

## **What is Italian Antispeciesism?**

### **An Overview of Recent Tendencies in Animal Advocacy**

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#### **1. Introduction**

The publication of Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* was a milestone in the history of animal advocacy worldwide. Although associations dedicated to vegetarianism and animal welfare had existed previously, after 1975 a consistent philosophical and social justice movement took shape, opposing the use of non-human animals in agriculture, research and entertainment. Singer defined speciesism as "a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species" (2009: 6), and believed it was the moral foundation for all exploitative practices against other animals. In consequence, this social justice movement has been referred to as "antispeciesism" or "animal liberation" (as in the title of the book). But does Singer's original definition encompass the complexities of the contemporary movement in its intellectual and activist variations in the Italian context? In this chapter, we outline the social and theoretical components of the antispeciesist movement in contemporary Italy by identifying two different trends: one leaning toward mainstream neoliberal positions, the other toward radical counter-hegemonic ones.

#### **2. The Italian Rebus**

*Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer's philosophical treatise which launched the term antispeciesism, was published in Italian translation in 1987.<sup>2</sup> At the moment, however, the word has acquired a range of meanings, to the point that some authors (in both Italy and other countries; see e.g. Filippi and Trasatti 2013: 145-64) speak of several antispeciesisms, rather than referring to antispeciesism as a unitary, homogeneous phenomenon. As we will see for *Radical Approches*, his distinction between forms of antispeciesism from a theoretical standpoint originated due to the application of continental, anti-humanist, and leftist philosophical interpretations to the analytic, utilitarian, or Kantian version of antispeciesism, that liberal philosophers like Peter Singer and Tom Regan initially promoted. In Italy in recent years a range of extremely different activists and groups self-define as antispeciesist, despite being motivated by very diverse perspectives and philosophical positions. The term antispeciesism is often an "empty signifier," to use the expression invented by Ernesto Laclau (2005) to define populism. This creates a methodological problem for sociologists – especially for critical sociologists – because we must take seriously the self-representations and auto-definitions of social actors (in this case, both animal advocacy groups and individual activists). At the same time, the range of groups that self-define as antispeciesist creates an epistemological issue because their use of the term can involve a total abdication of the initial meaning of antispeciesism itself, implying something more than a physiological re-interpretation of a philosophical frame, practice and vision of the world.

We propose a general dichotomy (mainstream vs. radicalism), which we hope may begin to address this methodological concern, epistemological rebus, and the burgeoning political nihilism among this population of social actors. This approach will allow us to critically consider the current situation of both antispeciesist activism and more general contemporary social trends. For each of these two perspectives, we discuss examples in terms of both theory and practice. Because both theory and practice are generated by the same vibrant

cultural and political environment – and mutually influence one another – the animal liberation movement can only be understood by considering both activism and intellectual work in parallel. Therefore, we will first review mainstream positions, considering forms of activism developed in the last decade by the most visible associations and groups, taking their modality of antispeciesism as a point of reference: this philosophical stance hopes to build a cultural and political dialogue with the current Western social structure, accepting its latent general assumptions and conditions, and seeks the improved treatment of non-human animals within such a system. Then we will address radical approaches, focusing on a set of scholars and activists which represent some of the most avant-garde and politically oriented elements: they propose drastically counter-hegemonic perspectives, and are particularly appreciated in anti-capitalist political environments. Instead of reforming the status quo, this kind of approaches seeks radical change, using contentious practice and unconstrained philosophical thinking.

### **3. Defining the Concepts**

Before proceeding with our analysis of mainstream positions, we give a brief account of the terminology currently in use in the larger field to which antispeciesism belongs. As in other countries, in Italy there is a fluid use of the terms animal advocacy, animal rights, veganism, animal liberation and antispeciesism. These notions originated independently, and although the boundaries between their underlying ideas are often vague and porous, their usage does not completely overlap.

- The umbrella term *animalismo* (animal advocacy) was adopted during the late 1970s to identify a movement that arose from a single issue – opposition to animal testing – before incorporating several other issues related to animal advocacy.

- Another term, *diritti animali* (animal rights) was introduced to the Italian community in 1990, when the Italian translation of Tom Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights* was published.<sup>3</sup> Internationally acclaimed philosopher Paola Cavalieri, with her journal *Etica & Animali* (1988-1998), contributed to the prevalence of this term describing animals as rights-holders, a terminology that became popular even among large institutional organizations.
- The vegan diet instead (a diet that intentionally excludes all animal products) began to be more common in the early 2000s as a radical form of solidarity among activists directly involved in campaigns against animal exploitation. Later, this diet was popularized, becoming a widespread,<sup>4</sup> vastly depoliticized commercial phenomenon, and in the process the term *veganismo* absorbed a confusing array of meanings. In addition to food, many activists (or sensible consumers) would consider commodities and activities involving the use of other animals to be *non-vegan*, making veganism a broad philosophical stance (proscribing certain behaviors) rather than a simple diet. The all-embracing notion of veganism constitutes a new form of identity and tends to replace animal advocacy, deflecting attention from animal ethics to an obsession over the absence of animal ingredients in food and merchandise.<sup>5</sup> Veganism often goes with the belief that persuading single consumers, one by one, to change their shopping habits will be sufficient to bring a substantial change in the way other animals are treated and perceived. Even more confusion is generated by social actors who promote veganism as a universal solution for environmental concerns or personal health. In Italy, groups dedicated to supporting and expanding the vegan community are growing by the day, one of the best-known contemporary organizations being Progetto Vivere Vegan (The Vegan Life Project, 2001-current). As a dietary concept, veganism was preceded by vegetarianism (a less restrictive diet which excludes foods that require the killing of

other animals; both a vegan and a vegetarian diet would exclude meat, whereas dairy and eggs are typically excluded by a vegan but not a vegetarian diet), which in Italy has long been practiced by small groups guided by moral and religious motives.<sup>6</sup>

- The term *antispeciesism* describes instead what are considered to be the most – philosophically and sometimes politically – coherent elements in the varied landscape of animal advocacy. Antispeciesism is commonly treated as synonymic with *animal liberation* to describe unbending forms of activism, in both theory and practice, which demand a complete dismissal of animal use. Antispeciesism provides a rationale (if controversial) for animal advocacy campaigns and the practice of veganism. This philosophical stance is often referenced by more theoretically prepared militants to distinguish themselves from other animal advocates whom they consider to be superficial, narrow-minded, or otherwise undesirable, yet the idea of antispeciesism is sometimes referenced even by these less cultured groups as a sort of ideological legitimization.

Compared to the relatively broad, equivocal, and unprecise notions of *animalismo*, those who ascribe their motivation to antispeciesism or animal liberation are typically against any use of other animals for human ends. A wide range of groups that fall under the generic term of *animalismo* would be likely to oppose cases of animal *abuse*, hoping to resolve these issues through the application of either existing laws or slightly modified variants. Only the smaller subset of antispeciesist groups oppose all instances of animal *use*. To provide a few examples, volunteers who dedicate their time to direct animal care and participate only in events in support of cats and dogs (like the annual, deviously racist protest against the Yulin dog meat festival in China) also describe themselves as *animalisti*. Indeed, the definition of *animalismo* is broad enough to include groups whose propaganda is repressive and masculinist, like Animalisti Italiani (Italian Animal Advocates, 1998-current),<sup>7</sup> as well as more sophisticated and

theoretically informed groups like Animalisti Friuli Venezia Giulia (Animal Advocates from Friuli Venezia Giulia, 2011-current), that can be fully considered antispeciesist. For this reason, some activists in antispeciesism recommend abandoning the umbrella term *animalismo*, which they believe to be irretrievably compromised.

#### **4. Mainstream Positions**

Among Italian animal advocates, mainstream positions are the most widespread, and these have proved to be generally effective in terms of enlarging the base of social actors who are engaged in animal advocacy as well as in the pursuit of some of their political goals. In this chapter we use the term “mainstream” to refer to those activists and groups that propose to find a space for the animal issues (and for veganism in particular, as a form of consumption) within the current neoliberal paradigm. Not always the theorists whose reception is more diffused in this area are themselves moderate or mainstream; however, they result particularly appreciated among this category of activists, sometimes also because of partial misunderstanding or simplification of their positions.

In recent years, the most visible groups among Italian animal advocates include Essere Animali (Being Animals, 2011-current), Animal Equality Italia (2012-current), Anonymous for the Voiceless (2016-current), Iene Vegane (Vegan Hyenas, 2016-current), and Lav. One indication of success for the mainstream position is that all of these groups have begun to issue an institutional endorsement of veganism. The considerable visibility and popular relevance of these organizations is sometimes a consequence of their large marketing budgets, but is also an outcome of well-executed strategies, such as the attention-grabbing public actions undertaken by Anonymous for the Voiceless and Iene Vegane. Even among the more institutionalized groups, such as Essere Animali or Animal Equality, some key members were previously

involved in grass-roots radical struggles, but then decided to professionalize their activism, explicitly stating that they wanted to work within the common rules of the Western market economy and social structure, trying to progressively veganize it from the inside.

Among these animal advocacy organizations, some claim to occupy apolitical positions, while others endorse reformist/moderate approaches. These are pragmatic philosophical stances: although they may recognize the philosophical contradictions inherent in compromising with speciesist institutions in particular and the overarching structure of the neo-liberal economy in general, they have decided that a mainstream approach is the most effective. This is the basic situation if we consider the “supply side” (associations and key leaders, resources mobilizers), although the panorama seems to be even more complicated if we consider the movement base, which combines a range of peculiar elements: “ecumenical”<sup>8</sup> positions, transversal approaches, disinterest in frame bridging discourses and operations, and a tendency to consider the animal question as the foremost issue among all contemporary social struggles. These generalizations do not represent the entirety of the animal advocacy base, but their prevalence has been documented by empirical survey data (e.g. Bertuzzi 2018) and by online debates that have occurred on some of the organizations’ social media webpages (e.g. De Matteis and Bertuzzi 2019).

The philosophical variegation among the Italian antispeciesism community seems to have been caused by an institutional preference among mainstream organizations to enlarge their available base as much as possible, even at the expense of abdicating a strong theoretical support. In the short term, this approach seems to have been highly effective. These organizations have accrued large number of followers on the social media; there has been a dramatic increase in attendance of vegan festivals across Italy, such as Mi-Veg (2013-current), Parma Etica (2014-current), Sagra del Seitan (Seitan Festival, 2005-current); increasing numbers of people self-identify as vegans among the general population. This transversal

approach, which popularized a vegan diet among the general public and seems to have increased both the visibility and favourable reception of animal-friendly positions, gained traction in the early 2010s.

As the mainstream approach has become more influential, it has also become less political; supporters are positively disposed to developments such as vegan offerings from fast-food chains and other major corporations. In the past, animal advocacy organizations endorsed companies like Slow Food or Eataly; now, animal advocacy organizations might endorse the vegan options even when proposed by McDonald's, Burger King, Granarolo, or other similar market actors, which are all notable not only as traditional symbols of the "worst" that neo-liberal capitalism has to offer, but also as massive exploiters (in both the past and present) of non-human animals. These companies seem to be implementing new lines of vegan products in order to attract and develop a new market niche (Evans and Miele 2012), not as evidence of a philosophical shift – none has concurrently reduced the exploitative nature of their traditional offerings. Clearly, these market actors have maintained their anthropocentric consumerist basis: it would be naive to expect for these market actors to eschew meat products, and the earnings made through their vegan offerings are re-invested in animal-exploitative facilities. And yet, despite the ongoing practice of these market actors, they have received the support of organizations that self-define as antispeciesist. The majority of the organizations that pursue a mainstream approach with big corporations are aware of this contradiction; however, they seem to believe that this attempt at *entryism* could be effective in the long term. Although we cannot predict which methods will prove most successful any better than the animal advocates who have chosen these strategies, the mainstream approach seems to have resulted in the corporatization of activism (Dauvergne and LeBaron 2014) and the hegemonic characterization of similar positions, all of which claim to want to change an omnivorous capitalist market with

a vegan one, but without questioning the social structure and the economic system supporting it.

As anticipated, within this broad area of animal advocacy, only at the “top of the pyramid” – meaning among the leaders or the most visible figures – is the theoretical basis for the mainstream approach actively questioned; the “base of the pyramid” tends to passively receive the theoretical debate. We do not mean this as an elitist, normative commentary, but as an analytical observation (Bertuzzi 2018). Given this regime, the author who has been most influential in this area of Italian antispeciesism in recent years is Leonardo Caffo, thanks to his skills as a communicator along with his considerable visibility and adept use of social media. Caffo is not only the most influential scholar regarding the animal question in Italy in recent years, but also the most divisive. It is not the aim of this text to critique Caffo’s stance, but it is worth noting that some of his positions have been favourably received due to their simplification and vulgarization. It is unlikely that everybody in the group of Caffo’s followers and admirers is an expert in his academic and published works. Indeed, the amenability of Caffo’s work to reinterpretation or even partial misunderstanding seems crucial to his alignment with groups such as Essere Animali or Animal Equality – groups that, as we mentioned before, seem strategically and consciously biased toward enlarging their base, sometimes to the detriment of uniform reception of their discourses and campaigns.

Perhaps less transversal and less well known, surely more radical, Adriano Fragano has also been a decisive influence on this area of activism. Fragano works outside of academia and has typically adopted positions that are more political than Caffo’s. His case is peculiar and needs a further clarification: Fragano’s positions could surely be defined as radical, but they have been positively welcomed also (and especially) among more moderate animal publics (Blue and Rock 2014). Fragano has built a reputation through his books, public lectures, and especially his work on the website [veganzetta.org](http://veganzetta.org). The claim introducing this website is

paradigmatic of some radical positions of the author, stating: “Happiness is not finding vegan product at the supermarket, but not finding supermarkets.” Some of his positions, however, are extremely appreciated among mainstream areas of animal advocacy, especially for the central role given to veganism and the primacy assigned at animal questions compared to other social justice issues. This pushed us to list Fragano among the mainstream authors, even if aware of the peculiarities of his approach: his production, in fact, is often mentioned by moderate and especially apolitical groups and activists (Bertuzzi 2018), namely those who would like to acquire favourable position for non-human animals (and human consumers) within the current socio-economic structure. We are conscious that considering authors like Fragano mainstream could be controversial. However, the more positive diffusion his work had among moderate (or apolitical) activists and the generalist public induced us to locate it in the present section of the chapter.

Very different, and surely definable as completely mainstream, is the case of another commentator who has recently had a decisive impact on this area of antispeciesism: we refer to the former television personality Giulia Innocenzi, who has put in multiple appearances at festivals and on television shows.<sup>9</sup> Her stated positions are emblematic of some moral compromise inherent in the mainstream approach: for instance, the photograph that she posted on Facebook of herself alongside the well-known chef Gianfranco Vissani, followed by the comment: “We are the best couple of the world, and we are sorry for the others<sup>10</sup>... The battle against intensive farming creates unexpected alliances, even between an almost vegan and an extreme carnivore” (our translation).

With all the differences previously specified, Caffo, Fragano and Innocenzi are among the most visible figureheads of the “new wave” of Italian antispeciesism, because of their favourable reception among transversal and depoliticized antispeciesist activists. This part of the animal advocacy movement is characterized by massive use of the Internet to promote

petitions and legal initiatives, as well as to share animal-related content.<sup>11</sup> Animal Equality created a page on its website named “Animal Defenders” (*Difensori degli animali*), that mobilizes activists with the slogan “Stop animal cruelty with a click,” and aims to “fight the cruelty of farms every day with simple and fast-paced actions that can be carried out directly from home to make a big difference for the animals” (our translation).<sup>12</sup> This huge emphasis on online activism seems to be related to the general trend of Western societies toward the development of so-called network societies (Castells 1996), characterized by narcissism (Lasch 1979), individualization (Giddens 1991), and the reduced time available for political activism (McAdam 1989). Online animal advocacy is a particularly contentious battlefield, both for the conflict between animal advocates and the proud defendants of human-centric speciesism, but also for the internal conflicts between various types of animal advocates themselves. “Clicktivism” is an emerging characteristic of this type of antispeciesism, and although this vein of activism has surely contributed to an expansion of the audience of possible supporters, it has also resulted in a progressive moderation on several issues. Large investments of energy and resources were made in an explicitly institutionalized manner to promote the European Citizens’ Initiatives (ECIs), such as Stop Vivisection (2012)<sup>13</sup> or EndTheCageAge (2018)<sup>14</sup>. These pan-European initiatives are hallmarks of the shift in scale from the local movements typical of Italian antispeciesism in the early 2000s to the present-day internationalization of the movement. This shift inevitably resulted in a higher degree of legal action (delegating to a few representatives the decision-making) and a lower level of direct involvement.

The major European campaigns were also promoted by the longstanding Italian animal welfare association Lav, which now self-defines as an antispeciesist organization. This shift in self-designation – in its original conception, Lav did not self-define *antispecista* but *animalista* – is indicative of several concurrent phenomena among animal advocacy organizations. This shift is likely due not just to an increase in awareness among the traditional membership of Lav,

but also to an awareness among the directorship that such evolution is strategically necessary to maintain relevance and opportunities in the present day.

There are also grass-roots organizations that explicitly claim an apolitical stance. From our perspective, this represents an inherent contradiction: antispeciesism *is* political. Although Italy has both left-wing and right-wing antispeciesist organizations – among the latter, the explicitly xenophobic and racist Centopercento Animalisti (100% Animal Advocates, 2003-current)<sup>15</sup> is the best known – the basic definition of antispeciesism (the refusal to translate species differences into species hierarchies) should theoretically compel political change.

When the major animal advocacy organizations seek to be accepted within the current hegemonic structure, they do so by insisting on the distinctiveness and priority of antispeciesist struggle over other social justice conflicts. The mainstream approach to animal advocacy inevitably transforms what would seem to be a broadly counter-hegemonic philosophical stance into a single-issue cultural battle. Some such groups have employed strikingly visible demonstrations – for example, both Iene Vegane and Cani Sciolti (Loose Dogs = Mavericks, 2009-current) have bombarded supermarkets and public transportation with graphic images and slogans about animal exploitation and violence against non-human animals. Anonymous for the Voiceless has enacted similar spectacles. In general, though, the activists who belong to these groups do not seem to be particularly interested in the theoretical framework behind antispeciesism. Whereas the major institutional Italian animal advocacy organizations seem to be inspired by analytically-inclined Italian authors (Caffo in particular, but also the more political reflections of Roberto Marchesini, or the articles in journals like *Animal Studies*, 2012-current), these grass-roots apolitical groups seem to be more influenced by foreign authors that stress the psychological and emotional aspects of animal issues, such as Melanie Joy or Jonathan Safran Foer.

## 5. Radical Approaches

Following several large animal advocacy campaigns (the most recent being Fermare Green Hill [Stop Green Hill] in 2012-2013), the last ideological developments of radical Italian antispeciesism occurred during a period of relative calm. Although some number of clandestine interventions continued to take place in Italy<sup>16</sup> – often without much influence on public opinion – the time from 2013 to 2019 stands in contrast to the prior decade, when the Italian tradition of public demonstrations against vivisection was revitalized by a wave of campaigns against animal testing, many of which started in Northern Europe.<sup>17</sup> Beginning in 2002, numerous demonstrations and sabotages targeted the firm Morini, in Reggio Emilia, which bred animals for laboratories in Europe and Israel. The campaign continued until Morini closed in 2010. Two years later, after a series of demonstrations in front of another breeding station called Green Hill (in Montichiari, close to Brescia), with thousands of participants, some of the protesters jumped over the barbed wire and stormed the facility, thereby forcing its closure. Big, moderate organizations like LAV and Legambiente were entrusted by a jury with the adoption of all 2639 dogs liberated from Green Hill (April 28, 2012). Finally, in 2013, activists of the same group that broke into Green Hill occupied the Pharmacology Department of the University of Milan, negotiating the release of several hundred transgenic mice and one rabbit. The Italian fur industry was also targeted by activists during this time period: the campaign *Attacca la Pelliccia* (Attack the Fur) targeted both farms in the countryside and clothing stores in city centres between 2004 and 2011. Between 2013 and 2019, however, long-lasting campaigns and ambitious acts of protest seem to have ceased, giving way to relatively generic marches in cities, often monopolized by the rhetoric of veganism as an individual practice capable of bringing substantial changes. During these years, veganism has often been represented as a personal choice and identity disconnected from its original ethical and political framework, both in the media (television, radio, and social networks) and at supermarkets (which began to provide a

wide range of new products explicitly designed for vegan consumption). After 2013, animal advocates have perpetrated only one large-scale, illegal act of civil disobedience in Italy – on January 27, 2019, the French antispeciesist organization 269 led activists from several European countries in the occupation of a slaughterhouse in Turin.

Despite the relative paucity of radical action during the years between 2013 and 2019, this vein of antispeciesism continued to develop on a theoretical level, through intellectual debate and the publication of books and articles. This intellectual ferment has varied the theoretical landscape beyond the foundations of classical antispeciesism. As Carlo Salzani wrote:

Both the utilitarianism of Peter Singer and the rights theory of Tom Regan – the two main philosophies that, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, redefined and gave new impulse to the modern animal protection movement – propose [...] a thoroughly humanist enlargement of the moral community, whereby the criteria for inclusion and exclusion remain those of the humanist tradition. These philosophies are still founded on the traditional, humanist notion of subjectivity – which was precisely construed through the exclusion of animals. They necessarily reproduce, therefore, the same structure of exclusion, violence and sacrifice that characterized humanism, granting privileges to some groups while excluding others, as results evident from Peter Singer and Paola Cavalieri's *Great Ape Project*. (2017: 107)

In the last ten years, alternative theories of antispeciesism have been developed in Italy which go in a different direction from the work of authors like Singer, Regan or Cavalieri. Examples include the eco-Marxist approach promoted by Marco Maurizi (e.g. 2011), or Gianfranco

Mormino's reading of speciesism through René Girard (Mormino, Piazzesi and Colombo 2018).<sup>18</sup>

Here we will focus in particular on Massimo Filippi, because of his significant role in the reception and elaboration of the international debate on antispeciesism as well as his key position in between theory and activism. Filippi is the co-founder and editor of *Liberazioni - Rivista di critica antispecista* (*Liberations – Journal of Antispeciesist Critique*, 2010-current). He is also the author of many books on the question of animality, of which *Crimini in tempo di pace* (*Peacetime Crimes*, 2013, with Filippo Trasatti) and *L'invenzione della specie* (*The Invention of Species*, 2016a) are the most influential. Reformulating Matthew Calarco's idea of three main frameworks in critical animal studies (2011), Filippi interprets the history of antispeciesism as divided into three waves (analogous to contemporary understandings of the history of feminism). Antispeciesism began with a focus on identity, progressed to the focus on diversity, and only recently has started to encompass what Calarco calls "indistinction" and Filippi – echoing Antonio Negri – "the common." Antispeciesism of identity (i.e. the theories espoused by Singer and Regan) is in fact a form of anthropocentrism, extending human rights to some animals considered to be particularly close to humans from an ethical perspective. Antispeciesism of diversity collects all those theoretical works (including, for example, Jacques Derrida's *The Animal Therefore I am*) where the line that traces the border between animals and humans is multiplied and complicated, but still not completely erased. With the third wave of antispeciesism, the very notions of animal and human are questioned, as are the mechanisms of species and speciation.

Following Judith Butler's critique of gender, Filippi – who considers himself to belong to the third wave of antispeciesism – rebuts the common assumption that classifying bodies into species is a neutral, innocent procedure. Filippi highlights the biopolitical implications of assigning to someone a particular normative behaviour, essence, and predesigned place in the

world based on its species. In so doing, Filippi draws upon queer theory to subvert species normativity and question the current relations between those whom we designate as humans or as non-human animals. Furthermore, Filippi adopts Giorgio Agamben's idea of the anthropological machine (Agamben 2004) to destabilize the idea that humanity or animality is something objective, natural, and stable by demonstrating the ways in which bodies, regardless of the biological species to which they are assigned, can shift from the status of humanity to animality through political mechanisms of privilege and oppression. As in Gilles Deleuze's conception of *becoming animal*, Filippi tries to dissolve the species construct via an argument that he refuses to label as post-human, insofar as it is no more post-human than it is post-elephant or post-murine (2016b: 38). Filippi's critique leaves behind the ideological apparatus of rights, which attributes an abstract and universal ownership to individualized, autonomous subjects (2010: 286-89), and instead aims to deconstruct subjectivity, which works by focusing on the identity of the subject as human rather than on one of its many other characteristic features characterizing this subject (such as class, gender, race, and so on). Insofar as Filippi thinks of speciesism as a machine that is both material and ideological, antispeciesism is then the liberating movement that interrupts the working of that machine and restores to bodies the fluid set of relations that constitutes them, rather than sectioning bodies into discretely identified, sacrificial individualities. In this logic, the central aim of antispeciesism is not expanding the circle of interests or rights, with humans at the centre measuring the distance between themselves and others and establishing value according to this measurement, but rather to embrace a proliferating, intersecting togetherness of embodied and situated experiences – of sensual more than sensitive beings (in accordance with Filippi's preference of Butler over Singer).

Filippi as well as other antispeciesist philosophers who contribute to the journal *Liberazioni* have stimulated a lively debate around the question of animality that went well

beyond the national borders, translating into Italian authors like Matthew Calarco, Ralph Acampora and Carol J. Adams,<sup>19</sup> as well as interviewing leading intellectuals like Rosi Braidotti (2015), Judith Butler (2015), Michael Hardt (Filippi, Hardt and Maurizi 2016) and Jean-Luc Nancy (2019). Contributors to *Liberazioni* had a significant influence on the debate about the strategies of the animal liberation movement in Italy, both by questioning its direction and by proposing new challenging perspectives. For example, while he took part in several public debates arguing against animal testing,<sup>20</sup> Filippi rejected the use of arguments like the alleged uselessness of scientific research conducted on non-human subjects, recommending that animal advocates maintain an exclusively ethical and political stance, rather than taking shortcuts that are pseudo-scientific and further enforce the centrality of the human subject.<sup>21</sup>

Although the past six years have seen a paucity of direct actions carried out by the radical antispeciesists, the national movement of radical antispeciesism has coalesced around a series of conferences and festivals. Incontro di Liberazione Animale (Encounter for Animal Liberation, 2004-current) is a meeting ground for those planning direct action – the organizers have emphasized this focus by scheduling their 2013 meeting in the Susa Valley, where the local populace has been fighting the construction of a new railroad for the last twenty years. The organizers of this conference lean towards John Zorzan’s anarcho-primitivism, refusing the possibility that technology has any emancipatory potential and emphasizing the biological basis behind the notions of species and gender (in accordance with second wave feminists, and disagreement with ideologists of a queerer antispeciesism like Filippi). Consequently, the meeting recently changed its name to Incontro di Liberazione Animale e della Terra (“Encounter for Animal and Earth Liberation”). The Milan-area antispeciesist organization Oltre la Specie (Beyond Species, co-founded by Filippi, 2002-present) hosted the event Veganch’io (a pun for “I am coming too,” and “I am going vegan too,” 2006-2018), although the name was changed to Festa Antispecista (“Antispeciesist Festival”) in 2016 because the

term “vegan” had shifted in connotation, having lost its original radical significance and becoming instead both a commercial phenomenon and an overemphasized hallmark of ideological purity. For the intersection between trans-feminism and animal liberation the two *Liberazione Gener-ale* (“General Liberation”, but also “Gender Liberation”) roundtables organized in Florence in 2013 and in Verona in 2016 by the collective *Anguane* (2012-current) were particularly remarkable.

Recent years have also seen the introduction of several projects belonging to the area of radical antispeciesism that are centred on a less paternalistic understanding of animal advocacy. *Bioviolenza – Al mattatoio sani e felici* (Bioviolence – Healthy and Happy at the Slaughterhouse, 2011-current)<sup>22</sup> opposes the rhetoric of organic farms where animals are given supposedly healthy, satisfactory lives until they are humanely put down. This rhetoric is used to relieve consumer anxieties about the slaughter of other animals by evoking an idealized notion of the good old rural life, where farmers and farmed live in symbiosis. Stressing the contradiction in thinking of non-human subjects as worth ethical consideration while still reaffirming that their destiny is the slaughterhouse, *Bioviolenza* appeals to the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics to reject the idea of benevolent control of others, given that humans are still delimiting their spaces and regulating their reproductive capabilities. The *Bioviolenza* collective exists mainly online, but its members also drew attention by interrupting public events like the gastronomy exhibition *Salone del Gusto* in Turin in 2011. *Salone del Gusto* is a gigantic event organized by Carlo Petrini’s *Slow Food*. Alongside Oscar Farinetti’s *Eataly*, *Salone del Gusto* is the most visible entrepreneurial initiative to establish an international brand for fair trade or eco-conscious traditional Italian foods, many of which are derived from animal products. *Bioviolenza* has maintained pressure against the drift toward welfarism in the antispeciesist movement (a welfarist approach would advocate for better conditions for farmed animals, rather than their liberation). For example, in 2015 members of *Bioviolenza* started a

successful petition to oppose the growth of CIWF (Compassion in World Farming, 1967-current), a worldwide animal advocacy group that claims to fight industrial farming by giving prizes to corporations which introduce minimal improvements in their facilities.<sup>23</sup> Around the same time, in 2015 and 2016, Bioviolenza contested renowned antispeciesist intellectuals for taking part in a Summer School in veterinary science at the University of Milan, that included the presence of CIWF and a visit to an organic farm.<sup>24</sup>

Resistenza Animale (Animal Resistance, 2013-current)<sup>25</sup> is a collaboratively maintained blog that collects stories from all over the world about acts of resistance by non-human animals, such as animals who retaliated against exploitation by escaping, attacking guardians or hunters, or refusing to perform in circuses or zoos. By overturning the notions of agency and resistance as exclusively human, Resistenza Animale highlights the manifest attempts of other animals to fight the systematic exploitation they suffer (despite thousands of years of genetic selection that should have made them completely harmless and docile). In the perspective promoted by Resistenza Animale, animal advocates are not heroic saviours but rather allies or accomplices in solidarity. Animals are not voiceless, contrarily to the claims expressed by mainstream antispeciesist organizations like Anonymous for the Voiceless or Iene Vegane – La Loro voce (Their Voice): rather, the work of Resistenza Animale argues that non-human animals have been forcefully muted by a multitude of factors: the physical displacement of their bodies, out of sight in barns and slaughterhouses; ridicule, like the folkloristic depictions of naughty animals who make inept attempts to live on their own, running away from the farm or the zoo; and speciesist propaganda that describes animals' pursuit of freedom as somehow horrid and monstrous, irrational beasts assaulting their affectionate masters. Members of these online radical antispeciesist organizations have also worked to expose Italian audiences to the writings of international scholars.

In 2017, Marco Reggio – a committed and intellectually influential activist who participates in Bioviolenza, Resistenza Animale and also another controversial project he co-founded, Vegophobia (2009-current),<sup>26</sup> – collaborated with feminoska – a leading figure in both the queer, anti-ableist, antispeciesist group AH! SqueerTo! (2014-current) and the collective of militant translators Les Bitches (2016-current) – to edit and translate the work of Canadian author Sarat Colling, *Animal Without Borders*. Colling builds upon the work of authors like Jason Hribal, who describes domesticated animals as forced labour, and expands this theoretical framework by addressing animal resistance from a feminist, postcolonial perspective. Colling's master dissertation received more attention in Italy, where the efforts of Reggio and feminoska led to its publication as a book (2017),<sup>27</sup> than in North America.

Animal resistance is inevitably linked with the issue of animal sanctuaries. Animals who escape farms and slaughterhouses or were liberated by human activists need a place to stay, since they would otherwise be surrounded by a highly anthropic and often hostile environment or else simply unable to provide for themselves when suddenly returned to the wild. Sanctuaries for farmed animals (*rifugi per animali*)<sup>28</sup> are being developed in Italy, and these places are often run by antispeciesist organizations. Agripunk (2013-current)<sup>29</sup> was formerly an intensive farm for turkeys owned by the Amadori corporation in the hills of Tuscany but has since been occupied and turned into a hotbed for anarchist and antispeciesist initiatives, as well as a welcoming home for many formerly farmed animals. One of them is Scilla, a calf who in 2016 escaped a truck and swam across the Sicilian strait during his journey to the slaughterhouse (from France to Lebanon). Agripunk was finally able to adopt Scilla thanks to a mailbombing campaign coordinated by Resistenza Animale. Sanctuaries like Agripunk allow for an actualization of the antispeciesist idea that human and non-human subjectivities could freely intermingle.

In Italy there is vast public interest in the treatment of cats and dogs – concern for these particular animals is generally apolitical, and often disconnected from other branches of animal advocacy. This public support was indispensable to the success of campaigns like Fermare Green Hill in 2012, where the lives of dogs (rather than other, less popular critters) was at stake. At the same time, in a country where euthanizing cats and dogs in excess of the market's demand is against the law, many spend their lives in (degraded) kennels supported by the State. Activists who are part of the collective Resistenza Animale, like Davide Majocchi, are working to re-evaluate the condition of stray, wild and community dogs whose lives, compared to pets, are less privileged but also less constrained, and can still receive medical and food assistance by supportive humans.<sup>30</sup>

Whereas first wave antispeciesism (based on identity) recognized a kinship between animal liberation and other historical struggles to include marginalized subjects in the community of those deserving moral consideration, third wave antispeciesism deconstructs dichotomies at the root of Western tradition (e.g., rich/poor, man/woman, white/black, able/disable), in this case noting flaws in the traditional distinction between human and animal, where all the negative, inferior poles in these binary distinctions are somehow associated with animality (beastlike poor, wild barbarians, emotional nonrational women, monstrous freaks, and so on). Not only the category of species can be fruitfully added to the set of traits canonically contemplated in the notion of intersectionality (like class, race, gender and ability), but Federico Zappino (2015), a prominent scholar in queer studies, argued that the sacrificial norm (the material and symbolical creation of man at the expense, both material and symbolic, of other animals and of all traces of animality in “man”) is foundational even to, for example, the heterosexual norm, and can be seen as a common root of all other forms of oppression. Without establishing this sort of hierarchy or priority between antispeciesism and other struggles, many groups adopted a fully intersectional approach, criticizing symptoms of

classism, racism, and sexism in mainstream animal advocacy, but also trying to build alliances with other social justice movements. Oltre la Specie has organized many cultural events and demonstrations stressing the parallels between systemic exploitation of non-human animals and other forms of oppression directed at “animalized” subjects such as workers, migrants, Romani people, convicts, women, LGBTQI individuals, or disabled persons. In recent years antispeciesist activists have sought to work in solidarity with trans-feminist and queer organizations, drawing inspiration from published works Filippi and Reggio edited, such as Rasmus R. Simonsen’s *The Queer Vegan Manifesto* (2012, 2014)<sup>31</sup> and the collection of essays *Corpi che non contano* (*Bodies That Do Not Matter*, 2015). Since 2017, the Italian branch of Ni Una Menos, Non Una di Meno (Not One Woman Less, 2015-current), includes one group specifically dedicated to ecofeminism and antispeciesism: Terra Corpi Territori e Spazi Urbani (Earth Bodies Territories and Urban Spaces, 2017-current). These initiatives continue the work of feminist and antispeciesist scholars like Agnese Pignataro, co-founder of the journal *Musi e Muse* (*Muzzles and Muses*, 2012-2014), and collectives like the above-mentioned Anguane, which already contributed to introduce in Italy the work of authors such as Carol J. Adams and patrice jones.

As Filippi wrote about the history of antispeciesism, upon close scrutiny the notion of species dissolves as a fictional – yet lethal – construct (2016a: 55). Dehumanized subjects have always been exposed to dominion, regardless of the species assigned to them (2013: 163-164). The conflict between speciesism and antispeciesism resolves itself when we acknowledge the intrinsic vacuity of these notions, embracing instead a wider critique of anthropocentrism that would encompass all struggles for liberation, regardless of whether they are centred on subjects conventionally identified as “animal” or “human.” When radical antispeciesist activists occupied a slaughterhouse in Turin in January 2019, the official statement released by the transnational protest organizers was rooted in anticapitalistic, intersectional philosophy. The

organizers claimed that their antispeciesist struggle was one front in the battle against all forms of discrimination and domination (including racism, sexism, and xenophobia), expressing disgust for the anti-immigration Italian politician Matteo Salvini, and denouncing the moral compromise of some mainstream animal advocacy organizations for allowing far-right ideologies to spread within their ranks. This combative, uncompromising attitude is indicative of the rift between Italian adherents of a moralistic, disembodied, allegedly apolitical mainstream antispeciesism and the subterranean persistence of a more politically oriented radical antispeciesism that aims for a radical revision of the common.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have provided an intellectual history of the recent debate within Italian antispeciesism, connecting theoretical proposals with activist's frames and action repertoires. This history is necessarily both partial and partisan: in the first part (*Mainstream Positions*), it would have been impossible to cover all the social agents active in the main field of animal advocacy, and in the second (*Radical Approaches*), we focused our attention only on a limited set of interrelated initiatives and projects, that we consider to represent the most interesting and innovative tendencies in Italian radical antispeciesism. We think, however, that our account will resonate with other contributions of this book that look more in depth at some of the aspects we have only sketched. Focusing on organizations devoted to animal advocacy, we dichotomized the various perspectives as mainstream and radical. The recent history of antispeciesism has clearly perpetuated the classic contraposition of reformism versus radicalism. In our view, it is worth questioning the authenticity of certain reformist organizations, both because they still seem to be operating within an anthropocentric paradigm, or because they may have been unwittingly instrumentalized by subtle marketing strategies. We have also tried to give more visibility to those organizations attempting to transcend crypto-

anthropocentric discourses and practices, going beyond the traditional limits of antispeciesism and finding a more radical posture.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although authors vastly cooperated to this essay, Niccolò Bertuzzi originally wrote the sections *The Italian Rebus* and *Mainstream Positions*, while Giorgio Losi wrote *Defining concepts* and *Radical approaches*. We would like to thank Frank Brown Cloud and Amanda Vredenburg for their excellent work of copyediting.

<sup>2</sup> The first independent translation was provided by Lav, Lega Anti Vivisezione (Anti-vivisection League, 1977-current). Several years later the book was published by an official editor, Mondadori.

<sup>3</sup> Original edition: 1983.

<sup>4</sup> According to Eurispes 2019, the percentage of Italian vegetarians and vegans is 7,3% of the population, meaning +0,2% compared to 2018, -0,3% compared to 2017, -0,7% compared to 2016, +1,4% compared to 2015. Such oscillation indicates the instability of the phenomenon, but these fluctuations could be due to a limitation in data collection due to response bias, stigmatization issues, or distinct personal definitions of vegetarianism and veganism.

<sup>5</sup> Consider the success of ruthless business operations like the label Vegan OK (2000-current), which identifies wholly vegan products on supermarket shelves.

<sup>6</sup> The first Italian vegetarian association, founded in 1952 by Aldo Capitini, was called Società Vegetariana (Vegetarian Society). Capitini, an anti-fascist philosopher and politician, is known as the “Italian Gandhi” and initiated the famous Perugia-Assisi Peace March.

<sup>7</sup> With strategies analogous to the American PETA (1980-current), Animalisti Italiani adopted as a sponsor porn star Rocco Siffredi, with slogans like “*Pene più dure*” (“Harsher penalties,” but also “A harder penis”) for those who abandon their pets.

<sup>8</sup> By “ecumenical” we mean here that approach that aims at uniting all animal advocates, regardless of their political ideas and the tactics they use.

<sup>9</sup> Much attention has been given recently to her book, *Tritacarne* (Innocenzi 2017).

<sup>10</sup> This is a quote of a famous Italian song entitled *La coppia più bella del mondo* (Adriano Celentano & Claudia Mori, 1968). Such quote sounds extremely weird referred to an animal advocate and a chef who supports culinary traditions and practices that are strongly meat-based, ferociously adverse to veganism.

<sup>11</sup> Similar online initiatives have been promoted in past years, for example, by the network Agire Ora (Act Now, 2003-current).

<sup>12</sup> <<https://animalequality.it/news/2018/03/08/paluan-cede-e-dichiara-che-abbandonera-le-uova-di-galline-gabbia-entro-il-2019/>>.

<sup>13</sup> <<https://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/successful/details/2012/000007>>.

<sup>14</sup> <<https://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/open/details/2018/000004>>.

<sup>15</sup> The present analysis of *Mainstream Positions*, including self-defined antispeciesist activists and influencers whose political postures go from liberal to populist, excludes those figures affiliated with right-wing political movements, that could hardly fit into the theoretical framework of antispeciesism. For an examination of this area of activism, we refer to the booklet *Conoscerli per isolarli* (2016) by Antispefa: <<https://antispefa.noblogs.org/files/2016/02/Conoscerli-per-isolarli-antispefa-2016.pdf>>. This text precedes the formation of Movimento Animalista (2017-current) by Vittoria Brambilla, publicly endorsed by Silvio Berlusconi. For a more updated retrospective, see Bertuzzi and Reggio 2019.

<sup>16</sup> As has been documented on websites like Bite Back <<http://www.directaction.info/>>.

<sup>17</sup> Particularly the campaign Stop Huntington Animal Cruelty (1999-2014) in the UK.

<sup>18</sup> In 2018 Professor Mormino launched the first official course on animal studies in Italy, at the university of Milan. Thanks to the efforts of Mormino and others, the University of Milan has recently become a centre for research, seminars and conferences about the question of animality.

<sup>19</sup> Although the first complete Italian translation of Adams' *The Sexual Politics of Meat* was published by Vanda in early 2020, excerpts of the book and other essays by the famous eco-feminist have been published before, for example in 2010 in *Liberazioni* 1, 23-56, and in Filippi and Trasatti (2010: 23-38).

<sup>20</sup> For example, in 2014, a conference at the Catholic University of Milan (<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ia9ueHam3R0&t=6s%29>>) and one at the festival BergamoScienza (<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8MK3xsGypYc>>).

<sup>21</sup> <<http://www.liberazioni.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Filippi-07.pdf>>. This article has been published by *Liberazioni* in an unofficial issue, shortly before the publication of the first issue in 2010.

<sup>22</sup> <<http://bioviolenza.blogspot.com/>>.

<sup>23</sup> <<http://bioviolenza.blogspot.com/2015/06/lettera-aperta-ciwf-compassion-in-world.html>>.

<sup>24</sup> <<http://bioviolenza.blogspot.com/2015/07/perche-collaborare-con-ciwf-e-compagnia.html>>,

<<http://bioviolenza.blogspot.com/2016/09/animalisti-che-organizzano-visite-agli.html>>.

<sup>25</sup> <<https://resistenzanimale.noblogs.org/>>.

<sup>26</sup> This is a project about the public stigmatization of veganism and vegetarianism: <<http://it.vegephobia.info/>>.

<sup>27</sup> Here is the original text in English:

<[https://dr.library.brocku.ca/bitstream/handle/10464/5229/Brock\\_Colling\\_Sarat\\_2013.pdf](https://dr.library.brocku.ca/bitstream/handle/10464/5229/Brock_Colling_Sarat_2013.pdf)>.

<sup>28</sup> In Italian, the definition of these places as shelters rather than sanctuaries is prevailing.

<sup>29</sup> <<https://agripunkblog.blogspot.com/>>.

<sup>30</sup> See also the recent documentary by Davide Majocchi entitled *No Pet. Liberi e randagi (No Pets: Free and Stray)*, (2018).

<sup>31</sup> Originally published in English as a journal article, in Italy Simonsen's text was published as a book.

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