

The Rise of Critical Animal Studies: Putting Theory into Action and Animal Liberation into Higher Education¹

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“The capacity to contain and manipulate subversive imagination is an integral part of the given society.” Herbert Marcuse

In the last three decades, animal studies has experienced an exponential growth rate in the academy. The “animal turn” in academic research has moved throughout humanities, the fine arts, and social sciences; it has crossed into fields such as psychology, philosophy, anthropology, political science, sociology; and it has made its mark in literature, history, cultural and critical studies and the arts, geography, philosophy, feminism, and queer theory. Currently, there are at least 40 courses being offered in departments that span these disciplines in universities and colleges in North America, the UK and New Zealand. The turn is manifest in an explosion of articles, books, conferences, and academic programs opening up from Canada to New Zealand.

Without question, these trends will continue and animal studies will evolve in new and stimulating directions. As its popularity increases, this new perspective will gain ever-broader acceptance within academia and, one would hope, within the public realm at large. Within a decade, perhaps, “Animal Studies” programs will be institutionalized globally throughout

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academia and take their rightful place alongside Women's Studies, African-American Studies, Chicano/a Studies, Disability Studies, and Queer Studies.³

This growing popularity of animal studies, moving it from the theoretical margins toward the academic mainstream, is both laudable and lamentable. For as animal studies becomes a potential force of enlightenment and change in public attitudes and behaviors toward animals, its academic proponents can only advance it by currying for respect, credibility, and acceptance, which can only come by domesticating the threatening nature of the critique of human supremacism, Western dualism, and the human exploitation of nonhuman animals. Throughout the world philosophers, sociologists, historians, literary critics, and others who embrace this fascinating and fecund field of study seek their rightful and equal place within academia, without realizing that animal studies is in grave danger of becoming co-opted and contained, if it has not already been muzzled and neutralized by a corporate-bureaucratic machine and its codes and logics. For once it takes shape within the sterile, normalizing, hierarchical, and repressive environment of academia, animal studies, like any other knowledge or discourse, is tied to abstract, arcane, technical, and apolitical codes and discourses, and is reified as a marketable academic product and commodity as well. The Faustian pact that any discipline or professor-employee signs with academia demands that they obey the logics of abstraction, profit, utility, and careerism; that they will never seek to mediate theory with practice (unless they wish to risk their reputations as "scholars"); and, above all, that they will never question the legitimacy of social power and organize against it, or they shall quite possibly be exiled from the ivy-walled kingdom.

³ To forestall possible confusion, "Animal Studies" with capital letters designates an institutionalized program or department, whereas "animal studies" refers to relevant research orientations, writings, discourses, and knowledges independent of any institutionalized status.

The recipe for the “success” of animal studies – immersion in abstraction, indulgent use of existing and new modes of jargon, pursuit of theory-for-theory’s sake, avoidance of social controversy (however intellectually controversial it may often be), eschewing political involvement, and keeping a very safe distance from “extremists” and “radicals” agitating for animal rights - is also the formula for its failure, upon being co-opted, tamed, and neutralized by academia. Consequently, the profound ethical, social, political, and environmental issues of animal exploitation are buried in dense theoretical webs; the lucidity and power of clear communication is oiled over with jargon and inscrutable language accessible only to experts; politically-charged issues are depoliticized; and theory is divorced from practice, resistance, and struggle. And all this unfolds amidst a new extinction crisis, the last one being 65 million years ago which wiped out the dinosaurs and over half of existing species,⁴ and as a massive planetary social and ecological crisis begins to unfold through the reverberations of global climate change.

But the fissures and cracks in the emerging paradigm of animal studies create openings for radical interventions. In this essay I emphasize the important virtues and contributions of animal studies, but the most crucial insights and implications of the challenges to humanist histories and the debilitating dualism between human animal and nonhuman animal are obfuscated and blocked by esoteric language, detached standpoints and apolitical comportment in a world in crisis, and humanity at the most critical crossroads in its entire history. What I am calling “mainstream animal studies” (MAS) should be superseded by

⁴ On the current extinction crisis, see Peter Ward, *The End of Evolution: A Journey in Search of Clues to the Third Mass Extinction Facing Planet Earth* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995); and Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin, *The Sixth Extinction: Patterns of Life and the Future of Humankind* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996).

“critical animal studies” (CAS), a viable form of which my ICAS colleagues and I have been trying to develop in theory and in practice for nearly a decade.⁵

This alternative to the arid and shockingly detached and complacent nature of MAS is itself growing, as the bankruptcy and irrelevance of ivory tower thinking becomes increasingly clear at a time of urgent social and ecological crisis. Whereas MAS remains entombed in the catacombs of academia, CAS seeks to breakdown and mediate oppositions between theory and practice, college and community, and scholarship and citizenship, in order to make philosophy (in a broad sense) again a force of change and to repatriate intellectuals to the public realm. Against MAS, CAS seeks to illuminate problems and pose solutions through vivid, concrete, and accessible language. It openly avows its explicit ethical and practical commitment to the freedom of well-being of all animals and to a flourishing planet. It opposes all forms of discrimination, hierarchy, and oppression as a complex of problems to be extirpated from the root, not sliced off at the branch. It supports civil disobedience, direct action, and economic sabotage. And it promotes bridge-building and alliance politics as the

⁵ Core members of ICAS have used the discourse and formulated the positions and politics of CAS against MAS since founding our original group, the Center on Animal Liberation Affairs (CALA) in 2001. For ICAS’s definitional platform on “critical animal studies,” see our ten-point statement below and at: <http://www.criticalanimalstudies.org/about.htm>. For recent attempts to define this field, see my introductory essays to the *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, Volume V, Issue I, 2007 (http://www.criticalanimalstudies.org/JCAS/Journal_Articles_download/Issue_6/introduction.pdf); and (with Carol Gigliotti) Volume V, Issue II, 2007 (http://www.criticalanimalstudies.org/JCAS/Journal_Articles_download/Issue_7/introduction.pdf). For clear examples of CAS, see my essays: “Rethinking Revolution: Animal Liberation, Human Liberation, and the Future of the Left,” *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, vol.2, no.3, June 2006 (http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol2/vol2_no3_Best_rethinking_revolution.htm); “The Killing Fields of South Africa: Eco Wars, Species Apartheid, and Total Liberation,” *Fast Capitalism*, Issue 2, Volume 2, 2007 (http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/2_2/home.html); and “Minding the Animals: Ethology and the Obsolescence of Left Humanism,” *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*,” Volume 5, Number 2 (Spring 2009) http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol5/vol5_no2_best_minding_animals.htm. I develop a detailed interdisciplinary and politically-oriented CAS position in my forthcoming book, *Animal Liberation and Moral Progress: The Struggle for Human Evolution* (Lanham, MD: Roman and Littlefield 2010). David Nibert’s book, *Animal Rights, Human Rights: Entanglements of Oppression and Liberation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002) approximates the kind of approach I advocate here, as does Bob Torres’ book, *Making a Killing: The Political Economy of Animal Rights* (Berkeley CA: 2007), but the latter book is severely marred in its uncritical embrace of the fundamentalist pacifist views of Gary Francione and the social ecology of Murray Bookchin, and its careless attempt to merge these incompatible viewpoints.

means to promote the large-scale social transformations that alone can free the continuum of animal life and the dynamic natural world from the elite's colonization and conquest and the building fires of global climate change.

Contributions of Mainstream Animal Studies

In many ways, the international, transdisciplinary, and pluralist field of animal studies defies easy categorization and generalization. It is still, moreover, a young and emerging framework (even as it congeals into theoreticism and apoliticism), and retains a kind of "Wild West" anything goes approach, which helps partly to account for its broad appeal. *Animal studies is everything to everyone* -- including welfarists, carnivores, speciesists, pro-vivisectionists, and sundry human supremacists and animal exploiters.

While a rich variety of animal studies approaches abound, we can identify some broad orientations, some of which rely on a clear empiricist style of writing and argumentation, while others take a far more esoteric, hermeneutic, and postmodern approach. These include: empirical and socio-psychological viewpoints; feminist/ecofeminist methods; the Continental/postmodern theory school; and posthumanist outlooks. Whether embedded in assumptions or brought to the fore, the political biases and orientations of MAS also are diverse, and may tend toward welfarism, rights, or abolitionism/liberationism. Among official animal advocacy organizations and academic-affiliated groups, however, CAS is unique in its defense of direct action tactics, its willingness to engage and debate controversial issues such as anti-capitalism, academic repression, and the use of sabotage as a resistance tactic; its emphasis on the need for total liberation stressing the commonalities binding various oppressed groups; and the importance of learning from and with activists.

The term “animal studies,” in fact, is a misnomer that impedes understanding from the start, for the field is not about nonhuman animals in isolation from human animals, but rather about human-nonhuman animal *relations*. Animal studies examines how our lives, identities, and histories are inseparably tied to other sentient, intelligent, communicative, and cultured beings in ways that human animals (in Western cultures above all) have systematically denied. Various writers and thinkers have thereby erased the fundamental, constitutive role nonhuman animals have played in the biological and social development of *Homo sapiens*, as human beings have of course for the last ten millennia domesticated and controlled every fact of every useful animal, an exploitative power now extended into systematic manipulation of animals’ genomes.

Following the lead of historicists, poststructuralists, postmodernists, feminists, and others who challenged and dismantled (via the method of “deconstruction”) binary oppositions pivotal to Western ideology and hierarchical rule, animal studies theorists have rearranged the conceptual furniture in the house of humanism. They have called into question the essentialist and dualist assumptions underpinning false views of humans and other animals alike. In doing so they have exposed the vain attempts to separate mind and body, the rational and the emotional, culture and nature, men (the masculine) and women (the feminine), and so on. These critical theorists reject Platonic metaphysics and notions that natural, human, and conceptual realities are grounded in or reflect some unchanging substance or essence.

Whereas postmodernists have deconstructed the numerous binary oppositions humans have created throughout Western history, many took apart everything but the Berlin Wall dividing

human from nonhuman animals.⁶ Animal theorists take it to the next level to dismantle the bifurcation between the “human” and “animal.” Consequently, animal theorists show that humans constructed their own “natures” and that of other animals as well principally through fallacious dualisms and the distorting lens of speciesism; this effectively prevented philosophers and scientists from grasping biological and social evolution in terms of a unity in difference and a difference in unity. It produced a theoretical mystification that both overestimated the fetishized “rationality” of humans and underestimated the amazing forms of intelligence found throughout virtually every animal species (such as specifically explored by the revolutionary field of “cognitive ethology” or “ethology,” which could be said to emerge with Darwin in the later part of the nineteenth century, was revived with the work of Donald Griffin in the 1980s, and was subsequently advanced and popularized by scientists and writers such as Roger Fouts, Frans de Wall, and Marc Bekoff).⁷ CAS argues that the “animal” includes all sentient beings, including humans, and thus “animal liberation” cannot be properly formulated and enacted apart from “human liberation,” and vice versa; it argues in addition that species survival is dependent upon a flourishing environment and global ecology, and thus animal, human, and Earth liberation are inseparably intertwined in the politics of “total liberation.” CAS is a critical human studies, and analyses how the discourse of the “human” has been constituted in dualistic, speciesist, racist, patriarchal, and imperialist terms.

⁶ This is not to say that major postmodern thinkers operated with an uncritical humanism, as certainly thinkers like Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and Michel Foucault dismantled Cartesian concepts of human agency, but with exceptions such as Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “becoming animal,” which invites a playful dissolution of species boundaries, they rarely explored humans as distinct kinds of animals in relation to other animals. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1988).

⁷ See Steven Best, “Minding the Animals: Ethology and the Obsolescence of Left Humanism.”

“The question of the animal,” writes philosopher Matt Calarco, is now being used by many scholars to highlight “the notion that humanist and anthropocentric conceptions of subjectivity must be called into question.”⁸ Such a discursive approach would analyze, for instance, how the Western world fractures the evolutionary continuity of human/nonhuman existence by reducing animals to (irrational, unthinking) “Others” who stand apart from (rational, thinking) human Subjects. Animal studies can show, moreover, that the same discourses used to devalue other sentient beings as “animals” – mindless, “savage,” disorderly “beasts” to whom humans have no moral obligations and treat as they sit fit – are used to exploit and massacre human groups (e.g., Jews, women, and people of color) once they are dehumanized and reduced to “animals” themselves. Thus, the connections between human oppression of other animals and of themselves are deep and profound.

The Animal Standpoint

Postmodern critiques have been hugely influential in many theoretical strains of animal studies, but theorists could not employ the insights of postmodernism without overcoming their limitations. This is crucial for two reasons. First, deconstructionists and social constructionists are typically speciesists and dogmatic humanists (even those who deconstruct “humanism”!) who rarely challenge the human/animal dichotomy and analyze how it is used to advance false views of all animal, human and nonhuman. Second, they fail to see that the human/animal opposition underpins oppositions between reason/emotions, thought/body, men/women, white/black, and Western/non-Western. Yet as noted by theorists (e.g., Keith Thomas, Jim Mason, and Charles Patterson)⁹ with broader optics and more inclusive theories

⁸ Matthew Calarco, “Animals in Continental Philosophy,” http://www.hnet.org/~animal/ruminations_calarco.html

⁹ See Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981); Jim Mason, *An Unnatural Order: Uncovering the Roots of Our Domination of Nature*

than humanism, speciesism and animal domestication provided the conceptual template and social practice whereby humans begin to clearly distinguish between “human rationality” and “animal irrationality.”¹⁰ Animals – defined as “brute beasts” lacking “rationality” – thereby provided the moral basement into which one could eject women, people of color, and other humans deemed to be subhuman or deficient in (Western male) “humanity.”

Whereas nearly all histories, even so-called “radical” narratives, have been written from the human standpoint, a growing number of theorists have broken free of the speciesist straightjacket to examine history and society from the standpoint of (nonhuman) animals. This approach, as I define it, considers the interaction between human and nonhuman animals – past, present, and future -- and the need for profound changes in the way humans define themselves and relate to other sentient species and to the natural world as a whole.

What I call the “animal standpoint” examines the origins and development of societies through the dynamic, symbiotic interrelationship between human and nonhuman animals. It therefore interprets history not from an evolutionary position that reifies human agency as the autonomous actions of a Promethean species, but rather from a co-evolutionary perspective that sees nonhuman animals as inseparably embedded in human history and as dynamic agents in their own right.¹¹

and Each Other (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993); and Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002). All three books develop penetrating critiques of dualism and speciesism, and grasp commonalities of oppression, but they also lack a political viewpoint and tactic in response to the immense problems they raise, and thus in a crucial way fall short of CAS as I attempt to define it.

¹⁰ Eco-feminists argue that speciesism and patriarchy emerged together in history, as part of the same hierarchical cloth of agricultural society, and so constitute the basis of, or significantly influence, other forms of hierarchy and oppression. See, for instance, Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

¹¹ I develop this concept of the animal standpoint in great detail in my forthcoming book, *Animal Liberation and Moral Progress: The Struggle for Human Evolution*.

The animal standpoint seeks to illuminate the origins and development of dominator cultures, to preserve the wisdom and heritage of egalitarian values and social relations, and to discern what moral and social progress means in a far deeper sense than what is discernible through humanist historiography, anthropology, social theory, and philosophy. However “critical,” “subversive,” “groundbreaking,” or “radical” their probing of historical and social dynamics, very few theorists have managed to see beyond the humanist bias in order to adopt a proper analytical and moral relation to other animals; they have failed, in other words, to grasp the importance of nonhuman animals in human life, the profound ways in which the domination of humans over other animals creates conflict and disequilibrium in human relations to one another and to the Earth as a whole.

Thus, the animal standpoint seeks generally to illuminate human biological and social evolution in important new ways, such as reveal the origins, dynamics, and development of dominator cultures, social hierarchies, economic and political inequalities, and asymmetrical systems of power that are violent and destructive to everything they touch. Providing perspectives and insights unattainable through other historical approaches, the animal standpoint analyzes how the domination of humans over nonhuman animals is intimately linked to the domination of humans over one another, as it also brings to light the environmental impact of large-scale animal slaughter and exploitation.

A key thesis of animal standpoint theory is that nonhuman animals have been key driving and shaping forces of human thought, psychology, moral and social life, and history overall, and that in fundamental ways, the oppression of human over human is rooted in the oppression of human over nonhuman animal. Animal standpoint theory thus leads us ineluctably to understanding the commonalities of oppression, and hence to alliance politics and the

systemic revolutionary viewpoint of total liberation.¹² It demonstrates – would that dogmatic Left, eco-humanists, and so-called “environmentalists” take note! -- the profound importance of veganism and the animal rights/liberation movement for human liberation, peace and justice, and ecological healing and balance.

A Critique of Pure Theory

“The contemporary effort to reduce the scope and the truth of philosophy is tremendous, and the philosophers themselves proclaim the modesty and inefficacy of philosophy. It leaves the established reality untouched; it abhors transgression.” Herbert Marcuse

CAS shares with MAS an interdisciplinary approach and engagement with notions of our relationships with and representations of nonhuman animals. But CAS differs from MAS in its explicit normative and political focus; in its critique of capitalism, imperialism, and hierarchical oppression in all forms; and its commitment to theory for the sake of total liberation, not for theory’s sake alone. Animal standpoint theory is not “neutral” or “objective” in any pretentious scientific, historical, or philosophical way; rather it defends and advocates a total revolution that works to dismantle every oppressive and dysfunctional system of hierarchy that thwarts freedom, creative activity, self-organization, and diversification.

In the current “Wild West” state of affairs in MAS, however, anything goes; including the detached pursuit of abstract and esoteric topics amidst a rapidly worsening animal holocaust and planetary eco-crisis. Here the underlying liberalism and pluralist relativism one finds in many quarters of MAS merges with complacency about urgent ethical, practical,

¹² See Steven Best, “The Killing Fields of South Africa: Eco Wars, Species Apartheid, and Total Liberation.”

political, and ecological issues, as part and parcel of a “repressive tolerance” (Marcuse) for speciesism, abstraction, and moral incoherence.

The abysmal state of MAS was evident recently as international animal studies scholars penned a blitzkrieg of missives to the H-animal list that could easily have been mistaken for the discourse of a pro-vivisection, meat-eating, pet-breeding, or general purpose animal exploitation site. Specifically, the Orwellian Wordfest began in December 2007, when Anita Guerrini, a University of California Santa Barbara Environmental Studies professor, earnestly wrote:

Does Animal Studies necessarily imply animal advocacy? Much, although not all, that I have read in this field takes some degree an animal rights/liberation/advocacy perspective. That is, the point of Animal Studies seems to be to advocate a certain political point of view, and this influences the kinds of work that have appeared thus far. Is there room in Animal Studies for people who, say, think eating meat is not wrong? Or that experimentation on animals in some circumstances is somehow justified? As someone who has written about animal experimentation quite a lot, but who has not unreservedly condemned it, I am not sure that I have a place in Animal Studies as it is currently defined. I don't think all uses of animals are good, and I don't think mistreating animals is ever justified. But I do think some human uses of animals are justified.¹³

This professor, commending the field of animal studies for its “growing sophistication,” came out as a defender of vivisection, a carnivore, and a clichéd welfarist who believes humans are inherently privileged and superior beings who can legitimately harm, exploit, and kill animals so long as they do so “humanely.” The responses from the list were mostly supportive (e.g., “Thank you for your interesting questions!”) and uncritical of the contradiction of a speciesist seeking a rightful place in the field of animal studies. Her insinuating questions, as at least a few respondents pointed out, were no less repulsive and incongruous than misogynists trying to ingratiate themselves in Women’s Studies or racists whose theoretical and historical

¹³ These and other exchanges are archived at: <http://www.h-net.org/~animal>.

interest in, and support of, slavery, lynching, and the Tuskegee experiments pursuing careers in African-American Studies.

Blatant forms of discrimination prevail in animal studies that would never be tolerated in other programs such as women's studies or African-American studies. Here, rather than being politely received, the patriarchal and racist equivalent of Anita Guerrini would have been vilified, reported, pilloried, fired, and run out of academia forever. But speciesist double standards prevail in animal studies, where sexist and racist discourse is not tolerated by progressive women and men in other areas. Indeed, after Guerrini broke the ice, erudite scholars weighed in on whether or not one could do animal studies if one supported vivisection, took their children to see circuses, hunted animals for food, or bought "meat" from the store for the family dinner. This was followed, astonishingly enough, by debates over whether it is acceptable to liquefy a goldfish in a blender for "performance art" (a work apparently intended to get us to "think" about animals, which of course perfectly justifies the act).

For academics whose commitment to animals is strictly abstract and theoretical, nothing more than an interesting topic of research and form of academic capital, there is no contradiction here. But for anyone who understands the real, concrete suffering of animals and the logical consequences – i.e., veganism and animal liberation - of valuing them as living beings rather than as signs, referents, texts, and publications, the contradiction of speciesists working in the field of animal studies is startling. In this deplorable context, the old saying that "A rat is a thing into which you inject chemicals to produce a scientific paper" needs to be revised thus: "An animal is an object, sign, referent, or historical abstraction that you reify and allegorize in order to produce a book, article, or conference paper."

On shameful display on the H-animal list here were the inherent limitations, contradictions, hypocrisies, and absurdities of MAS, such that the term “animal studies” was drained of meaning until it became a conceptual Transformer one could shape, mould, and morph to one’s liking. It became apparent that someone interested in researching and publishing in the animal studies area need not have any specific moral commitment to animals whatsoever; rather, all one needed was a scholarly “curiosity” about human/animal interaction, a fetishized inquisitiveness such as one might have about the invention of Roman plumbing or the role of eunuchs in Chinese dynasties. It is in fact the same attitude of “curiosity,” the same immoral amoralism, and the same absence of affect about one’s “objects of study” that drives vivisectors and has inspired some of the most unimaginable and obscene “experiments” (e.g., sensory deprivation, mother separation, enforced crack cocaine addition, and LD50 lethal dose injections designed to kill half of the “test population” with deadly substances to indicate the “acute toxicity” levels, etc., ad nauseam). But theoretical engagement of human exploitation of animals is no ordinary musing without momentous social and ecological relevance and import.

Lacking a coherent moral context, and populated by careerists and opportunists climbing onto the trendy bandwagon, MAS is a field where theorists can examine human/animal relations as an intellectual exercise undertaken without social, ethical, and political contexts or consequences. After all, it’s fun, interesting, the new wave, “progressive,” and the scholar who begins work in this field might get some new publications, make new contacts, kick-start an incipient career or revivify a flagging vocation. Thus, one finds carnivores, provivisectionists, and garden-variety speciesists operating in an academic terrain where a considerable number of theorists view animals as historical referents and abstract objects of

research, rather than giving urgent attention to those beings who live and suffer now, to the thousands of species teetering on the brink of extinction, and to the profound obligations we have as scholars to dramatically highlight these problems and to take aggressive action to protect and liberate present and future generations of nonhuman animals.

I must emphasize that I do not use the word “critical” in some vague generic sense already in use by some “critical animal studies” writers and programs; rather I espouse a position that is critical in two key senses. First, it is critical of (mainstream) *animal studies itself*, for its moral incoherence and aloofness (studying exploited beings without explicit commitment to ending their oppression, and indeed, further exploiting animals for their theoretical worth and career capital) and its overly abstract, esoteric, and jargon-laden language that is inscrutable to the general public and inherently elitist. The version of animal studies promoted by ICAS is critical, second, of the entire social system and complex of oppression and domination, such as has developed throughout the human-established “civilization” of the last ten thousand years, and it seeks a radical political analysis and tactic in response to systemic social and environmental problems.

Thus, in conditions where animal studies is already entrenched 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, carnivorous lifestyles, and at least tacit – sometimes overt -- support of numerous forms of animal exploitation such as vivisection, critical animal studies emerges as a necessary and vital alternative. CAS repudiates the insularity, detachment, hypocrisy, and profound limitations of mainstream animal studies that vaporize animals’ flesh and blood realities to reduce them to reified signs, symbols, images, words on a page, or protagonists in a historical drama. MAS

utterly fails to engage animals not only as “referents,” “signs,” and “texts,” but rather, first and foremost, as sentient beings who live and die in the most sadistic, barbaric, and wretched cages of technohell that humanity has been able to devise.

In contrast to the dominant orientations of animal studies, as well as to tendencies prominent throughout the animal welfare and animal rights movements, ICAS advances a critical, radical, and transformative alternative 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 and the critique of capitalism.

2. Rejects pseudo-objective academic analysis by explicitly clarifying its normative values and political commitments, such that there are no positivist illusions whatsoever that theory is disinterested or writing and research is non-political.

3. Eschews narrow academic viewpoints and the debilitating theory-for-theory’s sake position in order to link theory to practice, analysis to politics, and the academy to the community.

4. Advances a holistic understanding of the commonality of oppressions, such that speciesism, sexism, racism, ablism, statism, classism, militarism and other hierarchical ideologies and institutions are viewed as parts of a larger, interlocking, global system of domination.

5. *Rejects apolitical, conservative, and liberal positions in order to advance an anti-capitalist, and, more generally, a radical anti-hierarchical politics, This orientation seeks to dismantle all structures of exploitation, domination, oppression, torture, killing, and power in favor of decentralizing and democratizing society at all levels and on a global basis.*

6. *Rejects reformist, single-issue, nation-based, legislative, strictly animal interest politics in favor of alliance politics and solidarity with other struggles against oppression and hierarchy.*

7. *Champions a politics of total liberation which grasps the need for, and the inseparability of, human, nonhuman animal, and Earth liberation in one comprehensive, though diverse, struggle; to paraphrase Martin Luther King Jr.: a threat to liberation anywhere is a threat to liberation everywhere.*

8. *Deconstructs and reconstructs the socially constructed binary oppositions between human and nonhuman animals, a move basic to mainstream animal studies, but also looks to illuminate related dichotomies between culture and nature, civilization and wilderness and other dominator hierarchies to emphasize the historical limits placed upon humanity, nonhuman animals, cultural/political norms, and the liberation of nature as part of a transformative project that seeks to transcend these limits towards greater freedom and ecological harmony.*

9. *Openly engages controversial radical politics and militant strategies used in all kinds of social movements, such as those that involve economic sabotage and high-pressure direct action tactics.*

10. Seeks to create openings for critical dialogue on issues relevant to Critical Animal Studies across a wide-range of academic groups; citizens and grassroots activists; the staffs of policy and social service organizations; and people in private, public, and non-profit sectors. Through – and only through -- new paradigms of ecopedagogy, bridge-building with other social movements, and a solidarity-based alliance politics, is it possible to build the new forms of consciousness, knowledge, social institutions that are necessary to dissolve the hierarchical society that has enslaved the life forms on this planet and all for the last ten thousand years.¹⁴

CAS is engaged, politically radical, and as concrete as possible in its language and orientation toward oppression of all forms and toward the rapidly worsening ecological crisis that demands our full attention. Animal studies is morally bankrupt and incoherent – just another bourgeois diversion, distraction, and narcissistic pursuit -- without commitment to animal liberation in theory, practice, and one's own life, such as necessitates animal activism and a vegan lifestyle. I am not advancing an essentialist definition or Platonic construct, and thereby saying that other people cannot articulate concepts of “critical animal studies” that differ from mine. But I am arguing against notions that are conceptually vacuous, ethically bereft, and politically problematic; that fail to mediate theory and practice; that ignore the urgent crises of the day; and that do not grasp the full significance (psychological, cultural, political, and environmental) of the animal standpoint. Scholars pursuing animal studies typically seem concerned far more about academic opportunism and exploiting new forms of cultural capital than about abolishing the barbaric institutions and mindsets of human

¹⁴ I developed this ten point platform of CAS in dialogue with ICAS colleagues Anthony J. Nocella II, Richard Kahn, Carol Gigliotti, and Lisa Kemmerer; see www.criticalanimalstudies.org.

supremacism, species apartheid, and animal exploitation. The animals have already been exploited enough, and they do not need MAS theorists to add insult to their injury and exploit their suffering for their work without working to end their suffering. Those who disagree with my concept of CAS have the burden of proof to state why and to develop a better formulation.

It is crucial to interject a radical perspective and to help ensure the political relevance and potential of animal studies before it freezes into a homogenous outlook and dominant ideology, and becomes easily co-opted and contained by academia and its inherent bias toward abstraction, jargon, and value-neutrality or pseudo-radical politics. This has happened with other “studies” programs. Barbara Epstein, for example, attributes the defeat of the “vital mass women’s movement” in important part to its “institutionalization and marginalization” in academic Women’s Studies programs,¹⁵ and Russell Jacoby exposes how academics cloistered in Cultural Studies programs “merely end up celebrating the status quo” and brandish an arcane postmodern discourse that alienates them from the very people about whom they profess concern.¹⁶ Following a similar trajectory of co-optation and studied irrelevance, animal studies is becoming tamed, leashed, canonized, commodified, reified, neutralized, and rendered safe for academic production, consumption, and distribution. Another bad omen for the autonomy and political relevance of animal studies includes the practice of veterinarian boards, “pet food” industries, and sundry animal exploiters sponsoring conferences around this topic.¹⁷

¹⁵ Barbara Epstein, “The Decline of the Women’s Movement,” in Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper (eds.), *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts* (Malden MA and Oxford UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp. 328-334).

¹⁶ Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in and Age of Apathy* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

¹⁷ See, for example, the “Impacting Multiple Species” conferences, scheduled for October 20-25, 2009 in Kansas City, Missouri (http://rechai.missouri.edu/isaz_hai09), whose sponsors include the University Of Missouri College Of Veterinary Medicine, the International Society for Anthrozoology, and the Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction, along with Nestle Purina and Hills.

Thus, it is vital that CAS be developed as a radical critique of and alternative to academic institutions and to MAS itself, as well as to capitalism and all other oppressive ideologies and institutions. But one must be clear about the dynamics of opportunism and co-optation that neutralize everything of value and subversive import. Thus, a day may soon come when enough reformists and opportunists in the professorial class corrupt and dilute the radical ethical and political substance of CAS to the extent that it will have to be called something else such as “radical animal studies” to thwart dilettantes in search of something trendy and safe. But for now I will utilize the phrase “critical animal studies,” and continue, with my colleagues at ICAS, to forge this important, new, and radical path.

The Fetishism of Theory

To be perfectly clear, my position is not anti-theory, for theory provides the compass, maps, and studied reflection necessary for effective politics. My target, rather, is theory-for-theory’s sake, an academic disorder, which involves the severing of theory from ordinary meaning (or, often, meaning in any sense) and from action, practice, and politics, and the separation of scholarship from citizenship. I am vitally concerned with theory for two reasons. First, theory is indispensable to practice, and I stress the reciprocal relationship between theory and practice, such that the two inform and deepen one another (in what is sometimes called “praxis”). Second, theory – as well as reading, learning, study, and critical thinking skills in general – is essential for a viable political movement. The anti-intellectualism that Russell Jacoby and others expose runs deep through American culture also pervades activist culture which often lacks the historical, philosophical, and political literacy necessary for their tasks. One cannot change a world one does not deeply understand.

But let there be no mistake, there is a huge gulf between animal studies and animal advocacy. The debates over whether a theorist of animal studies is obliged to be a vegan, animal rights abolitionist, or activist of some kind replicates the old nineteenth and early twentieth century debates in art. There are direct parallels between critiques of art-for-art's sake and theory-for-theory's sake. Just as many artists resisted the call of the radical avant-garde to politicize their work, and insisted that politics would debase their art and transmogrify the beauty of form and ideal meanings into propaganda and ephemeral meaning, so theorists resist the call to connect their work to normative, practical, and political issues.

I appreciate the concern to do theory apart from an explicit political agenda (and of course all scholarly work has a bias, interest, or agenda whether recognized or not) and the demands of activism. I also believe that scholars in animal studies can indeed produce good and valuable work even if they eat meat, support vivisection, buy their dog from a breeder, and take their kids to rodeos, circuses, and zoos. There is no law that links the worth of people's ideas to the integrity of their life and consistency of their ethics. Just as there are no doubt liars, exploiters, racists, sexists, and violent abusers who write splendid ethical treatises, so welfarists, speciesists, and carnivores can do productive research in animal studies (on the surface, that is, on a deeper level connecting theory with practice the contradiction abides and vitiates the work in some significant way). I say this as a matter of logic and fact, and not in moral judgment of those who, unlike myself, are not vegans and dedicated animal advocates. But, again, there are jarring inconsistencies here, such as would not be tolerated in related academic fields, and these persist due to widespread speciesism, opportunism, and moral incoherence within the animal studies community.

Academics are endlessly creative in the act of inventing excuses for hermetically isolating themselves from a social and natural world in crisis and maintaining their aloof, analytic detachment. We have here again to examine the academic world itself and the dominant ideology that disparages work that deigns to engage real social conditions and practical life, dismissing engaged theory as amateurish in comparison to the “rigor” of detached and “disinterested” theory, the more abstract, formalized, and jargon-laden seemingly the better. There are, moreover, institutional norms and pressures to produce abstract theoretical analysis, theory-for-its-own-sake. Those who engage society and link theory to practice are disparaged, while those who actually involve themselves as activists, especially in controversial causes such as Palestinian autonomy, animal liberation, anarchism, anti-globalization, and graduate student unions are in many cases fired.¹⁸

One prevailing excuse is to emphasize the value of theory-for-its-own-sake, such that scholars who devote themselves solely to theory, research, and writing produce valuable works that activists and others can use for their own purposes. The labor of getting “dirty hands” in the practical affairs of politics or activism, the argument goes, takes away valuable time and focus from the all-important work of theory.

While it is true that, for example, Einstein’s immersion in abstract produced incredibly important insights, and that his time, one might claim, was better spent doing high-level mathematics than feeding the poor, this argument is vitiated by two fallacies. First, it ignores the dialectical relation between theory and practice, such that, for instance, social theorists could both bring and take knowledge from activism. Karl Marx and John Dewey, to name

¹⁸ See Steven Best, Anthony J. Nocella II, and Peter McLaren (eds.), *Academic Repression: Reflections on the Academic-Industrial Complex* (Berkeley, CA: AK Press, 2009).

just two giants, stressed the dialectical interdependence of theory and practice. Second, and relatedly, there is an obvious false choice imposed here, such that one commits to theory *or* activism, but cannot do both well. The mathematical preoccupations and achievements of Einstein did not prevent him from involvement in social life and becoming a peace activist who warned about the destructive potential of war and atomic weapons.

News of the incompatibility between theory and practice apparently did not reach the likes of Marx, Dewey, Bertrand Russell, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Foucault, Jurgen Habermas, or Noam Chomsky, as they dismantled this false opposition in favor of an organic union of thought and action. In sharp contrast to effete and privileged academics who glide from seminar rooms and airports to hotel cocktail lounges and book conventions, we should note that Socrates was widely respected for his valor on the battlefield, and Sartre, Camus, and other noted French intellectuals and artists joined the French Resistance, risking their lives to thwart German Nazism and making their writing a key part of their resistance.

One can only imagine what today's professors or intellectuals would do were their country invaded by something as menacing as Nazi forces. I shudder to think how privilege rots the soul and weakens the will. And while US academics are not working amidst conditions of fascist occupation, they are certainly living amidst *the gravest ecological crisis and challenge humans have ever faced*. Global climate change, and the while constellation of related problems (including rainforest destruction, human overpopulation, resource scarcity, and species extinction) poses, in fact, a *far greater danger* to "civilization" than Nazism, for it threatens not only one or many nations, but millions of species and the planetary ecosystem itself.

And yet consider the essay, “One or Several Literary Animal Studies?,” in which Susan McHugh uses the most obtuse and pretentious jargon possible to justify academic entrapment within the funhouse of theory and to construct an insidious argument against the very possibility of politics:

To be sure, this potential for literary animal studies has not always been clear. Deconstructive approaches trace how animal stories have been enmeshed in the metaphysical presuppositions of humanism, but their primary concern with language can defer exploration of the ways in which poststructuralist approaches to animal literatures confront metaphysics with questions of multiplicity...

[A]nimal representations also foster uncertainties about the future of literary studies as disciplinary ways of knowing, and more basically the relationship of reading to maintaining institutional structures. Literary animal studies likely will continue to foster unpredictable (and often conflicted) positions on animal rights and welfare, establishing no clear foundations of political let alone epistemological solidarity among researchers.¹⁹

One might conclude from this Coltranesque sheet-of-jargon and cacophony that she is only arguing the reasonable point that complex issues allow multiple interpretations that do not cohere in a theoretical or political consensus. But the overall tone of the essay – which reads like a parody, rather than serious exercise, of postmodern theory – is to leave the reader (should he or she even understand the language) utterly disoriented among the emphases on multiperspectivalism, incommensurability, and indeterminism. Of course society, our lives, our consciousness, and our theories lack clarity in the Cartesian sense, but McHugh - in moving from epistemological truism to political nihilism, from undecideability of knowledge to impossibility of change - implies that it is better after all that the theorist-sans-citizen continue to spin webs in ivory towers.

¹⁹ McHugh, cited at: http://www.h-net.org/~animal/ruminations_mchugh.html.

The reactionary effect of animal studies theorists such as McHugh is apparent: as one struggles through their writing, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Levinas, Kristeva, Deleuze and Guattari, and Derrida are rumbling in our ears, but the concrete realities of animal suffering, violence and exploitation, economic crisis and social power, and the rapidly worsening planetary ecological catastrophe are entirely muted and virtually barred from the hermetically-sealed chambers of theory-babble.

In the hands of the academic - the self-described “radical” or otherwise - theory is just another tool of pacification employed by the “society of the spectacle” (Guy Debord) via the academic-industrial complex. Little different from the television or video game, theory is just another form of distraction in which individuals can immerse themselves, as they detach themselves from the real and pressing issues of society, animals, and the environment. With the potential for enlightenment and edification, books, research, writers, and professors instead perpetuate ignorance, egoism, and apathy. Erudite professors train their students in their methods of abstraction, obfuscation, and alienated detachment, as the disease of intellectualism spreads from generation to generation.

Crisis? What Crisis?

The crucial problem with MAS is not just the separation of theory from practice, but also the decontextualization of scholarship from current the rapidly worsening crisis of species extinction and global warming. The “absent referent” (to borrow a phrase from Carol Adams) in animal studies is nothing less than the catastrophe staring us all in the face and nothing short of biological meltdown and ecological collapse. We are not living in just any ordinary period of history, but the most remarkable, important, catastrophic, and challenging era of all,

for global climate change is the biggest problem our species has ever faced. This “ecological crisis” is the overdetermined result of human overpopulation and overconsumption, the sixth extinction crisis (the last one occurring 65 million years ago with the demise of the dinosaurs), global climate change, rainforest destruction, and resource scarcity. Moreover, let us not forget, the enormity of animal suffering continues to build to the most severe and dire levels, especially with the globalization of carnivorism and fast-food outlets, as currently up to 50 billion land animals and billions more in the sea die every year on this planet for food consumption alone.

As theorists research in cavernous library rooms; as they stare with bleary eyes into computer screens; and as they present papers and chat in polite, temperate, and civil tones around the hotel bar, something is happening outside of the academic matrix, something we all know is unfolding, but which the majority of academics (like the public in general) nevertheless ignore. In the most egregious possible case of *bad faith*, professors from all disciplines carry on their research and esoteric concerns as if the ecological crisis – *the* most serious crisis humankind has ever faced - were not barreling down on us with a speed and fury shocking even to pessimistic scientists.

While academics play their theoretical fiddles, planetary ecosystems are collapsing. While they live in the historical past, it is the present that demands our utmost attention and the future that merits our most profound concern. We live in this most incredible, singular, unprecedented, do-or-die era that places the most extreme obligations and demands on us that we cannot ignore. In this era, in our age, in this moment right now, as we confront the decisive historical crossroads that stand before us, what we do, or fail to do, will determine

the fate of biodiversity on the planet and whether or not the world for future generations will be not only challenging and oppressive, but utterly nightmarish and dystopian.

Thus, the question must surge forth: do we have the luxury to be “merely” theorists or academics when the practical and political demands on us are so great? Of course theories are crucial for understanding the world, and a politics without reflexivity, study, history, philosophy, and social theory is no politics I want to advance. But it is not as if we need to work a detailed social ontology before we can proceed. It is by now somewhat apparent what the forces of destruction are, and what we have to do to resist and transform anthropocentrism, speciesism, global capitalism, and hierarchical domination in all forms. While the social and ecological realities are not transparent, they are clear enough to begin to take informed and decisive action. Our knowledge will deepen in practice, only in and through political struggle, and cannot mature in the study and seminar room. It is not about unilateral application of a pre-formatted theory to social relations and struggle; rather it is about learning and improving on theory from conditions of experience and practical application of knowledge.

One may argue we are not obliged to give up theory, research, and writing in order to spend all of our time in political meetings, demonstrations, actions, and litigations. But can scholars continue to be as isolated from politics and advocacy as they typically are? Can they be complacent about the severe crisis in the world playing out before their very eyes? Can they watch once more on the evening news as the Arctic ice shelves crash into the sea, and retreat to their books and computers as if they saw another heartburn or scalpel itch commercial?

Theodor Adorno quipped that “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” Could we not pass the same judgment about academic immersion in animal studies or any other topic not

directly related, in the most practical and political ways, to this grim time of planetary entropy, biological meltdown, global capitalist omnicide, totalitarian and fascist state power systems (e.g., the UK and US), and nihilistic philosophies which find their functional counterpoint in the extreme pacifism and glacial models of change urged by many of the so-called “new” abolitionists?²⁰

Rewilding Animal Studies

MAS is already beginning to solidify into something tame and domesticated by academia. The conditions that brought about its success as an innovative research topic are the very factors that are hastening its demise as a critical theory of political consequence. This is a tragedy as animal studies is potentially a subversive, critical, and radical perspective that can help illuminate and eliminate core structures of hierarchical domination and key dynamics of destruction and violence.

But so far, for the most part, animal studies has squandered and forfeited its radical potential to become another form of fragmented knowledge, another institutionalized “field of study” that exists in complacent harmony with, rather than fierce opposition to, the prevailing systems of power in academia and society overall.

²⁰ With Jason Miller, I have recently written a trilogy of critiques of fundamentalist pacifism and single-issues that are embedded in the visions of new abolitionist approaches as advocated by a number of individuals, including Gary Francione and Lee Hall. These essays demonstrate some of the core moves and concerns of CAS in bold contrast with MAS. See Steve Best and Jason Miller, “Pacifism or Animals: Which Do You Love More? A Critique of Lee Hall, Friends of Animals, and the Franciombe Effect in the New Abolitionist Movement” (<http://thomaspainescorner.wordpress.com/2009/02/07/pacifism-or-animals-which-do-you-love-more/>); Steve Best and Jason Miller, “Averting the China Syndrome: Response to Our Critics and the Devotees of Fundamentalist Pacifism” (<http://thomaspainescorner.wordpress.com/2009/02/24/averting-the-china-syndrome-response-to-our-critics-and-the-devotees-of-fundamentalist-pacifism/>); and Steve Best and Jason Miller, with Joan Court, Janet Tomlinson, and Lynn Sawyer, “Presence of Malice: UK Activists v. Lee Hall: Or, What Really Happened in the Churchyard” (<http://thomaspainescorner.wordpress.com/2009/03/23/presence-of-malice-uk-activists-v-lee-hall/>).

Animal studies must not become a safe and sanitized discourse; it must use its unique and powerful perspective to advance a radical, critical, and oppositional discourse that engages and politicizes the many profound theoretical, environmental, and political issues embedded in animal studies.

It is thus crucial that a radical and opposition form of animal studies - critical animal studies - has emerged in opposition to mainstream animal studies and academic conservatism in all forms, in order to politicize and radicalize animal studies, and making it as concrete and transformative as possible, relative and relevant to the contemporary context of crisis and catastrophe.

My critique of MAS is ultimately a critique of academia (or “higher education”), a unique world I have learned something about in three decades of life as a student, professor, and activist. For, to borrow Foucault’s terminology, there are strong disciplinary and normalizing biases in academia toward abstract, esoteric, jargon-laden, and apolitical research. No matter what discipline, person, or topic, the academic pathology is the same. It involves reified language, scholastic dullness, and detachments of theory from practice and scholarship from citizenship. While the content may differ - whether physics or philosophy, anthropology or animal studies - the same fissures, fractures, delusions, and narcissism prevails.

As mentioned, CAS eschews positivism, scholasticism, pretentiousness and elitist jargon (accessible only to other professional theoreticians and questionable in its ultimate worth and meaning), and the theory-for-theory’s sake approach – all of which vitiate mainstream animal studies. Rejecting the masks of objectivity and neutrality that in fact hide covert commitments and by default support systems of oppression, critical animal studies is

informed by a normative commitment to total liberation and transformation (as animal liberation is impossible without human and Earth liberation, just as human and Earth Liberation is impossible without animal liberation).

Clearly, CAS is doing more than merely criticizing the dominant paradigm in animal studies; it advances a positive and sharply different vision of what animal studies could and should be. This alternative model emerges from a broad political context that shatters the insularity of academia, and underscores the urgency of the current era defined by mass slaughter, species extinction, and a deepening and increasingly irreversible ecological crisis unfolding throughout the globe. CAS is rooted in a deep and explicit commitment to animal liberation, and it promotes a diverse range of radical politics and tactics necessary to struggle effectively and without illusions against capitalism and hierarchical oppression in all forms.

Parallels with the Frankfurt School

In fact, 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, from the late 1920s through the 1960s (for the first and second generation critical theorists), and our current moment in the twenty-first century, specifically in the post-9/11 era, as we ourselves confront the largely abstract and apolitical institutions of academia and society in general, in order to mount a critique of MAS from a critical theory perspective influenced by the Frankfurt School in many ways.

Beginning in 1923, theorists including Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Leo Lowenthal, Erich Fromm, and Walter Benjamin formed the “Institute for Social Research” in Frankfurt, Germany. The Frankfurt School abandoned the ahistorical, positivist,

and disciplinary outlook of mainstream philosophy and social science in favor of a historical, critical, and interdisciplinary approach that analyzed the interrelationships among culture, technology, and the capitalist economy. Frankfurt School theorists synthesized political economy, sociology, history, and philosophy, with the first modern “cultural studies” that analyzed the social and ideological effects of mass culture and communications. Against staid, pseudo-objective forms of “traditional theory,” the Frankfurt School developed a “critical theory” distinguished by its practical and radical objective, namely, to emancipate human beings from conditions of domination. Recognizing the limitations of “orthodox” or “classical” Marxism, Frankfurt theorists developed a “neo-Marxist” orientation that retained basic Marxist theoretical and political premises, but supplemented the critique of capitalism with other perspectives, thereby spawning hybrid theories such as Freudo-Marxism, Marxist-feminism, and Marxist-existentialism.

CAS emerges in conditions in which positivism is still a prevalent ideology in academia, and sophisticated sociological critiques of positivism replicate its separation of theory from values and practice. Apolitical values reign, as even “radicals” vie for respectability within the rules and logic of academia, and as the professionalization of discourse has transformed language from a potential medium of clarity into an opaque tool of obfuscation that ultimately reinforces systems of power. CAS eschews positivism and the fetishization of theory to respond as clearly as possible to conditions of oppression, domination, exploitation, and crisis. Just as in the 1930s and beyond Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Fromm, and others confronted a situation of growing totalitarianism, the domination of nature, the defeat of revolutionary movements, rampant consumerism and conformism, the co-optation of dissent, and the occlusion of emancipatory alternatives and possibilities, the same situations

prevail today, only in more advanced form, and they all form the context, background, and motivation for CAS.

Like the Frankfurt School, CAS seeks a multidisciplinary theory. MAS is also interdisciplinary, but it typically leaves out political economy, whereas CAS incorporates it as a crucial part of its outlook. Like the Frankfurt School, CAS synthesizes social theory, politics, *and* the critique of capitalist domination in a revolutionary project to transform society and psychology alike.

CAS must stay relentlessly negative and uncompromising in its critique of the current social order, as it remains affirmative in sense of validating possibilities of resistance and envisioning an alternative future. The ultimate purpose of theory and critique is not to deconstruct textual contradictions, to explore the polyphony of meaning, or to experiment with alternative realities in literary imagination, but rather to align itself with animals and fight for their liberation. Importantly this must not occur in a way that conceptualizes animal issues as if they existed apart from social issues, but rather that illuminates the central role of speciesism in the major problems of cultures and societies, and shows how animal exploitation is now only part of a massive global system of exploitation that must be changed at all points and not just one.

CAS takes shape in awareness of historically-constructed ideologies and systems of power and domination in which humans have oppressed and exploited animals. CAS has a broad and holistic understanding of hierarchical power systems (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, and speciesism) and their intricate interrelationships, explores the systemic destructive effects of capitalism on all life and the Earth, and views animal liberation and human liberation as

inseparably interrelated projects. In the spirit and tradition of the Frankfurt School, it seeks to realize its potential of developing one of the most comprehensive and radical outlooks yet developed.

Finally, at its best, the Frankfurt School tradition of critical theory mediated theory and practice through relatively clear language, explicit normative and political commitment, and attention to concrete forces of power, repression, and resistance. This virtue, unfortunately has been lost in the last few decades with the enclosure of theory within minutiae, esotery, and lifeless abstraction. The turn toward abstraction, the mass production of jargon, and the fetishization of Continental and postmodern discourse is but the flip-side of avoiding forces of power, structures of oppression, struggles of resistance, and the catastrophic global ecological crisis. As so blatantly evident in McHugh's approach, theory is completely detached from practice and indeed from comprehensible language itself, such that, the turn from critical theory to the likes of Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Derrida has had regressive effects.

Through the institutional biases of academia, and following the overall logic of modernity, theorists have become increasingly technical, specialized, and professionalized. They have thereby obliterated the role of the public intellectual and, ironically, of intellectual life in general, which the public regards contemptuously and dismissively as irrelevant to social, and thereby exacerbating the anti-intellectualism rampant throughout US culture. The tragedy is that theory – clear, concrete, and engaged as possible – is indispensable to practice, just as practice is to it, such that, to paraphrase Kant, theory without practice is empty, and practice

without theory is “blind.”²¹ Instead of working as a weapon that illuminates conditions of oppression, galvanizes people, and clarifies ethical and political practice, the language of the intelligentsia functions as a wall, fence, and boundary that isolate specialists from laypeople as it separates universities from communities and the public realm. Overall, academics become tools of elitism and pawns of the ruling powers. In MAS, they often operate as theoretical vivisectionists who dissect the “animal Other” as a social construction and discursive object, by way of a detached standpoint that substitutes for political commitment and revolutionary rage.

Commonalities of Oppression and Alliance Politics

CAS rejects liberal reformist visions rooted in the deep delusion that an inherently irrational, violent, and unsustainable system can be rendered rational, peaceful, and sustainable. Its revolutionary outlook sees “separate” problems as related to the larger system of global capitalism, and rejects the reformist concept of “green capitalism” as a naïve oxymoron. It repudiates the logics of marketization, economic growth, and industrialization as inherently violent, exploitative, and destructive, and seeks ecological, democratic, and egalitarian alternatives.

²¹ For a powerful critique of the turn toward abstraction in Western intellectual culture, see Bryan D. Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Temple University Press, 1990). Theodor Adorno clearly anticipated this critique in his 1964 work, *The Jargon of Authenticity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1983), which principally attacks the obfuscations of Heideggerian discourse as used in existentialist and phenomenological philosophy. For analysis of the theoretical and political advantages and disadvantages of postmodern theories, see the trilogy of works I have co-authored with Douglas Kellner: *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991); *The Postmodern Turn* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997); and *The Postmodern Adventure: Science and Technology Studies at the Third Millennium* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001). Russell Jacoby, among others, has chronicled the steady debasement and decline of the “public intellectual” in American culture since Dewey; see, for instance, *The Last Intellectual: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

Capitalism sucks everything inorganic and organic into the vortex of mass production and consumption. The profit imperative overwhelms the moral imperative; value is reduced to exchange value; everything, including human labor, becomes a commodity; market competition gives way to economic monopolies and political oligarchies; and Darwin's "survival of the fittest" concept is the regulating principle of social life. In pursuit of the development and accumulation imperatives that drive its dynamic grow-or-die economy, capitalism devours nature, species, human lives, and indigenous cultures. The global capitalist world system is inherently destructive to people, animals, and nature. It cannot be humanized, civilized, or green-friendly, but rather must be transcended through revolution at all levels - economic, political, legal, cultural, technological, moral, and conceptual.

Of course, capitalism did not pioneer the reduction of living beings to things and exploitable resources. The domination of humans, animals, and the Earth has ancient institutional and ideological sources in Western culture and, ultimately, agricultural society (spawned some ten thousand years ago) that transcend class and economic dynamics. But while the domination of nature and nonhuman animals hardly began with capitalism, the capitalist system raises human alienation from, and contempt for, the natural world to its highest expression in a global system of individualistic property rights and an advanced technological empire governed by transnational corporations. And when ancient pathologies are conjoined to modern technologies; to an industrial paradigm that subjects work, production, and living processes to mechanized procedures (such as the transformation of agriculture into agribusiness and farming into factory farming); to a bureaucratic state driven by efficiency imperatives; and to an economic system organized solely around accumulation and profit, the result is an unprecedented crisis stemming from a culture of carcinogenic growth and murderous extermination imperatives.

CAS is abolitionist, but in a far richer and more radical way than the prevailing abolitionist approach, as mentioned earlier. Despite recognition of the commonalities of oppression and the need for alliance politics, advocates of this approach appear ultimately to advance a one-dimension, apolitical, elitist program of vegan education. Symptomatic of this outlook is the depressing absence of an ethically and racially diverse membership attracted to the modern vegan abolitionist movement. This lack of diversity within the abolitionist camp exposes the broader movement to loud criticism, very much in keeping with other “progressive” and “radical” academic and activist movements. In its crudest terms, animal rights advocates are wantonly dismissed as yet another, “Western, white, middle class movement.” Until this insularity is recognised and effectively addressed it will continue to seriously compromise any achievements of the “vegan revolution.”

Moreover, there is a serious contradiction between the ‘one plate at a time’ glacial approach to social change, and the dramatic spikes in global meat consumption (particularly in the most populated nations of the world, China and India) not to mention the dramatic worsening of the planetary ecological crisis. Yes, veganism is a crucial and necessary step for total liberation and turning back the furies of global ecological breakdown, but on its own it is hardly a sufficient condition. Unless tied to alliance politics and a revolutionary social movement, veganism becomes just another bourgeois individualist consumerist and egoistic based outlook. Any advocate of a “vegan revolution” that fails to engage its larger social and economic causes, and that seeks to sever all ties with radical abolitionists (and other social movements and groupings) is destined to relegate veganism to an elitist bourgeois lifestyle practice rather than a broad and diverse social movement. Truly bold and innovative approaches must focus on: overcoming the narrow, elitist, and Euro/US-centric nature of

contemporary vegan and animal rights; branching out to working classes, people of color, and southern nations; and recapturing the pugilist spirit of the nineteenth century abolitionist movement, all of which are frequently jettisoned in favor of a toothless pacifism.

Animal exploitation is part and parcel not only of capitalism, growth, profit, and property-ownership relations, but also of a mass technics and instrumental rationality that objectifies and quantifies nature, culture, and the human personality. And it is this vision - the abolition of both speciesism and every other oppressive hierarchy - that guides this radical critique of MAS and development of constructive alternatives. CAS seeks to abolish not only animal exploitation, but also the exploitation of humans and the natural world. It challenges not only the property status of animals, but the institution of (corporate controlled) “private property” itself. Therefore, it is crucial that we continue to develop alternative, broader, alliance-based, bridge-building, anti-capitalist, anti-hierarchical social movements.

Since the fates of all species on this planet are intricately interrelated, the exploitation of animals cannot but have a major impact on the human world itself. When human beings exterminate animals, they devastate habitats and ecosystems necessary for their own lives. When they butcher farmed animals by the billions, they ravage rainforests, turn grasslands into deserts, exacerbate global warming, and spew toxic wastes into the environment. When they construct a global system of factory farming that requires prodigious amounts of land, water, energy, and crops, they squander vital resources and aggravate the problem of world hunger. When humans are violent toward animals, they often are violent toward one another, a tragic truism validated time and time again by serial killers who grow up abusing animals and violent men who beat the women, children, and animals of their home. The connections

go far deeper, as the domestication of animals at the dawn of agricultural society is central to the emergence of patriarchy, state power, slavery, and hierarchy and domination of all kinds.

In countless ways, the exploitation of animals rebounds to create crises within the human world itself. The vicious circle of violence and destruction can end only if and when the human species learns to form harmonious relations that are non-hierarchical and non-exploitative - with other animal species and the natural world. To repeat: on its own the animal liberation movement cannot possibly bring about the end of animal exploitation. It can only do this in alliance with progressive social causes, anti-capitalist struggles, and radical environmental movements. CAS asserts the need for more expansive visions and politics on all sides of the human/animal/Earth liberation equation, and we call for new forms of dialogue, learning, and strategic alliances. Animal, human, and Earth liberation are interrelated projects that must be fought for as one, as we recognize that veganism is central to peace, ecology, sustainability, nonviolence, and the healing of the major crises afflicting this planet.

In addition to gaining new insights into the dynamics of hierarchy, domination, and environmental destruction from animal rights perspectives, Leftists should grasp the gross inconsistency of advocating values such as peace, non-violence, compassion, justice, and equality while exploiting animals in their everyday lives, promoting speciesist ideologies, and ignoring the ongoing holocaust against other species that gravely threatens the entire planet. Conversely, the animal advocacy movement as a whole is politically naive, single-issue oriented, and devoid of a systemic anti-capitalist theory and politics necessary for the true illumination and elimination of animal exploitation; areas where it can profit greatly from discussions with the Left and progressive social movements. Furthermore, environmentalists

can never achieve their goals without addressing the main cause of global warming – factory farming – and grasping how water pollution, rainforest destruction, desertification, resource depletion and other key problems are shaped principally or significantly from global meat production and animal exploitation.

The human/animal liberation movements have much to learn from one another. Just as those in the Left and social justice movements have much to teach many in the animal liberation movement about capital logic, social oppression, and the plight of peoples, so they have much to learn about animal suffering, animal rights, and veganism. Whereas Left radicals can help temper single-issue and antihumanist elements in the animal rights movement, so animal rights can help the Left overcome speciesist prejudices and move toward a more compassionate, cruelty-free, and environmentally sound mode of living.

“New social movements” and Greens have failed to realize their radical potential. They have abandoned their original demands for radical social change and become integrated into capitalist structures that have eliminated “existing socialist countries” and social democracies as well in a global triumph of neoliberalism. A new revolutionary force must therefore emerge, one that will build on the achievements of classical democratic, libertarian socialist, and anarchist traditions; incorporate radical green, critical race, feminist, and indigenous struggles; and synthesize Earth, animal, and human liberation standpoints and politics. It must reach out to radical academics, political prisoners, exploited workers, indigenous peoples, subsistence farmers, tribes pushed to the brink of extinction, guerrilla armies, armed insurgents, disenfranchised youth, and to everyone who struggles against the advancing juggernaut of global capitalism, neo-fascism, imperialism, militarism, and phony wars on terrorism that front for attacks on dissent and democracy.

Animal liberation, vegan, and environmental movements must address radical anti-capitalist politics, just as social progressives and radicals must engage these issues in sensitive, serious, holistic, and inclusive ways. Diverse interests can come together in recognition of the common goal of building a social-ecological revolution capable of replacing global capitalism and hierarchical systems with radically democratic, decentralized, and ecological societies. While standpoints such as deep ecology, social ecology, ecofeminism, animal liberation, and Black liberation are all important, none can accomplish systemic social transformation by itself. Working together, however, through a diversity of critiques and tactics that mobilize different communities, a flank of radical groups and positions can drive a battering ram into the multifaceted structures of power and domination and hopefully open the door to a new future.

The three volumes that I co-edited with Anthony J. Nocella, II -- *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters? Reflections on the Liberation of Animals* (Lantern Books, 2004); *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth* (AK Press, 2006); and *Academic Repression: Reflections from the Academic Industrial Complex* (AK Press, 2009) – represent not merely a *theory* of alliance politics and total revolution but also concrete *practices* of radical politics. Each book brings together diverse people and positions that ordinarily never meet. These works break down boundaries that typically exist between academics and activists, scholars and political prisoners (former and current), whites and people of color, men and women, and human and animal rights advocates. Diverse voices together challenge capitalism and hierarchical domination of any and all kinds in pursuit of a more free, just, and sustainable world.

In addition to the various books, essays, and reviews produced by our members, ICAS has taken numerous other steps to *implement* change, such as through organizing annual conferences, initiating protests and boycotts, launching campus campaigns, hosting fundraisers, and always working in these ways as well to build bridges (such as with former members of the Black Panther Party, leaders from the American Indian Movement, and disability rights activists), promote alliance politics, and engage controversial political and tactical issues mainstream groups of all orientations fear and shun. In this manner, ICAS – in little time and with a paucity of resources – has taken a quantum leap beyond pacifist abolitionist who sometimes talk about alliance politics, but never actually do it, and who respond to radical direct action tactics with the same mindset and level of sophistication as Christian fundamentalists in response to Darwinist evolution.²²

Thus, CAS aims to replace partial concepts of revolutionary change in favor of a far broader, deeper, more complex, and more inclusive concept of total revolution. We must exchange the critique of any one system of domination (be it speciesism, sexism, racism, or classism) with a critique of hierarchy as a multifaceted and systemic phenomenon. And as we seek to understand and transform various forms of hierarchy, we must recognize that capitalism is a metastasizing cancer eating away at the planet and that a viable program for total liberation and transformation necessarily seeks to replace global capitalism with decentralized democracy and a dismantling of hierarchy in all forms.

²² One deplorable practical exception to the hollow alliance politics rhetoric I am aware of is the alliance that Hall and Friends of Animals developed with Southern Poverty Law Center, a speciesist-humanist group that shares their extreme pacifism and visceral contempt for and demonization of militant direct action tactics, such as the Animal Liberation Front's use of economic sabotage against animal exploiters (see Best and Miller, "Pacifism or Animals: Which Do You Love More?")

An Era Like No Other

As the global temperatures climb, icecaps and glaciers melt, sea-levels rise, and forests fall, the short-lived human empire has begun to devour itself and implode like a collapsing white dwarf star. The Earth itself – the bulk of which has been domesticated, colonized, commodified, bred and cross-bred, genetically engineered, cloned, and transformed into forces of mass destruction -- is refuting the myths and fallacies of Progress, Development, Science, Technology, the Free Market, and Neoliberalism, while demonstrating the inherent contradiction between capitalism and ecology.

It is time we drop all facile optimism, lift our heads from the sands, and recognize a powerful, singular, and ominous fact: Industrial civilization is unravelling at the seams, and it will be an ugly, brutal, horrifying process as environmental collapse - especially as brought on by global warming - exacts a deadly toll. We need completely new paradigms beyond what has informed our thinking in the last five hundred years, the last two thousand years, in the last ten thousand years. These moral and conceptual revolutions must be as bold and shattering of hierarchical and capitalist paradigms as say, Einstein's theory of relativity or quantum mechanics was for classical metaphysics.

The animal advocacy and vegan movements have made important gains, but in comparison to the rate of planetary breakdown these are far too little and much too late. Similarly, as an esoteric discourse unable to escape from the fragmentation imposed on it by capitalism and academia, devoid of a coherent moral or political viewpoint, MAS is hardly poised to become a catalyst of radical change.

Despite recent decades of growing animal advocacy and environmental struggles, we are nevertheless *losing ground* in the battle to preserve species, ecosystems, and wilderness. Increasingly, calls for moderation, compromise, and the slow march through institutions can be seen as treacherous and grotesquely inadequate. In the midst of predatory global capitalism and biological meltdown, “reasonableness” and “moderation” seem to be entirely unreasonable and immoderate, as “extreme” and “radical” actions appear simply as necessary and appropriate.

Politics as usual just won't cut it anymore. We will always lose if we play by their rules rather than invent new forms of struggle, new social movements, and new sensibilities. Causes require decisive and direct action: logging roads need to be blocked, driftnets need to be cut, and cages need to be emptied. But these are defensive actions; new movements must also be built, ones that incorporate social justice, animal liberation, and ecological politics in multiracial and global alliances. Such approaches have been taken by Judi Bari and Earth First!,²³ the environmental justice movement,²⁴ the international Green movement,²⁵ the Zapatistas,²⁶ alter-globalization struggles against transnational capitalism,²⁷ and radical holistic visions are also commonly found in the animal liberation movement.

²³ See Judi Bari, “Revolutionary Ecology: Biocentrism and Deep Ecology,” <http://www.judibari.org/revolutionary-ecology.html>.

²⁴ See Robert D. Bullard (ed.), *Unequal Protection: Environmental Justice & Communities of Color*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1994. Also see the Introduction to *Igniting a Revolution* for detail on social justice, anti-racist, and environmental movements.

²⁵ On the global scope of ecological and political battles, see Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search For a Livable World* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Richard Peet and Michael Watts (eds.), *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements* (London: Routledge, 1996); Bron Taylor (ed.), *Ecological Resistance Movements: The Global Emergence of Radical and Popular Environmentalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); and Chapter 8 in Rik Scarce, *Eco-Warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement* (Chicago: The Noble Press, Inc., 1990).

²⁶ Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, *Ya Basta! Ten Years of the Zapatista Uprising*. Berkeley, CA: AK Press, 2004.

²⁷ On the resistance movements against global capitalism, see Jeremy Brecher, Tim Costello, and Brendan Smith, *Globalization From Below: The Power of Solidarity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2000); and Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, “Resisting Globalization,” in G. Ritzer (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization* (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2006).

Narrow windows of opportunity are rapidly closing. The actions that human beings now collectively take or fail to take will determine whether the future is hopeful or bleak, whether, in David Korten's phrasing, we have Empire or Earth community, a Great Unravelling or a Great Turning.²⁸ While the result is horrible to contemplate, our species may not meet this challenge and could instead drive itself into the same oblivion as it pushed countless other species. There is no economic or technological fix for the crises we confront, the only solution lies in radical conceptual and institutional change at all levels.

The revolution that this planet so desperately needs after ten thousand years of "civilization" must involve, among other things, a transcendence of anthropocentrism, speciesism, patriarchy, racism, classism, homophobia, ablism, and prejudices and hierarchies of all kinds. At the same time, it must reconstitute social institutions in a form that promotes autonomy and self-determination of communities and individuals, decentralization and democratization of political life, non-market economic relations, guaranteed rights (or whatever post-capitalist equivalent discourse) for human and nonhuman animals alike, an environmental ethics and ethics of care and respect for all life, and the harmonization of the warring elements of this planet in crisis.

We need the boldest and most systemic, holistic, and inclusive vision possible, one that transcends the destructive alienation and pathology of humanism itself. We need the most uncompromising and radical form of politics we can muster, such that we can revolutionize what cannot be reformed, or, we shall all just be washed away by rising tides or buried by the

²⁸ David Korten, *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2007.

chaos and violence of a dying world. It is this looming, already unfolding, social crisis and ecological catastrophe that CAS addresses unflinchingly and head-one, and which provides the context and catalyst for its radical theory and transformative politics in action

