

Massimo Filippi

Species Troubles¹

Thank you. Thank you so much for inviting me here. I am very pleased to contribute to this meeting against speciesism. In my talk, I will try to show: a) that antispeciesism is a transformative political movement which involves to a great extent human animals and their social relationships; b) that the notion of “species” as elaborated by the Western tradition is a political/performative construct rather than an innocent and neutral description/classification of groups of similar living beings. Against this background, I will attempt to discuss different antispeciesist approaches as they have been historically elaborated, which in turn will allow us to identify the targets of a political antispeciesism. In essence, I will try to decline antispeciesism along the lines of what is called French Theory (mainly Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida), Italian Theory (mainly Agamben, Esposito and Negri) and Gender Studies (mainly Butler).

Let me start from Darwin, who is clearly central in the elaboration of the notion of species. Darwin himself was aware that species are more than a biological concept and stated that species is an arbitrary way to group together individuals that are very similar morphologically. With a jump of about 150 years, the onco mouse and all the other less famous engineered hybrid organisms created by the contemporary technical-scientific enterprise show that the species barrier is not natural and can be

¹ Talk at the Conference «Le Spécisme en Question(s)», Geneve, 3 September 2017.

easily overcome by the very same system based on human/animal distinction. Along the same lines, we could also state that capitalism does not disown any living body if it can be put at work within its productive/reproductive chains.

Does this mean that species do not exist? I believe that the few points we have highlighted so far rather shows the opposite. The notion of species has never been more alive and functioning as it is today! To paraphrase what Derrida stated about “nature”: there is no species, but rather effects of species, *speciality* and *speciation* – the acknowledgment of special features which transforms some bodies into *bodies that matter* (typically human bodies) and others into *bodies that do not matter*; clearly, within this latter category are included (to be excluded) not only non human bodies, but also the vast majority of human bodies (as history teaches us).

In other words, the hegemonic system cares little or even nothing about the notion of species – which seems to haunt antispeciesism more than speciesism – at the very same moment it is functionally saturated by it. *The notion of species is one of the tools which is instrumental in hiding the dark and obscene side of power and dominion behind a natural background.*

Having said that, it should be already clear why I am convinced that we should think of antispeciesism as a transformative political movement and not just a set of moral statements. However, we can substantiate this idea by taking into consideration a

couple of features related to something well known by all of you: the *Animal Question*. By this expression, it is meant the material and institutionalized oppression and killing of billions of non human animals every year. And its most important features are the following: the *size* and the *pervasive nature* of animal exploitation in our societies (an endless number of other animals is used every day in virtually all human activities from food production to clothing, entertainment, so called “sports”, science advancement, advertisement, etc.). If you make a very simple thought experiment and imagine what could happen if animal exploitation were to end right now, you would easily see that our society would collapse immediately. In other words, our society is based on a *sacrificial norm* that envisages a continuous bodily dismemberment, which does not spare humans and which also involves the negation/cancellation of human animality. If this is true, it should be evident that we are explicitly refusing the social system in which we live, that ours is a subversive discourse.

Then, moving from these material aspects to more ideological considerations – that can be defined as “*The Question of the Animal*” –, we can come to a similar conclusion. Indeed, the Human has always been thought of *himself* as *difference* (positive or negative) from the Animal. The Human is an Animal with something more (soul, language, reasoning, etc.) or something less (an animal without claws and tusks), who for this reason is outside the natural world as a superior entity who deems that all other beings are at his complete disposal. This varying and very telling

difference is described as ontological, natural and, as a consequence, insuperable. But, as shown by the few examples from which we started, this barrier is indeed extremely permeable, at least in the direction that goes from the Human to the Animal, when systemic economic interests require this to occur. Briefly, *the Human/Animal barrier is political and performative rather than biological and natural.*

From this perspective, we can now move to the second part of this talk and try to give a new definition of speciesism: in my view, *speciesism is the sacrificial norm which materializes the lethal intersection between the ideology that legitimates the institutionalized dismemberment of bodies and the set of performative and material devices that makes it possible and that realizes it.* The main performance of this sacrificial intersection is the deceitfully natural separation of bodies that matter – to be protected, defended and sanctified – and bodies that do not matter – bodies that can be exploited and killed with impunity.

Starting from *ideology*, speciesism can be thought as a machine, a machine which functions very similarly to the one that Agamben called the «anthropological machine». Indeed, both these machines work to produce the Man – what is recognized as human –, by separating him from bare life through a complex operation which, by revolving around an empty centre, makes use of mechanisms which are simultaneously excluding and including.

At a first glance, this looks like an esoteric definition. But, we can try to unfold it in the context of our discussion. *Empty centre* means that, despite all the historical differences that have characterized its functioning and “products”, the speciesist machine is set in motion by *a priori* definitions of what constitutes the Man. In other words, the materialization of the Human is not the result of an empirical discovery of identifiable biological traits, but rather the bureaucratic certification of the deceitfully natural origin of the social relationships in force. The empty centre allows the transformation of the continuous current of living animality into the alternate current of the deadly human tradition: you are either fully recognized or completely unrecognized. Briefly, *what seems to be the product of the activity of the speciesist machine is, in fact, what this machine is called to justify*. The empty centre is what bestows to the speciesist machine all its operational efficacy through its ability to short-circuit the production with the justification of the Man.

As regards the synchronism of the *exclusion/inclusion mechanisms*, we could say that, as it is the case of all machines, the speciesist machine produces (includes) through dissipation of energy and accumulation of by-products (exclusion). These phenomena are inseparably linked, the inside and the outside form together: inclusion (social recognition and intelligibility) is constituted through the rejection (removal, dematerialization and invisibility) of traits and groups which are appropriated and captured at the very same moment they are excluded. And vice versa. An historical

example might serve to illustrate this point better (but the same applies today to the separation running between Western people and migrants). So, let's go back to ancient Athens: the Man is who has free access to the *agorà*, someone who does not need to work, who is able to argue without being overwhelmed by passion, and who is able to speak Greek correctly. It is clear that the membership to this club does not require any apprenticeship and that the membership card is granted to those who are already part of the club. Likewise, it should also be obvious that the inclusion of the Athenian occurs simultaneously to the explicit exclusion of the Barbarian (who does not speak Greek), the Woman (who is supposed to be an easy prey of passion) and the Slave (who does not even own his/her body), and the implicit exclusion of the animality that haunts even the most Athenian among the Athenians. At the same time, however, the Athenian would have never come to light if he had not taken possession (inclusion) of the Barbarian, the Woman and the Slave, if he had not *outsourced* his bodily functions to women and slaves, and if he had not used them, together with the Barbarian, to draw the borders of his own identity. This crossed mechanism puts simultaneously the Athenian inside (as "spirit") and outside (as "animal body") the privilege sphere, and the Barbarian, the Woman and the Slave outside (as bodies to be exploited) and inside (as working force and goods) the *polis*. It should not be challenging to repeat this same reasoning when the creation of the Man is at stake.

The creation of the Man is a long-term process, and we do not have time to go through all its many historical articulations. An important stage of this creation is the

passage from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic, when nomadism was substituted by the formation of complex, large, hierarchical and settled societies, characterized by labour division and specialization, which in turn gave rise to unproductive classes (rulers, officers, warriors and priests). Such an increased social complexity required a supplement of energy and resources, which was “extracted” from the work of slaves and subaltern classes, but also from the intensive exploitation of the environment, with the development of agriculture, and that of other animals with the development of domestication. The exploitation of living beings so similar to the Man – human and animal slaves – needed the elaboration of ideologies able *to justify the unjustifiable*, to transform political decisions into undisputable natural facts, to assign to each individual and group a precise and unquestionable position along the “Scale of Beings”.

History did not end at that time and other events have contributed to the creation of the Man. Let’s enumerate some of the most important ones: a) the global diffusion of monotheist religions (in which God, made in Man’s own image and likeness, gave to the Man the dominion of the universe); b) Humanism and Renaissance (which put the Man completely outside of the rest of the natural world as a sort of divine observer from nowhere); and c) the industrial and technical/scientific revolution (which forged the tools – from the disassembly lines to the cold stores and transportation systems – which exponentially increased the bodily dismemberment we are witnessing today).

However, for the sake of time, it is perhaps more important to leave this list incomplete, and to underline the main lessons that we should learn from this long term historical process. The present animal condition has undergone profound quantitative and qualitative modifications, which were dictated not only by the ideological point of view, but also, and above all, by the technical development of tools of mass destruction, which are every day more and more efficient and automated. This suggests that *the material conditions of exploitation require the elaboration of an ideology able to legitimate them and not the opposite*. It is very important to highlight this point, since many animal rights advocates believe that ideology creates *ex nihilo* the materiality of exploitation. In the human context, this is now fully acknowledged by many: racism comes before the invention of races, patriarchy before the naturalization/normalization of genders, etc. Going back to the Question of the Animal, it is sensible to think that a similar mechanism is at work: animal exploitation, which is so incredibly necessary to the preservation of wasteful societies, has required the creation of a *wide gap* between the Human and the Animal, an abyss which is at the same time material (through a strict distribution of the life spaces: humans in the *polis* or in its vicinity and animals in the enclosures or in nature) and symbolic.

Regarding this latter aspect (the symbolic abyss), I wish to underline just a few aspects: a) the idea that there exists a trait, present without any exception, in all the humans and absent, without any exception, in all the other animals – quite an odd

idea from an evolutionary standpoint; b) the cognitive/psychological nature of the traits chosen to draw the border line; c) the persistency of the restless search, based on many errors and poor evidence, of the definitive and indisputable difference between the Man and the Animal. These aspects of the Question of the Animal should be striking because they clearly reveal the bad faith and the artificiality upon which the Human/Animal barrier has been and is built, a barrier which is proportionally stronger because of its ability to look natural, neutral and aseptic. Zooming in on the narrations of the uniqueness of the Man, it should not be challenging to detect a gigantic fallacy in their plots: the one who is writing the classification is so interested in the result, that he has it already in mind before “discovering” it. This explains the seemingly innocent choice of the metrics to draw the line: psychological/cognitive traits which are human-centric from the very beginning. This also explains the persistency with which the border line is continuously drawn and redrawn, whenever empirical evidence questions and staggers it.

All of this is perfectly summarized by the way we call our species: *Homo sapiens*. Such a “scientific” name is all but the result of a meticulous and neutral work of synthesis of a specific set of traits of a given group of animals. *Homo sapiens* is not an innocent description, but rather a prescriptive result of a cutting operation which leads to a colonizing appropriation of those who, with the same move, are excluded. Indeed, we should ask ourselves: why the noun, sexed and sexist, *Homo*? By any

chance, are we implicitly excluding and subduing at least half of the members of our species? And why the adjective, self-serving and self-optionated, *sapiens*? By any chance, are we saying: «Yes, no doubt, we are animals, but so unique, exceptional and superior that...», at the same time in which we pretend to be part of the natural classification of beings, we are instead escaping it?

Again: the Creation of the Man as difference from the Animal is a political and not a biological undertaking. By saying this, I am not suggesting that there are no different biological traits among the different animals, but that a) biological traits are not distributed in a binary manner according to a “yes/no” logic, and b) such biological traits become *eloquent* only within an *a priori* normative frame. A frame which has the amazing ability to become invisible, to transform itself in a natural law (which states: «It has always been like that and there is no way to change»), at the very same moment in which it ratifies the “normal” ways of thinking, living and relating. This should remind us of something: the oppressive, discriminating and hierarchical strength of the social/political value assigned to “mute” biological characteristics within human societies: for instance, the colour of the skin. Hence, the grotesque persistency with which the line separating the Man from the Animal is constantly drawn can be interpreted correctly: *an authentic military operation of border patrolling in order to keep and increase the profits of the dominant classes.*

Once we acknowledge the instrumental artificiality of the Human/Animal barrier, the Animal Question broadens, deepens and takes an even more grim shade. Indeed, the Man we are talking about is “someone” who, albeit being abstract and spectral, can be depicted precisely: “it” is *male, white, heterosexual, Christian, adult, able, healthy and owner*. The Man that distinguishes himself from the Animal is not all and any member of the species *Homo sapiens*, but a very selective and elitist belly that eats what “it” excludes; *the Man is the invisible as much as the categorical expression of a system of hierarchical classification which works through the removal of the Animal outside and inside our species*. Likewise, the Animal is another monstrous collective noun, which is made up not only by the grouping of all animals together (from fleas to chimpanzees), but also by the dissected remains of uteruses and vaginas, anuses and sinuous movements, “stupidity” and “backwardness”, hallucinations and insanities, stuttering and vulnerability, emotions and corporeity, feelings and compassion, drives and the unconscious.

This sets the theoretical frame of the political tasks of antispeciesism. Other theories and movements deconstructed – and are still deconstructing – the *attributes* of the Man (*feminism*: the seemingly natural predominance of being male; *queer theory and politics*: the seemingly natural predominance of heterosexuality and gender binary; *Post-Colonial Studies*: the seemingly natural predominance of whiteness, etc.). To accomplish its subversive but still unexpressed potential, antispeciesism should work to deconstruct the *substantive* (The Man) that governs the adjective series listed

before. In this way, the political objectives of an antispeciesism able to maintain its premises and promises start to emerge: *animal liberation*, *human liberation*, and the *liberation of animality* that runs across, whether one likes it or not, even the most paradigmatic and “normal” human among the humans. These liberation movements are not separable at least because we are vulnerable animal bodies which offer to power and dominion the same catching points as all the other animals. Therefore, the indissolubility of these liberation processes is not the mean search for sham alliances or the persistence of a hidden anthropocentrism, but the implementation of a materialistic and subversive vision, which does not think that the Animal Question is extraneous to human issues and, therefore, it is not a bourgeois concern.

We are now in a position to identify precisely the mechanisms through which the speciesist machine works. They are three: a) *the definition of “the Proper of the Species of the Man”* (as said, this definition is set *a priori* and the machine has just to return it back unmodified with a “certification of naturalness”); b) *the measurement of the distance* that runs between this and all other species; and c) *the hierarchical distribution of species* according to an order which is inversely proportional to the above mentioned distance (the greater the distance from the Proper of the Man, the lower the position occupied along the “Scale of Beings”). Following Derrida, we could describe these mechanisms as follows: the first operation of the speciesist machine (the definition of the Proper of the Man) is a *story* that we tell ourselves to cut away from “us” the rest of the animal world. The other two operations (the

measurement of the distance and the hierarchical distribution) are the *calculation* through which we establish and institutionalize power differentials. Clearly, as is always the case, the story and the calculation are not independent from one another. They instead run after each other in a vicious circle, so that *the story naturalizes the calculation and the calculation normalizes the story*, branding it in our flesh and transforming it in an indisputable truth. Once this system works at full capacity, the story and the calculation strengthen each other: ideological changes or innovations are, at the same time, cause and effect of the introduction of new systems to measure the “value” and to establish the hierarchical distribution. And vice versa.

This reiterates the political nature of the notion of species. *The species is the empty centre around which the speciesist machine revolves*. The species is the “fuel” which allows it to reproduce the Man on the one side and the Animal on the other. The notion of species is not a mere description of an unchangeable natural order or of an equally natural evolutionary process, but rather, or also, one of the most powerful performative constructs used to classify and discipline the infinite variability of living beings. The combination of normative frames and empty centres activates the blades of the dissecting machines and their excluding/including mechanisms.

Let me elaborate this point a little more in order to avoid misunderstanding. I am not stating that it is impossible to detect biological traits, more evident or more frequently expressed, in this or that “species” or, in other words, that there is no biological

difference between, for instance, humans, dogs, hippos and beetles. *What I am trying to say is that the operation carried out to identify the biological traits that allow the border line between the Man and the Animal to be drawn is not natural and neutral, but rather a normative and normalizing political decision.* In simpler words: what allows *Homo sapiens* to be distinguished is not the mere observation of a “mute” series of more or less exclusive features, but the ability to make such features eloquent thanks to the power that the sacrificial norm has gained within our societies, a norm that, behind the scene, has already decided the lives that are worthy of life and those that can be slaughtered.

This point can be elucidated further by showing that similar mechanisms are at work in other situations, for instance in gender construction. The penis and the vagina usually do not speak. This undisputable biological difference between human animals – those with a penis and those with a vagina – assumes its social/political value thanks to the *heterosexual norm* which, among the myriads of intra-human biological differences, recognizes the penis as the eloquent aspect for the materialization of the “human male body” and the vagina as the eloquent aspect to materialize the “human female body”. In other words, human males and females do not come first and, through their natural and reciprocal sex appeal, cause heterosexuality to become hegemonic. It is instead the heterosexual norm that produces male and female subjectivities, which then sell them off as natural. In turn, such male and female subjectivities naturalize the heterosexual norm that materialized them by reproducing

it every day, through the continuous repetition of the most “insignificant” daily life gestures, for instance the choice of how to dress. We could go on by saying that noses do not speak, but they were made eloquent by Nazis. Cranial eminences or shapes of cerebral convolutions do not speak, but they are made eloquent by the psychiatric norm. In brief: *the knowledge discourses and the power devices render some features of reality eloquent and confer to their narrations the appearance of truth.*

In light of these considerations, I believe it is sensible, as I have tried to do, to ask ourselves whether the notion of species works by leveraging on similar mechanisms. The bodies that the sacrificial norm has materialized as human behave as such and, in this way, they confirm and naturalize it every day and with all gestures, even the smallest, for instance by sitting in front of a table to eat bodies that do not matter. Is it really so odd, then, to maintain that the Human/Animal distinction is a political question and not an issue of comparative anatomy? A cultural product, that can and has to be changed, and not an innocent naturalistic description? After all, this is what the so called “savage children”, that perform non human subjectivities once they leave the human community, and the pets, that perform human subjectivities once they are socialized in an anthropic environment, should teach us.

To complete the description of what speciesism is, we now need to examine the *animal dismemberment devices*, which can be grouped into two classes: material and performative. Unfortunately, all of us already know very well the material devices

and we do not need to spend much time on them. They are the farm, the slaughterhouse, the lab and all other places of confinement and reification along with their structures designed in detail to take everything into account: from the place where to build them (away from sight) to their architecture which has to be functional to the scopes of the exploiting sector at stake, from the optimization of the interior design (disposition of offices, cages, operating tables, disassembly lines, etc.) to the obsessive, bureaucratic and certified precision used to standardize any aspect of the industrial activity, etc.

As stated before, dismembering devices are also performative. As the Speech Act Theory showed, some linguistic expressions are not denotative but *illocutive*: these statements do not describe but modify the reality. For instance, when someone says: «I pronounce you man and wife», he or she is not describing a situation, but is changing existing relationships, distributing rights and duties, assigning the place that is due to everyone, deciding the future of those who are involved, etc. Some of these statements have the power to kill, are *killing words*. This is particularly true in the case of animals, that are killed by a multiplicity of words. An incomplete list of such deadly words would entail: a) national and international laws, which regulate both the dismembering practices – “humane slaughtering”, “good experimentation” and “animal welfare” – and public grants to support them; b) the resolutions of the associations of the manufacturers and the trade unions; c) the regulations that define where and how to hunt, to camp out circuses, to run catering activities, to manage

kennels, etc.; and d) the administrative measures that establish where pets are allowed to enter and those places from which they are absolutely banned, the conditions that lead to the suppression of snapping dogs, etc.

To conclude this part, it can be stated that if we really wish to overcome speciesism we have to act simultaneously on two fronts: *we have to deconstruct its knowledge systems (its ideology and stories) and we have to dismantle its dissecting structures (its power devices)*.

I will now move to the last part of my talk, in which I will present three different versions of antispeciesism, that I will call “antispeciesism of identity”, “antispeciesism of difference” and “antispeciesism of common”. Although from an historical standpoint they appeared sequentially, these versions of antispeciesism are all still active today and frequently give rise to the most variable combinations of elements taken from one or another of these three main proposals.

For intellectual honesty, before starting to discuss the *antispeciesism of identity* (AI), I must admit that we would not be here without its elaborations. No one should dismiss its undisputable importance. Nevertheless, I need to call it into question in order to develop a more efficient critique of anthropocentrism. *AI engaged in challenging the reliability of the calculation system utilized by speciesism without questioning the content of its story*, the idea that the Human sits at the centre of the

world as the universal standard of reference. In essence, this first wave of antispeciesism stated: «Yes, we do not call into question the Proper of the Man but, at least in some circumstances, the measurement systems used to calculate the distance between our species and all the others were imprecise, if not completely deceitful. The Proper of the Man exceeds the Man, it is not his exclusive prerogative. Indeed – the argument continues – there are animals that have some human traits, a “Quasi-Human Proper”, for instance great apes and dolphins. If we would have used more precise instruments to measure the distance, there will be no doubt that many animal species should be fully admitted to the club that at present is still considered a human club exclusively». AI – and this explains its name – remains within the anthropocentric sphere with a vaguely colonizing flavour: only a very tiny proportion of non human animals – those with pseudo-humanoid traits – is released from the category of the Animal – which therefore becomes even more rigid for those who remain trapped in it – and included into the category of the Man.

It is not by chance, then, if *The Great Ape Project* has been the main public expression of the AI. *The Great Ape Project* requests that fundamental *human* rights – the rights not to be killed, tortured and imprisoned without a just cause – are granted to animals that are very similar to humans, i.e., chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans. Along the same line, the oscillations and the second thoughts of Singer and Regan about the animals that may be eaten by animal rights advocates – mussels? Fish? Mammals younger than one year of age? – can be interpreted as a structural

problem and not as more or less legitimate personal preferences. Finally, it is not by chance – and to me this is the most troublesome issue – that the AI considers speciesism as a *prejudice* and, as a consequence, favours a *moral approach* to the Animal Question. Prejudice is something more related to individual psychology and will than to social norms, history, and political and economic dynamics; it can be viewed as a sort of pathology of logical thinking, which can be treated with vigorous injections of rational argument and with adequate psycho-logical training. According to this antispeciesist version, the social framework is acceptable, once we do not consider the way animals are treated. And, after all, we could easily make the world a better place to live: it would “suffice” to refine it with an increased personal awareness of animal suffering.

The *antispeciesism of difference* (AD) made a few steps forward. This version of antispeciesism did not spring out uniquely from the void of academia, but rather from a dialogue with critical theories – especially anarchist, marxist and post-structural ones – and the struggles of antagonistic movements. This led to two main conclusions. First: the site of the speciesist machine to be attacked is not the way it measures the distance between *Homo sapiens* and other species, but the third operation, the one that transforms differences into hierarchy. There is no single difference which can sharply separate the Man from the Animal, but multiple differences, innumerable lines of fracture, which run throughout both fields; once this is acknowledged, the “main” border line is weakened – this explains the name chosen

for this stream of reasoning. Second: speciesism is not a moral prejudice; it is instead *an ideology created to justify the material practices of dismembering*. According to AD, it is not the speciesist prejudice, which remains unmodified along the course of history to ratify human supremacy, that comes first, but the changeable exploitation practices. Speciesism comes after (or, at least, simultaneously) such practices in order to legitimate them as a natural fact.

Behind this radical change of perspective, there is a profound difference in the way our society is thought of. In line with liberal and middle-class views, many animal rights advocates believe that society is the sum of isolated individuals, who are rational, informed and able to ignore their interests and privileges. On the other hand, most of the theorists and activists of the second wave of antispeciesism think of the society as the results of what dominant norms run among “individuals” – who have interests, are not fully rational and are not well informed –, the set of relationships allowed and the set of those denied, the set of visible and intelligible bodies and the set of invisible and unrecognized bodies. This has led more emphasis being put on *politics* and structures that govern the *social order* than on moral rules and individuals, which in turn resulted in an increased level of conflict between sharply opposing political instances and in a decreased importance attributed to activities related to “one by one vegan evangelization”. Indeed, individuals and their lifestyles are the result (and not the cause) of the neo-liberal and capitalistic social system, which “produces” thousands of omnivores for any new vegan. Then, it is not by

chance that the animal condition is steadily worsening, despite the increased number of vegans worldwide and the fact that more and more slaughterhouses have «glass walls». In essence, for the AD, social change is not the consequence of the sum of individual lifestyle modifications, but *the result of historical collective processes intended to make possible what today is considered to be impossible*.

The AD, however, is not without limitations. First because, as we have sadly learned from other experiences, differences can always be transformed into new forms of identity. Second, and most importantly, because it called into question the story of the Proper of the Man only partially and without full commitment. This version of antispeciesism has not fully challenged the artificiality and the discriminating and destructive power of the notion of species. True, it deleted the idea of a single border line dividing the Man from the Animal, but substituted such a line with a multiplicity of lines. Briefly, AD did not fully understand that *the problem is not where the line is drawn or how many lines are drawn, but in the fact itself that dividing lines are constantly drawn and redrawn*.

Despite these criticisms, the *antispeciesism of common* (AC) would have never been developed without the advances of the two previous versions. The AC focuses explicitly on the empty centre of the speciesist machine: *it is the idea of the Proper of the Man that needs to be abandoned*. In other words, the Proper (with its wealth of “properties” in all the accepted meanings of this term, including characteristics and

ownership) is the main product of the darkest reactionary thought: the Proper of the Man and, as a consequence, those of other species do not exist outside the discourse and practices of the hegemonic élites. Hence, the targets of the AC are multiple: it strikes the story, the calculations and the devices that form speciesism. Indeed, once the role of universal reference is taken away from the Man – once we understand that his centre is empty and the speciesist machine is activated by what it pretends to produce –, the measurement operations cannot be carried out anymore and the dismembering devices become unacceptable.

Animal lives, without any exception, are hybrid and mestizo, in one word: *improper*. Animals – human and non human alike – are *intrinsically relational*: they are not individuals which relate to each other, but relationships which, under some circumstances and with a net loss of their richness and potency, can be individualized. *We are all threads of relationships*, we are all part of a continuous process of creolization with those who came before “us”, those that came and come along with “us”, and those who will come after “us”. We are singularities immersed in a constant process of differentiation rather than different individuals.

At this point, it should be clear why I called AC this form – still embryonic and still to be fully elaborated – of opposition to speciesism. The common moves beyond the dialectic of identity and difference, it is the *layer of impersonal and trans-individual life*, which runs through all living and sensuous beings. The common is the space in

perennial change where the *vulnerability* and the *finitude* of each and all sensuous bodies meet the wholly-animal ability to *rejoice and play*, to move around and feel without any pre-established end, free of the categorical imperative of productivity and reproductivity. In essence, the common is what allows antispeciesism to overcome *bíos* – the specialized life which is the field of interest of biological sciences – toward *zoé* – which is not bare life anymore, but *potency that produces new worlds*. Antispeciesism is what makes the common *common*: the common is not a form of collective property, i.e., another version, although mitigated, of property, but *the life that allows to live*, the life which should be and should be made unavailable to the capture processes of the Capital, the flesh-of-the-world freed from the economy of usefulness and profits.

This should explain why the AC intends freedom as *liberation*, a collective process that materializes itself among and with others. After all, this corresponds to giving back to freedom its original meaning. Indeed, the Sanskrit root of freedom – as it is the case, for instance, also for *Freiheit* in German – is *frya*. *Frya* derives from the idea of a *common growth*, of *flourishing* to be interpreted as the *connective potency of life*. The same is true for *leuth* or *leudh*, the Indo-European roots for freedom, from which descend, for instance, *elèutheria* in Greek, *libertas* in Latin, *libertà* in Italian and *liberté* in French. And it is not by chance that terms such as *love* and *friendship* share in many languages the same etymological roots, for instance *libet* and *libido* in Latin or *Liebe* and *Freund* in German. *After all, it seems that freedom is not an*

isolated, solitary and individualized fact, but rather a collective process of progressive togetherness and hybridization.

To end and to further elucidate the political tasks of antispeciesism, I wish to disentangle what is hidden under the umbrella term “violence”, trying to define what is violence, power and dominion. Although its broader accepted meaning comprises both power and dominion practices, *violence* in a strict sense could be interpreted as an occasional, fortuitous and “personal” event. If you are assaulted for robbery, you suffer violence; if you kick a dog because he or she entered your garden, you are exerting violence. Clearly, even in this sense, violence is heinous, but it is still something very different from power and dominion.

Following Foucault, *power* is a much more complex phenomenon for a series of reasons. First, power is distributed according to *gradients* (for instance, patriarchy imposes a different burden on white heterosexual women, on white lesbians, on black heterosexual women and on black lesbians). Second, power has several *vectors*; indeed, in addition to the most known vector, the one which is vertically oriented (up to down), power also runs horizontally and transversally – for instance, within the same social classes or ethnic groups men have more power than women, heterosexual people more than gays and lesbians, and these more than transgender or queer people; within the same gender or ethnic group, members of the upper class have more power than proletarian and sub-proletarian people). Third, power is not only repressive and

subjecting, but also *productive and able to materialize subjectivities*. At least in Western Countries today, power exerts its control by regulating life spaces and times, by producing discourses and knowledge, by reproducing (and by making us reproduce) social norms able to shape subjectivities that are consistent with such norms. It is exactly this latter aspect – the need for a continuous repetition of norms in the most disparate contexts – that makes it possible to cause “errors” of replication and interpretation, which in turn can produce disturbing and subversive subjectivities. Briefly, power can also act *affirmatively*. Fourth, power forms together with *resistance*: even the seemingly most stable power is crossed, more or less visibly and more or less intensely, by counter-power movements which are engaged in the liberation/emancipation of oppressed groups. Finally, *power is intrinsic to life*. Life is power: I can walk, I can eat, I can speak, I can suffer and I can even die: all of this is power. And this is so true that those who state that power and life are two completely separated phenomena are working – it does not matter if consciously or not – in favour of the established power, since he or she is stripping life from its potency. *Potency not only means the power of doing, but also the power of not doing*; potency is also resistance, disobedience, the power of saying: «No!» – loudly in the case of rebellion and silently in the case of boycott and sabotage.

When it loses this complexity, when it is without gradients and vectors, when *precarious lives* are reduced to *bare life*, when it excludes any form of resistance and any chance to produce “irregular” subjectivities, power becomes *dominion*. Dominion

is annihilating subjugation, and methodical, absolute, detailed and complete control on the lives of those that rather than oppressed are *already-dead*. The second feature of dominion is its ability to become *invisible* proportionally to its amplitude and extension. This is why it goes unrecognized and it is interpreted as a sort of natural calamity. It is this invisibility that makes it, as Brecht stated, a more severe crime to rob a bank than to found it.

With this in mind, we can return to the Animal Question. Non human animals are exposed – according to their species, with different levels of intensity and for variable time periods – to violence, power and dominion. It is evident that animals exert and suffer violence, can experience intra- and inter-species power relationships, and can be annihilated by dominion. Therefore, all of this does not need to be discussed further. On the contrary, it is perhaps less evident that exist power relationships between animals and confinement apparatuses. A proof of this is that pets perform different subjectivities in relation to the lifestyles imposed on them and the level of anthropocentrism of the spaces and humans in which or with whom they happen to live. But the most crystal-clear proof that these power relationships do exist is that, when they can and despite the fact that their rebellion is frequently unsuccessful, the so called “farm animals”, even after thousands of years of domestication and selection of the most docile “species” and individuals, resist and rebel against the confinement apparatuses. The evolution of zootechny is not for fun, but to bend animal resistance in order to increase profits.

Since violence and power are intrinsic to animal life, they can be “modulated”, but not completely wiped out. Those who state that violence and power can be completely eradicated are priests and not political activists. On the contrary, dominion is the most terrible product of an easily identifiable social order – the one that reached its apex in modern and contemporary Western society – and, as such, can and should be overcome by transformative political processes worthy of this name. As a consequence, an antispeciesism that recognizes itself as a radical political movement should elaborate strategies and programmes able to *reduce* violence, to *voice* openly its active solidarity to resistant animals and, above all, to *dismantle* dominion ideologies and devices. Episodes of violence and power relationships will persist even in the most liberated society. But dominion would not exist even in the worst of these societies: indeed, a liberated society will not stand extermination camps, electric chairs, atomic bombs, and torture chambers as well as factory farms, slaughterhouses, and labs for animal testing.

In *The Animal that Therefore I am*, Derrida has spoken about what he called the «war on pity». In such a war, those who deny compassion even to the humans are opposed to those who wish to extend it to embrace even animals. Derrida stated that today this war is more intense than ever and that it has never been so disproportionate in favour of those who deny compassion. But – he continues – it is possible that one day this imbalance could be overturned... Antispeciesism is called on to anticipate this

moment, to transform the *world-of-meat* into the *flesh-of-world*. To this end, *antispeciesism* is no longer called on to demonstrate the unquestionable – that *animal can suffer* –, but rather to change the world. If love, as Hardt and Negri define it, is the production of new pleasures, new desires, new subjectivities, new worlds and new being, then *antispeciesism* is *liberating and liberated love*. And love can be expressed simply with two words only: «Thank you!».