruling class but also became a burden. It is from this latter meaning accorded to white elephants that the more common English understanding of white elephants arose: an object that has little use to its owner. In its English usage, a white elephant might be a gift received for which the recipient has no use, or an object purchased that no longer has utility for the owner, and which also likely has no utility for anyone else, and hence cannot be sold or even donated to charity (Annear, 2019).

In the episode of *Drag Race Thailand*, most of the competitors chose to represent the image of the white elephant through reference to beauty, grace, and elegance. Repeated reference was made to the King of Thailand, and the desire to honour him through the image of the white elephant. One of the competitors, however, chose to portray a different image of the white elephant. Kana Warrior, when describing her depiction of a white elephant on the *Drag Race Thailand* runway, stated that:

My concept for this runway is, those who possess shining beauty and uniqueness will always be targeted. I compare the idea of a white elephant to the LGBT people who are harassed. I will use acting to narrate all this. I want to talk about elephants that are abused by humans. Hunted, killed, or shot. Years before in Thailand, we could see mahout walking elephants to places and letting people buy bananas and sugarcanes to feed the elephant and a CD attached to the back of the elephant. It's so freaking sad.

Echoing one of the points we made in Chapter 1, namely in terms of identification, Kana Warrior here compares the plight of the white elephant to the positioning of LGBT people in Thai society. Yet having made this point of comparison, Kana Warrior goes on to speak in detail about the treatment of elephants in the context of Thai

tourism industries. Here, Kana Warrior refers to the spectacle of elephants (though not white elephants specifically) who are treated as objects for human viewing and related mistreatment. As Kana Warrior notes, animals were 'trained' through the use of metal objects intended to inflict pain, were kept in shackles, and both the trainer (*'mahout'*) and elephant were reliant upon the goodwill of tourists to pay for food for the elephant and to buy a CD (featuring photos taken by the trainer with tourists posing with the elephant) to provide an income for the *mahout*.

Practices of the abuse of elephants for the purposes of 'training' are now widely outlawed in Thailand; however, the practice of using elephants for tourism persists (Rizzolo & Bradshaw, 2018). In part, this is due to what is seen as the symbiotic relationship between *mahout* and elephants, such that mahout live within an economy whereby without their training and exhibition of elephants they are without work (Cadigan, 2016). Kana Warrior's depiction of the white elephant, then, is a commentary on the mistreatment of anyone who has 'beauty' and who is 'unique'; on the intersections of human and animal lives; and on practices of commodification and tourism that negatively impact the lives of many humans and animals. In the context of Thailand specifically, practices of sex tourism, which typically involve the consumption of Thai women's bodies (including trans women) by white male western tourists, are thus another form of the violence referred to by Kana Warrior's depiction of the white elephant. The white elephant, then, is the abused animal, the humans complicit in such abuse for their livelihood, and the humans who commission the abuse as tourists. The white elephant is also the female body that is put to work by the sex tourist, a body reduced to an object that is otherwise (i.e., outside of sex work) framed as having little use, particularly here referring to the bodies of trans women engaged in sex work in Thailand (Tan, 2014). That the female sex worker body—as symbolic white elephant—serves the desires of the white tourist echoes the multiple meanings accorded to the 'white elephant' outlined above.

Beyond the activism of drag performers, other members of LGBTQTNB communities have also engaged in animal activism.

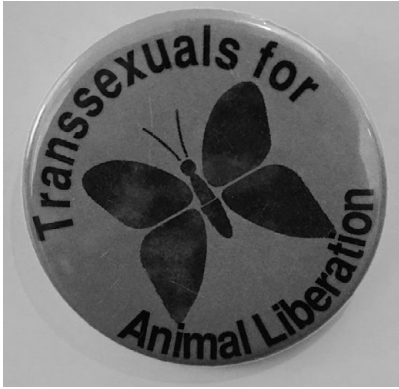


FIGURE 5.4. Transsexuals for animal liberation, image courtesy of Mirha-Soleil Ross, Xanthe Phillipa MacKay, and The ArQuives

A notable example appears in the work of Mirha-Soleil Ross. Through her work in the production of the trans street magazine *Gender Trash* in the early 1990s, Ross was involved in the development of a range of buttons that were available for sale through the magazine. The sale of buttons was intended to provide much-needed funding for the production of *Gender Trash*, given the self-funded nature of the magazine. One of the buttons, featured in Figure 5.4, focussed on animal activism.

The focus on animal activism reflected in the button speaks to broader animal activism work undertaken by Ross throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s. Another key example appears in a monologue performed by Ross in Canada, and which was subsequently recorded and made available for screening. Titled *Yapping Out Loud: Contagious Thoughts from an Unrepentant Whore*, the monologue focusses on the overlaps between attempts at controlling the lives of coyotes, and police attempts at controlling the lives of sex workers, and in particular trans sex workers. Drawing on her own work in the area of animal activism and her engagement and advocacy in the sphere of sex work, in the monologue, Ross makes a passionate call for recognition of the intersections of regulation between the lives of animals and sex workers. In her performance of the monologue, Ross includes screen projections of coyotes alongside her own physical representation of feminist and police regulation of sex work.

The monologue concludes with Ross citing the murders of a number of trans women engaged in sex work in Montreal, and the

stereotyped and hyperbolic claims made about these women's lives. This is immediately followed by a voice-over quoting from the work of Grady (1994), who emphasises that attempts to control the lives of coyotes are the root cause of issues facing these animals: human attempts to exert control over 'nature' only serve to justify anthropocentric ways of viewing and understanding animal ways of being. Situating narratives about the murder of trans women alongside accounts of the control, regulation, and murder of coyotes makes a broader point beyond the simple comparison of human and animal lives as we critiqued in Chapter 1. Rather, Ross makes the point that comparison is warranted if we step back from individual lives, and instead look at systematised forms of control that position one form of life (i.e., 'civilised society') over other lives (i.e., those of trans sex workers, those of coyotes). The analogy between trans women and coyotes, then, is not one of commensurability, but rather one that relies upon a focus on systems of power and control, and how their similarity impact the lives of all those marginalised groups by intersecting social norms (e.g., cisgenderism, anthropocentrism, racism, classism, sexism).

This point about the importance of focusing on systems rather than individuals is reiterated in an interview with Ross conducted by Claudette Vaughn in 2003. In the interview, Ross comments on why she felt that LGBTQTNB communities at the time were not demonstrating concerted awareness of the abuse of animals, such as in the context of animal experimentation. Ross maintains that it is a 'mistake' to assume that 'queer people' are any more likely to be engaged in animal activism than are any other group: that awareness of one's own oppression does not automatically translate into awareness of the oppression of others, and specifically animals. However, as we explored in Chapter 3, this is a contested idea, with some of the women we interviewed believing that there is a greater likelihood for a sense of shared oppression between their communities and animals. We take the view that while there is evidence of an affinity with animal rights in some LGBTQTNB circles, it should not be assumed to automatically translate.

Ethical dilemmas and conflicts of interests are plentiful, even among those of us who are invested in animal rights. An obvious example is our involvement with medicine. Science, medicine, and animal vivisection have a long and ugly history that continues to this day (Bates, 2017). Ross notes the development of medication for the treatment of HIV, where LGBTQTNB people have been encouraged to invest in the medical establishment, and specifically the use of animal testing in the development of drugs. In the interview, Ross goes on to speak about her development of the *Yapping Out Loud* monologue. As she notes, she was concerned about the sex worker activist group COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), given it had appropriated the word 'coyote' without any attendant focus on the suffering of actual coyotes. For Ross, then, the development of the monologue was about exploring how the use of animals as metaphors for human suffering all too often ignores the suffering of animals. As noted above, and by contrast, the monologue by Ross situated the suffering of trans sex workers and coyotes in a shared frame of reference, namely, systematised forms of control.

Although the work of Ross is not directly referred to in it, the 2020 edited collection *Queer and Trans Voices: Achieving Liberation Through Consistent Anti-Oppression* (Brueck & McNeill, 2020) draws upon arguments similar to those of Ross. Focusing specifically on veganism, the editors suggest that a single-issue focus on the consumption of animals fails to locate animal agriculture in a broader context of oppression that affects animals and humans alike. As they note, the term 'vegan' was initially defined as a praxis aimed at ending the exploitation of animals by humans, but this definition continues to fail to examine how 'the very same people that introduced animal agriculture and exploitation through colonialism and then used these same species (nonhumans) to uphold societies centred on white supremacy and all other "-isms" including homophobia and transphobia' (p. 14). As they go on to note, focusing solely on the mistreatment of animals by humans fails to examine how what they term 'white cisheteropatriarchal speciesism' impacts upon *all* marginalised groups,

including animals. For Brueck and McNeill and the contributors to their edited collection, then, fighting against anthropocentrism must be situated in a relationship to the fight against all forms of oppression. Rather than viewing the needs of, for example, LGBTQTNB people as separate from those of animals, or viewing the needs of people racialised as not white as separate from those of people marginalised based on socioeconomic status, an intersectional focus is needed instead, or what they term ‘consistent anti-oppression’. As we shall see in the following sections, an intersectional focus can help not only in seeing interlocking forms of oppression but also in seeing how LGBTQTNB can be unintentionally complicit with the marginalisation of other groups, including animals.

FLAGS, NATURE, AND APPROPRIATION

In the previous section, we focused on activism by LGBTQTNB humans in regard to the lives of animals. In this section, we begin by continuing with our focus on activism, but here specifically focusing on LGBTQTNB rights activism. As a hallmark of LGBTQTNB activism, the Pride flag is a readily identifiable symbol. Of particular interest to us in this section is the green stripe included in the flag, a stripe that is used to represent ‘nature’. Reference to the green stripe, however, is typically taken for granted (i.e., what is meant by ‘nature’ is rarely described in detail); however, one notable exception appears in the following quote, taken from a description of the documentary *Humans of Pride*:

The beauty of pride—celebrating love, humanity, and acceptance of and for everybody—is intrinsically tied with nature. To openly express and share one’s sexuality is natural. To be gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or transgender is natural. To love and be loved by others is natural. Our earth, its resources, its healing and feeding capabilities, are all a part of the pride movement’s overarching goal for peace, love, and equality. For humans and the planet earth alike. For Gilbert Baker, nature sat at the core of his movement.

(Green Film Fest, n.d.)

In this quote, the term 'natural' is used repeatedly to signal legitimacy for LGBTQTNB people's lives. Similar to the argument we explored in Chapter 1, the naturalisation of gender and sexuality diversity serves to situate both outside of culture, instead positioning them as natural, and hence deserving of equality. As we argued in Chapter 1, however, such naturalising arguments sit in a complex relationship to binaries of nature/culture, and human/animal, such that the positioning of LGBTQTNB humans within 'nature' potentially does little to disrupt these binaries, and hence does little to question anthropocentrism and its impact on all beings. This point is of particular note given that the quote goes on to suggest that pride encompasses not just people, but the planet earth itself. With this suggestion, the binary of nature/culture is completely collapsed, leaving little recourse to examine how humans (including LGBTQTNB people) continue to negatively impact upon the planet.

The creator of the Pride flag, Gilbert Baker, has himself commented on the place of nature in the creation of the flag. In his biography, Baker (2019) states that:

A Rainbow Flag was a conscious choice, natural and necessary. The rainbow came from earliest recorded history as a symbol of hope. In the Book of Genesis, it appeared as proof of a covenant between God and all living creatures. It was also found in Chinese, Egyptian and Native American history. A Rainbow Flag would be our modern alternative to the pink triangle. Now the rioters who claimed their freedom at the Stonewall Bar in 1969 would have their own symbol of liberation.

(p. 23)

Here, too, Baker makes recourse to the term 'natural' to legitimise the creation of the Pride flag. Interestingly, however, the word 'natural' is placed alongside the words 'conscious choice'. In many ways, these words are at odds: as Baker goes on to note, the Pride flag replaces the 'pink triangle' (with its negative associations), and as such is a conscious act undertaken in the face of discrimination and marginalisation directed towards LGBTQTNB people. What, then, is natural about

the creation of the flag? Is it natural for discrimination to occur, and natural for it to be resisted? The use of the word 'necessary' would seem to suggest as much, yet recourse to the word 'natural' in the quote above potentially serves in many ways to normalise a world in which discrimination exists, and of course emphasises the natural as pertaining to human lives, again leaving animal lives and the life of the planet outside of the narrative.

In the quote above, Baker (2019) also naturalises the Pride flag by situating it in a genealogy of rainbow flags: from 'Chinese, Egyptian and Native American history'. This type of genealogy is problematic as it appropriates a diversity of histories in the service of a particularly western account of inclusion. Such problems of appropriation are signalled in recent calls for the redesigning of the Pride flag to include black and brown stripes, so as to recognise the racial diversity of LGBTQTNB communities. As has been noted, the whiteness of LGBTQTNB communities serves to marginalise people not racialised as white and serves to legitimate racism within LGBTQTNB communities (Dhaliwal, 2019). The Pride flag, created by a white cisgender man, and now widely commercialised within community events primarily driven and funded by white LGBTQTNB people, is thus viewed as failing to adequately represent intersectionality. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the call for a more inclusive Pride flag has been met with considerable resistance. Murphy (2018), for example, suggests that the Pride flag itself was inclusive in its original design, ignoring the fact that the Pride flag was reduced from eight to six coloured stripes for 'purely practical reasons'. As such, there is historical precedent for updating or changing the flag.

Despite this historical precedent for changes to the Pride flag, Murphy (2018) suggests that the inclusion of colours such as brown and black in the flag is illogical, as a rainbow itself does not refract either colour. (Indeed, as he suggests 'black [is the] absence of light'.) Instead, Murphy makes recourse to claims about the physics of a rainbow to state that a rainbow is 'a natural phenomenon composed of the visible spectrum of colours created when white light is refracted

through a prism. . . White is absent from the rainbow because it is the colour of light from which a rainbow is *produced*' (original emphasis). By again making recourse to claims about nature, Murphy fails to recognise that the Pride flag as a symbol for LGBTQTNB communities is not a natural phenomenon, as Baker (2019) would claim. Rather, it is an interpretative act, albeit one founded on claims to nature and through the use of appropriation, as discussed above. To suggest that white is a colour (of light) and black is the absence of light is to perpetuate the foundational status of whiteness to rainbows (and hence the Pride flag) while legitimating black and brown as colours not proper to a rainbow. Given the emphasis on binaries in accounts of the Pride flag, we might suggest, by contrast, that there is no white *without* black, suggesting that a Pride flag grounded in 'nature' must do more than simply refract whiteness.

Problems associated with appropriation and marginalisation signal the second key theme that we explore in this section. We introduced appropriation mentioned above through Baker's (2019) account of the Pride flag and explore appropriation in more detail now by considering the example of Radical Faeries. Radical Faeries are groups of primarily white cisgender gay men living in a diversity of countries who practice a form of new-age spirituality that is grounded in claims to nature and the earth. Morgensen (2009), through ethnographic work conducted in Radical Faery communities, explores how the founder of the Radical Faery movement—Harry Hay, a founding member of the Mattachine Society—found himself dissatisfied with the materialism, corporatisation, and respectability politics of gay rights activism, and instead removed himself to South American First Nations communities. Hay, and those who adhere to Radical Faery ideals, claim that Radical Faery identities are grounded in a spiritual relationship to the earth similar to that experienced by First Nations people. As Morgensen suggests, however, the idea that a nature-based claim to spirituality by primarily white gay men would serve as a counter to materialism and corporatisation only functioned through the appropriation of First Nations accounts of the earth,

including First Nation spiritualities. Indeed, Radical Faery sanctuaries—shared areas of land located in regional areas where Radical Faeries may live or gather—are themselves situated on colonised land.

Povinelli (2006), in her ethnographic work in Radical Faery communities, also argues that Radical Faery accounts of spirituality are forms of appropriation. As she argues, it was not simply the case that Hay and those who followed him ‘borrowed’ from (i.e., appropriated) First Nations accounts of spirituality, but more than that, First Nations accounts were taken as constituting a heritage for a contemporary gay spirituality. Analogies were made between the oppression of gay men under Christianity, and the oppression of First Nations under Christianity, such that spiritual claims made by Radical Faeries through the appropriation of First Nations ways of being were legitimated through recourse to the idea of a shared history. What is collapsed here, as both Povinelli (2006) and Morgensen (2009) argue, is the complicity of white gay men with histories of colonisation. Similar to our arguments above about the implicit whiteness of the Pride flag, which has subsequently been dismissed in the face of calls for a more inclusive flag, so too does the Radical Faery emphasis on nature serve to dismiss the whiteness of Radical Faery accounts of an appropriated understanding of spirituality.

Pape (2013) has further argued that not only did Hay appropriate First Nations accounts of spirituality, but he did so through making recourse to the alleged authorisation of such appropriation. Hay has repeatedly claimed that he was blessed by a spiritual leader of the Paiute Nation, despite there being no evidence for this claim. Similar to the claims about animal activism we explored in the previous section, Pape argues that it would be entirely possible for white LGBTQTNB people to engage in nature-based activism that is not inherently founded upon appropriation. This would require a situated account of spirituality and activism that acknowledges histories of colonisation, alongside speciesism and other forms of marginalisation. Instead, as Pape suggests, Radical Faery accounts, grounded as they are in a supposedly authorised form of appropriation, serve to

naturalise whiteness. Pape further suggests that claims to (and certification in regard to) environmentalism on the part of some Radical Faery sanctuaries do not appear to be grounded in a broader commitment to environmentalist efforts. Again, this would suggest a singular focus on a (white) gay spirituality, rather than a broader intersectional focus on multiple forms of oppression (including of the earth).

In our own examination of Radical Faery documentation, we found little attention to 'nature' beyond the cursory. In available editions of *RDF* (a magazine colloquially known as the 'Radical Faerie Digest'), animals, for example, are barely mentioned. The word 'animal' is often used to refer to 'animalistic' sexuality—a point we take up in more detail in Chapter 6 in regard to the kink practice of 'pup play'. Reference is also made to the wearing of animal skins in a form of ritual connection to 'nature'. Animals and nature are thus frequently collapsed in *RDF* as a warrant to commodification in the service of Radical Faery spirituality. Such claims in the context of *RDF* are in direct contradiction to the history of the magazine itself. The magazine was originally established as *Rural Free Delivery*, a service provided to people living in regional areas of the United States who did not otherwise have access to postal services. As Herring (2007) argues, *RFD* (as 'rural free delivery') was originally used as a slur in gay communities to reference 'small town lives'. With the development of the Radical Faery movement, however, *RFD*—then stylised as *Radical Faery Digest*—became identified with a counterculture movement that was anti-urbanisation, anti-metro-normative, and instead, oriented to country living. As we argued above, however, this counterculture movement, as much as it sought to resist materialism and respectability politics, was mired in a normative whiteness that served not only to appropriate First Nation spiritualities but also served to appropriate regional LGBTQTNB identities.

These points about appropriation are further evident in documentaries about Radical Faery sanctuaries. Documentaries such as *Faerie Tales* (Roques, 1992), *Glitter* (Davison, 2011), and *Hope Along*

the Wind (Slade, 2002) uniformly make no mention of animals at all, including animal activism. Nature, again, is an object on which to project images of a Radical Faery spirituality, rather than as a populated space with long histories of animal and First Nation inhabitation. Indeed, in the three documentaries, the land is typically represented as a tabula rasa that can be shaped by the will of Radical Faery inhabitants (thus echoing colonising narratives), as much as it gives them what is seen as an unproblematic access to a naturalised sense of self. Claims to 'nature', then, function as a largely empty concept that provides a framework for whatever is deemed to fall under its ambit in the service of Radical Faery lives. This is not to say that Radical Faerie sanctuaries do not involve a commitment to sustainability. Certainly, this is a focus of the documentaries. But how this connects to activism for humans, animals, and the planet is typically left out of the narrative.

In sum, in many ways an off the cuff comment by Sharon Needles, winner of *RuPaul's Drag Race* season 4, exemplifies how Radical Faerie culture and claims to nature and the Pride flag are understood in contemporary LGBTQTNB culture: 'The original green colour in the flag stood for nature because all gays were hippies in the 70s. I used the snake because they are feared for the wrong reasons, and I've always kinda been feared for the wrong reasons'. (Season 4, Episode 6, 'Float Your Boat'). Played for laughs to the judges, Needles' comments equate the green stripe, nature, and 'hippies', but also make what, as we have argued above, is an exceptional and thus important comment on 'nature'. Needles' use of a snake in her costume references human perceptions of animals, thus bringing animals into the broader frame of reference about the Pride flag. That this is otherwise largely missing from conversations about the Pride flag is a topic to which this book as a whole orients.

ANIMALS, RAINBOWS, AND DEATH

In Chapter 2, we introduced a focus on the loss of a much-loved animal companion, and we explored how LGBTQTNB people navigate and experience mourning when an animal companion dies. In the

final section of the present chapter, we return to the topic of the death of an animal companion and apply the framework of appropriation as introduced in the previous section, to think further about how the deaths of animal companions are framed. Specifically, we explore the idea exemplified in a number of poems, namely, that animals cross a 'rainbow bridge' when they die, and that they are there waiting for us to join them when we too die. Although the history of the development of poems associating the death of an animal with the 'crossing of the rainbow bridge' are somewhat unclear (Humane Goods, 2018), with multiple authors claiming to have developed the concept, a consistent thread, and one that we explore in this section, is the idea that the rainbow bridge metaphor for the death of an animal companion draws upon First Nations mythologies that are appropriated in the service of western accounts of the death of a companion animal. Given our focus on rainbows (i.e., Pride flags) and appropriation in the previous section, it seems fitting to examine the motif of the rainbow and the framework of appropriation in this section also.

As noted above, multiple sources are claimed when discussing the history of the association of the death of an animal companion with 'crossing the rainbow bridge'. These include a poem by Dahm published in 1998 entitled 'The Rainbow Bridge', 'The Legend of Rainbow Bridge' written by Britton and published in 2011, and the poem 'All Pets Go To Heaven', by Sife, first published in the book *The Loss of a Pet* in 1993. In examples such as these, differing sources are claimed for the idea of the rainbow bridge as a symbol for the passage of animals into the afterlife. In some sources, the Norse mythology of the Bifrost is referred to. Made familiar to many through the Marvel movie series of *Thor* and *The Avengers*, the Bifrost is a rainbow bridge that allows for passage between the world of humans and the world of the gods. The use of Norse mythology in western accounts of the death of an animal companion is of course a form of appropriation. However, in this section, we focus specifically on claims that the rainbow bridge as representative of the death of an animal draws upon First Nations mythology, and specifically Navaho legends. This

necessitates a brief excursion through a historical account of the rainbow bridge.

Harvey (2012) provides a book-length study of the North American physical structure that is most commonly known as the rainbow bridge, a rock formation located in Navajo country. As Harvey reports, the bridge was first identified by a Navajo traveller and became known as 'the rock spans'. The bridge had long been a site for pilgrimages and ceremonies, given that the rock bridge is located in a series of mountains that are central to Navajo mythology relating to foundation narratives and to rituals related to sustenance and rain in an otherwise dry climate. It was only much later, in 1909, that the bridge was 'discovered' by colonisers. Led by a Navajo guide, a group of archaeologists surveyed the area, were introduced to the bridge, and subsequently named it the 'rainbow bridge' due to the colours of the rock in the formation. This naming was done despite the knowledge that the bridge had long been known to the Navajo people, meaning that claims to have 'discovered' the bridge were themselves an act of appropriation and disavowal of Navajo histories. Indeed, the Navajo guide was himself largely left out of narratives of the white 'discovery' of the bridge. As Harvey notes, then, white archaeologists gave specifically white, colonising meanings to the bridge, and in so doing brought it into a realm of intelligibility framed by archaeological 'discovery' and white practices of naming and claiming. Moreover, Harvey notes that in so doing archaeologists reinforced a binary of 'native/civilised', such that the power of naming is accorded to the second part of the binary, situating Navajo knowledges as partial and subjective.

How archaeological and/or First Nations understandings of the 'rainbow bridge' came to inform most of the poems mentioned above about the death of an animal companion is even murkier than the development of such poems themselves. We would argue, however, that as with any form of appropriation, it is likely that claims to an 'authentic past' about the rainbow bridge mythology in regard to animals was retrospectively applied. In other words, it is likely that

the poems were written, and only after the event was the idea of 'crossing the rainbow bridge' connected to Navajo accounts of the rock formation. This demonstrates how appropriation can act in multiple forms to situate First Nations knowledges as a basis for white western claims (as was the case for the Radical Faeries), or can be drawn upon to give substance to a white western idea that is otherwise seen as without basis (as in the case of 'crossing the rainbow bridge'). Importantly, however, for one of the poems, First Nations mythologies are not simply used to frame the poem but are instead used to inform the entire poem. In 'The Legend of Rainbow Bridge' (2011), the entire 'legend' refers to the author being told of the rainbow bridge by a 'shaman', who shares a poem about animals crossing the bridge and waiting for humans on the other side. Nowhere in the story is a claim made as to whether or not this story is grounded in 'fact', or whether the motif of the 'shaman' is an act of appropriation, but either way if, as the story claims, the rainbow bridge poem was originally narrated by a 'shaman', it is of note that they are not the author of the poem.

As such, and as Magliocco (2018) notes, the appropriation of the symbolism of the rainbow bridge has lent considerable credence to the poems, such that they now constitute a considerable market in animal-related merchandising. Magliocco notes that the commodification of the rainbow bridge motif in regard to the death of an animal companion is reliant upon the personification of animals, such that animals are seen to have a soul and hence an afterlife. This personification of animals sits in contrast to historically dominant accounts of animals as less-than-human, and hence as not privy to a psychic life, or at least not privy to a life that results in an afterlife, as we explored in Chapter 2. The attribution of souls to animals has long been a topic of philosophical debate (Harvey, 2007); however, in its most recent incarnation in the context of the rainbow bridge poems, it serves primarily to provide humans with a mechanism through which to grieve animals: it is unlikely that it serves many purposes to animals themselves, though it may well serve as a warrant for humans to show

greater kindness and care for animals. Certainly, as Magliocco suggests, the attribution of an afterlife to animals has served to create a market in animal death: from cremations to burial services to memorials and to multiple forms of rainbow-themed items that serve to celebrate the life of an animal.

Importantly, however, claims to the souls of animals, and the commodification of such claims through the rainbow bridge motif, sits alongside ongoing claims that animal lives are less than human lives, and hence less-than-grievable. In his work on grief arising from the loss of an animal companion, for example, and as we explored in more detail in Chapter 2, David Redmalm (2015) draws upon Judith Butler's (2000) work on grief to suggest that only 'some lives in some contexts are grieved while others are regarded as ungrievable, substitutable, and 'lose-able'' (p. 22). Redmalm goes on to suggest that the loss of an animal companion 'is best understood as liminal grief—as grief simultaneously inside and outside the margin' (p. 32). The loss of an animal companion is accorded a liminal status, Redmalm suggests, precisely because of anthropocentrism, which produces animal companions as non-persons. Yet at the same time, Redmalm suggests that the loss of an animal companion is outside the margins precisely because the experience of such loss refuses to privilege human-human relations (i.e., it treats the loss of an animal companion as important as the loss of a human). To an extent, Redmalm makes the call to celebrate this position beyond the margins as challenging anthropocentrism, but we are still left with the fact that the loss of animal companion is often not recognised.

A key example of the lack of recognition accorded to the loss of an animal companion in the context of LGBTQTNB people's lives appears in the documentary *Shatzi is Dying* (see also, Chapter 1). Produced by Jean Carlomusto, the documentary relates the story of Shatzi, a Doberman, who lived with Jean and her partner Jane. Across the span of the documentary, Shatzi is shown as living with a chronic illness and eventually dies at the conclusion of the documentary. At the heart of the documentary is an account that both celebrates the

joys of cross-species kinship yet highlights the fact that such joy always sits in a relationship to the differing life spans of humans and animal companions. The corollary of recognising the personhood of Shatzi, however, is that her death is a significant loss for both Jean and Jane. What is lost is not simply a body, but rather a person who had been part of their family. Yet as Carlomusto states, '[w]ith all of the misery and injustice in the world, how do you tell anyone that you are grieving for your pet?' One of the ways in which Carlomusto describes her response to the loss of Shatzi is precisely by recognising Shatzi's personhood and agency in regard to her death, in addition to the emotional response experienced by Rifka in regard to Shatzi's death:

In a way, Shatzi had the perfect death. She lived twice her expected age, never missed a meal. And died peacefully in her sleep. We should all be so lucky. Her death should have come as a relief, but both of our reactions were 'oh no, we weren't there for her'. Well maybe she didn't want us there. Shatzi didn't die alone, Rifka was with her. When we brought them home from the babysitters Rifka kept on holding up her paw as if something were wrong with it. And we checked it and rechecked it and it was just fine. Until finally, you know, we just came to the conclusion that she just lost her best friend, and that hurt.

In this quote, Carlomusto engages with Shatzi as a being who knows. While, as is true for all of us who live with animal companions (and indeed other humans), we can never truly know if our assumptions about their feelings and decisions are correct, for Carlomusto part of coming to terms with her own grief was about acknowledging Shatzi's agency. And it was also about acknowledging the loss experienced by Rifka. Different from Redmalm's (2015) suggestion that the loss of an animal companion is beyond the margins, and hence a challenge to anthropocentrism, the account provided by Carlomusto suggests that the challenge to anthropocentrism potentially comes when we

recognise that human grief is not the only grief to be known when a companion animal dies. Others, such as Rifka, will mourn them, too.

So far in this section, we have travelled from an account of the appropriation of Navajo mythologies to the creation of poems focused on the death of animal companions, to the commodification of animal death, to a lesbian-focused account of understanding animal agency in the face of death. In what remains of this section we take up this question of agency and use it to explore another example of appropriation in regard to the symbol of the rainbow. In 2016 in Australia, in a time marked by political change and calls for a public 'vote' about marriage equality, a group of women engaged in a form of everyday activism in response to religious rights organising about LGBTQTNB people's lives. At the time, the website for the Australian Christian Lobby became available for purchase, and this group of women purchased the domain registration, and launched a website called 'Australian Cat Ladies' (<https://australianchristianlobby.org>). Attention was paid widely in the Australian media to this act of resistance, especially given that the website used a cartoon image of a cat sitting atop a rainbow as its logo.

As the website states, 'we believe in family values—like hard work, marriage equality, and lots of tummy rubs.' The website is replete with both humorous references to a love for cats, as well as including many images and accompanying text about the importance of marriage equality for LGBTQTNB people. Reference to women's love for cats specifically, of course, trades on the well-known trope of the 'crazy cat lady' but repurposes it to political and activist ends. As Probyn-Rapsey (2018) notes, the trope of the 'crazy cat lady' has far historical reach: from women as alleged witches and cats as their familiars, to 'spinsters' living alone with only cats for company. Indeed, as Reti and Sien (1991) note, cats have long been associated with lesbian women, with largely negative connotations as per the example of witches, but also as symbols of female-centred ways of being and spirituality, such as through the cat goddess Bastet. As such

it was notable to us that when we presented initial findings from our project on trans and cisgender women and their animal companions to the funding body—the Australian Medical Association—and noted that most of the previous research had focused on women and cats, that we were met with much laughter from the audience. Indeed, McKeithen (2017), in his examination of the ‘crazy cat lady’ trope, suggests that women who live with cats and without other humans very much ‘queer’ the heteronormativity of homely spaces. As McKeithen suggests, the home is heteronormative in relation to assumptions of heterosexual human coupledness, with the home particularly and normatively configured as a space for ‘women’s work’. Women who live solely with cats, including lesbian women, then, resist such heteronormativity through their ‘more-than-human’ families, and through their generation of queer menageries that problematise assumptions about kinship relationships.

To return to the Australian Cat Ladies, then, their website is what we would argue to be a positive act of appropriation: it appropriates a domain previously used by the Christian right, which stands in opposition to, among other things, abortion rights, LGBTQTNB people’s rights, and their intersections. To appropriate the domain in the service of making a case for the recognition of both more-than-human families and marriage equality, including through the use of the rainbow imagery, does some of the work that we argued earlier in this chapter is sorely lacking when the rainbow flag is more typically used, such as in the Pride flag, which is often absent of recognition of animals. While always tongue in cheek, the Australian Cat Ladies website, then, is a positive example of appropriation in the service of building an inclusive civic society. It does not rely upon the trope of the ‘crazy cat lady’ (even if it implicitly references it), nor does it rely upon the appropriation of First Nations knowledges and mythology (as is the case for the rainbow bridge metaphor). Rather, through its existence, it makes a political statement inclusive across species (though strictly exclusionary of dogs: another humorous play on the ‘crazy cat lady’ trope).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this chapter, we have drawn together a veritable menagerie of ideas about LGBTQTNB people, animals, rainbows, and activism—an approach we similarly adopt in Chapter 6. By bringing together such a diversity of topics into conversation, we have broadened out our focus on animal and LGBTQTNB human lives to look at some of the wider societal and historical relationships that serve to give further warrant for this book. As we have demonstrated, connections between LGBTQTNB human lives and the lives of animals are myriad and take multiple forms, including those that are less than obvious. As a readily identifiable symbol, the rainbow, inclusive of the Pride flag, brings together multiple strands of thought about what it means to think about activism. Focusing on appropriation more specifically has allowed us to explore how claims about ‘nature’ and recourse to First Nations knowledges and mythology must be treated with extreme caution and indeed viewed with suspicion, given they evoke a single issue focus that fails to examine how anthropocentrism differentially yet consistently affects us all, inclusive of humans, animals, and the earth.

Indeed, it is important for us to acknowledge that a singular focus in certain parts of this chapter means that we, too, are guilty of providing limited depth to some of the topics we have addressed. This is particularly true in the case of drag queen activism, given that not only have there been reasonable critiques made of PETA as an organisation (e.g., Pendergrast, 2018; Rodrigues, 2020) but that more specifically allegations continue to be made about the public opinions of both Sharon Needles and Lady Bunny (specifically in terms of racism and transphobia). A singular focus on the ‘good’ work that some animal activist organisations and drag queens have done thus potentially elides how they are located in broader social contexts where other actions are potentially less than ‘good’. Our rationale for a singular focus was that the evidence in these areas is not singular and is open to multiple interpretations. Our decision to present one

particular image of these organisations and performers was thus intended to open up a conversation, rather than close down conversation through a focus solely on positive actions. Certainly, it is possible for any individual or organisation to engage in actions that are both helpful and harmful, and it is this multiplicity that we give further attention in the following chapter.

Further, and as we signalled in the introduction to this chapter, even when an intersectional focus is adopted, this can often occur through the privileging of particular (white, cisgender) voices, at the expense of those voices already marginalised. The poem read by Marsha P. Johnson serves as a continued reminder that trans women's voices in particular are often marginalised, even though such women have often been key to counterculture movements focused on ensuring the rights and lives of both animals and LGBTQTNB humans. Appropriation, as a thread that runs throughout this chapter, is thus also a formative force in terms of the types of voices that predominate in LGBTQTNB activism. When the voices of trans women are appropriated in the service of other groups, but when such women's voices are not adequately acknowledged, then there is a failure to evoke a truly intersectional politics. As we have suggested throughout this book, and as Brueck and McNeill (2020) emphasise in their work on anti-oppressive approaches to anthropocentrism, it is important to create spaces where a queer menagerie of voices is both possible and intelligible. Examples such as that of resistance to updating the Pride flag are examples where intersectionality is potentially refused. That this impacts upon the most marginalised of LGBTQTNB humans say much in terms of the potential for animal companions to as equally be recognised in anti-oppression movements led by LGBTQTNB humans. How multiple forms of resistance to oppression may share one stage, or whether this is in fact possible, is thus another topic that we will explore in further detail in the final chapter of this book.

