1. Framing Critical Animal Studies

1.1 The Emergence of CAS: A Historical Overview

If any historical narrative begins with a conventional date to distinguish *before* from *after*, then the history of "the animal question" begins in 1975 with the publication of philosopher Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*.[1] This chronological touchstone coincides with "a master-narrative in the field of animal studies, a narrative that traces significant philosophical concern with the moral status of nonhuman animals back only to the 1970s and to 'Oxbridge-style' analytic moral philosophy".[2] Singer was solicited to publish *Animal Liberation* when he was a postgraduate in philosophy at Oxford University, after he sent an unsolicited review of the 1971 book, *Animals, Men and Morals*.[3] Its authors, Roslind and Stanley Godlovitch and John Harris, were members of the so-called Oxford Group or Oxford Vegetarians, an intellectual circle developing a moral philosophy that included non-humans.[4]

Over the past 50 years, reflection and research on the topics of human-animal relations and animality, broadly construed, have undergone a remarkable expansion. The "animal turn" can be observed in a growing number of disciplines, including philosophy, anthropology, ethology, psychology, sociology, history, geography, biology, literary studies, and film studies, giving rise to the vast interdisciplinary field of animal studies (AS), or human-animal studies (HAS), and to novel paradigms for research. A quantitative change in the number of publications, conferences, books, academic programs, societies, etc., has been accompanied by a qualitative change: "As it has expanded the range of possible research topics in a number of

1 Singer, *Animal Liberation*.

2 Dawne McCance, *Critical Animal Studies: An Introduction*, SUNY Press, Albany, 2012, pp. 7–8.

3 Stanley Godlovitch *et al.*, *Animals, Men and Morals*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1971.

4 See Robert Garner and Yewande Okuleye; *The Oxford Group and the Emergence of Animal Rights: An Intellectual History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2020 and Peter Singer, "The Oxford Vegetarians – A Personal Account", *International Journal for the Study of Animal Problems*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1982), pp. 6–9. This is the mainstream genealogy of the animal question. As we shall see below fundamental contributions came, in the same 1980s, from feminism, especially ecofeminism, and often in direct opposition to Singer and Regan's approach.

disciplines, the animal turn has also suggested new relationships between scholars and their subjects, and new understandings of the role of the animal in the past and at present".[5] Criticisms of the animal turn accuse academia with either neutralizing or co-opting the political and social imperative intrinsic to the question of animal *liberation* explicit in the title of the movement's inaugural book – a normative commitment to the liberation of non-human animals from exploitation.

In 2001 a "theory-to-action, activist-led, scholarly think-tank"[6] established the "Centre for Animal Liberation Affairs". In 2007, it was renamed the "Institute for Critical Animal Studies", thereby formalizing Critical Animal Studies (CAS) as a field of study. It is important to note that CAS has little, if any, connection to the Oxbridge-style, analytical, Singerian framework. CAS vigorously rejects and critiques the liberal position on animal rights espoused by these perspectives, which seek to extend the legal discourse on fundamental human rights to non-human animals on the basis of moral theory (e.g., giusnaturalism,[7] contractualism[8]). The "founding act" of CAS, a manifesto written for the occasion of ICAS's inauguration, affirms the rejection of "apolitical, conservative, and liberal positions [...], reformist, single-issue, nation-based, legislative, strictly animal interest politics".[9]

It is important to consider precisely what is meant by the adjective "critical" in CAS. First and foremost, the presence of the term "critical" in this context refers to the critique of AS, which has been rebranded as "Mainstream Animal Studies" (MAS). CAS's founding act explicitly outlines this opposition:

> Animal studies has already entrenched itself as an abstract, esoteric, jargon-laden, insular, non-normative, and apolitical discipline, one where scholars can achieve recognition while nevertheless remaining wedded to speciesist values, carnivorist lifestyles, and at least tacit – sometime overt – support of numerous forms of animal exploitation such as vivisection. In recent years Critical Animal Studies has emerged as a necessary and vital alternative to the insularity, detachment, hypocrisy, and profound limitations of mainstream animal studies that vaporizes their flesh and blood realities to reduce them to reified signs, symbols, images, words on a page, or protagonists in a historical drama, and thereby utterly fail to confront them not as text but rather as sentient beings who live and die in the most sadistic, barbaric, and wretched cages of technohell that humanity has been able to devise, the better to exploit them for all they are worth.[10]

5 Harriet Ritvo, "On the Animal Turn", *Daedalus*, vol. 136, no. 4 (2007), p. 119.

6 ICAS website: https://criticalanimalstudies.org/about/ accessed on 9th June 2025.

7 Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1983.

8 Robert Garner, *A Theory of Justice for Animals: Animal Rights in a Nonideal World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013.

9 Steven Best, et al., "Introducing Critical Animal Studies", *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2007), pp. 4–5.

10 *Ibid.*, 4.

The criticism levelled here is that MAS separates theory from activist practice, pursuing theory for its own sake without significant action towards social change regarding the real conditions of animals. In contrast, CAS scholars are committed to "engaged theory"[11] – theory that is either directly or indirectly employed to effect radical or minor social transformation. They are committed to *praxis*, or the interconnectedness between theory and practice, rooted in the Western Marxist tradition. CAS is particularly indebted to the Frankfurt School's elaboration of praxis in the context of its critical theory of society. Steven Best devotes an entire section of his 2009 essay to highlight the affinities between CAS and the Frankfurt School. He states:

> There are interesting historical and theoretical parallels between the emergence of the Frankfurt School and their "critical theory" approach against positivist academia and conformist cultures in Europe and the US, and the CAS polemic directed against MAS and the positivism and apolitical culture that continues to dominate academia in the present day.[12]

This leads to a second, more substantial, meaning of "critical" in CAS. Two 1937 programmatic essays on the distinction between traditional and critical theory, Max Horkheimer's *Traditional and Critical Theory*[13] and Herbert Marcuse's *Philosophy and Critical Theory*,[14] trace the differences between traditional and critical theory, defining critical theory by its explicit political commitments, normative perspectives, and its goal to radically transform the existing social order toward emancipation.[15] In 2014, two prominent critical animal studies scholars in their conclusive essay for the

11 Taylor and Twine, "Locating the 'Critical' in Critical Animal Studies", p. 6.

12 Steven Best, "The Rise (and Fall) of Critical Animal Studies", *Liberazioni. Rivista di critica antispecista* (2013), http://www.liberazioni.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Best-TheRiseand-FallofCriticalAnimalStudies.pdf. accessed on 28th June 2025.

13 Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory", *Critical Sociology: Selected Readings*, trans. M. J. O'Connell, Penguin, London, 1976, pp. 207–8.

14 Herbert Marcuse, "Philosophy and Critical Theory", *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro, Beacon Press, Boston, 1969, pp. 147–54.

15 In more recent years, CAS anthologies, in delimiting their own field of study, make less direct reference to these authors. Nevertheless, they speak in terms of praxis and critical theory. For example, "a core difference between the animal studies scholar and the critical animal studies scholar is an intended commitment to praxis. Praxis is the application of theory to action and vice versa." Carol Glasser, "The Radical Debate: A Straw Man in the Movement", Taylor et al. (eds.), *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies*, p. 242. Or, in the introduction to a 2018 anthology, *Critical Animal Studies. Toward Trans-Species Social Justice*, the editors write, "Praxis means to bring theory into action". Atsuko Matsuoka and John Sorenson (eds.), *Critical Animal Studies: Towards Trans-species Social Justice*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2018, p. 18.

seminal collection, *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies: From the Margin to the Centre*, assert:

> CAS [is] a strand of critical theory (broadly defined) […]. By "critical", we mean the application of critical theory towards actual liberation. Max Horkheimer's famous definition of critical theory as that which tries "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" is correct as far as it goes, but wrong in that it places the limits of liberation at only "the human". We would say that critical theory and, therefore, *critical* animal studies, is that which seeks to liberate the animal from the circumstances that seek to enslave her.[16]

1.1.1 Before CAS: Animal Rights and the Left

CAS has an overt commitment to leftist, Marxist, and anti-capitalist politics. It emerged in opposition to the liberal, moralistic, and abstract discourse often associated with traditional animal rights, which had historically fostered mutual distrust between the Left and advocates of animal issues. The juridical framework of animal rights and welfare as extensions of human rights is the only discursive and political outcome provided for the animal question from Oxbridge-style discussions. For Marxists, this centralization of rights within the theoretical and political framework is inherently problematic.[17] In other words, before CAS integrated antispeciesism and Marxism, there was indeed significant tension between the two perspectives. The Left often viewed the traditional animal rights discourse as insufficiently critical of broader structural issues, which is central to Marxist thought and as incompatible with its focus.

Although there was not yet a clear animal question as we define it today, there was intense debate over vivisection and animal treatment in the mid-nineteenth century, especially in England. Marx and Engels expressed open disdain for pro-animal advocates, and in the course of delineating "Conservative, or Bourgeois, Socialism" in the *Communist Manifesto*, they make a passing reference to the treatment of animals:

16 Helena Pedersen and Vasile Stanescu, "Future Directions of Critical Animal Studies", Taylor et al. (eds.), *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies*, p. 262.

17 This is a controversial issue. See for example, Steven Lukes, "Can a Marxist Believe in Human Rights?" *Praxis International*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1981), pp. 334–45. More generally, the discourse of human rights and subjectivity-centered humanism have been subjected to fundamental criticism by authors, such as Giorgio Agamben, Costas Douzinas, Jean-Luc Nancy, Slavoj Žižek. On the other hand, these critiques led to thinking, according to Claude Lefort, Étienne Balibar and Jacques Rancière, that Marx failed to see the political dimension of human rights (e.g. the right to resist oppression, the right of association, the right to have rights).

> A part of the bourgeoisie is desirous of redressing social grievances in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society. To this section belong economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organisers of charity, *members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals*, temperance fanatics, hole-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind.[18]

Engels is just as sardonic in listing the sects of "weirdos" that could have been attracted from the workers' revolution:

> And just as all those who can expect no favours from the official world or are finished with it – opponents of inoculation, supporters of abstemiousness, *vegetarians*, *anti-vivisectionists*, nature-healers, free-community preachers whose communities have fallen to pieces, authors of new theories on the origin of the universe, unsuccessful or unfortunate inventors, […] honest fools and dishonest swindlers.[19]

Although such judgments may appear pitiless or ironic, they reflect the diverse composition and affiliations of animal welfare and animal rights advocates at the time. This diversity will be explored further in the fourth chapter, which analyzes slaughterhouse reform and the social composition and strategies of animal activist groups. Engles' charge that they are primarily white, middle-class, moralistic, classist, and patronizing will largely be substantiated via two examples. Firstly, Engels' list, which combines vegetarians and antivivisectionists with nature-healers, preachers, and opponents of vaccination, suggests this group was motivated by a spiritual or religious fear of scientific materialism. Secondly, the socialist reformer Henry Salt, creator of the *Humanitarian League* and author of *Animals' Rights: Considered in Relation to Social Progress*, the most radical, pro-animal text of the nineteenth-century, writes that the butchery process was so repugnant that it could be only delegated to a "pariah class".[20] In light of this, refutations made by various contemporary animal

18 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, 50 vols., vol. 6, Lawrence & Wishart, ebook, London, 2010, p. 513. [emphasis added]

19 Frederick Engels, *On the History of Early Christianity*, Marx and Engels, *MECW*, vol. 25, p. 451. [emphasis added]

20 Henry Salt, *Animal Rights: Considered in Relation to Social Progress*, Society for Animal Rights, Clarcks Summit, 1980, p. 61.

rights theorists[21] against the claim that the animal rights movement is not inherently leftist, but drawn instead from bourgeois morality, begin to lack significance.

On the other hand, animal rights movements have traditionally shown little interest in Marx. This is not surprising, given their roots in moral discourse and liberalism. Thus, those few who have worked to connect explicitly animal rights and Marxism represent a contradiction in terms, manifested in the oddity of approaching Marx's work with the classical method of "Oxbridge-style" analytic moral philosophy. The first essay in this direction, "Humanism = Speciesism: Marx on Humans and Animals" published in 1988 by British professor emeritus of sociology Ted Benton, was described as "pioneering ecosocialist".[22] Despite this article's relatively small impact within the field, it established a trend in the literature of accusing Marx of being speciesist and anthropocentric on the basis of his ontological humanism. In the wake of Benton's 1988 essay came his 1993 book *Natural Relations: Ecology, Animal Rights and Social Justice*,[23] Barbara Noske's *Natural Relations: Ecology, Animal Rights, and Social Justice*,[24] essays by David Sztybel,[25] Katherine Perlo,[26] Lawrence Wilde,[27] a manifesto for an animal rights by Charlton, Coe and Francione,[28] and, more recently, articles by Ryan Gunderson[29], Corinne Painter[30] and others.[31] These

21 See Alasdair Cochrane, *An Introduction to Animals and Political Theory*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2010, p. 102; John Sorenson, "Constructing Extremists, Rejecting Compassion: Ideological Attacks on Animal Advocacy from Right and Left", John Sanbonmatsu (ed.), *Critical theory and Animal Liberation*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2011, p. 234; Gary Francione et al., "The American Left Should Support Animal Rights: A Manifesto", *The Animals Agenda* (1993), pp. 28–34. John Sanbonmatsu, "Introduction", Sanbonmatsu (ed.), *Critical theory and Animal Liberation*, p. 15; Renzo Llorente, "Reflections on the Prospects for a Non-Speciesist Marxism", Sanbonmatsu (ed.), *Critical theory and Animal Liberation*, p. 129.

22 Ted Benton, "Humanism=Speciesism: Marx on Humans and Animals", *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 50 (1988), pp. 4–18.

23 Ted Benton, *Natural Relations: Ecology, Animal Rights, and Social Justice*, Verso, London-New York, 1993.

24 Barbara Noske, *Beyond Boundaries: Humans and Animals*, Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1997.

25 David Sztybel, "Marxism and Animal Rights", *Ethics and the Environment*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1997), pp. 169–85.

26 Katherine Perlo, "Marxism and the Underdog", *Society & Animals*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2002), pp. 303–18.

27 Lawrence Wilde, "'The Creatures, Too, Must Become Free': Marx and the Animal/Human Distinction", *Capital & Class*, vol. 24, no. 3 (2000), pp. 37–53.

28 Francione et al., "The American Left Should Support Animal Rights: A Manifesto".

29 Ryan Gunderson, "Marx's Comments on Animal Welfare", *Rethinking Marxism*, vol. 23, no. 4 (2011), pp. 543–8.

30 Corinne Painter, "Non-human Animals within Contemporary Capitalism: A Marxist Account of Non-Human Animal Liberation", in *Capital & Class*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2016), pp. 327–45.

31 Diana Stuart et al., "Extending Social Theory to Farm Animals: Addressing Alienation in the Dairy Sector", *Sociologia Ruralis*, vol. 53, no. 2 (2013), pp. 201–22.

texts share a common "Oxbridge-style" animal rightist approach, both in methodology and in content. They all tend to assert, explicitly or implicitly, a definition of speciesism: a prejudice according to which the species of an individual is relevant to establish whether they are part of a moral community. From this definition, two clear characteristics emerge. On the one hand, speciesism is defined as a *cognitive* prejudice that, accordingly, can be analyzed or refuted logically or rationally. On the other hand, speciesism is anchored to the concept of a moral community, which structures the entire discourse within the boundaries of normative ethics. Normative ethics is commonly defined as "the attempt to formulate a *morally* useful principle about the normative status of action".[32] The fundamental principle, which is embraced by Singer's utilitarianism and Regan, Garner and Francione's animal rights theory, is one of equal moral consideration on the basis of common qualities possessed by individuals. Normative ethics' strategy is to demonstrate with scientific evidence that animals have intrinsic interests and characteristics that render them part of our common moral community, in the least as "moral patients". A moral patient is an individual who is unable to perform moral actions, but can suffer because of the actions of others. Consequently, they must be recognized as bearers of interests that must be protected by guaranteeing the fundamental rights to life, physical integrity, and freedom. Normative ethical theories ultimately aim to integrate ontological questions with moral ones. In essence, if individuals are to participate as agents or patients in a moral community, they must exhibit certain characteristics reckoned *essential* for the principle of equal consideration. Ontological investigation thus serves the function of identifying agents and patients that share rights and moral obligations. In the field of normative ethics, to support an essential difference is, *ipso facto*, to assert an essential difference in moral value, drawing a line between the human and the other, the animal.

This perspective explains why normative animal ethicists focus almost exclusively on the young Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*[33] (or *Paris Manuscripts*) – his most Feuerbachian and thus ontological work – and other explicitly ontological moments in his thought. They fail, however, to acknowledge the broader *opus* of Marx's thought and historical conditions, seemingly cherry-picking favorable quotations on human-animal dualism, extrapolated from their original contexts.[34] In what appears to be a rather tenuous juxtaposition of disparate theories (animal rights and Marxism), these authors misread Marx as an exponent of

32 Fred Feldman, *Introductory Ethics*, Prentice-Hall, Upper Saddle River, 1978, p. 40.

33 Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," Marx and Engels, *MECW*, vol. 3, pp. 229–346.

34 This criticism has been raised also by Marco Maurizi in *Beyond Nature. Animal Liberation, Marxism, and Critical Theory*, Haymarket Books, 2022; and by Foster and Clark, "Marx and Alienated Speciesism", p. 2.

normative ethical theory. Certain accusations (or defense from these accusations)[35] of Marx's inconsistency regarding animal rights and his anthropocentrism are noteworthy. According to this literature, Marx's primary contradiction is the adoption of two opposing perspectives. On the one hand, there is the continuist perspective, which is grounded in naturalism and asserts that the human is a natural being. On the other hand, there is the humanist vision, which posits that the human is a privileged entity, essentially and qualitatively different from other animals (human exceptionalism). As Benton claims:

> The ontological basis of the ethical critique of capitalism (embedded in the notion of estrangement) appears to be inconsistent with the coherent formulation of its transcendence (in particular, the notion of 'humanisation' in relation to animals as part of nature). As I shall suggest later, this dilemma can be resolved by a revision of the ontology of the *Manuscripts* which nevertheless leaves intact a good deal of the ethical critique of capitalist society.[36]

Leaving aside the misconception that Marx's analysis of capitalism is conducted a) from an ethical standpoint and b) from the standpoint of estrangement/alienation [*Entfremdung/Entäußerung*],[37] the ambitious aim of normative animal ethics is a revision and extension of Marxism to include animal rights. This integration is based on the belief that only through such synthesis can Marxism's inconsistencies be resolved, thereby enabling it to effectively address the problem of the animal condition under capitalism. Sztybel gives a good insight into this attitude:

> It may be argued that there are contradictory tensions in Marxism, which can only be resolved by changing the received view of Marxism into a vision that admits of

35 Wilde, "'The Creatures, Too, Must Become Free'".

36 Benton, "Humanism=Speciesism", p. 5.

37 The terms "*Entfremdung*" (estrangement) and "*Entäußerung*" (alienation) have been firstly used in a systematic way by Hegel beginning with *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. The two terms are not equivalent. *Entfremdung* and *sich entfremden* always have the negative meaning of "splitting" and "extraneousness". *Entäußerung*, *sich entäußern* and *Veräußerung*, instead mean "renunciation", which can take a positive or a negative sense. In *1844 Manuscripts*, however, the two terms "*Entfremdung*" (estrangement) and "*Entäußerung*" (alienation) are indistinguishable. Moreover, there is a prevalence of *Entfremdung*, which appears 83 times (29 times in the *Die entfremdete Arbeit* (*Estranged labour*) chapter, while *Entäußerung* appears 55 times (13 times in that chapter). In terms of the prefix *ent-*, *entfremd-* e *entäußer-* (i.e. of verb forms) there is a strong prevalence of the former (152 times throughout the text and 62 in the chapter *Estranged labour*) over the latter (99 times throughout the text and 34 in the chapter *Estranged labour*).

> animal rights, or else a suitable equivalent […] As I will argue, revision of Marxism in the direction of animal rightism is both necessary and desirable.[38]

The core point of this revision, as established by Benton, is the extension of the concept of alienation to animals and, consequently, the extension of the concept of class. In order to apply the concept of alienation to animals, it is necessary to demonstrate that animals are alienated specifically by the conditions of capitalist production. This entails questioning human exceptionalism and expanding the working class to include "working animals". Thus, before examining these arguments in detail, it is necessary to consider Marxist anthropology-ontology as it is understood by normative animal ethics.[39] According to Feuerbach, one of the key aspects of alienation is the alienation of humans from their *Gattungwesen*, which is variously translated as "species-being", "generic essence," "generic being," or "human essence". Marx generally adopts his understanding of human essence from Western philosophy. His use of the term *genus* to indicate the scope of similarity amongst humans and animals refers back to Aristotle.[40] Marx proceeds, then, to identify the specific difference (*differentia specifica*) that distinguishes them qualitatively from other living beings. In 1844 he writes:

> [L]abour, life activity, productive life itself, appears to man in the first place merely as a means of satisfying a need – the need to maintain physical existence. Yet the productive life is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life. The whole character of a species – its species-character – is contained in the character of its life activity; and free, conscious activity is man's species-character. Life itself appears only as a means to life. The animal is immediately one with its life activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is its life activity. Man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life activity distinguishes man immediately from animal life activity. It is just because of this that he is a species-being. Or it is only because he is a species-being that he is a conscious being, i.e., that his own life is an object for him. Only because of that is his activity free activity.[41]

It is unsurprising that normative animal ethics finds such passages foundational. Here, in fact, Marx explicitly adheres to anthropologism (i.e., an essentialist per-

38 Sztybel, "Marxism and Animal Rights", p. 170.

39 Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, pp. 270–83.

40 See Marx W. Wartofsky, *Feuerbach*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977, pp. 224, 374, 423; and Jonathan E. Pike, *From Aristotle to Marx: Aristotelianism in Marxist Social Ontology*, Routledge, London, 2019.

41 Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, p. 276.

spective of human essence) in the wake of Feuerbach and Bruno Bauer against Hegel.[42] In summary, normative animal ethics views their conceptual tasks thusly: First, they isolate the essential characteristics of humans based upon Marx's analysis. Second, assuming an elision between ontology and ethics, they impute to Marx a speciesist ethical theory. Third, by anachronistically drawing on the most recent achievements in ethology and biology, they argue that these characteristics are also possessed by animals and that animals therefore occupy the same moral category as humans. The most paradigmatic example of this approach can be attributed to Sztybel, who, by assembling quotations from various Marxian and Engelsian texts, proposes a list of nine traits on the basis of which Marxism would support human exceptionalism:

> "man" alone is (1) a being for himself, (2) individuated only in the midst of society, (3) defined by labor and productivity, (4) productive of "his" own subsistence, (5) productive beyond immediate physical needs and for others beyond self and kin, (6) a tool-making animal, (7) a transformer of nature, (8) possessed of consciousness and knowledge of nature, and (9) capable of consciously making "his" own history.[43]

According to Sztybel, once human exceptionalism is removed from Marx's ontology, it becomes possible to extend the notion of alienation to animals. The first and most influential attempt in this direction was developed by Dutch anthropologist Barbara Noske in 1989. Noske applied the forms of human alienation proposed by Marx in the *Paris Manuscripts* to farm and laboratory animals. Her analysis identifies four specific modes of alienation, and a fifth and final overarching one. First, alienation from the product of labor: "animals are alienated from what they produce which consists of either their own offspring or (parts of) their body".[44] Second, alienation from the productive activity: animals are forced to perform a single productive activity (such as fattening) at the expense of all other natural activities that are their own. Third, alienation from their fellow animals: animals are estranged from their fellow animals because they are removed from their natural social configurations and forced

42 Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, Verso, London-New York, 2005; Jacques Rancière, "The Concept of Critique and the Critique of Political Economy. From the *1844 Manuscripts* to *Capital*", *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition*, trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach, Verso, London-New York, 2016, pp. 62–134; Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*, trans. Alexander Locascio, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2012; and Roberto Fineschi, *Marx e Hegel. Contributi a una rilettura*, Carocci, Roma, 2006, pp. 28–30, 47.

43 Sztybel, "Marxism and Animal Rights", p. 178

44 Noske, *Beyond Boundaries: Humans and Animals*, p. 18.

into conditions that prevent normal social bonds. Fourth, alienation from the environment: animals removed from their ecosystems are alienated from their natural stimuli and their natural behavioral patterns. Fifth, and in summary, alienation from nature: the union of these four forms of alienation results in the alienation of animals from their species life. Thus, concludes Noske, animals are "deanimalized" under capitalism.[45]

The assertion that working animals constitute an alienated and exploited group suggests a parallelism with the working class and its revolutionary potential. Traditional Marxist perspective holds that the working class, in perceiving its own alienation, recognizes that its plight stems from capitalism and that capitalism must be overthrown. This parallelism, foreshadowed in Noske and Benton,[46] is made explicit by Perlo, Hribal and, more recently, Painter. According to them, animals have agency, such as the "ability to intentionally engage in an activity, such as caring for one's young"[47] and "the capacity and intention to satisfy interests that are intimately connected to their flourishing – recall that they cry, they mourn, they flee and they bite back when they are mistreated".[48] Animals are "part of the working class"[49] and their labor produces surplus value.[50] In response to the common objection that animals do not experience themselves as alienated because they are unable to conceptualize their nature and, consequently, unable to conceive of themselves in terms of a class conflict, Painter recalls the words of Catharine MacKinnon:

> Who asked the animals? […] Do animals dissent from human hegemony [and dominance]? I think they often do. They vote with their feet by running away. They bite back, scream in pain, withhold affection, approach warily, fly and swim away.[51]

Painter is arguing that animals are able to perceive their own alienation (in the form of severe suffering and frustration) and, in this sense, potentially constitute a revolutionary class. Stated otherwise, if animals had the ability, they would "unite and break the chains that compel them to labour"[52].

---

45 *Ibid.*, 12.

46 Benton, *Natural Relations*, p. 59.

47 Painter, "Non-human Animals within Contemporary Capitalism", p. 334.

48 *Ibid.*, 336.

49 Jason Hribal, "Animals Are Part of the Working Class: A Challenge to Labor History", *Labor History*, vol. 44, no. 4 (2003), pp. 435–53.

50 Jason Hribal, "Animals Are Part of the Working Class Reviewed", *Borderlands*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2012), p. 12 and Perlo, "Marxism and the Underdog", p. 307.

51 Quoted in Painter, "Non-human Animals within Contemporary Capitalism", p. 332.

52 Bob Torres, *Making a Killing: The Political Economy of Animal Rights*, AK press, Oakland, 2007, p. 39.

There are intrinsic problems in these attempts to juxtapose animal rights theory and Marx, and within the thesis that Marx's criticism of capitalism rests upon the condemnation of the reduction of humans to the condition of animals.[53] Moreover, when viewed from a posthuman perspective, both sides of the debate are tinged with essentialism (what would be this "nature" from which animals would be alienated in Noske's fifth point?). There remains, nonetheless, a significant problem that demands attention. From the perspective of the leftist animal rights camp, there is no intrinsic connection between animal domination/exploitation and capitalism. Therefore, Cochrane, having considered the proposals of Benton, Noske, and Perlo, is justified in questioning "whether capitalism is a necessary impediment to achieving justice for [animals]" and in envisioning a capitalist society which raises animals for profit, and yet does not harm them.[54] Much of the literature I have reviewed here fails to conceptualize capitalism and capitalist society as a critical starting point. Benton and the others do not, for example, refer to *Capital*, but rather reduce Marx to a few citations from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and to the concept of alienation.[55] They ignore, willingly or not, the Althusserian framing of the conceptual break marked by *The German Ideology*.[56] This work elaborates Marx and Engels' critiques of the concepts of *Gattungwesen* and *Entfremdung/Entäusserung*. The former is supplanted by the concept of *bestimmte Individuen* (real individuals) and the latter appears only rarely and vaguely in Marx's writings after 1845.

From this point of view, what Sztybel says about himself: "I am no Marxist",[57] can be extended to leftist animal rights thinkers more broadly. Indeed, Benton himself defines his framework as "loosely Marxist".[58] In focusing on the *Paris*

53 As, for example, stated in Benton, *Natural Relations*, p. 23

54 Cochrane, *An Introduction to Animals and Political Theory*, p. 108.

55 Regarding Benton's position about the two phases of Marx, "Benton's earlier interpretation of the *Paris Manuscripts* and their political-economic topics as Feuerbachian and Hegelian, his repeated hints to the contrast between the young and the old Marx, and Benton's adoption of Althusser's periodization of the theoretical development within Marx's works suggest that Benton shares Althusser's paradigm of Marx's epistemological break […] Nevertheless, Benton's appreciative judgment of the *Paris Manuscripts* as the 'deepest […] of Marx's writings' seems to speak against the interpretation that Benton is a hardened Althusserian with respect to Marx's early writings." Christian Stache, "On the Origins of Animalist Marxism: Rereading Ted Benton and the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*", *Monthly Review*, vol. 70, no. 7 (2018), pp. 22–41. Benton does not comment on the issue in the article *Speciesism = Humanism*.

56 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels, *MECW*, vol. 5, pp. 19–539.

57 http://davidsztybel.info/99.html accessed 9th June 2025.

58 Benton, *Natural Relations*, p. 5.

Manuscripts, which is not considered to be part of the traditional Marxist canon,[59] and not referring to Western Marxism, which hinges upon the *1844 Manuscripts*, the pre-CAS leftist animal rights camp lacks a coherent and comprehensive interpretation of Marxism upon which an analysis of animal conditions under capitalism could be based. Nevertheless, many leftist animal rights authors assert, explicitly or implicitly, that traditional Marxism orients their field and serves as its foundation. Traditional Marxism has been described as the "closed, coherent proletarian worldview and doctrine of the evolution of nature and history",[60] which is based on three pillars: an ontological-determinism regarding the revolutionary providence of the proletariat; a historicist interpretation of the form-genetic method, in which the sequence commodity-value-money-capital is an abstract description of actual history; and a critique of the content of the state, by which the state is understood as an instrument of the ruling class.[61] In summary, a critical understanding of "animals in capitalism" cannot rely upon traditional Marxism due to the inadequacy of latter's account of capitalist social formation.

1.2 CAS and Intersectionality

Having explored pre-CAS efforts in normative animal ethics to link antispeciesism with Marxism, let us now go back to CAS and examine the fundamental concepts that underpin this field. Since its initial formulation, CAS has both interdisciplinary and intersectional,[62] concerned with understanding and framing animal domina-

59 For the definition of traditional Marxism, see Ingo Elbe's overview: "The term "Marxism" was probably first used in the year 1879 by the German Social Democrat Franz Mehring to characterize Marx's theory, and established itself at the end of the 1880s as a discursive weapon used by both critics and defenders of 'Marx's teachings'. The birth of a 'Marxist school', however, is unanimously dated back to the publication of *Anti-Dühring* by Friedrich Engels in the year 1878, and the subsequent reception of this work by Karl Kautsky, Eduard Berstein et al. [Thus] In many respects, Marxism is Engels' work and for that reason actually an Engelsism". Central Marxist texts, in addition to Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Marx and Engels, *MECW*, vol. 25, pp. 5–309, are: Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Marx and Engels, *MECW*, vol. 26, pp. 353–98; Marx, *Capital Vol. 1* – Chapter 32, "*Preface*" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 29, pp. 261–5; and Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. See Ingo Elbe, "Between Marx, Marxism, and Marxisms – Ways of Reading Marx's Theory", trans. Alexander Locascio, *Viewpoint Magazine*, October 21, 2013, https://viewpointmag.com/2013/10/21/between-marx-marxism-and-marxisms-ways-of-reading-marxs-theory/ accessed 9th June 2025.

60 Elbe, "Between Marx, Marxism, and Marxisms".

61 *Ibid*.

62 As Richard Twine puts it, "the key concept of CAS: intersectionality". Richard Twine, "Review: Defining Critical Animal Studies-An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation, Anthony J. Nocella, John Sorenson, Kim Socha and Atsuko Matsuoka (eds)", *Animal Studies Jour-*

tion within the complex network of various kinds of social domination. CAS has never understood animal domination as a single-issue. Instead, it has sought to break with anthropocentrism and to integrate the animal perspective within other critical frameworks. Notably, the intersection that has received the most attention in critical animal studies to date is that between animals and gender.[63] This is due to the ecofeminist roots of CAS:

> A significant catalyst for debate on animal ethics came from ecofeminist writings during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s alongside, and often in tension with, the influential work of well-known animal philosophers such as Tom Regan and Peter Singer. Any contextualization of CAS must confront the fact that, in an intellectual sense, it existed before the term was coined, and that it has since become an umbrella term for bringing together scholars who do critical research on human–animal relations.[64]

Stemming from ecofeminism's focus on nature, several alignments within animal studies and gender studies have emerged,[65] more recently with direct reference to climate change and ecological crisis.[66] The intentional coinage of the term "CAS" implies a commitment to intersectionality and extended disciplinary domain, includ-

---

nal, vol. 3, no. 2 (2014), p. 32. See Taylor and Twine, *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies*; Richard Twine, *Animals as Biotechnology: Ethics, Sustainability and Critical Animal Studies*, Earthscan, London, 2010; Kim Socha, *Women, Destruction, and the Avant-Garde: A Paradigm for Animal Liberation*, Brill Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2012; and John Sorenson et al. (eds.), *Defining Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation*, Peter Lang, Bern, 2014.

63 There were close connections between women's suffrage and anti-vivisection movements prior to ecofeminist discourse. Coral Lansbury, *The Old Brown Dog: Women, Workers, and Vivisection in Edwardian England*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1985; Nicolaas A. Rupke (ed.), *Vivisection in Historical Perspective*, Croom Helm, London, 1987; Mary Ann Elston, "Women and Antivivisection in Victorian England, 1870–1900", Rupke (ed.), *Vivisection in Historical Perspective*, pp. 259–94; Hilda Kean, "The 'Smooth Cool Men of Science': The Feminist and Socialist Response to Vivisection", *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 40, no. 1 (1995), pp. 16–38; and Craig Buettinger, "Women and Antivivisection in Late Nineteenth-century America", *Journal of Social History*, vol. XXX (1997), pp. 857–72.

64 Taylor and Twine, "Locating the 'Critical' in Critical Animal Studies", p. 4.

65 See Greta Gaard (ed.), *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1993; Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen (eds.), *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other animals and the Earth*, Bloomsbury Publishing, New York, 2014.

66 Greta Gaard, "Ecofeminism and Climate change", *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 49 (2015), pp. 20–33.

ing feminism, critical race studies,[67] queer studies,[68] and disability studies.[69] In this way, CAS clarifies and challenges how the material and symbolic exploitation of animals intersects with the dominant categories of gender, race, class, sexuality, and various forms of embodied difference, and their maintenance.

Today, the term "intersectionality" has entered the mainstream, and thus become vague or misused. The term was first coined in 1989 by the legal scholar, critical race theorist, and black feminist, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw,[70] to account for the intertwining of racial and gender discrimination, given the inadequacy of U.S. anti-discrimination laws to protect black women. Consequently, it is widely believed that intersectional theory originated in academia and is divorced from contexts of militant activism. In reality, the gaps amongst feminism, anti-racist discourse, and class struggle, had already been pointed out as early as the 1970s, and even before.[71] Black women activists and collectives, such as Angela Davis, The Combahee River Collective, bell hooks, and Debora King, among others, have noted that the oppression of black women is not adequately addressed from any one of these fields alone.[72]

---

67 See A. Breeze Harper, *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*, Lantern Books, New York, 2010; Maneesha Deckha, "Toward a Postcolonial, Posthumanist Feminist Theory: Centralizing Race and Culture in Feminist Work on Nonhuman Animals", *Hypatia*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2012), pp. 527–45; Claire Jean Kim, *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species, and Nature in a Multicultural Age*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015; and Aph Ko and Syl Ko, *Aphro-ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism from Two Sisters*, Lantern Books, New York, 2017.

68 See Simonsen Rasmus Rahbek, "A Queer Vegan Manifesto", *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2012), pp. 51–81; Jovian Parry, "From Beastly Perversions to the Zoological Closet: Animals, Nature, and Homosex", *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2012), pp. 7–25; and Massimo Filippi and Marco Reggio (eds.), *Corpi che non contano. Judith Butler e gli animali*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine, 2015.

69 See Stephanie Jenkins et al. (eds.), *Disability and Animality: Crip Perspectives in Critical Animal Studies*, Routledge, London, 2020; and Sunaura Taylor, *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation*, The New Press, New York, 2017.

70 Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989), pp. 139–67.

71 In 1949, Claudia Jones, an activist of the Communist Party USA and a black feminist, published "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!", *Political Affair*, vol. 28 (1949), pp. 51–67. It can be considered a forerunner of intersectional analysis, as it highlights how the simultaneity of class exploitation, gender, and racial oppression results in black women being situated at the lower rung of the social hierarchy.

72 See Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves", *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 13, no. 1/2 (1972), pp. 81–100; Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, Random House, New York, 1981; Combahee River Collective, "The Combahee River Collective Statement", Akasha Gloria Hull et al. (eds.), *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, Feminist Press Books, Westbury, 1982, pp. 13–22.

Intersectionality currently circulates as a key term amongst many contemporary social movements and critical social theories. It functions as a tool of investigation beyond the original "oppression pair" – ethnicity and gender – to encompass other categories and axes of power, such as class, sexuality, disability, speciesism, religion, castes, and so forth. Intersectionality emerged as a critique of radical and white essentialist feminism, and the perspective that such feminism relied upon an abstract, "universal" woman, understood as essentially "other" or "absent". The aim was to focus instead upon hierarchical and experiential differences determined by the multiple, simultaneous, and sometimes contradictory interconnections of different kinds of oppression. The metaphor of a crossroads, introduced by Crenshaw in an attempt to capture this aspect, is famous:

> Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. […] But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm.[73]

Another simple method for recognizing the interconnectedness of oppression is to "ask the other question", as proposed by Mari J. Matsuda in 1991:

> When I see something that looks racist, I ask, 'Where is the patriarchy in this?' When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, 'Where is the heterosexism in this?' and when I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, 'Where are the class interests in this?[74]

This approach analyzes the complexity and emphasizes the simultaneity of multiple power differentials at both the individual and the systemic level of analysis. At the individual level, it focuses on identity narratives and lived experiences of oppressed subjects and groups, aiming to show the social multidimensionality inherent to processes of subjectivation. On the systemic level, i.e. in relation to broader socio-cultural discourses, intersectionality focuses upon the mechanisms, the conditions, and the structural construction and maintenance of power and oppression. Patricia Hill Collins has introduced alongside the notion of intersectionality, which is useful

73 Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex", p. 149.

74 Mari J. Matsuda, "Beside My Sister, Facing the Enemy: Legal Theory Out of Coalition", *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6 (1990), p. 1189.

for describing and investigating micro-level processes, the concept of "interlocking systems of oppression", which addresses the macro-level development of oppressive structures.[75] Another way of formulating this difference is to distinguish between two camps:[76] one that adopts an "additive" or "cumulative" model (corresponding to the micro-level) and the other that adopts a "constitutive" model (corresponding to the macro-level). Such models can then be matched with different epistemological stances such as *anticategorical* (the deconstructivist rejection of social categories), *intracategorical* (aiming to complicate categories rather than eliminate them, focusing on social groups at previously ignored intersections) and *intercategorical* (a strategic and provisional acceptance of existing social categories in order to map multiple configurations of inequality).[77] The micro-level, combined with the additive camp and with inter and intracategorical approaches, considers the various social axes of oppression as pre-existing and trans-historical, and focuses on the ways in which they intersect under certain conditions to produce multi-marginalized individuals and groups.[78] Micro-level analyses are typically carried out through case studies, characterized, therefore, by empirical investigations that aim to identify, describe, and document the relations of oppression at stake in a given historical-social context. Macro-level analyses, on the other hand, aim, at least in principle, to explain why forms of subordination emerge and how they are reproduced, questioning the dynamics of existing social categories. The constitutive camp maintains that categories do not pre-exist and *then* intersect, but rather are constantly produced and (re)invented through each other in a relational process.[79] This model is oriented towards broadening theories of power relations. Some authors within this camp stress the idea of integral connections amongst oppressions, which they describe as "part of one overarching structure of domination",[80] or as "connected" within a "larger pic-

75 Patricia H. Collins et al., "Symposium on West and Fenstermaker's 'Doing Difference'", Sarah Fenstermaker and Candace West (eds.), *Doing Gender, Doing Difference. Inequality, Power, and Institutional Change*, Routledge, London, 2002, p. 82.

76 Nira Yuval-Davis, "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics", *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2006), pp. 193–209.

77 Leslie McCall, "The complexity of Intersectionality", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 30 (2005), pp. 65–92.

78 See Gabriele Winker and Nina Degele, "Intersectionality as Multi-Level Analysis: Dealing with Social Inequality", *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2011), pp. 51–66; and Wendy Hulko, "The time-and Context-Contingent Nature of Intersectionality and Interlocking Oppressions", *Affilia*, vol. 24, no. 1 (2009), pp. 44–55.

79 See Yuval-Davis, "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics", p. 195.

80 Patricia H. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Routledge, London, 2002, p. 222.

ture",[81] or related to a wider "landscape of power".[82] The constitutive model contradicts the categorical stability and reification of differences that they see within the additives camp. As Yuval-Davis asserts in relation to the triple oppression of Black and working-class women:

> Any attempt to essentialize 'Blackness' or 'womanhood' or 'working classness' as specific forms of concrete oppression in additive ways inevitably conflates narratives of identity politics with descriptions of positionality as well as constructing identities within the terms of specific political projects. [...] in such identity politics constructions what takes place is actually fragmentation and multiplication of the wider categorical identities rather than more dynamic, shifting and multiplex constructions of intersectionality.[83]

The additive model falls into the discourse of identity politics, thereby embracing the correspondence between positioning and social grouping. As a result, it fragments and multiplies identities, concentrating solely on the symbolic/discursive modes of construction and representation of difference as identity.[84] Along these lines, a crucial question remains unaddressed: "are there, in any particular historical condition, specific and limited numbers of social divisions that construct the grid of power relations within which the different members of the society are located?"[85]

In essence, the intersectional approach appears as an inclusive framework with dynamic and multi-layered perspectives on society, domination, and subjectivity. A framework that can challenge essentialist, binary, and reductionist fallacies, from both theoretical and activist standpoints. The insistence on the multiple simultaneity of oppressions means bringing to light and problematizing the privileges that complement them and that are often taken for granted. This, alongside the effort to understand why and how social dominations are connected, is essential for the establishment of political solidarity amongst different oppressed groups that is authentic, sound, and fruitful. Furthermore, if we consider that intersectionality is neither overly complex nor simplistic, and that it permits the examination of diverse theoretical problems through an array of methodological approaches, we can appreciate the reasons for its success and popularity amongst a wide audience, from the entire feminist spectrum and critical social theory in general.

---

81 Rita Kaur Dhamoon, "Considerations on Mainstreaming Intersectionality", *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 64, no. 1 (2011), pp. 238–9.

82 Floya Anthias, "Hierarchies of Social Location, Class and Intersectionality: Towards a Translocational frame", *International Sociology*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2013), p. 130.

83 Yuval-Davis, "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics", p. 195.

84 Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Post-Socialist" Condition*, Routledge, New York, 1997.

85 Yuval-Davis, "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics", pp. 202–3.

Nonetheless, intersectionality has been subjected to critique from both the academic and the political sphere. In addition to a lack of methodological clarity and the difficulty of applying such broad and open frameworks,[86] the most problematic aspect to be questioned is its theoretical consistency. While the additive camp explicitly overlooks the explanatory depth required for a coherent social theory, even the constitutive camp fails to address the underlying "why" in its examination of social categories. The constitutive camp, despite being less fragmentary and static than the additive approach, still under-theorizes the social dimension. In short, intersectionality *tout court* appears to lack a consistent theory of social power.

As pointed out by the Marxist feminist current of social reproduction theory,[87] such approaches consider the broader power relations that inform the social context as something indeterminate, discreet, and chaotic, composed of "ever-variable configurations (or 'matrixes') of partial relations, reproduced in the absence of any essential or systemic logic".[88] Intersectional scholar Dhamoon, for instance, refers to the "larger picture in which differences are connected" as "represent[ing] the shifting, messy, indeterminate, dynamic, and multilayered movement of difference making".[89] Evidently, such a conception merely alludes to a unitary logic, but does not identify or clarify it.

1.2.1 Ecofeminism: A Cultural Logic for Intersectionality

Long before the concept of intersectionality was explicitly defined, another feminist perspective functioned in a way that could be called intersectional: ecofeminism. The term ecofeminism was coined by the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974[90] with reference to the idea that women play a fundamental role in ecological revolution. The term also refers to the social, political, and theoretical movement that arose

86 This has been partly solved in Winker and Degele, "Intersectionality as Multi-Level Analysis".

87 See Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner, "Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives", *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1989), pp. 381–404; Sue Ferguson, "Building on the Strengths of the Socialist Feminist Tradition", *Critical Sociology*, vol. 25, no. 1 (1999), pp. 1–15; Isabella Bakker, "Social Reproduction and the Constitution of a Gendered Political Economy", *New Political Economy*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2007), pp. 541–56; Cinzia Arruzza, "Functionalist, Determinist, Reductionist: Social Reproduction Feminism and Its Critics", *Science & Society*, vol. 80, no. 1 (2016), pp. 9–30; and Tithi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Social Reproduction Theory. Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, Pluto Press, London, 2017.

88 Susan Ferguson, "Intersectionality and Social-Reproduction Feminisms", *Historical Materialism*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2016), p. 45.

89 Dhamoon, "Considerations on Mainstreaming Intersectionality", pp. 238–9.

90 Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Feminism or Death: How the Women's Movement Can Save the Planet*, trans. Ruth Hottell, Verso, London-New York, 2022.

from this idea and from the intersection of radical feminism, social justice movements, environmentalism, and pacifism.[91] In the 1970s, "ecofeminism" did not label a coherent body of theories, but was generally related to the theoretical and practical connections between sexism and the domination of nature in Western culture, investigated from various disciplinary perspectives, such as history, sociology, political science, literary criticism, and theology. Only since the late 1980s has ecofeminism entered academic discourse as a set of heterogenous orientations that is more accurately described by the plural term, "ecofeminisms". Broadly speaking, "ecofeminist philosophy"[92] may be described as the investigation and analysis of the integrated and structural domination of women and nature, the critique of representations of these subjects by patriarchal Western philosophical traditions, and the pursuit of alternative models, including ethical,[93] materialist/socialist,[94] cultural/spiritual,[95] queer,[96] phenomenological ecofeminism,[97] etc. Moreover, reference to animal issues has been implicitly present since the beginning of ecofeminist research.[98]

---

91 Ecofeminism underwent an academization which has led it to be "colonized" by philosophy. At the same time, this process has led to a separation between theory and practice due to the weakening of activism and ecofeminism slipping into the background as a social, political, and theoretical movement in favor of white academic feminism. See Julie Cook, "The Philosophical Colonization of Ecofeminism", *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 20, no. 3 (1998), pp. 227–46.

92 Karen J. Warren, "Feminist Environmental Philosophy", Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2015, https://plato.stanford.edu/ archives/sum2015/entries/feminism-environmental/ accessed on 9th June 2025.

93 See Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams (eds.), *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics: A Reader*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008; Lori Gruen, *Ethics and Animals: An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011; Marti Kheel, *Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2007; and Christine Cuomo, *Feminism and Ecological Communities: An Ethic of Fluorishing*, Routledge, London, 1998.

94 See Val Plumwood, "Feminism and Ecofeminism: Beyond the Dualistic Assumptions of Women, Men and Nature", *The Ecologist*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1992), pp. 8–13; Mary Mellor, *Feminism and Ecology*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1997; Mary Mellor, "Feminism and Environmental Ethics: A Materialist Perspective", *Ethics and the Environment*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2000), pp. 107–23; and Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern*, Zed Books Ltd., London, 1997.

95 See Starhawk, *Power, Authority, and Mystery: Ecofeminism and Earth-Based Spirituality*, Irene Diamond and Gloria F. Orenstein (eds), *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1990, pp. 73–86; Riane Eisler, "The Gaia Tradition and the Partnership Future: An Ecofeminist Manifesto", Diamond and Orenstein (eds.), *Reweaving the World*, pp. 23–34.

96 Greta Gaard, "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism", *Hypatia*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1997), pp. 114–37; Catriona Sandilands, "Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer: Ecofeminism and (More) Questions of Identity", *National Women's Studies Association (Nwsa) Journal*, vol. 9, no. 3 (1997), pp. 18–40.

97 Trish Glazebrook, *Eco-Logic: Erotics of Nature. An Ecofeminist Phenomenology*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2008.

98 For a detailed review of vegetarian ecofeminism, see Greta Gaard, "Vegetarian Ecofeminism: A Review Essay", *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2002), pp. 117–46.

During the mid 1970s, the intersections of species domination, with gender and race domination was explored within the context of second-wave radical feminism and lesbian feminism. Carol Adams' *The Oedible Complex*,[99] published in 1975, was the first lesbian feminist study on women's vegetarianism, and suggested a conceptual link between sexism and speciesism in Western culture. Adams reiterated and refined this claim in her 1990 essay, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*.[100]

Initially, ecofeminism thematized the domination of animals from an antispeciesist point of view only marginally. The topic first appeared in, "All and One Flesh: The Rights of Animals",[101] an essay from a 1983 anthology, *Reclaim the Earth: Women Speak Out for Life on Earth*. Almost a decade later, another anthology, *Reweaving the World*, featured essays critiquing the practices of animal sacrifice and hunting.[102] Some voices of vegetarian feminism chose to embrace a methodological convergence between ecofeminism and antisepciesism, as their "analyses shifted from the objects of oppression to the structure of oppression".[103] This is the case of Adams herself and, among others, Susan Griffin whose *Women and Nature* (1978) had been very influential for the vegetarian branch of ecofeminism text.[104] Both Adams and Griffin embrace ecofeminism as a term in 1991.[105] Two years later, Greta Gaard's anthology *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* establishes vegetarian ecofeminism as a field. As Gaard herself retrospectively explains:

> The convergence of feminist vegetarianism and ecofeminism, as if following a simple algebraic operation, combined the equation "ecofeminism = women +

99 Carol J. Adams, "The Oedible Complex: Feminism and Vegetarianism", *The Lesbian Reader*, Gina Covina and Laurel Galana (eds.), Amazon Press, Oakland, 1975, pp. 145–52.

100 Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, Continuum Books, New York, 1990.

101 Norma Benney, "All of One Flesh: The Rights of Animals", Leonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland (eds), *Reclaim the Earth: Women Speak Out for Life on Earth*, Women's Press, London, 1983, pp. 141–51.

102 Respectively: Sally Abbott, "The Origins of God in the Blood of the Lamb" and Marti Kheel, "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology: Reflections on Identity and Difference", Diamond et al. (eds.), *Reweaving the World*, pp. 35–40, 128–137.

103 Gaard, "Vegetarian Ecofeminism", p. 128.

104 Griffin's book is not typically regarded as ecofeminist. Gaard mentions two other ecofeminist texts in content, but not yet in name: Elizabeth Dodson Gray, *Green Paradise Lost*, Roundtable Press, Wellesley, 1981; and Andrée Collard and Joyce Contrucci, *Rape of the Wild: Man's Violence against Animals and the Earth*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1989. *Ibid.*, 126–7.

105 See Carol J. Adams, "Ecofeminism and the Eating of Animals", *Hypatia*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1991), pp. 125–45; and David Macauley, "On Women, Animals and Nature: An Interview with Ecofeminist Susan Griffin", *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy*, vol. 90, no. 3 (1991), pp. 116–27.

> nature" with "women + animals", and appeared in the first text of vegetarian ecofeminism in my *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*.[106]

Animal ecofeminism has provided indispensable contributions to antispeciesist reflection and CAS. Important examples include Carol Adams' concept of the "absent referent" – which highlights the disconnection between meat eaters and animals, as well as the separation of animals from their end products – and the idea of meat as "mass term," which reduces entire species of animals and unique beings into something without individuality and specificity.[107] Additionally, notable contributions are: the criticism of universalism as an approach to vegetarianism/veganism;[108] the intersectional approach to power relations and structures of oppressions; the central role of the body as a foundation for a feminist ethics of care that encompasses other animals, drawing moral obligations from human and animal interdependent situatedness in a broader ecological support systems.

After a period of both popularity and activism between the 1980s and 1990s, ecofeminism as a social and theoretical movement suffered a major backlash at the turn of the millennium, and an almost total exit from the scene from 2010 onwards.[109] This trajectory is consistent, on the one hand, with the weakening of the ecological, pacifist, antinuclear movements and, on the other hand, with the post-structuralist critique of identity essentialism within feminism. More recently, ecofeminism's highly problematic trans-exclusivity, sex workers exclusivity, and transantagonism have also been pointed out and rightly criticized.[110]

---

106 Gaard, "Vegetarian Ecofeminism", p. 128.

107 See Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, pp. 20–29; Id., "The War on Compassion", in *Antennae: The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture*, vol. 14 (2010), pp. 5–9.

108 See Richard Twine, "Ecofeminism and Veganism: Revisiting the Question of Universalism", Adams et al. (eds.), *Ecofeminism*, pp. 191–207; and Deane Curtin, "Toward an Ecological Ethic of Care", *Hypatia*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1991), pp. 60–74.

109 Greta Gaard, "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism", *Feminist Formations*, vol. 23, no. 2 (2011), pp. 26–53. See also, Laura Hobgood-Oster, "Ecofeminism: Historic and International Evolution", Bron R. Taylor (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature. Vol* 1, Continuum Books, London, 2005, pp. 33–538; and Noel Sturgeon, *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action*, Routledge, London, 2016.

110 See Kuura Irni, "Revisiting Ecofeminist Genealogies: towards Intersectional and Trans-Inclusive Ecofeminism", Kadri Aavik, Kuura Irni, and Milla-Maria Joki (eds.) *Feminist Animal and Multispecies Studies: Critical Perspectives on Food and Eating*, Brill, Leiden, 2024, pp. 207–47; Carrie Hamilton, "Sex, Work, Meat: The Feminist Politics of Veganism", *Feminist Review*, vol. 114, no. 1 (2016), pp. 112–29; and Valerie Tollhopf, *Ecofeminism Will Be Trans-Ecofeminist or Not at All: A Transfeminist Critique*, paper presented at 12th European Feminist Research Conference, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain, July 9–12, 2025.

Indeed, in order to avoid an association with the essentialism evoked by the term "ecofeminism", alternative names such as "ecological feminism",[111] "feminist environmentalism",[112] "critical feminist eco-socialism",[113] or simply "gender and the environment" have been sought to emphasize the intersectionality between feminism and the environment.

Alongside many field studies aimed at articulating the interactions amongst two or more forms of oppression in specific socio-cultural contexts, ecofeminism, and in particular the Australian philosopher Val Plumwood, have worked towards a unitary, systemic logic to explain why forms of domination intersect, remain stable, and reproduce. It is this logic that the strictly intersectional approach seems to be missing. In her most important book, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*,[114] published in 1993, Plumwood identifies this logic with Western dualism, e.g. reason/nature, culture/nature, mind/body, masculine/feminine, reason/emotion, human/animal, etc. She traces the history of this system of thought from the Greek philosophies of Plato and Aristotle through Descartes, leading up to contemporary mechanism and behaviorism. Dualism, according to Plumwood, is more than dichotomous opposition, and more than a relation of difference or non-identity. It is a conceptual scheme that constructs interrelated and mutually reinforcing binary oppositions based upon a hierarchical logic. Dualism converts a logical correlation of differences given according to a gradual continuum of similarity, to a subordinating opposition between already given and static objects, utilizing a hypostatization process.

As Plumwood puts it:

> Dualism is a relation of separation and domination inscribed and naturalised in culture and characterised by radical exclusion, distancing and opposition between orders constructed as systematically higher and lower, as inferior and superior, as ruler and ruled, which treats the division as part of the natures of beings construed not merely as different but as belonging to radically different orders or kinds, and hence as not open to change.[115]

Plumwood presents the main intersecting Western dualisms as a list, allowing two modes of interpretation.[116] A horizontal reading of the pair involves a hierarchy in which terms on the left side are culturally valued in opposition to those on the right

111 Karen J. Warren, *Ecological Feminism*, Routledge, London, 1994.

112 Bina Agarwal, "The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons from India", *Feminist studies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1992), pp. 119–58.

113 Val Plumwood, "Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature: A Critical Feminist Eco-Socialist Analysis", *Ethics & the Environment*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2000), pp. 285–322.

114 Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Routledge, London, 2002.

115 *Ibid.*, 47–8.

116 *Ibid.*, 43.

(e.g. culture/nature, mind/body: culture > nature; mind > body). A vertical reading maps, on the left side, interconnected and mutually reinforcing cultural hegemonies and, on the right side, interconnected and mutually devaluating categories (e.g. culture-mind/nature-body). Plumwood specifies the inter-relation between dualistic pairs with the notion of "linking postulates", which are "assumptions normally made implicit in the cultural background which create equivalences or mapping between the pairs".[117] Such postulates include the notion of men as more "rational", of humans being uniquely cultural, or of the body as inherently passive. The repetition of a reason/nature dualism throughout the majority of these pairs solidifies the culturally constructed relational values embedded in these horizontal hierarchies and vertical mappings.

It is important to note that discursive transformations take place here. Nature, for example, can be harvested by dominant groups for conceptual resources (e.g. aggressiveness, competitiveness) with which to construct their identities. Therefore, the whole structure needs to be thought of as fluid and open to being modified by the introduction of new dualisms.[118]

Plumwood characterizes five features of "logical structure of dualism":[119]

1. *Backgrounding (denial)*: culturally dominant concepts are considered to form a singular, centered reality while denying their actual dependence on relational opposites;
2. *Radical exclusion (hyperseparation)*: some characteristics (e.g. language in the human/animal distinction) are mobilized to signify polarized differences between two realms, in order "to maximize distance or separation between the dualized spheres and to prevent their being seen as continuous or contiguous";[120]
3. *Incorporation (relational definition)*: the devalued concept is defined only in relation to its opposite, thus in terms of lack and absence. It is therefore incorporated into a fundamentally relational system;
4. *Instrumentalism (objectification)*: the devalued concept is made passive and conceived as having no end in itself. Given the process of incorporation, its objectives are also defined in terms of the opposite pole;
5. *Homogenization or stereotyping*: differences within the devalued pole are denied. "They are all alike" becomes the motto.

117 *Ibid.*, 45.

118 See Richard Twine, "Ecofeminisms in Process", *Ecofeminism e-journal* (2001).

119 Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, pp. 47–55.

120 *Ibid.*, 49.

Moreover, according to Plumwood,[121] dualism's logical reliance on the concept of "the other" corresponds to the representation of otherness in classical propositional logic, or classical negation. Through a logical analysis of classical negation, she gives formal expression to the five features of dualism she has previously specified.

On the one hand, ecofeminism has provided theoretical consistency in identifying an integrated and unitary logic.[122] On the other hand, however, because ecofeminism moves into the field of culture, *epistèmes*, and the logical construction of concepts, it continues to under-theorize the social,[123] which gets in the way of its mission of cross-movement political solidarity. Indeed, "how we conceptualize the social matters in developing effective political strategies".[124] A cultural logic, therefore, is not enough to make intersectionality an effective element of critical theories. We need a "socio-material logic",[125] or, a materialist logic of social complexity, in order to understand the interlocking of multiple forms of domination and to investigate whether and how this logic conditions and limits particular configurations of multiply-oppressive experiences.

1.3 CAS and Anti-Capitalism: Marxist Approaches

It can be said that a general, materialist orientation toward the social is another key feature of CAS. CAS is fundamentally concerned with the *condition* of the animal – its treatment in and by society – with the explicit goal of engendering liberating so-

121 *Ibid.*, 55–9.

122 Twine highlights some contradictions in the list of dualisms, especially in Gaard's version, which includes pairs referring to sexualities (e.g. heterosexual/queer, production/reproduction). "Queer sexualities" vertically maps with "reproduction", but it is not the case that queer people are devalued via this association. Rather, queer people are being devalued by being portrayed as non-reproductive. In this case, queer sexualities are associated with nature, but via an association with nature's non-rational and "beastly" meaning. Twine, "Ecofeminisms in Process".

123 The same criticism is made by Cudworth, who defines Plumwood's position idealist, i.e. focused on cultural discourses. "[Her] understanding is ideational – we do not see how these ideas of separation, of human uniqueness and the animal as 'Other', are articulated in located contexts and inform what sociologists would understand as social institutions and related practices." Erika Cudworth, "Beyond Speciesism: Intersectionality, Critical Sociology and the Human Domination of Other Animals", Taylor et al. (eds.), *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies*, p. 27.

124 Ferguson, "Intersectionality and Social-Reproduction Feminisms", p. 42.

125 *Ibid.*, 43.

cial change via *engaged* theory.[126] As Taylor and Twine write, "In the CAS context, theory must be relevant to understanding and changing the material conditions of animals, and to historicising the still normative concepts that have been largely successful in shielding human–animal relations from critical scrutiny".[127] This is reflected in CAS's embrace of sociology and attentiveness to economic structures and power issues in society.[128] In the aforementioned "founding act" of CAS, reference to economy appears as the first point on the list of tenets: "We seek to develop a Critical Animal Studies that: 1. Pursues interdisciplinary collaborative writing and research in a rich and comprehensive manner that includes perspectives typically ignored by animal studies such as *political economy*".[129] The inclusion of an economical perspective is immediately characterized by a commitment to anti-capitalism (vaguely intended): "[CAS] rejects apolitical, conservative, and liberal positions in order to advance an anti-capitalist, and, more generally, a radical anti-hierarchical politics".[130] Since such anti-capitalist commitment, "sociology has made a most useful contribution in the theorising of human relations with non-human animals in terms of Marxist influenced analyses".[131] The important idea for CAS is that the "critique of capitalism [is] inseparable from a critique of both animal commodification and environmental destruction".[132]

Marxist analyses of contemporary capitalism conducted from the perspective of CAS deal with such questions as:

> What would global capitalism look like minus the exploitation of animal reproductive labour? How does that abuse intersect, in specific contexts, with that of human labour? And how can the disavowal of violence against animals illuminate, generally, theories of commodity fetishism?[133]

---

126 Helena Pedersen and Vasile Stanescu, "What is "Critical" about Animal Studies? From the Animal "Question" to the Animal "Condition"", Socha, *Women, Destruction, and the Avant-Garde*, pp. ix-xi.

127 Taylor and Twine, "Locating the 'Critical' in Critical Animal Studies", p. 6.

128 For a detailed account of the relation between (critical) sociology and CAS see Twine, *Animals as Biotechnology*, pp. 3–9; Cudworth, "Beyond Speciesism"; and Kay Peggs, "From Centre to Margins and Back Again: Critical Animal Studies and the Reflexive Human Self", Taylor et al. (eds.), *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies*, pp. 56–71. Cudworth writes, "It is time for sociology to step up to the task of outlining the social institutions in which the discourse of species is embedded and to provide an analysis in terms of social relations." Cudworth, "Beyond Speciesism", pp. 26–7.

129 Best et al., "Introducing Critical Animal Studies". [emphasis added]

130 *Ibid.*

131 Cudworth, "Beyond Speciesism", p. 27.

132 Twine, *Animals as Biotechnology*, p. 9

133 Taylor and Twine, "Locating the 'Critical' in Critical Animal Studies", p. 10.

Whether exploited animals are understood to be commodities,[134] wage laborers,[135] slaves,[136] superexploited commodities,[137] super-exploited means of production,[138] or as producing value in the form of biocapital,[139] the charge of economical reductionism holds true. All these analyses adopt, implicitly or not, a tripartite model of animal oppression. Nibert explains thusly: first there is the economic exploitation of animals for human interests. Then, power inequality is coded in law to allow exploitation. Finally, speciesism emerges as in ideology from these economic institutions and practices, legitimizing and inspiring domination.[140] Though this model fails to account for social intersectionality,[141] the general framework is adequately articulated to account for the intersectionality of species domination, specifically.[142]

134 Nibert, *Animal Rights/Human Rights*; and David Nibert, *Animal Oppression and Human Violence: Domesecration, Capitalism, and Global Conflict*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2013.

135 Hribal, "Animals Are Part of the Working Class Reviewed".

136 Painter, "Non-human Animals within Contemporary Capitalism".

137 Torres, *Making a Killing: The Political Economy of Animal Rights*.

138 Christian Stache, "Conceptualising Animal Exploitation in Capitalism: Getting Terminology Straight", *Capital & Class*, vol. 44, no. 3 (2020), pp. 401–21.

139 Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2009; Agnieszka Kowalczyk, "Mapping Non-Human Resistance in the Age of Biocapital", Taylor et al. (eds.), *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies*, pp. 183–200; and Twine, *Animals as Biotechnology*; Arianna Ferrari, "Nonhuman Animals as Food in Biocapitalism", David Nibert (ed.), *Animal Oppression and Capitalism*, Praeger, Santa Barbara and Denver, 2017, vol. 1, pp. 184–208. For critical perspective, see Francesco Aloe, "Antropodecentrare *Il Capitale* di Marx. Dal lavoro astratto al processo di valorizzazione", *Liberazioni. Rivista di critica antispecista*, no. 37 (2019), pp. 30–43.

140 See Nibert, *Animal Rights/Human Rights*, p. 17 ff.

141 See Cudworth, "Beyond Speciesism", pp. 27–8.

142 Consider the concept of Animal-Industrial Complex (A-IC). See Gwen Hunnicutt, Richard Twine, and Kenneth Mentor (eds.), *Violence and Harm in the Animal Industrial Complex: Human-Animal Entanglements*, Routledge, New York, 2024; Amy J. Fitzgerald and Nik Taylor, "The Cultural Hegemony of Meat and the Animal Industrial Complex", Taylor et al. (eds.), *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies*, pp. 165–82; Kimberley Ducey, "The Chicken-Industrial Complex and Elite White Men: Connecting the Oppression of Humans and Other Animals", Tracey Harris, "'The Problem Is Not the People, It's the System': The Canadian Animal-Industrial Complex", Livia Boscardin, "Capitalizing on Nature, Naturalizing Capitalism: An Analysis of the 'Livestock Revolution', Planetary Boundaries, and Green Tendencies in the Animal-Industrial Complex", Nibert (ed.), *Animal Oppression and Capitalism*, vol. 1, pp. 1–19, 57–75, 259–76. The concept of Animal Industrial Complex was first proposed by anthropologist Barbara Noske in *Beyond Boundaries: Humans and Animals*, and then refined by sociologist Richard Twine in "Revealing the 'Animal-Industrial Complex' – A Concept and Method for Critical Animal Studies", *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2012), pp. 12–39. It is understood as an organizing concept seeking to represent the overall framework of species domination in capitalist societies and intersections with other complexes of the global economy such as "military-industrial complex", "prison-industrial complex", "entertainment-industrial complex" and "pharmaceutical-industrial complex" (*Ibid.*, 16–20). A succinct definition of the A-IC is, "*a partly opaque and*

Research carried out within this framework is fundamentally sociological, empirically focused on institutions (governments, corporations, and scientific related institutions, both public and private), technologies, and media representation. In this respect, their focus is too narrow to account for the social from a more structural perspective. Other authors within the field of CAS adopt a less empirical perspective in addressing capitalism, conceiving of it not only as an economic system but as an integrated social formation. They pose structural questions such as: is it possible to achieve animal liberation without moving beyond capitalism? Is animal liberation compatible with capitalism? The answer, which is assumed without actually being explained, is summarized in the following quote by CAS scholar Sanbonmatsu: "Animal liberation and capitalism are in sum not merely in tension with one another, they are mutually incompatible modes of civilizational development".[143]

1.3.1 CAS and the Frankfurt School

Sanbonmastu's and other CAS scholars' analyses[144] make explicit reference to Western Marxism (György Lukács, Karl Korsch, Ernst Bloch, the Frankfurt School, Antonio Gramsci, Henri Lefebvre, etc.).[145] In so doing, just like leftist animal rights theorists, they focus mostly on the *Paris Manuscripts* and the concept of alienation, interpreted through the lens of Western Marxism. This shift in thinking, which arose from a crisis within the socialist labor movement in the aftermath of the First World

---

multiple set of networks and relationships between the corporate […] sector, governments, and public and private science. With economic, cultural, social, and affective dimensions it encompasses an extensive range of practices, technologies, images, identities and markets" (*Ibid.*, 23). A-IC is internally structured into three overlapping sectors: agribusiness, animal experimentation, entertaining-pet. A-IC concept and methodology are similar concerning their definition, function, and scope to the dimension of *dispositifs*. See below.

143 Sanbonmatsu, "Introduction", p. 26.

144 See Sanbonmatsu (ed.), *Critical theory and Animal Liberation*, especially: Zipporah Weisberg, "Animal Repression: Speciesism as Pathology", pp. 177–93; Aaron Bell, "The Dialectic of Anthropocentrism", pp. 163–75; Eduardo Mendieta, "Animal is to Kantianism as Jew is to Fascism: Adorno's Bestiary", pp. 147–62; and Christina Gerhardt, "Thinking With: Animals in Schopenhauer, Horkheimer, and Adorno", pp. 137–146; John Sanbonmatsu, "Capitalism and Speciesism", Nibert (ed.), *Animal Oppression and Capitalism* cit., vol. 2, pp. 1–30; Maurizi, *Beyond Nature* ; Amy Buzby, "From Factory Floor to Killing Floor: Marx, Critical Theory and the Status of the Animal", *Theory in Action*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2015), pp. 27–50; Melanie Bujok, "Zur Verteidigung des tierlichen und menschlichen Individuums. Das Widerstandsrecht als legitimer und vernünftiger Vorbehalt des Individuums gegenüber dem Sozialen", *Das steinerne Herz der Unendlichkeit erweichen: Beiträge zu einer kritischen Theorie für die Befreiung der Tiere*, Susann Witt-Stahl (ed.), Alibri Verlag, Aschaffenburg, 2007, pp. 310–43.

145 Elbe, "Between Marx, Marxism, and Marxisms". On "Western Marxism", see Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, Verso, London-New York, 2016.

War and has its "founding" text in Lukács' 1923 *History and Class Consciousness*,[146] turns away from a traditional reading of Marx and rather understands Marx's approach as a revolutionary theory of social praxis. Frankfurt scholars are primary references for CAS, in particular Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, and their socio-anthropological-psychological investigation of the structural foundations of what they termed an "irrational society." The expression originally refers to the global landscape from the 1930s onward, marked by the rise of authoritarianisms, the transformation of the Russian revolution in the Stalinist Soviet Union, the rise of National Socialism in Central Europe, and the growth of American capitalism.

At the heart of CAS's engagement with Western Marxist theories lies Horkheimer and Adorno's theory of domination as developed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, contemporary society is the apex of a process of unitary and increasingly total domination erroneously viewed as continuous progress. The cumulative growth of productive forces is cited as evidence of social progress, when it actually represents a regression of the human into barbarism. "The title Adorno gives to this process is 'retrogressive anthropogenesis'",[147] and it relies upon the concept of instrumental rationality, i.e. the objective subsuming the particular under the universal.[148] It is "the original model of domination, of which every other form of domination is merely derivative".[149] Thus, the key to understanding the contemporaneity of multiple totalitarian power systems, the current "irrational society", begins and ends in the genealogical criticism of instrumental reason.[150]

---

146 György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1972.

147 Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, trans. Kenneth Baynes, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 38.

148 Horkheimer and Adorno devote the first of two excursuses in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to the figure of Ulysses as the ultimate bourgeois consciousness and instrumental rationality, and the identification of Enlightenment reason in the mythological poem. In the episode of the Sirens in book XII of the *Odyssey*, they identify the secret of the "intertwinement of myth, power, and labor." Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2002, p. 25.

149 Honneth, *The Critique of Power*, p. 42.

150 "We have no doubt – and herein lies our *petitio principii* – that freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking. We believe we have perceived with equal clarity, however, that the very concept of that thinking, no less than the concrete historical forms, the institutions of society with which it is intertwined, already contains the germ of the regression which is taking place everywhere today. If enlightenment does not assimilate reflection on this regressive moment, it seals its own fate." Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. xvi.

The Frankfurt scholars, investigating the development of rationality, trace its evolution back to the prehistoric process of human self-affirmation on nature, or *anthropogenesis*. Horkheimer and Adorno write that human beings, when released from instinctual security, from animal immediacy with the environment, and from "bodily adaptation to nature",[151] and moved by the drive of self-preservation, "have always had to choose between their subjugation to nature and its subjugation to the self".[152] The implication is that the emergence of the human and the progress/regression of civilization as whole coincides with the process of *domination over nature*, which is one and the same with the process of *alienation from nature*.[153] Human estrangement from nature is twofold: from external nature (which includes animals); from internal nature (the animality of the human – instincts, inner impulses)[154]. And domination is, in turn, instrumental manipulation that goes hand in hand with reason which detects, fixes and objectifies those aspects of nature. The ways in which this manipulation has materialized has changed over time in the form of progressive/regressive phases, according to the logic of alienation and domination of nature. This process of thought, or reason, reaches its apex with modern science and technology embodied within material innovations and certain social organizations (hunting, nomadism, sedentary societies with agriculture and animal husbandry, capitalism, etc.). As summarized by Adorno and Horkheimer: "Civilization replaced the organic adaptation to otherness, mimetic behavior proper, firstly, in the magical phase, with the organized manipulation of mimesis, and finally, in the historical phase, with rational praxis, work".[155] With rational praxis begins also the social domination of the privileged class over the working class as an extension of the human domination of external nature.[156]

---

151 *Ibid.*, 148.

152 *Ibid.*, 25.

153 "Human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted" *Ibid.*, 6.

154 Both at a phylogenetic and ontogenetic levels, "Throughout European history the idea of the human being has been expressed in contradistinction to the animal. The latter's lack of reason is the proof of human dignity. So insistently and unanimously has this antithesis been recited by all the earliest precursors of bourgeois thought, the ancient Jews, the Stoics, and the Early Fathers, and then through the Middle Ages to modern times, that few other ideas are so fundamental to Western anthropology" *Ibid.*, 203–4.

155 *Ibid.*, 148.

156 "But if the nomadic savage, despite his subjection, could still participate in the magic which defined the limits of that world, and could disguise himself as his quarry in order to stalk it, in later periods the intercourse with spirits and the subjection were assigned to different classes of humanity: power to one side, obedience to the other. The recurring, never-changing natural processes were drummed into the subjects, either by other tribes or by their own cliques, as the rhythm of work, to the beat of the club and the rod, which reechoed in every barbaric drum, in each monotonous ritual". *Ibid.*, 15–6.

The peak of this process – which is, in a circular way, a "going back to the start" – is the mid-twentieth-century world situation of totalitarianism and capitalism. In the automatism of modern industrial society, is a submission to the hostile and alien forces of nature from which magic and myth, and then enlightenment, should have freed humanity. Here is the barbaric regression to which the violent anthropogenesis leads: "Any attempt to break the compulsion of nature by breaking nature only succumbs more deeply to that compulsion".[157]

The only way out is realizing the non-necessity of domination through the remembrance of nature, i.e. when nature is "apprehended as knowledge":[158]

> But a true praxis capable of overturning the status quo depends on theory's refusal to yield to the oblivion in which society allows thought to ossify […] Enlightenment consummates and abolishes itself when the closest practical objectives reveal themselves to be the most distant goal already attained, and the lands of which "their spials and intelligencers can give no news"– that is, nature misunderstood by masterful science – are remembered as those of origin.[159]

What CAS scholars fundamentally retain is the estrangement of nature, especially internal nature, or "the self-estrangement of our own animality".[160] For example, in the introduction to the volume *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation* the editor states:

> All the contributors to our volume show that the compulsory forgetting, or repression, of our own animal essence – that is, of the knowledge that we human beings are always already caught up with the drama of being animal (desiring, feeling, experiencing, suffering, laboring, loving, and so on) – prepares the way for the unending catastrophes of modernity […]. Negation of the animal other is not a side concern to the "real issues" facing human social life but the pivot around which our civilization itself has formed.[161]

The idea of the history of civilization as history of domination – a (circular) progress/regress starting with the domination of nature and culminating with capitalism – is interpreted seamlessly:

---

157 *Ibid.*, 9.

158 "Nature in itself is neither good […] nor noble […]; only when apprehended as knowledge does it become the urge of the living toward peace, the consciousness which, from the beginning, has inspired the unerring resistance to *Fuhrer* and collective. What threatens the prevailing praxis and its inescapable alternatives is not nature, with which that praxis coincides, but the remembrance of nature". *Ibid.*, 211–2.

159 *Ibid.*, 33.

160 Sanbonmatsu, "Introduction", p. 7.

161 *Ibid.*, 8.

> Of the two modes of life [speciesism and capitalism], speciesism is undoubtedly the more fundamental one. This is so not only because domination and control of other species is the precondition for all capital accumulation but because our species life, our identity as a species, is organized around this dominion. Speciesism, we might say, is the "*Ur*"-modality or most primordial of all modes of human life, of human productive activity […] Simply put, capitalism is the highest form of speciesism, the "ideal," or most fully realized – and therefore most destructive – of the myriad forms that speciesism could conceivably take.[162]

In adopting such a reading, CAS scholars inherit the problems[163] of Western Marxism as a social theory and its understanding of capitalism. First of all, they adopt a philosophy of history intrinsic to *Entfremdung* in Marx. Or better said, they attempt to think of history in terms of an *origin*, assuming a starting point, or historical basis, that, gradually, became concealed or expelled with the unfolding or progression of history itself. Therefore, human activity becomes – because of its own movement – an activity of concealment that hides its own origin and foundations. At this point, the only recourse is to look back from a state of oblivion and to remember – digging through religious, scientific, philosophical forms of sedimentation.[164]

Dialectic of Enlightenment's thesis of retrogressive anthropogenesis, with its "self-fulfilling prophecy" flavor, reflects this model as a theoretical armature.[165] Moreover, Adorno and Horkheimer's philosophy of history is "exempted from scientific confirmation"[166] and social criticism is assigned solely to philosophy. Adorno and

---

162 Sanbonmatsu, "Capitalism and Speciesism" p. 3. Or again, "Though capitalism did not create speciesism, it removed the last of the cultural and technical barriers to nonhuman animal exploitation which in previous epochs had set at least some limits to the scale and intensity of speciesist exploitation […] However, notwithstanding patriarchy, racism, and other structures of power that intersect with and help constitute speciesism, the chief propulsive mechanism of speciesism today remains the capitalist world system" *Ibid*., p.25.

163 We can set aside the intrinsic essentialism and humanist/anthropocentric social ontology – indeed at the basis of Frankfurt's social theory – to sustain the animal liberation. See Craig McFarlane, *Critical Animal Studies Beyond Anthropocentrism and Humanism*, presented at "Thinking About Animals" conference, Brock University, 2011.

164 See Warren Montag, "'Foucault and the Problematic of Origins': Althusser's Reading of *Folie et deraison*", *Borderlands*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2005).

165 "With the denial of nature in human beings, not only the *telos* of the external mastery of nature but also the *telos* of one's own life becomes confused and opaque. At the moment when human beings cut themselves off from the consciousness of themselves as nature, all the purposes for which they keep themselves alive – social progress, the heightening of material and intellectual forces, indeed, consciousness itself – become void, and the enthronement of the means as the end, which in late capitalism is taking on the character of overt madness, is already detectable in the earliest history of subjectivity". Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 42–3.

166 Honneth, *The Critique of Power*, p. 59 ff.

Horkheimer describe European civilization on the basis of indirect testimonies and the history of ideas: literary and philosophical works (especially Kant's and Nietzsche's texts), Homer's *Odissey*, de Sade's tales, etc.[167]

As this brief analysis demonstrates, Western Marxism is characterized by two features. First, "the neglect of problems of politics and state theory",[168] and a repressive and instrumental theory of the state. This reading is reflected in the following quote by Sanbonmatsu: "The role of the state […] in promoting and consolidating the capitalist-speciesist system could itself be the subject of an entire book. Under capitalism, the state effectively *serves* to protect the interests of corporations and the wealthy".[169] Second, "a selective reception of Marx's theory of value, and the predominance of a 'silent orthodoxy' concerning the critique of political economy".[170] The sum of these two features can be identified in the concept of "state capitalism," the central element of *Dialectics of Enlightenment*'s analysis of the socio-economic structure of contemporary society and the liberal phase of capitalism. As highlighted by Honneth, the designation "state capitalism", originally introduced by Frankfurt scholar Friedrich Pollock to account for the National Socialist political-economic order,

> asserts a mode of organization of capitalism in which the steering of the entire economic process by the mediating sphere of the competition of individual capitalists is transferred over to the centralized administrative activity of an apparatus of domination. The calculated interests of the major corporations and the planning capacity of the state organs come together in a technical rationality to which all domains of social action are uniformly subordinated. […] The cycle of civilization comes to a close with the end of liberal capitalism since, with the formation […] of an administrative elite who exercise control, a piece of human prehistory returns – the arbitrary and violent appropriation of power by social groups.[171]

Therefore, an analysis of capitalist society and its forms of domination and socialization, cannot be undertaken, since, in the totalizing view of the history of domination, "the commodity exchange is merely the historically developed form of in-

167 For a historical reconstruction of Adorno and Horkheimer's historical-philosophical theory of domination, that trace the link between domestication – neolithic revolution – and the birth of property relations and the state, as "tracing back the history of class-societies to the enslavement of nonhuman nature", see Maurizi, *Beyond Nature*.

168 Elbe, "Between Marx, Marxism, and Marxisms".

169 Sanbonmatsu, "Capitalism and Speciesism", p. 14 ff. [emphasis added]

170 Elbe, "Between Marx, Marxism, and Marxisms".

171 Honneth, *The Critique of Power*, pp. 72–3.

strumental rationality",[172] which has developed from human self-affirmation and alienation from nature.

1.3.2 CAS and (Post-)Operaismo

Other analyses in the field of CAS, such as those of Wadiwel[173] and Kowalczyk,[174] work with Italian Marxist operaismo and postoperaismo conceptual tools. Operaismo emerged in the 1960s in Italy and then spread to other countries in the 1970s as part of the so-called New Left. It criticizes classical workers' movement and left political parties for viewing workers as a passive, social factor, challenges traditional Marxism and its orthodox determinism and economism, and operates a "Copernican Inversion,"[175] which poses class struggle as the motor of capitalist development, rather than objective, economic laws. In this view, capitalism adapts itself to the thrusts and shocks produced by the workers' movement and its capability for resistance, modifying its own productive forms (new working practices, new technologies). Only in this way can capital continue its process of valorization.

> Workers' struggles determine the course of capitalist development; but capitalist development will use those struggles for its own ends if no organized revolutionary process opens up, capable of changing that balance of forces. It is easy to see this in the case of social struggles in which the entire systemic apparatus of domination repositions itself, reforms, democratizes and stabilizes itself anew.[176]

Working from this inversion, and later post-operaist Antonio Negri's and Micheal Hardt's reinterpretation of the working class as a boundlessness "multitude", critical animal studies scholars privilege the potency of resistance and struggle of the oppressed, their possibility and ability to oppose exploitation, extending the concept of multitude to include animals. Both operaismo and post-operaismo, however,

---

172 *Ibid.*, 38.

173 Dinesh J. Wadiwel, "Do fish Resist?", *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2016), pp. 196–242; Dinesh J. Wadiwel, "Chicken harvesting machine: Animal labor, resistance, and the time of production", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 117, no. 3 (2018), pp. 527–49.

174 Kowalczyk, "Mapping Non-Human Resistance in the Age of Biocapital".

175 Operaismo rereads Marx's *opus* from the point of view of *Grundrisse*, especially *Fragment on machines*, and *Results of the Immediate Process of Production*. Harry Cleaver, "The Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxist Theory: From Valorisation to Self-Valorisation", *Open Marxism-vol. 2: Theory and Practice*, Bonefeld Werner et al. (eds.), Pluto Press, London, 1992, pp. 106–44.

176 Mario Tronti, "Our Operaismo", *New Left Review*, no. 73 (2012), pp. 119–39. According to post-operaists Negri and Hardt, the transition to post-Fordist organizations of production based on flexibility, precariousness, and availability results from adapting capitalism to the resistance of workers through absenteeism, sabotage, cultural experimentation. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 272–6.

have been criticized in their account of capitalist society. The main shortcomings of these perspectives concern crisis theory, Marx's value theory, and the consequent introduction of the notion of "immaterial labor".

To put it briefly, by emphasizing class conflict as the decisive factor for capitalist crises, (post)operaismo tends not only to overestimate and to idealize contemporary struggles against capital (but not necessarily against capitalism as such), but also misses the crucial aspect of Marx's theory of crisis, i.e. that the capitalist mode of production has *intrinsic tendencies* toward crisis which are entirely independent of the state of class struggle.[177]

Hardt and Negri reject Marx's theory of value, drawing on the alleged novelty of "immaterial labor"[178] around which they center their economic theory of contemporary capitalist society. They argue that immaterial (intellectual, communicative, affective, and relational) forms of production have become hegemonic, and, since immaterial aspects of labor products can no longer be measured, the labor theory of value is outdated. This claim is clearly based on the orthodox "labor" theory of value – equating "abstract labor" with temporal, measurable factory labor. This reading, however, shows "an ignorance regarding concepts like value-form or fetishism".[179] As Michael Heinrich writes,

> Marx's concept of "abstract labor" is not at all identical with a particular type of labor expenditure, but rather a category of social mediation: it aims at the specifically social character of privately expended, commodity producing labor – regardless of whether this commodity is a steel tube or care giving labor in a nursing home, which is run in a capitalist way.[180]

Retaining CAS's key features discussed so far, namely intersectionality and orientation to the social analysis of contemporary capitalism, while aiming at avoiding their respective criticisms (intersectionality's lack of a consistent social and power theory; economic reductionism and/or mistaken account of the social and capitalism), the following chapter elaborates a theoretical framework (or a material-social

177 See Heinrich, *Karl Marx's Capital*, pp. 169–178; Frederick H. Pitts, "Creative Industries, Value Theory and Michael Heinrich's New Reading of Marx", *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2015), pp. 197–9.

178 Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor", Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (eds.), *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996, pp. 142–57.

179 Michael Heinrich, "Invaders from Marx: On the Uses of Marxist Theory, and the Difficulties of a Contemporary Reading", 2005, http://www.oekonomiekritik.de/205Invaders.htm accessed on 9th June 2025.

180 *Ibid*. See also Heinrich, *Karl Marx's Capital*, p. 44; Frederick H. Pitts, *Critiquing Capitalism Today: New Ways to Read Marx*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2017, pp. 191–218.

logic) of capitalist societies for a materialistic approach to socio-political analysis in which species domination can be addressed in proper and comprehensive ways. This is important if we wish to orient ourselves to a socio-political reconsideration of our relations with nonhuman animals. A proposed materialist logic is articulated into three main concepts: social form, in a Marxist sense, *dispositif*, and politics.[181]

181 This perspective draws and greatly expands upon Francesco Aloe and Chiara Stefanoni, "Verso una logica dei complessi sociali capitalistici: forme, dispositivi, politica", *Liberazioni. Rivista di critica antispecista*, no. 34 (2018), pp. 38–50.