

K. Forkasiewicz

Worlds Apart? The Unity of Liberation

John Sanbonmatsu, ed. *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation*, Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011. 376 pp. \$90, £57.95.

Animal exploitation is a complex process that plays out in various interlinked and mutually reinforcing ways, from ethics and values, cultural dispositions and habits, to ingrained concepts of who — or what — we are. Much attention has been given to its philosophical, ethical and cultural aspects, resulting in volume upon volume of valuable critical literature. However, other aspects, like its politics, have gone underappreciated. In its concrete, real-world expression, the now global behemoth which enslaves, tortures and kills billions of other animals a year, is a profoundly political phenomenon, in which questions of cultural values and individual attitudes are interwoven with those of power structures, resource distribution, and institutional hierarchy, i.e. with the capitalist world system itself. With some exceptions, this fact is still largely unnoticed and undertheorized. That it remains so is due to the divorce between two promising foci of oppositional forces: the animal protection movement and the radical Left. The former's lack of critical political consciousness and the latter's speciesist outlook go hand in hand in obstructing the efficacious grappling with animal exploitation. This is where *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation* comes in.

It is a challenge to draw from different, often historically and conceptually divergent traditions, and not to arrive at an artificial synthesis. The various strands of Frankfurt School critical theory, Marxism, existential phenomenology, psychoanalysis, feminism, etc. are not easily married. In spite of these potential difficulties, the contributors manage to elucidate the often obscure (or just ignored) connections linking the numerous oppressions that tear the vulnerable of the world apart. Inspired to some extent by the eclectic intellectual excursions of the Frankfurt School, the tome is packed with multifaceted content, ranging from historical and political analyses, matter-of-fact narrative of reporting the cruelties visited upon human and nonhuman victims, to poetry; all rightfully impassioned in lively opposition to the oppressive *status quo*.

In the introduction, editor John Sanbonmatsu sets out to sketch the structure and contents of the book. "The question posed by the chapters in this volume," he writes, "is how much closer we ourselves need to get to the reality of our own society's violence against other animals to perceive that violence for what it is — atrocity" (2). That

violence, as well as the cruelty humans inflict on each other, is normalized and thus made entirely tolerable, largely an ordinary part of life, except in those relatively rare instances where it stands out in plain view and shocks us into attention. Still, they “pale in significance beside the smoothly functioning planetary system of routine extermination” (3). The public pays little or no attention to it, unless something goes wrong. And it does; examples abound of when the system malfunctions and then becomes widely noticed, if in a form reduced to a spectacle for mass consumption. Whenever public health is thought to be jeopardized, hundreds of millions of other animals are killed “just to be safe.” The point is precisely that there are no limits to the violence humans are capable of visiting upon victims in attempting to demonstrate their own superiority. “Those wielding total power annihilate those with no power at all,” and so “the *idea* of the worthlessness of the other, the other’s lack of a right to exist” becomes a reality (3; emphasis in original). Reduced to a ready-made category of contemptible “animal,” the other is up for extermination. But Karen Davis’s essay, “Procrustean Solutions to Animal identity and Welfare Problems,” introduces a twist.

Focusing on chickens, Davis writes that “we have been accustomed through the environmental movement to think of species extinction as the worst fate that can befall a sentient organism. But the chicken’s doom is not to become extinct” (53). Like Procrustes (the Greek-mythological bandit) exploiters mold the bodies and ontological conceptions about animal victims, and the rhetoric used to describe them, to suit their own goals in what Davis says “can only be termed a genocidal assault on nonhuman identity itself” (35). Especially in settings of institutionalized exploitation, we never meet other animals on terms other than our own. Rather, what we encounter are “the animals’ human-imposed personas” (36). Locked up in a wholly alien and unintelligible world of industrialized “farms,” they have nothing to defend themselves with except learned helplessness. The solutions Davis discusses, which are at times proposed as welfare measures for mass-raised chickens, such as breeding blind, wingless, featherless, or brain-damaged animals to decrease the stress of spending an entire life in a battery cage, would erase whatever is left of their nature. Under the pretense of decreasing suffering, exploiters perfect other animals as tools for increased profit. Genetically manipulated beings literally become parts of the machine, attesting to the power of capital to break through even ontological boundaries.

In fact, suffering and death tend to be fetishized in the ongoing process of commodification. Dennis Soron, in “Road Kill: Commodity Fetishism and Structural Violence,” reflects upon “the commercial culture’s ability to wring opportunities for profit from the most abject circumstances” (55). He discusses the trend of transforming

the suffering of animals killed on the roads of America into consumable products in a car-dependent culture. Despite the intrusion of the car as “an apex predator” into the animal habitat, the subject has not received serious attention from (largely reactionary) animal rights groups. For instance, PETA has embraced the consumption of road kill as “natural, organic, pesticide-free” and “victimless meat” (59). The largely urban-based animal rights movement fails to address automobile hegemony as such, taking road kill to be a discrete moral issue and a matter of individual attitude. However, animal deaths on roads are woven into the fabric of the infrastructural setting in which they occur. Soron encourages the reader to consider how “responsibility for road kill [...] like automobility itself, is enmeshed with broader imperatives driving production, consumption, and government policy under late capitalism” (61).

A critique of capitalism — the nexus of a multitude of oppressive relations, and a prism through which all of them are expressed today — can shed light on the entirety of human history and culture as forcing both human and animal to “exist in conditions of alienation,” inhabiting a world that is “unfree” and to be “other than they are” (5-6). In Sanbonmatsu's words, the goal of critical theory is to “redeem the conscious, living *subject*, or person, from thoughtlessness, violence, and domination” (6). This work of redemption is to be carried out through a development, in theory and in practice, of a “new mode of address to the natural world, a form of *Mitsein* or inter-being in which humans might learn to live alongside the other conscious beings without imposing their own violent categories and systems upon them” (6-7). Throughout history and beyond all geographical and cultural boundaries, human identity has been constructed in large part on the basis of an artificial dualism of human vs. animal. The former has been celebrated, if only in the abstract, while the latter has been the object of unrelenting abasement. Zipporah Weisberg, in “Animal Repression: Speciesism as Pathology,” sets out to ponder the psychological dimension this phenomenon.

Weisberg says that human oppression of other animals and the denial of our own animality — the embodied consciousness we share with other sentient beings — have been two aspects of the same massive self-deception (178). It has taken a toll on the human psyche, resulting in “an unconscious sense of loss, melancholia, ambivalence, guilt, and a host of other neuroses, on both an individual level and a societal level” (178). Far from being completely banished, the animal in us is as present as ever, and it wants out. Drawing upon Freud, Marcuse, and feminist theory, Weisberg shows how we are torn between feelings of affection and frequent sadistic behavior towards other animals, with Thanatos usually getting the upper hand as we “bring our bloody

fantasies to fruition by committing atrocities against them on a massive scale" (183). The contemptible "animal" awaits its redemption.

Although the importance of other animals in the work of Horkheimer and Adorno has tended to be unappreciated, a number of contributors find inspiration there. In "Thinking With: Animals in Schopenhauer, Horkheimer, and Adorno," Christina Gerhardt is convinced that Horkheimer and Adorno's treatment of the dialectical tension between "the human" and "the animal" has the potential to open the door to a "different model of ethics" (138). Animal tropes, she writes, populate "the entire corpus of Adorno's writings" (138). The same goes for Horkheimer's oeuvre, where animality serves as an antidote to the negligence of material dimensions of life in the historical and idealist philosophical systems he criticizes. Influenced by the compassion-based Schopenhauerian ethic, and *contra* cold-blooded Kantian rationalism, Adorno states in *Negative Dialectics* that in terms of morality the individual can only "try to live so that one may believe himself to have been a good animal" (qtd. in Gerhardt 139). Animality is thus not a hindrance to morality, but a guide to it. In *On the Basis of Morality*, Schopenhauer writes that no action has moral significance, unless it springs from the single source of *Mitleid* (compassion) (143-4). Horkheimer beautifully celebrated the 100th anniversary of his death by stating in a lecture that "the heroic even the holy life [...] is the consequence of suffering and rejoicing with others[....] [P]erceptive humans cannot stop fighting horror until they die" (144). It is the animal in us alone, or rather the animal that we are, that can be attentive to the suffering of others.

Unfortunately, the content of Schopenhauer's remarks on other animals in *On the Basis of Morality* did not express any kind of firmly liberationist aspirations, and could not offer hope for a non-speciesist ethics. Rather, it expressed "welfarist" concerns still prevalent today, and hinted (at most) at a critique of entirely instrumental attitudes towards animal others, which assumed unparalleled proportions only a century later. The critique had to be deepened and broadened by others, and neither Horkheimer nor Adorno are among those who first come to mind. However, their treatment of the human-animal dialectic is profound, to which the work of still more contributors attests.

Following animal tropes in Adorno, Eduardo Mendieta continues the discussion with "Animal is to Kantianism as Jew is to Fascism." He quotes Adorno as saying that "philosophy is truly there to redeem what lies in the gaze of an animal" (151). Adorno develops a notion of natural history that seeks to bring to the foreground what is animal in humans and what is human in other animals. The human devoid of the animal, or of

consciousness of herself *as* nature, becomes dominated by instrumental rationality, i.e. her ends “become void” and are replaced by means. In the process, “late capitalism is taking on the character of overt madness” (152). If our humanity is to be accomplished, then the nature, the animal in us must be recollected. According to Mendieta, Adorno designated art as one of the spheres in which such recollection is possible: “it is [...] mimesis, and there we are harkened back to our species protohistory, as well as to our ontogenesis: once we were children, and as children we were innocent animals” (154). The theme of animal gaze is intertwined with redemption, the only standpoint from which, Adorno writes in *Minima Moralia*, philosophy can be practiced responsibly in face of despair (154). Perhaps the reason redemption is still possible is that “humans as such have yet to realize their humanity in accord with their animal nature” (155), and being incomplete, they are not yet doomed. Adorno's natural history could serve as an antidote to the attempts at assimilating “nature into history and subjectivity into complete socialization” (155), and so to the assimilation of the nonhuman into the human. In fact, the two interpenetrate one another, and it is only when this is well understood that they can avoid reification. From Descartes, through Kant and Heidegger, to Levinas, Lacan, and Habermas, a long lineage in Western philosophy has tended to view other animals as objects that *react* but *don't respond*. However, beyond narrowly reductionist notions of “the animal” implicit in their thinking, “we have not ceased to be animals, and will never cease to be, for whatever is part of our [historical] evolution is still part of our natural evolution” (159). Mendieta stresses that Adorno unequivocally recognizes our inextricable involvement in the “natural history of all animals, and all that is living in general.” There is no stepping outside, no going beyond as the animal gaze continues to haunt us, and — Adorno wrote — “there is nothing so expressive as the eyes of animals...” (154).

In the “The Dialectic of Anthropocentrism,” Aaron Bell explores the contradictions of humanist exceptionalism. The Enlightenment and (more broadly) modernity have been centered around the ascent of instrumental reason, which has torn apart myths and left nature — heretofore a constant source of fear and danger — disenchanting and disarmed (164). However, the origins of the human/nonhuman (or rationality/irrationality) divide date back to the development of the Judeo-Christian worldview. It is here that nonhuman life was perhaps first seen as devoid of its own purpose. Centuries later, its aimlessness was further insisted on within Enlightenment mechanicism: “‘life’ is [...] a bloody machine which continually creates and destroys, recycling the organic matter that it produces without providing any meaning to its processes” (165). According to this logic, the human animal alone has, or can have, a purpose, and so it transcends the blind organic mass of nature, utilizing it for its own

ends. In the end, writes Bell, God himself had to be killed, being the last obstacle on the human path towards domination of nature, an unnecessary distortion of the human/nonhuman dualism (166). Now human animals could openly start writing their own history. In effect, however, we performed what Bell calls auto-vivisection: we had to remove from ourselves “the meat of our being,” that which belonged — we felt — to the natural world, in order to separate out the desired human, non-animal element (166). Doing violence to ourselves, we opened even wider the door to cruelty towards other species: we lumped them all together in an undifferentiated mass. Speaking of “the animal,” we had no one — or no thing — in particular in mind. As “the human” rests upon a logic of exclusion, all humans can become a victim — when they get relegated to the status of animal, and the current victims will turn up as the oppressors, as soon as they “feel the power of representing the norm” (175). Bell asserts that women became the first human victims of the human/animal dichotomy, reduced to “biological function, an image of nature” (168). Forced into roles unappreciated by men, they end up serving as support for patriarchy itself, bearing visible marks of the Enlightenment view of nature as the aimless cycle of reproduction to be harnessed by the free (male) agent. The suppression of this and other varieties of subjectivity, including the subjectivity of other animals, are made possible through the freezing of the dialectical tension of human/animal and rational/irrational into inertia. With dualistic conceptual boundaries artificially clear cut, all those who happen to be pushed into a devalued category (“the undesirables”) become victims. As long as a logic of exclusion — of whoever happens to be excluded from moral consideration at any given moment — reigns, peace is merely armistice, a pause between atrocities (174). To nonhuman animals, who *perpetually* stand in for one end of the human/animal divide, this logic means hell.

Some practical implications of the logic of exclusion are pondered by Victoria Johnson in “Everyday Rituals of the Master Race.” Johnson likens the institutional and behavioral schemas humans employ to exploit and exterminate other animals to the ways the Nazis dealt with groups of devalued people. She writes, “on examination we find that that Nazi narratives justifying the domination of *human* subordinates are strikingly similar to beliefs about animals that are widely held to this day” (204; emphasis in original). Drawing upon historical materialist insights, and conducting a thorough sociological analysis, Johnson explores the rituals set up to legitimate animal slavery and to suppress fellow-feeling towards the exploited animals. Moreover, the same rituals are a precondition for the “animalization” of humans who then seem to be “deserving of exploitation and even extermination” (205). The confinement and enslavement of other animals dates back to the emergence of agrarian/pastoral societies

some 11,000 years ago. Human slavery came to accompany the slavery of other animals, with the latter serving as a “paradigmatic basis” of the former, and forming the core of rigid caste-based social systems with fixed hierarchies, with the “animal caste” at the bottom of the social order (205). Exploitation has come to be ritualized via philosophical discourse (one or another form of the ancient great chain of being), sterilized as part of abstract scientific pursuits of objective data, and made more tenable through humor and ridicule. In the end, though, power justifies itself by virtue of its ability to degrade others. Yet the objectification of nonhuman sentience has never been carried out all the way — even hunters are perfectly aware of animal subjectivity, they need it to exercise their power over *someone*. Otherwise, Johnson asks, “why not attack and destroy inanimate objects” (207). She draws our attention to the intersection of animal exploitation, racism, and colonialism, showing how they have tended to reinforce each other in fascism, the ideology which like no other “completely authorizes absolute violence against the weak” (208). Going beyond the repression of animal life and our own desire for the recognition of animal subjectivity will entail the dismantling of the rituals which make exploitation possible.

In “Neuroscience,” Susan Benston uses poetic imagery to bring the reader up close to the suffering repression brings about. She builds up an analogy between Christ's death on the cross and the manipulation of other animals into a helpless acceptance of their enslavement and torture. Death upon death, and we lose count of who died — there have been so many — and for what. First Christ dies to redeem humanity; next it is humans who maim and kill in his name. Evidently, there is always a way to conjure up a dubious reason to justify horror. Sometimes oxymoronic language suffices, other times it takes the prestige of the scientist/philosopher or notions of martyrdom. The victims themselves are never afforded a voice, and so their own stories of suffering go untold, lest they shake us down to our roots and into change (“this animal is forbid to tell the secrets of its prison house, it could a tale unfold whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul,” 198). As the blood continues to be spilled, one is bound to ask how all this came about. The answer seems to be: through suppression of feeling, through denial and disconnection (“That my keen knife see not the wound it makes/ nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark/ to cry ‘Hold, hold!’” 201). But there is still within us “that which speaks,” and in the twelfth hour even “the world's preeminent scholar comes to grief” (201).

Perhaps the grief has its roots in an unacknowledged desire we carry (and which Weisberg describes) for a return to our animality precisely as we fear its uncanny presence, its bursting to the surface out of control. That fear keeps us cut off from “the

open,” which other animals freely participate in. It is in their eyes that we may “glimpse *the promise of a new life*” (186; emphasis in original). Weisberg rightly concludes that a recollection of our animal nature is only viable if it is actualized in the world. Unless we wish to conclude we are nothing but demons, a deep civilizational turnaround is required. That, in turn, calls for the development of a *universal* movement against *all* injustice. Unsurprisingly, there are major structural and institutional obstacles in the way, and here we reach the domain of the explicitly political.

In their respective essays, Carl Boggs (“Corporate Power, Ecological Crisis, and Animal Rights” and John Sorenson (“Constructing Extremists, Rejecting Compassion: Ideological Attacks on Animal Advocacy from Right and Left”) review the negative attitudes by various segments of the Left to the animal liberation enterprise. Narrowly anthropocentric, despite the professed ecological focus of some of them, radicals suspend their critical sense in passively accepting what amounts to the most pervasive institutional barbarism of our time. “At this time,” Boggs writes, “the ethical, political, and ecological case for advancing the interests of nonhuman sentient beings [...] is so overwhelming as to force the debate to (the realm) of radical strategy” (73). So far, animal rights groups have had almost no influence on other radical causes, and have remained on the margins of the major contemporary social-change battles. Praising meat-based culture may be the only thing that unites conservatives, liberals, and radicals. They share “many of the same instrumentalist attitudes,” writes Sorenson (225). Progressives have rather consistently derided animal rights as an enterprise undertaken by extremists, misanthropes, sentimentalists, or worse. Right-wing commentators evoke images of Satan and his “socialist hordes (using) subversion and murder to promote their animal rights agenda” (224). All of this could be hilarious, if it did not actually influence the thinking of a considerable part of the public.

What is even more depressing is that the same happens among leftists, albeit with different arguments. Taking an occasional break from denouncing animal rights as extremist, the radical Left marginalizes animal protectionists as reformists (225). At the same time, the same people (Sorenson mentions a small faction of the Fourth International) condemn direct action against vivisectionists as “attacks on the personal property of the scientists” (225). It just doesn't get any better than this. Like their right-wing counterparts, leftists pick easy targets and focus on the violence utilized selectively by a small number of activists. The broader point forever eludes them, as does the violence committed against the activists by the corporate and state apparatus: “several advocates have been killed in demonstrations and others are alleged to have committed suicide in prison. Beatings by privately contracted thugs and by police are

routine" (226). Additionally, some have argued that carrying out activism on behalf of other animals is somehow dubious, as the latter cannot question the policies of animal protectionists (230). That may or may not be true. Other animals have been known to resist the policies forced on them by exploiters,¹ and it is those that we should focus on, instead of picking holes in a desirable, if not sufficiently consistent, historical enterprise.

The excuses for maintaining our species privilege are many. Sanbonmatsu traces the bitterness of the Left with regard to animality back to the "unresolved ambivalences and tensions at the heart of the humanist and Enlightenment traditions from which it sprang" (14). He is also right to say that the problems within this tradition should not tempt one to denounce it as a whole, for it has in fact made possible achievements such as democracy, liberalism, socialism, and, yes, animal rights themselves. However, both Marx and Engels, whose influence on the development of socialist thought in the 19th and 20th centuries were decisive, opposed animal welfare as a reactionary bourgeois pursuit.² Plus, Marx's conception of freedom is easy to read in narrowly anthropocentric terms. It stresses the liberation of free human creativity from the necessities of animal life. This view left a stain which has not been erased to this day. However, despite the "theoretical myopia" exhibited by most of their exponents, Boggs concludes that Marxism, social ecology, and deep ecology can become elements of a broader, non-speciesist vision. In fact, Renzo Llorente, in "Reflections on the Prospects for a Non-Speciesist Marxism," claims that "there is nothing in the basic structure or outlook of Marxism that commits it to speciesism" and that "certain considerations actually incline Marxism to an anti-speciesist position" (134). In their respective articles, Llorente and Ted Benton ("Humanism = Speciesism? Marx on Humans and Animals") probe Marx and Engels' views to find out just how open they might be to a worldview and politics of species egalitarianism.

Benton notes that Marx makes central use of the human/animal dichotomy in his *1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* to criticize alienation of labor under private property (99). Estrangement of labor reduces human life to its animal element. Its overcoming alone will enable the *homo sapiens* to fulfill their humanity, both as a species and as individuals. There is every reason to believe Marx thought of other animals — being part of nature — as an extension of the human body which, like nature itself, was to be appropriated for a whole range of human uses. There is a tension in the *Manuscripts* between the notion of "humanization" (or transcendence) of nature and the non-differentiation between the human and the animal under capitalism. In order to resolve it, Benton proposes to revise the ontology of the *Manuscripts*, which recreate the Enlightenment divide between humans and the rest of nature, as well as an internal

divide within the human being into an autonomous human element, and a “residual,” undesirable animal side. However, in parts of the *Manuscripts*, especially those criticizing Hegel, Marx brings the human into closer proximity with the natural world. Other animal species have their own distinctive modes of “species-life,” and fully manifest their own natures when their potential is optimally developed (114-5). Although Marx quickly pulls back, Benton deems that move unnecessary, and in fact disadvantageous to Marx’s own naturalism. On this alternative reading, the alienation of labor does not stand in the way of human excision of the animal from herself, but merely precludes the development of a uniquely human (but still just one of a myriad of other modes) species-life. Further, it is this fragmentation and distortion of human life under capitalism that prevents humanity from establishing proper relations with the natural world. It seems that one could salvage Marx for anti-speciesism, excavating implicit notions of which the author himself might have been only dimly aware.

Llorente explores areas of discord between the Marxist tradition and animal liberation, concluding that the incompatibilities are “largely spurious,” and can be reduced to an indefensible speciesism on part of the Left, or an equally untenable notion that human and animal liberation are mutually exclusive. He sees a more fundamental affinity between the two in the form of a “*radical egalitarian* orientation” that offers a chance for reconciliation (122). As did Benton, so Llorente thinks that “to the extent that a certain speciesism is constitutive of Marx’s [...] own thinking, Marx’s views are inconsistent with his own commitment to a thoroughgoing materialism, which must acknowledge the kinship, with all its implications, between human life and other forms of animal life” (127). Still, reflecting the attitudes of the general population, most Marxists do not even consider other animals members of the moral community, and so to demand that those animals be given the status of persons, for example, is unacceptable to them. Despite these practical difficulties and the inherent conservatism typical of anthropocentric views, the alliance — and indeed coalescence — of Marxism, with its emphasis on materiality, and animal liberation, with its appreciation of the diversity of embodied sentience in the world, is possible and highly desirable.

As most of the Left is stuck with its own prejudiced view of other animals — based sometimes on more orthodox reading of the Marxist canon —, major segments of the animal protection movement remain locked within the limits of a liberal outlook. Failing to see the intimate connection between capitalism as an inherently oppressive historical form of society, they fail to criticize it and embrace an explicitly radical politics. “Capitalism [...] is the highest, most maturely developed historical form of [...] domination,” the only one which has succeeded in completely objectifying (and

commodifying) living beings (20). Much more than a question of misguided individual attitude, speciesism itself is an institutionally embedded social construct, firmly merged with the capitalist order. 19th-century slaughterhouse designs served as inspiration for the first automobile assembly line, and intensified consumption of animal flesh came to be seen as a sign of economic progress and prosperity. Today, with increased flows of global capital, the “meat equals prosperity” model has been exported from “North America and Europe to Asia, the Pacific Rim, North Africa and Latin America” (23). Boggs discusses numerous “liberal illusions” with which animal protectionists are stuck, unable to recognize the scope of the crisis. Most often addressing individual consumers, they frequently fail to realize (or acknowledge) that their efforts are nullified by the global increase in demand for “meat.” At the same time, they have not worked out a way to relate to flesh consumption as “the decisive factor in altering planetary life” (78). The acreage of available arable land is inversely proportional to the searing demand for animal products, revealing much of the unsustainability inherent in the flesh-based diet. In face of all this, animal protection has trouble substantially merging with even the environmental movement; both are largely separate in organizational terms, if closer in discourse. Both are also not nearly radical enough in their demands, addressing a public which is still far behind in its consciousness of the trouble ahead. Redistributive efforts with regard to the global economy are bound to fail within the capitalist framework, the profit motive being central to its very metabolism. All the while, “neoliberalism legitimates its unsustainable practices on a foundation of technocratic arrogance, mythological belief in free-market economics, an instrumental view of nature, and contempt for other species” (80). However, most animal protectionists still believe the system as a whole is salvageable, and some tinkering will suffice to bring it into balance (historically unachieved). “Ecological balance,” writes Boggs, “depends on a shift away from corporate agendas, toward a regimen of public goods, long-term social planning, renewable energy resources, reduced population levels, and a vegetarian-based agriculture — now less a matter of individual preference than of collective survival” (81). Animal protection that does not go far enough in criticizing animal commodification, calling for better treatment instead of abolition of slavery, ends up being incorporated into market logic. Examples abound.

With its exploitation of the “humane” labels trend, the Whole Foods supermarket chain is a quintessential illustration of the co-optation process. “Locavorism” (the consumption of locally grown food) is another way of turning animal rearing and slaughter into a profitable business niche. In his “‘Green’ Eggs and Ham? The Myth of Sustainable Meat and the Danger of the Local,” Vasile Stănescu succeeds in unmasking its nativist and racist overtones, logical fallacies, and overall reactionary character.

The simplicity of the locavore argument might be its strongest suit — since it is harmful to the environment to transport food over long distances, the solution must lie in consuming food grown (and animals raised) locally. But things are not that simple. The environmental cost of transporting food is often much lower when compared with the same cost of food production (Stănescu offers convincing examples). Being a profitable market niche for producers of “organic” food, the locavore model is no alternative to the current highly unsustainable system — there is no land to sustain consumption on present levels with local-based solutions. Furthermore, locavorism fails to take into consideration the broader aspects of production and distribution within the global economy as such — although commodities other than food can be just as damaging to the environment, if not more so. Locavore enterprises themselves engage in promotion via shipping of collectibles over long distances, which to them is apparently unproblematic. Locavorism is also ripe with conservatism, invoking romanticized images of America of the days passed. However, the past had a darker side which is lost in the pastoral fairytale (247). It is hostile to immigrants and “others” more broadly, and content to see women under patriarchal dominance, tied to the household. Antifeminist sentiments pervade the animal protection movement itself, which is a topic undertaken by Carol Adams in “After McKinnon.”

Adams finds sexual inequality in the status of women within the movement, as well as in the choice of animals on whose liberation it focuses. Sexism expresses “a systemic inequality of power,” and works through sexuality as “a social construct of male power: defined by men, forced on women, and constitutive of the meaning of gender” (258). Thus, sexuality cannot be decoupled from gender oppression, as liberal feminism would have us believe. Failing to appreciate the intersections of speciesism and sexism, the animal protection movement ends up reproducing various forms of sexual inequality. The human is represented by man, prized human attributes by manhood, reason by culturally produced conceptions of male reason. On the other hand, femininity is equated with that which masculinity transcends, making up the overall narrative of Western philosophical and political thought — the social contract of who matters and why is already structured by power inequality, only reflected in ideologies of domination. The “other” is already subordinate, serving instrumentally as a springboard for the establishment of masculinity as the norm.

Women's labor and degrading images are employed in the animal movement itself, as if one form of exploitation could be wholly inoculated from another in a single-minded focus on the suffering of other animals. Further, the movement downplays the role of

emotion as it holds fast to what it deems its foundational texts by Peter Singer, Tom Regan, and more recently, Gary L. Francione — all of them rationalists strongly favoring privileged, disembodied, abstract male reason in the foundation of a nonspeciesist ethics. Their views stem from the very same logic of instrumental reason that makes technologically and scientifically advanced exploitation possible in what Derrida called “a two-century war on pity” (278). Challenging their views, Josephine Donovan in “Sympathy and Interspecies Care: Toward a Unified Theory of Eco- and Animal Liberation” seeks to redeem the significance of sympathy for eco- and animal liberation.

Donovan utilizes insights from a variety of theoretical approaches, most notably sympathy theory and phenomenology. Sympathy, she writes, does not preclude the operation of the intelligence, and does not entail, as empathy might, “losing oneself in another’s feelings” (280). Max Scheler proposed that sympathy is a form of understanding alternative to the scientific mode of objective knowledge. Facilitating the entry of phenomenology into the social sciences, he acknowledged its broader implications for the entire animal world. What is often clear to the careful observer of animal life has to be elaborated to the scientist and philosopher steeped in the Cartesian tradition, and so, Scheler says, “[W]e can understand the experience of animals” (281). We do so by “attending to their behavioral and expressive signs: these have as their referent the animal’s emotional and psychological state,” and “we have here [...] a *universal grammar*” (281, Scheler qtd. by Donovan; emphasis in original). No morality is possible, unless we first develop sympathy as a kind of intimate connection and identification with that which to Cartesian eyes is dead and inert. That “others live in us” is an insight that comes before a sense of egocentricity (283).

The material embeddedness in the world characteristic of an ethic emphasizing embodied care and relatedness to others can in fact open us up to the real-world, political dimensions of life so often obscured in idealist ethical models. Kant is always up for criticism in *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation*, and deservedly so. Maurice Merleau-Ponty has once criticized Kantian politics as holding a number of assumptions which in the end make politics itself “unthinkable.”³ In essence, the world is not so “well-made” as to make Kantian moral action possible: individual freedoms collide, human existence as an autonomous moral subject is not at all guaranteed, and abstention from violence (epitomized perhaps in the attitude of a vegan who does not engage in politics directly) is not sufficient to eliminate it (Whiteside 104). Further, the exposition of the truth of oppression does not suffice to make freedom prevail and overshadow exploitation. The above makes me think that the animal protection

movement's romance with male idealist thinking and its infatuation with liberal apoliticism are closely interrelated. Sympathy-based ethics, which are always less than a step removed from politics, can open our eyes to an improved understanding of what the current crisis requires, and what the needs of those involved are. It may help us comprehend the entanglement of patriarchy, speciesism, racism, and other varieties of oppression within the nexus of capitalism.

In the last analysis, it is the capitalist state that guarantees the continued existence of masculine human domination of other animals. Gearing its policies toward making animal exploitation optimally profitable, it makes liberal-oriented attempts at changing individual attitudes and introducing legislative changes terribly insufficient. Therefore, there is every reason for the inclusion of animal liberation (as a profound critique of speciesism) into the socialist ethos (with socialism being the most elaborate and clearly articulated critique of capitalism) in the search for a new, egalitarian mode of natural and social relations. The profound crisis of a world drowning in unnecessary suffering requires just such a response. A word of caution as regards the role of critical theory itself is called for.

Frankfurt School theorists have been targeted for criticism for their detachment from social and political practice. Notably, Perry Anderson has described them in his *Considerations on Western Marxism* as intellectuals removed from the practical struggles of their day. Theirs was an historical period in which hopes once associated with revolutionary socialism in Western Europe had failed, and Stalinism had thoroughly corrupted the Soviet State.⁴ In the aftermath of the 1920s, -30s, and after World War 2, many communist and socialist parties adopted reactionary policies. Dominated by bureaucrats, they became hostile to deviation from the official party lines and focused on building up electoral popularity. The revolution had been erased as a *de facto* aspiration. The genuine critical theorists had to seek home elsewhere, ultimately ending up at universities. There they could at least write and publish, observing the decay of radicalism in working-class movements from a safe distance. The failure of early 20th-century insurrections and the horror of global war had instilled in many of them an acute pessimism (Adorno), and where a semblance of optimism remained (Marcuse), it was for the most part politically impotent.

Insofar as the contributors to *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation* find inspiration for critical thought in the legacy of the Frankfurt School, it seems important to qualify the potential for real-world political action, not just reflection, that can be found therein. Understandably, it takes a leap of faith not to allow one's pessimism to result in

K. Forkasiewicz — "Worlds Apart? The Unity of Liberation"

inaction. Whether Adorno, Horkheimer, and others *didn't want* to do politics, or *didn't know how* to do it, Anderson is right in interpreting their withdrawal as a sign of political crisis and failure. Today, there is much reason to believe that critical theory itself will continue to serve as a refuge for intellectuals. On the one hand, "praxis [...] is already present in the beginning of the theory."⁵ Thus, doing applicable theory is a form of political practice. But on a different view, *theory is not-yet-practice*. As a mere beginning, it requires a political form, or structure, to carry actual political weight. The market forces have entered the university. It is time for critical theory to enter the world.

Critical Theory and Animal Liberation is a mature attempt at a theoretical reconciliation of struggles which have so far been conducted largely separately. Without such an effort at bringing the dispersed liberationist movements together, no theoretical totalization and unified action are possible against a threat that knows no species boundaries. Theory-action-change is a triad in circular movement, all of its elements indispensable. Contributors to this volume succeed in identifying promising avenues through this movement can proceed.

Due to its exercise of deepening the critique of oppression and its potential to inspire a vision of the social world made whole, *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation* is a highly recommended read. For a scholarly work, it is written in clear and forceful prose. My hope is that it finds a responsive audience within academia — among intellectuals ready to look at the broader picture. In fact, I believe it is crucial that it should. One of the basic conditions for transcending current organizational fragmentation and divorce of theory from practice is for academics to feel once more at home on the ground where the battles are fought, becoming truly involved in remaking our world. No book alone can make that happen. But if this one can gain traction with the mind of the scholar who is willing to act through more than just her professional research, the necessary links may be forged between activists and more traditional intellectuals to further the development of oppositional culture, values, and movements.

Notes

1. Jason Hribal, *Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance*. Oakland: AK Press, 2010.
2. Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. London: Pluto Press, 2008. 76.

3. Kerry H. Whiteside, *Merleau-Ponty and the Foundation of an Existential Politics*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988. 103-110.
4. Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*. London: Verso (3rd edition), 1989. 24-48.
5. Herbert Marcuse, *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, trans. by Joris de Bres (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973, reprint of New Left Books, 1972), 5; after J. Sanbonmatsu, *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation*, p.5