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Critical Animal and Media Studies: Expanding the Understanding of Oppression in Communication Research

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Abstract: Critical and communication studies have traditionally neglected the oppression conducted by humans towards other animals. However, our (mis)treatment of other animals is the result of public consent supported by a morally speciesist-anthropocentric system of values. Speciesism or anthroparchy, as much as any other mainstream ideologies, feed the media and at the same time are perpetuated by them. The goal of this paper is to remedy this neglect by introducing the subdiscipline of Critical Animal and Media Studies (CAMS). CAMS takes inspiration both from critical animal studies, which is so far the most consolidated critical field of research in the social sciences addressing our exploitation of other animals, and the normative-moral stance rooted in the cornerstones of traditional critical media studies. The authors argue that the CAMS approach is an unavoidable step forward for critical media and communication studies to engage with the expanded circle of concerns of contemporary ethical thinking.

Keywords: critical media studies, critical animal studies, speciesist-anthropocentrism, ethics, oppression

Introduction

To set the stage for the intersection of ‘animal’ issues within the historically anthropocentric field of media and communication studies, we must consider that this field has been in a constant evolution since its birth in the first half of the 20th Century, when scholars from the political sciences, psychology, and sociology first theorised the development of social communication models. From then on, the field has adapted to the changing cultural and technological environment that goes from *mass communication* to *new media* and *social media*.

Regardless of the permanent shift in which the field is immersed, there is a shared belief that this area of research addresses both a ‘societal’ and a ‘cultural’ phenomenon since the media is part of the structure of society and at the same time the messages disseminated through its communication activities are an important aspect of culture (McQuail, 2010: 80). This field covers a wide number of disciplines (including journalism, advertising, public relations, film studies, telecommunications, ICTs, social psychology, linguistics and semantics, amongst others) and has traditionally been aimed at the understanding of the production, processing and effects of ‘the symbolic interaction process between human subjects’ that are mediated by a communication technology’ (Fuchs, 2011: 75).

However, not all approaches to media and communication involve a critical stance, that is to say not all of them look analytically at the power relations involved in the processes of communication. The critical stance actually embodied a radical change in perspective after the earlier functionalist and administrative approaches. Critical communication and media studies are primarily characterized by a moral stance that focuses on the analysis of how communication and media contribute to domination and inequality in capitalistic societies. In such an approach, the

media communication process is seen as framed by the economy, the political system and society/culture – influencing, as well as being influenced by, all of them.

There is a strong consensus that critical media studies were inaugurated by the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School in the 1930s and 1940s – the first to claim that culture, and mass media within it, is key to understanding ideology and power relations in society. There is also a wide consensus that, from this original source, the current two main critical stances in media and communication research resulted: critical political economy and critical cultural studies (Babe, 2009). Regardless of the divisions between and within both (mostly between Marxian and NeoMarxian/Institutionalist approaches in the political economy and between cultural materialism and poststructuralism in cultural studies), they all have been ‘generally concerned with determining whose interests are served by the media, and how these interests contribute to domination, exploitation, and/or asymmetrical relations of power’ (Ott & Mack, 2014: 15).

Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony particularly influenced scholars such as Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall. The ideological critique and cultural industry theory of Adorno and Horkheimer influenced scholars such as Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Jürgen Habermas (Fuchs, 2011). The relationship between media and ideology was also widely influenced by Louis Althusser’s theory of state apparatuses, and the role of media as producers of ideology has been since then addressed by a long list of scholars after Noam Chomsky, Edward S. Herman and Herbert Schiller. Alternatively, the economic function of the media was stressed by political economists like Dallas Smythe and Nicholas Garnham, and followed by a number of critical scholars like Vincent Mosco, Robert McChesney, Graham Murdock and Peter Golding (Wasko et al, 2011)

Through elaborating on concepts like cultural hegemony, ideological critique, cultural industry, and the economic function of the media, critical media and communication research has been very fruitful in unveiling how cultural, social, political and economic practices relate to wider systems of power (classism, sexism, racism, imperialism, ethnocentrism, etc.). And despite the many differences amongst them, all scholars in the field of critical media and communication studies are united ‘by their skeptical attitude, humanistic approach, political assessment, and commitment to social justice’ (Ott & Mack, 2014: 14). In short, they all share a concern with what prevents human equality and social justice to flourish.

However, this critical approach has reproduced a ubiquitous bias in the social sciences and humanities (as evidenced also by Ott & Mack’s previous definition): the positioning of humans at the very centre of meaning, value, knowledge, and action. The social sciences and humanities have been until recently essentially devoted to the study of social relations from a human-centred perspective alone. This anthropocentric approach is however very problematic for at least two main reasons. Firstly, because it prevents scholars from addressing a most remarkable aspect that also shapes the quality or condition of being human: our relationship with the rest of life on the planet. Secondly, because it forgets that the object of study of this field is not the human being itself but the communication processes by which humans interact with each other and with nonhuman animals and, more particularly, how these processes prevent or perpetuate domination and oppression conducted by humans.

Because of a narrow anthropocentric view of what the *social* is, critical and communication studies have neglected in the past a major component of domination and oppression. This limited view implicitly promoted a rationale whereby if direct victims were not human beings, then the topic should allegedly not be of concern to the social sciences. For this reason, nature and nonhuman animals were almost absent from media and communication studies in general until very recently (Stibbe, 2012). Yet nature and animals have not been absent at all from the media and communications sphere and have actually been increasingly mediated by nature programs, news, books, magazines, cartoons, films and documentaries, museums, exhibits, and of course the Internet. This is simply a logical consequence of the role nonhuman animals have been forced to play in human societies because of how we exploit other animals and nature in our interest. This *use* therefore must be recognized as a social phenomenon inasmuch as the *social* in a human society cannot be restricted to only some selected human deeds. All our actions make the *social*. For these reasons, the ethical, political, economic and social implications of our exploitation of other animals and nature are already considered part of the *social* by a long list of moral

philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, political sciences, geographers and other scientists from social sciences and humanities.

Scholars working in the field of Critical Animal Studies (CAS) have produced consistent evidence during the last decades that the intense suffering humans produce on a massive scale for the species we exploit and abuse for food, clothing, entertainment, testing or labour is sustained by ideology (see for instance Noske, 1997; Nibert, 2002, 2013; Twine 2010; Joy, 2011; Nocella II et al, 2014; or Nibert, 2017a, 2017b). This ideology has been labelled as ‘speciesism’ (Nibert, 2002), building on the earlier development of this concept by ethicists to refer to the set of ideas that privileges the human species over all others (since Ryder, 1975 and Singer, 1975). More recently, sociologist Erika Cudworth (2011) has argued for the concept of anthroparchy (the human domination of nature) as having a more holistic critical reach than speciesism, because it more fully encapsulates the entanglements between the marginalisation, domination and oppression of all of the nonhuman world with that of humans who are ‘othered’ – often on the basis of their being associated with a less civilised ‘nature’. This issue fully deserves to be included in the concern of critical media scholars not only because of the role media and communication play in the perpetuation of speciesist or anthroparchal ideologies, but also because of its profound ethical implications. Our (mis)treatment of other animals is the result of public consent supported by a morally speciesist-anthropocentric system of values. Speciesism or anthroparchy, as much as any other mainstream ideologies, feed the media and at the same time are perpetuated by them.

The goal of this paper is to contribute to this understanding by introducing the subdiscipline of Critical Animal and Media Studies (CAMS). From these beginnings, the paper anticipates that the consideration of nonhuman animals will and should become mainstream for all Critical Media Studies (CMS) work in the future. CAMS are devoted to address this ethical challenge and research gap. It takes inspiration both from CAS, which is so far, the most consolidated critical field of research in the social sciences addressing our exploitation of other animals, and the normative-moral stance rooted in the cornerstones of traditional CMS. We argue in this paper that the CAMS approach is an unavoidable step forward for critical media and communication studies to engage with the expanded circle of concerns of modern ethical thinking.

This paper is organised as follows. We (i) introduce the main precedents to CAMS; (ii) discuss how CAMS is already contributing to cultural studies and the political economy of communication and (iii) conclude that current mainstream approaches, mainly liberal theory and the Marxist renaissance in critical media studies, cannot pretend to be morally grounded – and provide real egalitarian scenarios for humans – if they maintain a speciesist or anthroparchal approach.

The roots of CAMS

Every year on this planet trillions of other animals are confined, exploited, genetically modified, mutilated and have their lives shortened solely for human interests via industries (mainly for food, clothing, entertainment, and testing). As a specific example, in 2015 alone 1 to 2.7 trillion fish were killed in fishing (including aquaculture) and 70 billion land animals were killed in land farming (FAOStat, 2016). Additionally, every year, hundreds of millions of nonhuman animals are killed due to hunting (IDA, 2015) or used in experimental procedures (Knight, 2011). The total number killed each year in animal shelters, for entertainment, or due to habitat loss is simply unknown. But we do know that the human species is the primary cause of the current mass extinction of other species – the sixth mass extinction our planet has ever witnessed (and the only one known to be caused by a single species); in this geological epoch now called the Anthropocene (named to denote the profound influence of homo sapiens on the Earth’s biosphere), the current extinction rate of nonhuman species is 1,000 times higher than in pre-human eras (Wilson, 2016).

Likewise, we know that evolution is not a single straight line with human species at the top end and that different species have evolved along different neuroanatomical trajectories, providing alternative evolutionary routes to complex intelligence on earth (Marino, 2011). Evolution produces a tree, not a ladder. Since Charles Darwin (1859), evolutionary biologists, cognitive ethologists, and social neuroscientists have provided evidence of the capacity of nonhuman animals for psychical and physical suffering, for emotions, intellectual lives and consciousness

(The Cambridge declaration of consciousness, 2012). The idea that human interests are above those of other animals is no longer defensible either from an ethical or a scientific perspective. The above realisations are the reason why more and more activists, governmental and non-governmental organizations and scholars are increasingly rejecting the right of humans to use and exploit nonhuman animals and to neglect animals' suffering in general. Sentience – the capacity of suffering – is a crucial component of contemporary Western thought since English utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham (2007/1781) explicitly stated that the question with other animals was not, 'Can they reason?' nor, 'Can they talk?' but, 'Can they suffer?'. This premise has grounded reflections defending the rights and interests of animals since psychologist Richard Ryder (1975) and philosophers Peter Singer (1975) and Tom Regan (1983) founded the contemporary field of animal ethics, acknowledging that nonhuman animals have inherent value as sentient subjects of a life, deserving of having their major interests (in well-being, autonomy, and life) considered by humans. This paved the way for other disciplines concerned about social justice to progressively join the trend. In this respect, ethicist Martha Nussbaum concluded, referring to other animals, that sentience is the 'threshold condition for membership in the community of beings who have entitlements based on justice' (2004: 309).

Amongst the first social science disciplines to join animal ethicists in their criticism of nonhumans oppression by humans were scholars from psychology and sociology. Psychologists have explored how we block our empathy for nonhumans by 'denial, routinization, justification, objectification, de-individualization, dichotomization, rationalization and dissociation' (Joy 2011: 19). Sociologists study the social forms our relationships with non-human animals take (Cudworth, 2016) and have strongly pointed at how the oppressions of human and non-human animals are intersected (Nibert, 2002, 2013; Hribal, 2007, 2010, 2012; Cole & Stewart, 2014). A common theme in sociological analyses is the role media and communication play in building the public support needed to perpetuate the system of values that justifies what we do to other animals. The proliferation of such analyses within sociology but also the humanities has merited the assertion of an emerging multi-disciplinary space of 'vegan studies' (Wright, 2015). The term 'vegan studies' highlights the oppositional role played by veganism towards ideologies that legitimate oppression, and therefore also the ways in which veganism itself may be marginalised, misrepresented or distorted in and by the media. Such analyses have critiqued the representation of nonhuman animals in a wide range of media, including animal product advertising (Cudworth, 2011; Fitzgerald and Taylor, 2014; Linné and Pedersen, 2016; Stănescu, 2016; Cole, 2017; Cole and Stewart, forthcoming 2018), Hollywood representations of both real and animated nonhuman animals (Stewart and Cole, 2009; Molloy, 2011; Loy, 2016; Malamud, 2016), print media (Stewart and Cole, 2016), online games (Cole and Stewart, 2014), television shows (Wright, 2015; Cudworth and Jensen, 2016) and social media (Linné, 2016).

The multidisciplinary tenor of vegan studies is shared with the prior emergence of one of the most important critical projects of recent years: Critical Animal Studies (CAS). Indeed, vegan studies and CAS share common roots in many respects (with veganism as a baseline for CAS praxis) and may best be understood as related branches in the evolution of critical approaches to human domination, with, we argue, CAMS as another branch to be acknowledged alongside them. CAS is currently on the rise, as recent volumes show (e.g. Nibert, 2013; Taylor & Twine, 2014; Best, 2014; Sorenson and Matsuoka, forthcoming 2018). CAS seeks to differentiate itself from human-animal studies (or anthrozoology studies) by focusing 'on the circumstances and treatment of animals' and by linking 'activism, academia and animal suffering and maltreatment' (Taylor & Twine 2014: 1, 2). The term 'critical animal studies' also eschews the use of 'human' and thereby questions assumptions about human primacy over other species, and asserts our human kinship as animals alongside, but not superior to, others. CAS argues for an engaged critical praxis (and therefore the collapsing of academic/activism boundaries) and for political stances that provide a much-needed deconstruction of the binary opposition between human and nonhuman animals and dismantle structures of exploitation, domination, oppression and power. Open-access CAS academic journals such as *Journal of Critical Animal Studies* and *Green Theory & Praxis* promote 'total liberation' for all living beings, focusing on the intersectional analysis of human social justice, environmentalism, and nonhuman animal protection.

The first authors from the humanities to include media or communication in CAS approaches, proto-CAMS approaches (some predated the coining of ‘CAS’) addressed the representation of other animals in art, film, and visual culture. The works of Steve Baker (1993), Akira Mizuta Lippit (2000), Cary Wolfe (2003), Gregg Mitman (Daston and Mitman, 2005), Goodale & Black (2010) or Kari Weil (2012) are all notable examples. Yet, the volumes that are probably the most direct precedents of CAMS were authored by Carol J. Adams (1990, 2003) and Joan Dunayer (2001), both being centrally concerned with the role played by mass media’s use of language in legitimating and obscuring oppression. Following this pioneering work from disciplines close to media studies, the first CAS volumes within media and communication disciplines were mainly focused on audio visual media and ‘wild’ animals (Chris, 2006; Pick, 2011; Malamud, 2012; Pick & Narraway, 2013).

Groundbreaking works have very recently appeared addressing specifically media and communication from a CAS perspective, notably Claire Molloy’s *Popular Media and Animals* (2011), Emily Plec’s *Perspectives on Human-animal Communication. Internatural Communication* (2013), Carrie P. Freeman’s *Framing Farming: Communication Strategies for Animal Rights* (2014) and the volume co-edited by the authors of this article, *Critical Animal and Media Studies* (Almiron, Cole & Freeman, 2016). In the next section, we address in more depth what these and other contributions mean for the critical media studies field.

Contributions to analysis of the ethics and role of the media

CAMS have significant potential to contribute, and are already doing so, to the two main areas of critical media studies: cultural studies and the political economy of communication.

The most important contribution so far has been in the study of the representation of other animals in the media, and it is here that CAMS most clearly overlaps with vegan studies. According to Molloy, ‘media discourses are important in sustaining a range of constructions of animals that are connected, appropriated or co-opted by other systems of production and so play a role in the normalization of particular practices and relations’ (2011: 13). Research on the representation of other animals in films, news, advertising and literature has shown the systematic othering, manipulating and silencing of the reality of nonhuman animals and the arbitrariness of their framing – almost always built within frames of power relationship where they are treated as symbols, pets, pests, prey, food, danger, machines, etc. according to human convenience (Cole and Stewart, 2014). In the case of animals living in the ‘wild’, our looking at them has become a sort of voyeurism that reinforces our anthropocentric ethos (Malamud, 2012) while the simulation and fictionalisation of nature has almost supplanted representation, including ‘the illusory construction of wild animals as movie stars’ in Hollywood publicity discourses (Molloy, 2011: 64). Nonhuman animals are also valued for their cuteness, ‘in a way that is feminized, and derogatorily so: cute animals are like dumb blondes’ (Malamud, 2016: 158). Cole and Stewart (2014) coin the term ‘cutification’ to denote a distinctive representational style designed to attract the empathy and affective sentiment of children, while simultaneously distracting from the situations of real nonhuman animals. The suffering of nonhuman animals used in labs is invisible in the media while the lobbies’ narrative reinforces the notion of human supremacy and equates labs practices on other animals with hard (male) science and progress (Almiron & Khazaal, 2016). Research on the coverage of farmed animals – the category which includes by far the largest number of nonhuman victims – reveals that farmed animals are commodified and framed mostly according to economic interests, while their individuality, emotions and suffering are neglected in news discursive practices, which are primarily aligned with the perspective and interests of the agribusiness industry (Freeman, 2009; Khazaal & Almiron, 2016). At the same time, media representation of veganism has tended to trivialise it as a consumer lifestyle option at best, or a ridiculous or dangerous eccentricity at worst, in either case divorcing veganism from its critique of nonhuman animal exploitation, in other words denying that veganism was connected with animal activism (Cole and Morgan, 2011).

The portrayal of animal activists in 20th century American television media often tended to be negative (Gerbner, 1995), as was the portrayal of anti-vivisection activists in comparison to researchers, in the American news media (Kruse, 2001). Simonson (2001) found that PETA’s animal advocacy often found more harmonious coverage in entertainment media and popular

culture rather than in the news media. Yet earlier studies of the American news media found that positive coverage of animal advocacy campaigns were correlated with passage of important humane legislation, demonstrating the agenda-setting power of the media (Jones, 1996). The news media have sometimes played a helpful role in endorsing an animal issue as mainstream and legitimate through supportive editorials and favourable reporting (Jones, 1997).

Such research on the discursive practices of the media and other communication practitioners perfectly illustrates how they obfuscate the operation, consequences and opposition to human power relations with the planet and its nonhuman inhabitants. But the contribution of the media goes far beyond this, particularly when political economy is also considered. The role of media and communication in the manufacturing of consent for mainstream ideologies, systems of domination and discrimination, hegemony and oppression has been comprehensively studied by critical media scholars since the birth of the field. In the sizeable body of knowledge produced, there has also been a strong focus on the entanglements of human violence (including to a varying degree the intersections between capitalism and patriarchy, race, ethnicity, class and more recently also ecology, queerness, etc.). However, the entanglements of violence affecting other animals have been a blind spot for CMS and thus the field has been limited in its scope to understand violence. CMS research has already started to show how prolific and illuminating it is to fill this gap. By widening the focus to include human oppression of other animals, a whole new magnitude, depth and complexity of the entanglements of human violence, and of the role of media and communication in it, is revealed to us. What follow are some examples of this expanded scope.

Regarding the intersections amongst capitalism, patriarchy and the exploitation of nonhuman animals for food, authors like Nestle (2007), Molloy (2011), Almiron (2016) and Nibert (2013, 2016, 2017a) have shed light on the role public relations, advertising and strategic communication by interest groups have traditionally had on the promotion of the fast food culture. Their research variously shows how the hamburger, dairy, bacon and egg cultures, for instance, are not just a product of lobbies with vested interests but of an ideology promoted by those lobbies to justify and preserve the business – an ideology that combines classism, sexism and speciesism and which is perpetuated by media.

Adams (1990) and Dunayer (2001), in their turn, confirm how both the sexual suppression of women and human slavery were modelled after animal domestication practices and can be considered an extension of them – while advertising and news, through language and visuals, perpetuate and conceal the current relationship between gender violence, male chauvinism and animal exploitation.

Cole & Stewart (2014) analyse the role of the media in the cultural construction of human-animal relations in childhood. Particularly interesting is their analysis of how heteronormative gender identities and speciesism intersect in media aimed at children, demonstrating how children's films and magazines build dependence of nonhumans on humans through sexist stereotypes.

Plec (2016) probes the interconnections between racism and speciesism in the media looking at how sports news participates in the (re)construction of a rhetoric that has been a traditional strategy for dehumanizing people of colour: comparing them with nonhuman animals. She explains how the rhetoric of 'Man v. Cheetah' functions in media 'to keep both animals and black athletes in their place – a place defined, in part by, the perpetuation of racist and speciesist ideologies' (2016: 141).

Taylor (2016) highlights how the animal turn in media and communication studies enhances our understanding of the links between representation and political economy. This author describes how the lack of media coverage of the systemic violence exerted on nonhuman animals is fully aligned with the media complicity and interests in spreading capitalistic ideology – since capitalism is fully dependent upon animal bodies for profit and the media system is fully embedded in this capitalistic logic. The othering of animals, by silencing their suffering and depicting them as objects merely existing to benefit humans, is a key component of the structural violence. Taylor argues that to combat systemic violence as perpetuated by the media we must understand the mechanisms used to represent animals as inferior to humans.

A case study of the intersection between media representations and capitalist exploitation of nonhuman animals is provided by Stewart and Cole's (2009) discussion of fast-food tie-ins with

Hollywood films such as *The Lion King*. They argue that the use of cutified nonhuman animal representations from films on fast-food packaging and toy giveaways act as ‘lightning rods’ for childhood empathy, channelling ethical and affective attention from the real (dead) animals they are encouraged to eat.

Even though media audiences do not include nonhuman animals, these individuals are indirectly affected by media coverage (Freeman & Merskin, 2015). In the Anthropocene, the habitats of animals and their very lives are dependent on the types of cultural values, language, and worldviews various media programs cultivate in human societies. Given the scope of our global environmental crisis as well as industrial-scale animal oppression, fellow sentient beings and the issues they face deserve further inclusion in media and popular culture. And this coverage needs to encourage society to transform our relationships with fellow animals and nature in ways that foster less domination and exploitation and more care, respect, and ecological responsibility (Freeman & Merskin, 2015).

Thus, in 2014, as part of the critical animal and media studies commitment to transformative action, scholars Debra Merskin and Carrie Freeman published www.animalsandmedia.org – style guidelines for media producers in the professions of journalism, advertising, public relations, and entertainment media (such as television and film), offering concrete recommendations for how these communicators should cover and inclusively represent nonhuman animals in a fair, honest, and respectful manner, in accordance with media professions’ ethical principles (Freeman & Merskin, 2015). Broadly inspired by the work of human minority advocacy organizations’ work in creating media guidelines for respectfully covering misrepresented human groups, and Merskin’s (2010) expertise in the area of “othering” discourses, the specific style guidelines at animalsandmedia.org were also based in part on an article in *Journalism Studies* by Freeman, Bekoff & Bexell (2011) discussing how journalists could incorporate nonhuman animals as news sources, and Freeman & Jarvis’s (2013) recommendations on the media’s role in stemming the tide of mass extinction (within an anthology aptly titled *Ignoring Nature No More*).

Finally, through promotion of what she deems “ideological authenticity” (p. 226), Freeman (2014) demonstrates how counter-hegemonic social movement advocacy campaigns, in particular animal activism promoting veganism can be openly true to their goal of challenging society’s speciesist ideology while still drawing upon shared social values. For animal rights vegan campaigns to be transparent yet culturally resonant, Freeman recommends communicators focus on values of fairness, respect, altruism, and ecological responsibility while problematizing the inherent injustice and unsustainability of animal agribusiness and commercial fishing, within a discursive framework that openly questions humans’ entitlement to use other animals for our purposes and acknowledges our common animal status as fellow sentient beings who all deserve the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (Freeman, 2014).

Discussion

In the last decades, there has been an increased attention and focus on environmental issues in media and communication studies (see for instance Cox & Hansen, 2015), which is of course related to the main concerns aroused by climate change and the ‘denial machine’ that promotes a discourse of scepticism and confusion regarding the anthropogenic causes of global warming. In recent years, there has also been a Marxian renaissance in critical media and communication studies (see for instance Fuchs, 2015), to infuse renewed intellectual vigour to the field by returning to Marxist theory. Both trends are a good sign of the field being very alive and dynamic. However, both trends have not yet experienced the critical animal turn that other areas of the social sciences and humanities have.

On the one hand, the environmental approach is very much centred on the protection of natural ecosystems as a whole for the sake of humans and above the interests of the nonhuman individuals who inhabit them. This stance does not critique the social construction of nature versus culture and thus cannot unveil neither the industrial complex that exploits nonhuman animals nor the role of mediation in it. On the other hand, Marxist analysis is still useful to understand class and exploitation and it is noteworthy to recall that Marx, as an early theorist of liberal capitalism, recognized the domestication of other animals as the origin of inequality. In this light, the recent publication of a two-volume edited collection of essays entitled *Animal Oppression and*

Capitalism (Nibert, 2017a, 2017b) is significant. While the contributions to the collection do not necessarily share an explicit Marxian framework, their common insistence on the indissociably connected oppression of nonhuman animals and the development and perpetuation of capitalism ought to function as a stimulus to a critical animal turn among Marxian communication scholars. Meanwhile, like environmental approaches in general, Marxian analysis thus far often maintains a speciesist-anthropocentric approach that excludes any consideration of nonhuman animals' suffering and exploitation, which inhibits it from reaching a deeper understanding of the totality of interests involved in the reproducing of hegemonic power and prevalent mainstream ideologies.

Taking inspiration from CAS, the critical communication and media field can expand beyond the narrow views of humanitarianism and social justice that exclude other species by deeming them morally irrelevant. Nonhuman animals not only deserve to be morally considered but in doing so we unveil the anthropocentric status quo which produces unprecedented threats to life on earth, and reveal a holistic understanding of a larger global, interlocking, system of domination. Decentering humanity to embrace a truly egalitarian view is a natural step in a field like critical media and communication studies driven by moral values and concerned with the inequality triggered by power relations.

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