

[Review] Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel.

*Animals and Capital.*

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*Animals and Capital* is a comprehensive analysis of the distinct relationship nonhuman animals have with capital, inviting the reader to rethink the factory farm through the analytic tools of the Marxist theory of value. Being the culmination of over a decade of research and thinking, *Animals and Capital* provides a framework for analysing industrial animal agriculture within global capitalism as a system of domination. It builds on and expands Wadiwel's earlier work ('Do Fish Resist?'; "Like One Who is Bringing His Own Hide to Market"; 'Chicken Harvesting Machine'), sections of which are reprinted in the book. Wadiwel acknowledges that this book 'could reasonably be considered the second volume of *The War against Animals*' (2015) with the caveat that there is no 'unfailing coherence' between these two books (ix). One of the points where these two books diverge from one another is also at the core of a key argument that makes the book an essential read for both animal liberation and animal rights activists and leftists: *Animals and Capital* calls for and initiates a powerful discussion on the structural overlaps between animal advocacy and anti-capitalist movements. In addition to having a sharp focus on the critique of the industrial production regime, the book engages with a wide variety of literature, including, but not exclusive to, new materialisms, feminist social reproduction theory, Black Marxism, critical animal studies, and labour studies.

Wadiwel's book offers one of the few extensive analyses of the animal labour theory of value. The book describes and analyses the distinct position nonhumans occupy in the capitalist production regime, focusing on 'food animals' as a class. It shifts the question on animal labour

from 'Do animals labour?' to 'What is the use value of animal labour power to capital?' (98). Food animals, according to Wadiwel, are a 'distinct economic class' with a hybrid position in capitalist production, given the dual work they perform in value production (2). They transform themselves from raw material into consumption commodities by performing 'metabolic labour', a key concept proposed by Les Beldo for conceptualizing 'that which remains after human labor is subtracted from the equation of the "production" of animal flesh' (112). Metabolic labour is the factor behind their appearance as both raw materials to be worked on and labour power, in other words, both constant and variable capital. The third value form where nonhuman animals appear in industrial production, namely consumption commodities, is bound to this dual work. The focus on metabolic labour also allows Wadiwel to analyse a relatively underexplored site of animal exploitation: live trade in 'food animals'. Combining the significance of metabolic labour with the question of the 'cheapness' of live transport as an alternative to trading in processed 'meat', Wadiwel brilliantly documents the mechanisms through which the value animals produce eclipses the circulation costs. In both shifting the question of value to one that focuses on metabolism and in focusing on live trade as a relatively underexplored site of exploitation, Wadiwel makes a significant contribution to critical animal studies literature.

In focusing on the labour of the nonhuman animals involved in the production process, *Animals and Capital* makes key interventions in the anti-capitalist movements and literature.

Wadiwel's analysis distinguishes itself from the leftist analyses of formal labour, which considers animals as passive objects of production or nature-as-such that the capitalists freely exploit. The book details and argues against the effects of 'hierarchical anthropocentrism', one of which is to blur the active labour of nonhuman animals in making and fabricating the world as much as the human species does. This reframing encourages readers to recognize nonhuman labour as an essential component of capitalist production, which, Wadiwel argues, is crucial for a more complete critique of capitalism and for developing effective strategies to counter exploitation. These compelling arguments on the animal labour theory of value are presented to readers in an accessible way, regardless of their familiarity with Marxist terminology, attesting to the degree to which Wadiwel has refined complex concepts into engaging narratives that resonate with diverse audiences.

The book also challenges conventional narratives by shifting the focus from consumption to production relationships, arguing that the root of animal exploitation lies not in consumer demand for more meat but in the capitalist drive for surplus value through animal labour. This adds depth to the critique of these relations of production by moving beyond the ‘apparent wrong of commodification’ to address the structural problems as they cater to the moral ones (Wadiwel viii). While Wadiwel acknowledges the significance of ethical consumer choices, he also cautions against placing too much faith in consumption-focused politics, as capitalism remains primarily concerned with the reproduction costs of labour rather than with how wages are spent. This focus on (re)production creates a dialogue between feminist and animal liberation movements. Building on feminist critical animal studies as well as feminist social reproduction theory and labour studies, Wadiwel points towards a politics for abolishing all forced gestational labour. The book shows the continuities in how capital appropriates gestational labour in commercial surrogacy and agricultural practices. Human and nonhuman animals are denied connections, even the propertied ones, to their progeny in the industrial production regimes. If gestational labour is a key dynamic in the way capital dominates ‘life’, as feminist labour studies document, then refusing forced gestational labour is necessary as a starting point for imagining a different multispecies future. These insights are helpful for readers who are interested in recognizing animal agency while also challenging capitalist structures; they present a framework for rethinking the alignment between human and animal liberation movements without denying the fundamental conflicts between the two.

While making a powerful claim regarding the importance of building coalitions across these movements, the book also considers antagonisms, ‘the structural divisions that might prevent alliance-building’ (50). In making this point, Wadiwel uses Frank Wilderson’s analysis of Blackness as a unique structural position, an ontology that cannot be assimilated into any other position in capitalism, much like that of nonhuman animals. The analogy Wilderson builds between black ontology and nonhuman animals in slaughterhouses is a good reminder of the challenges of an intersectional vision – in the way Kimberle Crenshaw argued for in the article ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color’. Wadiwel writes, ‘A revolution that gave human workers control of the means of

production would not be a revolution for animals if they remained the means of production and the means of subsistence' (53). In the final section of the book, titled *Dreams*, Wadiwel takes up this challenge in a productive way and provides 'tactics' for producing 'a social imagination of a possible future' (200). These tactics are where Wadiwel's engagement with a wide variety of political movements comes to the fore in highlighting potential alliances. While providing concrete examples from Indigenous ethics and the food-justice movements, he also points to the promise of alliances between animal advocates and trade unions, feminists, and labour rights activists. This chapter is one of the key elements of the book that marks it as a distinct work in critical animal studies. By not only analysing but also imagining a multispecies way out of capitalist relations of production, it offers a deliberately non-programmatic horizon for collective liberation.

In *Animals and Capital*, Wadiwel offers a profound critique that reorients how we understand the exploitation of nonhuman animals under capitalism. By bridging between Marxist theory and critical animal studies, he challenges readers to see beyond traditional consumer-focused activism and instead to scrutinize the structural mechanisms that fuel animal and human exploitation alike. This work not only urges coalitions between animal rights and anti-capitalist movements but also recognizes the complexities and potential conflicts within such alliances. Through its exploration of hierarchical anthropocentrism, capitalist drive for surplus value, and animal labour as a fundamental component of that surplus, *Animals and Capital* provides a compelling framework for envisioning a more just, multispecies future – one that reimagines liberation as a shared struggle against exploitation in a more-than-human form.

## Works Cited

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