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Issue Introduction: Cultivating Nonhuman Animal Cruelty in Advertisements

Amber E. George

The media is saturated with imagery that uses nonhuman animals to send poignant messages about animal abuse and environmental issues. Some of the most prominent examples are advertisements that come from conservation organizations seeking to generate awareness or elicit parody. They use controversial ads to bring social issues to the forefront of the human imagination. For instance, a Portuguese nature conservation group published an advertisement showing animals committing suicide to highlight the impact that climate change has on animal habitats (Bhasin, 2011). Another conservation group, the World Wildlife Federation (WWF), wanted to raise awareness of the horrific clubbing slaughter of baby seals through an image of an adult seal club-hunting a baby human to death. The caption for the advertisement says, “Don’t treat others the way you don’t want to be treated” (Bhasin, 2011). The shock and awe presented in these controversial ads depict nonhuman animals in disturbing ways that powerfully impact viewers.

The article in this issue, written by Bridget Sutherland and Paul Judge, “Animals in Advertising: War, Vulnerability, and the Return of the Repressed,” critiques several ads that mock animals and sensationalize meat-eating, hunting, and other animal offenses. Whether purposefully brazen, accidentally offensive, or just shocking, these types of advertisements send powerful messages about the treatment of nonhumans and the environment.

One might suggest that the advertisements critiqued in Sutherland and Judge’s article are “fun” forms of entertainment and should not be taken seriously. However, what is amusement for one person can often mean pain or death for a nonhuman animal. Owing to the fact that the primary purpose of advertising is to sell products or services, humans are primed through socialization to commodify animals as part and parcel of materialism. Consume in this context means to observe and even ingest animal bodies through an advertising culture that supports violence. Life in a capitalist society is governed by money, competition, and various forms of violence. The stakes of this fun are too high for humans to relegate the discussion of nonhuman representation to the realms of entertainment only.

Furthermore, this issue of *JCAS* also features a book review of *Meat Planet* by Richard Giles, that explores whether the cultured meat industry contributes to the liberation or violence against nonhuman animals. Like so many other industries, cultured meat continues to be a prominent focus in the media, capital investment projects, and general public interest, which is deserving of careful analysis as well. One might assume that cultured meat

contributes favorably to CAS principles and goals, however, Giles suggests we consider an alternative perceptual frame to this assumption.

Thus, how animal images are framed to viewers serve to cultivate impressions about the world. If these messages come to us as a stable set of images that are consistent over time, they build a narrative that ultimately governs our lives and influence the decisions we make. If these messages suggest that nonhumans deserve to be oppressed, for instance, then this may influence one's behavior, attitude, and decisions toward nonhuman animals.

Depending on the images we consume, we may over time, start to cultivate new perceptions of animals even if we have little to no direct contact with these things. In other words, the "reality" that we cultivate in our imaginations may become more real to us than actual reality. This has vast implications for those who produce and consume media. It presents one with the opportunity to analyze and correct any misgivings regarding the treatment and perception of nonhuman animals. Gone are the days in which we can in good faith watch and enjoy commercials that satirize and trivialize animal cruelty in light-hearted ways. We must be mindful, diligent, and critical as we enter into a new age of heightened sensibilities about nonhuman animals.

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Animals in Advertising: War, Vulnerability, and the Return of the Repressed

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Abstract

By reflecting on a number of contemporary television commercials (TVCs) screened in New Zealand and Australia, this article discusses issues relating to the representation of animals in the media and the insights they can offer on the current state of human-animal relationships. We explore the psychological foundations of speciesism and ways in which it is maintained and naturalized across these texts to mobilize animal abuse on an industrial scale in the service of agribusiness. Alongside this analysis we are also concerned to reflect on ways that animals are somehow returning or re-surfacing in the TVCs, potentially disturbing or fracturing the intended message. As with Barbara Creed's notion of the fictional 'screen animal,' there is a sense in which the animal in advertising 'signifies meanings beyond itself,' returning to haunt and exceed their market function (2007, p 60). Relating to John Sanbonmatsu's contention that there is a 'growing semiotic instability,' anxiety and uncertainty surrounding the representation of animals in culture, our readings of the TVCs explore the possibilities of such instability and its implications for the culture (2014, p 34). In the context of abrupt climate change we suggest that, as with the horror and zombie genre, the current portrayal of animals in advertising points to a growing social unease about our exploitation of other sentient beings.

Keywords: *Media studies, advertising, speciesism, animal industrial complex, psychoanalysis, semiotics*



Figure 1. Banksy (2013), *Sirens of the Lambs*. Courtesy of Pest Control Office, Banksy, Clacton-on-Sea, 2014

This essay explores the use of nonhuman animals in a series of television commercials (TVCs) that screened in New Zealand and Australia between 2015 and 2018. In response to the expanding field of critical animal and media studies (Almiron, Cole, Freeman, 2018) we examine the messages of the TVCs that support animal abuse on an industrial scale and the ways in which representations of nonhuman animals can be said to rupture these media texts (Burt, 2002), signifying beyond the intended meanings of the advertisers. The first section of the paper focuses on how speciesism, a primal belief in human superiority over animals (Ryder, 1971), is naturalized and maintained in several TVCs to service what critic Barbara Noske refers to as the “animal industrial complex” (1997, p. 22). Foregrounding the semi-concealed networks connecting meat production, hunting, and all forms of animal cruelty to governmental, scientific and corporate interests, the identification of the animal industrial complex with its military counterpart is central to this concept. Linking, then, the discussion of these first TVCs is the premise that the human species is waging war against nonhuman animals (Wadiwel, 2009). Focusing on the oppression and domination of the nonhuman world by technology and global capitalism, we explore the psychic roots of this hostility and how it surfaces in the media.

By referencing the critical animal studies writings of John Sanbonmatsu, we also examine the notion that there is a “growing semiotic instability” concerning the representation of animals and “meat” in our culture (2014, p. 34). Indicative of increasing levels of cultural anxiety and uncertainty around our treatment of nonhuman animals, signs of this instability can be traced across popular media from cooking shows to horror films, and includes, as we will highlight, advertisements. The second section of the paper discusses several TVCs that highlight Sanbonmatsu’s contention that the psychic regime of speciesism is fraying at the edges and is under pressure from multiple sources including exposés from animal rights activists, a growing cultural awareness of animal sentience, and the glaring incompatibility of animal agriculture with a warming planet. As such, we explore a range of TVCs that use animals to sell products from life insurance to telecommunications to analyze how the unconscious element of these texts dislodges the premise on which the TVCs are based.

Grounding our research in cinema theory, we also investigate how animals in the TVCs may be thought of as forming “a rupture in the field of representation” (Burt, 2002, p. 11). Similar to Sanbonmatsu, cinema theorist Johnathon Burt proposes that the use of animal imagery in film has the potential to point “beyond itself to wider issues” that resist and problematize representations on screen (2002, p. 13). As such, the selected TVCs reveal an unstable positioning of nonhuman animal issues, and this analysis investigates how this positioning might empower animal advocacy to offer new opportunities for engagement and resistance. The onscreen presence of nonhuman animals in these TVCs elicits a powerful and emotional audience response that can be used by artists and filmmakers to disrupt conventional media about nonhuman animals.

The War Against Nonhuman Animals

Operation Boomerang.

The TVC *Operation Boomerang* (Meat and Livestock Australia, 2016) is a glaring testimony to the power and financial resources of the animal industrial complex and its war against nonhuman animals. According to critical animal studies scholar John Sorenson (2014), this complex spends “billions of dollars on advertising that normalizes the exploitation of animals and depicts their products as desirable and cruelty free” (p. xiii). Although

the marketing manager for Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) ironically claimed that “We’re not big spenders, we’re big thinkers” with the budget for *Operation Boomerang* ranging “not far north of \$500,000” (AdNews, 2016), other reports state it was considerably more expensive (That Vegan Couple, 2016). Constructed as a Hollywood-style spectacle featuring sports celebrity “Lambassador” Sam Kekovich, this TVC was positioned to capitalize on Australia Day, Australia’s National Day of Independence.

The TVC opens with the title “Presenting Operation Boomerang” and tells the story of a military exercise to bring expatriate Australians home for Australia Day so they can consume meat. A voice-over tells us, “Right now there’s thousands of Australians stranded overseas, snowball’s chance in hell of eating lamb on Australia Day. Let’s go get ‘em” (MLA, 2016). At this point, a military swat team launch their helicopters off a naval vessel and drop in on unsuspecting Australians in cities around the world. After rescuing Australians in London and Tokyo, the squad storm a New York apartment. “Come on mate, in a few hours you’ll be eating lamb on the beach.” “But I’m vegan now” replies the bearded man huddled on the floor. “Abort, get him out of there” is the commander’s order (MLA, 2016). The soldier shoots a flame-thrower violently at the meal on the man’s table, an image that drew a tirade of social media backlash from vegans and animal rights activists who resented not only the sheer violence of the act promoting “hatred” but the framing of veganism as aberrant or a threat to the social order (Mumbrella, 2016). The scene is set in an Eastern themed living room, with the actor cast as a stereotypical hippie whose bearded appearance simultaneously doubles for the radicalized and possibly dangerous outsider. Given the TVC’s obsession with nationalistic identity, this military operation enacted for the sake of meat consumption is presented as yet another arm of the West’s “war on terror.” The final shot of George Calombaris from Australia’s *Masterchef* (Shine Australia), overseeing lamb chops on the barbecue, is the climax of a narrative designed to connect meat-eating with ideas of nationhood, masculinity, and military prowess.

The aim of *Operation Boomerang* in this sense is to conflate the corporate military-industrial State with what Melanie Joy (2010) refers to as “carnism,” a prevailing ideology that naturalizes the exploitation and consumption of nonhuman animals. The association of carnism with masculinity in the TVC is overt alongside the affirmation of colonial imperialism. The nexus of interlocking power regimes that subject other

animals and indigenous peoples to the same form of violence is evident by the TVC's title (appropriating the term "boomerang") and its premise of celebrating Australia day, an event that marks the onslaught of colonial genocide with a story that celebrates the colonization and consumption of other animals (MLA, 2016). Other readings relate to the opening sequence and a scene that depicts a desolate high rise housing estate in Warsaw, Poland, where the narrator tells us there is "not a chargrilled chop in sight" (MLA, 2016). As several viewers rightly perceived, this image of desolation and hunger is offensive to the "holocaust Jews of Poland" (Mumbrella, 2016) and semiotically connotes the real-life connection between the holocaust and the current plight of animals on the planet (Patterson, 2002). Unwittingly prefiguring for the viewer material relating to industrialized animal slaughter, the TVC enacts what political philosopher Hannah Arendt referred to in her discussion of colonialism as the "boomerang effect" (Arendt, 1994, p. 155). Extending Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism to the question of animal rights, the slaughter and colonization of nonhuman animals by the human species likewise creates a "boomerang effect," wherein such activities are brought back into the social sphere, legitimating and enabling human exploitation on a military scale. Thus, the TVC in this context is aptly named.

The creators of this TVC, Meat and Livestock Australia, conjure "the new military urbanism" of the West combining imagery from World War II, Hollywood spy thrillers and the war on terror to position themselves as both a defender of Australian nationalism and an omnipresent corporate force (Graham, 2013, para 1). From the outset, the TVC features a well-known Chinese presenter (Lee Lin Chin) who enacts the "M" character from the James Bond franchise, confusing the semiotics of nationalist identity with 21st-century globalization. The uncertainties and complexities of Australia's tenuous political and economic relationship with China, highlighted by the financial "necessities" of selling meat to this lucrative market, surfaces in this imaginary militaristic spectacle where both American and Chinese interests are at play. Alongside all the glaring contradictions of this TVC, what stands out significantly is the reality of the scale and force of the animal industrial complex and the measures it will take to protect its multi-billion dollar industry. As with the mobilization of meat during the two World Wars to the allied troops from Britain and its food basket colonies, *Operation Boomerang* plays on nationalism to diffuse contradictions relating to animal death (Malloy, 2011). In this disguise, it manages to erase the fact that billions of

other animals are killed each year to feed such “military” operations and as such erases the reality of another unending war waging across the globe, the “first war” as Dinesh Wadiwel contends, the war on animals (2009, p. 289).

Talking Animals.

If images of actual animals are absent in *Operation Boomerang*, they arise like zombies from the post-apocalyptic horror TV series *The Walking Dead* (Darabont, 2010) in the Toyota Hilux *Talking Animals* TVC (2015). The militarized spectacle witnessed in *Operation Boomerang* is replaced by hunting imagery that links multi-terrain vehicles with the war on animals. It features a series of digitally rendered talking animals, all of whom are the traditional prey of the New Zealand rural, hunting and fishing fraternity - deer, wild boar, wild goats, ducks, whitebait, crayfish and, as an added extra, the common road-kill animal, the hapless possum. The animals are shown caught in a bucket or crayfish pot, or tied to the roof or tray of the Hilux as it darts over rough terrain. They are presented as happy to be in their doomed position, reciting poetry, and proud to be carried off to their deaths on such a marvelous symbol of strength, technical engineering, and bushman’s aesthetics as the Toyota Hilux.

The TVC begins with the animated image of a large stag, standing in a forest, breaking into spontaneous verse at the sight of the featured vehicle; “Oh joy to be upon the Hilux transported. I’ll not be hunted” (Toyota NZ, 2015). The stag suddenly stamps his foot so that the hunter sees him, and is then shot offscreen. Now lying dead on the wagon, the stag continues; “I’ll be happily courted, inspired by you to wax lyric in sonnet, mounted here proudly on your mighty steel bonnet” (Toyota, 2015). The stag’s soliloquy plays on the romantic notion that humans yearn for nature. However, here the object of desire is a vehicle presented as a hunting apparatus, an extension of the high powered rifle the hunter uses to shoot the stag. In the next segment, the Hilux glides into a city harbor with the family fishing boat in tow. Writhing strenuously as it might when first caught, a huge fish exhorts the wonders of the new Hilux while it is held proudly by a young family for a photo opportunity. As if celebrating its role in the food chain, the talking fish appeals to the hunter-gatherer tradition while the TVC’s focus on the small urban family also addresses the contemporary city dweller, possibly adherents of the Paleo diet or the Locavore movement. These are new forms of carnism that decry the factory farm, source their meat and produce locally,

and believe that animals want to sacrifice their lives for humans or are true, “partners-in-survival” (Sanbonmatsu, 2014, p. 35). With its emphasis on family, the loving Dad with his daughters and their single “catch,” the TVC implies that the fish has been hunted ethically and caught close to home. The notion of eating locally sourced animal flesh is gaining in momentum and, as with the Toyota TVC, suggests that it removes the guilt associated with animal death. As outlined by Sanbonmatsu, “Aficionados of the locavore food movement continually affirm their ‘respect’ and ‘compassion’ for non-human beings, even as they commodify animals’ bodies, terrorize them in hunts, shoot bullets into their brains, or even shove them into gas chambers” (2014, p. 34).

The next sequence features a chorus of claw-waving crayfish asking the viewer to “Raise a glass to the legend, While you have us for dinner” (Toyota NZ, 2015). Aligned again with the ideology of the Locavore movement, the concept of toasting the animal plays ultimately on ritualistic notions of sacrifice. “Toasting one’s victim, of course, does nothing to restore the life and vitality of the victim – but it works wonders for the killer, transforming her purposeful act of cruelty and extreme violence into the symbolism of the gift” (Sanbonmatsu, 2014, p. 35). The TVC returns obsessively to this theme of sacrifice, as if it were a dream that is working through unconscious material, it struggles to repress the tensions relating to the act of killing nonhuman beings. Our relationship to animals in this light reads more like a psychic wound deep in our human-animal culture, an “ancient disjuncture” located at the beginnings of agriculture or perhaps our first imaginings on the cave wall (Sanbonmatsu, 2014, p. 39). In its shallow consumerism, the Hilux TVC is enacting the fundamental contradiction of our humanity, playing on both our primal sense of kinship with other animals while demonstrating (and celebrating) the violence that the human species perpetrates against other sentient life forms. If sacrificial rituals and gifts involving animals once framed the relationship between the human and higher beings (of their making), then this violence is reenacted for the divinity of the Hilux, the reified commodity.

As the TVC ends, the camera focuses on the stag lying bound and “dead” on the bonnet of the Hilux. He *talks* from the dead, a zombie shouting with joy over a wide-shot of the grand Southern Otago landscape; “Yes, it’s an honour to lie in the tray of your booty” (Toyota NZ, 2015). The imagery of these dead animals talking caused a huge reaction on social media with

some commenting that it made them ashamed to own a Toyota Hilux, “I will cringe getting into my Toyota now when I think of this crap. I will think again before ever buying another one” (Daily Mail, 2015). The strong expressions of discomfort from many people suggest an increasing awareness of animal sentience among humans. If so, the advertising creatives for Hilux not only significantly misread their audience but broke one of the key rules of branding identification - stability and dependability. The decision to be irreverent in this case, more irreverent than other talking animals in Toyota campaigns, worked against the brand. Talking *dead* animals proved to be an idea that too readily confronts the viewer with the contradictions of carnism. Nobody wants to see their food talking. The morbid glorification of the animals’ deaths was “slammed on social media for depicting animals glad to be killed” as one article stated (Stuff, 2015). That the message was so widely perceived as distasteful also points to a growing unease around hunting and animal cruelty generally. It is telling that the TVC was removed from mainstream television after only a few screenings as Toyota bowed to public pressure and even issued an apology (NZ Herald, 2015).

Despite advertising agency, Saatchi & Saatchi’s claim that this is “a good ripping yarn” that fits with Toyota’s tradition of “getting people’s attention through brave storytelling” (Venuto, 2015), its fundamental misappropriation of the anthropomorphized animal from children’s media has proven its undoing as a six-month-long and half-million-dollar advertising campaign. As told through the eyes of animated animals, the creatures from these advertisements can be said to function as “screen animals” as outlined by the cinema theorist Barbara Creed (2007). A “Darwinian creature, endowed with ...intelligence, emotions and the ability to feel pain and pleasure,” Creed’s screen animal has the potential to signify meanings beyond itself, embodying notions of agency, dream, and affect (2007, p.100). As such, the image of these fictional animals forms a “rupture in the field of representation,” suggesting that nonhuman animals have emotional lives and intelligence, a concept that unsettles anthropocentric readings of the TVC and the notion that hunting is acceptable (Burt, 2002, p.11).

Working hard to counter these uncertainties, the narrative, however, insists on the notion that hunting is “more in tune with nature;” a rural goodness carried out by men of the land (Molloy, 2011, p. 129). As such, rural Kiwi “blokes” are merely doing what they are entitled to do by

birthright and enshrined in the natural law of the universe. They are destined to take the produce of the land, rivers, and sea by virtue of their gender, particular skill set, and access to technical hardware such as guns and multi-terrain vehicles. As with *Operation Boomerang*, meat-eating is associated with power, survival, and masculinity. The links between the violence enacted on nonhuman animals and the oppression of women (Adams, 1990) is indexed in this sense through the focus on poetry and passivity, qualities that are associated with the feminine. The animals in this light are cast as submissive and feminine in a scenario that gratifies male desire. The very concept put forward by the TVC, that nonhuman animals want to be killed and sacrificed, finds its dark shadow in the objectification of women within a patriarchal society that enable abuse.

Independence Dance.

A Kiwibank TVC (2015) that screened in New Zealand presents a family of meat workers situated within the animal industrial complex whose aspirations for profit reveal the unspoken relationship between capitalism and the war on animals. The advertisement begins by showing three characters dressed in white boots, overalls, and protective hair-nets dancing together in their meat-processing plant. The caption reads, “Why is Colin doing the indepen-dance?” Colin and his family are dancing because they have a new account with Kiwibank that allows their business to grow, to “step up another gear” and know what “independence feels like” (Kiwi Bank, 2015). They dance for the camera, the lead dancer moving his face close to the lens, a “selfie” for the benefit of the audience, while the rhythm of the music emphasizes the joyful physicality of the performance.

With its dance routine and feel-good narrative, the Kiwibank TVC normalizes the practice of speciesism that reinforces the notion of animals as mere commodities or units of production. The independence they exhibit is simply the freedom under capitalism to exploit nonhuman animals endlessly. Although unspoken during this spectacle of family values and enterprise, what is alluded to is the conjoining of “economic growth” with animal death, one that is combined with the total mechanization of the slaughterhouse to naturalize a staggering and unprecedented rate of killing (Pachirat 2013, p. 3). Furthermore, the abundance of animal bodies are present only as an absence that signifies their “after life” as meat. The white slaughterhouse overalls and gumboots, devoid of the usual blood expected to accrue while

working with animal carcasses, are an index to the animal's negated physicality. In contrast to advertising campaigns that focus on the happiness of farmed animals in green paddocks, this TVC relies on the object becoming a commodity once it is processed. Often referred to in the animal industrial complex as "finishing," it provides the context for this TVC to demonstrate that technical efficiency in this sector is linked with profit and success. As noted by Molloy (2011), technological improvements in meat production was based on a business model that arose during World War II and has flourished in tandem with the acceleration of industry since then. Kiwibank's reliance on the cultural association of meat production with profit and family values inevitably represses the true costs of farming to the environment and other life forms.

Another stark irony of this Kiwibank TVC and several similar TVCs in the campaign that enact this "dance of independence," is that there is no independence for the animal nor the "hard-working" family either. The glorification of their individuality, as with the selfie, contrasts with their subjection to capital in the same way as consumable animals. Dancing ecstatically at the prospect of growing their business, the meat-workers in the Kiwibank TVC are dancing at their ability to *access more dead animals*, suggesting not only a celebratory dance before the hunt but also a ritual display of the blood energy received from consuming meat (profit). As such, this TVC could be interpreted as the ultimate statement of consumer carnism, suggesting that any profit is the ability to access more dead animals to fuel the machine. In many ways we can consider this performance by the meat workers as a kind of primal *war dance* and, as already noted, this notion of a war against the animal can be thought of as the "originary conflict" preceding and enabling all others (Wadiwel, 2009, p. 289). The "Independence," in this context, signifies another kind of independence; the celebration and triumph of humans over animals in the service of speciesism.

The Rupturing Effect

Peter and the Rabbit.

Animals are framed in a completely different light in the *Peter and the Rabbit* TVC for British Petroleum (BP) (2015). As distinct from an animated or technologically configured animal featured in the Toyota Hilux TVC, the creature represented is a real live rabbit. However, this framing or

act of making the animal visible involves dislocating the animal from its natural habitat. Thus, its foray into “nature” is reduced to a road trip with a human on a motorcycle. The narrative centers on a lost pet rabbit and a young man named Peter who goes on a quest to return the rabbit to its rightful owner, a little girl who has moved house from Invercargill to Auckland, the length of the country, with her family. At first, one might assume this story unconsciously reinforces conventional human-animal relations whereby the socially mobile or the economically displaced family leaves behind the family pet. However, as the narrative unravels, key themes emerge that suggest a growing cultural unease around the representation of animals in the media.

The idea of personal freedom, signified by the motorcycle Peter rides, is enabled by fossil fuels (produced by BP). Peter is not exactly the “rebel without a cause” but more the sensitive, down-to-earth type who is independent and caring. He has the freedom to choose his transport choices and to take time out of his life to care for an animal. In this sense, this TVC reinforces the notion of animal rights as a personal lifestyle choice rather than a socio-political movement. As Peter is emoting with the rabbit by cuddling and petting the small creature in his care, audience members are likely to gain a growing awareness of animal sentience that the TVC creators are likely exploiting. In one version of the advertisement, Peter feeds the rabbit carrots at a petrol stop. As the story progresses, audiences witness that he cares, especially about the little girl’s feelings for her rabbit, so the emotional bond he experienced with the rabbit is transferred to the child. As such, childhood is presented as the real domain of emotion and recognition of animal sentience because typically the adult knows better. That is, the adult has been socialized to accept the oppression and exploitation of nonhuman animals as part of the natural order of things. The processes by which the child is taught to accept these contradictory relationships is in many ways meta-thematic to this TVC. Furthermore, the viewer is positioned to accept both the human love for animals and the treatment of them as objects. As described by Cole and Stewart in their sociological analysis of the relations between children and other animals, this “juxtaposition of death and delight” frames the experiences of early childhood from the outset (2016, p. 4).

This interplay of contradictory relationships is vividly portrayed in a scene when Peter stops at another BP station where a utility vehicle loaded with rabbit skins is present. Since rabbits have been thus far framed as both

pet and feral pest in this advertisement, Peter is compelled to cover his pet rabbit's eyes from its kin who have become victims to land management and commodification. Although intended as a joke, for a moment the audience is placed in the consciousness of the animal. The reference to the knowing gaze of the animal is mostly subconscious but significant because it acknowledges the rabbit's agency. Within the context of the status quo, that is, the economic reality of farming, pest control, and hunting, Peter's action is meant to be humorous, however, for Peter and the rabbit, the threat is real, and the scene highlights the nonhuman's vulnerability.

As the story continues, Peter becomes an internet sensation, checking his social media, taking selfies with the pet rabbit, and appealing to young women. All of this is meta-thematic to the function of the TVC itself, which enters into the superstructure of the cellphone and screen. The YouTube caption for the TVC reads, "Spend a minute and a half and enjoy the epic, heartwarming story of Peter and the Rabbit, the first of many inspiring BP stories" (BP, 2015). As Peter heads north with the rabbit on the bike, the BP service attendant places an image of the rabbit on the network, asking, "Is this your rabbit?" Other men laugh good-naturedly as they watch the GPS image while the lyrics on the soundtrack are those associated with falling in love. In contrast to the Hilux TVC, Peter's singing soundtrack tells us, "Now I've found something that I want to protect" (BP, 2015). Other scenes show Peter hugging and kissing the rabbit.

From his motorcycle, Peter waves at a BP truck. The driver toots his horn and waves back, indicating the networks of corporate communication are working and mirroring a community that also cares for the rabbit. Peter receives a text saying they have found the owner. As he finally reaches Auckland, he is the subject of considerable media attention, including a radio show. Further, there are teenage girls on a bridge hanging over the rail holding signs that read, "Marry me." He arrives at the little girl's new address to the lyrics, "I still want you" (BP, 2015). Again, playing out like a sublimated love story, he gives the rabbit to the girl. We enter into a terrain of emotion and bonding, with both intergenerational strangers who are "nice" and with other animals. But we are also confronted with a pet which is in the middle ground. The viewer is encouraged to identify and bond with an animal that is both farmed, slaughtered, shot and poisoned, *and* cute and cuddly, depending on the breed. Speciesism, then, is not so cut and dry with rabbits.

As much as being a narrative that strives to reinforce social norms, *Peter and the Rabbit* is, nevertheless, a narrative that both explores and exploits a new worldview; that which recognizes and respects animal sentience. As Burt (2002) foregrounds, the use of animal imagery in the media can incite an emotional response from viewers, and on a basic level, BP seeks to exploit such feelings. However, the rabbit is caught in an ambiguous and uncertain space which has a rupturing effect on the field of representation and suggests meanings beyond those intended by BP - such as the debate around speciesism, sentience and the poisoning of animals considered pests. The unintended readings of this text become problematic for the advertiser and suggest the growing anxiety and uncertainty around our treatment of nonhuman animals. The ravages of the fossil fuel industry, its collusion with neoliberal governments and its insistence on expansion in the face of climate change are all connotations now associated with the petrochemical industry. BP as a brand is tarnished with images of oil spills, dead dolphins, dead shrimps, the devastated lives of millions of people in the Gulf of Mexico and habitat loss for small animals like rabbits. The young girls presented in the TVC waving to Peter on his journey and those young people who may watch this advert are beginning to understand this.

Piggy Sue.

Rabbits, bears, cats, and dogs have a long history of being cute and belonging to childhood. Pigs, on the other hand, have long been presented to children in an ambiguous light as in the line from the classic nursery rhyme, “This little piggy went to market, this little piggy stayed home” (Opie, 1997, p. 349). However, the figure of the pig has also been presented as lovable, intelligent and, like a dog, worthy of respect, and protection as shown in the film *Babe* (1995). As Val Plumwood points out, *Babe* effectively illustrates the contradictions of speciesism symbolized in the “innocence” of the pig (2002, p. 160). SAFE (Save Animals from Exploitation) in New Zealand have also conducted on-going campaigns such as “Love Pigs” that have raised considerable public awareness of the suffering of farmed pigs (SAFE, 2019). The use of the pig in what was titled *Stay Connected* (2015), a Vodafone TVC, takes advantage of this growing awareness of pig sentience while seemingly aware of the cognitive dissonance that such identification entails.

The captions at the front of the TVC introduce Piggy Sue and assure us that, “Life’s better together, stay connected” (Vodafone NZ, 2015). Chris, a courier driver, finds a piglet abandoned on the road and uses his (Vodafone) phone to search for its owner. When Chris discovers the owner is a free-range pig farmer, he decides to return only an empty cardboard box to the farmer. When he gets back to the van, he looks down at the hidden piglet who returns his gaze adoringly. The audience assumes he has bonded with Piggy Sue, developed an empathy with her plight and realized her sentience. He telephones locals, asking if they know anything about looking after pigs. One man replies, “I only know they taste good” (Vodafone NZ, 2015). This type of banter between characters that care for animals and those that express the opinions of the ordinary meat-eater becomes a characteristic feature of what could be called the “animal sentience” genre of TVCs, that is TVCs that, like *Peter and the Rabbit*, seem to acknowledge that nonhuman animals have emotional lives.

Chris appears to be without a partner, which perhaps explains why he easily bonded with Piggy Sue and allows the viewer to identify with the narrative involving his loneliness and need for company. As noted, pigs are known for their intelligence equal with dogs; thus, the audience is shown the sublimated idea that animals can *communicate*. Staying in touch - communicating - is equated with emotion, bonding, family, and love. Within the context of a narrative that celebrates human exceptionalism as much as the ideology of the market, we are invited to perceive this communication as a defining quality of both human and nonhuman animals. Piggy Sue is presented as an animal with an emotional life to be valued, but also as a sign for human emotion and loneliness, human depth, and the ability to communicate. It is this ability to communicate that weaves its unconscious connection to the telephone. There is an implied telepathic connection between the human and the pig, a connection without words, an interspecies connection.

As the cinema and literary theorist Akira Lippit (2000) suggests, if modernism can be more accurately characterized as the period through which we witnessed the disappearance of animals, it is also the period in which animals return to haunt us in an array of uncanny spectral forms, encrypted for example in technology. “Modernity can be defined by the disappearance of wildlife from humanity’s habitat and by the reappearance of the same in humanity’s reflections on itself: in philosophy, psychoanalysis, and

technological media such as the telephone, film and radio” (2000, p. 2). As such, telephones (and the media of the screen itself) can be thought of as figures or conduits for humanity’s repression of the creaturely. In this reading, the *telephone*, (like *telepathic*), represents the impossible yet ever present desire for connection to an absent animal being. A symptom of a deep psychic wound, the telephone represses and magically disavows our complete and utter isolation as a species. Our sense of loss and unconscious longing for animal being is hence deflected in this spectacle and fantasy of technological communication. This strange encryption was foreshadowed in a much earlier series of telephone TVCs by Telecom in which footage of wild animals - notably meerkats and chimpanzees - expressed the idea of staying connected with cheap calling rates. Yet at this very time, as John Berger states, wild animals were “everywhere” disappearing (2009, p. 36). It would seem a sad irony that Telecom, a multinational corporation, would use wild animals to generate a successful communication network.

Life Cover.

The TVC for AA Life Insurance (2016), a New Zealand based insurance company, illuminates yet another set of contradictions and uncertainties around animal representation in the media. As with the Hilux TVC, it uses “talking” screen animals. The story involves Ramsey, a large breeding merino sheep with a fluffy golden fleece, telling Lambert, his young son, that he has taken out life insurance in case something happens to him and he can no longer provide for the family. Among Colmar Brunton’s Top 10 most popular ads throughout 2015, this TVC, according to AA Life’s head of marketing, “struck a chord with thousands of New Zealanders because we introduced an original idea and adopted a tone of voice that was approachable and empathetic” (StopPress, 2018). Although the TVC focuses on wool as opposed to meat, the implied connotations of the imagery are wide-ranging. Unless Lambert is one of the few lucky lambs to be, like his dad, selected for breeding, then Ramsey is either lying to the lamb (because he knows the grisly fate of his young son) or he simply has no idea of the reality. A pertinent comment on the YouTube site, now removed, expressed it in the following way:

The insanity of using a lamb who is lucky to make it to 3 months for an advert on life insurance the world is fucking nuts. I’m no academic

and can't write the theory behind it but the basics are terrifying so much as they are classed as real. This is normal to 99% of morons who can't open their eyes to the real world (AA NZ, 2016).

In genuine terms, this writer expresses the horrors of the industrial animal complex, the so-called "Meatrix." In Burt's (2002) terms, the use of animals in this TVC creates a sense of unease, an uncanny awareness that things are not quite right. While the TVC alludes to the inevitable fact of all human life - we all are going to die - it reads as a perverted *momenti mori*. The hidden meaning behind this text surfaces as insecurity regarding the future of humans and their children in a world under assault by similar lies that transfer from one generation to the next. As parents purchase insurance for an uncertain future beset by rapid climate change, they too, like the ram, reassure their young that they will have provisions.

"Dad, Dad, who's your favourite team?" "The Baa Baas," says the ram. The young lamb replies, "Me too. Dad, what's all that stuff you're wrapped in?" Ramsey answers, "That's my life cover, to help protect you and make sure you're comfortable when I'm not here" (AA NZ, 2016). The ram is trying to insure his family against becoming victims to humans and the joke involves the implication that without insurance there is no respite from the industrial meat complex. The uncertainty of a future for Ramsey and his offspring is expressed by his fixation on purchasing security, thereby allowing him to repress the true cause of his unease. However, the TVC itself struggles to disguise a more general unease and the animal ruptures this text by mirroring the fears and insecurities of human life and the false promises of commodity culture. The viewer is unconsciously implicated in the eventual demise of these animals in the food chain and the paradox of our food choices becomes central to this vision of a future under siege. That the TVC proved so popular is yet another example of how accustomed the human species is "to living in various states of contradiction" and the genuine delight we take in seeing nonhuman animals on the screen (Creed, 2017, p.13). Although it is ultimately ironic that AA Insurance's head of marketing should use the word "empathetic" to describe the tone of the TVC, the representation of emotion and love between father and son is key to its success and inadvertently speaks beyond the intended message (StopPress, 2018).

The Return of the Repressed.



Figure 2. *Toyota Drive Happy Project* (2018). [Digital photograph of billboard], Napier, New Zealand.

A 2018 produced series of TVCs by Toyota featuring a “Drive Happy” theme, mines the field of pop-psychology to present the idea that repressed psychic material will surface in our (day) dreams and our unconscious (Fig. 2). The talking animal returns in these TVCs as a digitally animated monster. Oversized, fantastic furry creatures, with huge faces and eyes, torment potential purchasers of a new Toyota, bringing their worries to life, their “car buying bothers,” in the form of abject animal monsters, albeit comical ones (Toyota, 2018). If the Hilux TVC can be read as a kind of zombie horror film, then the allusion here is to the “monster animal” genre. Uncanny in its meta-thematic treatment of repression and return, the unconscious of the TVC is such that the anxiety produced by the pressure to consume is somehow figured in our ultimate suppression of the vegetative and biological universe. Consumer uncertainty is symbolized by an abject animal being that, on the one hand, appears obstructive to the fulfillment of desire while, on the other, signifies a much deeper psychosis relating to the disappearance of the animal in a culture presided over by cars and the real monsters of industry.

Animals return in a more literal way in another TVC from 2018, where they enter into the family home, the locus of the uncanny as Freud contended in his 1919 essay *Das Unheimliche*. This haunting of the domestic realm by the nonhuman animal foregrounds the increasing uncertainty about the place of animals in our lives. Titled *Roy – Kong’s Out Again* (2018), this TVC by Mitre 10, a large hardware and home improvement chain, depicts a lonely but determined donkey seeking refuge in owners’ home. Similar to TVC stories such as *Piggy Sue* and the BP Rabbit, the Mitre 10 donkey is presented as having both sentience and the need for society. Alluding to the infamous King Kong, a creature that likewise pined after a mate, Kong is a semi-rural, pet donkey who lives alone in an enclosure adjacent to the house. During a thunderstorm, the family becomes concerned for Kong and father Roy ventures out to check on him. When he finds the enclosure empty, he looks back to the house to see that Kong has mysteriously managed to get inside to shelter with his human family. Roy then decides the donkey is lonely and needs companionship. He visits his local Mitre 10 store, buys materials and builds a makeshift wooden donkey to serve as a friend for their pet (Fig. 3). One must wonder why the father built an odd looking fake donkey as consolation for the real donkey’s lack of companionship? The acknowledgment of animal sentience is foregrounded by the donkey’s need for company and security during the frightening storm. However, the representation of animal intelligence is skewered by the misguided notion that a human-made, ramshackle construction of a donkey would suffice for the real thing. It is a sadly tragic gesture that ultimately insults Kong’s need for kinship with his own species. One of the final scenes in the TVC shows Kong sniffing the wooden construction, leaving the viewer unconvinced he feels any satisfaction with the wooden constructed animal. A warped anthropocentric humor is on display, typical of much animal focused humor that is at the expense of the animal’s intelligence, dignity, and agency.

The image of Kong in this context ruptures the field of representation as described by Burt (2002), pointing to other emotional content beyond the narrative of simply building houses. In fact, Kong’s need for shelter and sense of vulnerability is the very thing that emotionally connects humans to this narrative as outlined by cinema theorist Anat Pick (2011). Relating to her concept of the “creaturely poetic,” Pick contends that notions of vulnerability, beauty, and corporality transcend the separation of species (Pick, 2011, p. 5). In this instance, we worry about Kong because, like him,



Figure 3. Fig. 3. *Kong's Friend Buddy* (2019). [Digital photograph of Mitre 10 Instore Installation], Napier, New Zealand.

we know what it is like to be without shelter. We also empathize with his loneliness and need for company. This aspect of the story doubles uncannily with his namesake, King Kong, the great ape, and his desire for companionship or a mate. As discussed by Barbara Creed in her analysis of the *King Kong* films, the screen animal “endorses the Darwinian view of the animal” as one capable of emotion with social needs and desires (2007, p. 62). Kong the donkey signifies well beyond its intended use in the TVC, unsettling the text and revealing “broader cultural tensions and anxieties about our current treatment of animals” (Burt, 2002, p. 15).

The Mitre 10 TVC, *Roy – Kong's Out Again* (2018) is a strangely unnerving TVC due to its emphasis on storms and the donkey's quest to escape his enclosure. It seems to describe the societal unease generated over the mounting evidence of animal sentience and the assertion from scientists that animal agriculture heavily contributes to climate change. Although Roy's actions are those of an anthropocentric-minded farmer, the TVC perhaps also signals an awareness of the increasing number of people rescuing farm animals and providing them with a safe haven. The donkey in this instance has special significance, being, of course, the animal of Christ. But as anyone with even a passing interest in the welfare of animals knows, donkeys are on the frontline of animal suffering, visible as beasts of burden

in news footage from the Middle East (Duggal, 2015) and, less well known perhaps, as the target of the brutal gel industry, fueled by China and rapidly depleting the donkeys of the African continent (VOA, 2018).

The Sirens of the Lambs.

We wish to draw attention to Banksy's *The Sirens of the Lambs* (2013), an example of a work by an artist that highlights the significance and power of interventions into this arena (Fig. 1). Although originally staged as an activist art performance but now running as a media file on YouTube, this piece cuts across the genres of advertising and film, playing on images from childhood yet confronting the viewer with the reality and cruelty of animal death. Staged in the meat district of New York, the piece involved a truck driving around the back streets of this quarter with a crate full of stuffed children's toys, while speakers on the truck played audio of the animals' calling. Given the work's location, Banksy's strategy was clearly to raise awareness of industrialized animal slaughter yet presented in such a way as to connect emotionally with viewers. The conflict between the representation of animals as cute stuffed toys for children and the reality of how they are treated as commodities works to undermine our ideological certainties. Cultural tensions and anxieties are materialized in an image that addresses the contradictions inherent in TVCs that use "cute" animals to sell their products or those that market their flesh.

Sirens of the Lambs also references the movie *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), a title that conjures up the violence of carnism and is a sign for a "monster" in the cinema. Banksy is simultaneously signaling the silence of real lambs and specifically the cultural silence around the violence of their slaughter. While referencing the Sirens of Greek mythology, the word is also a contemporary sign for civil emergency and as such a warning of impending disaster. Banksy's *Sirens of the Lambs* foregrounds the urgency of this issue and provides a meaningful example of ways in which the representation of nonhuman animals can be deployed in the media to bring about transformational change.

In unraveling some of the more unconscious messages that are being produced in the advertising sector it becomes increasingly apparent that speciesism as a psychic structure is under pressure. In the context of abrupt climate change and escalating global conflict, the dangers of industrial techno-capitalism go hand in hand with recognizing the industrial meat

complex as both feeding, and feeding on, this economic structure. As advertising media are working harder than ever to repress and disguise these connections, it is also evident that this psychic regime is fraying at the edges. The practice of factory farming, live animal exports and the wholesale slaughter of animals, exposed to us primarily by the work of committed video activists, is officially hidden from view and relies on a massive form of both physical and psychic repression. As with the Hilux “talking animals” TVC, this social-psychological regime is no longer able to control its referent and, like the zombie stag, is speaking to us from the grave/dinner table.

If the identification of a fissure or uncertainty in dominant speciesist discourses is becoming evident in the media and, specifically, certain forms of advertising, then this instability or weakening of the sign system opens a space for action and education. Examples of interventions into this space include activist and artist videos that knowingly respond to topical TVC narratives, expanding on the uncertainties and contradictions and thereby confronting viewers with the reality of animal oppression. *Operation Boomerang* incited a number of such responses, including a reworking of the TVC, where shots of real animals at the slaughterhouse were inserted into the narrative (Behind the Scenes, 2016). Another intervention included an excellent video titled *Australia Day Lamb Ad Reaction* (2016) by vegan activists, “That Vegan Couple,” commenting on the TVC as it unfolded, still-framing salient parts and bringing the sublimated messages to light. As the couple noted, the vehemence shown towards vegans in the TVC suggests that the meat lobby feels threatened by animal activism and overall supports the premise that the psychic regime of speciesism is under pressure.

Other tactics used by organizations such as Animals Australia, PETA, and SAFE in New Zealand relate to the use of media celebrities to deliver content specific to animal exploitation and current animal rights campaigns. For example, the SAFE media TVC, *New Zealanders Against Factory Farming* (2013), uses celebrities such as Taika Waititi and Karyn Hay to draw attention to the cruelty of keeping farmed animals confined in cages. These campaigns work against the dominant ideology perpetuated in mainstream media while using the very faces and “influencers” from that domain. They deliver highly emotional content revealing the truth about the social needs of nonhuman animals.

Another example is the award-winning short film series scripted around the animated “screen animal” Moopheus currently hosted on the

Meatrix web site (2003). Satirizing the well-known film, *The Matrix* (1999), Moopheus uncovers for Leo, a pig, the horrific realities of factory farming. Although the *Meatrix* does not draw the line in regards to speciesism and all meat consumption (advocating instead for free range), it is a powerful testament to the use of screen animals to deliver emotional messages critical of the animal industrial complex.

In recognizing the extent to which viewers respond to narratives and images of animals on screen, it is clear that the media and filmmaking, in general, is potentially a powerful tool in the process of shifting cultural perceptions around nonhuman animals. Analysis of popular forms of media representation helps to foreground the issues and give substance to the unconscious structures that naturalize animal oppression, thereby providing a platform for resistance and change. Future work in this area is paramount as is research into the use of fictional narrative devices, such as those used in the *Piggy Sue* style of TVC, to deliver on-going stories that capture audiences while challenging the dominant ideology of speciesism and offering possibilities of new, non-violent relationships with our evolutionary partners.

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Image List

Figure 1. Banksy (2013), *Sirens of the Lambs*. Courtesy of Pest Control Office, Banksy, Clacton-on-Sea, 2014

Figure 2. *Toyota Drive Happy Project* (2018). [Digital photograph of Billboard], Napier, New Zealand.

Figure 3. Fig. 3. *Kong's Friend Buddy* (2019). [Digital photograph of Mitre 10 Instore Installation], Napier, New Zealand.

The Anthropocentricity of the Future of Food: A Review of *Meat Planet*

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Abstract:

This review looks at Benjamin Aldes Wurgaft's newest publication, *Meat Planet*. Given the notable publicity and prominence the book has attained, this review investigates the thoroughness of the book, as well as Wurgaft's ethnographic approach. The review highlights that, while Wurgaft's approach is interesting and refreshing in certain respects, the reading can also feel disjointed in its focus. Furthermore, there are notable literature omissions which erase key works, even whole fields, on both cultured meat and animal rights discourse. The omissions and disjointed approach reveal a strong degree of anthropocentricity, raising questions surrounding the intent of the ethnographic approach, as well as greater questions regarding the implications of cultured meat on animals in a literal and symbolic sense. The review ultimately considers whether the book is worth reading for those who do not have a prior understanding of cultured meat, but also want to combat common anthropocentric tendencies.

Keywords: *cultured meat; anthropocentricity; ethnography; philosophy; Jacques Derrida.*

Imagination, Benjamin Aldes Wurgaft stresses in his newest book, *Meat Planet*, plays an important role in the discourse surrounding cultured (lab-developed) meat. Since imagination is of such importance, I let my own, briefly, run wild, and I found myself meditating on how much more dense Jacques Derrida's 1991 interview, "Eating Well," would have been had the idea of lab-developed meat been in the popular discourse at the time. Unfortunately, cultured meat did not start to take shape as a notable idea until 2005, despite earlier murmurings, so Derrida was not alive to take into account the implications of this proposed innovation. I can only imagine what he would have had to say, especially if he had read *Meat Planet* for himself (and in the imaginary scenario that the book would have been available to Derrida at the time). To date, Wurgaft's book is the most prominent publication on cultured meat, as it summarizes the current state of the cultured meat "industry" and discourse with a certain effectiveness that is helped by the lack of other competing literature. Wurgaft's unique approach also allows him to stake a claim of originality that no other work on cultured meat can at this juncture. However, I find there is reason to be concerned with both the thoroughness of *Meat Planet*, as there are notable, surprising omissions, and with the anthropocentricity inherent to the book which Wurgaft fails to acknowledge. This book is one I can recommend only with caution, especially for those looking to explore the topic of cultured meat while maintaining an approach that combats anthropocentric tendencies.

Having reviewed about 100 academic articles and over 150 pieces of journalistic media on the topic of cultured meat, I can safely say that *Meat Planet* generally covers the important bases of cultured meat. The literature on the topic, up to this point, can be characterized as repetitive, with an overwhelming focus on getting readers "up to speed" on what cultured meat is; the potential benefits and issues; and whether it is close to market-ready. Wurgaft, thankfully, cuts through some of the repetition, allowing his book to focus on topics both directly related to cultured meat – such as Mark Post's role as the face of the potential product – and indirectly related, such as how San Francisco's gentrification intersects with cultured meat. Wurgaft's distinct efforts to keep his book from getting redundant are a welcome change of pace for a body of literature that, unfortunately, sticks to a few key themes that have become repetitive.

What also helps *Meat Planet* stand out is the ethnographic approach taken by its author. Readers do not get a book focused solely on cultured

meat, but instead a book that recounts Wurgaft's journey through the realm of cultured meat. Readers go from the morning in 2013 he tuned in to Beyond Meat's first major presentation, cup of coffee in hand, to 2019, as he meditates on how he once was able to get intimate access to Mark Post's office, but is now relegated to attending occasional conferences as the industry becomes more shrouded in secrecy because of the presence of venture capital interests. The journey includes pit stops in San Francisco, where he can cite poetry whilst meditating on gentrification, and in The Netherlands, where we can get details about cycling practices. I respect Wurgaft's reasoning for moving beyond a solely technical read, interjecting details that keep a seasoned reader more alert than would another 200-some pages about the possibilities of cultured meat. For those without a background in the topic, the ethnographic approach will likely also act as a sort of mirror, allowing readers to relate to the invasive or seemingly unrelated thoughts which often arise when thinking about cultured meat.

However, the approach can sometimes make Wurgaft's ideas seem more like a distraction than a reasonable aside, especially for readers who might want more of a literature review than an ethnographic meditation. Earlier, I mentioned the positives of Wurgaft's reflections on the relationship between gentrification and cultured meat, but there is a downside. The chapter in which this discussion takes place, "Fog," has a number of intersecting factors at play. Wurgaft reflects on the poem "Hollyhocks in the Fog;" comments on the actual fog of San Francisco; arson in The Mission district; The Founders Fund; Breakout Labs; autism research; and other subjects. While Wurgaft does pull them all reasonably together, his attention to detail comes at the expense of a clear and thorough conversation on the cultured meat literature that influences current discourse. While he does cover the impact of Hanna L. Tuomitso's 2011 life-cycle analysis, and its subsequent fallout; Neil Stephens' continued efforts to demonstrate that cultured meat is "ontologically ambiguous;" Patrick D. Hopkins and Austin Dacey's 2008 review of the ethics of cultured meat; and Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr's continued art project, there is a lot of missing literature. *Meat Planet* contains no mention of Gerben A. Bekker's efforts to understand public perception of cultured meat; Robert Magnuson Chiles's efforts at understanding the ideological underpinnings of the market, a topic Wurgaft directly deals with throughout the book; Erik Jonsson's contributions to the understanding of the ontology of cultured meat; or Cor Van Der Weele's

reflections on the state of understanding cultured meat. The best example of missing literature, however, occurs in the “Cannibals” chapter, where Wurgaft cites Sigmund Freud in his analysis of the debate regarding cultured human flesh, but overlooks Josh Milburn, who made the serious argument that human flesh should be cultured at the same scale as animal flesh in order to avoid concerns about a human/animal hierarchy (Milburn, 2016, p. 256-257).

The issue, here, is not that the book does not cite and engage with all of these authors or their work – space and time are indeed limited. Instead, the issue is about balance. While Wurgaft’s attention to small details help create variety, such attention also erases a wider literature that, for those unfamiliar with the cultured meat literature writ large, has to be found through deeper external research. Being familiar with the literature, I became frustrated that small details were being included instead of references to other literature that might be helpful to readers unfamiliar with the overall topic. And given the structure of the book, in which some chapters are a mere few pages, while others are over twenty, I argue that Wurgaft could have included a small chapter that made mention of the literature he did not directly cite. Because *Meat Planet* is poised to be the most accessible and up-to-date text on cultured meat at this juncture, the choices made in regards to balance are frustrating and also concerning, considering the other omissions made in the book.

In Chapter 12, “Philosophers,” Wurgaft argues that we are living in “strange days when animal protection activists interrupt philosophical discussions about the suffering of animals, about which topic the philosopher Peter Singer is an expert of record” (Wurgaft, 2019, p.121). It is at this moment when it becomes clear that Wurgaft is not at all familiar with the field of Critical Animal Studies; it is made even clearer as the chapter progresses, as Tom Regan’s opposition to Singer is raised only towards the end of the chapter, in conjunction with a review of Michael Allen Fox. Wurgaft uses his recounting of this disrupted panel, in which Collectively Free “tormented” Singer and others, to defend the carnist system. For example, Wurgaft cites Patrick Martins’ argument that, were it not for meat producers, the Red Wattle pig would have gone extinct were they not raised for food (Wurgaft, 2019, p. 123). Wurgaft cites this argument as an apparent way of proving that the Collectively Free protesters were over-enthused, insensitive activists, not taking into account the rationality of those on stage.

Yet, had Wurgaft read any literature on animal rights discourse written since 1990, the chapter may not have come across as so ideologically biased and poorly researched. A quick reading of Derek Ryan’s *Animal Theory: a Critical Introduction* or Dawne McCance’s *Critical Animal Studies: an Introduction* would have made it clear that we are not in “strange days,” but instead in a time in which the fields of animal studies and animal activism are in flux, having moved on from the days of Singer and Regan that instilled a Cartesian dualism and anthropocentricity that did not adequately investigate questions surrounding sentience. There are understandable reasons that Collectively Free might oppose the work of someone who once proposed brainless birds as an “ethical” solution to carnist dilemmas (Davis, 2016, p. 195). There are other issues with Wurgaft’s approach that need to be noted.

In an earlier chapter, Wurgaft argues that the “sentience of chickens, cows, and pigs is debateable,” but not for the reasons that might be highlighted by Regan or Singer, let alone other scholars (Wurgaft, 2019, p. 105). Instead, he cites a statement by Andreas Forgacs which focuses instead on the complexities of meat as more than a collection of tissues – note, not the complexity of the animal from which that meat came – and stresses that “saying... they are ‘just’ this [collection of tissues] belies their structural complexity... [leaving] out the crucial dimension of time... not to mention the dimension of space, or the environment... in which the whole animal lives. The phrase ‘collections of tissues’ underwrites the notion that tissues can be duplicated without recreating the life histories of animals” (Wurgaft, 2019, p. 105). Wurgaft not only, in one paragraph, makes it clear he does not want to state his full position on animal sentience, but seems to take more offense at meat being characterized “inappropriately,” erasing the animal almost entirely. As a result, I cannot say, with any certainty, whether Wurgaft’s approach is accidentally ignorant of the field of CAS and its major arguments and focuses, or if he purposely avoided mentioning this field in order to develop a narrative he views as careful and coherent. Regardless, Chapter 12 comes across as woefully inadequate, erasing not only an entire field of work, but taking a topic that looks into the future and discussing it using ethical analyses that have been updated and challenged since the 1970s and 1980s. Citing CAS literature also would have helped Wurgaft not come across so poorly when he argues that he views locavores as luddites when he is “grumpy” (Wurgaft, 2019, p. 112) – a simple citation of Vasile Stanescu’s

work would have prevented this inappropriate label, and added more clarity to Wurgaft's arguments throughout Chapter 10, "Momento."

Finally, for a book that cites many philosophers, Jacques Derrida is nowhere to be found, an omission as interesting as it is understandable. When Derrida declared, in "Eating Well," that "the *chef* must be an eater of flesh" in reference to world leaders' inability to declare themselves vegetarian and be elected to office, Derrida did not have to discern whether that flesh was lab-grown or not (Derrida, 1991, p. 114). Derrida's work is expansive, covering a wide range of topics, many of which are not relevant for this review. What is relevant is his work on "the animal" – with which I am more familiar – and it can be best summarized as being focussed not just on the material realities of meat eating and violence towards animals, but the symbolic realities that influence the current commitment to upholding such violence. It fascinates me that Wurgaft does not cite any of Derrida's earlier work on the topic of the animal, because Derrida was unwilling to declare any sort of commitment towards the project of vegetarianism, evidenced by the rather infamous quote that vegetarians "practice a different mode of denegation. The moral question is thus not, nor has it ever been: should one eat or not eat, eat this and not that, the living or the nonliving, man or animal, but since one must eat in any case and since it is and tastes good to eat, and since there's no other definition of the good... how for goodness sake should one eat well?" (Derrida, 1991, p. 115). Earlier Derrida works would provide a more philosophical way to understand cultured meat, especially given the questions regarding how the animal subject is removed or embedded in said understandings. And, given Wurgaft's own remarks on his affinity for meat eating against the backdrop of his moral discomfort on the topic, Derrida's "Eating Well" interview would have provided, albeit in a complicated manner, a way to better rationalize the continued dedication to carnism while employing predictions about the potential future of cultured meat. Such employment would likely read similar to Rebekah Sinclair's stance on the "murder" of plants (Sinclair, 2016, p. 229-248).

Yet, it is Derrida's later work that might explain why Wurgaft may have avoided such citations. Despite his arguing that cultured meat discourse employs too much imagination and hype, Wurgaft indulges in tremendous fantasy in the final two chapters of the book. "The pig in the backyard" is a trope in some cultured meat literature which argues that small communities could keep a pig in the town square, receiving human and animal visitor alike,

in exchange for a weekly biopsy of its cells which could produce meat for the whole town. Wurgaft, however, goes even farther than this “comforting” imagery, and argues that the pig in the backyard “points her snout at us and asks what kinds of persons we might become,” placing the pig in an anthropocentric role as a reflection of existential human morality (Wurgaft, 2019, p. 189). The pig exists not just in an instrumental sense, but a symbolic and philosophical sense, in which we, the humans, can “say thank you for the roast pork... share an apple with a fellow creature... watch it root around its little parcel of land, and remember that the uncompleted project of becoming what we might be starts with questions” (Wurgaft, 2019, p. 194).

Derrida, on the other hand, following his feeling ashamed by his cat seeing him nude, embarked on a mission to understand the metaphysical trappings of “the animal” and how Western philosophy and language have ensnared the animal in a constant, violent system of Cartesian dualism. This journey led Derrida to, somewhat unsubtly, invite us to use our imagination to review Nazism, letting readers imagine that “instead of throwing a people into ovens and gas chambers... [they] decided to organize the overproduction and overgeneration of Jews, gypsies, and homosexuals by means of artificial insemination, so that, being continually more numerous and better fed, they could be destined in always increasing numbers for the same hell” (Derrida, 2008, p. 26). Despite Derrida’s unwillingness to commit to a single ideological or activist project (Adams and Calarco, 2016, p.31-53), by the end of his career, he went from questioning what is “flesh,” in an interview that is as complicated as it is frustrating to read, to saying, when discussing the Hamburg zoo’s rationalizations for its practices, “as if these poor captive and dumb animals had given a consent they never in fact gave to a violence more sure of itself than ever, to what I’ll call repressive violence with a liberal, idealist and spiritual grimace” (Derrida, 2009, p. 398). Derrida’s language grew ever harsher with the systems of symbolic violence he had identified, and I argue that Wurgaft’s work, if it cited Derrida, would become haunted by Derrida’s ideas. His identification of consent in the context of the Hamburg zoo would have spoken immense volumes if applied to Wurgaft’s imagery of a captive pig, worshipped by a community that still takes the agency and voice away from said pig in exchange for a biopsy.

Meat Planet contains only one mention of the word anthropocentricity, a brief aside that is never discussed in any detail. Had Wurgaft cited any Derrida he could not have, in good conscience, written a

book on the topic of meat in such an anthropocentric manner. Cultured meat is not just about the instrumental or symbolic realities of human beings – it poses a disruptive and entrenching set of possibilities that hold implications for nature, and especially for animals. Yet, those concerns are absent in the book. The philosophical concerns are merely for human interests only, “questions of what we might become.” It is works such as *Meat Planet*, Cartesian in spirit, that Derrida took concern with later in his career. But unlike Descartes, Wurgaft has written a book on a specific topic in which he could have brought greater light to these symbolic and metaphysical concerns related to the animal. However, the book’s final chapters indicate that Wurgaft does not care about the agency, voice, or empowerment of the animal that cultured meat may or may not have an impact upon. It is a missed opportunity that finishes the book on an immensely sour note.

Meat Planet, some will argue, never set out to cover the matters I have raised in this review, and so my critiques may come across as aggressive and inconsiderate. But there is a difference in not having the space and time to cover issues thoroughly, and erasing those issues entirely. Wurgaft opts for erasure in a book covering a futuristic topic with an understanding of the animal which has not been updated since the 1980s. I cannot help being frustrated with how little Wurgaft seems to cover, despite his intimate knowledge of such a complicated and secretive topic, and I am especially concerned given that this book will likely be an authoritative text on cultured meat for the foreseeable future. *Meat Planet* may catch readers up on what is going on with cultured meat in a folksy manner, with added attention to the details of his smudged computer screen, but beyond that, there is more frustration than insight on offer. I recommend this book be read only with additional information and readings immediately on hand, and certainly not as an end-all, be-all text on such a complicated future food technology.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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 English grammar spelling.

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