



A political economy of viral chatter: contact, contract and bio-insecurity

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The Open
University



Biosecurity Borderlands evidence base

Labour and food production

- ❖ Ethnographic work and 50 interviews on farms, in factories, abattoirs, labs, supplier events
- ❖ Poultry growing, catching, processing, killing, portioning, cleaning, retailing
- ❖ safety regulations, working conditions, contracting

Wildlife and animal health

- ❖ Ethnographic work across 10 sites and 30 interviews with farmers, vets, ornithologists, breeders, wardens
- ❖ work shadowing and ethnographic observation on wildlife reserves, in virology labs, on farms, at agricultural shows

Biosecure publics

- ❖ 10 focus groups (60 participants across socio-economic groups, interests, age, and geographic locations)

Regulating food

- ❖ Ethnographic work at 20 sites across the food chain, long interviews with key actors
- ❖ work shadowing and ethnographic observation: on farms, at markets, in labs, at border posts, abattoirs, cutting plants and restaurants



Contacts and contracts





Contract: Supply chain management and vertical integration

‘Whichever way you do it, [by owning farms or contracting the growing], you make sure you have full control to make changes on farms ... Biosecurity is more straight-forward with your management structure.’ (Major UK poultry processor 2011)

‘Tesco’s probably knows more about the farms than the integrators know about the farms. They will have a file on every farm supplying them, they’ll know their mortality, their records, they’ll know antibiotics used – because they’re absolutely petrified of having anybody saying they’ve got any problem after eating their food because the financial effect is so great on them.’ (Poultry vet, 2011)



Scaling life

- ‘To have 1.3 million birds in here every week, it has to be carefully calculated from a hatching perspective (...) how many birds are put down on the farms, which farms, just to ensure a smooth supply of poultry into the plant because our customer demands are such we couldn’t have a million one week and then 1.6 the next week. It’s got to be 1.3 every week.’ (Interview with major poultry processor)
- “They’re rearing race horses, those birds **have to** go through like a race, to be honest, and if they slow down at any time, that’s it” (Industry Vet, Feb 2012)



Formatting mobilities

Contact

Exchange

Movement

Circulation

Communication

Commerce

Bare life

“The modern bird is very close to diarrhoea shall we say. You’re putting a high nutritional value product in one end and you **can** tend to get looser droppings out the other end. You’re growing a 2.5 kilo bird in 38/39 days, which used to take, even ten years ago, would have been 5 days longer...”

(Poultry Vet, Interview February 2012, original emphasis).



Reducing labour





Non-scalable elements of production

reduction in
ecological diversity

reduction in
resilience

reduced labour
inputs



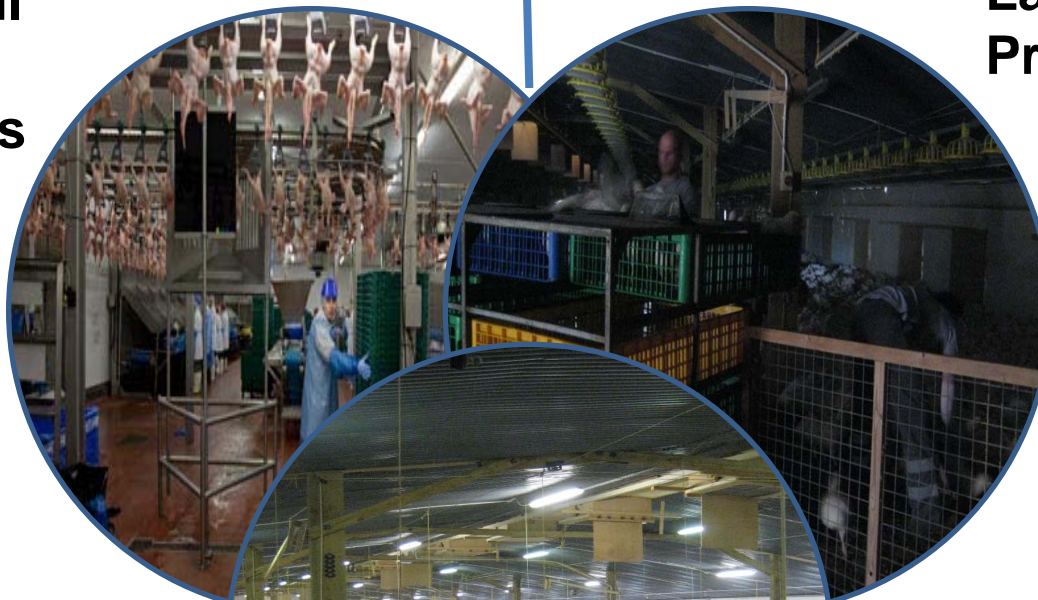
An expansion of precarious life and work

4. Just-in-Time Pressures : A Tipping Point

**Corporate
and Retail
Cost
Pressures**

Just-in-time delivery to food processor

**Labour
Pressures**



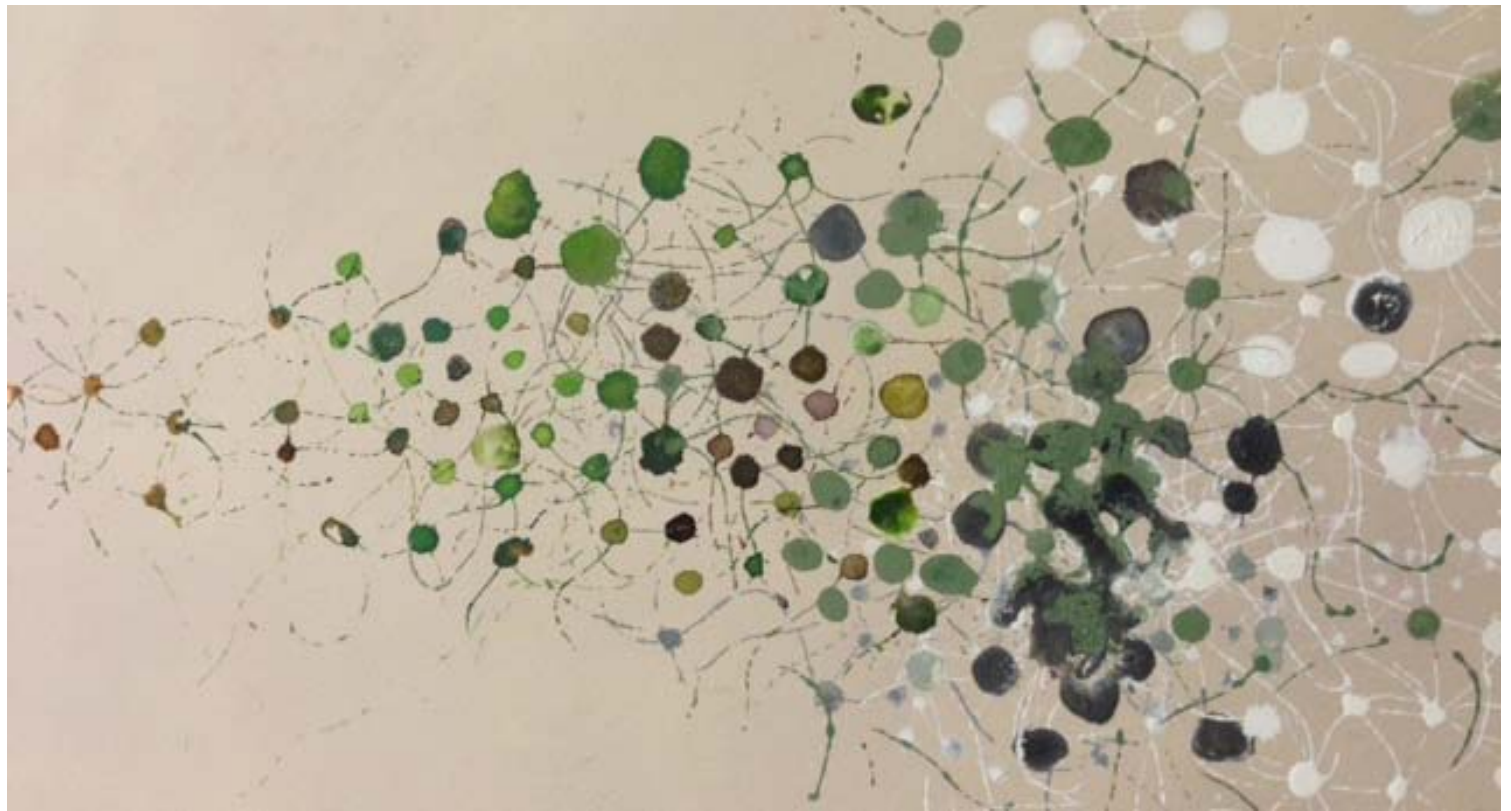
Disease amplification in stressed birds

Biosecurity driven by food safety concerns

Regulatory Pressures



From contact to chatter, to viral spaces



Helen Scalway, 2013 Tipping Points and Borderlands



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