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Rejecting Animal Exploitation: A Case for Interspecies Solidarity

Yvette Wijnandts

Katerina Kolozova's book *Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals: A non-Marxist critique of capital, philosophy and patriarchy* explores capitalism's exploitation of animals. Kolozova positions her argument in response to posthuman ideas grounded in the works of scholars such as Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Katherine Hayles, and Cary Wolfe. Kolozova identifies posthumanist theories as often falling into three potential traps, namely that they follow a teleological narrative, continue to place humans as main points of reference, and lean toward transhumanism. Kolozova argues that a Laruellian approach offers a strong alternative to these apparent shortcomings. Specifically, she uses Laruelle's framework of "non-Marxism" to prove that the exploitation of animals for human profit is philosophically indefensible.

The title of Kolozova's book is immediately striking and calls for explanation. Throughout *Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals*, Kolozova's actual use of the word "Holocaust" is sparing, and when it is used is done so in a way that could be considered provocative; while the term 'the Holocaust' usually evokes images of the Jewish Holocaust, Kolozova does not reference the Jewish Holocaust at all. Instead, in *Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals*, the word "Holocaust" is used in a literal sense. Kolozova supports this kind of usage by noting that a holocaust was "originally a sacrificial burning of animal flesh [...] by men" (110). Within the argument presented in *The Holocaust of Animals*, the Holocaust is thus first to be understood as the sacrifice of the physical animal body for the purpose of pure reason. Kolozova integrates this use of the concept of "Holocaust" within Marxist theory. In its simplest form, capitalism, Kolozova explains, works to sell commodities for money that can be used to purchase more commodities: the C-M-C equation. However, as Marx points out, within capitalism money has become its own commodity. Therefore, he proposes the M-C-M' equation: Commodities are circulated for the purpose of increasing money, and money has become a goal in itself. Kolozova continues this line of thought and argues that within capitalism, where capital should be produced purely for capital's sake, materiality will be the ultimate sacrifice. In other words, Capitalism in its purest form will eventually demand the Holocaust of materiality itself.

It is in Laruellian theory that the sub-title of *Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals* finds its roots. Kolozova explains Marxist, Laruellian, and non-Marxist theory in the introduction of her book. She outlines Marx's and Laruelle's shared ambition of replacing "philosophy" with "realism". The philosophy Marx and Laruelle aim to displace is a philosophy that desires "to create a reality of transcendence of the real, or sublimation of the real into sense, meaning, intellect as perfected form of the real, as if a more evolved plane of realness" (5-6). As an alternative, Marx turns to materialism, which he referred to as "realism" or "naturalism". In doing so, he suggests a 'scientific' treatment of philosophy; philosophy should be derived from the material, not the abstract or the transcendental. Marx, as well as Laruelle and Kolozova, agree that science, as meant by Marx, offers a valuable alternative to philosophy's desire for transcendence; science accepts the finitude of thoughts, and thus also the finitude of itself. Non-Marxism is where Laruelle

continues Marx's "scientific" approach to philosophy and adds that Marxism itself, along with philosophical theory in general, will always be incomplete. Here Laurelle agrees with Marx's prioritization of materiality and the real, but insists that this must be applied to Marxism itself. In other words, "non-Marxism" does not step away from Marxist thought but rather applies it to itself to ensure that it does not succumb to the transcendentalism it seeks to overcome. Kolozova agrees with Laurelle here and thus attempts to ground her critique of capitalism's holocaust of animals on "non-Marxist" theory.

The first chapter of the book positions capitalism in philosophy and uses linguistics to explore how non-capitalist understandings of species can form. The dyad between the physical and the automaton, or 'signifier' in traditional linguistics, is central in this chapter. Following Saussure's argument that language is both structural and arbitrary (in that it adheres to a structure but that the words within that structure are arbitrary), Kolozova makes the argument that linguistic theory allows thinkers to return to the "real," and therefore approach the world in a non-philosophical, i.e. scientific, manner. In other words, while philosophy has prioritized the signifier, or the automaton, in its explanations of the world, a linguistic approach explores how these signifiers became meaningful by going back to the signified, or 'real.' The chapter continues to position capitalism on the side of value, rather than the physical because, as Marx explained, within capitalism, value (monetarized or fetishized) has become a goal in and of itself. Thus, human and non-human animals are understood in terms of value rather than their physicality within capitalist frameworks. A non-philosophical approach prioritizes the physical over the automaton, which is required to envisage life in non-capitalist terms. A non-philosophical approach to capitalism, therefore, also leads to a non-Marxist approach to capitalism. Kolozova agrees with Marx that thought is finite, and a return to the material is necessary to break away from capitalism. However, Marx places revolt within the human classes whose labor is exploited and fetishized. Kolozova takes this a step further and decenters the humanist perspective. She proposes the development of "consciousness of the exploited" rather than the Marxist development of "class consciousness" to form a more-than-human inclusive approach to resistance against capitalism and exploitation. To change the treatment of the exploited requires a new shared consciousness of the exploited "of and against the exploited animal, body, nature, real economy, and reality in the name of projected values and virtues" (48). In other words, non-capitalism can only exist if non-humans are included within its framework.

Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals' second chapter positions its argument in broader philosophical and linguistic theory. In this chapter, Kolozova identifies similarities between Marx's materialist formalism and structural linguistics. Formalism's strength lies in its acknowledgement that it is self-reflexive and will not provide definite, all-encompassing answers. Due to these abilities, formalism allows philosophy to depart from transcendentalism and enter the realm of the material and real, argues Kolozova. The second part of the chapter then applies Marx's formalization to philosophy and argues how feminism, through this framework, is allowed to return to a universal approach rather than one defined by difference. Through formalization, difference becomes a richness rather than a reason for division.

In “Subjectivity as inherently philosophical entity and the third person’s perspective”, the third chapter of *Capitalism’s Holocaust of Animals*, Kolozova argues that the concept of subjectivity is disconnected from the physical/real. The chapter starts by positioning itself within Marxist and Laruellian theory; philosophy should not aim to offer universal truths but position itself within the world. Thus, philosophy and the world should be studied unilaterally rather than in their totality. Kolozova connects this instruction to Marx’s claim that philosophy’s fundamental problem is its subjectivity and denial thereof. Because philosophy is inherently subjective, it will inevitably be limited to partiality. Therefore, philosophy can never offer universal answers to the questions it aims to answer.

The penultimate chapter carves out how the arguments presented in the book differ from other scholarly explorations of critical theory, specifically theory situated in feminist philosophical arguments. The first half of the chapter centers on Luce Irigaray’s work, using it to explore how “[i]n the capitalist world, the excess commodity production is solved through the Holocaust of use-value – literal destruction of products – to preserve the mathematical projection of surplus value” (120). This Holocaust affects not only commodity products; within capitalism, “a spectacular entity of the Transcendental [is] enabled by the *holocaust* of its physicality” (ibid.). Consequently, the chapter argues that different feminist critiques are still complicit in remaining within capitalism, thus repeating the same narratives that maintain patriarchal and anthropocentric power structures. Kolozova draws upon examples such as transhumanism, xenofeminism, and Haraway’s figure of the Cyborg to make this argument. In summary, as long as feminist theory does not take a radical stance against capitalism, rather than abolishing patriarchy, feminism will unassumingly but inevitably contribute to power structures that oppress and marginalize human and non-human animals.

The fifth chapter, which concludes Kolozova’s argument, establishes the value of Laruellian theory in critical animal studies. Kolozova relates it to Haraway’s position that animal rights should be understood in terms of “instrumentality”. This instrumental approach towards animal rights is outlined in *When Species Meet*. Haraway proposes approaching animals as fellow laborers for their roles as lab animals, food animals, and service animals, and argues that humans must learn to treat non-human animals responsibly. This does not mean that humans cannot kill or work with animals but that humans should recognize and respond to the sacrifices non-human animals make. Kolozova, however, argues that the shift Haraway proposes is value-based and guilty of “philomorphising” animals. In other words, perceiving non-human animals as laborers focuses on how they are valued by human animals, without having much impact upon the non-human animals’ lives themselves. In addition, any argument based on labor rights falls short, as laborers are consistently losing their status and rights; non-human animals will not gain anything by being lifted to “laborers” if human laborers are increasingly being turned into resources themselves. Kolozova instead proposes that humans acknowledge non-human animals as companions first and foremost. It is only in this way that their lived, material circumstances can and should be improved.

Furthermore, Kolozova argues that acknowledging the need for humans to stop making animals suffer is not only important for animal welfare but is also key for

the posthuman endeavor. She explains that “only by the emancipation of the animal [is it] that the marginalized and exploited parts of humanity can be free from suffering and killing. Posthumanism can accomplish its goal of human decentering only by way of emancipating the non-human, beginning with the animal [...] They do not possess a self as they do not possess reason” (148). In other words, philosophy can only be escaped by emancipating materiality for the sake of being material. Other attempts at emancipation will inevitably fail to address the structures that are at the root of oppression.

Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals would be most valuable for scholars of Kolozova's work, as well as scholars of Marxist and Laruellian theory. It is strongly informed by the works of these two scholars to build upon posthuman arguments regarding the exploitation of animals. In so doing, Kolozova's exploration and explanation of Marxist and Laruelle's thought is of great value for both new and experienced scholars of their works. Experienced Marxist and Laruellian theory scholars will enjoy Kolozova's original and interesting interpretations of their works. Early scholars of their work will likely be intimidated by Kolozova's thorough readings of these theories. Still, they will find that the book offers valuable and in-depth explanations of where and how these theories inform her own thinking.

In summary, Kolozova offers a new approach to responding to philosophical questions of animal exploitation. Her commitment to the rejection of animal exploitation is admirable. *Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals* does not, however, offer many tools to help translate Kolozova's argument into action or change; it is first and foremost a theoretical exploration of the field of animal philosophy. In addition, it is important to note that Kolozova presents a *Laruellian* critique of animal exploitation. While the book explores other forms of animal theory, most notably posthumanism, this is predominantly done to situate her argument. However, depending on the reader's aims for taking up this book, this may not be a significant loss. At times, the approach towards the main argument of *Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals* feels a little slow, but this is also one of the book's main strengths. Kolozova offers carefully constructed and essential arguments that are novel and particularly interesting for those positioned in animal philosophy.

References

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Biography

Yvette Wijnandts has studied cultural studies, political studies, and feminist philosophy in Maastricht, Utrecht, and Singapore. Currently, she is a PhD student at the University of Adelaide. She explores relationships between human and non-human animals and the ethical norms that are constructed within these connections.