

# The 'Ethical' Space of the Abattoir: On the (In)human(e) Slaughter of Other Animals

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## Abstract

*Modernity's predominantly carnivorous culture ensures the unquestioning reproduction of its values and practices through transformations of social space and its associated habitus. Klaus Eder argues that these transformations include the development of an industrial food culture and a gastronomic culture both of which represent modernity's attempt to distance humanity from animality. Today, industry and gastronomy combine to make farm animals little more than a standing reserve of meat products ready for consumption. The abattoir epitomises these modern transformations in its organisation, practices and routines. But, because it is here that the key transformation from living animal to dead meat takes place, the slaughterhouse also remains a site of potential moral danger and conflict for contemporary cultural logic. In the abattoir we risk coming face to face with the animals themselves as self-expressive entities and sometimes, in their final moments, their voices can awaken us from our ethical apathy.*

**Keywords:** ethics, space, expression, animal, slaughterhouse

## The Voice

*Every animal finds a voice in its violent death; it expresses itself as a removed-self (als aufgehobnes Selbst)*

(Hegel in Agamben 1991, 45)

*It begins at the lead-up chutes when the hogs are brought in from the yards. Two or three drivers chase the hogs up. They prod them a lot because the hogs don't want to go. When hogs smell blood, they don't want to go. [...] I've seen hogs stunned up to twelve times. Like a big boar would come through, they'd hit him with the stunner, he'd look up at them, go RRRAAA! Hit him again, the son of a bitch wouldn't go. Its amazing the willpower these animals have.*

(Tommy Vladak, hog-sticker, quoted in Eisnitz, 1997)

What does it mean for the dying animal to find a voice? Hegel's claim raises many questions: questions about animality and its relation to humanity in an age of evolution, about violence in an age of mass-extirpations, about the voice as an expression of self-identity in these most self-centred of times. These are *ethical* questions, and their concerns — animality, violence, self-identity — all ask “how can we fail to hear and respond to the Other's voice in a time of need?”

These questions are gathered together in the violent death of animals because the animal traces both the limit of modern humanity's 'being' (*Dasein*) and the limit of human concerns. The animal brings into question (human) consciousness and conscience, existence and ethics. It does this because modernity defines the animal as humanity's Other, as the not-human, the inhuman, the less than human, the bestial (Baker 1993; Serpell 1986; Shepard 1996). Animality is that state of being which, it is claimed, humanity has transcended, evolved beyond, escaped, through becoming conscious of our selves as selves, through having tamed and transformed our animal desires, through the acquisition of the voice — the gift of language within which we express our-selves and our difference to animal Others. Perhaps then it is unsurprising that maintaining this difference requires that we remain *indifferent* to the call of other animals, that we exclude them from our ethical concerns, since ethics is precisely a concern for Others despite of, and because of their differences from us (Levinas 1991). After all, to hear their voice as a form of self-expression, as a language that might speak to us, that might alter our sensibilities, would be to jeopardise our special status, our separateness. It might reveal something of the frailty of human existence.

The ethical exclusion of animals thus depends upon a cultural logic that defines them as 'dumb,' as lacking the ability to express themselves, or indeed lacking any self to express. And, if modernity declares animals speechless and self-less this is not, Descartes argues, “so much cruel to animals as indulgent to men — at least those who are not given to the [vegetarian] superstitions of Pythagoras — since it absolves them from the suspicion of crime when they eat or kill animals (Descartes in Singer 1991, 201). Yet it requires more than philosophical definitions to maintain the convenient anthropocentric fiction that the cries of dying creatures are the responses of unfeeling automata. Close contact with

animals soon reveals the myriad ways in which they can and do express themselves in manners not entirely dissimilar to humans. Their presence in the flesh as undeniably active (rather than simply reactive) agents poses a real threat to the intellectually nurtured view of human exceptionalism. And, where they threaten to impinge on our consciousness, they also begin to trouble our conscience.

Ironically, the potential for this ethical intrusion can sometimes be averted by the deployment of moral arguments, arguments that emphasise humans' right to remain isolated from the contaminating influences of animals. A good example is the manner in which, during the early nineteenth century, arguments for re-locating Smithfield livestock market claimed that the animals herded there for slaughter were not only a physical but also a moral danger to London's populace. Their noisy presence and unrestrained expressions of animality, including openly sexual behaviour, were likely "not only to disturb the vulnerable minds of women and children but also to act as a likely stimulus to improper sexual practices on the part of the impressionable people living and working in Smithfield" (Philo 1998, 64). The inevitable conclusion was that "livestock animals should be "kept at a distance" from the "normal spaces" of the refined city for the good of "public morals" " (64).

Maintaining a clear conscience thus necessitates that those animals we intend to harm are kept out of sight and out of mind, or at least that their presence is managed so as to limit their scope for self-expression.<sup>2</sup> Thus, rather than facilitating a genuinely *ethical relation* to animals, one that recognises and respects them for what they are, modernity engages in a complex form of *moral regulation* that separates and constrains animal expression in order to minimise the potential danger to its cultural logic. This moral management regulates both the social space in which animal/human interactions take place and the hearts and minds of those involved. It works at different levels, not just consciously through the production of explicit codes of conduct, but implicitly through the unconscious adoption of specific social norms and practically through the employment of various techniques and procedures.

Retaining a "distinction" between man and beast is not then simply a philosophical project but requires what Bourdieu (1998) refers to as "transformations of social space," transformations that foster, and are fostered by, particular social practices and the adoption of particular (discriminatory) dispositions towards one's surrounding environment. Bourdieu refers to this system of embodied dispositions to act in certain ways as the *habitus*. The *habitus* is a form of practical sense operating without the necessary mediation of conscious thought. It is that unconscious "feel for the game" that enables individuals to respond to particular situa-

tions in a manner that meets with the expectations and norms associated with their inhabiting particular positions in social space, e.g., as a member of the working class, a professional, etc. "[I]nculcated in the earliest years of life and constantly reinforced by calls to order from the group" (Bourdieu 1991, 15) the *habitus* becomes "second nature." It is a (necessary) coping-mechanism that enables us to respond immediately and "appropriately" to the circumstances of everyday life. It also absolves us from the requirement and responsibility of constantly having to think things through or to experience things for ourselves.

What follows then aims to illustrate the production and transformation of certain modern social spaces which predispose people to turn deaf ears to non-human existence, particularly at that most ethically problematic of moments, that of the animal's death. Its subject is the ethical (or rather unethical) space associated with the abattoir, a space that exemplifies modern humanity's attempt to distance itself from its own animality and from its ethical responsibilities to animal Others. Put simply, I argue that the modern abattoir is a factory that facilitates a "social and ethical distancing" from the messy realities of animal slaughter. It achieves this through a series of practices and discourses, including moralistic discourses of "hygiene" and "humane" slaughter, that enable those outside its walls to maintain their carnivorous habits whilst pleading, if challenged, a kind of "diminished responsibility" — as people who can't (afford to) recognise what they are actually responsible for. This requires the suppression and silencing of the expressions of animals themselves and the removal/regulation of personal links between the animal corpse and human consumer. This is not then an argument against modernity's predominantly carnivorous habit(u)s simply on the grounds of the cruelty and killing involved. Rather, it focuses on the evolution of deliberate managerial and spatial techniques that seek to suppress the animals' room for self-expression (especially vocally). This in turn re-enforces the boundary between human and non-human and assists us in absolving ourselves of responsibility for the existence (and killing) of animal Others.

### Inside the Slaughterhouse

*Once the whistle blew at six the place began to resound, the cattle would become restive at being continually disturbed and would bellow violently, or the bulls which were chained in stalls would trumpet at the cows and cause them to mill and plunge around the pens, the overhead cranes would begin to whine, the killers bawl for the benefit men who would be standing smoking in the middle of the pass with their bare arms tucked into the tops of*

*their aprons, the guns would start to crack and the cleavers begin to thwack into bone and flesh*  
(Hind 1989, 115)

*the ear was assailed by a most terrifying shriek ... the shriek was followed by another, louder and yet more agonizing — for once started on that journey, the hog never came back. ... And meantime another was swung up, and then another, and another, until there was a double line of them, each dangling by a foot and kicking in a frenzy — and squealing. ... Meantime heedless of all these things, the men upon the floor were going about their work. Neither squeals of hogs nor tears of visitors made any difference to them; one by one they hooked up the hogs and one by one with a swift stroke they slit their throats. There was a long line of hogs, with squeals and lifeblood ebbing away together until at last each started again, and vanished with a splash into a huge vat of boiling water*  
(Sinclair, 1974, 44)

Hind's and Sinclair's "fictionalised" accounts illustrate the manner in which those working in abattoir's can seemingly become immune to the horror that surrounds them. Yet Sinclair's *The Jungle*, sparked such public outrage on publication that Theodore Roosevelt ordered a federal investigation into the so-called "meatpacking" industry (Schlosser 2001, 205). The final report confirmed the novels' accuracy and resulted in the Meat Inspection Act of 1906. But though this made some recommendations on food hygiene it had little effect on either working conditions or on animal welfare. As Sinclair later remarked "I aimed at the public's heart and by accident hit it in the stomach" (Sinclair in Adams 1990, 51).

Today, of course, slaughterhouses don't offer sightseeing trips — there are no visitors to shed tears, and animals are supposedly stunned before they are strung up and sliced. The uproar that threatened to deafen Sinclair's unwary visitors has subsided somewhat; the production line has become slicker. The abattoir itself has been shifted away from the city centres of a populace increasingly shielded from the sight and sound of the violence committed in their name. The old rail-heads that brought millions of cattle to their deaths in the Union Stockyards in Chicago are virtually gone. The site of the New York stockyards is now occupied by, that repository of *human* rights, the United Nations building.

But inside the perimeter fences and factory walls things go on much as before, indeed the production lines go even faster. The Chicago slaughterhouses Sinclair described "processed" about 50 cattle an hour — today's new plants can

dismember 400. Modern "meatpacking" is really just a continuation and exacerbation of the process described by Pick (1993) as the "rationalisation of slaughter." In fact, since its inception, the "meat" industry has employed the same formal rationality, the same language of calculation, measurement and efficiency and the same bureaucratic, accounting and scientific techniques that Max Weber deemed indicative of modernity in general. The analytic division of tasks and the rational ordering of production are designed to manage and control both working lives and animal deaths, to regulate the bodies that labour and are belaboured. The irrational elements of sweat and blood are subjugated within a scheme of things that, from its own instrumentalist perspective, is entirely reasonable. It is not coincidental that the first modern slaughterhouse, La Villette in Paris, was designed by the same Baron Haussmann whose new boulevards were constructed to "divide and rule" the disorderly masses of post-Napoleonic Paris (Pick 1993). The rationalistic social engineering that produced long straight thoroughfares to "furnish the shortest route between the barracks and the workers' district" (Benjamin 1999,12) was repeated in the "perfectly engineered" regimentation of his abattoir.

However what Weber termed the "iron cage" of rationalisation is far from metaphorical in the case of the factory-farmed chicken, pig or cow. Such animals find themselves incarcerated, measured, categorised, and under constant surveillance behind bars and barbed wire. Their very existence, growth and reproduction are subject to constant and minute control through the manipulation of their almost entirely artificial environments. Their light is regulated, their feed predetermined and pre-processed, and their bodies injected with antibiotics, hormones and other chemical cocktails designed to enhance their "productivity." Finally, of course they are shipped in bulk over vast distances to a modern "disassembly" line that even Henry Ford would be proud of.<sup>3</sup>

In meatpacking, as elsewhere, "time is money," and the modern abattoir strives to epitomise the rationalistic principles of *Scientific Management* associated with Taylorism (Taylor 1964) including an over-arching emphasis on efficiency, throughput, and the extensive division of (deskilled) labour. Each job in the abattoir is separated into a series of simple actions to be repeated over and over again as the bodies move on down the line and are progressively dismembered. The nature and brutality of these individual tasks is reflected in the jobs titles, "Knocker, Sticker, Shackler, Rumper, First Legger, Knuckle Dropper, Navel Boner, Splitter Top/Bottom, Feed Kill Chain" and so on (Schlosser 2001, 172). The recurrent nature of the tasks means that many workers suffer from repetitive strain injuries — including "trigger finger" in the case of the knockers who welcome the animals into the building by firing a steel bolt into their

heads. “A hog sticker may cut the throats of as many as 1,100 hogs an hour — or nearly one hog every three seconds” (Eisnitz 1997).

The rationalisation of the procedures, the repetitive nature of the tasks involved, the speed of the conveyor belt, and the partitioning of tasks all act as a form of ethical insulation, they encourage a feeling of detachment from the task in hand. Everything runs to the rhythm of the machine. As Weber argued, the inevitable corollary of rationalisation is the disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) of the world and its contents, the dispelling of all that is mysterious and sacred, the treatment of everything as a “means” rather than an end in itself. The animal that enters the abattoir gates is not seen as a fellow being, rather it is already no more than a resource, the raw material for raw meat. Those awaiting slaughter in the stockyards are to all intents and purposes what Heidegger refers to as a “standing reserve” (*Bestand*) (Heidegger 1993, 322).<sup>4</sup> It is one of modernity’s “little ironies” that the first thing that happens to this particular “standing reserve” on entering the abattoir is that its feet are swept from under it as it is stunned, shackled, and suspended by its rear legs from a rail before its hoofs are chopped off.

The movements of the workers as they sever arteries, split backbones, and stack slabs of flesh seem almost as mechanistic as the factory itself. Through daily immersion in the abattoir’s atmosphere and constant repetition they have acquired a practical mastery of their respective tasks transmitted in their “practical state without reaching the level of discourse” (Bourdieu 1991, 87). (Discourse is in any case almost impossible in such conditions and the pace at which the machinery moves makes sure workers have little time for conscious reflection.) Their actions are governed by what Bourdieu refers to as bodily *hexis*. This is the habitus “embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby feeling and thinking” (95). This bodily *hexis* “speaks directly to the motor function, in the form of a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic, because linked to a whole system of techniques involving the body and tools, and charged with a host of social meanings and values” (Bourdieu 1991, 87). Thus, although not entirely thoughtless or feelingless, the habitus workers acquire reproduces a particular *modus operandi* which reciprocally “engenders all the thoughts, all the perceptions, and all the actions consistent with those conditions and no others” (Bourdieu 1991, 95).

Thus, so long as everything continues to run smoothly the ethical implications of these activities remain suppressed. When things work as they are supposed to then the animal conveniently remains (in Heidegger’s terminology) ready-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*) as mere equipment in the work-world. As the historian of technology Siegfried Giedion remarked,

“What is truly startling in the mass transition from life to death is the complete neutrality of the act ... it happens so quickly, and is so smooth a part of the production process, that emotion is barely stirred. [...] One does not experience, one does not feel; one merely observes” (Giedion in Rifkin 1992, 120). Even where the animal’s presence is announced to consciousness the division of labour conveniently ensures the sharing and dispersal of ethical responsibility. The stunning of the unsuspecting creature is envisaged as a “humane” act to ease suffering; the animal whose throat is slit is already unconscious and by the time its head is being skinned it’s too late to care anyway.

In fact, due to the activities of the animals themselves, the process is often far from being as smooth as Giedion suggests, but this usually makes little emotional or ethical difference. The speed and danger of the work, the need to avoid kicking hoofs, sharp knives or a fall into bone-crunching machinery from floors slippery with blood leaves workers little time for compassion. Human injuries in U.S. slaughterhouses run at three times the national average for factory work and there is every reason to think even these figures are massively under-reported (Schlosser 2001, 172). The unwillingness of governments and society at large to address these long-term safety problems may entail more than mere pandering to the economic power of the meat lobby.<sup>5</sup> Because modernist moral hygiene requires that (unlike the medieval butcher’s shop) the abattoir is kept confined, away from public view, then qualms inevitably arise whenever the subject of its workings or workers are raised publicly. Such workers seem morally tainted by their noisome associations, as (apparently willing) participants in the ethically problematic process of changing farmed animals into Farm Foods. The general public remains in a state of denial about its own role (see below) and its ability to hear, in the U.S. at least, is further diminished by the fact that many of those employed are themselves regarded by the dominant culture as alien. They are immigrants whose first language is often not English (Schlosser 2001, 160).

Sometimes, however, things take another turn because, despite modernity’s rationalistic rhetoric animals are not a resource — they are living, breathing creatures who continue to express themselves and to intrude on our consciousness. Sometimes the very scale and speed of the slaughterhouse machinery means that those working or watching are forced to concede this even as they continue to work. Ramon Moreno, a “second-legger” cuts the hocks off the (supposedly dead) cattle carcasses as they pass him. “They blink. They make noises,” he said softly. “The head moves, the eyes are wide and looking around.” Still Moreno would cut. On bad days he says, dozens of animals reached his station clearly alive and conscious. Some would survive as far as the tail cut-

ter, the belly ripper, the hide puller. “They die,” said Moreno, “piece by piece”” (Warrick 2001a, AO1). Amongst numerous other instances Warrick also reports videotape of an Iowa Pork plant that “shows hogs squealing and kicking as they are being lowered into [...boiling] water” to soften their hides for skinning.

Gail Eisnitz recounts a workers experience in the Kaplan Industries slaughterhouse in Bartow, Florida. By North American standards this is a medium size operation killing about 600 cattle a day. But as the employee states “There’s too many cows in there, and the man killing them, he doesn’t have time to do it. They hang them up anyway, kicking real hard. ... Sixty to seventy a day were kicking after they were hung up ... sometimes they start yelling, Moo! They’re hanging down and still yelling moo. They pick up their heads, and their eyes look around. Sometimes they fall down and they try to stand up again. When the cow’s hanging down from the rail and is still yelling, uh — ‘Mooring?’ I asked. ‘Yeah. Mooring. Right. I think they are still alive when they do that. Everybody could tell these cows were alive’” (Eisnitz 1997, 42).

This description is revealing, not just about the hidden practices of the abattoir, but about how difficult it is, even for those inured by their daily experiences, to avoid hearing the call of the animals involved. In speaking of his working conditions this slaughterman constantly connects the animality of the cattle’s “Mooring” with a much more human “yell.” Eventually he completely elides the difference between the two and finds himself simply referring to the cattle’s yells. This brings him up short until the interviewer intervenes to re-make the connection, thus leading him to justify his elision - first by stating his subjective opinion “I think they are still alive when they do that” and then arguing its objectivity — “[e]verybody could tell these cows were alive.” In other words contact with the dying animals confirms Hegel’s claim about the voice — there can be no doubt that the animal expresses its distress, nor that the animal has an unhappy awareness of its own hopeless situation — a self-identity — a removed self.

Meanwhile the meat industry continues to grow. In the United States alone during 1999 7,642,000 cattle and calves, 101,694,000 pigs, 8,287,200,000 chickens and 265,000,000 turkeys were slaughtered (Anon. 2001).

### Outside the Slaughterhouse Doors

*Through detachment, concealment, misrepresentation, and shifting the blame, the structure of the absent referent prevails*

(Adams 1990, 67)

Sometimes then the animals voice makes itself heard, it forces itself upon human consciousness despite the distance that modernity’s “carnivorous culture” (Eder 1996) tries to put between them and us. As Eder argues, the cultural logic of carnivory both needs and supports the systematic creation of social distance. Meat eating represents a form of shared appropriation of nature that marks a stage “of the differentiation of society away from nature” (Eder 1996, 133), a form “differentiated in modernity into a high gastronomic culture and an industrial food culture.” In other words, our anthropic prejudices about our elevated position on the “scale of nature” have been both facilitated and reinforced by modernity’s “bloody” projects. The abattoir serves as a reminder of the symbolic, physical, and emotional distance we strive to put between animals and ourselves and the methods we employ to do so. But the practices of the abattoir and the habitus it inculcates cannot be regarded as an aberration nor treated in isolation. The transformation of the social space of the slaughterhouse is indicative of and requires the production of social distance in society in general. This too operates at a number of levels, geographically, habitually and at the level of discourse, including philosophically.

We have already seen how the abattoir and its practices are increasingly separated geographically and architecturally. As Serpell argues, “[f]actory farmed pigs and poultry are kept in anonymous looking, windowless buildings that more closely resemble warehouses than animal enclosures. Once inside, the animals are out of sight and, effectively, out of mind as far as the majority of people are concerned. Their transportation to the slaughterhouses also tends to be performed surreptitiously, and the abattoirs themselves tend to be hidden from public view” (Serpell 1986, 196). The shopper in the supermarket doesn’t need to see (indeed can’t see) the stages that transformed the steer into sirloin or the pig into pork sausages. The population at large is physically shielded and spatially separated from the places where the living sources of such “succulent” morsels are slaughtered.

This may actually help to explain one of the most puzzling features of the recent outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Britain. It was tempting to see the many farmers who openly wept at the slaughter of their stock as simply hypocritical, since these animals would inevitably have been sent to identical deaths within weeks or months. But today it is even possible for farmers to distance themselves from the slaughter process since their contact usually ends with loading animals onto an articulated lorry or depositing them in cattle-market pens. The abattoir’s uncalled for arrival on their very doorstep may quite literally have brought home to them some grim realities. This also illustrates how, in normal circumstances, the shifting of responsibility facilitated by the separation of tasks extends far beyond the division of labour

in the abattoir itself. Bauman has argued just this point about the social production of distance in another context, that of the holocaust: “[T]ask splitting and the resulting separation of moral mini-communities from the ultimate effects of the operation achieves the distance between perpetrators and the victims of cruelty which reduces, or eliminates the [ethical] counter-pressure” (Bauman 1989, 198).

But physical distance and the division of labour are only part of the story. We need to understand how the vast majority of people become habituated into accepting without ethical qualms, and usually without any kind of thought at all, the presence of what is still often recognisably a piece of dead animal on their plate. Of course it isn’t always instantly recognisable — there is little resemblance between the uniform cube of a chicken nugget and the bird itself. A single hamburger can contain the mechanically recovered remains of more than a hundred different cows. Such artificial alterations no doubt help create a kind of social distancing that disconnects the dead meat from living flesh and blood. Language too plays an important part in making the animal an “absent referent” (Adams 1990). In the abattoir the pig becomes a “pork production unit” while at mealtimes the murdered sheep becomes mutton, the calf veal and the cows cooked muscles become beef or steak. But this is only part of the story. However its fleshly origins are disguised, whether through reprocessing the meat or linguistic displacement, somewhere, even if only at the back of their minds, the carnivore knows what (even if not who) they are eating. Indeed carnivores often take a kind of macho delight in ordering an undisguisable “rack of ribs” and there is a culinary cachet in ordering calves liver.

The maintenance of modernity’s carnivorous culture is, like the continuation of the abattoir’s activities, dependent on more than linguistic circumlocutions. It requires the denial (conscious and unconscious) of animals’ ability to express themselves. Only through a constant ideological process of misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) can we continue to deny animals our ethical attention (Althusser 1993, 46).<sup>6</sup> To this end we are habituated, as Bourdieu might suggest, from an early age to make an absolute distinction between the “noises” animals make and human speech. The child learns that farm animals may moo, quack and oink, but also that this is qualitatively different from being able to speak. The picture-book representations of farm animals serve, like Adam’s naming of the animals in Genesis, only to put them in an anthropocentric order and in their “proper” places, the field, the farmyard, the sty. The child is fed a line along with its hamburgers because the farms pictured bear little resemblance to the conditions prevalent in contemporary industrial agriculture and the carnivorous rationale for farming the animals is entirely absent. (These books happily speak of milk

or eggs but steer clear of the animals’ imminent deaths.)

Children’s literature only raises the issue of the connection between farm animals and their fate through anthropomorphizing the animals concerned and giving them the power of human speech. Talking animals are, of course, numerous in children’s tales, from *Pooh* to the *Wind in the Willows*. But, wherever animals speak in modern children’s tales, they suddenly drop off the menu. Thus, in *Charlotte’s Web*, Charlotte, a spider, weaves text messages into her web to save Wilbur the pig from slaughter; “some pig” she writes. C. S. Lewis’ famous Narnia chronicles are even more blatant, distinguishing those animals that can speak and are thereby elevated to the social realm from those that remain dumb and are therefore fair game for supper.<sup>7</sup> The recent movie *Babe* (not, you will notice, piglet) is another case in point. The piggy hero, who as far as the cinema audience is concerned can talk, ironically saves himself and proves his (instrumental) worth by rounding up his fellow animals as though he was a sheep dog. It is clear which side of the social/natural fence he is meant to sit on! Yet, as the subsequent fall of pork consumption showed, some children did make uncomfortable connections (especially when it became known that the various pigs that played “Babe” all ended in the slaughterhouse.)

Such breakdowns in the anthropic imag(e)ination are however rare and their effects usually transitory given the overwhelming weight of messages that make meat eating normal or even necessary. It is much more common to see cartoon animals happily espousing their own edibility on television or even taking a more active role, as in the case of those smiling plastic pigs that stand on two legs wearing a stripped apron and wielding a cleaver outside so many butcher’s doors. These “animals” speak with the voice of our carnivorous culture.<sup>8</sup>

But real animals continue to express themselves in ways that evade and contradict a logic that deems them dumb. Despite the spatial relocation of the slaughterhouse and the distancing induced by continual habituation, some people still manage to hear animals’ cries and strive to expose and oppose the prevailing “logic.” Here, when all else fails and ethical questions begin to be raised, carnivorous culture turns at last to philosophical and moral discourses. These discourses provide theoretical justifications for habits that, before they were brought into question, seemed second nature because of their cultural dominance. As Bourdieu argues, once “the arbitrary principles of the prevailing classification can appear as such [i.e., as arbitrary and not “natural”] it therefore becomes necessary to undertake the work of conscious systematization and express rationalization which marks the transition from [implicit] doxa to [explicit] orthodoxy” (Bourdieu 1991, 169). Vegetarian heterodoxies thus force the previously unformulated practical/symbolic struc-

tures that underlay the habitus to be formulated and defended. It is to these formulations and their associated practices I now briefly turn.

### Moral regulation, Human(e) Slaughter and Social Distancing

The transformation of social space in modern society keeps the potential for culturally contaminating contacts with an unruly animality at arms' length. As Bauman argues, modernity's technology, its bureaucracy and the division of labour all serve to facilitate the "social production of distance" in a society where "*the effects of human action reach far beyond the 'vanishing point' of moral visibility*" (Bauman 1991, 193). Inside and outside the abattoir the prevailing social order ensures that there is little proximal contact between our everyday activities and their inevitable, but practically and habitually mediated, effects. There are however strands of resistance. Eder has argued that "vegetarian culture" poses a symbolic and practical threat to the usually unspoken predominance of a carnivorous cultural logic. Vegetarianism's anti-hegemonic and anti-industrial stance forces contemporary culture to formulate and defend its principles, to explicitly justify the treatment of animal Others.

To this end modernity deploys a series of discourses and associated practices that try to defuse the ethical issues raised by vegetarianism. Just as Descartes' did, some discourses deny that the animals' cries in the abattoir are indicative of self-expression at all and are therefore ethically irrelevant. But this position is tenable only for those already firmly convinced of the existence of an unbridgeable gap between animals and us. The fact that many meat eaters allow other kinds of animals, such as their pets, into their lives and their hearts makes such a division extremely problematic. Such *distinctions* are obviously a social rather than an ontological matter.

Society must therefore be seen to be doing something to take the ethical issues raised by animals undeniable presence into account. This is where (as in the case of Smithfield market) discourses of moral regulation come into play. These discourses seek to re-impose a moral ordering on those social spaces that have been disturbed. They aim to manage and suppress those elements that threaten to disrupt the fabric of normality, to separate out and eliminate challenges to the doxa. These expressions of a now explicit moral orthodoxy must accommodate heterodoxy whilst maintaining the basic structure of the prevailing cultural logic. Inevitably then, where the doxa incorporates a form of ideological misrecognition, orthodox moral discourses also inevitably misrecognise the basic problem. They focus on ameliorating the conditions that give rise to dissent rather than altering the current "order of things."

In the case of the abattoir this can be seen most clearly in discourses of "humane" slaughter. According to orthodox accounts the "progress" associated with increasing industrial efficiency should have gone hand in glove with moral progress. The shining new machinery was supposed to be matched by a new enlightened attitude to animal welfare. Thus "[i]n 1883 a London Abattoir Society had been founded to suppress private slaughterhouses, and to centralize the slaughter of animals in humane conditions" (Kean 1998, 130). This new moral hygiene was supposed to sanctify butchery's gory activities through a regime of "constant inspection, regulation, sanitisation and moralisation" (Pick 1993, 181 fn.39).

But, as we have seen, economic efficiency is anathema to ethics and there is a tendency for inspection regimes to merely act as moral sticking plasters, as yet another mediating influence that enables consumers to "forget" their own responsibilities. Far from raising fundamental issues of animal life and death moral regulations focus on facilitating a clean kill and making killing clean. And even here, within their own limited and limiting terms of reference, they have proven largely inadequate to the task (Eisnitz 1997; Schlosser 2001; Warrick 2001a). As the clamour about animal slaughter has continued to grow, the carnivorous culture, and those with vested interests in its continuation, have responded by trying to diffuse the issue through the technical/moral regulation of abattoir conditions. Companies like McDonald's have tried to establish their own voices in the meat plants as moral arbiters. "Never mind the bad old days, when slaughterhouses were dark places filled with blood and terror. As far as the world's No. 1 hamburger vendor is concerned, Happy Meals start with happy cows" (Warrick 2001b, A11).

The difference between the "pre-McDonald's era and a post-McDonald's era [...] is measured in light-years" claims animal scientist Temple Grandin (Grandin in Warrick 2001b, A11). But the reality of the slaughterhouse remains light-years away from glib images of happy cows. The meat industry's new found zeal for moral self-regulation may do something to reduce excessive cruelty but it does little or nothing to change the fundamental relationship between human and animal.<sup>9</sup> The animal remains a resource not a creature in its own right and the key argument for humane slaughter is the "tangible economic benefits when animals are treated well [sic]. Meat from abused or frightened animals is often discoloured or soft, and it spoils more quickly due to hormonal secretions in the final moments of life, industry experts say ... "Humane handling results in better finished products" " (Warrick 2001b, A11).

Many of those involved in ameliorating slaughterhouse conditions may genuinely feel that they are helping animal welfare in taking the fear and struggle out of the abattoir

event. But while this might be so (up to a point) from another perspective these changes represent yet another step in modernity's movement to efficiently regulate animal spaces, further reducing their room for self-expression, and further distancing us from ethical responsibilities for their existences and ends. If anything this mechanisation of mass slaughter simply masks the underlying immorality of constraining the existence and self-expression of Others, for instrumental purposes.

The purpose of moral regulation is to maintain (the dominant) social order in the face of potential cultural chaos. It is a form of instrumental rationality that seeks to ensure the slaughterhouse's smooth running by concentrating on the means not the ends themselves. It (mis)identifies the ethical problem of the abattoir as one of *controlling* animal and human behaviour and seeks to further suppress the animals' free-expression rather than regarding such freedom as the fundamental ground of any genuine ethical relation. Where ethics would hear the animals' voice as an expression of its (self)identity and of its difference (from us) moral regulation treats it only as a disquieting cacophony that needs to be silenced. It turns what should be a call to conscience into a technical measurement of its own managerial success. Thus cattle vocalization [sic] becomes a "simple scoring system" (Grandin 2001a, 192) and an "objective standard" by which to measure the effectiveness of an abattoir's "animal welfare" program. And, since animals' voices can be stilled by simple mechanisms, like the use of indirect lighting, non-slip floors, and blocking "the animals vision of an escape route until it is fully held in a restraint device" (Grandin 2001b, 30) those plants scoring acceptable or better levels have climbed to 90% in 1999 (Warrick 2001b, A11). The moral (rather than ethical) issue remains one of restraining animality. As Grandin (2001b, 30) explains, a "solid hold down cover on a conveyor restrainer will usually have a calming [sic] effect and most cattle will ride quietly" — she might have added "to their deaths."

The broader question posed by welfare arguments is then whether allowing (facilitating) the animal to "slip" away quietly is indicative of a genuine moral relationship or best regarded as an extenuation of modernity's persistent failure to listen (attend) to animal Others. To suggest the latter is not to argue that it is preferable that animals suffer and express distress and fear before their deaths but to state that a genuine moral relationship cannot be achieved through a project of managing the self-expression of Others or distancing ourselves from the realities of their existence and ends. In recognising the animal voice as an expression of a fearful self, as those actively involved in slaughter have been forced to do, we have options. Either we can quiet our own conscience by trying to still such expressions while leaving the basic instru-

mental (unethical) framework of our "relationship" intact or seriously consider the ethical implications of changing that relationship, of allowing greater freedom of self-expression to the significant Other throughout its life. This latter strategy is obviously more difficult since it contradicts the cultural logic of our society and unearths moral quandaries that many would rather not face.

### Afterward: The Voice and the Call of Ethics

*Mortals are they who can experience death as death. Animals cannot do so. But animals cannot speak either. The essential relation between death and language flashes up before us, but remains still unthought. It can however, beckon us toward the way in which the nature of language draws us into its concern, and so relates us to itself, in case death belongs together with what reaches out for us, touches us*

(Heidegger in Agamben 1991, xi)

This paper has tried to think what for Heidegger is not just the unthought, but the unthinkable, namely the relation between the death (mortality) of animals and the refusal to hear or heed the animal voice in the modern world. Like Heidegger, our carnivorous culture privileges the human voice as the paradigm of self-expression, the harbinger of self-consciousness and the "inner-voice" of conscience. Yet the corollary of this privilege is modernity's conscious and unconscious use of certain voices and certain forms of language to deny self-expression to animal Others, thereby ensuring that their sufferings fail to impinge on our thoughts or our values. This paper has tried to speak of what is unspeakable in more than one sense), to give voice to those denied expression — those whose tongue is quite literally ripped from their mouth, pressed and "cured" of its impertinent articulations and then presented triumphantly on a plate.

Hegel at least reconized that animals are capable of self-expression even if not full self-consciousness. The animal announced its individual existence through the ways in which it altered its external surroundings. For Hegel even the processes of digestion and excretion were modes of expression in which the animal opposed and assimilated "that which is external to it" (Hegel 1970, 152).<sup>10</sup> Hegel also spoke of the *nisus formativus*, another form of self-expression but one that reproduces the form of the animal on the *external* world — as in "the instinctive building of nests, burrows, lairs" (Hegel 1970, 167).<sup>11</sup> The voice then was only one, though the finest, aspect of this self-expression, that which brought animals *closest* to us. And in its death the animal comes closer still because here it finally "expresses the annulment of its

individuality ... The senses are space which is saturated and filled, but in the voice, sense returns to its inner being, and constitutes a negative self or desire, which is an awareness of its own insubstantial nature as mere space" (Hegel 1970, 140). This negative self, this existential awareness of its insubstantial nature is the pre-requisite for that self-knowledge, for the consciousness and conscience that supposedly make us humans so superior.

But the modern meat industry seeks to deny animals any form of self-expression outside of its own instrumental concerns. Animals are force-fed on the re-processed and indigestible remains of their predecessors and forced to stand in feed-lots covered with their own excrement. The metal cages and concrete floors that compose the sum total of their surroundings are impervious to their needs or form. Here the animal can leave no trace of their existence. And finally, even at the moment of their death, this carnivorous culture stops its ears, covers its eyes and relies on moralistic mantras to shield itself from what it does. It has no sense of the animal's existence, no ethics at all.

To grant the reality of the animal voice in no way denies the myriad differences between animal and human lives but instead calls for an attentive listening to the manner in which these differences are denied expression in the factory farm and the abattoir. The kind of closeness that ethics calls for recognises yet sustains such differences, it allows the Other free-expression. Even where this Other "inhabit[s] a world that is basically other than mine" they should not be treated as "a mere object to be subsumed under one of my categories" (Levinas 1991, 13).<sup>12</sup> Of course, no one can be compelled to hear the animals' call yet nonetheless they do make an ethical call upon us. If we hear this call then, just like human words, this voice too "draws us into its concern, and so relates us to itself." This is why the animals death should "reach out for us" and should "touch us."

The space of the abattoir is indicative of the need to reconceptualize our social relations with the non-human world, to regain an ethical sensibility and a sense of responsibility for what happens around us that has been dissipated in the rush for economic gain and technical progress. The abattoir exemplifies the unfortunate frailty of human ethics. Its machinery dissects and grinds more than animal bones it also annihilates the space where care and compassion might otherwise survive. Its soulless architecture and its mindless repetition reveal the ethical void at the heart of modern society and the thoughtless practices that allow this carnivorous culture to continue.

## Endnotes

1. 158 Marketgait, Dundee, DD1 1NJ, Scotland; email: m.smith@abertay.ac.uk.
2. The case of those animals we allow to become part of society, namely pets, is of course entirely different. As Serpell (1986, 185) remarks little moral conflict arises here since "the pet lives in the owner's home, participates in family life as an equal or near equal, and is given a personal name to which it learns to respond. It is cherished during its lifetime and mourned when it dies."
3. Indeed, as Rifkin (1992, 119) remarks, the packinghouses predated Ford, they were the "first American industry to create the assembly line." Ford actually claimed to have got the idea for his automobile assembly line "from the overhead trolley that the Chicago packers used in dressing beef" (Ford in Rifkin 1992, 120).
4. "Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed just to stand there so it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing ... We call it the standing-reserve [*Bestand*] ... The word expresses something more, and something more essential, than mere 'stock' ... It designates nothing less than the way in which everything presences that is wrought upon by the revealing that challenges" that is, technology (Heidegger 1993, 322).
5. Which is not to deny the very real economic and political power of the meat lobby. Just four large companies, ConAgra, IBP, Exell, and National Beef slaughter eighty-four percent of cattle in the U.S.A. As Schlosser (2001) remarks, the meatpacking industry has, in general, been a major financial backer of the Republican Party. Other rather more unsavory business contacts have also been evidenced on occasion. In the 1970's IBP were cited as a "prime example of how a mainstream corporation could be infiltrated by the mob" (Schlosser 2001, 155).
6. I mean here ideology in the Althusserian sense. "It is indeed a peculiarity of ideology that it imposes (without appearing to do so, since these are "obviousnesses") obviousnesses as obviousnesses, which we cannot *fail to recognize* and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of crying out (aloud or in the "still, small voice of conscience"): " "That's obvious! That's right! That's true!" " (Althusser 1993, 46).
7. In Prince Caspian the children worry that a bear the dwarf accompanying them has just killed might have been a talking bear " "Poor old Bruin" said Susan. "You don't think he was?" "Not he," said the Dwarf. "I saw the face and I heard the snarl. He only wanted little girl for breakfast. And talking of breakfast [...] meats precious scarce in camp. And there's good eating on a bear" " (Lewis n.d., 108-109). As the bear is skinned Lucy worries that, one day, some people might go "wild inside" and "you'd never know which was which?" "We've got enough to bother about here and now in Narnia" said the practical Susan, "without imagining things like that."
8. The film *Chicken Run* might seem to be an honorable exception to this rule. The machinery of the chicken mincer is explicitly shown and the battery farm looks extraordinarily like a concentration camp.

9. Even this claim is disputable. Gail Eisnitz argues that “The industry’s self-inspections are meaningless. ... They’re designed to lull Americans into a false sense of security about what goes on inside slaughterhouses” (Eisnitz in Warrick 2001b, A11).
10. “After the mediation of digestion ... organic being returns into itself out of this opposition and concludes this matter by laying hold of itself. ... It is through this process of assimilation that the animal acquires its reality and individuality” (Hegel 1970, 163).
11. “Animals therefore have relationships with the ground on which they lie, and want to make it more comfortable. In satisfying the need to lie down therefore, they do not consume something, as they do in the case of nutriment, but preserve it and merely form it. Nutriment is also formed of course, but it completely disappears. This theoretical aspect of the *nisus formativus* is a check on appetite” (Hegel 1970, 167).
12. Though ironically, Levinas too is ethically impervious to animals’ existence, the only faces he speaks of are human faces.

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