

**NOCELLA II, A. J.; SORENSON, J.; SOCHA, K. E  
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ANIMAL STUDIES: AN INTERSECTIONAL SOCIAL JUSTICE  
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**Anabela Santos**

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In the volume “Defining Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation”, Anthony J. Nocella II, John Sorenson, Kim Socha and Atsuko Matsuoka present the epistemological, theoretical and methodological bases of an emerging field in Western academia: Critical Animal Studies (CAS). Under the influence of critical theory, anarchist studies, ecopedagogy studies, and the principles of social justice, CAS is an interdisciplinary area that seeks to establish, in a holistic and coordinated way, a movement for human, animal and ecological liberation.

In 2007, one year after the renaming of the centre at the origin of CAS as the Institute for Critical Animal Studies, Steven Best, Anthony J. Nocella II, Richard Kahn, Carol Gigliotti and Lisa Kemmerer established the ten founding principles of this field of study. As stated in the introductory note to this book, Critical Animal Studies is guided by the need to promote an interdisciplinary approach; an academic environment that is active and politically committed to justice; theory-to-action politics; the intersectional understanding of systems of oppression; radical anti-capitalist politics; politics of solidarity; the politics of total liberation; the critical deconstruction of binary thinking; radical activism; and open dialogue between different social actors.

In order to explore the fundamental principles of Critical Animal Studies in detail, this volume gathers together a set of ten co-authored articles, which are divided into five specific parts: interdependency, unity, critical scholarship, radical education and taking it to the streets.

In the first part, the chapter “An Overview of Anthropocentrism, Humanism, and Speciesism in Critical Animal Theory”, by Adam Weitzenfeld and Melanie Joy, conceptualizes anthropocentrism as one of the ideological manifestations of the humanist paradigm, which sustains human supremacy over nonhuman animals. Under the aegis of Critical Animal Theory, the authors consider that anthropocentric humanism correlates, strengthens and legitimizes speciesism — the complex of social institutions and cultural discourses that subordinates nonhuman animals and erases their perspectives, interests and subjectivities. Carnism is introduced in this chapter as the highest expression of speciesist ideology in that it categorizes nonhuman animals by degrees of importance, and ontologizes only a few of these as edible or as consumables. Weitzenfeld and Joy advocate the adoption of vegan praxis in order to challenge oppressive power structures, socio-cultural discourses and individual perceptions. Informed by feminist theory, critical

race theory, environmental justice and green criminology, the chapter “Ecological Defense for Animal Liberation: A Holistic Understanding of the World”, by Amy J. Fitzgerald and David Pellow, highlights the importance of intersectionality for understanding the way in which different systems of oppression interact to produce the contexts of inequality, hierarchy and domination. Fitzgerald and Pellow focus, in particular, on the way anthropocentrism and speciesism are mutually reinforced by maintaining the binomial “culture-nature”. In common with other dichotomies (e.g. male-female, animal-human, civilized-wild), the binomial “culture-nature” is based on a hierarchical relationship, in which the dominant category (“culture”) becomes the standard and is privileged relative to its opposite category (“nature”). As stated by Fitzgerald and Pellow, the presumed superiority of human individuals over nonhuman animals (and those groups that have conventionally been associated with “nature”, such as women and black people) tend to be perpetuated in the Western context. The critical deconstruction of binary thought arises, then, as a necessary precondition for the abolition of the anthropocentric and speciesist paradigm.

In the second part, the chapter “Until All Are Free: Total Liberation through Revolutionary Decolonization, Groundless Solidarity, and the Relationship Framework”, by Sarat Colling, Sean Parson and Alessandro Arrigoni, discusses the Steven Best’s theory of “total liberation” (2011) - which highlights the need to promote, in a holistic way, human, animal and ecological liberation - seeking to expand this formulation from post-colonial theories. These authors maintain that “total liberation” inevitably presupposes individual transformation and revolutionary action (“revolutionary decolonization”), politics of solidarity (“groundless solidarity”) and considers the relationship of interdependence that human and nonhuman animals establish among themselves (“relationship framework”). For Colling, Parson and Arrigoni, the aforementioned principles are essential in combatting global capitalism and the numerous mechanisms it uses to suppress decolonization, solidarity and mutual aid, as well as to prevent the creation of individual and social ethics. In the chapter “One Struggle”, Stephanie Jenkins and Vasile Stănescu introduce the concept of “engaged veganism” as individual/social praxis which aims to end the use of nonhuman animals and all the dimensions of the animal industrial complex (e.g. food, clothing, scientific experiments, entertainment). As the expression of an integrated vision of social justice, as part of the radical ethics of care, “engaged veganism” goes against “boycott veganism”: unlike the latter, it opposes capitalist institutions, neoliberal social structures and the reduction of (vegan or anti-speciesist) activism to economic boycotts. Jenkins and Stănescu argue that “engaged veganism” and its links to anti-capitalist struggle can fight, in a sustainable way, the multiple “-isms” of oppression.

The third part of the book begins with the chapter “The Ivory Trap: Bridging the Gap between Activism and the Academy”, by Carol L. Glasser and Arpan Roy. The difficulty of access to academic institutions, the presumption of objectivity in the process of scientific production, methodological hierarchies, the policing of disciplinary boundaries and the marginalization of issues relating to social justice are identified as the main obstacles to making effective links between academia and activism. For Glasser and Roy,

scientific research should be focused on action, supported by a symbiotic relationship with members of a particular community, to foster and expand policies of (self-)emancipation. Kim Socha and Les Mitchell, who are responsible for the chapter “Critical Animal Studies of an Interdisciplinary Field: A Holistic Approach to Confronting Oppression”, discuss the importance of interdisciplinarity to overcoming the fragmentation of scientific knowledge and the segmented understanding of social phenomena. Using case studies to demonstrate the mechanisms of including Critical Animal Studies in different fields of knowledge, Socha and Mitchell argue that the eradication of power regimes and oppressive assumptions inevitably demands interdisciplinary collaboration in academic research and social praxis.

In the fourth part, the chapter “Radical Humility: Toward a More Holistic Critical Animal Studies Pedagogy”, by Lauren Corman and Tereza Vandrovcová, questions the paradigm of victimization which often informs the social (re)construction of nonhuman animals. Influenced by feminist theory and critical pedagogy — which affirm the capacity for resistance, agency and various forms of subjectivity — the authors argue the need to look at nonhuman animals not only as objects of oppression, but also as active subjects in their process of liberation. For Corman and Vandrovcová, it is important to promote heterogeneous and intersectional representations of nonhuman animals, especially in academia, in activism and in education, to enhance the critical conscience and emancipatory relational models. The chapter “Engaged Activist Research: Challenging Apolitical Objectivity”, by Lara Drew and Nik Taylor, outlines a critique of the embedding of the values of neutrality and objectivity in scientific research, taking them to be expressions of power and the interests of hegemonic groups. Drew and Taylor reveal the need to affirm the ideological and political guidelines underlying the production of knowledge, which as part of Critical Animal Studies involve a critique of capitalism, imperialism and hierarchy, as well as heterosexism, racism, ableism, speciesism and classism, among others. While they recognize academia as an apolitical, liberal and conservative institution (and therefore against the founding principles of CAS), Drew and Taylor believe that research can be configured as an act of resistance and an essential tool for the development of communities, for activism and for (radical) social transformation.

Finally, the fifth part includes the chapter “From the Classroom to the Slaughterhouse: Animal Liberation by Any Means Necessary”, in which Jennifer Grubbs and Michael Loadenthal begin by reflecting on how academia has become a neoliberal machine which, fundamentally, serves capitalist elites, commodifies knowledge and transforms students into consumers. Grubbs and Loadenthal discuss the place of non-violent direct action in the field of Critical Animal Studies, explore the tensions experienced by academics involved in illegal forms of activism, as well as address the marginalization of CAS in the university context. They also highlight the importance of reflexivity, working together and opposition to neoliberalism in academia and activism as an essential condition for achieving total liberation. Richard J. White and Erika Cudworth close this last part with the chapter “Taking it to the Streets: Challenging Systems of Domination from Below” in which they develop a critique of the exploitation of nonhuman animals rooted in (classic)

anarchist theories, particularly the thought of Élisée Reclus. Recognizing the need to go beyond the macro-politics of contestation, which is commonly associated with social movements, White and Cudworth conceptualize individual action as a focus for resistance and power against maintaining interspecies domination. In agreement with Brian Dominick (1997), which (re)positions individual practice at the centre of anarchist praxis, White and Cudworth maintain that the micro-politics of everyday living has the unique potential to dismantle, in the present, the systems of oppression through strategies such as consumer choice, the promotion of activist academia, organizing public demonstrations, direct action using civil disobedience, etc.

Without doubt, the volume “Defining Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation” is an important didactic resource and an indispensable tool for individuals, groups and communities that are acting in defense of those whose existence is threatened by exploitation, oppression and death. Despite the epistemological, theoretical and methodological limits (e.g. repetitive formulations, shallow reflection about research methods and superficial operationalization of fundamental concepts around CAS), this book emerges as a counter-narrative that challenges not only the silences, omissions and absences of an academia that it is reluctant to transcend the anthropocentric paradigm, but also the way science is pursued in the context of neoliberal capitalism. It is certainly an important moment in the consolidation of Critical Animal Studies and prefigures new lines of thought, reflection and political activism.

Anabela Santos is a PhD student funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), currently attending the FCT doctoral programme in “Communication Studies: Technology, Culture and Society” (University of Minho). She is master in Communication Sciences (University of Minho) and in Political Science (Russian State University for the Humanities). Her main research interests include media feminist studies, critical studies of animals, theories of Intersectionality and anarchists studies. She is a feminist activist and participates in LGBTQIA + movement and in the movement for animal liberation.

E-mail: [amsantos86@gmail.com](mailto:amsantos86@gmail.com)

Universidade do Minho Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Campus de Gualtar 4710-057  
Braga Portugal

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