


# Introduction

**Vesna Liponik**

ZRC SAZU, Slovenia

vesna.liponik@zrc-sazu.si

 © 2023 Vesna Liponik

I can still see myself sitting in the dark of the old and now sadly almost deserted cinema Udarnik (Strike worker) in my home town of Maribor, not more than seventeen years old, waiting for *Unser täglich Brot* (Geyrharter 2005) the documentary that shows long scenes of food production without any voice-over and practically no dialogue, to begin. I was hardly aware that I would not be able to watch the film to the end. Soon after the scene of artificial insemination of a cow began, my brain began to make unexpected comparisons with the unbearable rape scenes I remembered from other films, and I was gripped by an even more unbearable feeling that I was not only enabling these scenes, but was complicit in *rape* by drinking milk, something my feminist stomach could not bear. And as horrible and simple as this seemed at the time, what I could not have predicted as clearly as I felt it was that this question, the question of specific ‘dreadful comparisons’ and heavy (dis)entanglements, would probably stay there to puzzle me for the rest of my life.

Entanglement refers to a situation of difficult but inevitable connection, a situation in which two or more things, beings, concepts, particles are connected, regardless of the amount of proximity, and in this connection, they affect each other. The initial question for this special issue is how the question of the animal, of species(ism), enters, overlaps and is (dis)entangled with questions of race, class, gender, sexuality and ability, especially how to think these (dis)entanglements in the era of global capitalism, or rather with Marina Gržinić ‘racial necrocapitalism’ and ecological vulnerability, how to think of these (dis)entanglements in a time when a human demand for meat, a human demand for dead animal parts and fluids endangers the lives of other beings on this planet, a time when extinction cannot be thought of *as* extinction, but rather, as John Sanbonmatsu argues in this issue, as extermination, and this, unfortunately, says much more in one word about the true nature of things.

In a way, (dis)entanglement tries to capture what is so uncomfortable, and at the same time so urgent, about comparisons between the forms

of violence used by humans against humans and those used by humans against animals, which, as Dinesh Wadiwel points out in his *The War against Animals* (2015), are primarily about shared techniques and logics of violent management of life and death.

In thinking about these connections, these (dis)entanglements we are confronted with the question of how to ‘get the whole picture,’ and to get the whole picture means to see these connections but not to confuse things with each other, since ‘the risk of addressing the entanglement of all forms of oppression [always risks] obstructing the idiosyncrasies of each’ (Boisseron 2018, xxi–xxii).

Yet this is an increasingly pressing task if we are to think of our future and present as a shared transspecies future, if we are to think of the (un)common, the community, as possible sites of common revolt and transspecies alliances in this increasingly disintegrating world.

And as the conversation ‘Hegemony, Animal Liberation, and Gramscian Praxis’ between Wadiwel and Sanbonmatsu begins in this issue, thirteen years after Sanbonmatsu edited the collection *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation* the questions and challenges he raised: the tension between the left and the animal liberation movement, and the need for the movement to engage in a ‘penetrating critique of, among other things, patriarchy and male violence, the links between racialization and animalization, or the capitalist state as such’ (Sanbonmatsu 2011, 30) remain as relevant as ever.

The issue opens with a text ‘Animal (Dis)Entanglement: Value-Form and Animal-Form’ by Marina Gržinić Mauhler. Drawing on her extensive work on racial necrocapitalism, Gržinić places the animal as commodity at the centre of her reflections, coining the terms animal-form and sub-forms (animal-money, animal-object) to better grasp the animal’s position in capitalist production, reproduction and accumulation, while also highlighting the role of colonialism and racialisation.

Animals are deeply embedded in the process of capital accumulation, but as Gržinić argues, animals have a special position within the capitalist system and can also function as ‘counter-capital.’ This is where animal money comes into play. And Gržinić could hardly give a better example than the current plan to eradicate the nutrias from the Ljubljanica River, an example that (unfortunately) also perfectly illustrates the deadly link between racism and speciesism in capitalism.

This is the fate of the descendants of those South American nutrias that escaped from fur farms in the 1930s, as Gržinić points out, and be-

came full-blooded citizens, forming bonds of affection and coexistence with many, nutrias without whom Ljubljana will never be the same, nutrias whose eradication must necessarily be considered in the context of the accelerated gentrification and touristisation of ‘the most beautiful city in the world.’ As soon as they were no longer useful to the fur industry, when their existence was no longer profitable, nutrias became redundant and were labelled as a threat, as invaders that threatened ‘native species’ and ‘upset the balance,’ which, as soon as they were no longer useful in the capitalist system of exchange, had to be eliminated or reintroduced into that system. Their carcasses, therefore, should not be wasted either, but can become food for dogs in animal shelters. And the deadly cycle is complete.

Claire Parkinson, also co-founder and co-director (with Richard Twine) of the Centre for Human-Animal Studies at Edge Hill University, which celebrates its 10th anniversary this year and was the first of its kind in Europe when it was established (Parkinson and Twine 2024), continues with another topical issue, this time in the British context – the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991). Her text ‘Defining Dangerous Dogs: Breed, Class and Masculinity’ unfolds another deadly entanglement in capitalism, this time a historical connection between gender, class and breed in British culture, while answering the question of what it is that is ‘really’ dangerous.

The article begins by problematising the very concept of ‘breed,’ which emerged precisely in the period of rising capitalism in the 19th century that also saw the occurrence of institutional standardization and classification of dogs by national kennel clubs based on their appearance. It goes on to show the historical continuities that link social class to certain types of dog, the links that have influenced legislative decision-making, and analyses how these links have simultaneously been reinforced by a media and political discourse that has completely dominated the public and political debate on ‘dangerous dogs’ and affected the lives of many transspecies communities.

The followings papers by Justin Simpson titled ‘A Posthumanist Social Epistemology: On the Possibility of Nonhuman Epistemic Injustice’ and Simon John Ryle’s ‘The Uncanny Poetics of Capitalocene Meat: Carnologistics and Octavia Butler’s “Bloodchild”’ both focus on the (dis)entanglements of critical animal studies and posthumanisms. Simpson’s additional focus is on positioning of animals in the environmental ethics and social epistemology. If the former conceives of non-humans

primarily as passive victims, the latter can be accused of not including non-humans at all, which means that any further consideration of possible epistemic injustices towards non-humans is already pre-empted by the anthropocentric assumption of social epistemology. Simpson therefore ‘stays with the trouble,’ or rather ‘troubles the trouble,’ and suggests that non-humans – and it should be emphasised that he is not just referring to animals here – should first be considered as non-human knowers and moreover as teachers, and analyses the ways in which non-humans are subjected to epistemic injustice.

But where Simpson points to the productive links that critical animal studies can weave with posthumanisms, Ryle focuses on the places where the relationship between the two disciplines becomes ‘entangled,’ or more specifically, he challenges posthumanist positive readings of symbiotic notions of interspecies relations in Octavia Butler’s short story ‘Blood-child’ (2005) that overlook the dynamics of power and control in her literature.

Ryle therefore, while ‘staying with the flesh’ (Ryle 2023, 232), suggests a significantly different reading of this sci-fi feminist classic. Thus, if we read Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy (2000) in the context of a nuclear mundane (Brezavšček and Čičigoj 2023) in the special section on the return of nuclear weapon discourse edited by Nina Cvar for the last issue of *Anthropos*, Ryle at the intersection of vegan studies and recent anthropologies of animal agriculture and slaughter offers an uncanny carnological reading of Butler’s work that points to symbiotic relationships as a mode of anthropocentric and epistemic control.

The first part of the journal closes an extensive and in-depth look not only at the philosophy of the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci and a discussion of the relevance of his thought to the contemporary animal rights movement, but also a whole analysis of how speciesism is irredeemably embedded in our understanding of the world. The second part of the title of this special issue is taken from this conversation. In this passage, Sanbonmatsu (2023, 241) emphasises that

[w]hat animal advocates seek isn’t merely the ‘liberation’ of animals, but a *new form of civilization*, a civilization based on quite different social, ecological, economic and ethical principles than the ones that form constitute the present basis of society. In this connection, the problem of speciesism cannot be solved in the courts. Only through gaining mastery over the terms of debate and thought can the animal

rights movement thereby transform the total ensemble of existing social relations.

*Miscellanea* brings together three book reviews and three conference reports. Les Mitchell reviews Teya Brooks Pribac's award-winning *Enter the Animal: Cross Species Perspectives on Grief and Spirituality* (2021). *Animals, Mind and Matter: The Inside Story* (2022), the latest book by literary theorist and eco-feminist Josephine Donovan, is the focus of Aljaž Krivec's inquiry. Jelka Kernev Štrajn takes a closer look at the 'result' of the last European Researchers' Night, held under the slogan Man, Animal – a comprehensive collection titled *Človek, žival: poglavja o njunih soočanjih*, edited by Sašo Jerše and Mateja Gaber (2023). The triad of reviews is followed by another triad of conference reports. Betlem Pallardó-Azorín reports on the international conference 'The Factual Animal: Audiovisual Representations of Real Other-than-Human Animals,' held from 29 November to 1 December at the Faculty of Philology, Translation and Communication of the Universitat de València in Spain. In the same year, the joint 8th International Animal Futures Conference and the 8th Biennial Conference of the European Association for Critical Animal Studies (EACAS) was held in Tallinn, Estonia, and online, from 16 to 18 June, known for its horizontal structure, as Saara Mildeberg points out in her report on the conference. The last text in this section is not so much a report on the international conference Thinking Animals, organised by the Institute of Ethnomusicology, ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, Slovenia, from 16 to 19 October, but rather Anja Radaljac's critical response to some 'animal conference issues,' with their broad implications, which in a way underlines why we need contributions such as the one before you, why we need 'a better alternative' (Sanbonmatsu 2023, 242). This is the 'better alternative' that the authors in this issue have allowed me to put together. Please enjoy the read!

### References

- Boisseron, Bénédicte. 2018. *Afro-Dog: Blackness and the Animal Question*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Brezavšček, Pia, and Katja Čičigoj. 2023. »Sublimno in mondeno atomske bombe: prevračanje dualističnega mišljenja pri feminističnih in postkolonialnih kritikah jedrskega kompleksa.« *Anthropos: Journal of Philosophy & Psychology* 55 (1): 13–29.
- Brooks Pribac, Teya. 2021. *Enter the Animal: Cross Species Perspectives on Grief and Spirituality*. Sydney: Sydney University Press.
- Butler, Octavia E. 2000. *Lilith's Brood*. New York: Grand Central Publishing.

- . 2005. *Bloodchild and Other Stories*. New York: Seven Stories.
- Dangerous Dogs Act. 1991. *UK Public General Acts*, c. 65. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1991/65/contents>.
- Donovan, Josephine. 2022. *Animals, Mind and Matter: The Inside Story*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.
- Geyrharter, Nikolas, dir. 2005. *Unser täglich Brot*. Nikolaus Geyrhalter Filmproduktion, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), 3Sat.
- Gržinič Mauhler, Marina. 2023. 'Animal (Dis)Entanglement: Value-Form and Animal-Form.' *Anthropos: Journal of Philosophy & Psychology* 55 (2): 161–175.
- Jerše, Sašo, and Mateja Gaber, ed. 2023. *Človek, žival: poglavja o njunih soočanjih*. Ljubljana: Založba Univerze v Ljubljani.
- Parkinson, Claire, and Richard Twine. 2024. 'Reflections on a Decade of cfHAS.' Edge Hill University, 15 January. <https://sites.edgehill.ac.uk/cfhas/blog-post-january-2-2024/?fbclid=IwAR1FhGXrLxsRqwwkuFWsKMGtn6ZYoXlkbGUGhvyYgp6lonxQtM8T2sq3FCKc>.
- Ryle, Simon John. 2023. 'The Uncanny Poetics of Capitalocene Meat: Carnologistics and Octavia Butler's "Bloodchild."' *Anthropos: Journal of Philosophy & Psychology* 55 (2): 215–236.
- Sanbonmatsu, John, ed. 2011. *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Sanbonmatsu, John, and Dinesh Wadiwel. 2023. 'Hegemony, Animal Liberation, and Gramscian Praxis: An Interview with John Sanbonmatsu by Dinesh Wadiwel.' *Anthropos: Journal of Philosophy & Psychology* 55 (2): 237–268.
- Wadiwel, Dinesh Joseph. 2015. *The War against Animals*. Leiden: Brill.

#### Note

This introduction is a result of the research programme P6-0014 'Conditions and Problems of Contemporary Philosophy,' which is funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.