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# Journal for Critical Animal Studies



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## **Issue Introduction: Reimagining Human and Nonhuman Cohabitation**

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## **Issue Introduction: Reimagining Human and Nonhuman Cohabitation**

The issue of rodent control, in particular, rat maintenance has been a concern for humans since the beginning of agriculture and domestication. Once humans began cultivating food sources, the issue of controlling so-called “pests” became a matter of great economic and social importance. Thus, the profession of “nuisance wildlife control” was created to keep public and private spaces sanitary and safe from the sprawling “infestation” of not only rodents but other wildlife perceived as threatening to human populations. Popular population control methods involve using chemicals, inhumane trapping tactics, and other means of corralling pests that are not only unfavorable to the species under attack but also potentially harmful to the environment and other species. Thus, the issue of nuisance wildlife control involves a myriad of questions ranging from environmentalism

to animal rights, conservation biology to disease control, and ecological justice to architectural public planning.

When it comes to managing the problems, both real and imagined, associated with abundant wildlife while maintaining the nonhuman animal's right to life, dignity, and well-being, many of us are left scratching our heads. The essay of focus in this issue, "Follow the Rat. From Necropolitics to A Theory of Interspecies Cohabitation" by Gabriela Jarzebowska deals precisely with these concerns and more. Her essay explores rodent management through the lens of critical animal studies and interspecies cohabitation. The reader is encouraged to rethink how we view rats and consider alternative approaches to rat management that empowers both rats and those involved with keeping human living spaces viable.

There is no doubt that reworking how we do rat control is likely to generate volatile conversations and opposing viewpoints about the nature of human and rat cohabitation. This is in part due to the negative associations humans have about rats. Jarzebowska begins her analysis by explaining that our perceptions about rats are based on historically held assumptions, values, and perspectives related to a necropolitical narrative of war and colonization. She also addresses how social privilege may play a role in these matters. One way to address these concerns is to share the facts clearly, yet while making room for experiences and feelings about rats. We must ensure that rats are afforded some agency by adopting frameworks that consider their interests and sentience. We know they are capable of feeling pain, thus, we must avoid inflicting harm and suffering. Jarzebowska suggests we ought to rethink how and why we kill to determine whether there is a better way to cohabit our shared spaces.

When it comes to managing nonhuman populations, we assume there are only three choices available: reduce the number of births, increase the number of deaths, or relocate members of the

population elsewhere. We know that movement of individuals in and out of a given area does not change the numbers, it only relocates the issues to another place. As critical animal scholars and activists, we, of course, want to see the incorporation of ideologies that are nonlethal in scope. A solution mentioned in this article involves animal fertility, more precisely, rat contraception. Curbing fertility is perhaps is a means of preventing mortality, but from a critical animal studies perspective, one must question whether this solution is just. Is manipulating a wild animal's reproductive system compatible with our values as CAS scholars? If it is a choice between slaughtering rats through cruel and painful processes or preventing fertility, might we all agree that conception appears to be a reasonably gentle form of population manipulation and perhaps the preferred choice of the two? While Jarzebowska's essay does not grapple with the CAS ethics behind this choice, it is still an important thread that we would like to see analyzed a bit more in the future.

Naturally, our ethical preference given this type of situation is to leave the rats alone. We uphold the intrinsic right of all nonhumans to live their lives untouched by humans. However, leaving them alone is not something we can do when the public demands we take necessary precautions to protect human health and safety. In this specific case, due to our proximity to rat populations, might we forage a different relationship with them? One that suits our and their interests, alike? The author calls for us to reconsider our relationships with rats with the hopes that we can work our way out of the personal and political biases and prejudices that cause millions of individuals to suffer every year.



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**Follow the Rat. From Necropolitics to A Theory of Interspecies Cohabitation**

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**Abstract**

This essay develops the concept of a human-nonhuman collective and it concentrates on the conflict relation between humans and free-range urban rats. I pay attention to the necropolitical narrative of war and colonization that dominates the discourse around rat control. I attempt to answer the question as to how an interspecies community should be organized not only to protect human interests (in particular in underprivileged areas) but also to fulfill basic requirements of rats well-being. I analyze the main reasons as to why ideas on how to limit suffering in rat control programs are not present in the public debate. I argue that for the creation of an interspecies collective it is necessary to engage animal advocates, to provide transparency within the practices and to popularize alternative cultural codes establishing the image of the rat.

*Keywords:* rat, animal rights, ethics, necropolitics, community, collective, conflict, agonistics, zoopolis

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## **Follow the Rat. From Necropolitics to A Theory of Interspecies Cohabitation**

### **Introduction**

This essay provides an alternative model for free-range rats and humans to cohabitate in the face of a multispecies conflict. The extermination of urban rats is an integral aspect of urban nature management, even if on a discursive level it is taboo to discuss, especially in Western societies. Similarly to other social practices, extermination is based not only on an accumulation of knowledge but also the deeply rooted prejudice that stems from within a cultural context of nonhuman oppression. Free-range urban rats and humans were chosen for this analysis because they have scientifically proven their capacity to suffer. Their sentience encourages us to ethically consider their interests when deciding what we ought to do about inter-species cohabitation. Moreover, this issue deserves analysis because of rat's problematic relationship with humans that is based on competition, violence, and resistance. While such volatility between species makes it difficult to develop idealistic solutions that seriously consider the needs of both, it is still exploring for the sake of everyone involved.

The analysis begins by discussing dominant rat control practices, and hypothesizing reasons for why more humane solutions have not been used. I argue that a war narrative, which provides an interpretation filter that influences certain ideas from being debated, may play a crucial role in perpetuating the negative cultural perception of rats. In this context, Achille Mbembe's (2003) concept of necropolitics helps to prove that the mechanisms of exclusion and hostility developed within the colonial discourse also contributes to the negative perception of rats. To get beyond this negative perception, I propose a new theoretical model that considers human-rat

relations in the context of an interspecies community of collectiveness. Using Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka's (2011) Zoopolis theory, I argue that to embrace the specificity of these relations fully, the new model must acknowledge the conflict from within the collective. Consequently, I suggest using Chantal Mouffe's (2013) concept of adversary as a tool that can create a more balanced discourse on human-rat relations. My ultimate goal is to examine the possibilities of creating a different model for a more-than-human collective that includes both rats and humans. The concept of liberation may not be fully adequate here because free-range rats are not domesticated animals and can resist anthropogenic pressure. However, the extent of cruelty prevalent in rat extermination programs calls for more sustainable and humane solutions that will take into account not only human interest but also the well-being of rats. Most immediately, I hope this essay will inspire animal rights activists to advocate for less violent means of rat population maintenance. The suggestions proposed here intend to acknowledge the delicate social implications of such solutions within a myriad of contexts. It is not always the case that rat population control can be carried out by the same means and ends because, for some populations, access to knowledge and resources for cohabitation may depend on social privilege.

### **Methods: Why Cruelty in Rat Control is Commonly Overlooked**

It is essential to begin this analysis by presenting the most common methods used to exterminate free-range urban rats. I start from this point not because I underestimate the negative impact of rats on human settlements and human suffering caused by zoonotic diseases. In fact, I elaborate on this point later on, specifically in the context of how the presence of rats may affect underprivileged areas. However, these problems are widely recognized and have been extensively discussed (see Schneider et al., 2013, Himsworth et al., 2013, Feng & Himsworth, 2014, Battersby,

2015), whereas the well-being of rats is hardly discussed within the discourse. It is worth noting that, contrary to other forms of animal use such as factory farming or animal experimentation, rat control practices are usually not governed by any laws which could, at least in theory, minimize nonhuman animal suffering. According to the popular discourse regarding animals that are killed for food or in laboratories, they are not supposed to suffer, whereas rats subjected to rodent pest control have no recourse. For example, if a laboratory rat becomes poisoned with an anticoagulant, regulation maintains that they should be euthanized to shorten their suffering. Thus, the only criteria taken into consideration while planning and implementing extermination programs are effectiveness, cost and (less often) impact on the environment, humans and non-target species. The erasure of discourse, legislation, and regulation over the humane treatment and ultimately extermination of rats presents a large discrepancy that ought to be addressed.

The discrepancy in how humans view domesticated and undomesticated rats' suffering is not coincidental. Laboratory rats are commonly perceived as belonging to the sphere of culture and, as such, are valued more than their "uncivilized" cousins. The fact that the stereotypical lab rat is white whereas wild populations of this species are named "black rats" may provide another important, racial context for this issue. Although domesticated animals are usually valued less than populations of the same or similar species living in the wild (e.g., wild pig vs. domesticated pig) it does not concern urban rats as they are symbolically included in the sphere of dirt and perceived as a sanitary hazard. Consequently, they are also excluded from a highly valued category of "wildlife." Neither a domesticated non-human animal to be liberated nor a wild charismatic species to be protected, urban rats are "a blind spot" that does not catch the interest of pressure groups such as animal rights and environmental organizations. This oversight may be one of the reasons as to why ethical questions regarding their exterminations are rarely raised.

Currently, the most commonly used rodenticides are anticoagulants. They inhibit blood clotting, which causes internal bleeding. Many scientific studies suggest anticoagulants have a very negative impact on animal well-being (Mason & Littin, 2003; Broom, 1999; Sharp & Saunders, 2011; Littin et al., 2014). Mason and Littin (2003) emphasize that although bleeding itself does not cause strong pain, the accumulation of blood in body cavities and organs (lungs, kidneys, eyes) does. However, the main factor that contributes to how anticoagulants affect health is the duration of clinical symptoms lasting from a few hours to up to three days, although according to some studies, it could extend to five days. According to Mason and Littin (2003), the concentration of poison ingested into the body is the most important factor in killing time; the higher the concentration, the less time the clinical symptoms last (Mason & Littin, 2003).

Glue traps are another popular method of rat control that is controversial because of their inherent cruelty. Some countries such as New Zealand have banned their use, however, in most other countries they are freely available. Some people assume that nonhuman animals caught in a glue trap would die “humanely.” However, there are accounts of rats biting their limbs off to free themselves from the trap, or suffocating for hours in glue that covers their mouth and nostrils (Mason & Littin, 2003). One could imagine that such cases are incidental. However, from interviews I conducted with pest control professionals (PCPs), I suspect that the above cases are the rule, not the exception. Some PCPs state that animals are already dead when they come to collect the traps (which is not to say that they die quickly, as glue board checks are usually not conducted regularly). If not, they kill them anyhow, usually by striking them with some heavy object, submerging them in a bucket of water or simply throwing them in the rubbish bin to die. Some of them admit that they send still-living rodents to reprocessing center. When I asked one exterminator about the methods used, he stated that he hoped rats were “humanely euthanized,”

but he did not want to think about it (Interlocutor 3, 2017). Most professionals mention horrific things that happen with trapped rodents, such as rats desperately struggling to escape, “screaming their heads off” in pain and despair and rolling in glue board which sticks around their body and slowly suffocates them.

The current scientific consensus is that vertebrates such as rats can feel pain (Bateson, 1991). Research conducted in the 1970s and 1980s confirmed that rodents have pain and opioid receptors, and a brain structure similar to that in humans. MRI scans show that while experiencing pain, the same areas of the brain get activated in rats as it does in humans in similar situations (Smit, 1999, p. 317). Rats also have very high cognitive skills. Experiments have revealed that rats have a sense of time, spatial skills (finding their way in a maze, finding hidden objects) and that they can do simple logical tasks (Davis, 1996). They also have complex social systems (Macdonalds, 1999, pp. 54-55) and can experience emotions (Makowska & Weary, 2013).

Nonhuman animals are not the only constituents suffering from the use of rodenticides, as ecological advocates, mainly those within the field of ecologically-based rodent management, are skeptical about rodenticides. This field calls for a decrease in the use of poisons mainly because of the danger they pose to the environment and due to the short-term effects that they produce (e.g. Chambers et al., 1999, pp. 216-217; Cowan et al., 2003, p. 433; Meerburg et al., 2008). Yet, similarly to other discussions concerning large-scale systemic changes (such as modification of the capitalism or withdrawal from the use of fossil fuels), discussions around rodenticides are dominated by there-is-no-alternative discourse. In Europe, it is reinforced institutionally by European Union law which makes it difficult to register substances other than anticoagulants. Although the Biocidal Products Directive emphasizes the necessity to decrease the negative impact on animal welfare, the impact nonetheless is not defined, which makes the provision

unenforceable. Also, the scientifically proven negative impact of anticoagulants on nonhuman lives was omitted by the authors of the Directive. The only guideline on animal health and welfare which may be binding is the recommendation not to replicate experiments on animals in the process of biocides testing (see Smit, 1999). The belief that there is no alternative to painful methods results from a number of factors, most of which stem from specific axiological and political motivations. The dependence on anticoagulants seems closely related to the lack of interest of decision-makers in supporting coordinated actions and research of urban rat ecology.

Despite these considerations, by and large, the public rarely recognizes how cruelly rats are killed and how much they deserve ethical consideration, therefore rarely does anyone put forth a proposal to stop it. Mason and Littin (2003) suggest that one reason for this void may be the discourse of extermination effectiveness. Typically, humans want to rid their communities of rat problems quickly and use whatever means possible. Mason and Littin (2003) also mention that extermination professionals may not divulge what inhumane practices they use to kill rats, leaving humans ignorant to rats' suffering during extermination. It should be noted that the lack of transparency about inhumane practices is more of a procedural and systemic issue than the fault of the rat control professionals. Another reason may be the lack of accurate data on the welfare of the rat population as a whole. Consequently, discussions about rat well-being in rat extermination practices remain deeply uncertain. Moreover, rats are nocturnal and often live their life out of sight. Their nocturnal and withdrawn lifestyle tends to allow for their deaths to go unnoticed, and hence, could be another reason for why their suffering does not spark interest in public discourse.

From a macro-perspective there is yet another reason for this state of affairs and it is related to financial issues. Small-scale control programs based on poisoning animals are a more economical solution than investments in innovative research of rat ecology and alternative

methods, especially if their object is an animal that the public finds so uncharismatic. One may suspect that those in power may feel hesitant to invest large amounts of public money in solving a problem that may not be perceived as a public priority. Moreover, Western democracies tend to favor short-term actions for pest control. It is difficult to persuade decision-makers that a solution is valuable if, in all likelihood, it will only prove advantageous in 10-20 years. This is especially true given that most political decisions are made within 4-5-year cycles of politicians being in power. Furthermore, many politicians and their constituents may feel shame at admitting that their cities have rat populations. Thus, discussions about the presence and possible alternatives to the mass killing of rats is rarely broached (Parsons et al., 2017). A symbolic identification of rats with dirt and pathology results in a situation where war is waged against rats in an undercover operation. If these animals appear in the media, the coverage is almost always sensational, and does not provide a reasonable analysis. Such representations do not promote balanced views, nor does it generate empathy for these nonhuman animals.

### **Cultural Perceptions: Rats and Necropolitical Discourse**

Another factor that influences how rats are perceived by humans relates to how the cultural discourse presents them as deadly enemies of the human species. During my doctoral research, I examined rat control discourse in Poland and the United States after 1945 using professional literature, media coverage, educational materials, leaflets, posters, and websites. My research suggests that the relations between rats and humans have often been presented through metaphors of war, conquest, and invasion. Although during the Cold War, the warlike narrative was more explicit, it is fairly common to witness it in contemporary sources. It is worth looking at the image of the rat replicated by the visual culture - leaflets advertising rodenticides, pest control websites



or films (e.g. horrors *Willard*, 1971, directed by D. Mann, *The Rats*, 2002, directed by J. Lafia, or documentary *Rats*, 2016, directed by M. Spurlock) - to see how pervasive the motif of rats as deadly dangerous conquerors invading the urban/human habitat continues to be in popular media.

The narrative defining this species as a havoc-wreaking eternal enemy of *Homo sapiens* has a certain basis in the ecology of our relations since we have competed for resources for centuries (See Zinsser, 1935; Hendrickson, 1983). However, the war rhetoric has a strong performative potential, especially when it defines and justifies human's ruthless methods of rat extermination. It is worth analyzing the metaphors of invasion and colonization, thanks to which nonhuman animals we do not like (rats) are perceived as our enemy, assaulting our property, health or even life, rather than just as our ecological competitors (Biehler, 2013, p. 7; Jerolmack, 2014).

This rhetoric transcends a strictly anthropocentric perspective, though. The idea of ecological invasion coined by Charles Elton (2000) is crucial here, as it assumes humans are fighting against an alien species that pose a considerable threat to ecosystems. The term "invasive species" reveals a belief in what nature should be, which species are welcome and which should be exterminated. It also unconsciously replicates the very narrative used earlier in history to describe unwanted groups of people (Nagy & Johnson, 2013). Referring to Davis, Brendon Larson (2013) claims that the concept of invasion ecology resulted from war experiences, particularly those related to the attempted invasion of Great Britain by the Nazi army (p. 139). However, as argued by Richard Twine (2010), when the term colonization is used with reference to the human-non-human relations it should be understood not as a permanent situation but as a continuous, dynamic process of negotiations, transformation and resistance, which evades binary oppositions (p. 48).

Drawing from postcolonial studies, the concept of necropolitics is useful to describe the dynamic relationship between rats and humans. Achille Mbembe (2003) describes necropolitics as the use of political and social power to control mortality. It amounts to the right to impose death or the right to kill, enslave, and enact other forms of violence on Others. Our relations with nonhuman animals, and especially in the case of rats, can be described using the same logic. Living in places associated with dirt and decay, rats are an embodiment of a dangerous, chthonic face of nature, taking advantage of human civilizations. Similarly, stemming from the imperial imagination, colonies were inhabited by indigenous “savages” whose lives were a form of animal life. As Mbembe (2003) explains, this sovereign exercise of power was used to separate and divide individuals into categories, which established biological boundaries between some and Others. Classifying indigenous peoples as animals constituted a symbolic denigration that created widespread moral indifference toward non-white inhabitants of colonies. Indigenous peoples were not perceived as moral subjects, thus their exploitation and extermination was permissible. Likewise, our relations with animals are based on creating boundaries not only between humans and nonhumans but also between certain kinds of animals. Consequently, some animals (e.g., pets, endangered species) fall into the category in which killing is viewed as problematic, whereas killing other animals is devoid of any moral concern. Although most animals fall into the latter group, I argue that urban rats, perceived as “savages,” an embodiment of dirt and antithesis of civilization, can most forcefully exemplify this logic of exclusion. It is what makes them what Robin Mackenzie described as “bestia sacer” (Mackenzie, 2011). Moreover, indigenous tribes, void of organized armies, were subject to permanent war and hostility during which colonialists suspended moral and legal standards and violence was used in the name of “civilization.” Not surprisingly, this rhetoric and logic can be found in rat control discourse. Rats are described as an

eternal enemy of our species, upon which peace is impossible. Humans do not differentiate against any particular rat population as problematic; rather the entire species is subject to extermination because it is believed to be the right and natural course of action. The ideology of rat extermination has taken centuries to solidify into what it is today. In the 20th century, the absence of rats in a given community meant that the area was sanitary, civilized, and modern. Following this logic, rats began to symbolize backwardness and social deprivation. Furthermore, a biophysical elimination of the enemy or “savage” rat clearly strengthens the safety and livelihood of the colonizer or human (Mbembe, 2003). Rats are associated with numerous diseases which may pose a threat to humans’ health, thus their elimination is believed to be the only means of improving human safety and sanitary conditions.

The concept of necropolitics has already been used to describe human-non-human relations (Groeneveld, 2014, Wadiwel, 2015), mainly with a focus on domesticated contexts. However, in the case of rats (and, to a lesser extent, other animals referred to as pests and “invasive species”), the concept is even more adequate. The proverbial white flag in the Animal Protection Act, which prohibits unnecessary suffering, does not apply to the free-range rats who may find themselves at war with humans. Rats are perceived as a deadly threat to human existence and property, despite existing in countries that are not threatened by famine caused by rodents. This war propaganda against rats is not always linked with a direct increase in cruel rat control practices. For example, New Zealand recently banned glue traps because of their inhumanness, although the rhetoric of invasion remains explicit in the pest control discourse there. It does not change the fact, however, that describing any animal (human or nonhuman) as an enemy and placing them in the context of ‘war’ may support attitudes and actions that do not take ethical considerations into account.

To secure human interests in relation to rats without falling into necropolitical discourse is indeed a challenging task. To achieve it, we first need to overcome the dichotomy of permanent war and harmonious coexistence. This is why the agonistic framework proposed by Chantal Mouffe (2013) may be useful to explore. According to Mouffe (2013), conflict is inevitably incorporated in any given collective's functioning especially when there are values that clash. Although agonistic theory describes political communities of humans and as such is deeply rooted in discursive practices (conflicting values also mean conflicting narratives), it can be used to describe the conflicting interests of various species. Such perspective should assume simultaneous revocation of two paradigms: anthropocentrism on the one hand, and an individualistic understanding of animal interests on the other. Like humans, rats are individuals worthy of moral status and should not be subject to painful practices regardless of their effectiveness. Mouffe's (2013) concept of an adversary is especially useful as it is presented differently than how it is usually understood within liberal discourse. An adversary is not exactly an enemy to be destroyed nor merely a competitor, but rather, someone in between. An adversary is an opponent whose views or interests are disparate with ours but who deserves a certain degree of respect, as a legitimate member of the collective. Within the framework, rats should be perceived as ecological adversaries, whose interests clash with those of humans, but not as enemies to be annihilated.

### **Challenges: Epidemical and Social Issues Related to Rat Control**

Finding a theoretical framework that will overcome necropolitical discourse is an extremely difficult task, especially when assessing the health risk associated with rat and human cohabitation. On the one hand, we must concern ourselves with the physical and tangible, although socially ignored, suffering of thousands of nonhuman animals subjected to painful rat control

practices. On the other hand, human health, or even individual lives, may be in danger. While the threats imposed by such conditions may be hypothetical, should they materialize in real life, the results could be catastrophic. We, therefore, face a dilemma: should the scientifically proven suffering of many nonhuman individuals occurring here and now be more important than the potential (not very likely, but not impossible) suffering of one, ten or a thousand persons belonging to our species? The problem is that we do not have sufficient knowledge about the probability of a large-scale epidemic. There is indeed scientific evidence proving that rats can carry dangerous diseases. It is also known that they have fleas that carry pathogens, including *yersinia pestis* (plague) and hantaviruses. Rats are, therefore, capable of spreading an epidemic which, after decimating their own populations, may be transferred to other species, including humans (Battersby, 2015, p. 82). However, no unequivocal data indicates that the actual threat might occur. We know that risk factors for such a threat include urban sprawl and anthropogenic climate change that support the growth of rat populations. The matter is complicated further by the fact that even if the probability of an epidemic is very low, it does not exclude other sanitary threats, such as infectious bites or food contamination. Thus, problems caused by rats are not only theoretical. In fact, they can significantly affect our own wellbeing.

While considering the issues surrounding human-rat cohabitation, we must not overlook the social dimension of the problem, as rats seem to thrive mostly in the underprivileged urban areas. A relation between rats and social exclusion is a complicated issue. For instance, Harlem is one of the most rat effected neighborhoods in all of New York City. Many residents cannot afford to pay for the sanitation required to keep their homes and streets clean, which are often the only means of preventing rat population overgrowth. Social and racial aspects of rat control in American cities discussed, among others, by Malcolm McLaughlin (McLaughlin, 2011) and

Dawn Biehler (2013) and cannot be ignored here. They provide a historical analysis of rat problem in American cities in 20<sup>th</sup> century and how rats' presence (and lack of sufficient rat extermination programs in ghettos) was related to social-racial exclusion. That is why animal advocacy initiatives such as PETA's "Living in harmony with rats" which promotes a trap-and-relocate strategy as the only means of removing rats from one's property, may seem ambivalent. Although they do provide an alternative approach to human-rat relationship, they seem to overlook the fact that in some of the most underprivileged areas, rats are too numerous to be successfully relocated. Solutions like this may be advisable for middle-class residents who come across several rats on their property, but may not prove efficient for large-scale rat management in highly populated districts. As a consequence, these solutions, although ethical from a multispecies perspective, may also be viewed as an expression of social privilege. It does not mean that we should abandon measures to save the rats and treat them humanely, while still looking out for human health considerations. However, closer attention needs to be paid to the collective dimension of the issue from both a social privilege perspective and a collectiveness of rats. Rat control should be examined as a situated, contextually based practice (see Beumer, 2014) rather than an abstract, ethical question. That is why I propose that we re-imagine relations between humans and urban rats as two collectives living alongside each other in a state of conflict. The problem of collectiveness is crucial here, as our relationships with free-range rats are rarely about encounters of individual subjects – human and non-human. Their essence makes up a multitude on both sides of the interspecies border: cities of a few hundred thousand, sometimes a few million representatives of our species cohabiting with populations of thousands (sometimes millions) of rats. We are two populations that may constitute a considerable danger to one another, yet we occupy the same space and often use the same resources. The question of

scale puts our relationships in an entirely different light. Even if we acknowledge that individual well-being and protection of sentient individuals against suffering are important, such activities require new tools to take into account the context of collectivity.

To support the creation of collectiveness among species, the concept of animality as multitude proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) can help. Animality is a synonym for radical multiplicity, eternal becoming, in which individuality has been taken over by a group, a swarm, a population. When considering urban rats, the multitude is more than a metaphor; it becomes an important, material context that determines a relationship between our species. When the authors discuss multiplication, they emphasize the importance of becoming based not on blood relations or evolution, but on the population through direct-contact contagion (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Despite that contagion has a distinct metaphorical potential for Deleuze and Guattari, this concept can help us reflect more positively on a species perceived as a reservoir of disease. To emphasize this point, consider the laboratory rat again as “a living machine” and the free-range rat as “a swarm.” We can assume that the laboratory rat as a research model is an individual form, even if multiplied and killed by the millions. Urban rats almost always function in the paradigm of a multitude. I suggest that these models of individuality/multitude hamper the creation of an empathetic approach and deny nonhuman animals empathy. As a subconscious mechanism, perhaps it can help us understand why philosophers and animal advocacy groups concerned with animal suffering fail to recognize the plight of urban rats.

### **Solutions: Zoopolis as A Possible Means of Breaking Necropolitical Deadlock**

I would now like to consider the use of the Zoopolis theory proposed by Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka (2011) as a point of departure for an alternative model of humans-rat cohabitation. It focuses on collectives and simultaneously provides an in-depth reflection on the status of liminal species, i.e., non-domesticated animals that live near humans. Although it is based on the animal rights theory, it opposes the idea of, as they call it “species apartheid” (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2014), as supposedly the only possible form of protection of nonhuman animals against human oppression, by calling it unrealistic. Instead, the authors propose the concept of denizenship, i.e., an in-between status, where granting animals a place to live alongside humans is combined with the reduction of some rights and responsibilities often given to citizens. It may be granted to particular groups of animals, especially synanthropic species (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011, p. 230). The concept is based on interspecies coexistence, where liminal animals achieve subjectivity, agency, and can influence interspecies relationships which can include performing acts of resistance. Considering rats’ high adaptability, their caution when approaching baits and ability to resist other methods of extermination, they cannot be described as passive victims of oppression. Instead, rats become an anarchist figure of resistance. Donaldson and Kymlicka (2011) emphasize that conflicts in an interspecies community are inevitable and as such, justice does not necessarily mean friendship (p. 244). Rather, as with any relationship, cohabitation entails risk and reward. As supporters of nonhuman animal well-being, the authors clearly oppose lethal methods of rat control. According to them, prevention is the only morally acceptable method, and if it does not work they suggest using live traps and releasing rats in another location where they could live undisturbed (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011, p. 246).

However, some aspects of Donaldson and Kymlicka's (2011) denizenship should be reevaluated in this particular case. I fully agree that extensive poisoning campaigns are problematic



due to their inherent cruelty. However, the appeal for securing residence or even designing urban spaces to take account the needs of animals is not necessary. Even if we agree that some spaces, such as sewers, are natural rat habitats, we should still protect the spaces inhabited and resources used by humans. In other words, we should respect rats and grant them the status of urban denizens but we should not downplay the extent of the conflicts, as it seems not only unrealistic, but also socially irresponsible.

Another crucial factor that needs to be considered when looking at this issue from a collective is that rat population maintenance is closely related to other ecological problems. Measures that could help limit conflict between humans and rats might also help mitigate other serious environmental issues we face. For instance, limiting rats' access to leftover food (like pet waste and garbage) translates into humans cleaning up after themselves and taking care of the planet, instead of trashing it. It also means that rats have to move elsewhere to find food and perhaps are less likely to dwell in areas where the spread of disease is possible. Furthermore, should humans finally come with a solution to curb global warming, it's likely that rats will cease to reproduce as much during the temperate winter months.

However, in certain parts of the world, the atmosphere around rat control seems to have changed somewhat over the last few years. In particular, the introduction of rat contraception programs have sparked interest in the United States and have already been tested in several places such as New York City and Chicago. Fertility control seems to be a noteworthy alternative to lethal methods. Even if we assume that they affect the well-being of nonhumans to some extent, they cannot be equated to the impact of lethal methods, which - as we have seen - often cause long and painful deaths. Using contraception would shift our activity from simple extermination to biopolitics, which, from a philosophical point of view, may be considered controversial. However,

at this point we assume that biopolitics can be understood as a responsibility for a population of nonhuman animals that, due to their lifestyle, are considered problematic to humans. At the same time, biopolitics may be the only possible alternative to the mass killing of animals.

## **Conclusion**

This essay explains how and why a theory of interspecies cohabitation among free-range urban rats and humans is both necessary and desirable. I accentuated that cohabitation does not have to mean a harmonious coexistence and that rat population control is necessary for the functioning of an interspecies collective. At the same time, I emphasized that the current means of rat extermination cause prolonged suffering and should be replaced with methods that have a less negative influence on their well-being. I hope that this essay inspires those who take care of so-called invasive species to have prejudice-free discussions about changing how nonhuman animal populations, such as rats, are managed. It is necessary to overcome pure speculation about these nonhumans, and instead have open dialogues about interspecies relationships and various aspects of their control. This essay presents research that focuses on rat control discourse in Western culture (mainly Europe and the United States), and therefore may not provide a full view on how human-rat relations are presented and perceived in non-Western countries. I invite other scholars to join in my quest to inform the non-Western public about the need for cruelty-free population control and shifting social attitudes towards rats.

To ensure our fight against the power of necropolitics and build an interspecies collective we must involve the work of scholars and animal advocates alike. Animal activists can assist with putting into practice the theoretical changes we need to end cruel practices. Without their interest and active work (e.g., initiating the campaign against glue traps) change is highly unlikely.

Furthermore, residents, scientists, journalists, and public administrations must be more transparent in their actions when it comes to discussing rat population control. They must be clear about their intentions along with their research and practices that effect the human-rat relationship. And finally, another measure that might help improve the lives of rats living free-range in urban areas is to change the negative perception of them held by humans. We ought to think about how rats can enrich our lives, just as we can enrich theirs. For instance, renowned rodentologist Robert Corrigan (n.d.) points out to the few positive aspects of the presence of this species, e.g., the fact that rats feed on cockroaches and recycle urban waste left over by humans; thus rats become an element of urban metabolism. Naturally, as Corrigan goes on to explain, these aspects should not obscure the adverse balance of our cohabitation and resulting dangers facing humans (Corrigan, p. 36). Yet, it seems that recognizing the different aspects of our mutual relationship could show it in its entire complexity.

We should bear in mind, however, that knowledge transfer alone may not be sufficient. If xenophobia, racism, homophobia, transphobia and fear of immigrants and refugees are still seen despite a wide debate and educational efforts, a negative response can all the more occur with respect to animals that trigger such strongly negative emotions. That is why the third key aspect that could change the public perception of this nonhuman animal – and therefore, indirectly the practices of its extermination – should be work related to the collective unconscious. It should entail popularizing alternative cultural codes describing the image of the rat, and, by extension, rat's symbolic status. This dimension of work on a change is the most difficult as is any attempt to process collective fears and traumas, yet it seems necessary to create an alternative model of interspecies cohabitation.

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### **Editorial Objectives**

The *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* is open to all scholars and activists. The journal was established to foster academic study of critical animal issues in contemporary society. While animal studies is increasingly becoming a field of importance in the academy, much work being done under this moniker takes a reformist or depoliticized approach that fails to mount a more serious critique of underlying issues of political economy and speciesist philosophy. JCAS is an interdisciplinary journal with an emphasis on animal liberation philosophy and policy issues. The journal was designed to build up the common activist's knowledge of animal liberation while at the same time appealing to academic specialists. We encourage and actively pursue a diversity of viewpoints of contributors from the frontlines of activism to academics. We have created the journal to facilitate communication between the many diverse perspectives of the animal liberation movement. Thus, we especially encourage submissions that seek to create new syntheses between differing disputing parties and to explore paradigms not currently examined.

### **Suggested Topics**

Papers are welcomed in any area of animal liberation philosophy from any discipline, and presenters are encouraged to share theses or dissertation chapters. Since a major goal of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies is to foster philosophical, critical, and analytical thinking about animal liberation, papers that contribute to this project will be given priority (especially papers that address critical theory, political philosophy, social movement analysis, tactical analysis, feminism, activism and academia, Continental philosophy, or post-colonial perspectives). We especially encourage contributions that engage animal liberation in disciplines and debates that have received little previous attention.

### **Review Process**

Each paper submitted is initially reviewed for general suitability for publication; suitable submissions will be read by at least two members of the journal's editorial board.

### **Manuscript Requirements**

The manuscript should be in MS Word format and follow APA guidelines. All submissions should be double-spaced and in 12 point Times New Roman. Good quality electronic copies of all figures and tables should also be provided. All manuscripts should conform to American spelling.

As a guide, we ask that regular essays and reviews be between 2000-8000 words and have limited endnotes. In exceptional circumstances, JCAS will consider publishing extended essays. Authors should supply a brief abstract of the paper (of no more than 250 words). A brief autobiographical note should be supplied which includes full names, affiliation, email address, and full contact details.

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