

## Conclusion

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In this book, I have aimed at constructing a systematic and materialist intersectional logic for understanding how animal domination and exploitation are articulated in capitalist societies to advance our comprehension of the contemporary state of these problems. I have developed a framework that productively accommodates the contradictions that so far have weakened critical animal studies and advocacy. At the same time, I have sought to address the Left's – more particularly the eco-socialists' – under-theorization of urgent animal questions to bring to light the potential for radical change that a non-anthropocentric critical theory of society may have.

In the first chapter, I began by examining intersectionality, tracing its development within Black feminism and ecofeminism. This historical-conceptual review made clear the strengths of intersectionality for social criticism, particularly its ability to provide dynamic, multilayered frameworks for analyzing society, subjectivity, and domination. Intersectionality functions at the empirical micro-level, offering inclusive, multiple optics, and multiple-issue analyses that foster political solidarity among oppressed groups. At the macro-level of analysis, however, it struggles to provide a cohesive understanding of the broader structures that underwrite intersecting dominations. As we saw, Val Plumwood's critique of Western culture's dualisms explains the symbolic and discursive construction and maintenance of power structures. Plumwood is too focused, however, on cultural critique, and includes the critique of capitalism under the umbrella of cultural dualism. This under-theorization of the social lacks a robust theory of society and its material structures.

Through an exploration of various analyses of capitalism within critical animal studies, we saw certain shortcomings of the Marxist traditions that they draw upon. On one side, economic reductionism and determinism from traditional Marxism present key roadblocks, while on the other, the humanist philosophy of history, centered on alienation and inherited from the Frankfurt School, introduces its own limitations. These frameworks ultimately prioritize animal domination as the original model of domination, a model that capitalism merely intensifies. This "continuist" approach overlooks the fundamental elements of a capitalist society and the structural and qualitative changes that animal domination underwent during the capi-

talist transition. In short, they fail to establish a clear relationship between animal domination and capitalist society.

In order to sufficiently elaborate this relationship, along with a theoretical framework for critical social theory, other readings of Marx were necessary, specifically the New Marx Reading. Central to this perspective is the recognition of Marxist materialism as a *theory of the social forms of material reproduction*. These social forms are historically specific modes of organizing relations of exchange, production and beyond. They do not manifest themselves empirically, but are rather fetishized – both reified in things and institutions, and naturalized in “objective forms of thought”. Marx’s analysis of social forms like commodity, money, capital, and credit, reveals that these are neither natural nor free from domination and exploitation. Instead, they are the means of class separation, and therefore reproduce class domination and exploitation. These forms and their interconnections constitute the non-normative dimension of the social.<sup>1</sup> They mediate the socialization and social cohesion of individuals “behind their backs” and appear to be natural forces with “inherent necessities” beyond individual control. As a result, in capitalist societies, the decisive relations of domination and exploitation are impersonal, embedded in these autonomous forms.

Thus, the Marxian method of form-analysis is needed to decipher and to analyze these forms, and to perform an abstract conceptual reconstruction, an “anamnesis of the genesis”, of social forms and their interconnection. Form-analysis considers the social logics of reproduction and the naturalization of domination and exploitation inherent in capitalist production. The conceptual reconstruction of these logics, or the abstract structural connections, that shape power, knowledge, and subjectivity, effectively describes a given historical society as a capitalist one, and grasps the *differentia specifica* between capitalist and pre-capitalist contexts. This abstract level of analysis, however, does not explain how these structures actually manifest historically, nor how social changes occur. To remedy this, I proposed the additional concept of the *dispositif* – Foucault’s term for networks of institutions, practices, and knowledge that effect subjectivation. While form-analysis provides the “skeleton”, *dispositifs* offer the “flesh”, describing the normative dimensions of the social and the concrete, historical variability of conflicts. Unlike impersonal domination, which refers to relatively permanent social bonds determined by the social forms, the *dispositif* are conflictual, involving power struggles between social forces and strategies, what in this book I refer to as *politics*. Loosening Rancière’s distinction between politics and police, politics is understood as the disagreement over the assumptions and “naturalness” of social order. The theoretical framework known as Historical Materialist Policy Analysis (HMPA) maps social forces and strategies within specific

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1 Meißner, *Jenseits des autonomen Subjekts*.

policy fields as an armature for conflict analysis. Within this framework, politics has a specific historically meaning in the process of material reproduction.<sup>2</sup>

I developed a novel theoretical framework via the following research questions: a) How can we provide socio-material depth to an intersectional perspective? and b) How can we frame capitalism in a non-reductionist, non-economistic way? The aim was to enable a critical analysis of society that is both materialist and intersectional. Both of these terms had to re-examined in contrast to their traditional meanings. The notion of social materiality must be considered in a non-reductionist sense by overcoming the distinction between economic/cultural and base/superstructure. A first expansion occurs intensively, or vertically, by integrating social form analysis with the concepts of *dispositif* and politics to include both the formal-abstract level and the historical-concrete level as analytically distinct dimensions of materiality. This allows for the identification of structural constants alongside agent-institutional variables in the analysis of capitalist societies. This is the first way in which materiality becomes irreducible to the economic, opposing the base-superstructure distinction, according the Marxist notion of “objective forms of knowledge” and Foucauldian *dispositif*, which both refer to the epistemic-cultural dimension (ideology, to use Althusser’s term) as an acting agent in the process of material reproduction.

Through this analysis, a redefinition of intersectionality arises. Capitalist social complexes in any given period can be understood as interlocking, partially overlapping networks of *dispositifs* corresponding to various social forms. Indeed, multiple social forms can share certain institutions, practices or knowledges within networked configurations. This makes it possible to analyze the intersections between different *dispositifs* and to identify the nodal points at which meshes of power, and their subjectivizing effects, intersect. A key example is the state. As an institution, it is present in almost all *dispositifs* of social forms. Thus, not only the political form of the state as an institution, but also politics as practice, are implicated in all *dispositifs*. Another, concrete example from the history of the dietary *dispositif* traced in Chapter 4 is nutrition science. Within this field knowledge, there is an intersection of the dietary *dispositif*, in the refinement of the rational feeding of animals, and the *dispositif* of generativity, in which the home becomes a place for the consumption of a meat-oriented diet.

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2 This perspective distances itself from and critiques the ontologizing of politics seen in Rancière, Laclau, Mouffe, and others, where politics is hypostatized as the continuous, conflictual foundation of society. Despite their differences, these authors share the belief that no supra-individual, socio-economic structure of the social space exists prior to its formation, which they view as the direct result of struggles and contingent social practices. This overlooks the social significance of the autonomy and particular independence of material reproduction inherent in capitalist social conditions. (I thank Francesco Aloe for highlighting the importance of emphasizing this point).

A second expansion occurs extensively, or horizontally. In Chapter 3, drawing on the insights of 1970s Marxist feminists and following Engels, social materiality is conceptualized as a *unified reality*, a single process of material production and reproduction “of immediate life” with a double character. It encompasses both the production of goods and services, as well as the production of individuals. This unified process unfolds in a context shaped by different types of social relations, governed by social logics that are interconnected, but irreducible to one another. Alongside Marx’s analysis of the social forms governing the capitalist production of goods and services, and the transversal political form briefly discussed in Chapter 2, my analysis identifies the social forms organizing the production of individuals as labor-power under capitalist conditions. Here, we encountered a second anti-economistic logic, capable of recognizing specific forms, organizing gender relations, human-animal relations and “race” relations – often relegated in standard Marxist theory to cultural or superstructural – as fundamental elements of the material reproduction processes of society as a whole.

Regarding intersectionality, this horizontal extensive movement allows for an analysis that provides tangible substance to the “interlocking systems of domination,” “overarching structures of domination,” or broader “landscapes of power” of traditional intersectional scholarship. As explored in Chapter 3, the transition from pre-capitalist societies, in which production and generative reproduction within peasant families were unified, to the capitalist separation of the forms of production of goods and services and the forms of producing individuals revealed certain structural dynamics linking not only capitalist forms of production with generative reproduction, but also with the anthropological form. This framework allowed an understanding of the social form of animal domination and exploitation in capitalist societies, addressing the blind spots in both Marxist feminist and traditional Marxian-Engelsian analyses. The identification of these forms of the production of individuals is a step towards identifying and establishing a clear relation between animal domination and capitalist societies.

Form-analysis served as the initial stage in operationalizing the materialist logic for the animal question, and led to an abstract-conceptual reconstruction of the anthropological form of the production of individuals within the specific conditions of capitalist societies. First, we brought to light the constitution of this form of domination, understanding constitution as its anatomy, structure, and internal composition – the *forma formata*. With the support of diagrammatic representation, this reconstruction clarified that the synchronic structure of the continuous reproduction of separation between human and non-human animals coincides with the coupling of goods and services production with the form of generative reproduction. This form produces humans as gendered subjects and as labor-power, while simultaneously distinguishing them from animals as commodities. Thus, animals are ex-

cluded from the human category, yet included as consumable means of subsistence to support the reproduction of labor-power within private households.

Secondly, by introducing a diachronic perspective, we considered the development and emergence of the form, its *forma formans*. Its critical roles in resolving the crisis of social reproduction, caused by capital's destructive tendencies, are in its transformation of generative forms into the modern nuclear family and the establishment of capitalist production of means of subsistence, particularly concerning meat. It is at this moment that the transition from domesticity to post-domesticity occurs. This shift brings an end to *societas* as a closed unit and nucleus for the production and reproduction of human and animal individuals, as well as for the production of goods and services. It is important that these are social forms describing the social logics by which corresponding relations are organized. They are compatible with, but distinct from, the logics of commodities and capital. A key payoff of this analysis was a more thorough comprehension of the interlocking structure of domination within capitalist societies, particularly in relation to class, gender and human-animal relations. This analysis is essential because it allows us to de-naturalize the fetishized anthropological form, recognizing it as the specific means by which human-animal relations are organized in capitalist societies, along with its effects of power, subjectification and knowledge production. This perspective re-frames human/animal separation and meat-oriented nutrition as concrete social solutions enabling the production of human individuals as necessary for the reproduction of capitalist societies, and not as trans-historical biological survival.

It is worth clarifying that form-analysis of the anthropological form sheds light on the anatomy of animal domination within capitalist societies in general, relating it to other forms of domination. This analysis does not, however, answer whether capitalist society collapse if it ceased to exploit animals by replacing them with plant-based alternatives. It is reasonable, however, to suggest that capitalist society would be profoundly transformed if it were to abandon animal exploitation, with particular consequences on the production of labor power. The inverse proposition, would animal exploitation end if capitalist society collapsed, is clearly unrealistic. Animal exploitation and domination take many other forms, historically, even if these forms are not capitalist. This is evident in proposals from ecosocialists like Wallace and others,<sup>3</sup> who envision a future where animals are collectively used on a small scale.

Finally, form-analysis (Diagrams 2 and 3) allowed us to investigate the historical process leading to the materialization of the anthropological form, thereby arriving at a conceptual definition and analysis of the dietary *dispositif* that performed the so-called "nutrition transition" toward a meat-based diet. This transition was the

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3 Rob Wallace et al., "COVID-19 and Circuits of Capital", *Monthly Review*, vol. 72, no. 1 (2020), pp. 1–13.

result of a complex entanglement of knowledges, institutions, practices, and conflicts that arose in response to what contemporary commentators called the “health vs. wealth” crisis, in which capital’s imperative for endless valorization and surplus value production posed a threat to the production of labor-power. Social reproduction, *stricto sensu*, continued to be organized according to pre-capitalist forms, which proved incompatible with the inherently accelerating scale of capitalist production (Diagram 3). A pivotal question was the role of the meat-slaughterhouse-animals complex and the reforms introduced by the hygienist movement, which led us to label the process as “hygienizing meat”. Chapter 4 untangled this network of relations, beginning with an analysis of the modern slaughterhouse as an institution. The new slaughterhouse emerged as a centralized, mechanized, multi-dimensional complex, located away from urban centers for the streamlined killing of animals and meat production. It was a concrete solution to hygienic concerns aimed at promoting good health and preventing poor health. Von Liebig and nutritional science addressed the former concern with the discovery of protein. Miasma theory addressed the latter by equating odor with disease and identifying blood as having the most dangerous smell. Later, Pasteur and bacteriology synthesized these ideas, asserting that nutritious meat comes from healthy animals. “Centralization” and “separation” emerged as key principles. Animals were removed from crowded city streets, household courtyards, and small urban markets and concentrated in abattoirs. They were taken from the small, cultivated peasant fields, where they roamed for grazing, manuring, and reproducing, and concentrated on industrial farms. This represents the historical process that led to the zootechnical transformation of animals and the capitalist organization of their production – the shift from a pre-capitalist way of producing crucial means of subsistence to a fully capitalist mode.

Numerous case studies showcased diverse and variable historical processes behind the materialization and constitution of this form, as well as the political trajectories, strategies, and social actors, mapped through HMPA methods. These cases included: La Villette and its tradition of artisanal butchers; the Union Stock Yard and its “swamps”; Cincinnati’s mechanized wheel; Moscow’s public abattoir with its auditorium; debates over animal nuisance in London and the moral outrage raised by cattle driven to Smithfield Market; the French debate over contagionism and anti-contagionism; the English Humanitarian League’s advocacy for humane slaughter; and the frequent, mid-nineteenth-century insistence by observers on “the most offensive and disgusting” odors of blood, manure, and animal carcasses.

References to history and tracing the genealogy of the *dispositif* were essential for denaturalizing, and thus, importantly, politicizing, the domination and exploitation of animals and meat-based diets, in addition to formal analyses. The organization of human-animal relations in capitalist societies is neither given, nor the result of a technological teleology, nor an intensification of either primal or pre-capitalist human domination over animals. Tracing the knowledges, institutions, actors, and

trajectories of the scientific, philosophical, moral, and political debates surrounding mid-nineteenth-century slaughterhouse reforms demonstrates that this organization emerged amid hesitations, discontinuities, contestations, delays, divergent interests and antagonisms, not least among these animals' resistance. Indeed, "at any moment, history could have taken a different turn, small or large". Politics, as a practice of conflictual relationality, may take the forms of emancipation, radical critique and suspension of domination, or the stabilization and preservation of domination. While a degree of structure is provided by *dispositifs* and social forms, there is no strict functionalism, as political action does not conform consistently to social forms. These trajectories of conflict traversing *dispositifs*, or the materialization of social forms, can lead toward social change, if not toward emancipation.

To conclude, I go back to the third chapter, in which two important points arose: 1) The moment when the "golden" structure of the anthropological form operates at its peak corresponds with the highest level of reification and naturalization of class, gender, and species domination; and 2) Tendencies toward social reproductive crises inherent to capitalist production cause a disruption of this form's equilibrium – specifically, of the coupling of capitalist form with gender form, and the corresponding *dispositifs*. In light of current socio-ecological crises, pandemics, wars, and even the resurgence of nuclear threat, we may ask whether we are at a historical juncture in which capitalism's systematic blindness to the conditions of its own existence has led to a contradiction between social reproduction and the valorization process. Are we experiencing a phase of disruption?

A particularly clear instance of disruption with respect to the anthropological form was the COVID-19 global pandemic beginning in 2020. A missed encounter with what many at the time called a "challenge to change" became a bitter disappointment for animal advocates and CAS scholars. In 2020, it appeared that the social reproduction of the human labor-power was threatened by a virus originating from wild animals, whose transmission has been closely linked to the global capitalist circuit of industrial animal agriculture. After only two hundred years, what once served as a solution to a social reproductive crisis, the separating and centralizing of commodified animals to provide safe, affordable meat for the "victualing of the masses", ceased functioning and instead threatened human life. The COVID-19 crisis was inextricably tied to billions of animals' lives, to the production processes of meat and animal-sourced food in general, and to the *dispositifs* of animal oppression that materialize the anthropological form. A prominent direction of political conflict arose towards abolishing the separation itself and, along with it, other specific separations characteristic of capitalist societies. Yet, this trajectory had scarcely moved beyond the wishful thinking of voices advocating the "destabilizing potential of crisis and its promises of revolution" and was overshadowed by a world that responded to the crisis by further widening human-animal separation (for example, by exterminating all infected minks in Denmark in November 2020, or ordering meat-

processing plants to remain open, invoking a Korean-War-era law from the 1950s, as U.S. President Donald Trump did in April 2020)<sup>4</sup>. Nonetheless, the anthropological form remains disrupted.

The ambition of this book has been to provide a better understanding of species domination within capitalist society, generating two main outcomes. The first is epistemic: to challenge the naturalization of domination and exploitation by addressing the form-determination of “objective forms of thought”, bringing them back to the materiality of underlying social relations. The second is political: to orient the practice of conflictual relationality toward a complete transformation of the daily practices of (re)production of animal life – human and non-human alike – by replacing the existing ones and halting the perpetual reproduction of class, gender, and human-animal separation – in other words, a struggle against reification.

The goal is not simply to disrupt but to dismantle the anthropological form, to interrupt the mechanisms of the production of individuals and the *dispositifs* of sexuality and family, and to break the structural coupling that incorporates animals as means of subsistence and reproduction of labor-power.

Abolishing this present state of things can only be achieved through a real movement.

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4 Katherine Faulders, “Trump Signs Executive Order to Keep Meat Processing Plants Open under Defense Production Act.” ABC News, 28 Apr. 2020, [abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-sign-executive-order-meat-processing-plantsopen/story?id=70389089](https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-sign-executive-order-meat-processing-plantsopen/story?id=70389089) accessed 9th June 2025.