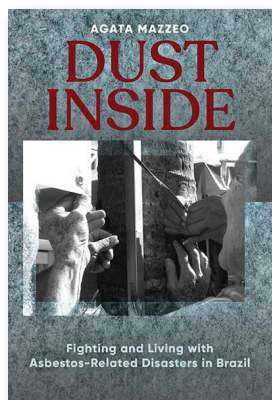


## BOOK REVIEWS, NOTES AND COMMENTS

Edited by  
**Federica Napolitani Cheyne**



**DUST INSIDE**  
**Fighting and living**  
**with asbestos-related**  
**disasters in Brazil**  
Agata Mazzeo  
New York - Oxford: Berghahn  
Books; 2020.  
202 p.  
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*Dust inside*, by Italian anthropologist Agata Mazzeo, from Bologna University, is a complex ethnographic study investigating health based grassroots activism aimed at countering an asbestos-related disaster occurring in Osasco, Sao Paulo, Brazil. Previous anthropological studies by the Author concerned asbestos exposed communities in Italy, starting from her hometown, Bari, and subsequently involving Casale Monferrato and Bologna (see also A. Mazzeo. Narrating and remembering as practices of care, community, and commitment in asbestos contaminated contexts. *Annali Istituto Superiore di Sanità* 55(1):94-9).

Differently from other disasters characterized by their high visibility, asbestos related disasters are regarded as “invisible” because they are not easily brought to light in the absence of *ad hoc* epidemiological surveillance or other appropriate procedures. The long latency time of asbestos related neoplasms among else contributes to uncouple the time-window of occupational and environmental exposures and that of disease onset and progression.

The founder of Osasco, initially an industrial district of Sao Paulo, then an autonomous municipality, was an Italian immigrant, who named the location after the name of his hometown, Osasco, Province of Turin. Many international companies opened their facilities in Osasco since the early Forties of the last century, among them Eternit, who built there the greatest asbestos cement manufacture of Latin America. The health impact of asbestos exposure on the workers and their relatives started to be perceived about forty years later, in the Eighties, like it happened in Italy.

In this frame, the ethnographic survey realized by the Author includes a series of interviews to patients

of asbestos related diseases and their relatives, bringing to light suffering, anguish and the notion of “embodied past coming to the surface”. In this frame, for many sufferers, engagement in activism has meant to contribute to “paths of care” for others. It can thus be stated that “reading and narrating the memories inscribed in the contaminated bodies coincide with practices of care and struggle”. In the meanwhile, besides individual activism, a national network of Brazilian asbestos exposed subjects (ABREA) started to work with collective issues such as access to health care, social security, compensation, court litigations and new regulatory frames aiming at asbestos ban. This also implied Brazilian participation in international networks, including a strict cooperation with Italian associations of asbestos victims and relatives, especially with the town of Casale Monferrato, where the largest Italian asbestos cement plant operated for many decades.

Finally, after a thorough review of the multiple disciplinary contributions required in order to disentangle the different issues at stake, the Author depicts the important role of anthropology and ethnography in the recognition of invisible disasters, empowerment of asbestos exposed communities, commitment to give a response to sufferers, and pursuit of environmental justice.

Besides the obvious interest of this book, that can easily be understood, I would add a few remarks on the way it is written. Firstly, the book’s template is directly derived from the notes written by the Author in her daily fieldwork; before starting, she achieved a good proficiency in Portuguese, in order to directly capture the interviewed subjects’ thought without intermediation by interpreters. Secondly, she took by herself the pictures that integrate the book, being highly significant under several perspectives. Thirdly, she often took notes about general issues concerning ethnographic studies, documenting her solid cultural background, and her familiarity with the thought of many important anthropologists. I would thus like to conclude this rapid review of *Dust Inside* by quoting the American anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes, reported by the Author, who wrote “If ‘observation’ links anthropology to the natural sciences, ‘witnessing’ links anthropology to moral philosophy”.

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**MANIFESTO PER  
UN ANIMALISMO  
DEMOCRATICO**

Simone Pollo  
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12.00 €

*[Manifesto for a democratic  
animalism]*

The Istituto Superiore di Sanità is actively involved in the revision of the project proposals involving the use of animal models, as well as in the cultural and applicative aspects of the legislation concerning animals used in scientific procedures. We have witnessed how animalist movements have been instrumental in the growth of awareness, both in the general public and scientific community, concerning the welfare of animals used in research laboratories. However, it is not perhaps wrong to say that most of us, when we hear the word “animalist” or “animalism”, think about a bunch of very angry young people thrashing research laboratories, or hard-core vegans who refuse any kind of use of other animals for any purpose by humans. This vision simplifies a much more complex and interesting picture. Simone Pollo, author of this agile volume, argues that animalism is a very important movement flourished during the last decades, and essential for reforming our relationships with other animals. Furthermore, animalism can, and in some respects already is, entwined with the ways of democratic societies: the author maintains this concept as the theoretical backbone of this book.

Simone Pollo is not new to these topics. His previous, very convincing, effort was dedicated to different ethical aspects of our relationships with non-human animals. His voice in the Italian scenario of philosophers dealing with animal ethics is original, and in my opinion, quite necessary. Instead of taking easy “pro” or “cons” perspectives, Pollo is always ready to discuss different options, even contrasting among them, and deconstructing mental “status quo”. This attitude could be perhaps easily pictured as too cautious sometimes, and unable to take clear positions, for example: “pro” or “against” the use of animals in biomedical research. Instead, in my opinion, it is the correct perspective to adopt for scenarios that cannot be approached by means of preconceived positions. Having said that, Pollo does not hold back himself when the occasion rises to criticise, for example, hunting practices or the use of animals in circuses.

The book develops in 13 short chapters (and few pages of conclusions). Each chapter discusses the notion of democratic animalism in relation to other concepts and issues, such as “transparency”, “progress”, “science”,

and so on. The starting point is that the perception we have of the other animals has radically changed, and the notion of “sentience” has become pivotal as an important concept to consider in our relationships with other animals. This implies the belief that other animals can suffer in sophisticated ways that resemble human suffering (scientific evidence for this is increasing in a significant way). Darwin already suggested that and his concept of “gradualism”, for different physiological as well as behavioural characteristics (and mental as well), serves very well a much-needed re-thinking of animal welfare. Simone Pollo is a fervent Darwinist, and successfully calls for the Great Man to support his thinking about transforming the way we think about animals.

The book is not a “manifesto” strictly speaking. It does not then propose a sort of political program, but argues in favour of animalism as being integral part of the dynamic characteristics of a democratic society. Animals have the right to be free. However, the evolutionary, social, cultural history of humankind is significantly based on the exploitation of other animals, in a way or another. For this reason, certain practices, such as scientific research with animal models or animal farming, cannot be so easily dismissed simply because “cruel” or “inhumane”, but surely have to be re-discussed with all of the stakeholders included, in new terms of what animal welfare is today.

I found of particular interest, for its originality, the chapter dedicated to wild animals “invading” urban spaces, or spaces inhabited and/or used by humans. The author is very critical of notions such as “management” of wildlife, because this notion is linked with a limitation of animal freedom, and our inability to comprehend and relate to something that is different from us (think about the term “alien species”). Pollo also says that the right to freedom of, let say, bears or wild boar which find themselves interacting with humans must be discussed taking into account everybody needs and reasons. I agree on this, and it would have been useful if the author provided us with some practical examples here.

Therefore, “animalists” cannot be understood anymore as just some loonies who reasons with their guts and emotions, instead of their brain. Animalism is and must be part of the developmental and dynamic processes of democratic societies. This is an important message that must reach, for example, those colleague scientists who still have some prejudice. However, extreme and violent animalism is still out there, but it just concerns a section of a more complex reality of people who do sincerely care for the welfare of animals we use for our purposes.

The book is reader-friendly, written in a style that leads the reader by hand through the reasoning of the author. The author is a philosopher, but do not worry! Simone Pollo’s style is simple and very clear. This volume can be of interest for anyone who has an animal in her/his life that is, a lot of us! But I would also strongly recommend it to members of ethical committees involved in evaluation of animal experimentation, as well as to the scientific community that use animal models, a community that increasingly care for the welfare of



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their scientific study subjects. However, as already said, the book will be enjoyed by anybody sensible to the relationship we humans have with other animals. Finally, I agree with the central thesis of the book: we need to discuss, we need to confront different ideas, we need to understand how we have to change our relationships with other animals. However, we also need to distinguish different contexts, and adjust our arguments in

relation to those contexts, but never lose the possibility to give voice to who thinks differently. And this should include other animals as well.

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