

Non-Speciesism in Critical Posthumanisms

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The term speciesism first appeared in 1970 on a printed pamphlet made by psychologist Richard Ryder for a protest against animal experimentation [1] and refers to discrimination on the grounds of belonging to a certain species. Thus, the assignment of different values, rights, or special consideration to individuals based solely on their species membership. Continuing the analogy to discriminatory practices like racism, sexism, classism, and others, the term was further popularised by philosopher Peter Singer in his 1975 book *Animal Liberation* [2]. Since then, the term speciesism is usually used with regard to practices of human domination over animals and the exclusion of all nonhuman animals from the rights, freedoms, and protections that are granted to humans.

Within the academic discourse of critical posthumanisms, the discussions that emerge from reflections on human/animal relationships are grounded in different theoretical frameworks and have different orientations and agendas [3]. On the one hand, the field of critical animal studies (CAS) focuses on the relationships between animals and humans and the notion of speciesism. This focus is usually firmly grounded in theories of intersectionality. Meaning that reflections on animal exploitation and oppression are discussed and analysed in their relation to critical theory about other forms of oppression (such as sexism, classism, and racism) with the aim to revolutionize current societal and political norms. On the other hand, the field of posthumanism can be understood as aiming much more broadly at deconstructing the category 'human' as something unique, distinct, and at the centre of the world [4]. This field focuses on the symbolic, discursive, institutional, and material arrangements that produces anthropocentrism and involves areas such as Science and Technology Studies (STS), material feminism, cultural studies, continental philosophy, geography, animal studies, and more [5].

This text provides an introduction to the discussion of (non-)speciesism, specifically within those two fields (posthumanism and CAS). Following the work of CAS scholar Helena Pedersen, the goal of this text is to put the notion of speciesism on the agenda of the Critical Posthumanisms Network.

As posthumanist theorist Cary Wolfe argued: “debates in the humanities and social sciences between well-intentioned critics...almost always remain locked within an unexamined framework of *speciesism*.” [6]. Even though scholarly attention has been directed towards animals with the aim to abandon humanism, Wolfe writes that even if it is our aim to expose how animals have been misunderstood and exploited, we are continuing to reframe our relationships with other beings through anthropocentric frameworks [7]. Wolfe proposes that a posthumanist bioethics should focus on the vulnerability and finitude that both humans and animals share [8].

Extending this view, feminist/posthumanist scholar Manuela Rossini states that it is in fact quite sobering that “the most radical metaposthumanists (and the humanities more broadly) do not quite manage to make an epistemological break with liberal humanism, insofar as their writing is also marked by an unquestioned “speciesism” [9]. Here she includes the term “carnophallogocentrism”, coined by philosopher Jacques Derrida, referring to the idea that in order to be recognized as a full subject in Western society, one must be a meat eating, male, authoritative, speaking self [10]. Rossini then argues that an anti-speciesist strand of posthumanist thinking involves a focus on two aspects:

- *zoontology* (drawing from Wolfe: meaning a broadening of ontological investigation to animals that investigates both sameness and difference outside of humanist parameters);
- and *companion speciesism* (drawing from feminist STS scholar Donna Haraway: embracing the positive configurations of the unavoidably close encounters between humans, animals, machines, and hybrids in an attempt to establish responsive and responsible relationships with ‘companion species’) [11].

These post-humanist critiques on speciesism and (male-oriented) anthropocentrism have been voiced by central figures within the field of posthumanism. However, CAS scholars have in turn questioned and criticised these attempts at moving beyond speciesism. In general, they argue that, rather than conceptually romanticising our relationships with other beings and theorizing the beauty of our shared encounters, we should focus on real animals, who are facing quite the opposite: more than 150 billion animals get slaughtered every year and this number is still rising [12]. According to CAS theorists, it is not only wrong and unjustifiable to treat animals as lesser beings, the act of being violent or oppressive should be abandoned in *all* forms and towards *all* beings [13].

CAS scholars therefore propose to, first and foremost, fully reject the (posthumanist) welfare position – or green ideology – (in which exploitation of animals under proper conditions is justified). Critics describe it as just another way to routinely sustain speciesist hegemony [14]. So rather than focusing on shared finitude, we should focus on the whole “enterprise of breeding, managing, and killing animals for human consumption as a master narrative reinscribing a curiously obsolete idea of the human subject” [15]. We should also recognize that posthumanist tendencies towards subject boundary dissolution and shared engagements between humans and animals – such as Haraway’s notion of ‘companion species’ – are never symmetrical and therefore cannot be innocent [16]. Surely, most animals have never expressed any desire whatsoever to ‘co-emerge’ with the species that exert violence, horror, and death on them [17]. According to CAS scholar Zipporah Weisberg, these “disturbing writings on the animal question represent a serious threat both to the development of a truly critical Animal Studies and, more generally, to the cause of animal liberation” [18].

In articulating a critique on posthumanist-speciesist tendencies, Pedersen nevertheless proposes that the edges between posthumanism and CAS could do the productive work of knowledge development in symbiotic relationships with each other. For example, the field of posthumanism could infect CAS with some healthy impurity, indeterminacy, and surprise [19]. Whereas posthumanism could be more rooted in some (un)firm political soil with consistent and committed critical attention towards oppression of humans and animals [20].

[1] See Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, (New York: Avond Books, 1990).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Helena Pedersen, ‘Release the Moths: Critical Animal Studies and the Posthumanist Impulse’, *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 52(1), 2011, 65-81.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites. American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 1).

[7] Ibid, p. 99.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Manuela Rossini, 'To the Dogs: Companion Speciesism and the New Feminist Materialism', *Kritikos: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal of Postmodern Cultural Sound, Text and Image*, 3, 2006, 1-25, p. 8.

[10] Jacques Derrida, 'Eating Will, or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida. In: Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy (Eds.), *Who Comes after the Subject?* (New York: Routledge, 1991, 96-119).

[11] Manuela Rossini, 'To the Dogs: Companion Speciesism and the New Feminist Materialism', *Kritikos: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal of Postmodern Cultural Sound, Text and Image*, 3, 2006, 1-25.

[12] 'Animal Kill Counter', (2008). Retrieved from <http://www.adappt.org/killcounter.html> [accessed 22 May, 2017]

[13] e.g., Anthony J. Nocella II, John Sorenson, Kim Socha and Atsuko Matsuoka, *Defining Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2013). And e.g., John Sanbonmatsu, *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011).

[14] Per-Anders Svärd, 'Protecting the Animals? An Abolitionist Critique of Animal Welfarism and Green Ideology', In *Global Harms: Ecological Crime and Speciesism*, (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2008, 167-186).

[15] Helena Pedersen, 'Release the Moths: Critical Animal Studies and the Posthumanist Impulse', *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 52(1), 2011, 65-81, p. 70.

[16] Ibid, p. 72

[17] Ibid.

[18] Zipporah Weisberg, 'The Broken Promises of Monsters: Haraway, Animals and the Humanist Legacy', *Journal of Critical Animal Studies VII*, 2, 22-64, p. 23.

[19] Helena Pedersen, 'Release the Moths: Critical Animal Studies and the Posthumanist Impulse', *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 52(1), 2011, 65-81.

[20] Ibid.