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# Farmed Animals on Film A Manifesto for a New Ethic

Stephen Marcus Finn

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Stephen Marcus Finn

# Farmed Animals on Film

*A Manifesto for a New Ethic*

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Centurion, South Africa

ISSN 2634-6672

ISSN 2634-6680 (electronic)

The Palgrave Macmillan Animal Ethics Series

ISBN 978-3-031-23831-4

ISBN 978-3-031-23832-1 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23832-1>

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Cover illustration: Svetlana Isochenko / EyeEm / Getty Images

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The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

*For my beloved LUGALA  
In our shared embrace of life's ethic  
And who has made all my joys possible*

## PREFACE

It was pouring and I didn't fancy cycling back in the rain pelting down in Palo Alto. So, I sat out the rest of the movie I was absolutely hating. And that changed my life and led to my becoming involved in animal rights advocacy, going from omnivore to vegetarian to vegan.

I was always on the side of the animals, from the first book that I, at five, was allowed to choose at our public library in my home town of Potchefstroom—*Chip Chip*, about a chipmunk who unwittingly gets the better of a hunter who is left humiliated, and after which Chip Chip realizes that he must pay more attention to his education. But that didn't affect my eating habits.

I did not change in this way a couple of years later either when I saw chickens being decapitated in a religious ritual and running around headless. My friends laughed, but I was appalled. Nevertheless, I still continued eating the birds.

I'm sure that most of us have many such stories where we were upset at what was going on but didn't do anything about it: we were too young, or our parents took no "nonsense" from us, or our school hostels refused to cater for vegetarians, let alone vegans.

Then there was the time as a young man that I walked up to an elderly nun standing on the shores of Lake Tiberias to ask for directions to a religious site, and she responded by asking in her Irish accent, "Are you a vegetarian?" When I said I wasn't yet (the "yet" possibly showing that it was lying in my subconscious), she said, "But you will be one day." It took a few years.

It was when I was watching the film I mentioned at the start of this Preface, *Apocalypse now*, based on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of darkness*, a university prescribed book I'd ploughed through thrice, detesting it more each time. I went to see the film because of good reviews. The highlight for me was when the main character, played by Marlon Brando, was being slashed to death, as I realized that it meant it must be near the end of the film. But the scenes were interspersed with horrific ones of a water buffalo also being hacked to death. As I saw the ribs appear, I said aloud to myself: "I can never eat meat again."

I was the first vegetarian, and soon after vegan, anyone seemed to know in my community. There was nothing for me at restaurants, and friends avoided asking me over because they said they wouldn't know what to give me. Decades on, my whole family and a number in our social circle are vegans or vegetarians, but it seems to be more of a generational thing. Most of our children's friends but fewer of ours follow a plant-based diet; at my university, few of my colleagues but a good percentage of my students. When I do races, I have "Stephen the Vegan" at the back of my shirt, my wife having "Louis the Vegan". Many people at each race comment that their son or daughter or niece or nephew is also vegan, but they themselves are not there. Yet.

I wasn't the only one in my family whose ideology and behaviour were changed by a film. While watching *Earthlings*, my wife and mother-in-law (who was eighty) became vegetarians (later vegans), as did some of our friends when we had home viewings of this documentary.

Other friends and acquaintances opted for a plant-based diet when seeing films as diverse as *Gandhi*, *Babe*, *Dominion* and *Land of hope and glory*. Intended or not, these films resulted in animal rights awareness, advocacy or activism for a number of them. Such reactions underline the potential power of a film. And this is what this book is about.

Centurion, South Africa

Stephen Marcus Finn

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to the reviewers of my proposal for this book, and especially for their constructive criticism.

My thanks to David Bilchitz, Carrie Packer Freeman, Randy Malamud, Debra Merskin and Pluto Panoussis for their encouragement and support, as well as for their example and commitment in the fields covered here.

To Trevor Steele Taylor for introducing me to different kinds of films from the past and especially to the work of Peter Watkins; to colleagues and mentors from the Department of Drama and Film Studies at the University of Pretoria, particularly Marth Munro for our fruitful discussions on research methodology, Kristina Johnstone for her input on post-humanism, and Chris Broodryk for his knowledge of screenwriting and introducing me to *Au hazard*, *Balthazar*.

I really appreciate the advice, knowledge and detailed clarification of method from my Editor, Amy Invernizzi. Much thanks also to Production Editor, Paul Smith Jesudas, and to Project Manager, Nirmal Kumar Ganaprakasam.

I am so fortunate to be involved with Asher's Farm Sanctuary—a place I dreamt about having for decades, and that has reified an ethical vision.

My gratitude to my amazing children—Arden, Meghan and Brandon, with Gabi, Maya and Lindsay, for their support, encouragement and insistence that I write this book.

An enormous thanks to Meghan—for her patience and expertise in accessing over half of the films for me, and without whom I wouldn't have been able to find the many worlds of film that I have.

Most of all to my beloved wife, Louis/Lugala, for her love, consideration, patience, enthusiasm, fortitude, knowledge, example, gigantic heart and beautiful being. Like all my writing, this book is dedicated to her.

## Praise for *Farmed Animals on Film*

“In this incisive and timely survey, Stephen Marcus Finn surveys a broad range of films about farmed animals with a keen ethical focus on how they serve to help or harm the lives of those who are caught up in the industries of carnivory. Finn breaks new ground in his demonstration of how ubiquitously our habits and values are shaped by a provocative canon of feature, documentary, and animated films ranging from *Okja* to *Babe*, *Chicken Run* to *Fowl Play*, *The Cove* to *Death on a Factory Farm*. Reading *Farmed Animals on Film: A Manifesto for a New Ethic* is like attending a keenly curated film festival, and readers will want to follow up by actually watching all these films and thinking about them through Finn’s lens.”

—Randy Malamud, Regents’ Professor of English, *Georgia State University*,  
author of *Reading Zoos: Representations of Animals and Captivity*

“Stephen Marcus Finn’s book, *Farmed Animals on Film: A Manifesto for a New Ethic*, is a comprehensive, insightful, and thorough analysis of over 30 films (documentary and narrative), and the power of cinema to tell stories. Besides thorough analyses of the films-as-text, Finn offers what much research and publishing does not: action steps. Once our consciousness is raised, what can we do? We are told in a well-written, accessible and interesting book that should be required reading for anyone who cares about animals.”

—Debra Merskin, Professor Emerita, *School of Journalism and Communication, University of Oregon*

“Stephen Marcus Finn offers us a book filled with illuminating insights concerning the role and potential of film in advancing the rights of farmed animals. The lively and engaging analysis is driven throughout by Finn’s unshakeable moral vision, namely, that farmed animals deserve respect and, as human beings, we are duty-bound to end their terrible suffering at our hands. Equally important, however, is Finn’s recognition that social change requires a methodology: his book fills a gap in demonstrating impressively the role film can play both in enlightening us but also unlocking our compassion.”

—David Bilchitz, Professor of Fundamental Rights and Constitutional Law at the *University of Johannesburg*; Professor of Law at the *University of Reading*

“As a fellow vegan and animal rights media scholar who promotes responsible, pro-animal media representation, I’m excited that Finn has analyzed the contributions of dozens of animal rights films and crafted a much-needed Film Manifesto that guides animal advocates toward productive film-making that centers on farmed animal lives to help us take their perspective, empathize, identify, and recognize some of ourselves in them—inspiring and indeed instructing us to transform our relationship from (ab)use towards one of mutuality and respect.”

—Carrie P. Freeman, Professor of Communication at *Georgia State University*  
and author of *Framing Farming* and co-author  
of [www.animalsandmedia.org](http://www.animalsandmedia.org)

“*Farmed Animals on Film* is a tour-de-force, entertaining, yet demanding. It is written with unfaltering conviction and deep tenderness. Not to be underestimated is the degree of delight it takes in its broad references to cinema in relation to farmed animals. It is a cinephile’s treasure chest. More importantly, however, is its contribution to the all-important ethical considerations of the moving image. Meticulous research and academic rigour aside, what you have, in essence, is the work of a deeply connected writer, who is both activist and poet, and is guiding us into a space of creative empowerment. A riveting, terrifying and, as a filmmaker, dare I say, life-changing read.”

—Pluto Panoussis, Founder: *School of Film Arts, Open Window, South Africa*;  
Co-founder: *Open Window University  
for the Creative Arts, Zambia*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Stephen Marcus Finn** is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. He is an animal rights activist who has been a farm hand, a journalist, a religious scholar and a schoolteacher, but mostly an academic, as well as a prize-winning public speaker and fitness ace. His novels, plays and screenplays focus on social outsiders and the oppressed. He is a founder and director of one of the first farmed animal sanctuaries in Africa.



## CHAPTER 1

---

# Introduction

*I have spent my life fighting discrimination and injustice, whether the victims are blacks, women, or gays and lesbians. No human being should be the target of prejudice or the object of vilification or be denied his or her basic rights.... But the business of fighting injustice is like fighting a multiheaded hydra. As one form of injustice appears to be vanquished, another takes its place....*

*But there are other issues of justice – not only for human beings but also for the world’s other sentient creatures. The matter of the abuse and cruelty we inflict on other animals has to fight for our attention in what sometimes seems an already overfull moral agenda. It is vital, however, that these instances of injustice not be overlooked.*

*Unless we are mindful of their interests and speak out loudly on their behalf, abuse and cruelty go unchallenged.*

*Archbishop Desmond Tutu—Foreword: Extending Justice and Compassion.*

*In Linzey (2013: xv).*

*My goal is simple. All I want to do is re-connect people with animals. Awaken some emotions and some feelings and some logic, that is been [sic] buried and suppressed, intentionally, by our society.*

*Gary Yourofsky (2013).*

The title of this study, *Farmed Animals on Film: A Manifesto for a New Ethic*, underlines what the rationale of this book is: an examination of animal rights films, leading to the presentation of a manifesto on how farmed animals should be treated in film. The word “farmed” is a statement of advocacy. These are not animals who live freely on a farm (such as at an animal rights sanctuary) but those who are put there in order for humans to benefit from their labour, their produce, their eventual slaughter, whether it comes just after they are born (for instance, male chicks for maceration and male calves for what is advertised as veal or for use as Torah material—scrolls in religious Judaism) or when they are older and their yield of eggs or milk has diminished. The word “farm” as a noun or an adjective connotes pastures, which is more often than not a misnomer; “farmed” is a verb that indicates that the animals are there under duress, their lives dictated by humans. In short, “human treatment of other animals needs to change, and the media have a crucial role to play in this change” (Linné 2016: 252).

For the first time, the concentration of a publication will be on farmed animals on film, and a framework of how screenwriters, directors, producers and cinematographers should act ethically to avoid our fellow beings here suffering or being exploited in any way.

As film is so popular, it is well-positioned to help take farmed animals beyond the fences of incarceration, vilification and suffering in what are in effect concentration and death camps. Motion pictures are fixtures of everyday life, “integrated into a wide variety of cultural processes” (Carroll 2006: 1). Moreover, “film has a profound influence in framing how we conceptualize and address ourselves and lifestyles, and by inference our global problems” (McDonagh & Brereton 2010: 134). In addition, as Randy Malamud points out, “film and other electronic media project the human psyche: they hold and promulgate modern human values, agendas, and norms. Films are dream and reality-makers” (Malamud 2010: 136). In this way, when films “include representations of environmental and animal issues, [they] can ignite public discourse surrounding animal exploitation” (Loy 2016: 221).

Films reflect our environment, our society, ourselves. They “both shape and bear witness to the ethical and political dilemmas that animate the broader social landscape” (Giroux 2002: 13). They can make us ponder over our values, attitudes and conduct, opening our eyes and minds to “the other”, whoever or whatever “the other” might be. This is becoming increasingly pertinent in today’s rather confused and confusing world. As

bell hooks tells us, “In this age of mixing and hybridity, popular culture, particularly the world of movies, constitutes a new frontier providing a sense of movement, of pulling away from the familiar and journeying into and beyond the world of the other” (hooks 1996: 2).

Film brings a visual intimacy to situations that we are aware of but also to those that have been clouded from our experience or knowledge. From the early days of film, contemporary social problems have been portrayed, one of the earliest being Alice Guy-Blaché’s 1912 film *Falling leaves* which is about consumption and its possible cure, à la *La Bohème*, *La Traviata* and *Moulin Rouge*, but in silence and with a happy ending. A prime example, among many others, of the depiction of social problems and even a call to the viewer to see issues in a new light is Vittorio De Sica’s remarkable Italian neo-realist 1948 film *Ladri di biciclette [Bicycle thieves]*, about poverty, unemployment and degradation. Briefly, other films that have affected public opinion are *To kill a mockingbird* (1963; Mulligan)—racial prejudice in the USA; *Cathy come home* (1966; Loach)—homelessness in the UK, filmed for television; *Philadelphia* (1993; Demme)—AIDS; *Erin Brokovich* (2000; Soderbergh)—cancer-causing polluted water; and *Babe* (1995; Noonan)—pigs on farms.

As seen in the last example, animal rights films continue this tradition, with visual images giving rise to an essential discourse, proving useful in the recruitment of activists in this regard (cf. Freeman 2014: 71–72). However, we live in a paradoxical society, with a “cultural oversensitivity to the treatment of animals on screen, [appearing] to sit at odds with a culture that is also heavily dependent on animal exploitation” (Burt 2002: 14); this can be regarded as a “moral schizophrenia” (Francione 2004: 108).

Tom Regan made the point several decades ago that it is not possible, certainly in a single publication, “to examine the enormous variety of ways in which human acts and institutions affect animals”. Therefore, “such activities as rodeos, bullfights, horse and dog racing, and other public ‘sports’ involving animals will go unexamined, as will petting zoos, roadside zoos, and zoological parks, including aquaria” (Regan 1983: 330). To this we can add puppy mills and hunting, the coward’s game, which ranges from fox hunting, to killing giraffes in the bush, and to canned lion shooting where the animals do not have a chance to escape, another example of necrocentricity, with death betokening achievement (cf. Kheel 1995: 107). However, Regan makes the additional point that he cannot

cover the use of animals in the film industry. This book sets out to rectify that with regard to farmed animals.

The ultimate *raison d'être* of *Farmed Animals on Film* is to strive for the manumission, the freeing from slavery of any type, of farmed animals who are forced into certain environments by humans; the farm owners' coercion is a process of deterritorialization, with their ultimate aim of the translocation of farmed animals being to the slaughterhouse. This book can be regarded as part of the liberation movement that "demands an expansion of our moral horizons" (Singer 2002: xxiii). It is a way of speaking out for animals who can speak but who cannot be understood by humans, most of whom refuse to recognize that the sounds and movements these animals make portray their joy and despair, their contentment and fear, their pain and their terror. It goes far beyond a dog's tail wagging or a cat's purring. As Jean de la Fontaine says in his Epilogue to Book II of his *Fables*: "Car toute parle dans l'univers;/Il n'est rien qui n'ait son langage/[... for none/Is there in all the Universe but that/Has language of its own]" (Hollander 2007: xxix).

More direct is Polynesia the parrot who tells Doctor Dolittle:

"I was thinking about people," said Polynesia. "People make me sick. They think they're so wonderful. The world has been going on now for thousands of years, hasn't it? And the only thing in animal language that *people* have learned to understand is that when a dog wags his tail he means 'I'm glad!' It's funny isn't it? You are the very first man to talk like us. Oh, sometimes people annoy me dreadfully – such airs they put on talking about 'the dumb animals.' *Dumb!* Huh!" (Lofting 1920: 18; italics in the original)

This study is an attempt to overcome the notion of "dumb animals", and that of the objectivization and "commodification" (Freeman 2014: 225) of farmed animals with an appreciation that they are sentient and cognitive beings, individuals who have a life force akin to that of humans. To do this, it is necessary to transform the brutal socio-economic-political-cultural structures that aggravate their suffering and undermine their well-being.

We question why many societies regard dolphins as sentient but cows not; dogs can suffer but sheep do not; you can't slaughter a rhino, but there is no problem if you slay a goat; woe betide you if you kill an eagle, but a chicken doesn't matter. People go gooey and succumb to the "bambi effect" (Flynn & Hall 2017: 314) when a piglet escapes from a truck on

the way to the abattoir, all this while they tuck into their so-called ham sandwich with no compunction. They happily do this because farmed animals become what Carol Adams calls “absent referents” (Adams 2003: 209), with animals renamed once they are killed or even before that—when they are destined for slaughter. So, cows, sheep, pigs, for instance, are called “livestock” in the farming industry; chickens, turkeys and geese are “poultry”; pigs are “pork” or “ham” or “bacon”; calves are “veal”; squid are “calamari”; cows forced to give milk for human consumption become “dairy cows”; cows and bulls become “beef cattle” or “steak” or “T-bones”. (Cf. Pickover 2005: 144). All this for taste bud traction, or what Kai Horsthemke calls “palatal pleasures” (Horsthemke 2010: 81).

Generally neglected in writing or discussions in the advocacy movement are the crustaceans such as crabs, crayfish and lobsters, and other “sea-foods” such as oysters, whelks and winkles. They are caught, taken to processing plants, soaked and macerated (as examples of what happens to them) and then presented as delicacies in restaurants, with no regard to the horror that beset them (Cf. Ponthus 2021: *passim*).

A graphic example of society’s inconsistency in the approach to animals can be seen in New Zealand’s Massey University Magazine of 2012. There is a picture on page 37 of dozens of dead birds—penguins, petrels and gannets lying in a row, covered by oil released by a grounded ship; when this occurred, there was a tremendous outcry about the maritime disaster and how it killed these poor birds (cf. Little 2012). In contrast, on pages 30 and 31 of this magazine, there are pictures of hundreds of carcasses in freezers in New Zealand, all farmed animals having been killed to be devoured by humans. And there is a national pride about this “meat-processing facility” that stores dead animals, killed by humans on purpose (Cf. Yska 2012).

Acting and speaking out loudly on behalf of farmed animals is a particular decision of priority, and does not negate other discrimination, other injustice, other cruelty. To concentrate in this book on film and a manifesto regarding such heinousness regarding these animals is to open a field that has been sadly neglected. Film in its various forms (including narratives, documentaries, docudramas, televised events, videos, social media) is one of the ways that people try to get their message across. These methods range, for instance, from becoming vegan; to handing out pamphlets on street corners or shopping centres; to teaching; to dramatic presentations; to writing (essays, articles, short stories, poetry, plays, screenplays, novels); to establishing and supporting plant-based restaurants; to setting

up farmed animal sanctuaries; to exposing and publicizing cruelty on farms (usually but not only the industrial ones); to institutions promoting ethical concerns for the well-being of animals through academic research and public debate (the prime one here is the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics); to physically saving animals (as examples, Direct Action Everywhere, and the Animal Liberation Front); and to formulating a manifesto to obviate cruelty in films, as this book does. The range is from individual advocacy to group activism. The focus in this book is unlike certain other studies of animals such as the superb ones of Gregg Mitman's *Reel nature* (1999) and Derek Bousé's *Wildlife films* (2000) that examine as their titles indicate the filming of animals in the wild. Even Jonathan Burt's excellent *Animals in film* (2002) that has an impressive range pays minor attention to films that concentrate on farmed animals.

With farmed animals, there is generally the ongoing attempt, the institutional policy, even the law “to keep the consumer in ignorance” (Matthieu 2016: 43). This enables in a cynical way, to use Matthieu's term, a “moral dissociation” (Matthieu 2016: 53); it conceals cruelty and makes the public's experience of it off limits. The excuse cannot be that “humankind/Cannot bear very much reality” (Eliot 1959: 14)—look at all the violence, gang warfare, prison horrors portrayed in films and lapped up by the public, including children. The insistence on moral dissociation is to make sure that the slaughter and suffering of farmed animals doesn't change diet, doesn't result in traditions being questioned, doesn't hit the pocket, while Mammon, or wealth incarnate, can remain the main god to pay obeisance to. In this way, the torture, the “throat-cutting, electrocution, and evisceration” (Caron 2013: 1753), remains in the ether so that the compassion of a gullible public is anaesthetized while the individuality of what they are eating is not thought about. Like David Nibert, although I will touch upon farmed animal sentience, I shall not concentrate on it here, as much has already been written on this as an attempt to refute the traditional arguments that are “used to legitimate the oppression of other animals” (Nibert 2013: 4).

The reference to “other animals” is significant because like several publications promoting animal rights, here humans are also considered to be animals. However, this does come with a terminological problem. Many rightly esteemed writers on animal rights use the word “non-human” to indicate animals other than humans. I find this problematic as it betokens a hegemony putting humans as a moral, behavioural, physical and sentient touchstone, and is reminiscent of the policy (in apartheid South Africa, for

instance) of terming humans “whites” or “non-whites”, with the implication that whites are superior in all ways, and blacks are seen as lacking something, not even having a term to describe them (apart from the derogatory ones). This can be extrapolated to the traditional role of the woman in most societies: “She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other” (de Beauvoir 1997 [1953]: 13).

When I do quote other writers who use the “non-human” terminology, however, I shall do so without a [sic]. To try to avoid this hierarchical ranking of living beings, I shall, like David Nibert, prefer to use “humans and other animals” (Nibert 2002: xiv; cf. also Ryder 1989: 2).

This is why it is right to use the same pronouns when referring to all animals, including farmed animals, as we use when referring to humans. Examples to be followed include:

---

Who	and not	Which
Whom	and not	Which
He/she/they	and not	It
Him/her/them	and not	It
His/hers/theirs	and not	Its

---

Furthermore, when the gender of the animal cannot be determined but a pronoun is necessary, the word “they” as a singular will be employed.

The liberation of farmed animals can be considered the most pressing of all movements fighting oppression because of the dearth of compassion regarding them and the tremendous numbers of our fellow creatures who are suffering in their various incarcerations. This has become increasingly exacerbated in recent decades with factory or industrial farming “that tries to raise as many animals as possible while minimizing the space of their enclosures in an effort to maximize profits” (Degrazia 2011: 755). The horrors inflicted on farmed animals by industrialized and intensive agriculture were exposed almost sixty years ago by Ruth Harrison in her seminal book, *Animal machines: An exposé of “factory farming” and its danger to the public* (Harrison 1964). But the cruelty is not confined to such intensive farming; on other farms there is also forced feeding, milking, forced artificial insemination, dehorning, castration and branding, to give just a few examples; and murder.

Such practices are to be found not only in North America and Europe from where most examples are drawn but also throughout the world. The “undemocratic, exploitative ... advance of global capitalism” (Nibert 2002: xiv) to the detriment of farmed animals is, for instance, evident in South Africa.

In 2016, Wynand Dreyer published a book consisting of interviews with nineteen South African “megaboere” (mega or large-scale farmers),<sup>1</sup> about half of them producing fruit, vegetables and wine, while the others raise, imprison and slaughter animals—bovids, sheep, pigs and chickens mainly. Financial prosperity is the measure of meeting their goals and evidently what gives meaning to the farm owners’ lives. One is a foremost producer of “beef” in South Africa, with about 100,000 “livestock” in feeding-pens at any time, with 200,000 slaughtered a year. The owner of the factory farm explains how they have ways to determine how each animal will grow and what profit they will bring, having about a hundred days to get an animal “ready for slaughter”. The concern for the health of the animals is based on their “readiness” for the abattoir (Dreyer 2016: 41–50). Another breeder says bizarrely that for him his sheep are “lovely, just as his children are lovely to him” (Dreyer 2016: 74). But he is happy for them to be killed. For a chicken farmer who has 734,000 hens who lay about two million dozen eggs a month, everything is about production (Dreyer 2016: 119–127). A pig farmer says that the most important aspect of his factory is that it must be managed in the most cost-effective manner. From the figures he gives (Dreyer 2016: 142–148), we can determine that 100,000 sows a year are slaughtered in South Africa—that would be over 8000 a month, 275 a day, 12 an hour, 1 every 5 minutes. A milk farmer, “an embryo pioneer”, says that his passion for the highest possible volume of milk production comes from God (Dreyer 2016: 153), and mocks cows for thinking that the calves they are carrying belong to them (Dreyer 2016: 157). What emerges from here is a callousness of factory farmers, driven by profit, and not caring about the health or welfare of the animals except when it affects their pockets. This goal of money-making ties up with the original meaning of “farm”: its etymology comes from the Latin “firma”, which means “fixed payment”. In like vein, the original meaning of the word “pecuniary” (to do with money) came from the Latin “pecu”, meaning “cattle”. It is obvious that some farmers see it as their “god-given right” to do what they do for financial purposes.

<sup>1</sup> As the book is in Afrikaans, I shall translate all quotations into English.

Once more, this is no different from what happens in the more publicized factory farms in other countries where there are far more intensive farm facilities (to use another description), with the United States of America being the prime example. The numbers are horrendous and have been published many times, but it is important to give them again, even if in summary: Francione (2004: 109) records in 2004 that according to the United States Department of Agriculture, 8 billion animals were killed for food in that year; that means 23 million animals were slaughtered every day, over 950,000 an hour, about 16,000 a minute, more than 260 a second. This grew to 18 billion killed in the United States alone in 2008, including, for instance, over 35 million cattle, more than 116 million pigs, 9 billion chickens (Flynn & Hall 2017: 301–302). Ten years ago, slaughter worldwide was 56 billion farmed animals a year, according to the UN report *Livestock's long shadow* (in Donaldson & Kymlicka 2011: 2); at much the same time, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization put the number at 65 billion (cf. Višak & Garner 2016: 2). This does not include the hundreds of billions of fish, the suffering of cows in the dairy industry, the incarceration of laying hens and the maceration of male chicks (cf. Sanders 2018; World Economic Forum 2019; Zampa 2020). As examples for today, every minute 115,000 chickens are murdered; 2700 pigs; 1000 sheep and 540 cattle (The Vegan Calculator 2020).

As with the Nazis and the Holocaust, these killings of farmed animals occur within the bounds of the law (Taylor 2013: 541), often influenced by economic and political factors, giving justification to murder in order to obtain and retain power and financial gain (cf. Flynn & Hall 2017: 304). These farmed animals are victims with no rights, unlike those charged with crimes in various parts of Europe from at least the thirteenth century (a pig in Fontenay-aux-Roses near Paris in 1266) to the nineteenth century (a cock in Leeds, England), who were tried in court for anything from damage to property to murder, and not always found guilty, but if so, sentenced to various punishments (cf. Evans 2013 [1906]; Girgen 2003)—directly or for the humans deemed to be in charge of them. That was the practice of the day, often with criminal charges based on passages in the Bible and related to Christian edicts.

Such a custom of animals having legal standing even if only related to their misconduct has changed. Other traditions have taken their place, be they social, cultural or religious. As Matthew Scully points out, “Traditions can ennoble us, or they can enslave us” (Scully 2002: 41). Or we can use them to ennoble others—or enslave them; in this case, farmed animals.

Therefore, current conduct founded on what is regarded as tradition can pervert the sense of the ethical and can rot away compassion. Any kind of oppression or bullying reveals more about the perpetrator than the victim, be this, as examples, with racism, sexism, speciesism or domineering religiosity, and what it exposes is somebody who is cruel, nasty and bigoted, revelling in a self-conceived power.

Religious leaders could well set the example of compassion, referring to the kindness and not the cruelty in their texts and traditions. Much has been written on this, ranging from the pointed but often conciliatory works by Andrew Linzey to the hard-hitting and accusatory personal letter by Qhaunis Kruunu to leaders of different religions around the world. Any further discussion here will sidetrack the overall aim of this book, so readers are rather referred to the following as examples of a survey of animal rights and religious systems. The seminal work is Andrew Linzey and Claire Linzey's 2020 *The Routledge handbook of religion and animal ethics*. Also informative are Akers (2000); Berman (1982); Blakeley (2003); Chapple (1993); Kalechofsky (1998); Kaufman & Braun (2002); Kemmerer (2012); Keown (2000); Kruunu (2012); Linzey, A. (2013); Linzey, C. (2022); Masri (2009); Phelps (2004); Prabhavananda (1977); Schwartz (2001); Socha (2014); and Tlili (2015). However, I agree with Richard Ryder in his saying that "we need to accept the idea that morality can exist without god" (Ryder 2011: 12).

Religion does not feature strongly in animal rights films (I am not talking about home videos put on Facebook or YouTube here). The most significant is most probably *Anima: Animals, Faith, Compassion*, filmed as a series of short statements of just over eleven minutes with religious leaders on their faiths, twelve in all, and the sacredness of animals (Jennifer Jessum 2018). It was created by the Guibord Center in Los Angeles for Animal Defenders International to use in its work to end animal cruelty throughout the world. "Anima" means the soul or animating principle of a living thing. Noble it certainly is, but what a pity no farmed animals appear in it. Apart from humans, the only other live animals are five or six dogs, being held or walked by the speakers. There is also an impaled bird next to one of the speakers, which appears to be part of his religion. It is a good starting point for discussion of each one of these religions, but little substantive reference is given from oral or written traditions.

This study, in line with social constructionism as explained by Burr (2015: 9), will look at the world from a specific perspective to benefit farmed animals. It will "focus on issues of exploitation and oppression", its

aim being “to bring about social change in the form of emancipation and social justice” (Burr 2015: 17). We can appropriate Arundhati Roy’s political comment here:

What is happening to the world lies, at the moment, just outside the realm of common human understanding. It is the writers, the poets, the artists, the singers, the filmmakers who can make the connections, who can find ways of bringing it into the realm of common understanding. (Quoted by Waller 2012: 157)

Film and the other art forms can be contextually related to animal rights. As it embraces many of the arts, film should be put briefly in a broader historically, aesthetic and artistically creative context. Films tell stories, as novels do; they have actors and dialogue, as plays do; they also include music as songs, bands, opera and ballet do; the medium employed is the visual, in this way resembling paintings and sculptures. Films combine verbal narrative and pictorial representation. Screenwriters and filmmakers come from a long tradition of animal rights activism. As the focus of this book is on film, just a few examples from other media will suffice in order to underline how animal rights films are linked to them.

In her Curatorial Essay in *Dystopia*, Elfriede Dreyer says:

Art often serves an observational, analytical and interpretational purpose. Both art’s mimetic function and its imaginative aspect provide powerful means by which any society can introspect, investigate and visualise itself as a capsule of the socio-cultural and political status quo. (Dreyer 2009:6).

For this study, I am not concerned with transanthropomorphic depictions or centaurism in art as in Jane Alexander’s works or those of Edwina Ashton, such as her 1997 video *Sheep*, or John Isaacs’s 1994 mixed media *Say it isn’t so*; or the totally artificial and non-living Jeff Koons’s 1986 *Rabbit* in stainless steel; or Emily Mayer’s 1995 *Corvus corium*—leather, steel, wood, rubber.

We can rather consider animals other than the human as portrayed in their full individual animality. Such paintings can certainly play a role in promoting animal rights, as we can see in several of them. One that can be interpreted as encompassing the equality of farm animals (as distinct from farmed animals) is Paulus Potter’s 1647 life-sized oil *The young bull* (Mauritshuis, The Hague), where, in clockwise order from left back, we

see as a non-hierarchical unit an elderly man, a tree, a young bull, a cow and three sheep, some of whom are meeting our gaze, seeing us as we are seeing them.

Created a century later was the second of William Hogarth's 1751 engravings, *The four stages of cruelty* (Andrew Edmunds Prints & Drawings, London), where we see the evil Tom Nero flogging his horse who has collapsed by being made to carry too heavy a load. Here, too, a drover is seen clubbing his sheep to death, a donkey is prodded with a pitchfork and a mob baits a bull. Meanwhile a possibly caring individual notes everything down, and we, the viewers, are appalled at what we are seeing.

Steve Baker says that possibly the most striking example of a twentieth-century artist who tries "to think outside the secure perspectives of the human" is Franz Marc's 1911 essay, "How does a horse see the world?" (Baker 2000: 21). Marc says that "it is a poverty-stricken convention to place animals into landscapes as seen by men" who like Picasso, Kandinsky, Delaunay, Burljick and Pisanello project their own inner worlds; he would rather be more subtle and sensitive and try to paint how an animal feels (cf. Baker 2000: 21). A hundred years on, Giovanni Aloï is on the same track: "Unlearning the animal means effectively to suspend one's knowledge of nature in order to reconfigure it, or perhaps to let it reconfigure itself; it means to deconstruct the certainties offered by nature, in order to acquire a critical awareness of the relational modes we establish with animals and ecosystems, and simultaneously to find the courage to envision new ones" (Aloï 2012: xvi).

This approach is reified in Marc's 1911 Expressionist oil *Yellow cow* (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York), where we see a frisking, jubilant yellow cow, Marc's yellow often being associated with femininity and sensitivity (which is tangentially ecofeministic). In the same year as Franz Marc's *Yellow cow*, Marc Chagall painted his Cubist *I and the village* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York), which is forefronted with the profiles of a white sheep and a green man holding each other's gazes, lens to lens.

More blatant and tendentious is the contemporary Sue Coe's works that go to the heart of the matter, such as her *Screaming hen*, with its echoes of Edvard Munch's *The scream* (cf. Eisenman 2013: 245). We can see this as well in her photo-etching *Modern man followed by the ghosts of his meat* (1990), depicting a man holding a McDonald's take-away, followed by many of the different kinds of farmed animals killed for greed and gluttony.

As striking is literature that attempts to get readers to respond to narrative. Adam Apich says in the novel *The overstory* by Richard Powers: “The best arguments in the world won’t change a person’s mind. The only thing that can do that is a good story” (Powers 2018: 336 and 488). This is underlined throughout Małecki, Sorokowski, Pawłowski and Cieński’s book *Human minds and animal stories: How narratives make us care about other species* (Małecki et al. 2019).

For pertinent examples, novels by three winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature can be quoted from somewhat extensively.

The first is by the pacifist Frenchman Romain Rolland (awarded the prize in 1915), whose masterwork is the ten-volume *Jean-Christophe*. The extract comes from Volume IX, *Journey’s end: The burning bush*, just after the protagonist realizes that the first duty of humanity is to limit the sum of suffering and cruelty:

He could not think of the animals without shuddering in anguish. He looked into the eyes of the beasts and saw there a soul like his own, a soul which could not speak; but the eyes cried for it: “What have I done to you? Why do you hurt me?”

He could not bear to see the most ordinary sights that he had seen hundreds of times – a calf crying in a wicker pen, with its big, protruding eyes, with their bluish whites and pink lids, and white lashes, its curly white tufts on its forehead, its purple snout, its knock-kneed legs: - a lamb being carried by a peasant with its four legs tied together, hanging head down, trying to hold its head up, moaning like a child, bleating and lolling its gray tongue: - fowls huddled together in a basket: - the distant squeals of a pig being bled to death: - a fish being cleaned on the kitchen-table.... The nameless tortures which men inflict on such innocent creatures made his heart ache. Grant animals a ray of reason, imagine what a frightful nightmare the world is to them: a dream of cold-blooded men, blind and deaf, cutting their throats, slitting them open, gutting them, cutting them into pieces, cooking them alive, sometimes laughing at them and their contortions as they writhe in agony.... To a man whose mind is free there is something even more intolerable in the sufferings of animals than in the sufferings of men. For with the latter it is at least admitted that suffering is evil and that the man who causes it is a criminal. But thousands of animals are uselessly butchered every day without a shadow of remorse. If any man were to refer to it, he would be thought ridiculous. – And that is the unpardonable crime. That alone is the justification of all that men may suffer. It cries vengeance upon all the human race. If God exists and tolerates it, it cries vengeance upon God. If there exists a good God, then even the most humble of living things

must be saved. If God is good only to the strong, if there is no justice for the weak and lowly, for the poor creatures who are offered up as a sacrifice to humanity, then there is no such thing as goodness, no such thing as justice (Rolland 1915: 1421–1423).

Sounding a lot like Rolland is the 1978 laureate, the vegetarian Isaac Bashevis Singer in several of his books, but the example will be limited to his last one, *Shadows on the Hudson* (evidently a TV series is in production) that stresses a plant-based diet:

Among the ideals Grein had sketched out for the day when he would return to God was vegetarianism. How could one serve God when one butchered God's creatures? How could one expect mercy from heaven when one spilled blood every day, dragged God's creatures to the slaughterhouse, caused them terrible suffering, shortened their days and years? How could one ask compassion of God when one plucked a fish from the river and looked on while it suffocated, jerking on the hook? Grein had once visited the slaughterhouses in Chicago and had vowed to stop eating meat. He realized that even by eating milk and eggs one was killing cattle and birds: one could get milk only by destroying the calves for which the milk was intended, and the chicken farmers sooner or later sold the fowl to the butcher. Why should he not behave in the same way as millions of Hindus? One could easily exist on fruit, vegetables, bread, cereals, oil – the products of the earth. If humankind was to continue multiplying, it would come to that in any case. (Singer 1999: 383–384)

The final example is the 2018 winner, Olga Tokarczuk who, in *Drive your plow over the bones of the dead*, has her protagonist hold these views:

'It's Animals show the truth about a country,' I said. 'It's attitude towards Animals. If people behave brutally towards Animals, no form of democracy is ever going [to] help them, in fact nothing will at all.' (Tokarczuk 2018: loc 1272)

'Killing has become exempt from punishment. And as it goes unpunished, nobody notices it any more. And as nobody notices it, it doesn't exist. When you walk past a shop window where large red chunks of butchered bodies are hanging on display, do you stop to wonder what it really is. You never think twice about it, do you? Or when you order a kebab or a chop – what are you actually getting? There's nothing shocking about it. Crime has come to be regarded as a normal, everyday activity. Everyone commits it. That's

just how the world would look if concentration camps became the norm. Nobody would see anything wrong with them.’ (Tokarczuk 2018: loc 1318)

‘When you kill them, and they die in Fear and Terror ... you doom them to hell, and the whole world changes into hell. Can’t people see that? Are their minds incapable of reaching beyond petty, selfish pleasures?’ (Tokarczuk 2018: loc 1326)

This ecofeminist, anti-patriarchal novel has been made into a Polish film, *Pokot [Spoor]* (2017; Holland), which has the words (with subtitles in English): “A new cycle will begin and a new reality emerge.” This is what we’re after.

Finally, we turn to Shakespeare, and an unlikely but potent speech in *Henry VI Part II* III 1210–216, where King Henry says:

And as the butcher takes away the calf,  
And binds the wretch and beats it when it strays,  
Bearing it to the bloody slaughter-house,  
Even so remorseless have they borne him hence,  
And as the dam runs lowing up and down,  
Looking the way her harmless young one went,  
And can do nought but wail her darling’s loss ... (Shakespeare 1956: 539)

Unfortunately, *plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*. A back projection of this scene in a play or the voice-over of the king intoning or declaiming these words in a film while visuals of the cow and calf are shown could underline the king’s telling words, making this, as with the possibilities of the other literary excerpts, a scene with the focus on animal rights.

We must consider the premise behind the filmic text and what the partisan approach is. With documentaries about farmed animals, this is nearly always obvious, but the case might well be different with narratives. Was the film made to entertain only? Was it produced mainly to be profitable? Does the overall message promote animal rights? We can take these questions into account without falling prey to the intentional fallacy. To paraphrase and contextualize Wimsatt and Beardsley from three quarters of a century ago, design or intention is generally neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging whether a film is successful or not (cf. Wimsatt & Beardsley 1946: 468). We do not have to know what the producer or director’s intention was; we should rather determine how it supports this particular advocacy. Whatever form a film takes, it could enlighten,

educate, entertain or enkindle emotion—or any combination of them. Similarly, in seducing an audience with its message, it could influence, instigate and even incite, with or without any of these being in concert with any purported intention.

It seems that distributors of films, generally those to be shown in cinema four-wallers or television channels, are loath to screen films that disrupt the farmed animal status quo. Ricard Matthieu reminds us that “every time Shaun Monson, the director of [the animal rights documentary] *Earthlings*, contacted television channels to get his film shown, he received the reply that his images ran the risk of shocking children and other sensitive viewers” (Matthieu 2016: 43). He points out the double-standards here, with the media not afraid to show images in other areas that might offend such “sensitive souls”, with war, bloodshed and natural disasters being broadcast continuously, “with the goal of providing information and in some cases, of arousing our compassion and encouraging us to come to the aid of victims” (Matthieu 2016: 43). Furthermore, children are exposed to violence and horror as much as their parents allow them to be (and as much as they can hoodwink their parents), but this hardly plays on the consciences of programmers. This is all as legitimate as those in power deem it to be. And those in power are seldom concerned with the well-being of farmed animals. That must change, and such a change is a goal of this book.

The next chapter considers the concepts and theoretical underpinning related to this study: the difference between animal rights and animal welfare, critical animal and media studies, ecofeminism, and post-anthropomorphism.

Chapter 3 examines cruelty and compassion in films, with a brief history of abuse shown in documentaries, and then by that in narrative live-action films. This is followed by a summary of regulations to overcome brutality in such films, and then the role of film in promoting compassion for farmed and other animals.

Chapter 4 is concerned with animal rights and documentaries, with major forms, styles and techniques being examined. The films are explored as expository, observational, interactive, reflective, poetic, intersectional, and interviewed; and as related to thirteen persuasive techniques. Eighteen films from the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany and Russia are divided into several categories, including

omnibus documentaries that bring together various aspects of rights; compendium documentaries that are concerned with different kinds of farmed animals; single issue documentaries; interviews with activists and perpetrators; those with a plant-based focus; and those concentrating on individual farmed animals. As home videos and those made by farm sanctuaries fall under the ambit of documentary, these will also be considered and classified.

Chapter 5 discusses animal rights and narrative films, with storytelling in getting a message across and influencing viewers regarded as vital. Seventeen films are examined here, these being from the USA, the UK, Australia, France, South Korea, Japan and India. They have been divided into five categories: adaptation from novels; animated antics; the quest; docudramas; and downers. The importance of the screenwriter is also argued.

Chapter 6 brings everything together with its Farmed Animal Rights Manifesto (FARM) for Film. Manifestos are shown to have a moral premise to exhort their readers and listeners to action. There is a brief discussion of certain political manifestos, followed by a survey of animal rights manifestos from the time of Pythagoras in the sixth century BCE to the present century, including an essential relationship to feminism. After this, there is an examination of film manifestos of the past hundred or so years, with the focus on ideas in them that are relevant to animal rights. The climax is FARM for Film, with just on sixty points being made in eight categories: all-encompassing concepts; farmed animal centrality; filming; terminology and facts; portrayal of humans; specific persuasive techniques; financial aspects; and wider issues.

The Conclusion acts as a brief summary, with a call for compassion and a reference to the antagonists in various spheres. Quotations on animal rights are given from each of the thirty-four films that have been discussed, these divided into animal rights, not welfare; sentience and not suffering; humans' base behaviour; humans' activism and decency; and film for change. It is considered that sympathy is not enough because a way must be shown to achieve a better life for farmed animals—for all animals. Films have an essential role in achieving this.

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## CHAPTER 2

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# Concepts and Theoretical Underpinning

*“I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory,’ Alice said.  
Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course you don’t – till I  
tell you. I meant ‘there’s a nice knock-down argument for you!’”  
“But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean ‘a nice knock-down argument’,”  
Alice objected.  
“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone,  
“it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.”  
“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so  
many different things.”  
“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be  
master – that’s all.”  
Alice was too much puzzled to say anything, so after a minute Humpty  
Dumpty began again. “They’ve a temper, some of them – particularly  
verbs, they’re the proudest – adjectives you can do anything with, but  
not verbs – however, I can manage the whole lot! Impenetrability!  
That’s what I say.”  
Lewis Carroll—Through the looking-glass (1872: 72) [italics in  
original].*

## 2.1 ANIMAL WELFARE AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

Alice asks whether one can make words mean so many different things. This can be turned around to masking the same act with different words, for instance, culling, poaching and hunting. If the authorities decide that there are too many kangaroos in Australia or elephants in a national park in South Africa, it is deemed in order for those with guns and official permission to euphemistically “cull” them, which means “kill” or “slaughter” or “murder”. There is rightful horror about rhinos being illegally poached and killed (their horns are ludicrously presumed to be aphrodisiacs), but self-righteousness or a sense of achievement abounds when kudus are hunted and shot with a government-endorsed licence (they have magnificent, curved horns which presumably reflect the virility of the shooter). The majority view in many societies is that it is fine to hunt (if it is not legal, then it is considered to be poaching) and to cull, but as Peter Singer points out, “the fact that a view is widespread does not make it right. It may be an indefensible prejudice that survives primarily because it suits the interests of the dominant group” (Singer 2004: 78–79). It is important, therefore, to refine and sometimes redefine concepts by considering relevant relations, assumptions and inferences (cf. Buckland 2012: 6).

However, history, custom and tradition all come into play, too, as Stephen Eisenman tells us:

The prejudice has existed for at least 7000 years, or since the Sumerians domesticated sheep (mouflon) and cattle (aurochs). The first animal to wear the harness, suffer the whip or have its young taken from it so that its milk could be used for human consumption suffered the world-historical defeat of animal rights. And from the pastures of the Fertile Crescent to the laboratories of modern behaviourists, the bigotry of humans concerning animals has flourished, with oppression and violence down in its wake. Modern speciesism is built upon ancient and classical foundations. (Eisenman 2013: 45–46)

The farmed animal industry in which these animals are exploited for humans to make a profit is located “within the larger dynamics of capitalist exploitation” (Torres 2007: 2). We must recognize that animal welfare is complex as it involves more than husbandry and sentience, as economics plays a major role (cf. Norwood & Lusk 2011: 353).

There might well be confusion in public awareness of the difference between animal welfare and animal rights, regarding them as synonymous.

This is seen, too, as will be shown in a later chapter on manifestos, in certain organizations that give a detailed exposition of what “rights” they stand for, but who are really utilitarians or welfarists.

This reflects their speciesism that animal rights fight against. The word “speciesism” was devised by Richard Ryder in 1970 to indicate a bias that reflects the favouring of one’s own species against the well-being of others. Like racism and sexism, speciesism disregards the similarities between the discriminator and those discriminated against, and does not care about the interests or sufferings of others (cf. Ryder 1983: 5). For the purposes of this context, the oppressive treatment of animals other than human is indicative of speciesism. Animal rights counter-hegemonic activism is similar to human rights movements that oppose “legally-sanctioned discrimination, objectification, and exploitation of women and racial or ethnic minorities based on arbitrary and unjust hierarchies” (Freeman 2012: 107).

Peter Singer who is not always in accord with animal rights advocacy highlights a point of agreement in which he says that he, Ryder and Tom Regan agree with “practically everyone in the animal movement ... that a difference of species alone cannot provide an ethically defensible basis for giving the interests of one individual more weight than the interests of another” (Singer 2011: 6).

Singer is a utilitarian, aligning himself to John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham with their view that whatever increases the overall happiness of the greatest number is considered to be good. In the oft-quoted words of Bentham’s *Introduction to the principles of morals and legislation* of 1780, “The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?” (cf. Francione 2004: 113; Garrett 2011: 78).

Animal welfarism is linked to utilitarianism and, in the context of this book, to the notion that if you train an animal (for film or circus, for instance) or if you get them to do unnatural actions while rewarding them for doing so, or once you’ve finished with them find a way of disposing of them that is not too traumatic for them or for you, then all’s right with this world as you’re bringing delight to so many humans—and it’s also good for your pocket.

Animal welfare aims at reducing the suffering of animals but, in its ethos of utilitarianism, accords them only the right not to suffer. But animal experiments could be in order, if humans would benefit. Their regard for them as fungible really results in their being expungible.

This approach is related to what Martha Nussbaum calls “Kantian contractarianism”. Kant argues that all duties to other animals are merely

indirect ones to humanity, and if you are good to other animals, then you might behave in a similar fashion to humans. Such animals, therefore, do not have an intrinsic worth (Nussbaum 2004: 300).

The Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare (UDAW), “agreed on by governments”, recognizes that all animals are sentient beings in an interdependent ecosystem, and includes animals used in farming and scientific research, companion animals and those in recreation (presumably that would include hunting and circuses). David Madden (2013: 265–266) points out that apart from the moral aspects of preventing cruelty to animals and reducing their suffering, the UDAW would produce tangible benefits for animals as well as for humans and the environment because (my comments are in square brackets)

- Good animal care reduces the risk of food poisoning and of diseases transmissible to humans; [So, the main concern is with humans; other animals are ancillary and looked after merely to benefit the dominant species.]
- Responsible animal management affects land use, climate change, pollution, water supplies, habitat conservation, and biodiversity for the better and should play a role in disaster preparedness and response; [Here, environmental care is seen as the leading factor but, again, the implication is that the effect on humans takes central position.]
- Looking after animals properly improves their productivity and helps farmers to provide food for their families and their communities; [This is obvious: there is no real concern for farmed animals; care for them is only seen in the ways in which they can benefit humans.] and
- People’s attitudes and behaviour toward animals overlap with their attitudes and behaviour toward each other, and the human-animal bond has important therapeutic benefits. [This, as mentioned earlier, is Kantian. If humans are kind to animals this will have a knock-on effect in making for a more pleasant human society.]

This is in line with the precepts of Compassion in World Farming that for “meat-eaters” is a noble organization against factory farming and does good research on cruelty with concomitant action, but its aim of providing a better life for farmed animals (called “farm animals” by this organization) is linked to humans eating with a clearer conscience because they think that they will be eating “happy chickens” and calves that were not

killed when young but “reared humanely for beef”. Compassion in World Farming claims to “give animals a voice”, but our question must be, “What kind of voice?” Their screams when they are on the way to slaughter, when they are killed in whatever way? (Cf. [www.ciwf.org.uk](http://www.ciwf.org.uk) 2022).

Compassion in World Farming is against industrialized farming, being more in favour of the traditional kind, but that does not obviate subsumed cruelty in the latter type. On many traditional-type farms today, it is not unusual to have calves fitted with flaps attached to their nostrils as anti-suckling devices that prevent them from getting their mother’s teat into their mouths to nurse, but they are considered to be “humane” as mother and child can remain together. Meanwhile, the calves are starved of appropriate nutrition and the cows are deprived of more intimate contact with them. In other examples, it is hardly pleasant for a chicken to be chased about before having her throat slit, or a mother pig seeing her piglet being taken away in order to be killed for the Sunday roast.

In short, therefore, animal welfare does not provide any long-lasting protection for animals with so-called more humane killing methods, and merely gives an excuse to continue fossilized cultural, religious, and social traditions and actions (Cf. Pickover 2005: 10).

Although I do not agree with Peter Singer’s overall approach (just as he disagrees with Richard Ryder, Tom Regan and Gary Francione who all promote animal rights), he does make important points in trying to improve the lot of other animals. A pertinent example is in his Preface to the 2002 edition of *Animal liberation* where he refers to an epidemic of foot and mouth disease that swept through Britain in the spring of 2001. “On one evening television program, a tearful farmer said: ‘We’re so sorry to see our lambs die—they should be the symbol of spring, of new life. But now they die due to this awful disease.’” Singer then points out what would have happened to them in the usual circumstances. “He would have taken these little symbols of spring away from their mothers, packed them into trucks, and sent them to slaughter. The symbol of new life would become dead meat” (Singer 2002: ix). This sounds much like the farmer mentioned in the Introduction to this book, who says his sheep are like children to him, and also like the Walrus in Lewis Carroll’s poem “The Walrus and the Carpenter” who weeps for all the oysters that he has just devoured. Such hypocrisy abounds in much of the farming community, and, unfortunately, among some welfarists who try to improve the lives but not the final lot of farmed animals.

This is not meant as a total disparagement of the efforts of welfarists: they do feel for the farmed animals; they do want to make their lives better, and in some ways, they do succeed. But, at the same time, they play into the hands of an industry that is after financial profit as its main goal. Furthermore, it is speciesist. Mark Rowlands explains that “there is really no such thing as a humane, free-range, family slaughterhouse, where animals happily gambol to their demise ... Remaining alive, rather than having one’s life prematurely ended, is a vital interest of animals, just as it is a vital interest of humans” (Rowlands 2013: 41).

To complement this comment, we should consider an instance of an oppressed animal as being a human in such a situation. Let us say that certain humans live in an area where they are well looked after, but every once in a while, they see their controllers grab one of them and slit their throat; this will make the rest of them nervous and detract from any sense of security or stability. Instead, they will exist with intense fear that they could well be next. Another example: a human woman gives birth, but her son is taken away from her suddenly and to a place that she knows not; all she does know is that her breast milk is forced from her by another animal’s hands or by a machine and taken to be drunk by another species. Is this fair? Does this make her contented?

Those in power essentially make the rules, but might does not make right. And this is what animal rights fights against. Gary Francione (1996) insists that animal rights concepts are more than mere rhetoric, and quotes Helen Jones, the founder of the International Society for Animal Rights (ISAR), who said in a 1984 letter to the *Animals’ Agenda* 4(4) 3, that “animal rights” reflects the ISAR’s moral and philosophical position (Francione 1996: loc 658).

Among the various animal rights theories, the abolitionist one of Tom Regan has most probably received the most purchase. He says that all animals have the right to respectful treatment that cannot be infringed by human utilitarianism. He sees the way that animals are turned into food, clothes, performers and competitors as terrible and dire metamorphoses, and that the animal rights activists (ARAs) who oppose such deeds can hardly be regarded as misanthropic or extremists, just as those who are advocates against sexism or racism can hardly be called extremists (cf. Regan 1983, 2003, 2004). With this in mind, I agree with Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka who hold that “this rights-based approach is a natural extension of the conception of moral equality underpinning the doctrine of human rights” (Donaldson & Kymlicka 2011: 4).

Regan's premises centre on respect, inherent value and subjects-of-a-life. There is some assessment that "Regan's theory still remains the most rigorous foundation of an animal ethics alternative to the utilitarian approach of Peter Singer" (Allegrì 2019: 41). Francione points out that Regan "limits protection to those animals who have preference autonomy" (Francione 2004: 142), an issue also raised by Allegrì who says that Regan accords inherent value to mammals, birds and fish; other animals are not necessarily subjects-of-a-life (Allegrì 2019: 55).

Francione is more inclusive. He makes hard-hitting comments and takes an unmitigated stand in favour of animal rights and against animal welfare (cf. Francione 1996, 2004, 2008; Francione and Garner 2010; *passim*). He is an abolitionist who is totally opposed to regulation aimed at making other animals' lives more pleasant with the end-goal of slaughter, as this still regards them as property. The concept of "unnecessary suffering" is absurd. What is "unnecessary"? Why should there be any suffering at all? All this continues to lead to exploitation. It is only ethical veganism that recognizes the moral personhood of animals. This all has particular relevance to farmed animals and the moral core of this book, as will be seen with the manifesto and also the examination of animal rights films.

All animals are seen as having subjecthood, which "generates rights not only against the infliction of pain but to the conditions for integrity of consciousness and activity, including freedom from boredom, freedom to exercise normal capacities, freedom of movement, and the right to life ... In accord with deontological moral theories, these rights cannot be overridden by the aggregate interests of humans or any other beings" (Anderson 2004: 278). Here, humans are the dominant group who "other" and marginalize species not their own.

The question of terminology regarding the massiveness of oppression and murder of farmed animals could well be controversial, but we should bear in mind that if a word is limited to a certain group of humans and there are objections to other humans being referred to in the same way, this alone could show evidence of racism or sexism, for instance. The same goes for animals other than the human. If there are objections to certain terms when referring to animals other than the human, then speciesism raises its hydra head once again. No group has the monopoly on suffering, or oppression, or being slaughtered, and sometimes a term referring to one group might be more easily grasped by transferring it to the description of another.

Therefore, with regard to the evils perpetrated by humans on farmed animals, the massive degree of the oppression, suffering and slaughter, we have to find a word that can describe the extreme infringement of their rights accurately. The word “apocalypse” implies the impending end of the world (which could be where we are heading, but this destruction is not necessarily intentional); another word “catastrophe” connotes a sudden change or turn for the worse, but there is nothing impromptu or unforeseen about the murder of farmed animals; “cataclysm” is more of a violent event in the natural world, more suitable to a description of an earthquake or volcanic eruption; “tragedy” has been diluted by its use in everyday life to relate a minor, transient incident.

More of a possibility, and something I suggest that could be used in time or be understood if referred to as such by others in their writing and discussions, would be “The Horrors”, with its connotations of painful emotions, of shuddering, fear, terror, repugnance, something that is shocking, frightful, dreadful and experienced through the actions of others. (Yann Martel’s characters use this term in his exceptional allegorical novel *Beatrice and Virgil* [Martel 2010: 136]). Similarly, “The Carnage” could be a possible term to describe the ongoing mass slaughtering.

If not, then an accurate word would be the Roma “porajmos” that refers to the genocide of Roma under the Nazis, and means, “the devouring”, which is apt on different levels, but the word is not in common parlance. What some find to be a suitable word, and one that is generally understood and has been used by many writers to mean slaughter on a massive and monstrous scale is “holocaust” (as distinct from “Holocaust”, with an upper-case “H” and that refers specifically to the killing of six million Jews under the Nazis).

The word “holocaust” that alludes to farmed animals also importantly reflects the intentionality of humans in this, more than words such as “apocalypse” or “cataclysm” do. Stuart Rachels points out that when it comes to moral horror, it is the Holocaust meted out on the Jews that comes to mind, but “*for every single human being who suffered in the Holocaust, five thousand animals have suffered in American factory farms during the last twenty years*” (Rachels 2011: 897—italics in original).

J.M. Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello* puts this approach eloquently:

Let me say it openly: we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing which rivals anything the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating,

bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them. (Coetzee 2003: 63)

Like Coetzee a winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Isaac Bashevis Singer in his short story “The letter writer” has his protagonist, Herman, espousing the novelist’s views; he talks to a mouse and decries man’s egocentricity and cruelty with regard to other animals who, because of their torment, find that “all people are Nazis; for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka” (Singer 2021: 197). This last comment inspired the title of Charles Patterson’s 2002 book, *Eternal Treblinka: Our treatment of animals and the Holocaust*, which goes into much detail about the parallels here. Further parallels can be found in the views of Derrida (2002), Kim (2011) and Schnurer (2004), whereas Haraway (2003) disputes this.

As with the Nazis and the Holocaust, the killings of farmed animals occur within the bounds of the law, often influenced by economic and political factors, giving justification to murder in order to obtain and retain power and financial gain (cf. Flynn & Hall 2017: 304).

Carrie Freeman explains that while marginalized humans can sometimes participate in a social movement for themselves, “animal rights is truly an *other-directed* movement in that it relies solely on human volunteers to advocate on behalf of nonhuman animals” (Freeman 2014: 165—italics in original). She makes it clear that it does not mean that “nonhuman animals don’t have a voice or a perspective on their treatment and their lives”, but it is important for humans to reveal what these voices are and show what their reactions are to captivity and treatment.

“This is why it’s so important for society to hear and see other animals speaking for themselves in audio-visual media—such as that obtained via nature documentaries, home videos, and undercover footage” (Freeman 2014: 165, note 1). To this, we should add narrative films: the imaginative can have as much bearing on situations as well as influence as that of films that are solidly factual.

However, animal studies and media studies, particularly of farmed animals, have been two disparate fields of interest over the years, with until recently a dearth of any research linking the two.

## 2.2 CRITICAL ANIMAL AND MEDIA STUDIES

For this book, it is essential to bring together an examination of animal rights and that of media studies. Critical animal studies is a discipline concerned with “the actual life situation of most nonhuman animals in human society and culture, as physically and emotionally experienced with its routine repertoire of violence, deprecation, desperation, agony, apathy, suffering, and death” (Pedersen & Stănescu 2012: x). It combines an understanding of a “commonality of oppressions, activism, abolitionism rather than reformism, and anti-capitalism” (Almiron & Cole 2016: 1). To this, we can add health, veganism, gender activism, education reform, law, religion, climate change, power, ethics and aesthetics. The *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, established in 2003, aims at developing activist consciousness of animal liberation, and promotes intersectionality, social justice, direct legal action and anarchism. However, only one of its eight issues in 2020 and 2021 has anything to do with media (Cf. Khan 2021: 5–41).

Unlike the Institute for Critical Animal Studies, the Centre for Animal Ethics at Oxford University does not support anarchism in any way and also not the Animal Liberation Front. Its aim is to put the ethical concern for animals on the intellectual agenda and contribute to an enlightened public debate on animals. Its superb summer schools are thematic, but the media are generally neglected. With the same tenor as the Centre for Animal Ethics, the *Journal for Animal Ethics* publishes excellent articles, but only one of the ninety or so published in six issues from 2019 to 2021 is remotely connected to the media; it is a review article of a book on photography of animals in World War I (Johnson 2020: 79–82). This is rectified to a certain extent by the Palgrave Macmillan Animal Ethics Series (that is paired with Oxford’s Centre for Animal Ethics). Of the forty-five or so books published in this vital series, this present one is the fourth that examines animals and the media (but not necessarily film). The others are by Claire Molloy (2011), Randy Malamud (2012) and Rebecca Rose Stanton (2021).

The lack of attention to animal rights as reflected in the media was evident at the latest conference of the European Association of Critical Animal Studies (EACAS), from 24 to 25 June 2021, at which seventy-two papers were presented. It does not take away from the quality of the papers to point out that there was only one on the media and animal rights, and that was related to children’s television.

Another major and rightfully reputable journal is the wide-ranging *Society and Animals* that covers diverse scholarly disciplines dealing with human-animal interaction in various settings. However, in about 150 articles in twenty-one issues from 2019 to 2021, media analysis is sparse, with one article mentioning science fiction films and another looking at print media reportage of animal cruelty. About 10% of the articles are about farmed animals, but there is nothing about farmed animals and the media.

In like vein, the journal *Anthrozoös* has nothing which relates to both the media and farmed animals, and no contributions to *Between the Species: A Journal for the Study of Philosophy and Animals* examine media coverage of animal rights.

The *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* has between two and five articles on farmed animals in each issue, but, as its name indicates, discusses animal welfare, not animal rights.

This lack does not detract from the journals referred to here. Every book, journal, academic, writer and activist has the right to focus on what they want to. This merely shows that this vital area is unfortunately neglected.

The obverse is evident in major journals on the media which ignore animal rights. Apart from a fine article on the film *Au hasard Balthazar* (Balsom 2010), the *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* has nothing on farmed animals, animal welfare or animal rights. Similarly, *Critical Studies in Media Communication* shows no interest at all in these fields.

*Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, with a multicultural and interdisciplinary focus, publishes research on diverse and current trends in media scholarship, but of eighty-two articles from 2017 to 2021, only one is linked to animals: Rosalind Galt's "The animal logic of contemporary Greek cinema". This considers films that depict "non-human animals participating in human-centered narratives" and "also pose questions about the status of animals in cinema" (Galt 2017: 9). In like vein, the otherwise impressive *Routledge Library Editions: Cinema* does not have anything concentrating on animals in cinema in their forty-three publications.

The *Journal of Visual Culture* has nothing of relevance in this regard in the last ten issues up till April 2021, and it appears that in all its years of publication, the *Journal of Media Ethics* (until 2015, the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*) has only had one such article, and that by Carrie Freeman (2009).

Fortunately, Freeman joined Núria Almiron and Matthew Cole as editors of an outstanding book, *Critical animal and media studies*:

*Communication for nonhuman animal advocacy*, that goes towards rectifying the hiatus in both animal research and media studies, and centres on their convergence (Almiron et al. 2016). This is part of the excellent Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies, but still the only one of 146 in the series from 1997 to 2022 to focus on animals in the media. This is such a critical aspect of modern life, but, it seems, remains academically neglected in media discussion when compared to other areas of oppression, including race, sex, gender and religion.

*Critical animal and media studies* has a superb collection of essays grounded in the critique of ideological domination and committed to social justice to foster change. It is “rooted in vegan anti-speciesist praxis” and contends that “captive animals ... constitute the largest number of exploited and tortured other animals in the name of human ‘interests’—and are usually the most neglected in scholarly research” (Almiron and Cole 2016: 3), as has just been pointed out.

Topics embrace political economy, media depictions of violence, consumer vision, media activism, and teaching animal and media studies. As the editors call it, CAMS (Critical Animal and Media Studies) is a cross-disciplinary field drawing on several traditions, including feminism with its intersectional social justice approach, and critical/cultural studies, focusing on “unpacking the power dynamic in communications” and “a context within which we can recognize shared histories of oppression” (Merskin 2016: 12–13). The various chapters and articles certainly give an impetus to what one should include in a manifesto on film and the rights of farmed animals that go beyond the anthropocentric.

Most of the issues they cover are related to Western media. This particular book also concentrates on North America and Western Europe, although the manifestos considered and films discussed in later chapters broaden to include South American film philosophies and some films from Korea, India and Japan, among others. Nevertheless, our aim is the same: to transform the hegemonic, brutal socio-economic-politico-cultural structures that underline animal suffering and undermine animal well-being wherever they are, with my specific concentration being on farmed animals (cf. Torres 2007: 5). Therefore, the manifesto in question here must be more than mere theory but show how certain relevant films fit in with its tenets in various ways. It is, then, a vital aspect of critical animal and media studies.

In our context here, with other animals, particularly in this case farmed animals, the human’s “oppositional gaze” (cf. Flory 2009: 228) must be

metaphorically transfused to an empathetic one through a double lens—that of the human and that of the camera. This makes it an integral part of critical animal and media studies. Film can bring us to accept and embrace “otherness”, pointed out in different but related matters; we can see this in Sartre’s views on perception, transcendence and identification with the look of the other as well as the unseen eye of the camera (Sartre 1956); Merleau-Ponty’s (1968) insistence on the primacy of perception; the parochial racial, “white” or imperial gaze that Fanon (1967) discusses (cf. Ponzanesi & Waller 2012: 5) and, explicitly with film, the exacerbating male heterosexual one (Mulvey 1975). This last is from a feminist point of view and leads us to the next section.

### 2.3 ECOFEMINISM

Films about animals, especially farmed animals, have a visual language defined by the human, by the human glare as such, and even if there is an attempt to see it from the farmed animals’ point of view, it has to be mediated through that glare. As shown, CAMS sets out to empower animals, and it is in many ways closely connected to a discussion of other oppressions and ways to counter them, the most interrelated of these being ecofeminism.

This idea is closely allied to Lori Gruen and Kari Weil’s comment that “some of the most penetrating criticisms of what might be called the mainstream philosophical position of animal ethics first came from feminist theorists who were equally concerned about the mistreatment of other animals and who often shared the practical goals of the animal liberation movement” (Gruen & Weil 2012: 477).

Ecofeminism, to revert to the quotation at the start of this chapter, could well be a “nice knock-down argument” when it comes to animal rights and how it can be related to film. But it is essential to determine what part of this argument is contextually valid; in other words, whose ecofeminism is the one that is accepted for this study. This does not mean that for our purposes there is necessarily a gendered spectatorship in cinematic representation (cf. Evans & Gamman 2004: 214), but that a particular approach will be considered as the most relevant.

There are many types of feminism and ecofeminism, but “all feminists agree that sexist oppression is wrong and seek to overthrow patriarchy in its various forms” (Davion 1994: 16; cf. Warren 1994: 2; Regan 2001: 21; Carr 2011: ix). It is beyond the ambit of this study to discuss different

approaches or to give a historical overview. The feminism that is of bearing here is that propounded by Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan. They reject a feminism that pursues the rights and opportunities for women only. Instead, they propose a broader feminism, “which provides an analysis of oppression and offers a vision of liberation that extends well beyond the liberal equation, incorporating within it other life-forms besides human beings”. They continue:

We believe that feminism is a transformative philosophy that embraces the amelioration of life on earth for all life-forms, for all natural entities. We believe that all oppressions are interconnected: no one creature will be free until all are free – from abuse, degradation, exploitation, pollution, and commercialization. Women and animals have shared these oppressions historically, and until the mentality of domination is ended in all its forms, these afflictions will continue. (Donovan & Adams 1995: 3)

patrice jones makes an even stronger case in saying that animal liberation is a feminist project, with speciesism and sexism “so closely related that one might say that they are the same thing under different guises” (jones 2004: 139); patriarchy and pastoralism appear on the historical stage together and inseparably, being, as they are, “justified and perpetuated by the same ideologies and practices” (jones 2004: 140). She substantiates her views with references to articles linking cattle “ownership” and the coevolutionary loss of matrilineal descent in Africa, in referring to articles in the *New Scientist* and *Proceedings of the Royal Society: Biological Sciences* in 2003 (jones 2004: 154 note 6).

Underlining this succinctly, Ashley Allcorn and Shirley Ogletree posit, “women and animals are structurally connected by the societal acceptance of exploitation and objectification of women and animals” (Allcorn & Ogletree 2018: 458). David Nibert emphasizes this view in insisting that, “the exploitation of one group frequently augments and compounds the mistreatment of others” (Nibert 2002: 4). Ecofeminism considers furthermore how oppression affects the natural environment as well as the oppressed; patriarchy is, therefore, culpable in bringing ruin to the world we all live in.

Lori Gruen’s standpoint is also aligned to that of Donovan and Adams, in holding that ecofeminism should be inclusive, and that

an adequate eco-feminist theory must not only analyse the joint oppression of women and animals, but must specifically address the oppression of the non-human animals with whom we share the planet. In failing to do so, eco-feminism would run the risk of engaging in the sort of exclusionary theorising that it ostensibly rejects.... Eco-feminists argue that we need not and must not isolate the subjugation of women at the expense of the exploitation of animals. Indeed, the struggle for women's liberation is inextricably linked to abolition of all oppression. (Gruen 1993: 60–61, 82)

When we consider films from an ecofeminist perspective, we do so by looking at oppressions across the board. For this study, our concentration will be on farmed animals, but we shall not neglect violence meted out to other animals, including humans, and the natural environment.

Ecofeminism opposes a value-hierarchical thinking with its dualistic logic of domination, and strives for a complementary rather than a mutually exclusive relationship (cf. Peterson 2013: 38). In her examination of feminist film studies, Karen Hollinger refutes the notion that there is no current need for feminist film theory as if all its battles have been won. She argues that

feminist film studies is not only still alive and well, but has, in fact, become much more heterogeneous, dynamic, and open in its scope, encompassing not just film analysis but also television and new media studies; responding to the need to include issues of race, ethnicity and class in its analyses; adopting a more global reach; and becoming more pluralistic and eclectic in its theoretical framework and critical praxis. (Hollinger 2012: 19)

I hold with her on what she says, but not on what she omits: issues of species. All animals should be part of feminist film studies, as well as the environment, to make it properly inclusive.

Randy Malamud makes the point that the “animals we gaze upon in film, on the internet, in advertisements, are prized for their ‘cuteness’ – in a way that is feminized, and derogatorily so ... Animals are ‘celebrated for their subservience, their entertainment value, and the extent to which they affirm an anthropocentric ethos. ...’” (Malamud 2010: 141–142).

It is important for us to be aware of how farmed animals have their individuality, in fact their whole beings, negativized, invalidated, desecrated and even enucleated. We should examine how animal rights films try to make us aware of these horrors and suggest how they could be countered.

From an ecofeminist point of view, we can hold that men kill animals because of their desire to oppress, to prove their masculinity and to complement their penile-centricity, giving them power over others. Women are coerced at first, also culturally, and by tradition, into agreeing to the results of man's murderous propensity, and they fall in with it, out of fear of penile dominance, and then, also, in order to prove themselves men's equals. The murder of farmed animals (and any animals) as well as the ingestion of them is a case of sexual aggregation, this word coming from the Latin "aggregat", meaning "herded together", from the verb "aggregare", in turn from "ad" (towards) plus "grex, greg-" (a flock). It is the herd attitude of men, proving their sexual dominance in the herd, and women, flocking to appease men's dominance and, by this, acquiescing to it, that they all resort to the eating of "meat". Until men are liberated from this penile herding, and women free themselves from the oppression by men, people will continue to eat "meat" in all its *manifestations*, and anything produced by farmed animals of whatever ilk.

Even though there is an integration of oppressions under the heel of patriarchy, there are those who speak out for ecofeminism who are nevertheless bound by what the Romantic poet William Blake in his 1793 poem "London" calls "the mind-forg'd manacles" of man (Blake 1973 [1793]: 27); of certain forms of the very patriarchy they rail against.

Vital here would be the tyranny of reproductive violence that female farmed animals in particular are subjected to (cf. Taylor & Taylor 2022: 8). We are talking about uteruses, breasts and reproductive capacities. Female chickens are experimented on to make them lay more eggs, not given a chance to raise the chicks they usually would; sows are incarcerated in farrowing crates where they can stand and lie to be suckled by their piglets whom they cannot even see at times; cows have to give their milk for human consumption while their offspring are whipped away from them to be killed or to enter into the same slavery that they have been subjected to their whole lives. If one looks at this from a gendered perspective, one must ask how ecofeminists can continue consuming eggs and milk products let alone the bodies themselves. With this in mind, animal rights films should include the viciousness meted out to female farmed animals in this way, and not just concentrate on slaughter.

Until ecofeminists have as their agenda a stand and an action against the oppression of female farmed animals which includes the consumption of eggs and milk products, we cannot limit our understanding of

contemporary cruelty to androcentrism, but extend it to anthropocentrism to include all those implicated in culpable, collaborative compliance.

To start to get that far, we'll have to work towards and enter a post-anthropocentric world which, according to Rosi Braidotti, is in line with contemporary feminist theory that is "productively posthuman" (Braidotti 2019: 39).

## 2.4 POST-ANTHROPOMORPHISM

In their superb introduction to *Animals and women: Feminist theoretical explorations*, the already quoted Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams sum up the approach in this study when they insist:

It is not our goal to assimilate animals into feminist theory only to the point where it furthers women's issues. This may be one consequence of the feminist theoretical explorations represented here because of the historical association of women and animals. But we wish to propose a vision that goes beyond anthropocentric theory. We believe it is important that feminist theory accede to this broader perspective for the good not just of women, but also of animals and indeed of life on earth. (Donovan & Adams 1995:4)

They challenge "human-biased premises of feminist theory" and "all human-biased theorizing, including that found in environmental theory" (Donovan & Adams 1995: 5).

There is a brittle line between anthropocentrism (in which all animals are regarded from a human perspective, and certain human qualities and conduct are ascribed to them while the world is seen from a human's point of view) and what the primatologist Frans de Waal calls "anthropodenial", which is a term he coined to refer to the "blindness to the humanlike characteristics of other species" and "try to build a brick wall to separate humans from the rest of the animal kingdom" (quoted by Ackerman 2017: 23). It might be more appropriate not to speak about "human qualities" of other animals, but qualities that many animals, including humans, have in common. These include morality, intelligence, reasoning, creativity, agency and a desire for freedom.

In 2000, Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer suggested that what with human population growth, fossil fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions in the past three hundred years, we might have entered a new geological and ecological epoch shaped by humans that they term the

“Anthropocene” (Crutzen & Stoermer 2000: 16). Two of the areas that they highlight regarding the impact of the interaction between humans and other animals and which are particularly relevant to this study are the growth in global cattle populations, and the expansion of industrialized fishing. In the Introduction to *Animals in the Anthropocene: Critical perspectives on non-human futures*, the Human Animal Research Network Editorial Collective (HARNEC) argues that although much of the focus of discussion on the anthropocene has centred upon global warming and climate change, “there is an equally important challenge in thinking about our relationships with non-human animals” (HARNEC 2015: loc 54). This implies that in order to save farmed animals, to save all animals, to save ourselves, we have to move into a post-anthropocene era, post-humanism, post-anthropocentrism, where humans do not insist on their centrality in all existence.

Florence Chiew points out that human-centredness and self-referentiality have led to humans being both destructive and restorative (Chiew 2015). However, to avoid being stuck in culpability for the former, humans should not fall prey to the concept of the sanctity of their own interests and sole well-being; and, for those who believe in such things, they should move to an all-animal and environmental interest for soul well-being. Madeleine Boyd calls on humans to allow *Homo destructus* to fade and rather to embrace *Homo sapiens relationata* (Boyd 2015). For that to happen, *Homo sapiens* would have to forego *Homo homicida*. That would certainly lead to the post-anthropocene.

This could well result in a development in zemiology (the study of social harms) that has been almost exclusively anthropocentric in its past approach, and could rather address the victimization of animals other than the human (cf. Flynn & Hall 2017: passim).

To get beyond the anthropocene, to get to the post-anthropocene and post-anthropomorphism, one has to link with the post-colonialism of Edward Said and look at connectedness (cf. Young 2012: 28). Alternatively, we can turn to E.M. Forster’s epigraph to his novel *Howard’s End* that the post-anthropomorphists could use as an aphorism: “Only connect ...” (Forster 1989 [1910]). He was intent on the moral imperative of connection between individuals across race, class and nation; today, we can add gender and religion to this, and, of course, species.

However, we must be realistic. Anthropomorphism encourages us to experience a world from the human perspective, but, as Marc Bekoff argues, “we *must* be anthropomorphic when we discuss animal emotions”

(Bekoff 2008: 772; italics in the original) because it is human language we use to do that. On the other hand, we do not have to insert something human into other animals in a discussion of commonalities. We must give consideration to the point of view of the latter. This has been done in several films, such as *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966; Bresson), *Gunda* (2020; Kossakovsky) and *Cow* (2021; Arnold), all of which will be examined later in this study.

The mechanisms for filming inevitably entail a human lens, but we must try to go beyond the anthropocentric when it comes to farmed animal rights. Post-anthropocentrism is a form of post-humanism that rejects species hierarchy and human exceptionalism. It is, therefore, a rebuke of humanism with its construction of human exceptionalism that leads to a socially forged speciesism. With an ethic affirming the rights of all animals (human as well as others), we must fight against the topography of power, as all creatures are “driven by the ontological desire for the expression of [their] innermost freedom (conatus)”, as Rosi Braidotti (2019: 34) points out. In other words, they have a will to live that nobody should thwart. Braidotti refers to the term “zoe” as the non-human and vital force of life that “is the transversal entity that allows us to think across previously segregated species, categories and domains”, with zoe-centred egalitarianism being “the core of a posthuman thought” (Braidotti 2019: 42).

With this in mind, we can apply Mbembe’s view of necropolitics to farmed animal slaughter. He holds that the “ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who may die. Hence, to kill or to allow to live constitute the limits of sovereignty” (Mbembe 2003: 11–40). From a post-anthropocentric standpoint, this can be regarded as an act of exocannibalism; even an act of predation to acquire the strength and abilities of a defeated enemy (cf. Menget 1985: 129–141), something which film can fight against by adhering to a manifesto that subverts this sociopathy.

Film is a dominant medium that animal rights activists can use to combat the bullying of the human and “expose the repressive structures of dominant subject-formations (*potestas*), but also the affirmative and transformative visions of the subject as nomadic process (*potentia*)” (Braidotti 2019: 34). Viewers should become nomadic in positive ethical transformation, travelling to find non-threatening fresh pasture for all. In other words, this will not be a speaking of truth to power, but a speaking of

truth to empathy, to compassion, and away from the cruelty generally embedded in society, and, for the purposes of this study, particularly in film.

The result will be privileges and entitlements for all. This might be seen as unrealistic, as an unachievable utopia, but it is the responsibility of animal rights advocates and activists to try to get others to journey towards it with them. Groups, communities and societies of humans have done this through the ages; it is now that in a post-anthropomorphic world, all species should be included. Admittedly, this is paradoxical: to get to the post-anthropomorphic, we have to see the similarities of all creatures with the anthropomorphic. But we cannot centre ourselves on the human. We must go from seeing the other as objects to rather being with them as fellow subjects, from the accusative to the nominative for all and the physical dispossession of the genitive for the human. And film can play a major role in connecting humans to other animals in a post-anthropocentric, a post-anthropomorphic world.

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## From Cruelty to Compassion

*We can congratulate ourselves on the unprecedented accomplishments of modern Sapiens only if we completely ignore the fate of all other animals. Much of the vaunted material wealth that shields us from disease and famine was accumulated at the expense of laboratory monkeys, dairy cows and conveyor-belt chickens. Over the last two centuries tens of billions of them have been subjected to a regime of industrial exploitation whose cruelty has no precedent in the annals of planet Earth. If we accept a mere tenth of what animal activists are claiming, then modern industrial agriculture might well be the greatest crime in history. When evaluating global happiness, it is wrong to count the happiness only of the upper classes, of Europeans or of men. Perhaps it is also wrong to consider only the happiness of humans.*

Yuval Noah Harari—*Sapiens: A brief history of humankind* (2011: 424–425).

*Come you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,  
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full  
Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood;  
Stop up the access and passage of remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature.*

*Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between.  
The effect and it!*  
*Lady Macbeth in Macbeth I v 41–48.*  
*William Shakespeare (1956 [1606]: 841).*

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Viewers have watched cruelty to animals in films for almost as long as this medium has been around. Some of the films were documentaries whereas others were narratives; some were live action, while others were animated; some depicted wild animals, others farmed animals and still others companion animals. Generally, however, to see an animal pulverized in an animated film was fun; what happened was for laughs. In live-action films, when animals were injured or killed, often in an exciting scene of battle, there were seldom questions asked; this just added to the illusion of being part of the adventure—the “wow” effect.

An older generation grew up with Warner Brothers’ animated *Looney tunes* and *Merrie melodies* (1942–1962; Warner Bros.), delighting in violence, in animals being killed and resurrected, shattered and reconstructed; Tweety the canary and Sylvester, his always-thwarted feline would-be nemesis, are just one example, with Tweety’s wide-eyed exclamation, “I taut I taw a puddy-tat”, not only eliciting laughter but becoming part of common parlance in much of the English-speaking world. The greater the injury, the greater the laughter, the greater the fun. This continued fifty years later with animated cartoons, such as the siblings in *Cow and Chicken* (1997–1999; Hanna, Barbera, & Sidney). Just to take two episodes as examples of appalling fare, in *Part time job* Cow (essentially a young girl) decides to get money when she sees a van with the sign, “Milk squeezed from the finest cows on Earth”. She volunteers to what can only be called a lascivious man, and says, “It would be an honour to squirt for you.” When she does, he is so thrilled with her that he strokes her udders. Porn for children. In the following episode, Chicken, Cow’s elder brother, goes to the chicken farm run by the ubiquitous evil “Red Guy”, who puts him on the assembly line of death; this is terrifying, but he is saved by his sister becoming “Super Cow”.

Such a line to slaughter in a realistic documentary faces resistance from distribution companies, who fear it could offend or upset the public, and who would prefer not to even go to see it. It seems that violence is fine as long as you can laugh at or be excited by it. Murder and mayhem will evidently only ensue if what the audience sees is real. However, for decades cruelty in narrative films was acceptable; it was not problematic for farmed animals, and others, to be killed or hurt on screen. This dark side will be discussed in the next section.

### 3.2 CRUELTY IN NARRATIVE LIVE-ACTION FILMS: A BRIEF HISTORY

Narrative, live-action film has a terrible history of brazenness in the depiction of animal cruelty, embracing even suffering and slaughter. Victims have been across the range of land mammals and water creatures, encompassing animals in the wild, farmed animals, other captured animals and traditionally companion animals. Just on thirty films will be mentioned as examples of cruelty in order to show how many genres they encompass (from Westerns to epics, from comedies to social commentary, from children's films to those aimed specifically at the adult market); its universality (examples will come from the USA, the UK, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Denmark, Russia, Turkey, Mexico and New Zealand); and ways in which animals have been maltreated. Wildlife films will not be included, as the concentration will be on farmed or trained animals. We should also bear in mind that in violent films when people are hurt or killed, everything is generally simulated, scenes are edited, cutting is important and trick photography is used; with animals other than humans, what we see is nearly always what happens—suffering, injury and murder.

This all began blandly enough not with narrative films but with those more in the documentary line: with photographic sequences of animals in motion. Eadweard Muybridge started this with a series of shots in the United States of America of a horse galloping in 1878; Frenchman Étienne-Jules Marey used a chronophotographic gun of instantaneous sequences of horses, sheep, dogs and elephants in 1882; and German Ottomar Aschütz used a similar technique in 1885 (cf. Burt 2002). But at much the same time, this developed into horror according to Derek Bousé (2000: 43), with Muybridge arranging for the killing of a buffalo by a caged tiger in 1884, and the filming of a Seville bullfight in 1896 (cf. Burt

2002: 167–168). This particular incident was preceded by a different kind of “entertainment” with a short eighteen-second film of a boxing kangaroo. Kangaroos do box each other to establish alpha male dominance, but the 1895 film at the Circus Busch, *Das Boxende Känguruh* [*The boxing kangaroo*] (1895; Skladanowsky), set up a kangaroo, dressed in a vest and wearing boxing gloves, being made to take on a “Mr Delaware”, who showed him who the real alpha male was. Whether the director Max Skladanowsky had used a trained kangaroo or he (the kangaroo) was just put into the ring without preparation, this was animal exploitation and anthropomorphization to make the audience laugh at cruelty and show the dominance of a human in fisticuffs.

Related to this but even more upsetting was the Edison company’s 1903 *Electrocuting an elephant* (1903; Porter & Smith) at Coney Island, New York. At Forepaugh Circus, Topsy the elephant had crushed a spectator to death after he had thrown sand in her face and burnt the tip of her trunk with a cigar. It was decided that she should be executed (hearkening back centuries to the animal trials in Europe discussed in Chap. 1). She had a noose put around her neck, was poisoned with cyanide and was then electrocuted in front of invited guests and the press, while the whole event was filmed.

In early 1914, *The Times* of London reported on an RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) film of decrepit horses, showing weary horses who had been worked to the ground, moving along streets to the slaughterhouse; the RSPCA acknowledged that the film was too troubling for the general public to see (cf. Burt 2001: 211–212; Burt 2002: 167–168). So, here we have the horror of documentary kept away from the public, as it might affect the sensitive, arouse compassion and, possibly, action. But a live-action film for entertainment in which farmed animals were hurt and murdered was seemingly quite legitimate from early times. Animal cruelty depicted in documentaries soon gave way to that in narrative films.

It is not possible to discuss every instance of animal cruelty meted out in film by humans to those who are not humans. We shall not list, for instance, every occasion horses and bovids were battered and killed in Westerns, but rather highlight some of the more obvious and egregious cases, and concentrate, even if not exclusively, on farmed animals, who will include a plethora of horses.

The expensive silent film *Ben-Hur: A tale of the Christ* (1925; Niblo) is an unfortunate example of this, with over a hundred horses being killed in the major chariot race towards the end. Tripwires were used to fell the

horses while they were galloping, a common method, used also in *The charge of the Light Brigade* (1936; Curtiz), which also claimed many lives, but not of the human actors. The 1959 remake of *Ben-Hur* (1959; Wyler) has the same chariot race as the climax of the earlier version, but it seems that the horses managed to survive, even though one wonders what “training” some of them had to go through, especially to leap together at full tilt over a fallen chariot (no trick photography here).

In the same year as the first *Ben-Hur*, the Russian director Sergei Eisenstein released *Stachka* (1925; Eisenstein)—better known in the English-speaking world as *Strike*, in which he used animals as metaphors for the oppressed workers, such as dead cats hanging from a structure. The climax of the film, in the last two minutes, presents cross-cuts between scenes of striking workers in 1903 being shot and killed en masse and close-ups of cows being slaughtered. We see a few, one at a time, with their necks being slit, and then their open eyes gazing in terror. This effectively shows Eisenstein’s intention of portraying the labourers as being treated similarly to cattle. Akira Lippit (2002: 14) points out that Eisenstein decided to “move outside of the diegesis by inserting the animal trope in order ‘to excise from such a serious scene the falseness that the screen will not tolerate but that is unavoidable in even the most brilliant death scene’”. Eisenstein evidently considered that over-acting would diminish the realism of the scene, whereas the brutality of the slaughter of cows would act as a comprehended metaphor. One thinks of the opening line of the poem, *Anthem for doomed youth*—“What passing-bells for those who die as cattle?”, by the great World War I poet, Wilfred Owen (1931: 80); but today we, as animal rights advocates, see the pain of each cow and the horror that she was going through, while we know that the people fell down to cue unharmed. This could well be a mixture of documentary mode with live (ironically) action, with cows murdered on screen to underline the brutal scenes of human carnage.

In 1933, the French director Luis Buñuel made the controversial *Las hurdes: Tierra sin pan [Land without bread]*, spoken in French but set in Spain as a kind of travelogue depicting poverty, and banned for three years because of its portrayals of the misery of the people, and not because a donkey was covered in honey and then stung to death by bees after two of their hives were overturned, and not because a goat was shot to make him fall off a mountain (cf. McNab 2000).

The year 1939 was a particularly bad one for obvious historical reasons, but it also saw the release of three films where hundreds of animals were

killed. In the Western *Stagecoach* (1939; Ford), horses were maimed or killed in the same way as those in the 1925 film *Ben-Hur* when they ran into tripwires. A second horrific film was Jean Renoir's satirical critique of corrupt French society, *La règle du jeu* [*The rules of the game*], (1939; Renoir) in which hundreds of animals were killed (cf. Bertin 1986: 163). There are shots of actual killings of pheasants and rabbits. One instance is that of a wounded rabbit twitching before he dies, that replicates the killing of a human later in the film.

The third 1939 film in question was one that had a profound effect on what was to be allowed in filming in the USA: *Jesse James* (1939; King). Near the end of the film, we see the hero escaping by jumping off a 70-foot cliff with his horse. However, it came to public notice that the horse had been blindfolded, pushed and was killed when he fell (cf. Klein 1987). The stuntman (as most others) survived because he knew what to expect and was prepared for this. This led to the American Humane Association becoming involved in how animals other than humans were treated on set, something that we shall come back to later.

The acclaimed Turkish film *Susuz Yaz* [*Dry Summer*] (1964; Erksan) that won the Golden Bear at the 14th Berlin International Film Festival includes the slaughtering of a chicken and the killing of a dog. Also critically celebrated was Andrei Tarkovsky's 1966 Soviet epic *Andrei Rublev*; how terrible it is then that Tarkovsky found it necessary to get a horse from the slaughterhouse, have him taken upstairs, shot in the neck to make him fall downstairs, then stabbed with a spear, before returning him to the abattoir as he was expendable, his life regarded as worth nothing.

Jean-Luc Godard's 1967 film *Weekend* is supposed to be in the black comedy genre, but there is nothing amusing when seeing a blood-stained skinned rabbit being carried by the feet, or a thirty-second montage of a butcher slaughtering a pig and a goose in a forest. There is also nothing funny in the vile-in-all-ways, disgusting, so-called comedy *Pink flamingos* (1972; Waters), with a chicken being used in a sex scene. Bad taste is also the order of the day in the dreadful, exploitative, Italian cannibal films, with their on-camera graphic footage of animal torture, mutilation and death (cf. Bernard 2016: 192), including staged cockfights, a goat having his throat slit and a pig being kicked and then shot, in films such as *Il paese del sesso selvaggio* [*Deep river savages*] (1972; Lenzi) and *Cannibal holocaust* (1980; Deodato). The last-mentioned has six animals murdered on-screen (ranging from a tarantula to a boa constrictor, to a sea turtle, to a monkey, to the already-mentioned pig). This film was severely censored by

the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) in 2001 because of these scenes as well as another of rape, but ten years later it was passed with just one cut of an animal being shown having a slow death, as the sexual violence was deemed acceptable for adults to see and “the deaths were quick and painless as in *Apocalypse now*” (BBFC 2011). Really?

As I have mentioned in the Preface, I hated that film, but it was the one that had the greatest effect on me, moving me to animal advocacy by seeing the slaughter of a water buffalo. The probability that the buffalo in *Apocalypse now* was eaten afterwards (and, therefore, the killing was deemed “acceptable” by the BBFC) does not diminish the terror he must have gone through. We must ask how “okay” is “okay” if what we see is similar to what happens in countless abattoirs around the world. Is this documentary or part of the narrative action? If the latter, how necessary was it? For me it was important to see for obvious reasons. But I doubt that it was so emotional for the myriads of others who watched it. And, as always, we must consider the animal who is the subject of the slaughter, and remember Marguerite’s words in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* about how easy it is to kill an animal other than a human one: “It’s only the chicken who does not find it quite so simple” (Orczy 2018: 51).

Such chickens are found in the appalling surreal fantasy and blood-drenched Mexican film *The holy mountain* (1973; Jodorowsky), with hundreds of them slaughtered, sheep crucified, a decapitated lamb, a dead pig and a killed octopus, all intended to show the absurdity of religion and mysticism, being “death for art’s sake” (cf. Klein 1974: 1). More such violated chickens are found in another 1973 film, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973; Peckinpah), where live ones are buried up to their necks in sand and then have their heads blasted off as target practice. And it is not so simple for the pig who is killed in Bernard Bertolucci’s *1900*, where the slaughter is filmed in much detail (1976; Bertolucci).

The American Humane Association was barred from monitoring the animals on the set of *Heaven’s gate* (1980; Cimino). As in all such cases, we must ask why. The answer is that four horses were killed, one being blown up with dynamite. There was alleged cock fighting, chickens decapitated and cows disembowelled, not every scene making it to the final film (cf. The Fifth Estate 1982; American Humane 2018; Bilson 2018).

Under cruelty to animals, the film *Free Willy* (1993; Wincer) must be mentioned. This film is about freeing a captured orca from an amusement aquarium or dolphinarium where he has been performing under duress for the public; some might think that it should be deemed an animal rights

film. It won the 15th Youth in Film Award for the Outstanding Family Motion Picture: Drama; the Environmental Media Award; the Genesis Award for Feature Film and the German Golden Screen Award. The public was completely blindsided by the abuse inflicted in the making of the film. They just liked the feel-good impression they had at the end: Willy lives happily ever after, and it is so wrong to keep orcas captive. What they missed until it was pointed out to them was that another orca had to be trained to act like Willy: Keiko. And Keiko suffered, having been captured, isolated from other orcas, trained to do things to amuse people. But he made a lot of money for the filmmakers. Eventually, it was decided to free Keiko, too; he was released off the coast of Iceland, but could not become part of a pod of orcas as they did not want him and he was not used to being with his own kind. He eventually died a lonely death.

To use something of a cliché, we can say that from the story of Keiko, the road to hell is, obviously, paved with good intentions. We have the same thing with another popular children's film about a sea creature, which is the obverse of the disgraceful instances noted: *Finding Nemo*.

*Finding Nemo* (2003; Stanton) is a computer-animated children's film. We follow the trials, the frustrations, the hope, the despair and the triumph of a clownfish, Marlin, as he searches for his wayward son, Nemo, both of them having gripping adventures, until a happy reunion. Unfortunately, such was the success of the film that environmental devastation resulted, with a massive demand for and purchase of clownfish for "pets" and for aquariums that would attract visitors even though the film shows how awful this is for the fish in question (cf. Arthur 2004).

This might seem a contradiction of Melson's comment that "because children accept animals as other living beings, they raise issues of just, fair, right, and kind conduct" (Melson 2001: 97). On this point, Adams explains: "Unfortunately, we socialize children to forget this recognition and accept utilitarian relationships with other animals" (Adams 2006: 121). The resultant besottedness of children with clownfish after having seen *Finding Nemo*, shows how careful filmmakers must be in getting their message across, possibly providing a postscript at the end of a film if they think that something akin to what happened in this case could occur (for instance, having Nemo talk directly to the audience about how they should not go out and buy fish to put in bowls or aquariums). Regrettably, cute can be catastrophic. Nevertheless, it is important to have animal rights films directed at children (and at teenagers who might be seeking a new life and world view different from that of their parents) as there is "an

increasingly intimate relationship between children, consumer cultures, and commercial media” (Moore 2016: 540; cf. also Nibert 2002: 210–211; Linné 2016: 258–262).

Another film aimed at youngsters without obvious cruelty but with appalling results was *Pirates of the Caribbean: The curse of the black pearl* (2003; Verbinski). Hundreds of sea creatures, mainly fish and squid, were killed during an underwater explosion, used for effect (cf. Davis 2017). Furthermore, the dressed-up monkeys in many of the *Pirates* film series are also evidence of other animals being trained to act in ways alien to them just to entertain the audience.

Film directors sometimes can cut scenes from a film if they realize that the public outcry will make inclusion not worth their while. An example is Lars von Trier in *Manderlay* (2005). An early inkling that all was not right was when *The Guardian* reported that the actor John C. Reilly had dropped out of the film because of a donkey having been killed (Brooks & Tempest 2004); this scene was cut before the film was shown.

Furthermore, tigers were maltreated in *Life of Pi* (2012; Lee), with whippings and near-drownings reported, and this despite American Humane’s certification of “No Animals Were Harmed” in its making (cf. Baum 2013). Also egregious was the death of twenty-seven animals, many of them sheep and goats, who died from dehydration, exhaustion and drowning in the making of *The Hobbit: An unexpected journey* (2012; Jackson), as reported in *The Independent* (Wyatt and Walker 2013); once again, the end credit is that “No Animals were Harmed” (cf. Trumbore 2013).

There is no such assurance in the credits of the outstanding New Zealand film, *The power of the dog* (2021; Campion), which deserves all its plaudits, except that we see a close-up of a castration of a young bull, and, also, the main character losing his temper and taking it out (even if no contact is made) on a terrified horse. This last is obviously minor compared to what happened to the horses and other farmed animals in earlier films.

It seems that the filmmakers have come a way in understanding and practice in treating animals other than the human, especially with the latest computer-generated imagery, and the realization that any obvious cruelty will meet with a critical and public backlash (cf. Burt 2002: 201–202).

However, the understanding is that no animals were harmed in the making of the films. What about before the start of production? What about the wearing of fur coats over decades? What about eating meat or

fish or egg or dairy dishes on set? What about leather equipment? In other words, what about what happens before the filming, or elsewhere during the filming? Is it a case of thus far and no further? And how many of these precepts are followed in films that are billed as promoting animal rights?

In short, what are the related regulations, and how effective and accurate are they?

### 3.3 REGULATIONS TO OVERCOME CRUELTY IN NARRATIVE FILMS

In their censoring of films, the main causes of concern by the authorities around the world are centred on the political, religious, racist and sexual. What is anathema in one country could well be acceptable in another. Animal cruelty is generally not of concern to the censors. A notable early exception was with the British Board of Censors (as it was then called), established in 1912. T.P. O'Connor, the President in 1916 of the BBFC—British Board of Film Classification (as it became)—summarised its policy for the National Council of Public Morals. Of the forty-three grounds for deletion, the first was “Indecorous, ambiguous and irreverent titles and subtitles”; the second was “Cruelty to animals”, which, surprisingly, came before the third, “The irreverent treatment of sacred objects”, and before the seventh, “Cruelty to young infants and excessive cruelty and torture to adults, especially women” (BBFC n.d.). But, we may ask, what “cruelty” comprised, and what in particular was “excessive cruelty”. Did that mean that “ordinary” cruelty was acceptable? But that is beyond the ambit of this study.

There was a governmental revision of policy in 1937, prohibiting films involving cruelty to animals. In 2019, the BBFC commented:

The 1937 Cinematograph Films (Animals) Act makes it an offence to distribute or exhibit a film whose creation involved actual cruelty to an animal.

Unlike more draconian legislation such as the 1978 Protection of Children Act, exemptions are granted for filmmakers who can demonstrate that they were unaware that distress was being caused, and to filming events such as butchery or ritual sacrifice that would have occurred regardless of the camera's presence. This latter point largely applies to documentary producers, though scenes such as the climactic sacrifice in *Apocalypse Now* (US, d.

Francis Coppola, 1979) have also benefited. (British Film Institute (BFI) (2019)

This is in effect a cop-out, kowtowing to the dictates and excuses of filmmakers. It sidelines conscience, giving filmmakers leeway in saying that they were “unaware that distress was being caused” when an animal reacted with fear or cried out in pain, and could well be in the moral tradition of Descartes who considered that animals other than humans are mechanisms or automata. As for the maker of a narrative film setting up scenes of common butchery or related to ritual sacrifice being held non-culpable, this merely underlines the callousness of common society and authorities as well as of certain religious precepts. Anything can be used as an excuse, an explanation and exculpatory device. On the other hand, there is a degree of oversight, and filmmakers can be held accountable, which is certainly better than turning a permanent blind eye to abuses.

In 2003, the Animal Consultants and Trainers Association (ACTA) published guidelines for filming, *Filming with animals: The manual*, in which it undertakes to provide “professional excellence and the highest standards of welfare in the preparation, training and supervision of animals throughout the media and performing arts” (ACTA 2003: 6). This could be seen as a step forward, although the concentration is on welfare and not rights, and animals are sometimes encouraged to perform in ways unnatural to them.

Across the Atlantic, the American Humane Association, formed in 1877, started investigating abuse in film in 1925, and has tried to protect other than human animal actors since 1940, after that horrifying death of a horse in *Jesse James* (1939; King) came to public knowledge. It was established to monitor the ways in which animals are treated on film sets. It claims to oversee more than 1000 productions and 100,000 animals a year, “looking after safety and humane treatment of animal actors”, from pre-production to housing to filming, trying to enforce guidelines (formulated in 1988) that cover a wide range of animals. The separate areas they mention are amphibians, birds, dead animals and animal pets, dogs, domestic cats, exotic/captive wildlife, fish, horses (equine) and livestock, insects and arachnids, primates, reptiles and wildlife. The word “livestock” is unfortunate, as it connotes farmed animals used for production or trade on the eventual way to slaughter. The “No Animals Were Harmed” certification was first used in 1972 in the film *The Doberman gang* (1972; Chudnow).

PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), itself no stranger to controversy (as an example, cf. Ryu 2021), maintains that the “No Animals Were Harmed” certification “is misleading to filmmakers and audiences alike. From *Zookeeper* and *The Hobbit* and everything in between, it has allowed animal abuse on film sets for years and has even been complicit in some cases of on-set endangerment” (PETA 2018).

As Randy Malamud points out, “given the extent to which our culture is virtually built upon animals’ lives and deaths, this claim of ‘no harm’ seems more than a little ironic” (Malamud 2010: 136). We can ask what actually constitutes harm. Malamud says elsewhere:

The Humane Association explains: “...Animals used in filmed entertainment are well-trained to perform specific stunts (such as falling down on cue), and the rest of the illusion is created by the filmmakers.” So even AHA assurance that no animals were harmed does not protect against a rhetoric of violence and cannot guarantee an ethically palatable expression of visual culture. (Malamud 2012: 71)

No doubt, Animal Humane is not perfect, but it has had a major positive impact on the treatment of animals other than humans in film, which could be followed by legislation in other countries, that is lacking. All these guidelines are related to narrative films in particular. Generally, in portraying the cruelty that is practised in various fields, documentaries set out to expose the horror and the terror without adding to it.

### 3.4 COMPASSION FOR ANIMALS: THE ROLE OF FILM

The role of film in promoting kind-heartedness towards animals has been sadly neglected by animal rights advocates in their writing and in their exhortations to readers to foster change in society. Film includes the main genres of documentary and narrative, live action and animation, big studio productions and home videos, all of which can show cruelty but also compassion; show the perpetrators of horror en masse as well as their victims, but also individuals on both sides; and show the before and after of those animals who have been saved.

Even though we are all entitled or qualified to concentrate on the aspects that we prefer, it is unfortunate that writers on animal rights often seem to forget that film is a medium that can be used to get their message to the masses. As an example, Ethan Smith and Guy Dauncey (2007) in

their *Building an ark: 101 solutions to animal suffering* do not mention film. Carrie Freeman (2014) in her superb *Framing farming: Communication strategies for animal rights* underlines the importance of visual rhetoric or graphic visuals that use shocking images to recruit activists, but gives cinema or film itself scant attention. In *The animal rights debate: Abolition or regulation?* (Francione & Garner 2010), Gary Francione looks at educational efforts to be used to promote animal rights but fails to include film. Similarly, in his 2013 book, *Animal rights*, Mark Rowlands (2013: 135–136), under “Ten things you can do to make a difference”, mentions that one could write books and articles, and give talks at schools and public meetings, but ignores the showing of films. He also mentions “ten useful websites” and “five great books on animal rights” (Rowlands 2013: 131–133), but fails to say anything about five or ten significant films.

In contrast is Joaquin Phoenix’s acceptance speech on being awarded the Oscar for best actor, in which he spoke up for the oppressed, including farmed animals, particularly cows and their calves:

But I think the greatest gift that it’s [film] given me, and many people in [this industry] is the opportunity to use our voice for the voiceless. I’ve been thinking about some of the distressing issues that we’ve been facing collectively.

I think at times we feel or are made to feel that we champion different causes. But for me, I see commonality. I think, whether we’re talking about gender inequality or racism or queer rights or indigenous rights or animal rights we’re talking about the fight against injustice.

We’re talking about the fight against the belief that one nation, one people, one race, one gender, one species, has the right to dominate, use and control another with impunity.

I think we’ve become very disconnected from the natural world. Many of us are guilty of an egocentric world view, and we believe that we’re the centre of the universe. We go into the natural world and we plunder it for its resources. We feel entitled to artificially inseminate a cow and steal her baby, even though her cries of anguish are unmistakable. Then we take her milk that’s intended for her calf and we put it in our coffee and our cereal. (Phoenix 2020)

As mentioned earlier, the “voiceless” mentioned by Phoenix are those whose voices go unheard or unattended, something that the compassionate group Anonymous for the Voiceless tries to remedy. Members of this

grassroots group of activists, with members around the world, stand in streets and squares with computers or Pads, playing graphic and powerful footage of animal exploitation, and also engage with individuals who watch and would like to discuss the issues in question. This is a way of mobilizing spectators, and linked to videos put on to YouTube or other social media by animal rights advocates to reach a wider audience than the more formally shown or professionally made films that will be discussed in the next two chapters.

Anonymous for the Voiceless, like so many other animal rights advocates and like Joaquin Phoenix's intersectional plea for an end to oppression, is a movement based on compassion. Such a call for compassion forms the drive behind the documentary films discussed in the next chapter, ranging as they do from the massive filmic tome of *Dominion* to one-minute videos that show the abuse meted out to farmed animals and also the joy of rescued ones. They are also the overall message of the majority of narrative films commented on in the chapter after that, no matter what their genesis might have been.

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## Animal Rights and Documentaries

*Henry ... had in fact written two books: one was a novel, while the other was a piece of nonfiction, an essay. He had taken this double approach because he felt he needed every means at his disposal to tackle his chosen subject. But fiction and nonfiction are very rarely published in the same book. That was the hitch. Tradition holds that the two must be kept apart. That is how our knowledge and impressions of life are sorted in bookstores and libraries – separate aisles, separate floors – and that is how publishers prepare their books, imagination in one package, reason in another. It's not how writers write. A novel is not an entirely unreasonable creation, nor is an essay devoid of imagination. Nor is it how people live. People don't so rigorously separate the imaginative from the rational in their thinking and in their actions. There are truths and there are lies – these are the transcendent categories, in books as in life. The useful division is between the fiction and nonfiction that speaks the truth and the fiction and nonfiction that utters lies.*

*Yann Martel—Beatrice and Virgil (2010: 6–7).*

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Non-fiction does not have the monopoly on the portrayal of truth, as fiction or the imaginative can convey truths as pointedly and as significantly. What is true need not necessarily be real. In short, there is room for both the factual and the imaginative, for both reportage and creativity. On the

other hand, with events documented in film, facts are more immediately to hand and the filmmakers are more direct in what they wish the audience to focus on. We are not getting involved in a debate on fake news that serves a political purpose and with which the world is increasingly flooded. Our subject is farmed animals and how best to convey their rights and mobilize others in helping free them from the evils of incarceration and other forms of oppression.

Although documentaries and narrative films that tell a fictive story can be apart from each other as well as a part of each other, this chapter focuses on documentary efforts that fight for animal rights. John Grierson pointed out as early as 1932 that the term “documentary” designated a “higher” order of non-fiction film in which “we pass from the plain ... descriptions of natural material, to arrangements, rearrangements, and creative shapings of it” (quoted by Plantinga—2009: 494). Knowledge and understanding of certain techniques used in related films are essential in formulating a manifesto on farmed animals in film.

At the start of the 1957 film *The three faces of Eve* (1957; Johnson), the journalist Alistair Cooke tells us: “This is a true story. How often have you seen that statement at the beginning of a picture? It sometimes means that there was a man named Napoleon, but that any similarity between what he did in life and what he’s going to do in this movie is strictly miraculous. Well, this is a true story ...” By the same token, the documentaries discussed here are true stories. What we view is what has happened, is happening and, unfortunately in many cases, will continue to happen. They expose the multiple faces of power: those that purport to be doing good for human society, those that say that they are trying to ease the lot of their victims and those that have no problems with espousing viciousness. But there is only one face for the victims who are farmed animals: the agony of fear at some or other stage in their lives, ongoing or short-lived. And “short-lived” is what generally occurs.

Documentaries about animals cover a wide field. There are celebrated ones about wildlife, such as Disney’s *True-life adventures* (1948–1960), compiled into *The best of Walt Disney’s true-life adventures* (1975; Algar), and the rightly acclaimed ones fronted by David Attenborough with the BBC Natural History Unit (1979–; BBC). There are also many about the horrors of hunting, an example being *Trophy* (2017; Clusiau & Schwarz), vivisection and cruelty meted out to circus animals, such as *Tyke the elephant outlaw* (2015; Lambert & Moore). Our focus, of course, is on farmed animals, film here including not only large-scale, and often

well-funded documentaries (that will receive the most attention), but also those put out by farmed animal sanctuaries, and others by activists whose videos sometimes go viral, including events filmed on cell phones.

Carrie P. Freeman and Scott Tulloch maintain that documentaries “function as a critical counterpoint to the hegemony of speciesist rhetoric circulating in the public sphere” (Freeman & Tulloch 2013: 111). They are also astute in saying that animal liberation documentaries often use “undercover footage [that] functions as a reverse panopticon where the underdog activists gain surveillance power over industry by shining the light of scrutiny on its actions – elevating the audience above the barriers to witness prisoner conditions” (Freeman & Tulloch 2013: 112). In short, the intention is to show exploitation in an effort to convert viewers to animal advocacy or to consolidate their positive views and urge them to action.

The powers-that-be have vested interest in trying to vitiate the impact of documentaries; “meat producers” and corporates fear that their profits will be affected if the truth comes out. Mammon rules while compassion is rubbished. Examples of this can be seen in the Canadian Meat Industry’s objections to Jennifer Abbott’s *A Cow at my table* (1998; Abbott), and also with *Death on a factory farm* (2009; Simon & Teale) where the judge acknowledged that pigs were abused but found that such conduct was the reality of pork production; ways other than hanging were “too expensive” (cf. Hale 2009: sp.). The cruelty of penning and slaughter was not at issue. This is not that far from religious practices, with, for instance, rabbis deeming kosher killing just, no matter the torture undergone by farmed animals (cf. McNeil 2004). The filming of grisly scenes such as those depicted at a kosher slaughterhouse in Iowa was regarded as intrusive. In other words, “How dare you show the world what’s going on!” This typicality is seen in *Speciesism: The movie* (2013; Devries) with the problems encountered by investigators when going onto factory farmed or abattoir property. In the United States, activists are frustrated by the anti-whistle-blower Ag-gag laws that forbid undercover films and photographs of farms (usually the massive, industrialized ones) that reveal animal abuse (cf. Bittman 2011).

On occasion, to overcome this impediment, activists have filmed interviews with those who have made the transformation from factory farmer and carnivore to vegan, as in *Peaceable kingdom: The journey home* (2004; Stein) and *73 cows* (2018; Lockwood). In like fashion, *Live and let live*

(2013; Pierschel) makes a strong pro-animal rights case, but this is frustrated by most of the film seeming to be just talking heads.

A key successful documentary of exposure is *Blackfish* (2013; Cowperthwaite). Even though not strictly about a farmed animal, it is still significant here as it is about a captive orca (called a killer whale), Tilikum, involved in the killing of a trainer at SeaWorld in Orlando. The film exposes the cruelty involved in the business of capturing and training orcas, and raised public and governmental concerns, eventually resulting in SeaWorld stopping its breeding and performance programmes (cf. Jamieson 2016; Thomas-Walters & Verissimo 2021). The film had the backing of CNN that helped publicize the plight of captive orcas. This underlines the importance of having strong corporate support and wide publicity to get the animal rights message across to the public and authorities.

Documentaries cannot be objective: to get their message across in what they consider to be the optimal way, filmmakers decide on structure, framing, editing, cinematography and sound. Grierson summed this up in something of a bon mot as “the creative treatment of actuality” (Grierson 1933: 8). Animal rights documentaries must be polemical and tendentious, as the intention is to convey a message on a societally controversial issue (Cf. Carroll 1996: 224; Choi 2006: 137). They are vital in trying to conscientize viewers “because they function as a critical counterpoint to the hegemony of speciesist rhetoric circulating in the public sphere” (Freeman & Tulloch 2013: 110).

Documentaries are different from fictive films. The latter are initially dependent on imagination; there is generally a screenplay, a narrative and a storyline; hence, the distinctive terminology used in this book will be “documentary” and “narrative” to distinguish the two major genres.

## 4.2 MAJOR FORMS, STYLES AND TECHNIQUES OF FARMED ANIMAL RIGHTS DOCUMENTARIES

Animal rights documentaries could be discussed species by species, for instance looking at how the exploitation of pigs is covered in various films, what they have in common and what not, but this would most probably result in the first farmed animal in question being concentrated on the most, whereas successive ones could get increasingly less attention. Another way could be to take a chronological approach, but it would not necessarily give a satisfactory overview as this would entail jumping from

one type of documentary to another, some films appeared in the same year, different ones took longer to film and release, and no real development in style could be ascertained as different documentaries used different styles (interviews and undercover filming as examples). A third way would be to look at the cinematographic techniques of filming, but different angles, close-ups, panning and clarity of picture, for instance, although mentioned at times, do not form the major thrust of this study. The most efficacious way could be going from broad to narrow, from the all-embracing to the particular, as far as subject is concerned: therefore, from a discussion of cruelty to many species, with this including not just farmed animals but also those who suffer in scientific research, or who are used to entertain humans, or who are hunted, and also the relationship to social justice, or the environment; to documentaries that are focused on individual species; to those that serve as biographies of just one or a few farmed animals. The documentaries falling into each category could then be chronological, as there would be fewer to compare each time and enable more of a comparative facility.

Apart from the first documentary to be discussed, *Le sang des bêtes* [*Blood of the beasts*] (1949; Franju), which could be seen as the ur-documentary on animal rights, the films considered in depth here include eight different categories, with two or three examples given in each. Most of these documentaries will be discussed to show different issues covered and techniques used, but to avoid repetition not all those mentioned will be considered in detail. Square brackets in this paragraph indicate the documentaries that are not discussed but merely mentioned. Those receiving the most attention because of the wide and sometimes intricate range covered will be *omnibus documentaries* that bring together various aspects of rights—in addition to those of farmed animals, those of animals used as entertainment and for scientific research, and also other aspects of social injustice as with sexism and racism; examples are *The animals film* (1981; Schonfeld & Alaux), *Earthlings* (2005; Monson) and *Dominion* (2018; Delforce). The next ones are *compendium documentaries* that include different kinds of farmed animals—for instance, *Meet your meat* (2002; Friedrich & Akin), *Land of hope and glory* (2017; Winters), [*Eating animals* (2018; Quinn)] and *Seaspiracy* (2021; Tabrizi). In *single issue documentaries*, there is the focus on egg-laying hens in *Fowl play* (2009; Durand) and on dolphins in *The cove* (2009; Psihoyos). *Interviews with activists* who have different but complementary practices are shown in *Behind the mask: The story of the people who risk everything to save animals*

(2006; Keith), *Peaceable kingdom: The journey home* (2009; Stein), *Live and let live* (2013; Pierschel), [*Speciesism: The movie* (2013; Devries)], [*The last pig* (2017; Argo)] and [*Eating animals* (2018; Quinn)]. Interviews with both activists and perpetrators are central to *A cow at my table* (1998; Abbott) and *Death on a factory farm* (2009; Simon & Teale). A plant-based focus, with the concentration on the benefits to humans or the environment, is evident in [*Cowspiracy: The sustainability secret* (2014; Andersen & Kuhn)], [*What the health* (2017; Andersen & Kuhn)], [*The game changers* (2018; Psihoyos)], *Vegan 2019: The film* (2019; Mitchell) and *Milked* (2022; Taylor). And a focus on an individual farmed animal is seen in *Gunda* (2020; Kossakovsky) and *Cow* (2021; Arnold). Furthermore, there will be a short section on videos from farm sanctuaries and others taken by members of the public on their cell phones.

Interlinked with all these in the next section will be the classification of Bill Nichols (2017) whose categories will be embroidered upon, with a discussion of which ones pertain to the specific films in question, with the understanding that some combine various approaches (cf. also Hollinger 2012: 73–74). These are as follows:

- The expository: An expository documentary is one that appears to be objective, according to Hollinger. However, for the purposes of this study, objectivity is not the issue and, as mentioned earlier, I question whether any documentary can really be objective as directors have certain views or an ideology that they wish to convey. Such a documentary can make use of the voice-over, is stylistically didactic and could contain interviews. With this type, there is an authoritative narration in the description, commentary or interpretation of what is being filmed, something in the style of Peter Watkins (to be discussed in the next chapter).
- The observational: Here, meaning is conveyed through observation, often with “raw” filming. With this, we could include grainy footage and a low-tech style, for instance, with handheld cameras or with certain shots including those involved in doing the filming, or non-diegetic views.
- The interactive, participatory, or performative: In such a type, there is a mixture of observational footage with direct engagement between the filmmaker and the subject.
- The reflective: With this style, there is an obvious self-awareness of the filmmakers, with references to them, and also to the filmmaking

process. Therefore, the involvement of the filmmaker is highlighted, in a contemplation of what is being filmed.

- The poetic: By this, Nichols explains that the concentration is on the “inner truth”, not necessarily having linear continuity; images can be linked to colours, sounds or music, while mood and emotions are foregrounded.
- Intersectionality: This sixth mode is that of John A. Duvall (2017) where, in this context, a relationship between the plight of farmed animals and that of health, climate or the environment is established.
- A seventh mode could well be that of the interview, with clips of people giving their views, but little else. It does not necessarily have a voice-over, is not observational for the most part as the focus is on the speakers, is not interactive as there is no direct engagement between the filmmaker and the overriding subject in question, is not reflective as there is no obvious self-awareness by the filmmaker and has no attempt to be “poetic” as colour or sound does not play any significant role; it could possibly be linked to intersectionality, but it is the interview itself that holds sway.

For a polemic to be optimized in influencing viewers, whether this be in a documentary or a narrative film, a filmmaker might find it useful to use certain techniques of persuasion. These can be called upon by any of the sides in the animal rights debate, from direct perpetrators of oppression and cruelty in traditional as well as in industrialized farming, to their brokers, to the judiciary, to governmental administrators as well as to animal welfarists and animal rights advocates. The concentration here will be on what the last-mentioned can do and, at times, actually do, to get their message across. To adapt some of the themes discussed by Oliver Thomson (1977: 20–23), these could include the hero or martyr (the filmmakers and animal liberators as well as the farmed animals themselves); conflict, in which the favoured party has to overcome terrible odds (again, those just mentioned); revelation (drawing attention to malpractice); hope (a look towards a more rainbow-tinged future); crime and punishment (pointing out the moral and illegal conduct of the perpetrators of heinous acts, but, unfortunately, here the messenger is often shot because of the Ag-gag laws in the USA and their equivalents in various countries).

In an attempt to get their message across, filmmakers should be wary of confusing fact and opinion, or using unverified findings, as, if exposed, this could vitiate their credibility and effect.

Major techniques of persuasion related to this study include the following (cf. Miller 1967: 13–17; Lee & Lee 1972: *passim*; Brembeck & Howell 1976: 234–235; Finn 1978: 55–69; Soules 2015: 141–172):

- Direct address: the use of the second-person (“you”) or of the first-person plural (“we”), to try to involve the viewers as more than mere passive spectators, and instead bring them to the realization that their actions have a direct affect on the farmed animals whose lives they are watching through a mediated lens; the “we” implies that all humans are part of the issue and also that the narrators do not put themselves above or apart from others who are being addressed, but share the concern or commitment desired.
- The rhetorical question: the filmmaker’s opinion appears in the form of an inquiry not to gain information but for effect, and pressing for the audience to respond in the desired way.
- Hostile comments, also known as pejoratives or name-calling: the giving of a negative label to the “bad guys” in an effort to help make the audience condemn their actions.
- Sympathetic terms, also called amelioratives or glittering generalities: this is the opposite of name-calling, often by using a positive sweeping statement to encourage the audience to associate with the farmed animals or even the filmmakers and their human subjects.
- Transfer: the device adopted when the authority, reputation or sanction (or disapproval) of someone respected (or derided) is presented.
- Testimonial: this is related to Transfer, but is more direct and obvious, with an esteemed figure commenting in favour of the filmmaker’s view or even being a presenter or voice-over in a film.
- Plain-folks: here, the filmmakers or speakers show that they are at one with the people who are watching the film.
- Bandwagon: everyone is doing it—so should you.
- Card-stacking: the putting forward of different facts, ideas or opinions in succession in order to prove a point.
- Repetition: related to card-stacking; with this technique, the same or similar scenes, words or sentences are used more than once.
- Consequences: the pointing out, often by using a threat or fear tactics, that something bad will result from certain behaviour or lack of it; on the other hand, possible positive results from actions can also be highlighted.

- Slogans: short and dogmatic watchwords are used in order to garner the required reaction. One has only to think of Orwell’s “Four legs good, two legs bad!” that eventually morphs into “Four legs good, two legs *better!*” in *Animal farm* (Orwell 1964: 83 [emphasis in original]).
- Humour: sometimes an attempt at amusement might be used as a means to get the message across.

To these, we can add other techniques, such as:

- Silence: used often to underline the horror, by giving the viewers the opportunity to catch their breath or reflect on what they have just seen.
- Noise: this could range from the grunts of the animals on the farms, to their screams when captured and on the way to slaughter as well as during the killing; and also the sound of blows inflicted on them or of trucks taking them to their deaths.
- Music: Non-diegetic music to enhance the scene being shown or the emotion evoked, although diegetic music can also be used, as in *Babe*.
- Time: The amount of time devoted to a particular scene in order to drive home a specific effect, ranging from tranquillity to horror, from kindness to cruelty.
- Shots: Panning, long shots or close-ups, from below or from above, straight or slanted, to drive home the point the filmmaker is conveying, whether to stress the multitude who are being maltreated or to focus on the fear and pain an individual animal is going through. However, as stated earlier, this will not be a prominent focus in this study.
- Low-tech style and grainy footage that could add to the authenticity of the scenes depicted and imply that this was the only way to expose the reality that the perpetrators of cruelty wish to hide from the public.

All these techniques combine to help the viewers “connect” with the farmed animals with compassion and an understanding of their dire lot.

### 4.3 THE DOCUMENTARIES UNDER DISCUSSION

The selection of documentaries in this section will be discussed in different ways, depending on what stands out in them. This will also eschew a set framework which can lead to formulaic analysis and which does no credit to any individuality in each film and would then possibly diminish an awareness of original approaches. Through different emphases, those reading this can also find ways in which they can not only analyse but also consider how to make their own films. It also feeds into the overall manifesto propounded in a later chapter and thus serves as a precursor.

The first to be looked at, and in a class of its own with its marked contrast with human habit and habitation, is George Franju's 1949 *Le sang des bêtes* [*Blood of the beasts*], that can be regarded as the ur-documentary on animal rights. Intentionality is an obvious factor in documentary films on this subject, but it appears that Franju's aim was to portray rather than expose atrocities. Another reason to discuss it here rather than under the "Compendium" section is that it precedes any other documentary intentionally made as animal rights advocacy by several decades. It is also somewhat shorter than any other documentary discussed here bar one (*Meet your meat*), at just twenty-two minutes. The black and white film with voice-over contrasts the tranquil scenes of elegant Paris suburbia with graphic and gruesome footage from a slaughterhouse, where we see cattle, horses and sheep being killed. In a filmed interview (Bazin & Labarthe 1997), Franju states that he was "not particularly interested in the subject of slaughterhouses", but their locations in Paris made them ideal for such a documentary. He adds that "I believe there's nothing but the truth". And it is the truth that we see, the horrors of the killing of farmed animals who are shown time and again in so many of the documentaries that were made with the main purpose of exposing these abominations.

In a short review in the *New Yorker*, Richard Brody points out how "Franju evokes the collective brutality from which the refinements of culture are made" (Brody 1949). Blood spurts, limbs twitch and the gazes of the animals reveal their terror as their throats are slit, how they flay about while still alive, how they are gutted and how they are skinned.

The scene of the killing is shown with footage of what could be a place of worship, but we are disillusioned quickly: "This isn't a chapel to St John the Baptist, patron saint of butchers, nor to his gentle lamb. It's the auction block of the slaughterhouse." Later, when we see two nuns walking away from us, the suggestion is that religion bears a certain amount of

guilt in these enduring practices being socially acceptable; alternatively, life and religious practice continue no matter what cruelty is perpetrated.

The killers are seen to be matter of fact, even cheerful as they whistle or sing while they slit throats. It is significant that one of them sings “La mer”, the song made famous by Charles Trenet, with the words, in translation:

The sea  
 In the summer sky  
 The clouds like fleecy sheep  
 Seem angels on high ...

In the original, the “fleecy sheep” would refer to the breaking of waves (like the metaphor “white horses” used in English). The implication that in this film it is the sheep themselves being referred to is not by chance, as while these lines are being sung, the camera pans to the sheep, standing and waiting to be slaughtered. Later in the song, we hear about the tall damp reeds by the pond, with the visuals showing blood flowing down a canal. Then,

In the pen, the sheep, still agitated, will fall asleep in the silence. They won’t hear the gates of their prison closing, nor the Paris-Vilette train, which sets off after nightfall for the countryside to gather tomorrow’s victims.

Franju certainly does tell it as it is, and a partisan approach is seen with the words “prison” and “victims”. This might well have been an inadvertent animal rights film but an animal rights film it certainly is, as we see what is happening, and the horrors hit home as they do with the other documentaries, including those more ambitious in scope, such as the omnibus ones.

### 4.3.1 *Omnibus Documentaries*

The most ambitious films promoting animal rights are the omnibus ones that try to discuss as many farmed animals as possible, as well as those subjected to the viciousness of scientific research, hunting and so-called entertainment. They also can bring in aspects related to other issues of social justice, of health and of the environment. The most telling of such documentaries are *The animals film*, *Earthlings* and *Dominion*.

#### 4.3.1.1 The Animals Film (1981; *Schonfeld & Alaux*)

The first full-length documentary on animal rights aimed at the cinema audience was *The animals film*, ground-breaking in its coverage of different aspects of animal exploitation and cruelty, farming and fur, blood sports, scientific research and entertainment—therefore, from food to fun for humans. It is generally expository but obviously partisan even though it tries to give something of a balance with interviews that range from the views of animal rights activists, to scientists, to people taken seemingly at random in the street—a mixture, then, of testimonials and plain-folks. With the latter, we see people espousing the eating of meat as well as those who have forsworn it.

When shown originally, it was generally (but not wholly) met with positive, even rave, reviews for its bravery and originality, although it was also deemed controversial by BBC's Channel 4 where it was shown on television. The director, Victor Schonfeld, eventually agreed to the request to cut the last ten minutes that shows the work of the Animal Liberation Front in saving animals from farms and laboratories; the authorities feared this would set an example for the general public to follow.

It might be somewhat dated today with the general quality of cinematography and in its depiction of the treatment of animals in scientific, pharmaceutical and military research; although this certainly continues today, it is possibly in less blatant or universal form. On the other hand, the farming of animals has increased, with concomitant suffering, all for the sake of profit more so than just the public palate.

The narrator is Julie Christie, the acclaimed film star, who lends an extra sense of eloquence, dignity, persuasiveness and testimonial to the documentary, an example taken up by others in, for instance, *Earthlings* (Joaquin Phoenix) and *Meet your meat* (Alec Baldwin). The repeated lyrics of the opening song ("Mind" by Talking Heads) are appropriate and underscore the intention of the filmmaker as well as encapsulating the ethos of the other documentaries discussed in this study: "I need something to change your mind."

The opening montage of archival footage also sets the scene. We have the 1905 film *Rescued by Rover* (Hepworth & Fitzhamon) interspersed with other films from the early twentieth century, including cattle being herded, rabbits beaten to death, dog fights and Edison's *Electrocuting an elephant*. This implies the dichotomy in the public and the film world with a response of pleasure to adorable or heroic animals (the dog Rover), as well as the interest in, even relishing of, cruelty.

This ties up with the first section on pets, and stray dogs being captured, with the voice-over telling us that we live in an urban society that causes social problems (indiscriminate dog breeding, for instance) but is unable to remedy them; we then see dogs being put down by being injected with an overdose of barbiturates.

As we move to farmed animals (the most relevant part of the documentary for this study), we see a woman who is interviewed saying that meat is “habit forming like everything else”. This is what *The animals film*, like all the succeeding ones, tries to overcome—the social and cultural mindset of meat being an unbreakable part of life. We are led to factory farms with dairy cows being milked and standing in their own excrement, and calves fed powdered milk before being taken off for slaughter. We see individuals up close in agony as well as a multitude who are incarcerated, something that is repeated with all the other farmed animals depicted, with these scenes alternated with those of animals who seem to be free in pastures and grazing or romping about. This underlines the cruelty and horrors these sentient beings are made to undergo. And why? Because, we are told, factory farming is a “very profitable business”, with animals (in this case, steers) regarded as “food machines” rather than as living creatures.

A clever cinematic ploy of silence and a black screen is used several times in the film in order to break the style and give some space for breathing and reflection, as well as driving home the horror of the following scene, the suffocating of male chicks just after birth. We then see hundreds of dead chicks—followed by the silence and an empty screen—and then their being “ground up into animal feed”.

The viciousness of debeaking is shown in detail, with close-ups of the process adding to our witnessing the terror of the chicks, and the workmanlike method of the farmhand. The cinematography is excellent here as lighting, distance, the mixture of panning and close-ups were done in one session. There was no need for undercover filming, unlike with later documentaries, as the farmers generally seemed to be willing to have their undertakings filmed. Suspicion and the realization that their pockets might be affected as well as that the public perception of their work would be altered, had not hit home to all of them yet but became *de rigueur* with later documentaries. The same could be applied to the way in which Schonfeld and his team managed to gain access to scientific and pharmaceutical laboratories and experiments. It seems to have been a time of pride for the perpetrators—proud with what they were doing, and willing

to let others know about it, until the realization came that what they were doing could well be deemed offensive by many in society.

In watching *The animals film*, we see that much has stayed the same in the past forty or so years. Many activists, well known then and now, are interviewed in this film, including Peter Singer, Tom Regan and Richard Ryder who galvanize attention in pointing out that speciesism (a term Ryder coined) is similar to racism and sexism (thus, touching another chord with certain viewers), and saying that speciesism is the cruellest and greatest form of exploitation in the world today. Lord Houghton is filmed in one of his many outbursts in Parliament in contending that the trouble with animal welfare organizations is that they are fragmented, overlapping, in competition with each other, and lack the will and power to exert maximum pressure on political positions. This is still relevant today, what with nastiness evident among activists on Facebook and Twitter, and a reminder that many of them fail to see the picture beyond their own egos. Houghton's diatribe could well be a way to make viewers of the time as well as now reflect on their public personae and work.

There is occasional sarcasm voiced by Julie Christie, such as "The slaughter of poultry at its most modern and humane" and the "modern, humane, slaughter of pigs", when we see the brutality of the captive bolt pistol, knocking them unconscious, sometimes after several attempts, and then their being eviscerated, and farmed animals having their throats slit.

Interpolated in all the abominations is a sudden 1925 cartoon of Felix the cat and a chicken, and then chickens on strike, marching like suffragettes. This humour breaks the anguish and tension which lends another breather for the viewers. We are then switched to a shed with hundreds of encaged egg-laying chickens, followed without commentary to others wandering free. The horrors of pig and sheep incarceration are next, also portrayed in graphic detail. Unfortunately, there is relatively little on the terrors in the fur industry, and nothing, apart from turtles, on animals who live in the sea, lakes and rivers.

Another shortcoming is the extended attention given to Roger Ulrich, who experimented on animals: we see him as a young man presenting his research as well as in the present for eleven minutes, which causes this part of the documentary to drag. More positively from a perspective of editing and inclusion, we see restricted government and military films for the first time, and understand the futile and speciesist experiments undergone. Pigs are called "biological specimens", thus stressing the view that they are regarded as insentient objects. Also shown are monkeys who are being

experimented on, with the superficial and totally absurd anthropomorphic words by a commentator: “Somehow one gets the impression that the chimpanzee [sic] is proud of his contribution” to the national effort.

Whether one agrees with their methods or not, the Animal Liberation Front cannot be ignored, so the last ten minutes have a purpose. One of the members comparing the tortured animals to the Jews in the Holocaust is also significant, as the perpetrators are seen in the same light as the Nazis, and the breaking into the facilities where they are kept is equated with raids on concentration camps.

A comment by Julie Christie towards the end is vital: “Do we condone the widening exploitation of animals, or do we act to end it?” This is a call to action, but the methods to do this successfully and with public support are unclear. On the other hand, what we have been watching is one of the ways to take action: film can bring the plight of these animals to the notice of the public, with the hope that society reacts in a way that includes stopping the eating of animal products and the wearing of fur, and, no doubt, demonstrating against the use of animals in laboratories and circuses.

In an interview in 2008, and included in the DVD of the film, Victor Schonfeld returns us to the initial song in the documentary:

I felt that the way one could attempt to use cinematic language to challenge habitual thinking and make people feel things that they were unable to do by any other means was what I wanted to do.

*The animals film* set the bar for similar wide-ranging films and also led the way for other documentarians to concentrate on a particular issue. Its omnibus direction was not to be surpassed until the advent of *Earthlings*.

#### 4.3.1.2 *Earthlings* (2005; Monson)

If *The animals film* set the bar for documentaries, Shaun Monson’s *Earthlings* raised it even further a quarter of a century later, this time with another acclaimed actor in the forefront of animal activism, Joaquin Phoenix, being the narrator. Unlike *The animals film*, and the majority of related documentaries, there are no interviews, no talking heads; sufficient are visuals, sound and superb non-diegetic music (mostly by Moby, another person whose activism credentials cannot be questioned and thus adding to the credibility and clout of the film).

In a featurette, Shaun Monson says that his main goal in making the film was to empower humans (with our understanding that this would

enable them to come to terms with their compassionate contact with nature and other animals), and adds that “we need viewers brave enough to see it”. Indeed, with the graphic detail, one needs a strong will and emotional toughness. He mentions that two-thirds of the film was done undercover, with hidden cameras or eye-witness videos. Nevertheless, for the most part, the visuals are sharp and clear. He also discusses the difficulty in getting *Earthlings* screened because of distributors being loath to show what they obviously regarded as controversial and upsetting footage, and also because of the USA’s recently passed Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act of 2006, which has a clause forbidding the showing of anything that could affect profitability of various enterprises. Once again, Mammon is the god that animal rights activists have to contend with.

As an omnibus documentary, “a holistic activist film” (Pick 2013: 21) which is expository, observational, reflective and poetic, the last because of the synchronicity of mood between music and visuals, *Earthlings* examines the issues of “pets” (their breeding, neglect, capture and killing), the exploitation of animals for food and clothing, entertainment (circuses and zoos) and science (research by scientists for pharmaceutical companies and the military in the main).

The documentary starts with words, to be read not heard, that the images viewers are about to see are not isolated cases but the industry standard for animals in the various categories mentioned above. We are then told that there are three stages of truth: ridicule, violent opposition and acceptance—the first two being shown in various other documentaries too. Loud music with a strong beat on drums with the lyricism of wind instruments emblemizes how aspects of exploitation and cruelty are hammered home in the film, but interspersed with the pasteurality and pleasant lives of those animals who are free, something that occurs throughout, as with *The animals film*. The first visuals are those of the Earth from space, an image that is returned to at the end, thus lending a united structure to the film.

This segues audially into Joaquin Phoenix’s voice-over and the words on screen: “earth.ling n. One who inhabits the earth.” The insistence is that there is no sexism, no racism and no speciesism in the term “earthling”, and that there is an equality of suffering. This is an astute move by Monson in his writing of the script as it places animal rights in the same light as that of human rights; animal oppression on the same basis as that of humans if they are “othered” by more powerful ones. To underline this, there is footage of racist, sexist and speciesist cruelty.

An unexpected note is included in the words in upper case: LEST WE FORGET. This phrase is used in certain war memorial services, and comes from the imperialist Rudyard Kipling's poem "Recessional", based on Deuteronomy 4:9: "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them to thy sons, and thy son's sons ..." This could well appeal to knowledgeable Jews and Christians, and could be seen by others as a slogan to adhere to, but to others it lends something of a jarring note: religiously biased, totally out of accord with the rest of the film, and one of the very few missteps in this outstanding work. Just after this is a quotation that some Jewish people could object to; it comes from Isaac Bashevis Singer's novel *Enemies* that all men are Nazis, with the implication that farmed animals who are victims of mass murder can be framed historically in the horrific incidents during the Holocaust; others would take the view that it is an accurate analogy; only this Holocaust is ongoing, as discussed in an earlier chapter.

In the first part, "Pets", we are told that "we must learn to see into the eyes of animals ..." Unfortunately, although there are both long-shots and close-ups of animals suffering in *Earthlings*, it is a pity that there is so little eye-contact between the animals and the lens. Admittedly, this could be regarded as nit-picking as so much else in the film is of outstanding quality in subject, visuals and commentary. Facts and figures are given when every animal is discussed, showing solid research as well as expert camerawork. In seeing pigs being stunned before slaughter, we are told that "what happens in slaughterhouses is a variation of the theme of exploitation of the weak by the strong". This is a redolent theme throughout this documentary. We see cattle destined to be "beef", branded, dehorned, transported and slaughtered; dairy cows being milked electronically when their calves are taken away for slaughter, these youngsters having no bedding or light for four months until they are murdered for veal. This is to the evocatively sad music of Ravel's "Pavane".

One of the most brutal, horrifying and shocking depictions is that of kosher slaughter, underlining the hypocrisy of this mode of killing. Shekhita, or ritual slaughter, is supposed to be quick and decisive, but what we see is abominable, with no compassion, with death being neither quick nor merciful. Monson cannot be accused of antisemitism, just as he cannot be accused of racism or that he advocates an anti-Asian trope when we later see dolphins being slaughtered in Japan. His camera pans abuses around the world: many countries and practices are included. It has a

broad perspective and particular incidents must not be taken in isolation as an indication of partisan bias. The only tendentiousness is that which exposes malpractice in order to try to help farmed animals escape from the maelstrom of terror.

As with *The animals film*, on occasion *Earthlings* has visuals without commentary; the sound could be music or diegetic animal sounds. This enables one to focus on what one sees, in the case of pigs on their diseased bodies, cannibalism and waste pits. Comments are kept to a minimum with tail docking, ear clipping, teeth cutting, castration, electric prods used to handle pigs as they are dragged along, electrocution and throat slitting: a litany of horror, the listing of abuse hammering home. This is followed by more exegesis, explaining what we are witnessing: the voice-over recitative keeping to the same tone and note with the boiling and hair removal, with some pigs still alive while they are submerged and drowned.

A discussion of poultry abuse follows, with the figure of 8.5 million birds being slaughtered in a week, and the fact that when the film was made Americans ate as many chickens in a single day as they did in a whole year in 1930. The debeaking is shown in even more of a close-up than in *The animals film*. The horrors of battery cages are shown, with unrelenting suffering, damnable transportation and slaughter in assembly lines, concluded with the comment: “Surely, if slaughterhouses had glass walls, would not all of us be vegetarians?”

The film moves from there to seafood, with the concentration being on environmental pollution, on untreated sediments from the run-off from mammalian farming going into the seabed as “inconvenient waste”. This threat to the environment is dealt with in other documentaries that concentrate on one issue, such as Kip Andersen and Keegan Kuhn’s 2014 *Cowspiracy: The sustainability secret*. We are told about the diseases caused by this waste, but, unfortunately, there is little mention of the sensitivity of fish, the suffering they undergo, how they, too, are creatures deserving better.

More emotion is given to the filming of whaling and dolphin slaughter in Japan, an issue covered in Louie Psihoyos’s *The cove* (2009) and Ali Tabrizi’s *Seaspiracy* (2021). Unlike the footage on fish, that on these mammals in *Earthlings* does tug at the emotions, with remarks such as dolphins never abandoning family members which makes killing mother and child at the same time easier, and “these are benign and innocent beings – and they deserve better” than being left to slowly suffocate, convulsing and contorting in the throes of agony while schoolchildren walk by.

An important aspect of farmed animal cruelty is that of their exploitation for clothing. We are told in *Earthlings* that cows are sacred in some parts of India, but not all. So thousands are transported in terrible ways to states where they can be killed, before which they suffer through, among other things, tail-breaking and chilli pepper being rubbed into their eyes to force them to move. There is additional footage of them being hacked and sawed to death, and then the tanning process takes place. The result is leather worn around the world.

This is followed by visuals of animals being captured, caged and killed for their fur, the last happening through carbon monoxide poisoning (echoes of the Holocaust again), suffocation, their necks being broken and anal electrocution which does not always work immediately. We see some being skinned alive.

The terrors continue in the next sections, with attention drawn to abuses in circuses and zoos, and in scientific experiments, all of this making *Earthlings* a prime omnibus documentary.

*Earthlings* ends with a polemic on cruelty, our being told that all animals suffer, that “pain is pain” no matter who undergoes it; with name-calling in the utterance that the inflicting of pain is “the lowest form of debasement” that “man” can reach. We are told again in something of a glittering generality that all animals are earthlings, and that “the time has come for each of us to reconsider our eating habits, our traditions, our styles and fashions, and, above all, our thinking”. Viewers are reminded that nature, animals and humankind are all earthlings, and that we should make the connection. It is a pity that humankind is not seen as another group of animals here, but at least this is a call to dietary reflection and a consideration of the evils of human attempts to enforce their dominion over others.

#### 4.3.1.3 Dominion (2018; Delforce)

The third omnibus documentary is Chris Delforce’s *Dominion*. In eighteen sections it examines the abuse of animals, mainly farmed ones, in various ways. Unlike *The animals film* and *Earthlings*, it has more than one narrator, including the actors Joaquin Phoenix (again), Rooney Mara and Sadie Sink, the singer Sia and the tattoo artist Kat Von D, who act as the voice-overs for “the collage of atrocities” (Pick 2013: 28). At 120 minutes, it is comprehensive regarding the treatment of farmed animals, this being the main thrust of the film, even though hunting, “entertainment” (zoos, circuses, rodeos) and animal testing are also shown, commented on

and damned. Like the other omnibus films, it is expository and observational, having appropriate music that adds to the aesthetic but also many diegetic animal sounds, ranging from grunts to squeals to screams that complement the visuals.

Although *Dominion* is the only Australian film in this section, what it portrays has global ramifications as it explains from the start, and that what we see is regarded generally as “industrial standards”. This is underlined by each of the sections having the heading of what it is covering, underneath which are the figures for the murder of these animals in the following countries: Australia, United Kingdom, United States, New Zealand, Canada and China. This is the only documentary to do this: to show how what occurs in one country also happens across the world. This is effective and drives home the ubiquity of cruelty, but it is unfortunate that no figures are drawn from Africa or South America.

*Dominion* is also the only documentary that does not stop at presenting the facts about exploitation of the most common farmed animals in the Western world (cattle, pigs, chickens and sheep) but also includes turkeys, ducks, camels, dogs, horses and different kinds of fish. Missing from here are donkeys who are kept captive (even if not factory farmed as most of the others are) in certain areas of South Africa, and are skinned alive for their pelts to be used as an aphrodisiac in Asia.

As *Dominion* covers so much that other omnibus, compendium and single issue documentaries portray, there could well be a superfluity of information and unnecessary repetition of detail to explain what is seen and how it is presented. For this reason, the issues covered and visuals filmed will only be touched on if they have been shown in *The animals film* and *Earthlings*. There will be more concentration on different evidence or style. Furthermore, themes and examples in other documentaries which concentrate on single issues, will rather be discussed in those documentaries, and mention merely made in the discussion of *Dominion*. It is deemed more important to bring to the fore what is omitted in those other films.

The most vital visual motif in *Dominion* is an extreme close-up of an eye before each section: for instance, a chicken’s for the section on egg-laying hens, a sheep’s before the section on the exploitation of this species. It is a case of lens meeting lens, saying, “Look at me! I am an individual!” that other documentaries gloss over at times, if not in their commentary but in their visuals. This is particularly telling with fish who are not just regarded as a mass (even though most of the footage is of multitudes of them) but as individuals. Just as hens, ducks and turkeys are not just

“BIRDS”, sea creatures are seen as different species within the overreaching group: salmon, trout, barramundi, lobster, snapper, tuna kingfish, Murray cod and abalone. Seals and dolphins have their own section as they might be sea creatures but are not fish. Furthermore, under the heading of each kind (“PIGS”, for instance), a subheading tells us what humans use them for.

Animals discussed in this documentary and that we seldom see in others include ducks (for food, entertainment and clothing), goats (for dairy), rabbits (farmed for their fur and scientific research), minks (farmed for their fur), dogs apart from companion animals (food, and entertainment—greyhound racing), horses (entertainment—racing and rodeos, research, pharmaceuticals, food), camels (entertainment—generally racing, clothing, experiments, food) and mice (scientific research, pets).

Most of this documentary used undercover filming of a high, sharp quality, as well as for the first time in such a documentary, drones, particularly to film fish farms. We also see scuba divers going to these farms to film. Unlike what is seen in some other films discussed here, nothing lyrical or beautiful is seen in the underwater swimming: this is a job to expose maltreatment, not a communion with the animals. There are also no interviews with activists and little footage of perpetrators or the public: the focus remains on the incarcerated animals. All this adds to the quality, factuality, universality, contemporaneity, perspicacity and perspicuity of *Dominion*.

The didacticism of the film is immediately obvious, with the words on screen of a poem by M. Frida Hartley, while we hear the squealing and roaring of animals:

From beasts we scorn as soulless,  
In forest, field and den,  
The cry goes up to witness.  
The soullessness of men.

The word “men” is interesting, as the majority by far of the perpetrators of exploitation and cruelty are seen to be male in all the documentaries discussed in this study, thus suggesting a certain patriarchal hegemony when it comes to abuse of animals.

This is followed a minute or so later by Joaquin Phoenix’s voice-over:

Out of sight, out of mind, they cease to be individuals, most known only as livestock, faceless units of production in a system of incomprehensible scale, exempt from the cruelty laws that protect our companion animals. Their suffering unseen and unheard, their value determined only by their usefulness to humankind, rationalised by a belief in our own superiority, the notion that might equals right. A notion that must be questioned.

It is precisely this that *Dominion* questions successfully.

We see farmed animals being overfed or given “enriched” (with poisonous chemicals) food to accelerate their growth rate, so much so that many cannot stand; alternatively, they are starved (for instance, calves for veal, or, in India, cows being taken to another state to be killed for their skins to be made into leather, a co-product not a bi-product of meat); we see them forcefully artificially inseminated, wallowing in their excrement, diseased because of such close confinement, transported as objects with the smaller ones just thrown into trucks, being beaten—with sadism relished and the perpetrators showing off to their fellows; we are shown the animals having their throats slit, being gassed, plucked, scalded and skinned alive—cows, pigs, sheep, chickens, turkeys, dogs and minks as examples. Those who are weak or do not provide sufficient milk or eggs, are carted off for slaughter in order to provide meat. When some struggle to escape (cows or sheep, for instance), they are slammed back into the pens, their understanding that they are about to be killed being obvious. “Waste products” are turned into lard, food, soap, lubricants and gelatine. We see mother cows being separated from their newly born calves, all of them mooing or bellowing in grief, and then the mothers running after the trucks taking away their children.

We also see individual fish suffering by being frozen to death, while they flap about trying to breathe. We see others being in restaurants, while customers can choose which individuals they would like killed for consumption.

At times there is no commentary, just visuals, sounds of terror and pain, or non-diegetic elegiac music. This enables the viewers to see what is happening; there is no need to tell them. And all this exploitation and cruelty with one main aim: financial gain. The cheaper that all this can be done, the better for the humans involved. Most feel nothing for the animals, and blind the public with advertisements and signs, as on the side of a ship to which our attention is not explicitly drawn but which is in the background:

“The World’s Most Loved Salmon”. The “love” is gustatory, not emotional; it is also financial, because farming them is lucrative.

Something else that is not given in other documentaries are these figures:

In our entire recorded history, 619 million humans have been killed by war. We kill the same number of animals every three days, and this isn’t even including fish and other sea creatures whose deaths are so great they are only measured in tonnes.

The word “we” is important, as it shows that the person speaking is one of “us”; the implication is that we, all humans, are involved in this torture, this degradation, this killing.

The narrators generally keep a calm, steady tone throughout, which adds to the pathos. There is no obvious anger, just sadness. At one stage towards the end, however, Joaquin Phoenix’s voice appropriately and effectively starts to break.

At the end, we are brought back to the start, with our being reminded of the dastardly exercising of “power, authority and dominion over those we perceive to be inferior, for our own short-sighted ends”. Then, with relevant footage, and intersectionality brought in, the following:

It is a justification that has been used before. By the white man, to enslave the black or to take their land and their children. By the Nazis to murder the Jews. By men, to silence and oppress women.

The question asked is whether humans are capable of something more.

Visuals over the credits give an indication of what can be done, with some individuals shown when gently rescued from confinement. *Dominion*, however, does not say specifically what those affected by the film can do. The obvious understanding is that what they have viewed should be enough to encourage them to action, whatever that action might be. The explicit injunction of “you could do this” is not employed as it is in some other films. Whether it should be here or not, *Dominion* embraces what we see in nearly all other documentaries, apart from interviewing activists and perpetrators, and seeing certain moral development of those who once farmed these animals. It sets a new yardstick in animal rights documentaries. This does not negate the importance of other documentaries which might be less ambitious and whose focus is not quite as broad, as we

see in some compendium documentaries and those that are concerned with single issues, because sometimes viewers might be more driven by a specific cause that they can relate more closely and immediately to, or be more encouraged by individuals whose moral development from farmer to fellow traveller is seen.

### 4.3.2 *Compendium Documentaries*

Compendium documentaries concentrate on different kinds of farmed animals but are less likely to include abuse in other fields. Those chosen here, *Meet your meat*, *Land of hope and glory* and *Seaspiracy*, have markedly different styles and techniques, and are also of vastly differing lengths. However, they all get their message across effectively and, combined, cover a great number of species.

#### 4.3.2.1 *Meet your Meat (2002; Friedrich & Akin)*

The forceful expository and observational documentary *Meet your meat* (2002; Friedrich & Akin) of the anti-speciesist organization PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) is all the more effective as it is the shortest of the films discussed here at just twelve minutes. It is additionally telling with the undercover filming and grainy footage, at times panning over scores of animals in anguish, and then honing on to the terror of a cow being slaughtered. All this is complemented by the controlled tones but with obvious underlying emotion of activist Alec Baldwin as the voice-over and, because of his renown, acting, like Joaquin Phoenix in *Earthlings*, as a testimonial to what he is describing; the message is enhanced by having the voice of somebody well-known for his work for animal rights.

The scenes, particularly the mixture of close-ups and the repetitive ones of different animals going en masse to slaughter, with their throats slit but not all dead before being scalded, are gut-wrenching. One's initial thoughts could well be "The horror! The horror!", even more so than in Conrad's *Heart of darkness* on which *Apocalypse now* (1979; Coppola) is based (cf. Conrad 1964: 153). We see egg-laying hens, oxen, cows, calves and pigs being murdered.

The opening words are chilling:

What you are about to see is beyond your worst nightmares. But for animals raised on modern intensive production farms and killed in slaughterhouses,

it is cold, inescapable reality. Once you see for yourself the routine cruelty involved in raising animals for food you'll understand why millions of compassionate people have decided to leave meat off their plates for good.

The use of direct address and the second-person (“you”, “yourself” and “you’ll”) involves the viewer immediately as this has a direct bearing on this person as an individual. This is enhanced by the bandwagon effect that millions of people have opted for a non-meat diet, and also by the glittering generality of “compassionate”. In other words, you, too, should be as beneficent as all the other people.

We are taken to the incarceration of chickens. (An avoidable slip in the film is that turkeys are mentioned in the section title, but only chickens are shown and discussed.) We immediately hear the clucking of chickens, and graphic descriptions are used in concert with the visual—chickens immersed in their own excrement, thousands of live, crippled ones being with the corpses of others who have died of heart-attacks or stress. We see the genetically manipulated hens who, because of unnatural growth, cannot walk or even stand. We hear that PETA (a subtle way of bringing in the producers and, thus, encouraging viewers to be supportive of this organization) used undercover filming (obvious from the handheld or hidden cameras, the lack of sharpness and the grainy effect, as mentioned earlier). This adds to the authenticity of what we are seeing. The ghastliness of the chickens’ lives is stressed by the repetitive use of “filthy” and also by our seeing as well as hearing about their “entire miserable lives”. We are also made aware that the powers-that-be approve of these horrors, such as the terribly cramped conditions of egg-laying hens and the use of metal rods on the chickens, “deemed legal and standard by the industry”.

The scene shifts to cattle who are castrated, dehorned and branded without pain-killers, and we see electric prods being used to control them. We are told that the USDA (the United States Department of Agriculture) “allows meat from animals with cancerous lesions and pusculated wounds to be certified as USDA pure”, which is a damning indictment of the authorities and plays to the health-concerns of viewers. We are then told that many of the cows are skinned and dismembered while fully conscious, and then are given figures in order to underline the accuracy of what we are being shown: “40% of dairy cows are lame by the time they reach the slaughterhouse”; “more than 100 000 cows are unable to walk off the transport trucks every year, yet they are slaughtered for food anyway”. We have close-ups of cows being hung upside down, with blood pouring from

them. We are shown how male calves are “ripped” from their mothers to be used as veal, while their mothers’ milk is denied to them. Again, the second-person is used effectively to infuse the viewer with guilt: “If you’re consuming milk, you’re supporting the veal industry.”

The scene then moves to pigs who have their throats slit and are burned while alive. We see them suffering and are told that many will go insane from the complete lack of stimulation. We hear piglets screaming. We see one being slammed against the floor headfirst in order to kill him. We are told that everything is done to maximize profits for the company.

Occasionally, we only hear the sound of the farmed animals, groaning or screaming. At times, there is just silence. These techniques, as mentioned in the discussion of omnibus documentaries, give the viewers a time to think, to reflect, to catch their breath. It also allows time for the horror to sink in, before we move on to the next gruesome scene.

*Meet your meat* ends with direct address again and a call to the viewers to change their lifestyle, as well as the use of the first-person plural, “we”, to show that we’re all in this together; the technique of “plain-folks”: “Please think about what you’ve seen. Every time we sit down to eat, we make a choice. Please choose vegetarianism. Do it for the animals; do it for the environment; and do it for yourself.” Therefore, the call goes beyond compassion; it is a call for moral upliftment, for conscience. It is a pity that the word “vegetarianism” is used at the expense of “vegan”, which is what the film could possibly have pushed more, but this is a quibble which should not detract from the overall message and quality of this documentary.

As it is so short compared to other similar documentaries, much is left out, for instance, the maceration of male chicks, the horrors of milking, the slaughter of sheep, the agonies of fish. On the other hand, because it is so short the message hits home immediately and there is no time for viewers’ attention to wander. The audience is left punch-drunk from seeing and hearing everything in this short but exceptional documentary that uses various techniques of persuasion to enforce its message. *Meet your meat* could serve as an exemplar for others that deal with related issues as well as for those covered here but in more detail.

#### 4.3.2.2 Land of Hope and Glory (2017; *Winters*)

*Land of hope and glory* is another outstanding film and, like *Meet your meat*, can be regarded as a benchmark for animal rights compendium documentaries. At forty-eight minutes, it is about half the length of most of

the documentaries discussed here, which allows a concentrated focus. The title is ironic and a reference to the music with the same title from Edward Elgar's patriotic *Pomp and Circumstance March No 1*—in fact the superb background, non-intrusive and elegiac music composed by Moby, among others, is reminiscent of some adagio movements by Elgar. “Land of hope and glory” also references the BBC TV series aired a year earlier than *Land of hope and glory* with the same title and the subtitle of “British country life”. There is another important reference, possibly more oblique, in the opening words and scenes of the documentary:

When we think of UK farming, we imagine picturesque rolling hills of lush greenery and serenity inhabited by peaceful, content farm animals roaming freely amongst the landscape.

This brings to mind the English Romantic poet William Blake's words from his long poem *Milton*:

And did those feet in ancient time  
Walk upon England's mountains green:  
And was the holy Lamb of God  
On England's pleasant pastures seen?  
(Blake, in Ferguson, Salter & Stallworthy 1996: 683).

In the same poem, Blake talks about “these dark Satanic Mills” in England, which implies both a millstone, with the extended meaning of “factory”, and the destructive, evil mills of the mind.

The connotation goes even further as both Elgar's “Land of hope and glory” and Blake's “Jerusalem” (with similar words to the extract quoted above) were sung for decades at the Last Night of the Proms in London's Royal Albert Hall as emblematic of patriotic fervour but was recently banned because of certain words implying that England's greatness was built on imperialism and slavery. In the context of this film, the slavery is that of farmed animals.

The film switches from views of freely roaming cattle, turkeys, sheep, pigs and chickens to their use as eggs and meat. Therefore, the filming, the words, and the poetic and musical references all combine to point out the discord between the ideal and the reality, between unthinking patriotism, ignorance and a holding on to a perceived pastoral past which is a chimera, and the real one of cruelty, torture and hell for farmed animals.

In an expository voice-over throughout, the narrator Ed Winters (also known as Earthling Ed) speaks steadily and authoritatively, with a certain vocal crepitation which adds to a low-intensity emotion that is effective throughout in conveying the horrors that the animals endure. For the most part, what we hear is reflected visually in images of cruelty inflicted on the animals.

At the start, written in bold uppercase that complements what is said, we hear and read:

BE AWARE – THE GOVERNMENT AND THE ANIMAL AGRICULTURE INDUSTRIES FIGHT TO KEEP THE CONTENT OF THE FOLLOWING FILM HIDDEN FROM YOUR VIEW. THE FOOTAGE YOU ARE ABOUT TO SEE IS NOT FROM ISOLATED CASES. THESE FACILITIES SUPPLY ANIMAL PRODUCTS THAT ARE LABELLED FREE-RANGE ORGANIC HIGH-WELFARE RED-TRACTOR APPROVED AND RSPCA-APPROVED.

As we are told that the footage to be shown is the reality of United Kingdom farming, the message is that we cannot trust what is put out by the above groups. To prove the point that the conditions described and portrayed are what usually happens, each scene has a superscript as to where it was filmed; in all, about a hundred farms or, more accurately, factory facilities, are included, as well as eight rescue farms.

The second-person that is used above, involves the viewer directly, as does the first-person plural, in the repeated “Like us” that follows, that embraces consciousness, awareness of the world and an understanding that life is unique to each being—farmed animals as well as humans. The documentary is divided into sections that cover separately pigs, cows, birds, eggs and sheep. Much of the footage is by undercover investigators with hidden cameras, but unlike several other films, the videos are clear with little grainy footage. We see the different animals being hit, kicked, thrown about, left to die, beaten to death, having their throats slit while still alive, struggling when they are hung up to bleed out and screaming in pain. There is a mixture of panning with hundreds of animals being shown, and close-ups of individuals who are suffering. At times, they look directly at the camera, leading to the viewers being able to connect directly with them and perceive their individuality as well as their pain.

Hostile, but not abusive, terminology is used throughout when referring to government and the agriculture industry, such as “façade”, “treated

as objects”, “solitary confinement”, “forcibly impregnated”, “no care or compassion”, “no standards or guidelines”, “lay in own faeces”, “horrific”, as we see corpses covered in maggots.

As with some other animal rights documentaries, there are scenes reminiscent of the Holocaust, although *Land of hope and glory* does not refer to it as such. But one cannot help but think of it with film of pigs being transported in terrible conditions, a hopeless look and being thrown into gas chambers filled with carbon dioxide, while they squeal in terror. With this last, we are told that this is the method of slaughter used for pigs whose bodies are sold at certain supermarkets such as Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury’s, Lidl and Waitrose, thus naming and shaming.

Figures are given throughout, including that each year 950 million birds in the UK are slaughtered for consumption, 90% of them spend their lives indoors, that “free-range” is a misnomer, that the birds are given food to make them grow inordinately quickly and which leads in turn to deformities and weakness. Furthermore, we see some of the forty million male chicks who are killed shortly after birth either through gassing or maceration.

Jeremy Bentham’s dictum about suffering being the most important issue on which to base one’s treatment of other animals is mentioned, and we are told: “It can never be moral to inflict unnecessary suffering on to another being ...” The word “unnecessary” flies in the face of what we have seen as it reeks of welfarism. But this is immediately followed by the moral injunction that “killing non-human animals” for any reason cannot ever be justified because of alternatives that are available in the society at whom this is directed. The next paragraph is hard-hitting and sums up this activist message:

It is believed that taking the life of an animal who does not want to die can be done in a humane way. However, this very concept is an oxymoron as you cannot kill someone who wants to live in a compassionate or kind way.

It is significant that two words are used in a way that emerge as glittering generalities, and that underline the anti-speciesist ethos of this documentary: “someone” and “who”. This is followed by card-stacking, and also a combination of this technique and that of bandwagon complemented by the use of the first-person plural.

We can no longer cling to ideas of high welfare farms or humane slaughterhouses, as to deny someone their freedom, commodify and mutilate their body, take away their babies, and take their life can never be done without exploitation or abuse.

The use of the third-person plural “their” to refer to the singular is gender friendly and implies that we must treat farmed animals in the way that we would treat humans. All these words and techniques underline the contemporaneity of this documentary.

While this is being said, we see clips of farmed animals running freely and displaying affection to each other, even across species, which brings us back to the opening of the film, thus giving it a circular structure. Furthermore, we see them in England’s “green and pleasant land”, and the message is that it could well become a land of hope and glory.

#### 4.3.2.3 *Seaspiracy* (2021; Tabrizi)

Just as documentaries on different land animals can fall under the compendium rubric, *Seaspiracy* (2021; Tabrizi) that focuses on different sea creatures does too. This gives a more overall indication of how documentaries can examine animal rights, especially those of farmed animals, be they on land or in water. With *Seaspiracy*, the term might become somewhat nebulous as what is discussed and what we are shown could well be regarded as hunting, but late in the documentary, the attention shifts to fish who are farmed, and this should be seen as conjoined to the abuse of water animals wherever and however they are killed. The word “fish” cannot be used all the time, as these animals include mammals (whales and dolphins) as well as crustaceans (shrimps) who also come into the picture.

The style of *Seaspiracy* is akin to that of two important films that will receive less attention in this study: *Cowspiracy: The sustainability secret* (2014; Andersen & Kuhn) and *What the health* (2017; Andersen & Kuhn), both of which focus more on the benefits of a plant-based diet rather than on the travails of farmed animals. *Cowspiracy* examines the effect of animal agriculture on the environment, showing how certain environmental organizations find it convenient to ignore the climate changes brought about by the expulsion of methane from farmed animals and the leaching of their waste products into water, and that animal agriculture is more of a threat to the environment than fossil fuels. *What the health* sets out to show the link between diet and disease, and how a plant-based diet can benefit health, stamina and strength. It also exposes the dubious ethics of

various organizations, such as the American Heart Association, the American Cancer Association and the American Diabetes Association, that are funded largely by processed food companies, such food being a significant cause of the diseases the associations purport to try to cure.

*Seaspiracy* confronts similar issues, but concentrates on the animals themselves. The protagonist and narrator, Ali Tabrizi, goes about things the same way as Kip Andersen does in the other two films, which is no surprise as Tabrizi helped with the editing of *What the health*, and Andersen produced *Seaspiracy*. In the films, we see the narrator on the way to interviews, conducting them, and becoming frustrated by being turned down for other interviews by companies involved in exploitation. The documentaries have comments interspersed with related footage. They have unobtrusive, non-diegetic music, use graphics and animation, have the narrator seen to be vegan at the end and have clips of final comments by some of the interviewees who are in accord with the overriding ideology of the film. *Seaspiracy* is expository with its interviews and commentary; observational, with some undercover footage, and also including Tabrizi filming; interactive as Tabrizi is heavily involved in the research and discussion; and reflective when it comes to the filmmaking process in which we see that Tabrizi undertakes what is really a quest and an adventure in which he puts himself in danger at times.

The scene is set immediately with Tabrizi being told: “It is dangerous for you to make this documentary.” As with *Cowspiracy* and *What the health*, he, as narrator, tells us about his background, with clips of him watching performances at a dolphinarium, his love of the sea and his “doing good” by cleaning up shore pollution. But then he learns about worse despoliation of the oceans and decides to expose the perpetrators.

His going to Taiji in Japan to film the atrocities of dolphin hunting is similar to what we see in more detail in *The cove* (to be discussed in the next section), and like Andersen and Kuhn, he is accused of using anti-Asian tropes and being racist (cf. Pauly 2021). This is an easy accusation to make if one focuses on his attempted interview with those in Japanese corporates and, later, in Thailand with its purported slavery. However, such attacks do not hold water as he also shows the horrors of fish farming in Scotland, the overfishing by the French off their Atlantic coast, the whale slaughter in the Faroe Islands and the European Union’s appropriation of mass fishing off the coast of Africa; this last leaves Africans starving and leads them to forage for bush meat which, in turn, can lead to

circumstances that cause Ebola. This is hardly racist on his part, but rather comprehensive and encompassing.

Tabrizi explains how prices and profits dictate the rules of animal slaughter (as we are told in so many of the documentaries), how the killing of dolphins is claimed to be a form of “pest control” (name-calling by the corporates and government) to control the fish stock, but that the real destroyers of oceanic life are the major fishing companies with their trawlers. We realize that dolphins are merely used as scapegoats, so to speak. Tabrizi and those who align themselves with his ideology also use pejoratives throughout to get their message home, such as “ocean criminals”; “death machine” (a fishing boat); “seafloor devastation”; “it’s just a continuation of a history of plundering the African continent” (the economic might of the European Union that fishes off the African coast); “biological nonsense” (that factory salmon fishing is good for the environment and that the fish are well treated); shrimp farming “depends on slavery”. Tabrizi shows how all these descriptions are accurate.

When the film moves to the savage killing of sharks for their fins, it is clever to have Paul de Gelder, the shark activist and conservationist, speaking out on their behalf, serving as the ultimate testimonial in this context, as we see that he lost a leg to a shark. Other prominent people whom Tabrizi uses with this technique include the oceanographers and marine scientists Sylvia Earle and Callum Roberts, as well as Paul Watson of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society.

Tabrizi manages something of a coup when, in an interview, a director of the Earth Island Institute, Mark Palmer, admits that the “Dolphin Safe Tuna” label on tins is inaccurate, that observers are seldom on board long-line fishing boats and that when they are they can be bribed. Tabrizi explains not only that the nets from these trawlers kill masses of unmarketable sea creatures, but also that the discarded nets pollute the ocean with far more plastic than anything else (immeasurably more than the plastic straws humans are discouraged from using), but these facts are hidden by organizations and governments.

It is a Faroe Islands fisherman (or whale slaughterer) who brings us back to all fish and to all land animals, as well as to a certain perspective, when he talks about “fashionable animals” (my term here) and says that one whale gives the same amount of meat as 2000 chickens: “A fish, a chicken, a whale – exactly the same value – it has one life.” He might be saying that he is less cruel than those who kill and consume all those

chickens and fish murdered in factory farms; however, the contextual implication is that the killing and eating of any animal should be anathema.

It is important that Tabrizi emphasizes that fish are sentient and that, as Sylvia Earle points out, the notion that they feel no pain “is a justification for doing dastardly things to innocent creatures”. This ties in with the speciesist view that only humans are sentient. But, in the words of Sylvia Earle again, “fish feel pain ... Fish have a lateral line down their sides that sense the most exquisite little movements in the water.” They feel pain, experience fear, have complex social lives, are intelligent and have memory capabilities. This applies to crustaceans as well. She and others point out that there is no such thing as sustainable fishing, particularly as nobody quite knows what sustainability is. *Seaspiracy* ends on a didactic note that is also one of hope, with Earle saying that the best way to protect ocean and sea life is not to eat them; the one ethical thing to do is to stop eating fish. In a direct address to the viewers, and reminiscent of Mrs. Reichardt towards the end of Captain Marryat’s *The little savage* who says, “It is never too late ... to do good” (Marryat 1889 [1848]), Sylvia Earle comments:

It isn’t too late to take the best hope we will ever have of having a home in this universe ... Most of the positive and negative things that bring about change in human civilization start with someone. Some *one*. And no *one* can do *everything*, but every *one* can do *something*. And sometimes, big ideas make a big difference. That’s what we can do ... That’s what you can do right now. Look in the mirror. Figure it out. Go for it.

Tendentious it might be, but partisan is obviously what this documentary sets out to be. This is superb investigative journalism, but being so it is like the other two films mentioned here in that it has come in for a share of criticism, with some of their conclusions being challenged, and with the directors being accused of cherry-picking. On the other hand, this is an investigative and ideological film, not an academic treatise; most of the facts are accurate, and those accusing the makers of being selective with facts are themselves cherry-picking and sometimes ignoring the over-reaching findings. Many also object to the push for veganism, with some of them obviously protecting their own interests (cf. McVeigh 2021; Pauly 2021). It is incumbent on filmmakers to be accurate and to check their facts, but viewers or experts on both sides should eschew the Facebook

and Twitter age with their sharp comments, but focus on the crux of the documentary.

*Seaspiracy* is an example of the compendium type of animal rights documentary which impresses with its comprehensiveness, attention to detail, bravery and eloquence. Despite all of this, it does not serve the cause of farmed animal rights evenly throughout: the mammals (dolphins and whales) are sometimes seen as individuals, but farmed and caught fish are seen as a mass—swimming, being killed, being cut up, being dead. There is no personal or individual connection here, implying at times that they are creatures less deserving of attention, and are really a commodity. It is also a pity that we do not see or hear from animal activists in Japan or African countries: this would have sent more of a message to those concerned in those countries about hunting sea animals. This does not make *Seaspiracy* racist; it makes it somewhat parochial with the audience it hopes to attract.

### 4.3.3 *Single Issue Documentaries*

The single issue documentary is important as it drives home the horrors of a particular species, and would be most telling with members of an intended audience who are specifically interested in that species. The documentaries discussed here are *Fowl play* (chickens) and *The cove* (dolphins): one is of land animals, the other is of water ones; one is of birds, the other of mammals; the former can be construed as global, whereas the latter has a more geographically confined area of horror; chickens are murdered in their millions, dolphins in their thousands; chickens might be wrongly regarded by the public as a humdrum species, dolphins are fashionable for some societies to care about. Those killed, on the other hand, are all individuals, are all sentient and all deserve their stories to be told, which is what these documentaries set out to do.

#### 4.3.3.1 *Fowl Play (2009; Durand)*

Mercy for Animals is an organization aimed at preventing cruelty to farmed animals and promoting compassionate food choices. One of the ways of getting their message across is through film, including *Fowl play* (2009: Durand), a documentary about the egg industry, and the abuse and slaughter of egg-laying hens. This is presented in an observational mode (grainy footage and handheld cameras) with also a participatory style in that there is engagement between the activists and the viewers to

whom they talk directly. There is much to admire about the particular coverage of this documentary: the commitment of those involved; undercover footage; the cruelty meted out to the chickens shown (although there is a dearth of footage of those who abuse them); the pathos generated through close-ups of the suffering of hens; the insistence that “consumers have a right to know where their food comes from, and we feel that the animals have the right to have their stories told”; the stress that the industry is profit-motivated; and a couple of “happy ever after” stories of those who were rescued. In addition, there are echoes of Nazi action during the Holocaust, with sorters given Mengele-like decision-making as to who will go to the left and who to the right; who will survive in agony (hens), and who will die immediately (male chicks); also, who will die from being gassed. There is also the message that the cage-free system is a chimera, because if one walks into a barn, what one sees “is birds that are wall-to-wall packed together”, with no veterinary care; finally, a 360-degree view of the inside of a cage is shown, that brings home the claustrophobia and disorientation suffered by the chickens. Discordant and repetitive elegiac music is played throughout.

This is all well and good, but the film fails on a number of grounds: very few effective techniques of persuasion are used; the speakers intervene with telling about their oh-so-similar experiences; there is much repetition that leads to tedium; there is no structure, with similar scenes being shown at different times in the fifty-two-minute film, and jumps to footage of a sanctuary in the middle, but then back again to the nightmare the chickens go through. This is a film that was in need of much editing to get its message across.

It is important to be told that “we live in a society that makes it very easy for us to remain sort of wilfully ignorant to the processes and the details behind food production”; for viewers to see footage of the horrifying lives forced on these chickens; to see people doing their best to help these chickens. It is important to know that the latest techniques to get hens to lay ten times more than their ancestors did, lead to depleted calcium and osteoporosis; to see what the chickens see, to hear what they hear and to realize that the smell of ammonia has a terrible effect on them. But a tighter filmic structure would have got the vital message across more effectively.

#### 4.3.3.2 The Cove (2009; Psihoyos)

The dolphins in the outstanding documentary *The cove* (2009; Psihoyos) are not farmed in the ways that the chickens are in *Fowl play*, but farmed they are: herded, caught and slaughtered. They might not be confined for life in cages or barns, but they are corralled with no chance of escape. They might not be artificially inseminated as cows are, but they also see their calves taken from them while they are powerless to prevent it. They might not be murdered in different facilities throughout a specific country, but they are shown to be murdered nonetheless, even if the concentration is in a specific cove in a specific town.

This film, supported by the Oceanic Preservation Society, is excellent structurally, starting with the glow from a lighthouse, reminiscent of a searchlight: this searchlight is carried metaphorically not only by the filmmakers but also by their antagonists—fishermen, municipal authorities and corporate leaders—who try to blind them and the public to the evil they are perpetrating with false illumination and distorted facts.

The focus is on the undercover operatives and the filmmakers who speak directly to the viewers. We see film equipment being used and hear the methods or secret ops of the mission employed to make the film, such as hidden high-def cameras in rocks, thermal cameras, hydrophones and drones. All these techniques make this documentary a combination of the observatory, reflective, participatory and poetic. It is participatory because we see one of the driving forces, Ric O’Barry, in different clips over many years, working intimately with dolphins in aquariums and performances, and, then, when he turned from entertainment to activism, trying to save them from capture and incarceration. It is poetic because of the background music that adds to the tension at different times, especially when the quest becomes dangerous adventure, and when the music is tranquil to depict dolphins swimming freely below the surface. It is a pity, therefore, that the music during the end credits breaks the atmosphere by being incongruously loud and upbeat and out of kilter with the rest of the film. It is also a shortcoming that we are not always told who certain activists are or what their organizations are. Otherwise, this is a gripping, disturbing and horrifying film.

It is important that the director, Louie Psihoyos, says at the start: “I do want to say that we try to do the story legally.” But they cannot, as they are barred from going to the cove and from filming openly; hence, the undercover methods are employed.

Like facilities in the USA, the UK and New Zealand, for example, the town of Taiji, where the cove of slaughter is, tries to keep its unsavoury actions away from the public. It has dolphin tours, drawings, sculptures and slogans throughout celebrating these creatures, but a veil is drawn over its nefarious activities. We learn, as we do in many other such documentaries, that profit is the motivating factor in capturing and killing the animals.

We are told that “a dolphin’s smile is nature’s greatest deception. It creates the illusion that they are always happy.” The music, if not the lyrics, at this stage comes from Charlie Chaplin’s “Smile”:

Smile though your heart is aching,  
Smile even though it’s breaking,  
When there are clouds in the sky you’ll get by  
If you smile through your fear and sorrow ....

It might escape nearly all viewers that this music comes from the 1936 film, *Modern times* (1936; Chaplin). The somewhat oblique reference is that the horrors that we are watching are not traditional; they are contemporary. And we need to delve below the surface to find out the truth; this is what Louie Psihoyos and his team have done.

There is pathos throughout: from Ric O’Barry’s description of how Kathy (one of those who played Flipper in the TV series) committed suicide by closing her blowhole and died in his arms, to seeing a lone dolphin desperately trying to escape but then succumbing to her wounds while the water turns red around her.

A fisherman says: “This is our tradition. This is our culture. You don’t understand us. You eat cows. Well, we eat dolphins.” He is right, of course. But the two evils hardly cancel out each other. This makes us realize that the cruelty inflicted on farmed animals is prevalent in all countries, but this is the specific example that the filmmakers have chosen to expose. As Psihoyos says: “You want to capture something that will make people change.” This could well be the mantra of all the filmmakers whose documentaries are discussed in this study. *The cove* might be limited to one species, but we can extrapolate from there to a wider, even all-embracing, anti-speciesist rhetoric.

*The cove* suggests, sometimes implicitly, how viewers could try to change the public’s perceptions, lifestyles and diet. At the end, we see shots of Ric O’Barry confronting people in a variety of ways: he shows the deputy

director of the Fisheries Agency of Japan footage of the dolphin slaughter, the response being corporatively damning, “When and where did you take this?”; we see him tackling delegates to the International Whaling Commission, with a monitor strapped to him and showing what we take to be the horrors we have witnessed; we have a long shot of him standing in a teeming crowd with a screen strapped to his body with what must be a telling video as pedestrians start coming around to watch. The implication is that this is what other activists could do, too; those who do not have the obvious financial backing of a filmmaker such as Louie Psihoyos. We also have a call to action that is vital to the aim of such films: “The dolphin slaughter is scheduled to resume each September. Unless we stop it. Unless you stop it. Text dolphin to 44144 or go to [takepart.com/the-cove](http://takepart.com/the-cove).” The direct address is important here, as this is aimed unequivocally at the viewers.

#### 4.3.4 *Interviews with Activists*

Animal rights advocates and activists cannot be lumped together as an amorphous group holding the same views regarding how to go about liberating animals. There are those who have turned the corner from carnivoria or from maltreating farmed animals to finding sentience—their own as well as that of the other animals; others who speak from public platforms to try to convince their audience that veganism is the route to follow; those who break into experimental facilities as well as farm sheds in order to free animals. Discussed in chronological order of release, *Behind the mask*, *Peaceable kingdom: The journey home* and *Live and let live* give a good cross-section of these approaches.

##### 4.3.4.1 *Behind the Mask: The Story of the People Who Risk Everything to Save Animals (2006; Keith)*

What a pity that Shannon Keith’s documentary *Behind the mask* that espouses the ideals and actions of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and Direct Action, is flawed with poor cinematography and editing. It is important to portray the remarkable humans who are willing to put their lives at risk in order to save animals from torture, whether this takes place in research laboratories (the main focus of this documentary, with horrifying footage) or on farms. The latter includes fur farms which are also part of the focus of this study, but have received almost negligible coverage compared to other areas of violence and cruelty. What we are shown here

is the torture that minks go through, such as anal electrocution. Animals farmed for food are also shown here, and the footage, as in other such documentaries, is horrifying.

An essential point repeatedly made in *Behind the mask* is that civil disobedience is necessary to achieve change; that the law must be broken if it embraces evil or prevents good from being done. This is what those do who align themselves with the tenets of the Animal Liberation Front, not an organization as such but a movement that attracts disparate people who want to overturn the status quo. The guidelines that they are advised to follow are—with my comments in square brackets:

- Liberate animals from places of abuse. [This is in line with what most animal rights activists try to do legally, especially those who establish farm sanctuaries to save animals from slaughter.]
- Inflict economic damage on those who profit from the exploitation of animals. [This is the tourniquet that farm owners dread, as financial profit from their livelihood is what motivates them.]
- Reveal atrocities committed against animals. [This is why so much of the Animal Liberation Front's work is filmed in order to show the public what is going on; in this way, it is no different from what other activists try to do.]
- Take all precautions against harming any animal, human and non-human. [Therefore, it can hardly be seen as a terrorist organization, but rather one of freedom fighters; however, the terminology depends on who is using it.]

In short, those who align themselves with ALF regard it as a compassionate movement.

It is bizarre, quite Kafkaesque, that the FBI considers the Animal Liberation Front to be the #1 Domestic Terrorist Organization, obviously on grounds of economic sabotage. As one of those involved says, “Nobody in our movement has hurt any living thing.” This is in contrast with hunting and abuse on farms. Ironically, perpetrators of cruelty are rarely prosecuted.

What detracts from this film is its bitterness, going back and forth between short clips of rescue efforts by ALF and the vile conduct by others, as well as long, repetitive statements by various people—in all eighteen of them whom we hear from time and again to give some sort of testimonial to the work of ALF, but as most of them (apart from philosopher

Steve Best and PETA founder and president Ingrid Newkirk) are not in the public eye, this technique does not quite work. More effective is the use of transfer to reflect on what ALF is doing—using other movements that have broken the law in the past, such as the Boston Tea Party and the suffragettes. Furthermore, others involved in civil disobedience are referred to, such as Harriet Tubman and Nelson Mandela, as well as a long clip from Martin Luther King’s most famous speech. But these come towards the end with grainy footage, when they would have been far more effective in the initial discussion of why ALF follows in the steps of other ground-breakers in getting a more just society.

*Behind the mask* tries to get its message across but fails to do this optimally because of its uneven cinematography and scattered editing. This results in a whirligig effect which does neither ALF nor the animals it tries to save a favour.

Whether one agrees with the actions of the Animal Liberation Front or not, it is time for another documentary to be made about them so that the public can get a clearer vision of what it stands for.

#### 4.3.4.2 Peaceable Kingdom: The Journey Home (2009; Stein)

Although a superficial viewing might consider Jenny Stein’s expository and interactive *Peaceable kingdom: The journey home* (2009; Stein) to be structurally flawed, it is in effect well put together, with the back-and-forwarding of scenes, people and chronology being finely edited as it gets progressively darker in mood. It is suffused with pathos throughout, but also has some humour (a lamb head-butting at the start, goats chasing a farmer and his toddler to shrieks of laughter towards the end) that gives a brief emotional break. The audience becomes an increasing witness to the individuality of the animals as it gets sadder and more gruesome: we see a terrified sheep stunned repeatedly as part of the killing mechanism, followed by lambs having their throats slit, then a cut to a young farmer who breaks down telling his story of connection with a steer who enabled him to switch on again his light of compassion that he had had as a child.

Unlike some other films where experts, activists or heads of corporates are not named at all, leaving viewers puzzled as to who is speaking, the ploy in *Peaceable kingdom* is to give the names of the various farmers with the end credits; this goes towards underlining the plain-folks approach. This is apart from the recognizable animal activist Howard Lyman whose interviews and hard-hitting speeches are interspersed throughout as a form of testimonial. While the audience is still reeling from the footage,

the end credits are rolled and we see the faces and names of the main humans interviewed as well as those of several of the farmed animals. This ties up with the unity of species increasingly stressed and also with the combination of long-distance and panned shots, with close-ups of the farmed animals, as pigs, cows, sheep and chickens have their eyes focussed on; they look us in the eye, their lens to the camera lens, their lens to our lens.

One of the former farmers says at the beginning: “The greatest gift we can give to them is to recognise them as individuals.” These farmers admit to questioning the basic assumptions they grew up with (“The last thing you want to be is weak; weak farmers don’t survive”), their frustrations and then the journeys home—journeys to compassion.

Mostly unobtrusive background music is used throughout to complement the voice-over and action. What is striking, is the absence of any commentary in a sequence where we are shown animals in stockyards, on trucks, on the way to slaughter, stunned, killed and then their carcasses hanging up.

We are later shown calves being taken from their mothers and told that they will be killed to make high-end leather, for instance, for gloves. What is not mentioned is that such skin is called vellum, an essential material for Torahs (the Scrolls of Law that contain the Pentateuch) in Judaism. The question is whether a mention of this would be regarded as anti-Semitic or, more accurately, information for any Jewish animal rights activists to make them interrogate the consistency of liturgy that stresses the Torah supposedly showing ways of kindness. Something else we are told, and that does not come out in other documentaries discussed here, is that the stomachs of these calves are scraped for rennet that is used to curdle cheese. What can be gathered from this is that vegetarians who consume dairy cheese are actually not vegetarians at all but feed into the slaughter process. But there is no such comment here. We are left to work it out for ourselves.

Two other statements from those who were once farmers are admonitory (with the sense of warning, rather than reprimand): “It’s kind of sad and empty sometimes when people are looking at your belief system and passing judgement on you, and just disappearing from your life.” And: “The community can turn their back on you, but it’s also finding a new community.” Nevertheless, these activists who were once farmers show that this move to compassion can be undertaken and lead to emotional upliftment.

As with other documentaries, the desire for monetary profit seems to be the motivation of those who farm animals; here, the comments are made almost as an aside. What also comes through is that there is no such thing as humane farming or humane killing, which is why Jenny Stein and those she has interviewed try to make a peaceable kingdom for themselves and the farmed animals they have rescued.

#### 4.3.4.3 Live and Let Live (2013; Pierschel)

Marc Pierschel's 2013 documentary *Live and let live*, unusual in alternating between German and English, is suffused with interviews, and, because of a lack of variation in style throughout, is somewhat tepid, especially when compared to the heat generated in other animal rights films. The main techniques in trying to get its message across are testimonials and plain-folks. With the former, we have, among others, major figures in the animal rights or welfare movements, often with academic clout and who have written much on the subject, such as Peter Singer (Professor of Bioethics), Tom Regan (Professor of Philosophy), Gary Francione (Professor of Law), Melanie Joy (sociologist and psychologist—the lone woman with this standing in the film), Jonathan Balcombe (ethologist and biologist) and Will Potter (journalist). With plain-folks, there are a track cyclist, a one-time butcher and now a vegan restaurant owner (who gets the most time to express his views), and various other activists. The comments are, for the most part, rational. One has to ask whether all activists are white, which, together with the blandness, limits its appeal.

We do see incarcerated chickens, and, to serve as a contrast, many free animals grazing or resting in pleasant surroundings. We hear about pejoratives used by the agricultural industry for social justice activists, demonized as “terrorists”, and about unchecked corporate power in the pursuit of profits (a common theme that cannot be emphasized enough) as well as government and corporate oppression.

The emphasis moves to plant-based diets and organic farming, and jumps to cocoa bean or chocolate factories and human oppression, thus showing the important link between oppression across species.

*Live and let live*, even less than a decade old, is dated, especially as far as examples from the sporting world are concerned, with only one sportsperson being shown here (and Jack Lindquist is hardly a household name), whereas there are so many today, as featured in other documentaries; furthermore, the technique of having so many talking heads not engaging directly with viewers is hardly embracing. It is accurate in what it shows

and in what we hear, but it lacks spark and does little to engage with viewers in pushing the animal rights agenda.

#### 4.3.5 *Activists Versus Perpetrators*

A way in which to highlight the polarized opinions of activists and perpetrators is to have both sides giving their approach, sometimes as point and counterpoint. An animal rights documentary would have a partisan approach, but it is important to hear what the opposing camp has to say and also to hear what arguments can be used to negate their views, as we see in *A cow at my table* and *Death on a factory farm*.

##### 4.3.5.1 *A Cow at my Table* (1998; Abbott)

Jennifer Abbott's ninety-minute 1998 documentary *A cow at my table* examines the conflict between animal rights advocates and those involved in factory farming, those "megaboere" [megafarmers] discussed in the Introduction (Dreyer 2016). It is very much a dichotomy between ethics and economy, between pity and profits, between compassion and cruelty. Nevertheless, Abbott gives each side their opportunity to express their standpoint, with interviews being interspersed with clips of the abuse of farmed animals mainly in Canada.

The documentary is almost totally in black and white, lacking in visual sharpness, and can be seen as both interactional and observational. The interviewees generally, but not always, tread politely, putting across their points but taking care not to offend the other side; this does lead to a certain blandness in commentary, whereas a direct discussion could have borne more obvious fruit. When politeness goes by the board, pejoratives are the techniques usually employed by the various people interviewed—newspaper reports quote those involved in farming as calling activists "lunatics"; and "vegan" is obviously akin to a swear word. However, positive terminology or amelioratives are used for themselves—they all purport to try for the "humane", as well as the notion of "plain-folks". Bandwagoning is brought in too—for instance, with the public wanting cheap food.

There is an attempt at a touch of humour to lighten up the emotional darkness by using clips from the 1915 film *A bird's a bird*; this could be regarded as specious, but it is actually closely linked to the idea that some animals (parrots, for instance) are companion animals who are not there to be eaten, whereas others (chickens), even though also birds, are regarded

as food by the social majority. What is interesting is that the parrot is also encaged, as are most of the chickens whom we see. The question is: Do humans always find it right to shut off other species? There is a lone female singer playing a guitar throughout *A cow at my table*, but, unfortunately, this does not effectively complement the message of the film.

These and other points make the documentary appear as severely dated. Not only are there many clips of advertisements from decades back promoting meat and eggs, the style is reminiscent of 1940s and 1950s newsreels, even with the interviews from the 1990s. There is a plethora of talking heads, with the main focus on the views of Susan Kitchen, a Canadian livestock industry spokesperson, whereas well-known activists such as Carol J. Adams, Tom Regan and Peter Singer are given less time to express their position. In addition, the focus is on animal welfare, rather than on animal rights.

What is effective in this documentary is the cutting between factory farm owners or supporters and clips of farmed animals being abused (on the farms, in trucks and in the slaughterhouses) which give the lie to their comments. Two quotes from the documentary should suffice. Susan Kitchen, whose view is somewhat simplistic, says near the beginning when she tries to underline how much better conditions are on factory farms (a term she objects to) than on other more traditional farms in the past:

Agriculture's come a long, long way from those days – those days when hogs would freeze in the cold, would be susceptible to predation, and a tremendous amount of disease and illness. Those all have changed.

This is followed by clips where we see farmed animals suffering terribly, with humans as the predators, and where pigs and cows are seen to have debilitating diseases. The implication is that things have changed: they are worse now.

The Co-founder and Executive Director of Farm Sanctuary, Gene Bauston, says shortly after this:

We're challenging what they're doing, and we're as nicely as possible asking them to get out of business ... You know, we are animal rights people. We are vegetarians, and when we go to stockyards, to factory farms, to slaughterhouses, what those businesses stand for, what we stand for is ... diametrically opposed to. So when we come into these facilities, the people get very upset. One reason is that when we go in there, we get videotapes and

pictures showing how horrible the conditions are, and when the public sees those, they don't want to support those industries.

In short, as Abbott shows, what happens to farmed animals is so cruel, so awful, that if the public were to know, they would be shocked; and the companies would lose what they most want: financial profit.

A strong point comes at the end when we hear a recording of Jennifer Abbott being prevented from filming at a "facility", and when she does surreptitiously struggle her way inside the grounds of Intercontinental Packers, how charges are brought against her for trespassing. When these charges are dropped for no reason, viewers should realize that the Intercontinental Packers understood that their malpractices would have to be revealed in court and that the publicity would hurt their pockets.

The Ontario Chicken Producers' Marketing Board, the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and the Ontario Veal Association all attempted to discredit the film, but Jennifer Abbott's veracity could not really be called into question.

Had the filming been better, had there been more of a direct confrontation between parties, this documentary could have been more telling. But it is still a fine example of groundwork and undercover reportage.

#### 4.3.5.2 Death on a Factory Farm (2009; Simon & Teale)

Another documentary with admirable undercover filming is *Death on a factory farm* (2009; Simon & Teale), which also shows the conflict between activists and perpetrators. The technique is observational, participatory and poetic (music is important). This is more in the welfare than the animal rights vein, but we can extrapolate to overall cruelty: from the evils carried out on farms such as the Wiles Hog Farm in Creston, Ohio, to the actual ethic of the farming of animals in any way for human consumption.

Like many other undercover documentaries, the start is jerky and grainy. It takes twenty-five seconds for us to see a dead pig and hear squealing in agony. Unlike the music in *A cow at my table*, that here adds to the atmosphere, it has an adagio tempo throughout, and, although original, is reminiscent at times of Bruch's *Kol Nidre*. The acoustic and slide guitar, pedal steel and dobro, violin, cello and piano electronics all combine to give an elegiac mood, somewhat eerie but also, because of electronic aspect, being obviously contemporary, with the implication that the events seen are happening now.

What holds the film together structurally is what we read close to the start: “Virtually no federal laws mandate the humane treatment of farm animals. Most state laws are weak and rarely enforced.”

We follow an undercover investigator, “Pete”, sourced by the Humane Farming Association (HFA) to investigate abuses on the hog farm. We see piglets thrown into crates, pigs cannibalizing one another, in farrowing crates, hit over the head and bashed on the floor to kill them, and hanged. Those most at risk at an early age are “junk pigs”—those who are too skinny to fetch a good price; and those who are crippled and won’t live to be transported to slaughter are called “downers”.

Once again, profit is shown to be the yardstick in farming, and the cheapest way to get rid of a pig is implemented. The word “profit” is used as both a glittering generality (farm owners and workers, and their lawyers), and as a hostile word (those from the HFA). On the whole, pejoratives are used by “Pete” (“Nasty, nasty work”; “Everything is brutal. Everything”). The filmmaker uses card-stacking throughout, showing scene after scene of pigs being abused, in order to drive the point home. Generally, those interviewed, including “Pete” and people from the HFA, talk directly into the camera in order to gain fellow-feeling from the viewers.

The court case that ensued from this undercover work, takes up nearly all the second half of the documentary, and it is well-balanced between prosecution and defence. The perpetrators were found guilty on only one of the ten counts of animal cruelty brought against them, which ties up with the opening statement about laws covering animal abuse.

This is a fine documentary, with certain utterances by characters summing up much of it from either side:

- Ingrid, a compassionate worker on the farm: “Never looked at a piece of pork and associated it with a pig; never thought that a pig, er, was actually like a dog, and had feelings and emotions.”
- Another worker: “I hate pigs. I hate them bad.”
- Ingrid: “What kind of people are they?”
- Farm owner: “These pigs have a value” (income).

Something else that is important is the garnering of understanding and feeling for undercover agents, as emblemized by “Pete”. This is done not only by our seeing the risks he takes but also by what he says about his life. This gives a nobility to his purpose and enables the viewers to realize

why he does what he does for the cause of animals whom he puts before himself:

It makes me often a lonely person. It is a lonely, fucking life. You're either out in the middle of nowhere working undercover with a bunch of people that you hate or even if you do make friends out there and people treat you well, that's it. You're not going to be able to stay in touch with them and say, "Hey! It's me!"

It is also important that he explains that he understands that humans who are oppressed also need to be protected and fought for, but they have their own spokespeople and activists. He has thrown his lot in with animals: "This is the fight that I pick."

Once more, it appears that cruelty goes hand in glove with a desire for profit. Mammon rules.

#### 4.3.6 *Plant-Based Documentaries*

There is a relative plethora of films that push a plant-based diet with an emphasis on health and the environment, with animal rights (or even welfare) being something of a by-product. It is often a case of eat plants and live longer, or follow a plant-based food regimen to avert climate change and save the world, and, okay, it will be good for the farmed animals too. This does not in any way denigrate the good that these documentaries set out to do, or their quality. They also fit into the general ethos of this study because the end-result should only be good for these animals, in addition to the human ones. On the other hand, it is not necessary to go into detail with each of these documentaries as the style is generally quite similar. Therefore, I shall just mention as examples *Forks over knives* (2011; Fulkerson), *Cowspiracy: The sustainability secret* (2014; Andersen & Kuhn), *H.O.P.E.* (2016; Messenger), *What the health* (2017; Andersen & Kuhn), *Das System Milch/The milk system* (2017; Pichler), *The game changers* (2018; Psihoyos) and *Eating animals* (2018; Quinn). I would rather concentrate on two others: *Milked* (2022; Taylor), because it is the latest at the time of writing, is as telling as the earlier ones, is in a similar style and is focussed on a country not in North America or Europe but on New Zealand, which underlines the global problem of farming with animals; and, before that, *Vegan 2019: The film* (2019; Mitchell), as, stylistically, it

is different from the others and is an example of another approach to be considered by those documentaries that concentrate on animal rights.

#### 4.3.6.1 Vegan 2019: The Film (2019; Mitchell)

*Vegan 2019: The film* (2019; Mitchell) is a pulsating documentary. It is absolutely different from the other documentaries but also effective and an example of how to get the vegan message across. It has superb, sharp images, quick video sound bites throughout, discussions of pros and cons (including the taste of plant-based food), all the while putting issues into contemporary context. This is the ideal documentary for a public who prefers a quick fix rather than long discussions, who relishes testimonial-giving celebrities (who are often physically attractive) who give their point of view, of plain-folks as well as “stars”, of direct address and of quick card-stacking for people who are quick to jump on to the bandwagon. There is humour at times, but when coming from someone who opposes vegan food, often misplaced, misinformed and crude. This would be an ideal type of documentary for certain people in the promotion of animal rights. However, this is really plant-based and animals hardly feature. It is about health and the environment, what the viewers could gain for themselves and how the world could be saved by eating against climate change. Those making films about farmed animal rights could well take a stylistic and technical lesson from this. Of course, this does not detract from the details and styles of other types of animal rights films, which remain essential. It just gives another way of doing things.

We hear early on that “meat production is destroying our planet”, but the focus is not on the animals as we move from there to climate breakdown and catastrophe, and the sixth mass extinction. These are fear tactics that tell it as it is. We switch to Roger Hallam and the Extinction Rebellion movement, and then to the *raison d’être* of the film: a plant-based food system to stop climate change. From this we have free (presumably) advertising of Greg’s vegan sausage roll, Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods. And, among others, there are warnings (climate change) and encouragement (eat plants) from David Attenborough (for gravitas), Bill Gates (wealth), Leonardo di Caprio and Kim Kardashian (glamour), Simon Cowell (in judgement as usual), Novak Djokovic and Lewis Hamilton (sport), Arnold Schwarzenegger (strength) and, the longest clip, Greta Thunberg (younger generation with reasoning and guts) with facts and feeling to raise emotions at the UN Climate Action Summit in New York:

Even most climate scientists or green politicians keep on flying around the world, eating meat and dairy ... People are suffering; people are dying; entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction. And all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!

*Vegan 2019* then references *The game changers* (already mentioned in this chapter), followed by two sides of the debate to give an impression of fairness and, thus, enhance credibility in the accuracy of reportage. Here we go from the hostile, “Sheep were almost the ultimate in renewable technology ... good for the environment”, to the solidly factual, referring to a study that embraced 119 countries and 40,000 farms that showed that the vegan lifestyle was best for the environment.

*Vegan 2019* then moves on to the animals themselves in turning to the biggest dairy farm exposé in history, giving consumers “a reason to ditch milk”: the horrendous abuses at Fair Oaks Farms in Indiana, with its half a million visitors every year to its hotel, restaurant and museum, with all its talk about looking after animals being phoney. We see demonstrations in Australia and something of a rabid response by the Prime Minister who calls activists “green-collared criminals”; and then, with the other side showing how “police protect corporate criminals” who participate in gas chambers for pigs in panic and agony—which, once more, is an implicit reference to the similarity between what is happening to the pigs to what happened in the Holocaust.

At one stage, we do hear about the dangers of such food (some is highly processed, packed in plastic, sprayed with pesticides), and then some hostility from the growing carnivore movement and animal agriculture industry who push back with vegans’ “mental illness”, “tyranny” and “fascism”. But the final message is that non-animal is good in the areas discussed. At the end we are given hope as a new narrative is emerging: compassion, health, sustainability and equality for all.

This is a superb documentary that seems to cater for all: those interested primarily in themselves (health and longevity—both glittering generalities), those who want to save the world (as this has a strong bearing on humans as well, it is not wholly altruistic) and, finally, but with less coverage, animal well-being and rights.

#### 4.3.6.2 *Milked* (2022; *Taylor*)

*Milked* (2022; Taylor) ticks as many blocks as any of the others advocating a plant-based diet and targeting the hypocrisy of corporations and politicians. It is a documentary that incorporates the expository (an authoritative narration and commentary), the observational (occasional undercover footage), interactive (a direct engagement with the narrator and the subject), reflective (self-awareness), poetic (the music is low-key throughout but adds to the mood) and intersectional (although the environment and health are foregrounded, the plight of farmed animals is considered, too, even if only after fifty-five minutes or so, when we see many dead bodies and many skinned carcasses). When it comes to clips of farmed animals, we see hundreds, possibly thousands, of them on a factory farm, but also close-ups of calves and cows, and affection between humans and them. The awfulness of calves being separated from their mothers is shown, how they are thrown into trucks and how the cows follow the vehicles taking their offspring off to slaughter.

The person who fronts the documentary as an investigator is personable and an insider (a Maori, Chris Auriwai), as he unveils the facts behind the obfuscation put forward by the biggest company in New Zealand, the industrial dairy giant co-op Fonterra. His approach might be low-key, but he is obviously committed and knowledgeable, thus engendering confidence in the viewer that he is right in what he says, especially with the use of substantiated facts, the occasional animation and graphs. His efforts to get the corporation's side of the story are thwarted by officials' refusal to meet with him, therefore underlining the dodginess of their practices.

This documentary uses many techniques of persuasion.

- Direct address: Chris speaks to the viewers throughout.
- Rhetorical questions: "What did the biggest company in our country have to hide?" "Do we have to keep doing things the same way?"
- Pejoratives: The dairy industry is referred to as a cancer. It is poisoning rivers. Milk exacerbates and even causes colorectal, prostate and breast cancer.
- Glittering generalities: Fonterra claims to be "delivering the most nutritious dairy products, connecting with communities and caring for the environment". A politician refers to meat and milk as "our legacy industry".
- Card-stacking: "Industrial dairying is this country's biggest polluter. It's our biggest climate emitter, emitting more greenhouse gases

than our entire transport sector. It's our biggest water polluter. And it's also a major stressor for biodiversity and for soil health.”

- Transfer: The people interviewed are those who instil confidence as they are scientists, nutritionists and former politicians as well as activists.
- Testimonial: The person whose comments are filmed most is Jane Goodall, underlining the credibility of the central ethos of the film.
- Plain-folks: Chris makes this clear from the start that he is typical of young rural New Zealanders, having grown up having Weetbix with milk every morning; later, local residents and farmers who feel hard done by give their views.
- Bandwagon: An increasing number of people are seen to be standing up against exploitation by the dairy industry.

All this adds to a superb documentary that eschews wild statements and is structurally focused; even when health issues and animal well-being are considered, we see this in the context of environmental degradation. It ends on a note of hope, solutions for the future which will not be reliant on animal agriculture but will also serve farmers and consumers. This is important as it shows a way forward that other documentaries sometimes stop short of.

It is vital to include a film such as *Milked* in the discussion of animal rights. Even if the focus is on health or the environment, an underlying message is that farmed animals are abused and that to move from eating them to having plants as the sole diet can only benefit them. It is another way of driving the message home, no matter that the *raison d'être* for the documentary might not be primarily their lives and well-being.

#### 4.3.7 *The Individual*

Two animal rights documentaries that focus on individual animals are *Gunda* and *Cow*, the first where the protagonist is a sow and the second where we follow the life of a cow. Both of them underline the uniqueness of any animal's life: experience through sentience, love, grief and suffering. We do not see a multitude of animals here but, in each, one that we can focus on; from this we can extrapolate to all. They serve as a vital stylistic counterpoint to all the other documentaries discussed in this study, and form a link to narrative films where the focus is usually on individuals.

#### 4.3.7.1 Gunda (2020; Kossakovsky)

Filmed on farms and sanctuaries in Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom, with Joaquin Phoenix once more having a role in it, this time as a co-producer, the Russian director Victor Kossakovsky's *Gunda* enables us to relate to a single pig over several months as she raises her twelve or so offspring.

In black and white, the filming concentrates on long takes, slow panning and very often close-ups to help connect us to the animals portrayed. Everything seems beautifully bucolic, with nothing happening except what could be regarded as a humdrum, uneventful life. It is the viewers who might be nervous, not the farmed animals, because we are waiting for something awful. Gunda herself, unlike Luma in *Cow*, seems to be unaware of what lurks around the corner of time.

In this observational and subdued film of ninety minutes, we see Gunda with her newly born piglets, caring for them as they excitedly suckle, then, some time later, taking them outside to let them snuffle about, and a bit later still becoming obviously tired with their demands as they grow up, and sometimes seeking time away in mud while they frisk about as they get bigger and go from babies to porcine pre-teens. This is interspersed by fifteen minutes of a clutch of hens and a one-legged rooster foraging, and by twelve minutes of a herd of bovids charging happily from their sheds towards fields of pasture. All the while, the only things heard are the susurrations of the wind in the trees, the sounds of the farmed animals we are looking at or others in the background, as well as birds cooing, chirping and singing. The only sign of a person is near the beginning of the documentary with a view of a pair of legs moving quickly away from the barn where Gunda and her children are, and then only for a second or so. All is peaceful, all are contented, it seems. But there is a wire fence around the farm that the chickens try unsuccessfully to get through and that other animals walk up to. They are, therefore, hemmed in by what is obviously a traditional farm, and not the factory farms that we see in other documentaries.

We can ask how different are these lives depicted from that of humans. Gunda is very much like a so-called traditional housewife (no sexism is intended here, but Gunda is female and a mother after all) who spends her whole day looking after her children and making sure that they have enough to eat as well as resting at certain times. The chickens are like a group of people, wandering about and looking for things to interest them. The cows and oxen stare at us at times, some are loners and others pair up

in what is obviously some sort of conversation and the enjoyment of company, like a couple of people going out together for a meal. Are all of them symbolic of human society, then, showing that there is little difference in roles, chores and socialization? This seems to be one of the messages: we are all similar.

This mood and similarity is broken towards the end of the film when we hear and then see a machine arrive. It is a combine harvester to which some sort of enclosed trailer is attached. Our first sight is a chilling one from the front, where we see what looks like rapacious teeth, a mouth agape. The machine is backed against the barn, a door is opened, we hear faint squeals, the door is shut and the machine leaves. We do not see the capture itself.

What we do see is Gunda looking confused and bereft for the remaining eleven minutes of the film. She tries to follow the machine but cannot get to it. She runs up and down, obviously worried. She sniffs the straw where her children were, but to no avail. She goes to a trough, gives it a quick bite, but then starts searching again. This is a mother in anguish. The mood is one of pathos. At times the focus is on her teats, indicating that they will not have a use any more—not for these youngsters at least. She stares into the camera, the focus is on her eyes. We must decide whether they are puzzled, angry or accusatory. Eventually, she approaches the barn opening. At the beginning of the documentary, we see her lying in the doorway as she does several times as the film progresses, always with her children around her. Now, she sadly goes through the doorway alone. The last shot is one of the empty doorway. Gunda is bereft. There is a hole in her life. And we feel for her.

This is an animal rights documentary that does not need commentary or dialogue. We understand that Gunda is a sentient being who suffers, and from there we understand that other farmed animals go through the same, whether they be chickens or cows. This is the message to viewers: it is morally wrong to take away the lives of others, to make them suffer, to leave them bereft, because they are so much like humans in experience and emotion. It is not nothing that happens; it is life; it is suffering; it is the individuality of a pig called Gunda.

#### 4.3.7.2 Cow (2021; Arnold)

Andrea Arnold's narrative films *Wasp* (2003), *Red road* (2006), *Fish tank* (2009) and *American honey* (2016) all depict in different ways a woman alone in a world she tries to make her own but which incorporates both

commercial and sexual exploitation. Her documentary *Cow* (2012) continues with this motif, but only here there is no chance of the protagonist finding a different or a new life. The cow is Luma (although this name does not come out in the film as such), a Holstein chosen by Arnold because of her feistiness, with Arnold “intrigued as to whether we would be able to see her consciousness if we followed her long enough”. It is “beautifully crafted and tender”, although “the ending is pure Tarantino” (Hattenstone 2022). Like *Gunda*, this is about a farmed animal’s life on a more traditional type of farm for the most part (except for mechanized milking), also observational in *cinema verité* mode, with no voice-over, and no dialogue except with the farmhands briefly talking to each other and to the cows. And like *Gunda*, it is a tragic life that we witness where the farmed animals are deemed expendable. Like *Gunda*, the cow (number 1129) and her calf (number 04481) are tagged, thus indicating their being viewed as property, numbers in a system with the ethos of economic profit.

Unlike the documentaries of animals on factory farms, the farmhands here speak decently to them, even gently at times. However, as far as animal rights are concerned, what happens to the cow is anathema: she is used as a milk machine for the money she can bring for the farm and when she cannot anymore she becomes an object to be expunged.

The documentary starts with the mooing of a cow, followed by a close-up of her looking into the camera: lens to lens. We see her licking her newborn calf and then something akin to gentle whispering. The calf is allowed to suckle only once but is then fed formula milk, after which the cow is led to a milking machine. Her lowing continues unabated, and we see her watching in obvious distress where her calf is taken—to a pen away from her. Then, the calf is fed from an artificial udder, is branded, is tagged and follows a farmhand by sucking an offered finger. It is obvious that both mother and child crave affection from each other. Filming is usually done at the level of the cow or calf, so we often see what they see rather than looking down at them from the vantage point of the human eye.

Arnold portrays the passing of time by moving from scenes of the mother to scenes of her calf, both of whom look lonely, with the cow often seen peering into the distance, or directly into the camera, her eyes meeting ours, thus underlying her having an individuality, her own life force and also accentuating the pathos that is brought home to the viewer. On the other hand, there are long shots of cows when they are allowed to go into the fields, their silhouettes beautifully filmed against trees to indicate what could have been an idyllic life.

Needle drop music is important in this documentary as it is piped into the cowsheds from Radio 1. Some of the titles of the songs are significant, appropriate and ironic, including “Lovely”, “Everybody loves you”, “Mad love”, “I’m waiting for you” and, during the mating scene, “Tyrant”.

“Luma” is milked and milked and milked. Then she is examined by a vet who tells the farmers, “She was only slightly dirty”; this refers to there having been only a slight discharge from the uterus. He says next that the “main focus will be to try to get her cycling again”. In other words, to get her ovulating, as part of the reproductive cycle, which means they want to get her pregnant again as soon as possible in order to calve and produce milk.

Some time later, she is introduced to a bull who mounts her, but as he is about to penetrate her, the scene switches to fireworks exploding in the night sky. At first this might appear to be a somewhat cheap image, somewhat akin to Hemingway’s description in *For whom the bell tolls* of the earth moving during orgasm (Hemingway 1940: 174), but it is really a way of showing that this event occurs on the 5th of November, during Guy Fawkes. This makes sense because her uterus is palpated thirty-six days later to determine that she is pregnant. A later image of a hot-air balloon displaying the Union Jack could indicate St George’s Day (the 23rd of April), another way of indicating the passing of the months, and that what is happening on this farm is typical of what occurs throughout such farms in the UK. When she gives birth to another calf, she becomes aggressive when the farmhands try to take her calf away, and we hear that “this is the first time she has become like this”, and that it could be because of “old age”. We also learn that this is the sixth time she has had her children taken away from her. As she now becomes uncooperative and she has full udders, she is forced to the milking machine, while she bellows incessantly in frustration and grief. The farmhand is wearing an elf’s cap, obviously indicating that it is Christmastide. We witness how this supposed time of love and celebration in Christianity is undermined by the inhumanity revealed, and in a barn of all places. This hypocrisy is underlined when we see that the cow’s udder ligaments have ruptured, she is led off, she can barely walk, her legs splay out continually, she is taken to a shed apart and shot in the head.

Because of the many close-ups, because of the perpetual lowing in what can only be confusion, grief and anger, because of the cow with whom the viewers have been encouraged to connect throughout, this can only be regarded as an animal rights documentary. And because the last scene,

while the credits are rolling, is that of the first calf running along with many others, we realize that this process is ongoing. It will be a case of like mother, like child. This might be a farm more decent than factory farms, but the result is the same: the exploitation and suffering of a particular animal. One is reminded of the opening of “Burnt Norton” in *Four quartets* by T.S. Eliot (1959: 13):

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past.

The lives of animals on such a farm go on in this way generation after generation.

Like *Gunda, Cow*'s poignant message comes across as strongly as the horrors depicted in the other documentaries that have more bloodshed and violence throughout: monetary profit is the goal of farmers, no matter how animals are treated, and the result at the end is the same: suffering and death. No voice-over is needed here, no commentary: the visuals and lowing speak for themselves.

#### 4.4 SHORT VIDEOS MADE AT FARM SANCTUARIES AND BY INDIVIDUALS

In today's world of social media, with the majority of people able to take their own videos ranging from selfies, to socio-politico-cultural comments, to opportune ones of shattering events, those related to animal rights are also put on Facebook or YouTube or whatever other forums the video-maker opts for. Just as it is incumbent on this study to give a few examples of such videos, it is beyond its parameters to go into detail. A broad overview will have to suffice, with the concentration being on the videos made by farm sanctuaries.

The lyrics from the title song of Lerner and Loewe's musical, *Camelot*, could well be appropriate for the ideals of farm sanctuaries:

In short, there's simply not  
A more congenial spot  
For happily-ever-aftering than here  
In Camelot. (Lerner & Loewe 1961)

This is evident in many sanctuary documentaries of life on the farms which underline the work there for the cause of animal rights. However, these sanctuaries are not just sanguine about the lives of rescued animals, but also have videos of farmed animal abuse as well as before-and-after films of these animals. These films are able to reach an audience more quickly and at times possibly even more effectively than big-budget documentaries. They are generally short and are often viewed by other animal rights advocates who can use them to show to those who are yet to be converted. They also serve as a vehicle to encourage viewers to visit these sanctuaries, attend talks or walkabouts to see the rescues and then possibly change their ideology and eating habits to plant-based.

Such videos portray the kind of farm where filming has taken place and, as with the grander documentaries, can be divided into the omnibus type (such as the VINE sanctuary in Springfield, Vermont, with its intersectional commitment to animal rights, gender equality and social justice), the compendium ones (most of them), those concentrating on one species only (such as *Goats of Anarchy* in Annandale, New Jersey), those that interview activists and those that focus on one animal only, a mini-exposition of the *Gunda* and *Cow* ilk.

There are about two hundred farm animal sanctuaries in the world (with about half in the USA and more than fifty in Australia), most of which post videos ranging from a few seconds to several minutes of what they are doing, whom they have rescued and various types of farmed animal exploitation in their countries. Some sanctuaries are large, long-established and well known, even internationally so, such as Farm Animals Sanctuary in Watkins Glen, New York (established about thirty-six years ago), the Farm Animal Sanctuary in Evesham, England (this has been going for thirty years) and Edgar's Mission Sanctuary in Lancefield, Australia (from 2003); others are younger, smaller or have less funding than these, being in countries where corporate support is hard to find; we can mention Juliana's Animal Sanctuary in Colombia; Freedom Farm Sanctuary in Olesh, Israel and Asher's Farm Sanctuary, near Pretoria, South Africa. The last has most probably one of best videos on the story of a sanctuary animal before and after rescue, that of the emaciated and terribly beaten horse Duke, thrown out of a cart on the side of the road, left to die, but rescued and then restored to joyous health, before a sudden death a year later. A documentary such as this one but with a more commonly eaten animal, such as a cow, a pig or a chicken, could well be effective for the abnegation of food from animals if posted widely. Asher's also

sets a fine example with its video of Babe who, as a piglet on the way to slaughter, jumped from a moving truck, was picked up in the road and then was brought to the sanctuary.

Related to farm sanctuary videos is the filming on a cell phone of events and issues by any member of the public. A prime exponent of cell phone videos is Jane Velez-Mitchell (2021), with her #JaneUnChained digital news network that concentrates on animal rights and veganism and has a significantly large viewership. Her videos cover a wide range of subjects, sometimes preaching to the converted, but at other times being watched for initial reasons by those interested in linked issues. Examples include “Meet your hamburger on the way to her death”, “Texas cattle ranch turns vegan sanctuary” and the vegan hunk series, covering ethics, climate, health and appearance.

Such documentaries should never be discounted. What they sometimes lack in artistry, they might well make up in commitment, in documenting the trials and tribulations as well as the joy of farmed animals. It should always be borne in mind that every filmmaker has the right to make the kind of film that concentrates on or reflects aspects that they deem important and that they want to communicate to the wider public.

The intention of all these videos is to garner the compassion of viewers and also mobilize them to take action against abuse, help free the incarcerated by legal means if possible and lend a hand in supporting those rescued wherever they might be.

## 4.5 CONCLUSION

Filmmakers are often driven to make the documentaries that they wish to, and this is especially so with those related to animal rights. Profit is not the underlying factor but communication to the public is in an effort to allay the plight of farmed animals. It helps for such filmmakers to have some *savoir faire*, some knowledge of what would work best in convincing their audience, and that is why there are so many ways of making such a film, as we have seen in the examples above. Even though the different aspects of audience studies are beyond the parameters of this book, we should bear in mind that viewers should not be regarded as passive, but able to select, compare and interpret images, sounds and ideas (cf. Rancière 2009: 11), and then take action themselves. Therefore, the documentary has to be tendentious and has to promote a certain ideology.

This could be by showing all the gore and gruesomeness of farmed animal slaughter; it could be by interviewing activists who appeal to the morality of viewers; it could be by showing the life of an individual animal and how they have to contend with the horrors around them and to which they are led. All these carry weight in determining what a manifesto regarding animal rights in film should comprise. And they are all related not only to documentaries but also to narrative films.

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## Animal Rights and Narrative Films

*Every human communication involves storytelling of a sort: ... we describe ourselves and others in narrative form ... And, in fact, the brain scientists tell us that people assimilate things much better through stories than through recitals of mere facts.*

*Margaret Atwood: Literature and the environment.*

*In Burning questions (Atwood 2022: 139; 142).*

*Old Major cleared his throat and began to sing ... The words ran:*

*Beasts of England, beasts of Ireland,*

*Beasts of every land and clime,*

*Hearken to my joyful tidings*

*Of the golden future time.*

*George Orwell: Animal farm (Orwell 1964: 7).*

*SUSAN: That's a grand story.*

*HONOR: He tells it lovely ...*

*PEGEEN: ... there's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed.*

*John Millington Synge: The playboy of the western world.*

*(Synge 1968: Act Two—103; Act Three—169).*

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Narrative films are in line with the above comment by Margaret Atwood: they have a story to tell. And this is much in evidence in films about farmed animal rights. Many of these films show or, at the least, imply the horrors of such animals' lives, being, as Old Major says in *Animal farm*, “miserable, laborious and short” (Orwell 1964: 3), but most (certainly not all) of them end with a look towards the “golden future time”. This reflects bell hooks's view that “the function of art is to do more than tell it like it is—it's to imagine what is possible” (hooks 1994: 281). In the end, the majority of these stories are “grand” and told in a lovely way, but if we think back, behind the general happy endings are the dirty deeds that precede them.

Cinematic portrayals of such stories that concern animal rights have a wide range. There are flibbertigibbet ones with loads of talking and entertaining all the time; these are generally animated films such as *Chicken run* (2000; Lord & Park) and *Free birds* (2013; Hayward). They might be fun, but do reflect on serious issues of animal abuse that are customary in many societies.

The great war poet Wilfred Owen wrote that “the poetry is in the pity” (Owen 1931:40), and some narrative films about the plight of farmed animals are related to this: they are full of pathos, with the poetry found in the intensity of feeling shown and then engendered in the viewer, such as in the French film *Au hasard Balthazar* [*Balthazar, at random*] (1966a; Bresson), and also in the related Indian film in Tamil, *Agraharathil kazbutai* [*A donkey in a Brahmin village*] (1977; Abraham).

Then, there are the narrative films that go on the attack, showing the terrible lives that farmed animals are subject to, as well as the horrors of the slaughterhouse or of experimentation, such as we see in *Gordy* (1994; Lewis), *Ferdinand* (2017; Saldanha) and *Okja* (2017; Bong Joon Ho). We rarely see the expressed desire for revenge on the perpetrators of cruelty, such as in *Bold native* (2010; Hennelly), but here the revenger is a human; and in *Animal Farm* (1954; Halas & Batchelor), but only the beginning.

What all these animal rights films and the others to be discussed have in common is storytelling, something that has entranced and entertained audiences from the first narrative film that was more than one scene, Alice Guy-Blaché's 1896 *La fée aux choux* [*The cabbage fairy*]. Most narrative films about farmed animals generally have one character as a protagonist

although there are exceptions, such as the two films of *Animal farm*, with their conglomeration of characters. The focus on the individual is in contrast with documentaries that concentrate on the multitude (exceptions being *Gunda* and *Cow*); but from the individual we can extrapolate to the collective, and from the animated we can consider the real, whether during watching or after. We become involved through characterization and are gripped by suspense and conflict, willing our favourites to survive and be victorious.

Something of a Cinderella in the subject of films and animal rights is screenwriting. As this has more resonance with narrative than with documentary films, this aspect of film is discussed briefly here. Screenplays tell stories, and as set out by the International Affiliation of Writers Guilds, they are stories “that influence our behaviour and shape our culture. They help us understand. Stories can conquer fear. Stories have power” (in Conor 2010: 267–268).

There have been dozens of how-to publications on screenwriting in general, among the most well-known and helpful being Syd Field’s *Screenplay: The foundations of screenwriting*, first published in 1979 (Field 2005); Linda Seger’s *Making a good script great* (Seger 2010); Robert McKee’s *Story: Substance, structure, style and the principles of screenwriting* (McKee 1997); Christopher Vogler’s *The writer’s journey: Mythic structure for writers* (Vogler 2020); Linda Aronson’s *The 21st century screenplay: A comprehensive guide to writing tomorrow’s films* (Aronson 2010); and Blake Snyder’s *Save the cat: The last book on screenwriting that you’ll ever need* (Snyder 2005).

The selling-points of many such books are how to write (the three-act structure is generally de rigueur), how to be noticed (how to get your idea across succinctly in an elevator if need be) and how to make money (what kind of story could grab the attention of a director or producer). These are all important and fine for what they stand for, but are not the only vital areas as far as the ethos underlying this book is concerned. In short, the notion of a relationship to social issues is generally lacking.

Petr Szczepanik makes the point that the screenplay is in many ways a paradoxical text. Concentrating on Czech film under a communist regime, he explains: “At once literary work and production blueprint, it provides a link between cultural politics, a production system, and everyday production routines” (Szczepanik 2013: 76). In freer societies, the screenwriter has more leeway, but sometimes must abide by the formulaic writing that a studio demands (Cf. Staiger 1983: 33–45).

As the focus here is on the overall portrayal of animal rights, less attention is given to the stylistic or technical aspects of the three-act structure or arc of development in the films. Suffice it to say that many of the films move through setting to problem to false resolution to complication to trauma to solution (prime examples are *Babe*, *Chicken run*, *Free birds*, *Ferdinand*, *Okja* and both of *Charlotte's Web*). On the other hand, *Au hazard Balthazar* and *Agraharathil kazhutai* do not fit neatly into such a formulaic structure. It is more important for this study to examine how these films promote animal rights overall.

We could well ask how important the screenwriter is. Of the seventeen narrative films discussed here, the directors had a hand in seven or eight of the screenplays (*Be humane* is a possibility). Sometimes the director had the kernel idea for the film or was the primary or only writer (Joy Batchelor and John Halas in the 1954 *Animal farm*; Robert Bresson in *Au hasard Balthazar*; Denis Henry Hennelly in *Bold native*; Bong Joon Ho in *Okja* and Simon Amstell in *Carnage*), or had an input in the writing (Chris Noonan in *Babe* and Jimmy Hayward in *Free birds*). Therefore, it was the screenwriter-cum-director's point of view, even ideology, that drove the making of these films. But it was the screenwriter's initial impetus and point of view that held sway in a number of the others.

In general, screenwriters should be considered as more than the purveyors of raw material. Some directors regard themselves as, and indeed are, the auteurs of a film, but in a call for the vital role of the screenwriters, I must stress that with many films it is the latter's imagination, skill, view of the world and ethos that directors take and make their own. The script can well be the basis of a film's success (or failure). The influential and celebrated screenwriter, director and actor, Orson Welles, emphasized this in saying: "In my opinion, the writer should have the first and last word in filmmaking, the only better alternative being the writer-director, but with the stress on the first word" (Quoted by Corliss 2008 [1973]: 143). It is beyond the scope of this book to examine what a director does with the original screenplay (how it coalesces, how it differs), but we should not underestimate the driving force of the screenwriters, such as Venkat Swaminathan (*Agraharathil kazhutai*), Karey Kirkpatrick (*Chicken run*, and the 2006 *Charlotte's web*), and Tim Federle and Brad Copeland (*Ferdinand*). Despite this, our focus here must remain on the film itself—the finished product that is viewed by cinema audiences wherever they might be.

Many of these narratives are akin to fairy stories, as Orwell designates *Animal farm* with its subtitle of *A fairy story*. Fairy stories usually have the notion (implied even if not explicitly stated) of “once upon a time”, with the understanding that what we are about to read, hear or view is not real and took place in another era or realm, time or world. The humans, farmed animals or other creatures we meet are not necessarily like those we come across in daily life, especially if all of them are able to speak to and understand one another. Such stories (unlike folk tales) also end “happily ever after”, and we finish the book, story or film feeling warm and that all will be right with the world. Until, of course, we remember that the world is not really like that at all. *Babe*, *The Muppet musicians of Bremen* and *Chicken run* all end happily for the main characters, but not all narrative films about farmed animals are like that: *Au hasard Balthazar* and *Agrabarathil kazhutai* are too realistic and upsetting, especially at the end with the former, to be considered fairy stories in any ways: they are arch-realistic, as is the Japanese film *Buta ga ito kyōshitsu*. Therefore, farmed animal rights films cannot be bound by the category of the fairy story, although some do have certain elements in which we must willingly suspend our disbelief, to paraphrase Coleridge (1817: 216).

This is crucial when watching any film, but those about farmed animals discussed in this chapter have another facet that we must consider. Although some are obviously light froth, others, like *Okja* and, possibly, *Free birds* and *Babe*, have a tendentiousness that cannot be ignored. The audience should not leave just with a warm glow, but with resolution to transform the particular world of cruelty portrayed. Whether this results or not depends on the final message that is brought home.

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, films about farmed animals have a visual language mediated by the human lens (person or camera). As a result, it is difficult to escape “a humanised view of animal life” (Ryan 2015: 37). Therefore, filmmakers should strive for an empathetic imagination to try to mirror what is deemed to be the emotional state of the farmed animals.

## 5.2 THE NARRATIVE FILMS UNDER DISCUSSION

Films often have what Berys Gaut calls “the locus of perceptual identification” (Gaut 2006: 265), with the viewers seeing what a particular character is shown as seeing. This concept is linked to narrative theory, with its concept of “focalization” that describes “the focus of attention of a given

representation” in which “the viewer activates anthropomorph schemata-orienting emotions or goals” (Grodal 1997: 90). Can we get inside the mind, or do we just have an exterior view of the character? With the seventeen films discussed here, we are sometimes led to believe that we know what it is to be such a farmed animal, how they feel, what they think.

The films discussed were made and originally screened in five languages (English, French, Japanese, Korean and Tamil). Those in each subsection are discussed in chronological order:

- Adaptations from Novels: the two of *Animal farm*, the two of *Charlotte’s web* and *Babe*.
- Animated Antics: *Be human*, *Chicken run*, *Free birds* and *Ferdinand*.
- The Quest—Flimflam, Filial and Fulminating: *The Muppet musicians of Bremen*, *Gordy* and *Okja*.
- Docudrama/Dramadoc/Fictional facticity Mockumentary: *Buta ga ita kyōshitsu*, *Bold native* and *Carnage*.
- Downers: *Au hasard Balthazar* and *Agraharathil kazhutai*.

### 5.2.1 Adaptations from Novels

Literary works, such as novels and plays, have served as inspirations for films from 1896, starting with *Trilbee and Little Billee* (American Mutoscope Company), a short scene based on George du Maurier’s 1894 book *Trilby*. The first full-length film based on a novel was most probably *David Copperfield* (1911; Nichols), the first of many based on the Charles Dickens 1850 novel, the latest being *The personal history of David Copperfield* (2019; Ianucci).

In adaptations or transtextuality—the term used by Gérard Genette (1997)—there will always be changes “the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium” (Bluestone 1957: 5–6). The aim of film-makers is not an exact transmutation from the original source, but to use it as a stimulus. Robert Stam posits that strict fidelity in adaptation is not possible:

An adaptation is automatically different and original due to the change of medium. The shift from a single-track verbal medium such as the novel to a multitrack medium like film which can play not only with words (written and spoken) but also with music, sound effects, and moving photographic

images, explains the unlikelihood, and I would suggest even the undesirability of literary fidelity. (Stam 2005: 4)

For this study, a useful classification of the transition of fiction into film is that of Geoffrey Wagner. He differentiates three types: transposition (which implies a minimum of apparent change), commentary (which restructures and alters in whatever way the original) and analogy (which changes the original considerably) (Wagner 1975: 222–227). However, instead of “commentary”, I would prefer “reimagining”. Examples of the first two will be seen later in this chapter. An example of the last would be *Pretty woman* (1990; Marshall), which is essentially a Cinderella story, as pointed out by Thomas Leitch (2007: 94), and seemingly based on George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*. If one considers *Au hasard Balthazar* [*Balthazar, a random*] to be a Christian allegory, this film could also fall into this last category, but we are more concerned here with films based on novels.

The order of the films discussed here is in the chronological order of publication of the books on which they were based, rather than in the order of film production. Those to be discussed are the two films of *Animal farm* (1945), the two of *Charlotte’s web* (1952) and *Babe* (based on *The sheep-pig* of 1983). (The somewhat chaotic *Babe: Pig in the city*, with some characters from the original film, will not feature in this discussion as it has little to do with farmed animal rights or liberation.) The film *Ferdinand* was inspired by Munro Leaf’s 1936 book, *The story of Ferdinand*, but apart from the frame or even idea of the brief and charming story (a flower-loving bull who is taken to a bullfight but refuses to take part and then returns home), the full-length film is different with events, characters, subplots and humour; therefore, this will be discussed with other animated films where the main character has agency.

#### 5.2.1.1 *Animal Farm* (1954; Halas and Batchelor)

In reconsidering and reimagining the original sources, filmmakers have to take into account the length of the film, budget constraints, updating, relocating, the target audience and the demands of the underwriters.

These underwriters played a crucial role in the first film based on George Orwell’s *Animal farm* (1954; Halas & Batchelor). In the novel, we have a group of farmed animals who rebel against and overthrow their cruel human oppressor, Mr Jones. Initially, things go well until the pigs take over completely, the other animals suffer cruelly, there are murders,

the pigs live lives of luxury at the expense of the others and at the end they take on the lifestyle and accoutrements of humans, even looking like them. The animated film follows the events reasonably closely, filmed mostly in pastel shades, with a dispassionate voice-over giving the occasional setting, the period elapsed or the emotions and thoughts of the animals. The music by Mátyás Seiber complements the mood throughout with what appears to be the influence of his mentor Zoltán Kodály's orchestration with folk song and jazzy movements. What does not work is the replacement of the song "Beasts of England" that looks forward to the time when "Tyrant man shall be o'erthrown", with a cacophony of sound; however, it is more realistic as the words cannot quite be grasped and we hear the animals neighing, braying, baying, mooing and bleating away. The mood is dark for the most part, with a few instances of gratuitous Disney-like comedy, usually with a young duckling not quite being able to accomplish what the older animals are doing.

No human woman appears in the film (the only one in the novel is Mrs Jones, and that, just for one sentence). So, it is human men who appear as caricatures, physically ugly, self-seeking, stupid and nasty.

The first part certainly reflects animal rights. Old Major, the oldest and wisest pig, gives his final words to the assembled animals: their lives will be truncated—"Few of us will ever know the blessings of a peaceful old age"; they are treated abominably—"Whatever we produce is taken from us, stolen from us and sold"; farmer Jones must be got rid of—"Overthrow this evil tyrant, then we shall be rich and free"; and then an injunction—"But remember when you have got rid of Jones, don't adopt his vices." Shortly afterwards, Old Major dies, the drunken Jones forgets to feed the animals, they break down the food sheds, he arrives to whip them, and they rebel and chase him from the farm. Revolution is complete, and utopia has arrived.

This glorious period continues under the leadership of two pigs, the arch enemies Snowball and Napoleon, until Napoleon's dogs, whom he has trained, attack Snowball and chase him from the farm. Hardship follows, and that is the end (until the final scene) of animal liberation, with Napoleon becoming a dictator. When any animals try to rebel against his strictures, they are murdered.

A technique in the film, that possibly moves it more into the animal rights genre than the novel, is the issue of human speech. In the book, all the animals converse in English, but in the film the only ones who use such speech are the pigs, who are also able to write and draw; thus, they are

really humanoids whereas the others remain farmed animals. Exceptions are the sheep, who continually intone, “Four legs good, two legs bad”, but they are shown as unthinking and merely puppets of the regime. Other occasional animal rights flashes in this film are when the pigs at the beginning have visions of their fellows hanging from hooks after having been slaughtered, and, also, chickens seeing a couple of their killed fellows hanging from a rafter. Their own squashed rebellions and murders come later.

Another aspect where animal rights come to the fore is the ending. Orwell wrote this book as a satire of Soviet Communism, and the conclusion has the other farmed animals looking through a window of the farmhouse where the pigs are entertaining a group of men, and realizing that they all look similar. It ends darkly: the pigs have become humans; the others will remain forever enslaved and have lives of horrendous hardship. The ending of the film makes it appear in line with Orwell’s subtitle: like a fairy tale and the possibility of a happy-ever-after ending, although it is more open-ended than conclusive, considering what has happened in the past, and with the implied possibility of humans returning. Here, Napoleon and his coterie are entertaining wealthy pigs from all over England, when the other animals see what is going on. They are led by a braying donkey, Benjamin, the great friend of the deceased horse, Boxer, who has been sold to the knackers. Benjamin (in the book, the wisest of the animals, but who remains aloof from the action) decides to take revenge and the other animals join him in attacking the pigs, killing them and ravaging the farmhouse. Therefore, in the end, the other farmed animals triumph.

This change came about through the underwriting of the film by the CIA (Leab 2007; Senn 2015). This organization saw the film as a vital cultural cog in attacking the evils of Communism: democracy will reign, and the Soviets and their satellites will be deservedly overthrown by the people. In our context, we go back to Old Major’s speech: the golden, future time will come as tyrant man, whatever his guise might be, should be defeated in order for all animals to have lives of fulfilment and joy. This is certainly a softening of the ending and, in the context of the time, obvious propaganda, but I am looking at the animal rights implications here. In a consideration of the interpretation or teaching of this film, it could be from this perspective as well as from the obvious and intended political one. As Peter Marks points out, “every adaptation invites multiple interpretations as part of a potentially unending interactive process” (Marks 2021: 1681).

### 5.2.1.2 Animal Farm (1999; Stephenson)

Almost half a century after the first filmic adaptation of *Animal farm*, the second one saw a combination of live-action and the animatronic. This *Animal farm* (1999; Stephenson) takes even more liberties with the original text, with humans playing a larger role, Pilkington being the major antagonist and then supporter of trade with the farm, and his wife bedding the perpetually drunken Jones. It has a minor character in the novel, the border collie Jessie (the mother of the pups who become the enforcers of Napoleon's cruel oppressive measures) framing the action by being the almost omniscient narrator, appearing, even if briefly, in every scene on the farm, watching, commenting and then taking the initiative at the end. In many ways, she is the intelligent moral centre of the film.

In this film, all the animals converse in English with one another, with their voices underlining their characters: Jessie speaks in beautifully modulated received pronunciation, Old Major has Churchillian phraseology (something like the character in the original film), the sheep sound dim, Napoleon stentorian.

Once again, the film starts with human cruelty being highlighted. Pilkington's sons use their slingshots to hurt the farmed animals, and Jones tries to fell Boxer with a rock, but Jessie prevents that. Moses, the priestlike raven, admonishes Jessie, by telling her that "no animal can attack a human," but she responds, "No human should ever hurt an animal."

Old Major's speech, based on Orwell's original of "our lives are miserable, laborious, and short", becomes: "Animal kind is born to a miserable, laborious, and short existence ... And when our usefulness has come to an end, we are slaughtered with hideous cruelty ... And who, pray, is responsible for our suffering? Huh? Hm? Man! Man is our enemy ... Remove man and the root cause of hunger and overwork is abolished for ever." He then leads them in a song, again not of Orwell's more catchy, "Beasts of England", but of "Beasts of the world we will unite", which has the same animal rights message but is not nearly as powerful. All this is interspersed with clips of people partying, thus showing their disregard of the farmed animals, their hardship and their suffering, of which the humans are the causes.

More animal rights activism is seen after Old Major dies and his body is hacked into edible pieces. When Jessie is offered some of his ribs to eat, she runs off. In fact, we never see her eating any animal product, even when eggs are broken around her, thus cementing her moral rectitude.

After the rebellion, when the animals go into the farmhouse, they are horrified to see hams hanging (they then are buried), there is the comment that “animals die so that humans can be in comfort” when they see leather chairs and feathered mattresses, and the principles of animalism are in place. John Rodden holds that “the effect of these scenes [also with Boxer being taken off to the glue factory] is to promote an anti-vivisectionist animal rights agenda” (Rodden 2003: 69). These scenes, however, are more than “anti-vivisectionist”, a term used incorrectly by Rodden; they are rather examples of the overall cruelty of humans and support for animal rights. A discordant feature is the appearance of a rat in the first part of the film, passing trite comments (possibly to get a cheap laugh), which have little to do with the action and which detract from the immediate emotional impact of the narrative.

A third of the way into the film, at thirty minutes, we notice Napoleon’s obvious undermining of joyous coexistence, and animal rights go for a loop from this time onwards as the pigs become increasingly human-like.

Songs are interspersed throughout to add a different flavour to the film and as a break from the horrors, and nearly all to do with glorifying Napoleon. They also can be understood as being in conjunction with composer Richard Harvey’s instrumental music that complements the action throughout: at first generally sounding typically and appropriately English, something like Vaughan Williams’s *Folk song suite*, but morphing into something akin to Westerns music when Napoleon starts asserting himself.

As the pigs increasingly adopt human behaviour (sleeping in beds, getting drunk, murdering other animals), capitalism plays a growing role, with Pilkington after profit and Napoleon after power and liquor, while the other animals starve and are forced to work harder.

It is only Jessie towards the end who peers through a window and cannot tell the difference between Pilkington and Napoleon, and it is she who gets the surviving animals to run off and hide at the edge of the farm for years. It is here where the film starts and finishes, with her comments on and our seeing of the farm being destroyed in a storm; Napoleon and his cohorts are dead, with the only survivor of those who were once powerful being one of Jessie’s children. We are then greeted with a scene of puppies gambolling in the grass, the weather clears, the scenery is gorgeous, all is coming right with the world and Orwell’s original dark ending becomes facile and specious. A new family in a stylish car arrives to take over the farm, and an ageing Jessie has a semblance of hope that things will be

better: “After all we had been through, I needed to believe there was still hope.” However, she has cataracts and can barely see. This betokens a misplaced hope, no matter what she thinks or says. It might indicate a fairy-tale ending, but is really ambiguous. We can ask, “Quo vadis, animal rights?” It is unlikely to be on this farm.

At the end of this film, we are told that it was made “in accordance with the American Humane Association’s code for the use of animals in film”. This should be reassuring as the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) oversaw the filming (even if the SPCA is more animal welfare than rights). The final statement is that “scenes depicting cruelty were simulated or accomplished with the use of animatronic animals or computer graphics”. If so, then this would be in accordance with animal rights.

### 5.2.1.3 Charlotte’s Web (1972; *Nichols & Takamoto*)

Like E.B. White’s novel on which it is based (White 1952), the 1972 film *Charlotte’s web* is sweet and has a happy ending for Wilbur the pig who is saved by the skill and machinations of the remarkable spider Charlotte. He is earmarked for slaughter, but through Charlotte’s spinning the words “SOME PIG”, “TERRIFIC”, “RADIANT” and “HUMBLE” into her web at different times to describe him, he gains national celebrity and the farmer who has the say over life and death is eventually rewarded with \$25 which is enough for him to be grateful and promise never to kill Wilbur. Charlotte dies, but Wilbur looks after her egg sack and several generations of her offspring keep him company throughout his life, while they all live happily ever after.

The animals are anthropomorphized, and they talk fluent English with an impressive vocabulary. Some, including Wilbur and Charlotte, have gorgeous blue eyes like Wilbur’s original rescuer, the farmer’s daughter Fern. There are ten or so songs, with the most charming possibly being Wilbur’s:

Isn’t it great that I articulate,  
Isn’t it grand that you can understand.

But the only human who understands is Fern. There is an obvious lack of communication between humans and farmed animals, and the former ignore the sentience and intelligence of the others, except when farmer Zuckerman, on reading Charlotte’s first message, says that they seem to

have no ordinary pig, and his wife, more accurately, disagrees by saying that it is really no ordinary spider who has spelled out the message.

We can ask whether this is an animal rights film. It is obviously aimed at children under the age of ten, and they might object to eating anything from a pig after seeing it. They might also object to any cruelty perpetrated on any animal. That is obviously good but merely a possibility. Apart from this, there is no change on the farm or by the humans who carry on eating meat (for instance, the boy Avery has a hamburger), and Fern is seen carrying an enormous bowl of eggs and drinking cow's milk.

However, we should not be too dismissive as rights and wrongs in the film could be discussed if the opportunity were to be given to the children. No human is obviously wicked, and the farm is set in a bucolic paradise. We are told that there is "no place more wonderful than a farm in spring-time". This is not an industrial farm, and any cruelty is not apparent apart from the initial attempt to kill Wilbur and his being told several times that his lot is to die to provide "bacon" and "ham" for the humans. His life hangs in the balance until the end, with Wilbur repeating several times, "I don't want to die." He and the other animals are always referred to as "it" and not "he" or "she", which shows that apart from Fern's view, they are regarded as objects, even if sweet and occasionally cuddly ones. But Fern's father, John Arable, does admit, after his daughter has convinced him to let her raise Wilbur, that "Fern was up at daylight trying to rid the world of injustice", which is taken verbatim from the book. Justice might triumph at the end, but that is only for Wilbur, and that is only because of a remarkable spider.

#### 5.2.1.4 *Charlotte's Web* (2006; Winick)

Like the first one, the second *Charlotte's web* remains consistent with the original E.B. White story, with the question of animal rights not being a major focus. This is rather just Wilbur's rights overseen by a vivacious Fern and the innovative Charlotte. Unlike the first one, this is a mixture of live action, animation, animatronic animals as well as real ones, and computer graphics (CG). We have a real pig in Wilbur for the most part, with CG being used in the stunt shots; Charlotte and Templeton the rat (who convincingly goes through a character arc from awful at first to endearing at the end) are entirely computer generated, the result being "a photorealistic arachnid and rodent" (Doyle 2006: 26). We are given the mantra at the end that "no animals were harmed in the making of this motion picture", which is possible to believe (although one wonders how the various

animals were trained), and pleasingly learn that “animals Australia was instrumental in finding homes for all the pigs used in the film and will minister their well being for the rest of their lives”. This might be reassuring, but it is a pity that the word “used” is in this sentence, adding to the notion that, unfortunately, the pigs could well have been seen both as sentient creatures and as objects to get the filming done.

At the start we are told in a voice-over that the people in this idyllic setting were ordinary and “didn’t question the order of things”. In other words, pigs were “used” for breeding, sale and eating. This is underlined by the scene immediately following Fern’s being given Wilbur to look after, by her mother frying “bacon” for breakfast. This ties up with Wilbur’s saying that “humans love pigs”, with Templeton’s riposte, “Hm—they love pork.”

Wilbur’s life hangs in the balance until the end, with farmer Zuckerman on being told that he could lose the fee for entering Wilbur into the “best pig” competition if he doesn’t win, responding: “Even if he does lose, I can make it all back on the bacon alone.” Thus, Wilbur remains a commodity to all, except Fern, who also actually abandons him when she grows up.

The final message is one of hope, however, with the song “A place in the sun” that is sung over the credits and that includes the lyrics: “There’s a place in the sun/Where there’s hope for everyone.”

The human characters in this film do not change regarding farmed animals on the whole, even if they are “a little bit kinder, a lot more understanding” after experiencing the miracle of Charlotte’s web. But this cannot be extended to all animals on the farm. It might be a film made in accordance with animal rights, but unless a youngster watching it is moved by not wanting to eat any Wilburs, and their parents allow this, and unless the film is discussed openly at home or at school, then it remains just a sweet and amusing film about an amazing spider, a humble pig and a compassionate girl.

#### 5.2.1.5 Babe (1995; Noonan)

We go from Wilbur, the humble pig, to Babe, the gallant one. This latter epithet is the subheading of the American publication, which changed Dick King-Smith’s (1983) charming book *The sheep-pig* to *Babe: The gallant pig*. The novel has little on animal rights, with the sheepdog Fly’s puppies hinting a few times that Babe is destined for slaughter, and Mrs. Hoggett on whose farm he lives, mentioning all the meat she’ll be able to

get from him. That is until she, like her husband, warms to him completely and changes her mind.

Even more pertinently, the start of the film shows the farrowing cages in a factory farm, the darkness in there and a large truck taking Babe's mother off to slaughter. While we are watching this, the voice-over tells us: "There was a time not so long ago when pigs were afforded no respect except by other pigs. They lived their whole lives in a cruel and sunless world." The implication is that such a time is past, with the subtext that those watching should realize that such cruelty should not be allowed to occur anymore. Nevertheless, there are suggestions throughout the film that pigs make fine meals: Farmer Hoggett (spelt "Hogget" in the book) is told when he guesses the weight of Babe that "Ah—Christmas Day. Think of it. What a feast"; Mrs. Hoggett considers whether roast pork or duck l'orange would make the better dish on that day. Furthermore, a duck, Rosanne, is killed to the music of "Away in a manger". The innuendo is that Christmas is essentially a day of murder for the farmed animals, which underlines the hypocrisy of those who celebrate it. This ties up with the wannabe-rooster duck, Ferdinand, who acts as the occasional moral spokesperson in the film, saying: "Dinner means death. Death means carnage."

Related to this, even if obliquely, is the music in the film. Although Nigel Westlake is given official credit for the film score, the music is mostly classically composed, the composers being Léo Delibes, Edvard Grieg, Georges Bizet, Gabriel Fauré and, more recently, Richard Rodgers. However, most heard is the theme from Camille Saint-Saëns's Third or Organ Symphony. We hear it throughout, and Farmer Hoggett hums, sings and dances to it when he tries to revive a depressed Babe. The lyrics are those of Scott Fitzgerald's "If I had words", emotionally accentuating here the importance of communication between species. Significantly, this music is based on the Gregorian chant, "Dies Irae", meaning the "Day of Wrath" and betokening the Last Judgment. The implication is that not only does Babe get through various judgements in the film, but, to take it further, so does Farmer Hoggett whose judgement is generally (but not always) favourable and at the end we realize that Babe will never be slaughtered for Christmas or for anything else. Both are, therefore, saved, and even if only few in the audience might realize it, this music betokens a triumph for farmed animal rights.

Susan McHugh (2002: 149) contends that *Babe* "culminates with the reconfiguration of social boundaries between animals, machines and

humans”, and that the “barnyard society shifts from an anthropological system, organized around the singular human, to a nonanthropocentric network, from which the human farmer becomes no less inseparable than the farm animals and machines”, with television (that humans and animals watch) facilitating cross-species communication. This is an interesting take on *Babe*; agreed that relationships do change in that Babe gets the dogs to talk gently to the sheep instead of snarling at and biting them, that the Hoggetts see pigs in a new way because of him, and that the farmed animals form a unity, as seen when they as well as Mrs. Hoggett elsewhere watch the sheep trials on television. But the farmer retains control in the hegemonic power dynamic, even if that control is a gentle one. On the other hand, it does give hope for increased amicability in the future.

The making of the film abided by anti-cruelty prescripts. Although the live animals were trained, this was evidently in accordance with the directives of the RSPCA and the American Humane Association (as we are told at the end). There is also the mantra given of no animals being maltreated or harmed in the making of the film, and any scenes depicting injury were simulated or accomplished with the use of animatronic animals or computer graphics. This, too, then, was in accordance with the underlining of animal rights in the making of a film.

Evidently, the screening of *Babe* led to a spurt in the number of young people becoming vegetarian, and of James Cromwell (who played Mr. Hoggett) becoming vegan and saying: “If any kid realized what was involved in factory farming, they would never touch meat again” (Nobis 2009: 58).

In writing about *Babe*, Val Plumwood (1997: 21–22) contends that this film is a work of art that “makes an effective and transformative representation of the situation of an oppressed subject”. The audience grows to care about what happens to such a being and realizes its own role in maintaining oppression. Furthermore, *Babe* provides “a rich context for thinking about ... representations of animal communication”. *Babe* succeeds in all these aspects and is an example of how film can promote animal rights and liberation.

### 5.2.2 *Animated Antics*

Animated films may bring a sense of the unreal with them, and as we suspend our disbelief we are entertained. Furthermore, they can portray issues that are of immediate or timeless concern, focus on specific areas but

have universal significance, make us laugh but also allow us to ponder on deeper and upsetting matters. They might well be directed at children, but the best can draw a teenage and an adult audience, too, and much discussion can ensue. Films about farmed animals are particularly relevant in this regard, especially if youngsters are able to or even allowed to see and comment on the bigger picture.

The films discussed in this section all fit well into this category of animated films about farmed animals, even if the setting is unusual and even if the farming is not what we usually come across. They are *Be human* (1936; Fleischer), *Chicken run* (2000; Lord & Park), *Free birds* (2013; Hayward) and *Ferdinand* (2017; Saldanha).

### 5.2.2.1 *Be Human* (1936; Fleischer)

The first film to be attuned to animal rights was a Betty Boop and Grampy black and white one, Dave Fleischer's 1936 *Be human*. At under seven minutes, it is also the shortest one discussed here, but it gets its animal justice message across strongly.

In this cartoon, Betty Boop sees her loutish neighbour brutalizing various animals: whipping a dog and a horse, punching in the face a cow who has not given sufficient milk and slamming down, possibly killing, a hen who has failed to provide him with eggs. Betty phones Grampy who owns Prof. Grampy's Animal Aid Society, and he rushes over to wreak vengeance (a taste of his own medicine, so to speak) on the brute. Grampy dumps him into a dungeon where he is continuously whipped while he runs on a treadmill until he changes his attitude. Meanwhile, all the animals are happily given food, even if by machine. What makes this more of an animal welfare than a rights film is the scene of the hens playing billiards with their eggs, and a cow's milk being given not to calves but to cats.

On the other hand, Betty Boop's song, written by Sammy Timberg, which she belts out while accompanying herself on the piano is what could be the credo of the farmed animal liberation movement. This is "Be human", although, more accurately, it should be "Be humane":

Be human, animals can cry,  
 Be human, it's easy if you try.  
 Don't go around with a heart of stone,  
 Or you'll be sorry and all alone.

Be human, have a tender word  
 For every animal and bird.  
 If we would all be human  
 This world would be in rhyme,  
 So be human all the time.

Be human, won't you even try.  
 Don't think you're wonderful just because  
 You weren't born with a tail and paws.

Be human, have a tender word  
 For every animal and bird.  
 It's futile to be brutal,  
 That won't get you a dime,  
 So be human all the time.

This is a call for the realization that all animals are sentient, that humans are not superior to others (in this case, farmed animals in particular) and that all animals should be treated with tenderness and respect. Almost ninety years on, similar films are still trying to get this message across.

#### 5.2.2.2 *Chicken Run* (2000; *Lord & Park*)

What a humdinger of a film *Chicken run* is, or to use slang terms in line with the puns we hear throughout, it is a corker and a blast, the last description being particularly relevant as the farm on which the chickens have been incarcerated is destroyed. The title has a double-meaning—that of the chicken's desire to run away (or fly off), as well as designating their enclosed area.

From the start, we realize that *Chicken run* is a spoof in many ways of the film *The great escape* (1963; Sturges). The earlier film portrays the escape from a German POW camp by a great number of British prisoners in World War II. The fenced-in enclosure of *Chicken run*, complete with barracks, barbed wire, a watchtower, searchlights, a camp guard, a character (here, a rooster) who was with the RAF, as well as evidence of trying to dig under the fence, references the earlier film. This is underlined by John Powell and Harry Gregson-Williams's music which echoes the melody, beat and orchestration of Elmer Bernstein's original.

The lead characters, Ginger and Rocky, seem to be from the 1950s screwball comedies starring Rosalind Russell, Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant and James Stewart, with their repartee and love interest.

Nevertheless, *Chicken run* can be regarded as a farmed animal rights film because of the setting and the understanding that when a hen stops laying eggs her head is chopped off and she becomes a meal for humans who are after financial gain all the time. As Ginger says, “We lay eggs day in and day out, and when we can’t lay anymore, they kill us.” This is exacerbated when the owners of Tweedy Farm decide to turn it into a “gold mine” with “full-scale automated production”. The young pre-teen viewers at whom the film is obviously aimed, would feel for the hens (and even the two vainglorious roosters), want Ginger and Rocky to escape from the nail-biting attempt to make them into pies, cheer these two on when they save each other as well as the rest, and applaud when they manage to escape and conquer their human oppressors. However, they would not realize that the take-off (in more than one way) of *The great escape* continues until the end when the aircraft the chickens build struggles to get over the fence, unlike the Steve McQueen character in the earlier film who crashes into one when he tries to escape from the Germans. Older and informed viewers might. Therefore, the film operates on at least two levels: the spoof and, more importantly, the call for the rights of chickens to live decent, unthreatened and free lives.

### 5.2.2.3 Free Birds (2013; Hayward)

Two other attempts at a great escape are seen in the computer-animated sci-fi film, *Free birds*—one in the present (unsuccessful) and the other in 1621 (seemingly more successful until the final scene halfway through the credits shows that it is not so). Both have to do with saving turkeys from the mass slaughter at Thanksgiving, an American, originally Christian-based, harvest festival.

Like *Chicken run*, the title could have different, even if related, meanings. “Free” could be a verb which is what the turkey hero, Reggie, desires to do—free his fellows; it could be an adjective, signifying what he wants the end result to be; and it could also be an imperative, even demanding that he and his fellows have no option but to go about saving turkeys and overturning a cruel and crass tradition. We have some tangential links to other films, such as James Cameron’s 2009 *Avatar*, with the outsider Reggie saved in a forest by the chief’s daughter, Jenny, this leading to them falling in love; to the Tarzan films, with swinging from lianas; to the most obvious, *The time machine*, the H.G. Wells 1895 novel as well as the two films based on it, but all these concentrate, even if not solely, on journeys into the future rather than into the past.

The film received negative reviews, with critics finding it slow, boring and unconvincing, but here we are looking at its imprimatur related to animal rights. A typical negative review is that of Sara Stewart (2013) in the *New York Post* who asks whether Hollywood is attempting “to turn your little ones into strident vegetarians”, in other words seeing this as something unfortunate and to be avoided, especially as she sees it as an “animated tale of turkeys trying to take back Thanksgiving”. Activists would actually consider this to be a good thing, but those opposed to animal rights could regard it as violating an essential part of American culture. Stephanie Merry (2013) in *The Washington Post* views this as something positive. She writes, “Finally, there’s a movie vegetarian parents can enjoy with their impressionable offspring.” And, indeed, this is how it should be seen in this context.

The film is also tongue-in-cheek in its take-off of other similar animated animal films, with the disclaimer that it is not historically accurate, “Except for the talking turkeys. That part is totally real.” As “real”, it appears, as English-competent farmed animals in other films discussed in this book. We, the audience, hear and understand what the turkeys say, but what the humans in the film hear is just “gobble-gobble-gobble”. The film is implying that just because we do not understand what other animals are saying in reality and if all that we hear is a mishmash of sounds, this does not mean that these animals do not communicate effectively with one another.

The hero, Reggie, is like Ginger in *Chicken run* in that he sees what happens to turkeys who are taken away (they think happily that they are going to Turkey Paradise). The bizarre custom is satirized when the President pronounces that Reggie is the pardoned turkey (we can ask why he should be pardoned), and being saved from a “delicious fate”. This is an example of an extreme transferred epithet—the one being eaten is given the taste buds of the one eating.

Reggie is soon captured by Jake, a member of the Turkey Freedom Front (a not-so oblique reference to the Animal Liberation Front [ALF]) who insists that they go in a time-machine back to 1621 when, he says, Thanksgiving started. If they change a custom from three hundred years ago, then no turkey would be killed for such food. Elsewhere, we learn that Jake grew up on a factory farm, with graphics to underline the incarceration of turkeys and the difficulty he had in escaping.

Amid much mayhem, they happen to land up in an official governmental time-machine, and back in history they go, being guided by the computer voice STEVE (Space Time Exploration Vehicle Envoy), which is

more accessible than the *2001: A space odyssey*'s HAL (Heuristically programmed ALgorithmic computer) (1968; Kubric).

The colony of turkeys is terrorized by humans, fight back with much help from Reggie and Jake, and peace is made with time-capsule delivery of pizzas—the new meal for Thanksgiving. Unfortunately, when attacking the colonizers' fort, they put on war paint that makes them look like Native Americans, this obviously for a very outdated and offensive stereotypical reference. Exacerbating this is the appearance behind the colonizers of a group of these Native Americans.

Everything seems to end happily until the last scene of all: Jake arriving back in a time-capsule and showing Reggie what the latest is: turducken. The implication is that all their adventures, all their thrills, all their bravery were in vain. Turkey, bird or animal rights have remained abnegated.

#### 5.2.2.4 Ferdinand (2017; *Saldanha*)

Unlike Munro Leaf's simple and charming story on which it is based, the film *Ferdinand* can be regarded as a Bildungsroman in which we see a calf who prefers flowers to fighting, growing up into a bull, while retaining a sensitivity and gentleness throughout. It is the only one of the narrative films where the main character (or any significant character at all) is a bovid.

Much of the film is about incarceration and escape: Ferdinand is on a farm for bulls (and some horses who think they are supremely beautiful and talented) called "Casa del Toro" which is there to provide bulls for top matadors, particularly the most fêted of the lot. He manages to escape when he realizes that his father has been killed in the bullring, and lands up on an idyllic flower farm, ministered tenderly by a girl and her father, until he is a massive bull. When they go off to a flower festival, he runs after them, causes havoc in a town and is captured, landing back at Casa del Toro. This time he gets the other bulls and a goat to escape with him, after some great rescue attempts. What ensues is a hilarious car chase until he is captured, is made to confront the matador and shows amazing bravery and sensitivity, with the crowd demanding that his life be spared. At the end, all are united in tranquil bliss on the flower farm, and in line with the opening words of the book, "Once upon a time", they all live happily ever after.

But there is much more of import in this CG film. It is not just a feel-good narrative, but one that explores the horrors of bullfighting and slaughter, as well as the vileness of school "bullying". When one of the

bulls, a fighting failure, is sent off to what is called the chophouse (the abattoir), the nastiest of the bulls, Valiente, tells Ferdinand: “Now, you’re either a fighter or you’re meat. Later, meat.” The other side is Ferdinand giving his credo to one of his fellows, which is: “If we don’t look out for each other, who will?”

As far as bullfighting is concerned, Lupe, Ferdinand’s self-proclaimed training goat, says to him: “I get it. You don’t like the bullfighting. It’s because you’re hung up on the blood and the guts and the maiming and the gore and the senseless violence.” Instead of having this as a voice-over, we hear it from one of the characters who is mocking another, and as a disquieting comment sums up what bullfighting is about.

Ferdinand learns other truths about bullfighting, such as “the bull never wins” and that the bullfighting arena “is just another chophouse”. When he goes to rescue his previous rivals and mockers, we see the inside of the slaughterhouse in action, with horrendous blades, saws and other decapitating machines, while the three bulls just manage to escape each one. The filming brings to light a reality that most narrative films eschew.

Many of the characters exhibit emotional arcs: although remaining adorable and kind, Ferdinand moves from a self-concerned, undefined agency to an altruistic, directed one; the nasty bulls become helpful at the end; the bull breeder has a late sniffle; but, even though he spares Ferdinand (a reciprocity he actually does not want to perform), the matador remains narcissistic and cruel, thus underlining the nastiness of bullfighting.

In short, *Ferdinand* is fun and frolicsome for much of the film, but it has many darker and telling scenes that lead viewers into realizing what the horrors of bullfighting are. In other words, it is a fine example of an animated animal rights film.

### 5.2.3 *The Quest: Flimflam, Filial and Fulminating*

Narrative films reference animal rights directly or obliquely, and sometimes they go off the track and have a resolution that flies in the face of what has gone before. The three films that have been put into this particular section all essentially have to do with undertaking a quest to save farmed animals in one way or another—from the selfish to the altruistic—and are aimed at different age-groups. The first, *The Muppet musicians of Bremen*, is one of flimflam, a word that underlines how nonsensical and insincere it is when it comes to animal rights: the animals in question here

are self-centred and superficial; on the other hand, we should not be looking at too much detail here as it is directed at an audience much younger than those of any of the other films. The second, *Gordy*, is essentially about filial relationships—a pig being a good son to his mother, father and siblings in tracing them, and two saccharinely sweet children who help him and have a wonderful relationship with their parents, with everyone exemplifying happy families at the end because of such good and deferential behaviour. Finally, *Okja* is one of fulmination: vehement protest against misdeeds of those in power—by the title character who tries to escape maltreatment, by her human companion who stops at nothing to free her, and by members of the Animal Liberation Front who are prepared to cause mayhem to expose animal abuse, with the film unmasking those who side with the perpetrators being the really violent ones. This ties up with the Latin etymology of “fulminating”, which is “fulminare”, meaning “to denounce formally”, which, in effect, is what the film does with regard to corporate carnage.

### 5.2.3.1 The Muppet Musicians of Bremen (1972; Henson)

There have been many versions of the German tale published by the Brothers Grimm of “The town musicians of Bremen”, whether these be in writing or in film. Many of the latter have been screened as television films directed at a very young audience and that have little in common with the original. The one here has been chosen because it follows the basic story of four animals, two farmed and two companion ones, who, because of getting old and past their usefulness, are threatened with death by their human “masters”, run away, team up as musicians, scare off a band of robbers, move into the robbers’ house that has a plentiful supply of food and spend their days making some sort of music. This film with puppets is hosted by Kermit the Frog and takes place not in Bremen but in Louisiana.

For the first half, it seems that this film will be one that promotes animal rights. Kermit tells us: “You may have noticed that the heroes in our story are all animals and the villains are all people. I hope none of you take that personally.” The donkey, rooster, dog and cat all recover from the trauma of attempts made on their lives or from being discarded, and form a mutually supportive group. However, the dog insists that he wants a hambone to eat rather than a trombone to play, towards the end it is the idea of “ham” that whets their appetite, and after they have taken revenge on the robbers who are their former “masters” (without their actually knowing who they are), they are delighted to find a house full of food, including

corn, sweet potatoes, “ham, sausages, bacon”. This detracts incredibly from the idea of the unity and the understanding of all animals’ sentience, as these farmyard animals fall into the same state of mind as the humans: certain farmed animals (especially pigs) are seen as commodities, as bits of flesh to be devoured.

Therefore, what could have been an ideal film for very young children from the animal rights perspective, loses its way as it goes from a call for animal liberation to the gastronomic status quo. It is included here as an admonition that what appears right on the surface is subverted by the comments at the end.

#### 5.2.3.2 *Gordy* (1994; Lewis)

*Gordy* had the misfortune of being released at much the same time as *Babe* and received very unfavourable reviews. In short, it is soppy, ridiculous many times, and has characters who are either angelic or over-acting rogues. On the other hand, it could well appeal to the younger children (under the age of ten) at whom it is obviously aimed. It is a film of fillers, with an abundance of dance and music scenes that do not move the narrative along. On the other hand, it is in stark contrast with *The Muppet musicians of Bremen* in that it starts with animal rights and ends very strongly with them after tense, even if predictable, scenes in a slaughterhouse. It is the last that sets it apart from other narrative films of its kind except for *Okja* and possibly *Ferdinand*. This is not a film with “abattoir-over-there” scenes, but one in which we are taken inside the slaughterhouse even if not as plangently as with *Okja*.

In short, *Gordy* is a film about a piglet whose family are taken away “to the north” to meet their ends, and he sets out to save them (but not in a super-pig manner). He is found by a girl, saves the life of a boy to whom he is then given (both who can understand his talking because they are “pure of heart”), becomes a national celebrity, is kidnapped, is saved again, and then finds his family, rescues them at the last minute (of course), and the good humans and all the farmed animals end up where the latter started: on the beautifully pastoral and peaceful Meadowbrook Farm where they live together happily ever after.

Where the film moves into animal rights is our seeing *Gordy*’s family in a stockyard where they are auctioned (money ruling), being taken to a “finishing yard” and then a processing plant in Omaha to be made into sausages. In the slaughterhouse, we might not see any murders but we see axes chopping, knives being sharpened, hooks for hanging corpses and

vats of boiling water, while members of the pig family slowly get closer to their execution. They are saved and the slaughterhouse is closed down. As viewers will obviously be on the pigs' side throughout, this is a call for animal rights and against the eating of them.

In marked contrast with the final comment on food in *The Muppet musicians of Bremen*, *Gordy* ends with a barbecue where the food that is to be consumed consists of corn and vegetables aplenty. Animal rights triumph. However, the disclaimer at the end of the film is far from satisfactory. The credits show very few people involved in animatronics or puppetry, and although we are told that “Animal Action was monitored by the The American Humane Association”, there is nothing about how the film was made, how the animals were trained or that no animals were harmed in filming. As a result, there have to be questions about and a shadow on the making of the film.

### 5.2.3.3 *Okja* (2017; Bong Joon Ho)

*Okja* is a hard-hitting, adventure-packed, suspense-filled, combined live-action and animated South Korean film that satirizes corporate greed and tugs at the heartstrings. Even though the performances of Tilda Swinton (CEO of the exploitative Mirando company) and, especially, Jake Gyllenhaal (vet and zoologist attached to the company) are outrageous and pantomimic, this is no film for young children; what with the violence and cruelty depicted, it is aimed rather at teenagers and adults.

*Okja* succeeds with its message of animal rights or, at least, the rights of a particularly massive breed of pigs. It is a pity that there is a discordant note in that *Okja*'s beloved human, the girl Mija, and her grandfather eat fish and chicken early in the film.

At the start of *Okja*, the CEO of Mirando Corporation, Lucy Mirando, announces a global super-pig breeding contest, underlining the company's “new core values” of environment and life, “a revolution in the live-stock industry”. She says that a miraculous piglet was born in Chile, and twenty-six of her offspring, all born naturally, will be sent to different parts of the world to see which farm system will result in a pig flourishing the most—in other words, which one will be the biggest. This is a lie, of course, as we unsurprisingly learn later that the pigs were all genetically modified in an experimental facility.

The film then cuts to ten years later in the present in the South Korean countryside. We meet *Okja* and Mija who have a symbiotic relationship, communicating well through whispers and sign language. *Okja* saves

Mija's life early on, this reflected in turn by Mija doing everything to save Okja throughout the rest of the film. At one stage, the music in the background is that of John Denver's "Annie's song", with some of the words being pertinent to the relationship of Okja and Mija, as well as where they are happiest, including:

You fill up my senses  
 Like a night in a forest  
 Like the mountains in springtime  
 Like a walk in the rain....  
 Come, let me love you  
 Let me give my life to you....  
 Let me lay down beside you,  
 Let me always be with you....

Okja is the winner of the contest, which results in Mirando representatives tracking her down, kidnapping her, transporting her to New York where she is fêted, raped and sent for slaughter. She is regarded as nothing more than a commodity that will result in the economic benefit of Mirando. In what is something of a super-child quest, Mija tracks her down and, with the help of the Animal Liberation Front, eventually saves her, bribing Lucy's even nastier twin-sister Nancy with a small golden piglet (obviously worth a lot).

The main character, Mija, is charming, determined and brave; the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) has a large role in rescue operations (which would appeal to certain activists), portrayed not one-dimensionally but with internal disagreements; the breeders of the pig are motivated by one thing only—money, which underlines capitalism and profit being the sole goal of factory farms; Okja herself is massively adorable; and no real farmed animals are used in the film, so there is no question of animal rights being infringed. The film is exceptionally dark at times, with the violence Okja undergoes, her terror in both Seoul and New York, and then the horrifying scenes in the slaughterhouse which seem as real as a documentary: the super-pigs are executed with bolt guns, carcasses hang from hooks, the bodies are sliced up by machines and by hand, and there is a flood of blood on the floor.

Several scenes and dialogue are telling, some being subtle. One is with Mija in Seoul where the red that she is wearing stands out from the crowd around her, with everyone else wearing dull colours; this is reminiscent of

the girl in red in *Schindler's list* (1993; Spielberg). As Mija is walking against the horde of people, it shows the difference here: the child who cares for another creature as opposed to the mass influenced by corporate propaganda; it also underlines her individuality. When members of ALF introduce themselves to her, the leader says: "We're not terrorists. We don't like violence ... We never harm anyone—human or non-human. That is our 40-year credo." This is repeated in various ways throughout the film and is in contrast with the mercenary Black Chalk called in by Mirando to recapture Okja and beat up those supporting the rescue attempt, thus showing once more the disconnect between public perception of the forces of law and order as opposed to the work of animal rights activists.

However, ALF appears naïve, putting a monitor in Okja's ear to record what happens to her, and letting her be kidnapped again, thinking that nothing bad could occur in the laboratory. However, the abuse she suffers in that hellhole is horrendous. On the other hand, this enables them to screen these horrors to the public in the street parade, which turns them against Mirando. Nevertheless, Mirando does not back down from its decision to slaughter Okja. Once more, this shows the evils of factory farming as well as corporate greed. Government untrustworthiness or even corruption, as well as the gullibility of a fickle public, is conveyed through the mention that super-pig products have already been approved by the FDA, and that if food is cheap, consumers will eat it (no matter what its genesis).

*Okja* portrays the evils of dystopic globalization and factory farming, being akin to real-life and current systems of animal agriculture and breeding (Gunawan 2018: 264), where the pigs are commodified. Okja's aliveness, her emotions, her intelligence seem to be expunged in the abattoir: she knows that she cannot escape; there is no hope; she has a stare of defeat and non-comprehension. However, she overcomes this after she is saved. When she walks out with Mija, another "super-pig" passes her baby under the fence, and Okja hides this baby in her mouth. This underlines the sentience and intelligence of all the pigs and that they are aware of their fate. Towards the end we see Okja, Mija, her grandfather and the baby back in South Korea living in blissful surroundings. And, in the final scene, we see members of ALF preparing to continue their work in disrupting animal abuse.

This is a magnificent animal rights film as it depicts pigs as sentient individuals, exposes animal abuse, has characters the audience can relate to

and shows what individual humans can do to improve the lot of farmed animals. While viewers can breathe with relief at the end and smile at the rural idyll, and while many might well be determined to become more active in countering animal abuse, the scenes that remain will be the horror of factory farms. It must be borne in mind, however, that this film does not seem to have been intended to be directed at animal rights. The director and cast were not vegan or even vegetarian and, it appears, had no intention of becoming so (Lee 2017). Nevertheless, the effect of a film is not dependent on intention, and films like *Babe* and *Okja* could have as much influence on the promotion of animal liberation as the documentaries made specifically with animal rights in mind.

#### 5.2.4 *Docudrama/Dramadoc/Fictional Facticity/ Mockumentary*

One way to get a particular message across in film is the docudrama, this being the re-enactment of actual events, keeping to an overall historical fidelity. The earliest docudrama was the French film pioneer Victorin Jasset's 1912 *Bandits en automobile* [*Automobile bandits*] which portrayed the crimes of the French anarchist group, the Bonnot gang. Although it could be regarded as a hybrid genre, a number of docudramas have been made in the past century, one of the latest being the Kurdish-Iranian *Walnut tree* that covers Saddam Hussein's ordering of the chemical bombing of Sardasht in 1987 (2020; Mahdavian). The prime exponent of this genre is most probably Peter Watkins with, among others, his 1964 *Culloden* (about the 1746 Battle of Culloden between British forces and rebellious Scottish Jacobites), the 1974 *Edvard Munch* (a biopic docudrama about the Norwegian artist) and the 2000 *La commune* (portraying the 1871 Paris commune). In this line of verisimilitude is the Japanese director Tetsu Maeda's 2008 film *Buta ga ita kyōshitsu* [*Schooldays with a pig*] that is essentially about animal rights or, more particularly, those of a particular piglet.

Related to this genre is what could be termed dramadoc, or which I would neologically call fictional facticity—or a ficumentary: that is, a narrative that is not factual in itself but uses documentary footage in order to complement its message, thus combining a fictional storyline with factual clips. This is not a docudrama as it does not tendentially portray a specific event in the past, but references the present or even the future. I prefer it to the term “faction” which might well refer to a literary and

cinematic genre in which a fictional narrative is based on actual events, but the term also refers to a dissentient group in politics, religion or any social construct. A film of fictional facticity that supports the rights of farmed animals is Denis Hennelly's *Bold native* of 2010. A related genre is that of mockumentary, a term that can be used for a genre that combines documentary footage with narrative in a satirical or parodic style, such as Simon Amstell's 2017 *Carnage: Swallowing the past*.

#### 5.2.4.1 *Buta ga ita kyōshitsu* [Schooldays with a Pig] (2008; *Maeda*)

*Buta ga ita kyōshitsu* reflects the event in Japan when a sixth grade primary school teacher, a Mr Hoshi, brought a piglet to school in order to try to teach the children about responsibility and the link between life and food. However, there is nothing compassionate about this. "What do humans need to stay alive?" he asks in the film, and then continues: "Humans need to eat to stay alive. We eat other living things. I want you all to get a sense of what that really means." The children, in contrast, teach him something of kind-heartedness. They call the pig P-Chan, the "chan" a term of endearment akin to "darling". The teacher tells them that they will have to care for the pig until the summer vacation when they graduate, and then they can have the pig slaughtered and eat her. However, after building an enclosure for P-Chan, caring for and feeding her, as well as cleaning up after her, most of the children regard P-Chan with affection.

Towards the end of the year, Mr Hoshi says they should decide whether to keep P-Chan, give her to the third grade children who are willing to look after her even though she has grown quite a bit, or have her slaughtered. Ethical behaviour is implied with a song in English halfway through that has the words: "Reach out, maybe open your heart." It is important that whereas Mr. Hoshi refers to the pig as "it", the children call P-Chan "she" and "her". There are arguments throughout about prejudice, responsibility, quality of life, animal cruelty and vegetarianism.

The children vote twice for either slaughter or to give her to the younger children—once openly and once by secret ballot. Each time there is deadlock: 13–13. As a result, Mr Hoshi has to make the decision, and after much soul-searching, he decides on slaughter.

The film is often fun, has an enormous amount of discussion and debate between the children, shows problems that the parents have, and is moving throughout. We see children stopping their eating of meat because of relating this to P-Chan. We could question how P-Chan is different from all the other animals who are killed every day. But this is a docudrama, and

the filmmaker had to remain true to the event, rather than giving it a happily ever-after ending. With this in mind, I cannot agree with Shen Shián (2009) that the film “failed to deliver greater lessons on respect for life”. It was the original teacher who did not think through things.

P-Chan is different from Babe and Gordy in that she is not portrayed as being able to speak in the tongue of the humans around her. It might be aimed at the same audience, but its ending could be troubling (cf. Lee 2008).

Because this film is a docudrama, it could possibly be used effectively in the classroom in the promotion of animal rights. It could be shown to children, they could discuss the various arguments put forward by the youngsters in the film in opting for saving or slaughtering P-Chan and then they themselves could vote. As the filming shows many of the children crying, as it portrays Mr. Hoshi as ambivalent at the end about what to do, as we see a girl trying to free P-Chan and the children rescuing P-Chan from the police when she runs off, and when we observe the abattoir workers pulling and hitting her when putting her into a truck at the end, it is likely that a well-led discussion would bring much greater awareness to the plight of farmed animals. Animal rights films aimed at children do not have to have fairy-tale endings. Sometimes, the downside could lead to more understanding, a change in attitude and lifestyle, and eventual activism.

#### 5.2.4.2 Bold Native (2010; Hennelly)

Presumably, the word “native” is used in the title of the film and is also how the main character, Charlie Cranehill, refers to himself, in order to indicate that he is an Earthling, like those he tries to save, but also a patriotic American, having been born and being resident there. This betokens his view as well as that of other members of the Animal Liberation Front that he is not a terrorist as deemed by the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act of 2006, with its clause forbidding the showing of anything that could affect profitability of various enterprises. Therefore, because he has been involved in destroying farm and pharmaceutical property (even though not harming any animal, human or otherwise), he is regarded as a danger to society, is hunted down by his father and the FBI, and faces a long prison term. He does this in order to liberate animals from places of abuse and to reveal atrocities to the public.

This film, with its guerrilla filmmaking and many sourced clips of horrendous animal abuse in factory farms and experimental laboratories, is

essentially a narrative film, with a vague storyline (while Charlie is on the run, he meets up with other activists to plan a concerted action by thirty or so ALF cells). The generally grainy documentary footage underlines its authenticity and was obtained from various sources, such as the Humane Society of the United States, Last Chance for Animals, PETA, Farmed Sanctuary, and Uncaged Films and A.R.M.E. However, the fictive narrative hops from one meeting to another with somewhat uncertain editing and acting.

The overall message is clear throughout, the film opening with the lead character in a blurry setting asking: “What is free? Are we born free or do we earn it? If you deny freedom to the quiet ones, those who have no voice, can you be free yourself, or are you caged by your own compassion?” This is unmistakably partisan or tendentious, and Charlie and his cohorts see themselves as partisans, too, in their fighting what can be seen as an occupying, capitalistic sector of society.

The mix of documentary footage and narrative is well done when the former augments the latter, such as in the scene with vegetarian Karl Hansen, the creator of the advertisement for “Happy Chicks”, being shown the terrors of incarcerated chickens, including the maceration of baby male chicks; this leads him to become a vegan and activist. Also screened is a man who tortured and murdered pigs being shown his vile deeds. This man is being held prisoner against the ethical tenets of Charlie and ALF, but it gives the audience an opportunity to equate his imprisonment with that of the sows he abused.

There is also debate between animal welfare and animal rights activists, which highlights the difference between the two: the former encouraging corporates to gradually start giving the farmed animals a more comfortable life before their killing, the latter taking the moral highpoint of stopping all cruelty with immediate effect. The message is: “An animal only has one thing, its life.” The word “its” is a mistake in the film, as this falls prey to society’s general view—the farmed animal as property. “Its” could have been replaced by “his”, “her” or the currently more acceptable “they”; alternatively, the sentence could have been rephrased in the plural. This is, admittedly, a nit-picking point in the light of the overall message, but one that should be commented on. Other strong messages are given throughout, such as “animals are used as property”, with business and social nomenclature condemned with its use of “beef” not “cow”, and “pork” not “pig”. Another issue brought to the fore is the generational disparity, exemplified by Charlie’s activist ethic, and his father’s

intransigence regarding animal rights (although he does change at the end but, as he admits, any action he could take by resigning his position would be ineffectual).

Telling comments shown with the credits at the end of the film are:

Animals were harmed during the making of this movie. But not by us.

Last year, 10 billion animals were killed for food in the United States alone after being raised in extreme confinement.

Over 150 million animals were caged and tortured in American laboratories.

Each vegan saves at least 90 individual lives a year.

*Bold native* is a film that espouses animal rights by combining narrative and documentary. It is for an audience comprising teenagers and adults. It uses an ideal form to get its message across, the only such film of its ilk but, we can hope, the first of many that will follow its example.

#### 5.2.4.3 Carnage: Swallowing the Past (2017; *Amstell*)

*Carnage* is a satirical, futuristic film set primarily in an idyllic, vegan Britain of 2067, with flashbacks and footage of the carnivorous lifestyle from 1944 until the 2030s. It plumbs the conflict and contrariness of the past through portrayals and parodies of power, protest and pain.

Both the title and the subtitle are telling, being marvellously multifaceted in meaning. The word “carnage” implies butchery and a massacre, with “carcasses” being referenced, too, and the word coming from the Latin “carnaticum”, meaning “flesh” or “meat”. This is related to the murder and consumption of farmed animals by humans as portrayed in the film. On the other hand, as the film proceeds we can see that it implies how the eating of animals in various forms (including flesh, eggs and dairy) led to the untimely deaths of millions of people through diseases contracted in this way: therefore, the authorities, food producers and companies driven by profit were guilty of killing the human population.

“Swallowing the past” connotes devouring, the physical act of eating and digesting, but also implies that people in past years swallowed unthinkingly the lies that they were told about food. However, it also refers to the peaceful, pastoral, polyamorous youngsters in 2067 having been kept in ignorance about the past, “swallowing” also meaning to cause to disappear, the leaders of the future hiding the horrible history of past generations from them. This is underlined by the voice-over at the beginning, in

which we are told that violence has been defeated with compassion, and depression with intimacy (the youngsters' sexuality is diverse), and "history has been replaced with silence". Certain dates must be remembered, however, such as 1944 (from which the earliest documentary clip comes) when, factually, the first vegan newsletter, *The Vegan News*, was published, and the film starting on the fictional Troye King Jones Day; we find out that Troye King Jones was a leading animal rights activist who was murdered, something we are prepared for as the day has ramifications of Martin Luther King Day, and is about somebody else who had a dream and who strove to attain it for the benefit of all. A final implication refers to a group of older people who stand in a circle and, in the way of organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous, tell others about their gustatory and devouring failings when they were younger, "swallowing" here also signifying the act of retracting or recanting. They are consumed by a guilt they need to have assuaged.

There is much in the film that is over-the-top, such as the scenes with the "celebrated psychotherapist" and writer of *The guilt of eating your brother*, Yasmine Vandenburg, in which she facilitates the expunging of the guilt just mentioned. In giving a brief, potted explanation of her generation's previous eating habits, she says that they couldn't have imagined that they were involved in the slave trade. This term relates to the transport, exploitation and murder of farmed animals, but the first understanding is that she is talking about human slavery. Through the use of this term, the similarity (even the equivalence) of all species is implied as well as the horrors of racism. Vandenburg continues that "the language of the time suggested we were just eating our dinner". This, of course, reflects meat words (pork, mutton) having been used for animal ones (pig, sheep) in order to distance the public from what they were really consuming.

Simon Amstell, as director, switches the film between voice-overs, documentary footage from the past, mockumentary footage from the future, scenes of horrible slaughter, examples of frying and gobbling meat, ridiculous rants from the old guard, members of the public justifying why they eat animal products and advertisements. This lends a vibrancy to the film, enhanced by humour. Because of many bizarre scenes (regarding vegans as well as carnivores), it could be considered that Amstell is not taking the vegan cause as seriously as he could. However, this is another way of getting the animal rights message across, bringing in the amusing in order to

drive home the seriousness of the issue, by giving a break in intensity, a breather through contrast and making the overall issue more driving.

A tongue-in-cheek scene set in 2032, with voice-over, has four scientists, dressed formally and in white coats à la the early twentieth century, standing half-mooned around a goat who has electrodes attached to their head. This internal thought translation device enables the deciphering of thoughts and feelings of all animals (here we have a sheep and a cow, too), all of these translated into English and uttered by the activist actor, Joanna Lumley, who, we are told, recorded this “before she died with enormous charm”. Here we have a mocking seriousness embellished with wit, and something of an in-joke for those who are au fait with Joanna Lumley on film.

There are clips from blockbusters of the past, such as *Free Willy* and *Babe*, where children’s heartstrings are pulled and then they are taken by their parents to a meat meal. Advertisements in which “the clown, the captain, the king” encourage the eating of meat are shown, these characters underlining how entertainment seduces children, as does the referencing of authority figures (such as politicians who are made to appear vile) and those that the youngsters could hero-worship, all of whom chew animal products.

In serious vein, industrial farming and the eating of meat are shown to be linked to climate change and flooding that are disregarded by the public in the 2020s because they refuse to see how these will eventually affect them. Furthermore, the consumption of animal products is linked to obesity, diabetes, heart problems and cancer. Thus, *Carnage* combines animal rights with human suffering, the latter brought about by corporate greed, unthinking adherence to cultural and societal traditions, and parental stupidity. A message is that all these led to the abuse of children who were raised on meat, salt and sugar.

A thought-provoking comment is that the fashionable “Meat Free Mondays” is actually as offensive a notion to have as “Ethnic-Cleansing Free Tuesdays” would have been. This comparison is an example of what in Yiddish is called a “bittere gelechte”, a bitter laugh, or laughing through tears and pain.

One of the most important statements made in *Carnage* comes in a television interview when Troye King Jones attacks the meat industry after vegans are accused of being extremists:

Look at what the meat industry is ... is doing to our planet. Look at what it's doing to our animals. Look at what it's doing to us. That's extreme. We are not vegans. They are carnists.

He is saying that veganism should be the status quo; that meat-eating is extremism. This could well be the ethos of all animal rights films.

### 5.2.5 *Downers*

The subheading of “Downers” has several implications. First, it means a forlorn or depressing experience, and both films discussed here are upsetting. Secondly, the events depicted and their conclusions stand in stark contrast with the “happily ever after” endings of most other narrative films that engage with animal rights. Thirdly, the word has the connotation of an animal who has fallen down and cannot rise unaided, if at all.

With the French *Au hasard Balthazar* [*Balthazar, at random*] and the Tamil *Agraharathil kazhuthai* [*A donkey in a Brahmin village*], the animal in question is a donkey, and the mood of the films is dispiriting for the most part. Whereas Balthazar is born on a farm, the donkey in the Tamil film is a foundling, regarded as no more than a beast of burden and, when it comes to animals, the lowest of the low.

#### 5.2.5.1 *Au hasard Balthazar* [*Balthazar, at Random*] (1966a; Bresson)

*Au hasard Balthazar* is, in essence, the story of a donkey living a life of misery in a dreadful world with evils perpetrated on him by the humans in charge. One person, Marie, loves him, but she, too, has to give him up periodically even when he escapes to her for succour. The French title is a syllabic homophone, a perfect rhyme, but what we see are random events where (apart from a couple of times when he runs off) Balthazar is subject to what appear to be the caprices of fate as he is born on a farm into love, is used in religious rituals, is kissed and has flowers plaited into his mane. But, for the most part, he serves in distress as a beast of burden where he is forced to pull carts, plough, carry panniers of bread and contraband, walk in aimless circles around a millstone, is beaten with a stick, is whipped, is punched, is kicked, has his tail set aflame, is left in the snow and eventually dies from a stray gunshot wound.

Although we see events in the lives of other characters as well as their relationships, it is Balthazar who is the focus of our attention, with the director, Robert Bresson, insisting that he is “the main character, the main

story”, with our anxieties being aroused “when faced with a living creature who’s completely humble, completely holy and happens to be a donkey: Balthazar. It’s pride, greed, the need to inflict suffering, lust in the measure found in each of the various owners at whose hands he suffers and finally dies” (Bresson 1966b). This insistence is emphasized by the film being framed by Balthazar’s life and death.

Many critics and reviewers of this film have regarded it as spiritual, as incorporating the seven deadly sins, and as Balthazar emblemizing the life of Jesus Christ and the crucifixion in particular (cf. Cameron 2011: 4; 28–29 for a fine summary of these views; cf. also Browne 1977: 21, 26). Although this is by no means the focus in the discussion here, we can call to mind the life of another equine, Black Beauty, who, in the 1877 novel by Anna Sewell, also lives a life of hardship at times but that ends happily. One of the characters puts his view succinctly: “There is no religion without love, and people may talk as much as they like about their religion, but if it does not teach them to be good and kind to man and beast it is all a sham—all a sham ...” (Sewell 2018 [1877]: Part 1, Chap. 13, p. 40). This is underscored by the main villain in *Balthazar*, Gérard, seen singing as the soloist in a church service.

It is more pertinent to consider *Au hasard Balthazar* as a film that makes a case for animal rights. Balthazar is seen throughout (apart from by the children) as a piece of property. Even though focus is often on his eyes which betray no obvious emotion, his ears flick constantly in response to sounds that humans sometimes cannot hear, he flinches at unexpected noise and he tries to escape physical attack. That he is a sentient being is accentuated by the way he walks and holds his head, and also how he succumbs to the bullet at the end. Through all of this he is not anthropomorphized (cf. Balsom 2010: 37), but filmed as a living, feeling, much abused animal regarded as no more than a beast of burden, an object forced to do what humans desire him to do.

On the other hand, in one of the most significant scenes, his eyes do send a strong message to the viewer. This is when he is being led around the circus and reciprocally eyeballs the circus animals in mutual recognition (cf. Haskell 1999: 61). When the camera moves backwards and forwards between Balthazar and the caged tiger, polar bear, chimpanzee and elephant, some of whom are obviously in distress, it highlights their similarity and the impression that all are cruelly encaged: the circus animals by bars, Balthazar by the bars of society and labour, all of them subjected to cruelty for human comfort and entertainment.

Balthazar's trials are complemented by the non-diegetic music in the film: the andantino from Schubert's Sonata No 20. Although the main theme with its tenderness and sadness is repeated several times, the excerpts from the andantino are in an apparent random order, and form a melancholic echo to Balthazar's life, especially in accompanying "moments of anguish, pain, and death" (Browne 1977: 28; cf. McDonald 2007). William Kinderman (1997: 216–218) finds the opening theme to be modelled closely on Franz Schubert's earlier *Pilgerweise/Pilgrim's song*, with words by the poet Franz von Schober (Schubert 2005: 262):

I am a pilgrim on this earth  
and go silently from house to house.  
O bestow on me the gifts of love  
with a friendly gesture!

With open, sympathetic glance,  
with a warm grasp of the hand  
you can refresh this poor heart  
and free it from long oppression.

These opening lines to the poem are telling and reflect what we understand to be what Balthazar needs and deserves, but rarely gets. Balthazar is a witness to everything around him; we are witnesses to what he endures.

In an interview for The Criterion Collection's 2004 edition of *Au hasard Balthazar*, film critic Donald Richie recognizes the emotion elicited by the end of the film:

I find it impossible to look at the final scenes of this picture without crying. I mean, for a picture to have this effect upon one time and time again, argues for something I really don't understand. But when the Schubert starts, and the donkey collapses and the sheep gather and the little bells sound, the combination of, you know, something awful and something wonderful going together, it reduces me to the emotional human being. (Richie 2004)

Related to this is Roger Ebert's (2004) review of the film: "This is the cinema of empathy." It is a film that espouses the rights of oppressed animals, and we can see it as a call for liberation—in this case of a farmed animal, of a so-called beast of burden.

### 5.2.5.2 Agraharathil kazhuthai [A Donkey in a Brahmin Village] (1977; *Abraham*)

Like Balthazar, we first see the donkey in *Agraharathil kazhuthai* as a foal and, like Babe and Gordy, no matter how much time passes he remains young and the same size. This adds to the pathos in the film, with its portrayal of bigotry, moral hypocrisy and cruelty, with which the fairy-tale start of, “Once upon a time, there was a donkey and its calf” is immediately dispelled with the murder of the donkey’s mother: she has a tin tied to her tail, kicks out when she is beaten, hurts a boy and then is killed because of her self-defence. The word “it” in the opening words is used throughout, which underlines how animals, in this case donkeys, are seen as worthless, unfeeling creatures.

More of a summary will be given here than with other films, as films in Tamil are not well-known by viewers who are more accustomed to American or European cinema. The foal wanders about and is taken in by a compassionate professor who calls him Chinna (“little one”). He says later to his father: “I felt a loving thing had come to me for love and protection.” However, this leads to many problems for both of them because according to Brahmin religion, donkeys are the lowest of the low. They are regarded as contemptible brutes who (in this case, “which”) cannot be touched—in short, pariahs (cf. Devkota 2015: 58–61), like human “untouchables” in India, and deserving of harsh labour.

We become increasingly aware of the extent to which donkeys are despised: the professor’s domestic worker refuses to clean up the donkey’s droppings (a cow’s or a dog’s would be fine); he is mocked by his students for having a donkey; he is given an ultimatum by the head of the college to get rid of the donkey; when he takes Chinna to his village to be looked after by Uma, a deaf-mute young woman, a man on the bus objects to being in the same vehicle as a donkey; the orthodox elders in the village are furious at having such a creature in their august presence; the children play pranks on the donkey; and he is regarded as an omen of bad luck, even being the cause of the professor’s sister-in-law failing to conceive. The villagers also manipulate events, using the donkey as a “scapegoat”, for instance when a village elder organizes for Chinna to be pushed into a house where a marriage arrangement is being made; because of the presence of the donkey portending a disastrous union, the agreement is angrily cancelled. Finally, when Uma gives birth to a stillborn child (having become pregnant by an insistent young man) who is left at the temple, it is decided that the donkey brought the corpse there and, as a result, has

desecrated the temple. As punishment, Chinna is dragged to a pit, and is beaten and stoned to death as a rite of purification.

Afterwards, and as predicted by a soothsayer, the sister-in-law conceives, an eighty-year-old paralytic suddenly walks again and the village headman's long-lost son returns. Villagers start seeing the phantom of the donkey, it is decided that the donkey has blessed the village, he or she is, therefore, divine and a temple should be erected in his or her honour. The fire they make to start proceedings gets out of control, the whole village burns down and the only survivors are the professor and Uma.

Although the film is a hard-hitting satire on Brahmin bigotry and superstition (Banerjee 2022), here it will be looked at from an animal rights perspective. It is significant that the professor and Uma are the only survivors as they are the only ones who have shown any concern for and given succour and tenderness to the donkey. This is in line with the words, that come over as incantations, from the Tamil poet and advocate of social and religious reform, Subramania Bharati, quoted at the beginning and end of the film, among which are:

Fire is the god of heroism ...  
 May it burn....  
 We offer it sacrifice ...  
 May it burn.

By saving the donkey, the professor carries out a heroic deed. The donkey is sacrificed as a victim of jaundiced Brahmin closed-mindedness, but the whole village is then sacrificed in a conflagration, with the implication that because of their cruelty, heavenly powers take vengeance. The villagers fear destruction because of the donkey, but they are destroyed because of their abominable behaviour. This serves as a warning and can be seen as a revolutionary fire to change the thinking of humans.

If we put the events in *Agraharathil kazhuthai* into a Western context, what the villagers do to one animal is akin to what people in the Western world do to billions of farmed animals and so-called beasts of burden. The bigoted Brahmins are no different from certain people who profess their Christianity, Judaism or Islam, and use their religions, cultures or superstitions to support the mass killing of farmed animals for their customs and palates. In other words, no society that condones killing of any kind should look askance at any other. This ties up with the whaler in *Seaspiracy* quoted in the chapter on documentaries, who asks whether there is a difference

between the killing of a whale and that of slaughtering a chicken: each has a life that is destroyed. Not one of the groups should have a holier-than-thou attitude.

As in John Abraham's other films, in *Agrabarathil kazhuthai* he aims at awakening "the collective conscience of viewers against man-made systems that perpetuate and normalize oppression of the weak ... [In] spotlighting the fascist structure of human thought and the cruelty it inflicts upon innocent beings, his cinematic preoccupation bears resemblance to that of Robert Bresson" (Staub 2021). There is a strong link between this film and *Au hasard Balthazar* that evidently influenced it. They form an essential contribution to animal rights in film.

### 5.3 CONCLUSION

What all the narrative films have in common is that the main character or several of the farmed animals are under threat, and always from humans who wish to work them hard, exploit them or kill them in order to make their own lives more comfortable, to eat them or to profit financially from them. Some of the animals show agency in undertaking a quest to overcome their situation, but others are dependent on sympathetic humans. The ending is not always happy: for instance, the upsetting *Buta ga ita kyōshitsu*, and the heart-rending *Au hasard Balthazar*. Sometimes the viewer can be conflicted as to whether the ending is emotionally pleasing or not: *Agrabarathil kazhuthai* ends with everyone dying except those who were good to the donkey, but the donkey is also dead; and with *Bold native* a point has been made, but the corporates and government remain victorious. There are a few that end in something of a utopia (what was aimed at is achieved) but others are dystopic, if not throughout then certainly at the end.

Those that end unequivocally cheerfully are animated ones aimed at a very young audience (*Chicken Run*, *Ferdinand* and, unless one dwells on the turducken, *Free birds*). Those that are aimed at a more adult audience (*Au hasard Balthazar* and *Agrabarathil kazuthai* are the obvious examples) are more realistic and desperately sad as far as the donkeys in question are concerned.

Most of the films have a hero or a martyr, half of them have to do with hope, and the majority portray a crime as well as punishment that befits the perpetrator. Hostile comments regarding humans abound as do sympathetic ones regarding the farmed animals. As with documentaries, many

of the films show that those depicted are “plain-folks” (one of many like them) and there is a call (blatant or subtle) for humans to jump on to the bandwagon of animal rights, through the card-stacking of abuses. Humour abounds in the majority, but very few (the obvious examples are *Buta ga ita kyōshitsu*, *Au hasard Balthazar* and *Agraharathil kazhuthai*) have repeated instances of silence for several seconds that would enable the audience to ponder what is going on and to let the emotion of the moment wash over them. Although all have both diegetic and non-diegetic music, those that really grip one are the song that the farmer sings in *Babe* and Schubert’s Piano Sonata in *Au hasard Balthazar*.

What all these films have in common is a desire of somebody to change the world for the better in some way. Societies and their cultures are held up to question and satire in most of these films, as we realize what evils are perpetrated by the humans in them. This feeds into the ethos of animal liberation and animal rights. We cheer on the chickens in *Chicken run* (and members of the audience, we hope, will question whether they can eat chickens with a clear conscience in future); we embrace the characters of Babe, Okja and P-Chan (and we ask how anybody seeing their life stories can easily consume pigs again); and we weep with the donkeys in *Au hasard Balthazar* and *Agraharathil kazhuthai* as we grow to understand the cruelty they endure. We want to join forces with Mija in *Okja*, with the Animal Liberation Front in its ethic of freeing farmed and laboratory animals without hurting anybody, and even with Grampy and Betty Boop in *Be human*.

In most of these films, the farmed animals talk to one another, and in *Animal farm* and *Gordy* in particular they manage to talk to and be understood by humans. But human speech evades them in *Okja* (although Mija understands her), *Buta ga ita kyōshitsu*, *Au hasard Balthazar* and *Agraharathil kazhuthai*. However, they are all able to communicate, even if the majority of humans turn a blind eye, a deaf ear and an unfeeling heart to them. In many of the films, farmed animals are effectively anthropomorphized in order for the audience of whatever age to relate to them in human terms. But in others, such as those in the last four films mentioned, the animals are portrayed not in human terms but as themselves, as individuals in their pathos and in their trauma. In all of them, viewers can come to a new understanding, a new compassion, and question the status quo.

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## A Farmed Animal Rights Manifesto for Film

*In this dismal age in which we seem to have thrown away the moral compass, somebody seems to have found it again. I jump up and down in my classes and in Hollywood story meetings about the desperate desire of the audience for entertainment that embodies some moral principles, some guidelines for ethical living, some prescription for a healthier world and a saner life.*

*Christopher Vogler*

*Foreword to Stanley D. Williams (2006). The moral premise: Harnessing virtue and vice for box office success (p. xv).*

*Do I dare*

*Disturb the universe?*

*T.S. Eliot: "The love song of J. Alfred Prufrock". Eliot (1963). Collected poems: 1909–1962 (p. 14).*

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Documentaries that foster animal rights obviously do so with an intentional moral premise. Narrative films, on the other hand, do not always have that as their main aim as sometimes the producers, directors or screenwriters think that the story and concomitant film will be marketable and profitable. Here, then, we might well have the intentional fallacy but are more concerned with what we can glean from the message conveyed if that is in line with animal advocacy. Any manifesto that is related to either

genre should look to the moral high ground in its effort to disturb the universe of the social and cultural status quo.

Mark Dion comments that because “ours is a time of a decentred subject” with “a pervasive pluralism”, manifestos could well seem “quaint and naïve on one hand, and striving for tyranny on the other” (Dion 2012: 142). However, it is precisely because it is a time “in which dominant ideologies have been delegitimated”, as he says, that a manifesto opposing such dominance, such oppression, is necessary in speaking definitively for a new order, a new legitimacy, a new ethic.

In the words of Terry Eagleton, we are concerned with “values rather than prices, the moral rather than the material, the high-minded rather than the philistine” but, in this context, we disagree with his mention of “the cultivation of human powers as ends in themselves rather than for some ignobly utilitarian motive” (Eagleton 2003: 24). Such “cultivation” with regard to the lives of animals tends to lapse into utilitarianism to the severe detriment of farmed animals, most extremely to what David Nibert refers to as “devalued groups” (Nibert 2002: xiii).

Manifestos exhort us to action, and they often do not allow any dissent, as Janet Lyon points out:

The literary and political manifestos that flag the history of modernity are usually taken to be transparent public expressions of pure will: whoever its author and whatever its subject, a manifesto is understood as the testimony of a historical present tense spoken in the impassioned voice of its participants. The form’s capacity for rhetorical *trompe l’oeil* tends to shape its wide intelligibility: the syntax of a manifesto is so narrowly controlled by exhortation, its style so insistently unmediated, that it appears to say only what it means, and to mean only what it says. The manifesto declares a position; the manifesto refuses dialogue or discussion; the manifesto fosters antagonism and scorns conciliation. It is univocal, unilateral, single-minded. It conveys resolute oppositionality and indulges no tolerance for the faint hearted. (Lyon 1999:9)

Bill Nichols puts it more succinctly:

How to make manifest the spirit and intentions of a movement that has yet to triumph over an oppressive but dominant adversary? Issue a manifesto. Stand up and speak out. Rally and mobilize. Goad, galvanize, and transform. Be bold, be ruthless, be uncompromising in the vision that will guide the transformation. (Nichols 2014: 80–81)

Those who are passionate about a cause are at times prepared to make public declarations embracing their principles, in an effort to change the ways others consider, understand and act.

Of the manifestos that have proliferated in the last 200 years, the most famous is the Marx and Engels Communist Manifesto of 1848, with its talk of battling against “naked self-interest”, personal worth being denigrated to mere exchange value and “exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions” (Marx & Engels 2008 [1848]: 37). In our context, this could well apply to the ways farmed animals are treated and the excuses for doing so, a point taken up by George Orwell who analysed Marx’s theory from the animals’ point of view (cf. Eisenman 2013: 235–236). To animals, Orwell says, “it is clear that the concept of a class struggle between humans was pure illusion, since whenever it was necessary to exploit animals, all humans united against them: the true struggle is between animals and humans” (Orwell 1968: 406).

Another political manifesto that has ideas that could be applied to animal rights is that of K.H.Z. Solneman’s *An anarchist manifesto: The manifesto of peace and freedom* (1977), touted as an alternative to the Communist Manifesto, and which puts forward views on freedom, force and anarchy, stressing non-domination. Also political is a contemporary Canadian one, *The leap manifesto*, headed by Naomi Klein (Klein & Lewis 2015), that addresses climate change, income inequality, racism and colonialism.

Sometimes blatantly political, the manifestos discussed in the next sections will be those that specifically address animal rights, on the one hand, and film, on the other. This will be followed by a Farmed Animal Rights Manifesto (FARM) for Film that combines these two areas. Like those mentioned above, these manifestos are aimed at having “political, social, and cultural consequences in the world at large”, and are not static, temporal texts but discourses and exhortations aiming at “radical, utopian possibilities” (Mackenzie 2014: 4; 6).

## 6.2 ANIMAL RIGHTS MANIFESTOS

In order to give a historically ethical context to FARM for Film, it is important to refer to significant animal rights proclamations of the past. This book shares the abolitionist views of Tom Regan (1983, 2001) and Gary Francione (1996, 2008), rather than the utilitarian approach of Peter Singer (2002). Ideologically, it is akin to Carrie P. Freeman’s *Framing farming*, being “about *how* we can create a needed global shift to a

plant-based diet” (Freeman 2014: 20 [italics in original]). An animal rights manifesto adds to methods that seek to convince others (here, the audience) to adopt or persist with an alternative lifestyle to the major carnivorous one.

Even though some of the statements quoted below seem to promulgate vegetarianism rather than veganism, all will feed into the Farmed Animal Rights Manifesto (FARM) for Film. This survey of manifestos does not pretend to be comprehensive but merely takes a selection of ones across the board from different eras and areas to give a soupçon of what has been written, and to show that the views of today’s animal rights advocates are not new but are part of an ideological pedigree.

The first here is the declaration by the sixth century BCE Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras who promulgated the notion of metempsychosis or transmigration of the soul, maintaining that if souls of humans entered into the bodies of animals, then eating animal flesh was cannibalism (cf. Violin 1990).

At the turn into the Common Era, the Roman poet Ovid, in Book XV of his *Metamorphoses*, quoted Pythagoras first and then also admonished flesh eaters:

The earth, prodigal of its wealth, supplies you with gentle sustenance, and offers you food without killing or shedding blood ... Oh, how wrong it is for flesh to be made from flesh; for a greedy body to fatten, by swallowing another body; for one creature to live by the death of another creature! ... When you place the flesh of slaughtered cattle in your mouths, know and feel that you are devouring your fellow-creature. (Ovid 2000: 395–396)

Pythagoras appears as something of a touchstone for promoters of animal rights. Slightly after Ovid, in the first century of the Common Era the Greek philosopher and historian Plutarch expounded:

Can you really ask what reason Pythagoras had for abstaining from flesh? For my part I rather wonder both by what accident and in what state of soul or mind the first [could have had] who did so, touched his mouth to gore and brought his lips to the flesh of a dead creature, he who set forth tables of dead, stale bodies and ventured to call food and nourishment the parts that had a little before bellowed and cried, moved and lived. How could his eyes endure the slaughter when throats were slit and hides flayed and limbs torn from limb? How could his nose endure the stench? How was it that the pollution did not turn away his taste, which made contact with the sores of others and sucked juices and serums from mortal wounds? (Plutarch 1957)

Related to this view is that of the third-century CE Tyrian and Roman philosopher Porphyry in his *On abstinence from killing animals* in which he explains that animals have souls and that meat is bad for humans, physically as well as intellectually (Porphyry 2000: *passim*).

On another continent, the eleventh-century Syrian Arab poet, Abū l'Alā' al-Ma'arrī, known for his attack on religious dogma, also invested in the idea that no living creature should be harmed and stressed a vegan world view in his *Epistle of forgiveness, or a pardon to enter the garden* (cf. van Gelder & Schoeler 2016: xxvii). This is similar to the 1524 pronouncement of Thomas Müntzer in his *Hochverursachte Schutzrede* (in Marx 1992), and that of the eighteenth-century Scottish social critic John Oswald in his abolitionist work, *The cry of nature or an appeal to mercy and justice on behalf of the persecuted animals* where he explains that people are not meant to be carnivorous; forswearing the eating of meat would promote the love of peace and justice (Cf. Oswald 2010 [1791]: *passim*).

The early nineteenth-century English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley has several pronouncements on the cruelty of eating animal flesh, that we are anatomically frugivorous and that vegetarianism strikes at the root of evil. The best-known statement where this appears is in his long 1813 poem *Queen Mab*, Canto VIII, lines 198–238, where he writes how consuming animal flesh kindles putrid humours, hatred and despair (Shelley, 1842: 60), and his notes to these lines where he says that the “supereminence of man is like Satan’s, a supereminence of pain” (Shelley 1842: 112). Eleven years later, Shelley’s compatriot Lewis Gompertz, a founder of the RSPCA and inventor of the velocipede, an early form of bicycle aimed at replacing horses as a means of transport, insisted that all animals had more right to the use of their bodies than others had, and took a strong stance against any abuse of farmed animals, in *Moral inquiries on the situation of man and of brutes* (Gompertz 1992 [1824]: *passim*).

Certain other manifestos purporting to be for animal rights are rather for what is commonly considered to be “welfare”. For instance, The Universal Declaration of Animal Rights of 1977 has as its Article 9: “In the eventuality of an animal bred for food, it must be fed, managed, transported and killed without it being in fear or pain,” which rather beggars the point. The wide-ranging *Animals Manifesto: Preventing Covid-X* (World Federation of Animals 2020) is also more concerned with welfare than with rights.

The Declaration of Animal Rights of 2011 is more in sync with abolition: “all animals have the right to be free, to live their lives on their own terms, be physically and psychologically comfortable, have the right to live in their natural environment, grow to a rhythm natural to their species.” It also emphasizes that animals are not the property or commodity of humans; are to be free from exploitation, oppression and brutality; should not be slaughtered for food, killed for their skins, experimented on, killed for religious purposes, used for labour, abused for sport, entertainment and commercial profit, or hunted. This is spot on, but there is nothing on how to implement it, and, also, nothing on film.

In an interview in which she puts forward her animal manifesto, Carol J. Adams (2006) brings a twenty-first-century perspective to the debate by propounding a vegan-feminist animal rights manifesto in which she speaks out strongly against dominance and murder and calls for the reproductive freedom of all female animals. The implied question is how can one be a feminist if one is not a vegan, as the egg and milk producers are female, and she shows how, in a patriarchal system, human women are denigrated in farmed animal nomenclature:

All flesh eaters benefit from the alienated labour of the bitches, chicks, (mad) cows, and sows whose own bodies represent their labour and whose names reveal a double enslavement—the literal reproduction forced upon them, and the metaphoric enslavement that conveys female denigration, so that we human females become animals through insults, we become the bitches, chicks, cows, and sows, terms in which our bodies or movements are placed within an interpretative climate in which female freedom is not to be envisioned. (Adams 2006: 122; cf. also Adams 2003)

These animal rights manifestos contend (sometimes blatantly and at other times implicitly) that cruelty to animals and specifically the eating of them is evil. Some writers stress the harm it does to the perpetrators (spiritually, intellectually, emotionally and physically) while others underline the suffering of these animals and call for mercy and justice, insisting that humans, too, are animals. However, what these manifestos are lacking are suggestions of how to implement this ideological framework, how to promote animal rights; and, understandably considering when most were written, there is nothing on film here. It is important, therefore, to look at the promulgations of film manifestos and then link them to animal rights advocacy.

### 6.3 FILM MANIFESTOS

There have been way over a hundred film manifestos in the past century, several of which can inform animal rights. Like other manifestos, that for film should be a “threshold utterance” (Emerson 2012: xi), a declaration that can have a catalytic efficacy. In his definitive *Film manifestos and global cinema cultures*, Scott Mackenzie contends that

film manifestos are ... a creative and political engine, an often unacknowledged force pushing forward film theory, criticism, and history. [They constitute] calls to action for political and aesthetic changes in the cinema ... as catalysts for film practices outside the dominant narrative. (Mackenzie 2014: 1).

In *Purity and provocation*, Mackenzie succinctly delineates the aims of most of such proclamations:

Throughout the history of the cinema, radicals and reactionaries alike have used the film manifesto as a means of stating their key aesthetic and political goals. Indeed, film manifestos are almost as old as the cinema itself.... In most cases, these texts were calls to revolution—a revolution of consciousness, of political hierarchies and of aesthetic practices, which all bled together in an attempt radically to redefine the cinema and the culture in which it existed. (Mackenzie 2003: 49)

In his manifesto just on a century ago, the Russian Alexei Gan (1974 [1928]: 129) saw cinema as a revolutionary “cultural and active weapon of society”. This understanding has been echoed across the years by a number of filmmakers, writers and ideologues. The most prominent in this regard have been those writing about a third cinema in Latin America, with views that animal rights advocates could well consider as relevant to their cause. The earliest was the writer, director and theorist Fernando Birri from Argentina who expressed his notions about a revolutionary possibility for film that

brings ... consciousness, which awakens consciousness, which clarifies matters, which strengthens the revolutionary consciousness of those ... who already possess this, which fires them, which disturbs, worries, shocks and weakens those who have a “bad conscience,”—which is “anti-colonial and anti-imperialist.” (Birri 1983 [1962]: 9; also see Mackenzie 2014: 211)

Birri's compatriots, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, also see the revolutionary potential of film, especially of documentary:

The cinema known as documentary, with all the vastness that the concept has today, from educational films to the reconstruction of a fact or a historical event, is perhaps the main basis of revolutionary filmmaking. Every image that documents, bears witness to, refutes, or deepens the truth of a situation is something more than a film image of purely artistic fact; it becomes something which the System finds indigestible. (Solanas & Getino 2021 [1970]: 390)

This has applicability for animal rights advocacy. Solanas and Getino (2021 [1970]: 393) also talk about having a camera in one hand and a rock in the other in the quest for liberation against increasing dictatorial forms of rule. This is seen as guerrilla filmmaking, which needs the support of militants. As attractive as the concept of ideological revolution is, especially against increasing dictatorial rule, animal rights advocates should question the notion of violence, as many activists are opposed to meeting violence with violence, viewing that as an estranging effect on the general public, and playing into the hands of those profiting from animal oppression. On the other hand, the camera may be physical, but in the context of animal rights the rock could be seen as metaphorical, something to smash the status quo of human hegemony, oppression and cruelty.

In referring to revolutionary cinema, the Bolivian director Jorge Sanjinés (1983 [1976]) gives the rider that individual stories must have collective meaning to be effective. In this regard, we think of films as varied as *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966; Bresson), *Gunda* (2020; Kossakovsky) and *Cow* (2021; Arnold)—films about individuals who epitomize the oppressed and suffering multitude and whose stories could act as the seed of conscientization and action.

To do this, animal rights filmmakers have to try not to be slaves to commercialism. Film manifestos have drawn attention to the problem of money, be that funding, cost or the desire for financial profit. As early as 1934, in an open letter to the film industry, the Hungarian painter and photographer Lászlo Moholy-Nagy (1934:56) pointed out how money was swallowed by “monster decorations” and the “piling up of stars” with their huge salaries. Little has changed since then.

The arch-crusader for financial profit in this regard is unsurprisingly Ayn Rand in her “Screen guide for Americans”, written “on behalf of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals” in 1947:

If you denounce the profit motive, what is it that you wish men to do? Work without reward, like slaves, for the benefit of the State?

An industrialist has to be interested in profit. In a free economy, he can make a profit *only* if he makes a good product which people are willing to buy. What do you want him to do? Should he sell his product at a loss? If so, how long is he to remain in business? And at whose expense? (In Mackenzie 2014: 425)

In addition to the dated sexism, this view is at variance with animal rights filmmaking on the whole, and it has no place for altruism.

In contrast, a number of manifestos point out the quandary of filmmakers in having to overcome Mammonist lust, and not seek financial profit. An example is the 1975 manifesto by FEPACI, the Fédération Panafricaine des Cineastes—The Algiers Charter on African Cinema, that maintains that “the question of commercial profit can be no yardstick for African filmmakers” (Marin 1982: 5–6.) We should bear in mind that it is difficult to make an ideological film in poorer countries where there are activists but no major source of financing or altruistic wealthy individuals who could bankroll production. This puts a poser to Ukadike’s (1994) view referred to in an earlier chapter on how important film could be in such countries; however, cost militates against success.

The 1962 Oberhausen Manifesto insists that films need freedom from the “outside influence of commercial partners” as well as “from the control of special interest groups” (Fowler 2002: 73). The insistence on not being influenced by those who control finances is vital, but we should look closely at “special interest groups”. At first glance, we might think that this could result in filmmakers not heeding the call of animal rights advocates, but it is more nuanced than that. The operative word is “control”: in short, filmmakers have the right to make the film that they want to without interference by any group who wishes to lay down rules and, as a result, stop them from focussing on what they wish to, even if this means, in line with the Oberhausen Manifesto, in having to take economic risks.

Related to this is the manifesto Dogme 95 (also spelled Dogma 95), promulgated by Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg. In a certain genesis or ideological standpoint, it could well have something in common

with a Farmed Animal Rights Manifesto for Film; this could be so if one looks at Mette Hjort's explanation in "A small nation's response to globalisation" (Hjort 2003: 31), which is much like László Moholy-Nagy's 1934 statement already referred to:

While the aims of Dogma 95 may be multiple, an all important ambition is to unsettle an increasingly dominant film-making reality characterised by astronomical budgets and by marketing and distribution strategies based, among other things, on vertical integration, stardom and technology-intensive special effects.

Dogme 95 has a "Vow of Chastity", a set of rules that include insisting that shooting must be done on location; props and sets must not be brought in; sound and images should not be produced apart; the camera must be handheld; the film must be in colour; optical work and filters are forbidden; there may not be "superficial action"; there must be no murders or weapons; temporal and geographical alienation are forbidden; the film must take place here and now; genre movies are unacceptable; the film format must be Academy 35 mm and the director must not be credited (cf. Hjort & Mackenzie 2003: 199–200). From this it is obvious that Dogme 95 is rigidly prescriptive, but certain films succeeded in abiding by these strictures, such as the first one made along these lines, *Festen* [*The celebration*] directed (uncredited) by Thomas Vinterberg (1998). The wave of Dogme 95's low-level film production lasted about ten years and revitalized the industry, particularly in Denmark. Certain of its ideals and practices will be incorporated into the proposals for FARM for Film (for instance, shooting on location in order not to take animals away from their environment), whereas others are untenable (one of them being their contention that film format must be Academy 35 mm, and that genre movies are unacceptable).

Dogme 95 gave rise to several other manifestos, such as Werner Herzog's provocative "Minnesota Declaration: Truth and fact in documentary cinema", which attacks Cinéma Vérité, also known as "observational cinema", saying it is "devoid of vérité" with the only truth being that of accountants (cf. Hjort & Mackenzie 2003: 200–201). This not only harks back to previous manifestos decrying the goal of profit-making but also raises the important point of accuracy and truth. However, we should bear in mind that truth does not always mean reality as we can see

in films as diverse as *Babe* (1995; Noonan), *Chicken run* (2000; Lord & Park) and *Okja* (2017; Bong Joon Ho).

Unlike the plethora of film manifestos, there are few on screenwriting. No matter their paucity, they can be related to the portrayal of animal rights, with films themselves having their genesis in someone's ideas, someone's stories, someone's screenplays. The foremost screenplay manifesto is the European Screenwriters Manifesto (2018). Its ethos is set out in the opening paragraph:

Stories are at the heart of humanity and are the repository of our diverse cultural heritage. They are told, retold and reinterpreted for new times by storytellers. Screenwriters are the storytellers of our time.

Their assertions in summary include:

- The screenwriter is an author of the film, a primary creator of the audiovisual work.
- The moral rights of the screenwriter, especially the right to maintain the integrity of a work and to protect it from any distortion or misuse, should be inalienable and should be fully honoured in practice.
- The screenwriter, as author, should be entitled to an involvement in the production process as well as in the promotion of the film and to be compensated for such work.
- National and European law should acknowledge that the writer is an author of the film.

The association also insists on screenwriters receiving as much attention as directors and actors as film is a collaborative art. These points all have bearing on a manifesto for farmed animals on film, with the first two points especially important. This is so because if a screenplay promotes animal rights in a certain way, the director (even if that person is not the screenwriter as such) should abide by the tenets evident in the screenplay that comes originally from the ideology and imagination of the screenwriter.

This underscores the essentiality of imagination in presenting possibility as well as reality (cf. Švankmajer 2007 [1999]), in what the Mauritanian director Med Hondo (1979:20) refers to as the construction of people's consciousness. It is a consciousness that animal rights advocates who are involved in filmmaking need to have as a goal. The underlying theme of these manifestos is that of filmmaking being a revolutionary activity that

needs to exhort viewers to action, to be uncompromising in standing up against the dominance and imperialistic modus operandi of the powers-that-be, to march towards utopian possibilities and in short, to disturb the universe, all of which could be ensconced in a Farmed Animal Rights Manifesto (FARM) for Film.

#### 6.4 A FARMED ANIMAL RIGHTS MANIFESTO (FARM) FOR FILM

To date, there appears to be no manifesto concerning film and animal rights, particularly the rights of farmed animals. Where an animal rights manifesto for film would differ from many other manifestos is in its not being directed at the oppressed, but at those who are in the position of being the oppressors.

The theoretical and ideological underpinning of such a Farmed Animal Rights Manifesto (FARM) for Film has already been discussed in earlier chapters of this book, with an insistence on rights and not welfare; with an affinity with ecofeminism as reflected here; with an understanding that critical media and animal rights studies can be combined into one ethical approach; with a realization that the question of post-anthropomorphism (as propounded here) should be addressed in a world crying out for a new ethic.

The animals in question are different from all other oppressed groups as they cannot speak for themselves in ways that the oppressors can or choose to understand. This is the task for humans who wish to be humane, and this should be their goal in such films: striving for the acknowledgement and activation of the rights of all animals that generally have no effective way of conveying their grievances to those in power. In this particular context, we are directed at the manumission, freeing from slavery, of all farmed animals, giving a voice to those who are not voiceless but whose voices are so often neither understood nor heeded.

A Farmed Animal Rights Manifesto for Film focuses on those animals confined to farms, industrial or otherwise, for labour, produce or food. But it is more than that. Such a manifesto gets to the heart of the human oppression and exploitation of all animals, be they on farms or in the wild, whether they are eaten or hunted, whether they are used as clothing or entertainment, whether they are experimented on or exiled from their natural habitats: the goose and the goshawk; the cow and the kudu; the

trout and the tuna. And all this is in the context of the fight against the environmental travails of today, the climate catastrophe and all kinds of oppression of humans, including the sexual, the racial, the cultural, the religious, and is informed by all of them.

In a rethinking of the aesthetic (a term used by Flory 2009: 234), another kind of cinema moves under the spotlight. If the first is rooted in corporate Hollywood, the second being European with its auteurship, the third revolutionary in which political goals are expressed and the fourth in tune with women's gazes and voices (cf. Ponzanesi & Waller 2012: 5), then this will be a fifth: that of animal rights which should, at various times, be able to cater for the emotional, the educational and the entertaining, but always the ethical.

Guidelines for such a manifesto are well informed by Freeman and Merskin's superb "Respectful representation: An animal issues study guide for all media practitioners", and especially those pointers related to journalists and the entertainment media (Freeman & Merskin 2016: 209–217), even if the focus is not on film as such. Pertinent points, adapted here for film concentrating on farmed animals, would include the sentience of all animals; individuality; avoidance of stereotypes; complexity of character and emotion; interactions of farmed animals with humans; investigation of exploitation; the use of appropriate gender designation; eschewal of industry terms; the use of digital technology rather than training animals; social and ecological responsibility.

FARM for Film "declares a position", will in all likelihood foster antagonism, "is univocal, unilateral, single-minded" and "indulges no tolerance for the faint hearted" (Lyon 1999: 9). It is also a call to "a revolution of consciousness, of political hierarchies and of aesthetic practices" (Mackenzie 2003: 49).

### *The Farmed Animal Rights Manifesto for Film*

*FARM for Film* is informed by the general ethos of animal rights, the practice as shown in the films discussed in Chaps. 4 and 5, and also relevant aspects of the various manifestos considered earlier in this chapter. In order to avoid repetition of the discussion in earlier chapters, there will only be the occasional reference to specific films in the various points.

*The All-Encompassing Concepts*

- *No harm*: The overarching principle is that of no harm. For a film to be seen as one whose basic tenets abide by animal rights, no animals should be harmed in the making of the film, it should not foster harm in any way and it should expose harm in its multitudinous forms (from bloodletting, to other physical abuse, to emotional trauma, to cognitive stifling) when related to what is being brought to the public's attention through this film.
- *Animal rights*: In short, we are looking at animal rights as examined in Chap. 2 and not at animal welfare. To repeat what was said earlier, animal welfare aims at reducing the suffering of animals but, in its ethos of utilitarianism, accords them only the right not to suffer. With a welfarist approach, animal experiments could be in order, if humans would benefit. Their regard for them as fungible, really results in their being expungible.

This approach is related to what Martha Nussbaum calls “Kantian contractarianism”. Kant argues that all duties to other animals are merely indirect ones to humanity, and if you are good to other animals, then you might behave in a similar fashion to humans. Such animals, therefore, do not have an intrinsic worth (Nussbaum 2004: 300).

Therefore, animal welfare does not provide any long-lasting protection for animals with their so-called more humane killing methods, and merely gives an excuse to continue fossilized cultural, religious and social traditions and actions (Cf. Pickover 2005: 10).

With animal rights, we adhere to Francione's approach. He makes hard-hitting comments and takes an unmitigated stand in favour of animal rights and against animal welfare (cf. Francione 1996, 2004, 2008; 2010; *passim*). Animal rights films should be abolitionist and totally opposed to regulation aimed at making other animals' lives more pleasant with the end-goal of slaughter, as this still regards them as property. The concept of “unnecessary suffering” is absurd. What is “unnecessary”? Why should there be any suffering at all? All this continues to lead to exploitation. The core of ethical veganism is that it recognizes the moral personhood of animals that should be reflected in animal rights films.

- *Exposing cruelty*: Exploitation, oppression and brutality must be exposed in whatever form they take, and animal rights films cannot be party to any of them, this stance being in line with The Declaration of Animal Rights of 2011.

- *Exposing exploitation in entertainment:* Forced sport entertainment (such as horse and dog racing), murderous entertainment (such as hunting), brutal entertainment (such as rodeos), oppressive entertainment (such as circuses), immured entertainment (such as zoos) and laboured entertainment (such as donkey and elephant rides) are anathema to animal rights, and if these are relevant to a film on farmed animals, they should be exposed for what they are: exploitative, coercive, denigratory, brutal, often leading to killing when the animals are no longer deemed to be able to serve their controllers' purposes, and all for the pleasure of people without considering the lives of the animals who are gazed upon, cheered and jeered.
- *Condemning cruelty in religious practices:* No special dispensation should be given to any religious practices if they involve cruelty of any kind. This can range from the killing of animals for religious festivals to the use of skins for ritual. These, too, are anathema and their betrayal of any kindness purported to be behind them, should be shown to be hypocritical, superstitious or bound by outmoded tradition—or any combination of these.
- *Goal of moral metamorphosis:* In the pursuance of animal rights and liberation, films have a transformative potential. Filmmakers should face the challenge of being part of a moral metamorphosis of human society as a whole by being prepared to present this case clearly and, depending on the audience, with various levels of forcefulness, be it through fact, fulmination or fun.

### *Farmed Animal Centrality*

- *All genres:* There is no limit to the genre implemented to portray animal cruelty as well as rights. The two overarching ones are documentary and narrative, but there can be combinations of them. Furthermore, such films can range from home videos to blockbusters. Documentaries have “the potential to significantly alter public perceptions and to seriously affect the lives of those whose images appear on film” (Plantinga 2009: 501–502). We expect documentaries to show us the state of the world as it is. However, films can promote an ethic through a truth that need not be real; in other words, they can expose malpractices in the physical world and also through the world of the imagination, as a fictional story can often grip an audience and bring them to the reality of a situation. To quote Richard Powers (2018: 336 & 488) again (as seen in Chap.

1): “The best arguments in the world won’t change a person’s mind. The only thing that can do that is a good story.” A fictional narrative can drive home an ethos to convince viewers that the plight of farmed animals is an evil that is against the tenets of humaneness. Such a film can strive to generate a new world order with the overriding ethos of compassion for all. But there can be negative consequences. An example given in Chap. 3 is that of *Finding Nemo* (2003; Stanton), with Nemo’s cuteness leading to children being given bowls or small aquariums with fish in, captured beings who lead existences of boredom and are generally neglected and even forgotten about. The same could be said about parents who buy their children piglets because they want their own Babes, not considering that piglets become big pigs whose cuteness becomes cumbersome. Therefore, the end of such films should explain why the obtaining of such animals ends up in cruelty and that parents should be discouraged from getting them.

- *The farmed animals’ point of view*: Filmmakers should endeavour to reflect the farmed animals’ point of view. For filmmakers to achieve this, whether they be screenwriters, directors or cinematographers, it is vital to give more than a panopticon-like view of animals’ lives, although this is important too. It is from these animals’ eyes that we need to try to see the world. To go beyond Laura Mulvey (1975), then, we are not looking at merely escaping the gaze of the male. We must work at divorcing the spectator from all dominant positions of oppositional glaring. We must move from hearing to hearkening. It is not only white arrogance, heterosexual glowering, class scowling and imperialistic frowning that must be fought against in film, but overall human hegemony that tries to smother the other. We must go beyond observing the other as an object, to integrate the captive animal gaze with that of the human stare, to see what is filmed with the eyes of those who are oppressed, to allow those behind the screen to lock gazes with us in order for us to connect, as done superbly in *Dominion* (2018; Delforce). The lens of the camera must aid the lens of the eye to traverse distance, to transfuse experience. Such transfusion is not only visual but also auditory. We must also try to hear the world from the ears of other animals—a point generally ignored by writers on this topic who tend to forget that hearing as well as sight is a sense used in cinema. We need not just see the grass

- they eat but hear the munching around them; not just see the slaughtering that they approach but also hear the screams of horror and pain.
- *Sentience*: The portrayal of farmed animal sentience is a sine qua non. To regard only humans as sentient betokens speciesism, is derisively derogative and considers farmed animals as objects and products for consumption and other exploitation. Their feelings must not be disregarded, and neither their right to live their own lives in ways that lead to contentment.
  - *Individuality*: The individuality of animals should be stressed. They can be shown as a multitude of beings undergoing torture and slaughter in order to underline their mass murder, but individuals should be shown in order to accentuate that they are beings with their own self-interests (cf. Freeman & Merskin 2016:215); that each one does have their own look if we observe closely enough (ranging from colouring to expression), that each one is different, that each one has their own life, their own character.
  - *Emotions*: The emotions of farmed animals should be filmed, these ranging from joy to sorrow, from anger to love, from frustration to pleasure. Therefore, their complexity of character, of emotion and of cognition should be portrayed.
  - *Voices of farmed animals*: As farmed animals are not voiceless, their voices must be heard. This does not mean to have only grunts, squeals, bleats and clucks (although those should be included), but also screams and cries of anguish on screen.
  - *Voice-overs*: In order to underline the lives and voices of the farmed animals, voice-overs of humans can be used. These can give an overview of issues and events, be explanatory, be used not just in a matter of fact way but give verbal treatment of predicaments sympathetically and tendentiously.
  - *Stereotypes*: Stereotypes should be avoided: not all sheep are dim-witted and sweet; not all piglets are cute; not all bulls are ferocious. Stereotypes give an oversimplified image or concept of a particular animal who is not an emotionally or cognitively one-dimensional automaton who should always be expected to act in a predetermined way, but has a multifaceted personality and individuality.
  - *Caricatures*: We could say that the portrayal of animals in film should not caricaturize them in order to raise a laugh. The obverse of this is that caricatures are important when the film is directed at a young audience. Exaggeration can get the audience more involved in the

film through amusement; it can be a keyhole into feeling more for certain animals. Therefore, one must take into account the age of viewers aimed at before condemning the use of caricatures.

- *Agency*: It is fitting to show farmed animals as subject to the whims, wiles and wickedness of humans, but also to show that they do have agency, that they can make decisions and that they can try to do things, including escape.

### *Filming*

- *Location*: With live action, filming should be done on location. This is obvious for documentaries, but an attempt should be made not to disrupt farmed animals' lives by taking them away from their environment.
- *Naming and shaming*: With documentaries in particular, when abuses are shown there should be a policy of naming and shaming: the places where the animals are maltreated should be identified. Unfortunately, with anti-whistle-blower or AG-gag legislation having been passed in certain states in the USA, Canada and Australia, for instance, filmmakers are at risk of legal action being taken against them for trespassing or bringing malpractice to the attention of the public. But a stand must be made against this policy of shooting the messenger while perpetrators of cruelty go scot-free.
- *Handheld cameras*: Where possible, handheld cameras should be used as this would be less intrusive to those being filmed, facilitate such filming and even keep the price down.
- *Undercover filming*: Undercover filming is acceptable, whether this be by secreted cameras or by drones, in order to expose the horrors of farming and slaughter, and the lives that the animals are forced to lead.
- *Public domain*: Images in the public domain should be used to press the case of animal rights. Films from decades back could put the tribulations of animals into historical context, and home or amateur videos can show immediacy and local issues as well as reflect a more global import.
- *Training of animals*: Farmed animals should not be coercively trained to act in certain ways, which could be harmful emotionally as well as physically, and lend an artificiality to their behaviour. This would be no better than elephants and tigers being trained in cir-

cuses, and is against the tenets of animal rights. Digital techniques can overcome this problem.

- *Anthropomorphization*: Farmed animals should not wear clothes for any reason, be this for amusement or to physically anthropomorphize them. A film such as *Babe: Pig in the city* (1998; Miller) breaches aspects of animal rights as many of the simians are dressed in human clothes, which lends itself to both pathos and amusement, depending on the audience. While these are not farmed animals, they are circus ones, and the training to get them to dress, wear and disrobe certainly betokens conduct under coercion. On the other hand, the portrayal of similarities between farmed animals and humans is not necessarily anthropomorphic, but a way to galvanize a new conscientization. To show these animals as cognitive and emotional beings who have agency is not anthropomorphic, but a way of including all animals under the mantle of sentient beings.
- *Weapons and violence*: Documentaries on animal rights should not refrain from showing weapons (clubs, knives and guns as examples) or other physical acts (kicking and hitting) used in subduing, terrorizing and murdering farmed animals. The filming of such action highlights the horrors of such farming and delivers proof of such atrocities that can conscientize audiences. In fictional narrative films, any such violence should be done through Computer Generated Imagery, or the filming should switch to animation in order not to harm or frighten any animal.
- *Monochrome and colour*: Monochromic films are as acceptable as those in full colour in order to get a point across. This technique could be particularly useful to indicate a flashback, memory or imagination.
- *Time sequences*: Temporal and geographical alienation is just as acceptable as a strict adherence to chronology and place; therefore, flashbacks or flashforwards can be used. These are all related to imaginative, creative and technical skill and, although not essential to the success of a film, can add to an understanding of context.
- *Sound*: Both diegetic and non-diegetic sound can be used. It would be effective to combine sound with visuals in order to emphasize the odious. For instance, visuals of sheep being herded and the sounds of their terrified bleating can be complemented by trucks revving to take them to their deaths, or by sounds of the machinery of slaughter.

- *Music and song*: Music and song are acceptable in enhancing action, depicting emotion, underlining confusion or frustration, and facilitating the involvement of viewers in the events, as well as encouraging empathy with the animals being portrayed.
- *Screenwriters*: If a screenplay is aimed at animal rights, but the director considers that certain scenes are not possible, they should be prepared to consult with the screenwriter in order to find a way of presenting an issue or scene that is acceptable to all and to the benefit of the farmed animals.

### *Terminology and Facts*

- *Correct terminology*: It is essential that correct terminology is used. The terms that designate humans should also be used for all animals, such as “he/she/him/her/his” and not “it/its”; “who/whom” and not “which/that”. The term “owner” is an abomination and should be proscribed, as nobody can own another sentient being; the use of the word “owner” reduces the animal to an object regarded as something without sentience or agency. The term “non-human animal” should also be avoided, as this suggests a hegemony with humans at the top of any classification, and also seen as justifiably in control. It is the same as calling a black person a “non-white”. There are ways around this terminology that is unfortunately used by many writers with otherwise and deserved strong animal rights credentials: one can talk about “farmed animals”, or “cows” or “sheep” or “chickens” or “trout”. The word “non-human” lumps all those who are not human into one amorphous category.
- *Industry terms*: Unless those who are implicated in the perpetration of animal oppression are quoted, industry terms cannot be used as they promote a cognitive dissonance that could be linked to animal welfarism in which an attempt is made to assuage unease over hardship and death by euphemisms for animal carcasses on a plate. Words such as “ham”, “pork”, “steak”, “beef”, “veal” and “mutton”, for instance, hide and disguise provenance. They should be called what they are: “pig”, “cow”, “calf” and “sheep”. To be even more accurate, the words “dead”, “slaughtered” or “killed” could precede them.
- *Accuracy*: It is essential and ethical to check facts and verify findings that are shown, discussed or mentioned in films. Any slip can cloud the main issue and be to the detriment of animal rights if this becomes

public knowledge and then those opposed to such rights use it as a hammer against advocacy.

- *Statistics*: If it is appropriate for a film to give statistics and hard numerical facts, then these should appear on screen or in a voice-over or discussion. These would include the numbers of farmed animals incarcerated and murdered, and also the truncated lifespans. The financial profits made by farmers, industrialists and manufacturers of animal-based products should also be given when appropriate.

### *Portrayal of Humans*

- *Relationship to humans*: Animals must not be portrayed as inferior to humans. Both similarities and differences could be highlighted, such as love, watchfulness, a desire for comfort, frustration, confusion, terror and grief. Such portrayals could elicit empathy and a realization in audiences that the farmed animals being shown deserve as much consideration as humans.
- *Correspondence to other oppressed groups*: Animal rights films can highlight similarities to other oppressed groups (gender, race, sexuality). For instance, cows, sows and hens are women, and portraying their commonalities could be attitudinally advantageous to all. Wherever there is enslavement and discrimination, it must be shown to be diabolically wrong.
- *Portrayal of humans*: The portrayal of humans should not be one-sided. Although wicked actions should be shown, time and space should be given to those who are kind to farmed animals.

### *Specific Persuasive Techniques*

The different *techniques of persuasion* listed in Chap. 3 and related to various films, particularly those discussed in Chap. 4, follow. They could be used in animal rights films in order to help convince the audience ideologically and to encourage them to act accordingly. In summary:

- *Direct address* is a vital method of drawing in viewers as they are encouraged to feel that whatever is said or shown applies to them directly.
- *Rhetorical questions* are a fine technique in getting the audiences to respond in the way that the director or scriptwriter wishes them to.

- *Bandwagon* implies that “everybody is adopting this way of life; so should you.”
- *Plain-folks* appeals to viewers on the grounds that what or who is depicted relates to them.
- *Card-stacking* denotes the varied approaches or clips that show the same thing or that convey the same message.
- *Hostile comments*, pejoratives or name-calling is used to give something a bad label.
- *Sympathetic terms*, or amelioratives, also known as glittering generalities, refer to words or terms that are used that underline the positive aspects of a certain approach or ideology.
- *Transfer* depicts or refers to something that viewers can relate to and that enhances the cause of animal rights (such as a pastoral scene, or one of a farm sanctuary). It can also be used to show something appalling or abominable (smoke rising from a slaughterhouse) that is then intended to turn viewers away from the status quo which glorifies production, cruelty or death.
- *Testimonials* have an esteemed figure narrating the film or backing its ideology in an interview.
- *Slogans* that are used to get a point across in a pithy way can remain in the minds of viewers. In animal rights films, slogans used in industry can be highlighted to show their falsity.
- *Humour* occurs rarely in animal rights films, apart from wry comments or, more often, madcap animated films aimed at children. However, amusing the audience is a way of getting a point across as long as it is not to the detriment of anyone except humans acting in appalling ways.
- *Satire* can be used to mock offensive lifestyles and hypocrisy. These can be forefronted through ridicule to get aspects of animal rights across to an audience.

### *Financial Aspects*

- *Financial profit*: Animal rights films should not have financial profit as their main goal. If any gains are made in this regard, that money should be ploughed back into related enterprises. Although it is understandable that those involved cannot work for free, the ideal (even if not always practicable) would be for everyone to be satisfied to subsist on bed and board support only.

- *Lack of expense*: An attempt should be made to make the film as inexpensively as possible, while still enabling it to be viewer-appealing. If “big names” are used, they should give their time freely.
- *Sponsorship*: Sponsorship from a wealthy individual, group or corporation should be considered, as should crowd-funding. However, this could be difficult in poorer countries. For this reason, an appeal for support should be made by filmmakers from such countries to those in wealthier ones. In a striving for a more global impact, animal rights groups, movements or enterprises in richer countries should be prepared to help filmmakers in financially strapped ones. In summary, FARM for Film happily takes the ideas expressed in Bamberger, Knoller and Kol’s Webdogme Manifesto of 1999 (in Hjort & Mackenzie 2003: 201–202) that decrees that films should be cheap to make (thus, an insurgence against the policy of the pocket), quick to produce (if possible), inexpensive to distribute, usually through the internet, and use generally free equipment (if that suffices).

#### *Wider Issues*

- *Vegan lifestyle*: An ultimate animal rights film would be one not only as far as theme is concerned, but one in which all those involved in the making of the film engage in a vegan lifestyle; on set, there should be no food that is not plant-based, no leather, no wool, no silk, nothing that has been taken from an animal for human comfort.
- *Helping*: Films should not only have the disclaimer that no animals were hurt in the making of the film, but explain how animals were helped in the production (cf. Malamud 2010: 146), as well as suggestions of how to improve the lot of these animals. Films could end with an easily recognizable person addressing the audience, raising issues and suggesting how to become part of animal advocacy. An example of this can be seen in the production and sharing of videos concerning the slaughtering of male chicks; these generated a petition and has resulted in Italy banning such killing (Cf. Núñez 2022). Therefore, there should be a call to action.
- *Community involvement*: In order to get the community more involved in and committed to animal rights, they could be part of pre-production as individuals or organizations, and then their efforts noted in the credits.

- *Global similarities*: In order to avoid a slip into finger-pointing at specific countries and communities, similarities should be pointed out. For instance, if dolphins are shown being slaughtered in Japan, then clips should show how this is related to industrial farming and slaughter of cows in the USA.
- *Health*: There are always humans who are affected by only that which could be advantageous or detrimental to them. Films that underline the health aspects resulting from the pursuit of animal rights, how a plant-based diet can benefit the human body physically as well as physiologically, could turn members of an audience towards a vegan lifestyle, which would then obviously benefit farmed animals.
- *Social and ecological responsibilities*: Animal rights films could be linked to social and ecological responsibilities, with an explanation of how harming animals and the use of animals on farms have a direct bearing on environmental degradation and climate change.

## 6.5 CONCLUSION

*FARM for Film* is a way of striving to change the lifestyle of a tainted world, but it is a world that is harsh, and the “situation we find ourselves in cannot be dealt with through anything less than plain speaking” (Atwood 2022: 61). What the perpetrators of animal cruelty do should be criminalised and should not be part of contemporary culture, society, religion, law or conduct. FARM for Film can be ascribed to by animal activists everywhere who have access to filmmaking in order to try to give farmed animals a better world in perpetuity. It is idealistic but with ideals such as these, humans can be encouraged to act and to change for the benefit of all beings.

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## Conclusion

*I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and  
self-contained,*

*I stand and look at them long and long.*

*They do not sweat and whine about their condition,  
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,*

*They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,  
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of  
owning things,*

*Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of  
years ago ....*

*Walt Whitman: Song of myself 32*

*(Whitman 1998: 54)*

*If a filmic metaphor is used to depict a social injustice, then what is  
more real to the people who are suffering from that injustice? The  
image of a carefree, happy consumer society showed by the passive mass  
media, or a metaphor which draws attention to that injustice which  
those people are experiencing?*

*I do think it is important for us to draw strength from the struggle of  
activists and so many others and from the capacity of people everywhere  
to resist.*

*Peter Watkins (2004)*

*[Comment on his film Punishment park.]*

Animal rights activists, advocates and academics should bear in mind that films “both shape and bear witness to the ethical and political dilemmas that animate the broader social landscape” (Giroux 2002: 13). They should “seize the popular cultural opening of cinema” (Loy 2016: 229–230) as a tool of conscientization to advance the ethical claims of farmed animals.

In his book *Black African cinema*, Nwachuku Frank Ukadike (1994: 222–223) describes how cinema has proven to be an asset in African countries with high illiteracy rates, and also as a powerful instrument of ideological education. Film can be used in most countries or societies to get across the animal rights ideology, too, to bring a new awareness to viewers, to try to establish a different understanding of those who are being portrayed.

Furthermore, the rational should not be stressed in isolation, as emotional engagement with issues is also important. Carroll calls this criterial prefocusing: “the notion that a filmmaker can focus the viewer on aspects of the story that address certain emotion-generating moral criteria” (Frome 2009: 341).

Most of the farmed animal advocacy films discussed in this book are committed in various degrees to portraying injustices undergone by farmed animals. All the documentaries and most of the narratives can be considered as embodying a transformative agency, something that the manifesto has as its goal as well. It is a way of counteracting other media that downplay or disregard the role that the eating of animals (and the concomitant enslavement, maltreatment and murder of them) has on the overall ethic of humans, as well as on health, both their own and that of the world we live in, including that of climate change (Cf. Kristiansen, Painter & Shea 2021: 153–172; Winters 2022: 229).

We need a call for compassion and for humans to act on it. As Marc Bekoff points out, “All over the globe people are talking about ways to lighten our carbon footprint and accrue carbon credits. But what about increasing our compassion footprint and accruing compassion credits?” (Bekoff 2008: 773).

It is vital that animal rights films do not stop at just showing what is there, exposing the difference, for instance, between the advertisements of smiling cows inviting you to drink their milk and the reality of their oppression and suffering; they should also include a call to action, motivating their viewers to change their lifestyles or advocating practical support for animal rights. In strongly addressing this issue, especially with

regard to the education of children, Tobias Linné points out that the focus of media studies, and film in particular, tends to representations rather than changing conditions for “nonhuman animals in human society”. He adds, “It also means asking questions about what media studies education can contribute to critical animal studies pedagogies and the work of a more species-inclusive, intersectionality-based education that can incorporate, in both theory and practice, human-nonhuman animal relationships as part of broader social justice projects” (Linné 2016: 252).

These films should be able to make the audience care about farmed animals and what their own role is in the continuing cruelty. This is in line with Val Plumwood’s precepts of what such a work of art should foster: recognition of the subjectivity of this group, respecting them and attempting “to disrupt those violence-prone perceptions” (Plumwood 1997: 21–22). These films should aim at producing a moral metamorphosis in those who watch them, or, with those already engaged compassionately, enhancing their commitment to advocacy.

With animal rights cinema, we have to contend with antagonists on the following levels: economic (factory farmers); social (people traditionally bound—hide-bound—to the tradition of eating meat); cultural (the blind following of religious or cultural mores); political (the expedience of politicians in not wanting to rock the gastronomic boat); legal (that which makes anything gustatory legal if linked to the economy, and any attempt to subvert that is seen as illegal) and hegemonic (the notion that humans are the epitome of life-forms and can do with other creatures what they will—as long as they are not “fashionable” beings). Therefore, such a deracination, a tearing up of cruelty by the roots, is not easy, but it can be done. We have to free ourselves and others from the moral entrapment of a pernicious social identity. And to do it, films must be accessible to the intended audience, with the educational and the entertaining linked to the ethical.

We cannot submit to the view that sympathy does not lead to empathy, and that empathy rarely leads to altruism and prosocial behaviour (cf. Coplan 2009: 108). This notion is founded on a cynicism which filmmakers must strive against and show that farmed animals, in this case, share much in sentience, emotion and cognition with humans; screenwriters, directors, cinematographers and actors can lead the audience in making a difference. Such a quest is not an easy one, but it has to be one that can be enjoined. Why else make these films?

In line with this, it is fitting here to quote or glean from each of the animal rights films (some several times) discussed in earlier chapters, in which points are made that tie up with many of those in FARM for Film. In other words, precise statements from these films act as a summary of what has gone before. The broad categories are:

Animal rights—not welfare  
 Sentience and suffering of individuals  
 Humans: Base behaviour  
 Humans: Activism and decency  
 Film for change

### *Animal Rights: Not Welfare*

We can no longer cling to ideas of high welfare farms or humane slaughterhouses, as to deny someone their freedom, commodify and mutilate their body, take away their babies, and take their life can never be done without exploitation or abuse. [*Land of hope and glory* (2017; Winters)].

What you are about to see is beyond your worst nightmares. But for animals raised on modern intensive production farms and killed in slaughterhouses, it is cold, inescapable reality. Once you see for yourself the routine cruelty involved in raising animals for food you'll understand why millions of compassionate people have decided to leave meat off their plates for good. [*Meet your meat* (2002; Friedrich & Akin)].

Nasty, nasty work.... Everything is brutal. Everything. [*Death on a factory farm* (2009; Simon & Teale)].

In our recorded history, 619 million humans have been killed by war. We kill the same number of animals every three days, and this isn't even including fish and other sea creatures whose deaths are so great they are only measured in tonnes. [*Dominion* (2018; Delforce)].

Animals were harmed during the making of this movie.

Last year, 10 billion animals were killed for food in the United States alone after being raised in extreme confinement.

Over 150 million animals were caged and tortured in American laboratories.

Each vegan saves at least 90 individual lives a year. [*Bold native* (2010; Hennelly)].

Troye King Jones: “Look at what the meat industry is ... is doing to our planet. Look at what it’s doing to our animals. Look at what it’s doing to us. That’s extreme. We are not vegans. They are carnists.” [*Carnage: Swallowing the past.* (2017; Amstell)].

What did the biggest company in our country have to hide?... Industrial dairying is this country’s biggest polluter. It’s our biggest climate emitter, emitting more greenhouse gases than our entire transport sector. It’s our biggest water polluter. And it’s also a major stressor for biodiversity and for soil health. [*Milked* (2022; Taylor)].

We live in a society that makes it very easy for us to remain sort of wilfully ignorant to the processes and the details behind food production. [*Fowl play* (2009; Durand)].

Ferdinand: “Dinner means death. Death means carnage.” [*Babe* (1995; Noonan)].

Old Major: “Few of us will ever know the blessings of a peaceful old age.... Whatever we produce is taken from us, stolen from us and sold.” [*Animal farm* (1954; Halas & Batchelor)].

Ginger: “We lay eggs day in and day out, and when we can’t lay anymore, they kill us.” [*Chicken run* (2000; Lord & Park)].

Lupe: “I get it. You don’t like the bullfighting. It’s because you’re hung up on the blood and the guts and the maiming and the gore and the senseless violence.” [*Ferdinand* (2017; Saldanha)].

### *Sentience and Suffering of Individuals*

Out of sight, out of mind, they cease to be individuals, most known only as livestock, faceless units of production in a system of incomprehensible scale, exempt from the cruelty laws that protect out companion animals. Their suffering unseen and unheard, their value determined only by their usefulness to humankind, nationalised by a belief in our own superiority, the notion that might equals right. A notion that must be questioned. [*Dominion* (2018; Delforce)].

These are benign and innocent beings—and they deserve better. [*Earthlings* (2005; Monson)].

A fish, a chicken, a whale—exactly the same value—it has one life. [*Seaspiracy* (2021; Tabrizi)].

Wilbur: “I don’t want to die.” [*Charlotte’s web* (1972; Nichols & Takamoto)].

Gordy’s mother: “Someone, help us, please.” [*Gordy* (1994; Lewis)].

Never looked at a piece of pork and associated it with a pig; never thought that a pig, er, was actually like a dog, and had feelings and emotions. [*Death on a factory farm* (2009; Simon & Teale)].

Sylvia Earle: “Fish feel pain.... Fish have a lateral line down their sides that sense the most exquisite little movements in the water.” [*Seaspiracy* (2021; Tabrizi)].

The greatest gift we can give to them is to recognise them as individuals. [*Peaceable kingdom: The journey home* (2004; Stein)].

Wilbur: Isn’t it great that I articulate,  
Isn’t it grand that you can understand.

[*Charlotte’s web* (1972; Nichols & Takamoto)].

[The film] is not historically accurate. Except for the talking turkeys. That part is totally real. [*Free birds* (2013; Hayward)].

{It is not just the voices, the speech, of the fictional characters that we hear. We also hear the voices of the real pigs and cows in *Gunda* (2020; Kossakovsky) and *Cow* (2021; Arnold); we hear their anguish; they speak their own language. We do not understand their precise words, but we understand that they are sentient individuals, and that they are suffering.}

### *Humans: Base Behaviour*

[We are] faced with a living creature who’s completely humble, completely holy and happens to be a donkey: Balthazar. It’s pride, greed, the need to inflict suffering, lust in the measure found in each of the various owners [sic]

at whose hands he suffers and finally dies. [Robert Bresson (1966b) on *Au hazard Balthazar*—*Balthazar, at random* (1966; Bresson)].

[There is the exercising of] power, authority and dominion over those we perceive to be inferior, for our own short-sighted ends.... It is a justification that has been used before. By the white man to enslave the black or to take their land and their children. By the Nazis to murder the Jews. By men, to silence and oppress women. [*Dominion* (2018; Delforce)].

Old Major: “Animal kind is born to a miserable, laborious, and short existence ... And when our usefulness ... has come to an end, we are slaughtered with hideous cruelty. And who, pray, is responsible for our suffering? Huh? Hm? Man! Man is our enemy ... Remove man and the root cause of hunger and overwork is abolished for ever.” [*Animal farm* (1999; Stephenson)].

You may have noticed that the heroes in our story are all animals and the villains are all people. I hope none of you take that personally. [*The Muppet musicians of Bremen* (1972; Henson)].

Wilbur: Humans love pigs.  
Templeton: Hm—they love pork.  
[*Charlotte’s web* (2006; Winick)].

The language of the time suggested we were just eating our dinner. [*Carnage: Swallowing the past*. (2017; Amstell)].

Teacher: “Humans need to eat to stay alive. We eat other living things. I want you all to get a sense of what that really means.” [*Buta ga ita kyōshitsu*—*Schooldays with a pig* (2008; Maeda)].

These pigs have a value. [*Death on a factory farm* (2009; Simon & Teale)].

He’s a big ’un. He’ll bring a good price. [*Gordy* (1994; Lewis)].

Greta Thunberg: “Even most climate scientists or green politicians keep on flying around the world, eating meat and dairy.... People are suffering; people are dying; entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction. And all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!” [*Vegan 2019: The film* (2019; Mitchell)].

*Humans: Activism and Decency*

Be human, animals can cry,  
 Be human, it's easy if you try....  
 Be human, have a tender word  
 For every animal and bird.  
 It's futile to be brutal,  
 That won't get you a dime,  
 So be human all the time.  
 [*Be human* (1936; Fleischer)].

Moses: No animal can attack a human.  
 Jessie: No human should ever hurt an animal.  
 [*Animal farm* (1999; Stephenson)].

We're challenging what they're doing, and we're as nicely as possible asking them to get out of business ... You know, we are animal rights people. We are vegetarians, and when we go to stockyards, to factory farms, to slaughterhouses, what those businesses stand for, ... [is] diametrically opposed to [what we stand for]. So when we come into these facilities, the people get very upset. One reason is that when we go in there, we get videotapes and pictures showing how horrible the conditions are, and when the public sees those, they don't want to support those industries. [*A cow at my table* (1998; Abbott)].

It's kind of sad and empty sometimes when people are looking at your belief system and passing judgement on you, and just disappearing from your life.... The community can turn their back on you, but it's also finding a new community. [*Peaceable kingdom: The journey home* (2004; Stein)].

It makes me often a lonely person. It is a lonely, fucking life. You're either out in the middle of nowhere, working undercover with a bunch of people that you hate or even if you do make friends out there and people treat you well, that's it. You're not going to be able to stay in touch with them and say, 'Hey! It's me!' [*Death on a factory farm* (2009; Simon & Teale)].

We need viewers brave enough to see it.... Surely, if slaughterhouses had glass walls, would not all of us be vegetarians? [*Earthlings* (2005; Monson)].

Nobody in our movement [Animal Liberation Front] has hurt any living thing. [*Behind the mask: The story of the people who risk everything to save animals* (2006; Keith)].

We're [Animal Liberation Front] not terrorists. We don't like violence.... We never harm anyone—human or non-human. That is our 40-year credo. [*Okja* (2017; Bong Joon Ho)].

What is free? Are we born free or do we earn it? If you deny freedom to the quiet ones, those who have no voice, can you be free yourself? [*Bold native* (2010; Hennelly)].

Fern was up at daylight, trying to rid the world of injustice. [*Charlotte's web* (1972; Nichols & Takamoto)].

Professor: I felt a loving thing had come to me for love and protection. [*Agraharathil kazhuthai—A donkey in a Brahmin village* (1977; Abraham)].

Jack Lindquist: “I was chatting with a really good friend of mine about veganism, and, you know, how she was vegan, and she asked me a couple of questions I couldn't answer.... One question in particular: What's the difference between your dog ... and a cow or a pig? And I didn't have an answer.... I said, well, yes, I guess I'm vegan now. That totally makes sense. There is really no difference between the animals, there's no reason to exploit one and love another, and, you know ... I couldn't go on living doing these horrible things to these wonderful creatures.” [*Live and let live* (2013; Pierschel)].

### *Film for Change*

I felt that the way one could attempt to use cinematic language to challenge habitual thinking and make people feel things that they were unable to do by any other means was what I wanted to do. [Victor Schonfeld interview; *The animals film* (1981; Schonfeld & Alaux)].

Talking Heads: “I need something to change your mind.” [*The animals film* (1981; Schonfeld & Alaux)].

The time has come for each of us to reconsider our eating habits, our traditions, our styles and fashions, and, above all, our thinking. [*Earthlings* (2005; Monson)].

You want to capture something that will make people change.... The dolphin slaughter is scheduled to resume each September. Unless we stop it. Unless you stop it. [*The cove* (2009; Psihoyos)].

It isn't too late to take the best hope we will ever have of having a home in this universe.... Most of the positive and negative things that bring about change in human civilization start with someone. Some *one*. And no *one* can do *everything*, but every *one* can do *something*. And sometimes, big ideas make a big difference. That's what we can do. That's what you can do right now. Look in the mirror. Figure it out. Go for it. [*Seaspiracy* (2021; Tabrizi—emphasis in original)].

Going from the last injunction, we can say that films, in line with FARM for Film, should in various ways be powerful in portraying animal rights in order to move viewers. Advice should be taken from a Middle English poem from about 900 years ago, *The owl and the nightingale*, where we are told about the Nightingale:

But she was bold and held her nerve,  
 & wisely, spoke with guts and verve,  
 & looked her foe straight in the face.  
 The timid voice will lose the case;  
 a rival prospers if he sees  
 you run—stand firm though & he flees ....  
 (Armitage 2022: 29).

All the documentaries (and some of the narrative films, too, such as *Agraharathil kazhuthai*, *Bold native* and *Carnage*) discussed in this book have been made by filmmakers with “guts and verve”, sometimes with those involved having to be bold and hold their nerve. Whether a film for animal rights uses humour or horror, it embodies a protest against the powerful; it is a means to valorize the victims in a system that perpetually tries to vanquish the farmed animals' selfhoods that are as significant, meaningful and individual as those of their oppressors. And even those funny, animated or partly computer-generated films aimed at children have frightening scenes that can conscientize the audience, films such as

*Chicken run, Free birds, Gordy, Babe, Ferdinand* and *Okja*. Some of the films discussed show how the bodies of the animals might be massacred but also how their stories cannot be slaughtered. We are compelled to listen to their cries of anguish. We are compelled to retell.

Our aim is freedom for farmed animals, our fellow earthlings who must be liberated from the apocalypse that is wrought upon them. There cannot be true liberation of any oppressed people until we all transcend our own situations and work for the liberation of these animals: these who can rarely take action themselves, whose screams are ignored by so many, whose tears are unseen by the majority of humans, whose suffering is brushed aside, whose deaths are disregarded by those who fill their stomachs with their bodies, and their pockets through profit-making. People must go beyond the traditions and behaviour that have fenced their compassion off from them for so long.

Animal rights films should aim at helping free all animals from the razor wire (literal and metaphoric) that surrounds them. These films should always enlighten, educate and enkindle emotion. And, sometimes, they should entertain too. These films should influence, instigate and even incite the audience to take a stand against the bedlam of brutality and the atrophy of conscience. They should fight against the cancer of carnivorousness and the toxicity of cruelty that are fuelled by the prospect of pecuniary profit. They should dream of a tomorrow with “fresh woods, and pastures new” (Milton 1970 [1638]: 358). Idealistic it might seem, but that is what manifestos are and what these films in particular also are in striving for a better life for farmed animals, for all animals.

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# APPENDIX: CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF FILMS REFERENCED AND DISCUSSED

## ANIMAL RIGHTS FILMS

- 1936—*Be human* (Fleischer)  
1949—*Le sang des bêtes* [*Blood of the beasts*] (Franju)  
1954—*Animal farm* (Halas & Batchelor)  
1966—*Au hasard Balthazar* [*Balthazar, at random*] (Bresson)  
1972—*Charlotte's web* (Nichols & Takomoto)  
1972—*The Muppet musicians of Bremen* (Henson)  
1977—*Agraharathil kazhuthai* [*A donkey in a Brahmin village*] (Abraham)  
1981—*The animals film* (Schonfeld & Alaux)  
1994—*Gordy* (Lewis)  
1995—*Babe* (Noonan)  
1998—*A cow at my table* (Abbott)  
1999—*Animal farm* (Stephenson)  
2000—*Chicken run* (Lord & Park)  
2002—*Meet your meat* (Friedrich & Akin)  
2004—*Peaceable kingdom: The journey home* (Stein)  
2005—*Earthlings* (Monson)  
2006—*Behind the mask: The story of the people who risk everything to save animals* (Keith)  
2006—*Charlotte's web* (Winick)

- 2008—*Buta ga ita kyōshitsu [Schooldays with a pig]* (Maeda)  
 2009—*Death on a factory farm* (Simon & Teale)  
 2009—*Fowl play* (Durand)  
 2009—*The cove* (Psihoyos)  
 2010—*Bold native* (Hennelly)  
 2011—*Forks over knives* (Fulkerson)  
 2013—*Blackfish* (Cowperthwaite)  
 2013—*Free birds* (Hayward)  
 2013—*Live and let live* (Pierschel)  
 2013—*Speciesism: The movie* (Devries)  
 2014—*Cowspiracy: The sustainability secret* (Andersen & Kuhn)  
 2015—*Tyke the elephant outlaw* (Lambert & Moore)  
 2016—*H.O.P.E.* (Messenger)  
 2017—*Carnage: Swallowing the past* (Amstell)  
 2017—*Das System Milch [The milk system]* (Pichler)  
 2017—*Ferdinand* (Saldanha)  
 2017—*Land of hope and glory* (Winters)  
 2017—*Okja* (Bong Joon Ho)  
 2017—*Pokot [Spoor]* (Holland)  
 2017—*The last pig* (Argo)  
 2017—*Trophy* (Clusiau & Schwarz)  
 2017—*What the health* (Andersen & Kuhn)  
 2018—*73 cows* (Lockwood)  
 2018—*Anima: Animals, faith, compassion* (Jesum)  
 2018—*Dominion* (Delforce)  
 2018—*Eating animals* (Quinn)  
 2018—*The game changers* (Psihoyos)  
 2019—*Vegan 2019: The film* (Mitchell)  
 2020—*Gunda* (Kossakovsky)  
 2021—*Cow* (Arnold)  
 2021—*Seaspiracy* (Tabrizi)  
 2022—*Milked* (Taylor)

#### FILMS IN WHICH ANIMALS WERE ABUSED

- 1895—*Das boxende Känguruh [The boxing kangaroo]* (Skladanowsky)  
 1903—*Electrocuting an elephant* (Porter & Smith)  
 1925—*Ben-Hur: A tale of the Christ* (Niblo)  
 1925—*Stachka [Strike]* (Eisenstein)

- 1933—*Las hurdes: Tierra sin pan [Land without bread]* (Buñuel)  
 1936—*The charge of the Light Brigade* (Curtiz)  
 1939—*Jesse James* (King)  
 1939—*La règle du jeu [The rules of the game]* (Renoir)  
 1939—*Stagecoach* (Ford)  
 1959—*Ben-Hur* (Wyler)  
 1964—*Susuz yaz [Dry summer]* (Erksan)  
 1966—*Andrei Rublev* (Tarkovsky)  
 1967—*Weekend* (Godard)  
 1972—*Il paese del sesso selvaggio [Deep river savages]* (Lenzi)  
 1972—*Pink flamingos* (Waters)  
 1973—*La montaña sagrada [The holy mountain]* (Jodorowsky)  
 1973—*Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (Peckinpah)  
 1976—*1900* (Bertolucci)  
 1979—*Apocalypse now* (Coppola)  
 1980—*Cannibal holocaust* (Deodato)  
 1980—*Heaven's gate* (Cimino)  
 1993—*Free Willy* (Wincer)  
 1998—*Babe: Pig in the city* (Miller)  
 2003—*Pirates of the Caribbean: The curse of the black pearl* (Verbinski)  
 2005—*Manderlay* (Von Trier)  
 2012—*Life of Pi* (Lee)  
 2012—*The Hobbit: An unexpected journey* (Jackson)  
 2021—*The power of the dog* (Campion)

#### OTHER FILMS

- 1896—*La fée aux choux [The cabbage fairy]* (Guy-Blaché)  
 1896—*Trilbee and Little Billee*  
 1905—*Rescued by Rover* (Hepworth & Fitzhamon)  
 1911—*David Copperfield* (Nichols)  
 1912—*Bandits en automobile [Automobile bandits]* (Jasset)  
 1912—*Falling leaves* (Guy-Blaché)  
 1936—*Modern times* (Chaplin)  
 1948—*Ladri di biciclette [Bicycle thieves]* (De Sica)  
 1957—*The three faces of Eve* (Johnson)  
 1963—*The great escape* (Sturges)  
 1963—*To kill a mockingbird* (Mulligan)  
 1964—*Culloden* (Watkins)

- 1966—*Cathy come home* (Loach)  
1968—*2001: A space odyssey* (Kubric)  
1974—*Edvard Munch* (Watkins)  
1975—*The best of Walt Disney's true-life adventures* (Algar)  
1990—*Pretty woman* (Marshall)  
1993—*Philadelphia* (Demme)  
1993—*Schindler's list* (Spielberg)  
1997—*Cow and chicken* (Hanna, Barbera & Sidney)  
1998—*Festen [The celebration]* (Vinterberg)  
2000—*Erin Brokovich* (Soderbergh)  
2000—*La commune* (Watkins)  
2003—*Finding Nemo* (Stanton)  
2006—*The Doberman gang* (Chudnow)  
2009—*Avatar* (Cameron)  
2019—*The personal history of David Copperfield* (Ianucci)  
2020—*Walnut tree*] (Mahdavian)

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