



Is it Vegan? Ethical Enrolment and Exclusion in Digital Food Systems

Eva Giraud
University of Sheffield

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Over the past decade, possibilities for ethical food practice to serve as a lever for systemic change have been eroded: as illustrated by the popularization of veganism. In western Europe, vegan practice has shifted from something marginal into the mainstream, with fast-food franchises offering vegan options and supermarket chains dubbing ‘flexitarianism’ the future of food. Yet what are the implications of radical expressions of food politics becoming enrolled into infrastructural arrangements they have historically lain at odds with?

Feminist STS elucidates that when publics move from being non-users of socio-technical systems to being enrolled by these systems, it can become difficult to explore whether oppressive norms and standards could be ‘otherwise’. Interviews with long-term vegans and analysis of vegan digital media ecologies (including social media platforms, commercial food ordering systems and apps such as ‘is it vegan’) illustrate these tensions. As large food manufacturers and restaurant chains have adapted their ordering systems, technical organisation, and supply-lines to accommodate plant-based options, vegan practice has become more accessible. At the same time, possibilities for maintaining connections between veganism and other social justice issues – particularly environmental and labour politics – are being foreclosed. While digital food infrastructures enrol users by appearing to cater to a range of moral (as well as technical) requirements, in practice the onus is on consumers to be more ethically flexible and fit with infrastructural norms that enact more limited understandings of what veganism is and means. The ethical dimensions of enrolment require elaboration to conceptualize these developments.

Eva Haifa Giraud is a Senior Lecture in Media at the University of Sheffield, UK. Her research has two strands: contemporary non-anthropocentric theory, and understanding how frictions that arise in the relationships between activism, political ideals, and digital media technologies are negotiated. She has published in journals including *Social Studies of Science*, *Theory, Culture & Society* and *New Media & Society* as well as her monographs *What Comes After Entanglement?* (Duke University Press, 2019) and *Veganism* (Bloomsbury, 2021).

Zoom, 23 March, 3pm: <https://bruneluniversity.zoom.us/j/4624210504>
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