

Meatsplaining

The Animal Agriculture Industry and
the Rhetoric of Denial

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Grieg in the henhouse: 12 seconds at the contested intersections of human and nonhuman animal interests

Daniel Lees Fryer

Opening shot: interior, henhouse, low light, hens, two rows of perches and nest boxes. Voiceover, subtitle: 'That's why we play music'. Close-up of human hand flicking switch and turning dial on old radio. Cue music: Edvard Grieg's 'Morning Mood'. Close-up of hens. Wider frame, man walks slowly between perches and nest boxes. Voiceover, subtitle: 'They become calm. They enjoy themselves.' Close-up of single hen shaking feathers. Low-angle shot, hens, man by open door, daylight. Man speaks, subtitle: 'Ba-pa-pa-pa!' Fade to black. Caption, white on black, top of frame: 'GOOD TASTE WITH A CLEAR CONSCIENCE.' [Producer name], white on black, middle. Green logo, 'organic', lower right. Ends.

Introduction

Chances are you've seen and heard hundreds if not thousands of ads for animal-based products in your lifetime – ads for meat, dairy, eggs, clothing, cosmetics, medicine and entertainment.¹ If you spend any

1 A study published in the early 1990s (Kunkel & Gantz 1992) estimated that children in the United States were exposed to more than 40,000 television

time online, engaging in digital environments, you've probably seen many of those ads on social media, especially since the early 2000s.

Social media allow us, as users, to produce, distribute and respond to user-generated content, connecting people (and products) in potentially innovative ways. Whether it's sharing cat videos, sending personal messages or organising events, that connectivity can have transformative, liberating and emancipatory potential; it can also be controlled, manipulated and commodified in ways that can be difficult to fully appreciate.²

The ad described in the opening of this chapter is a short film I saw on social media in 2017. While seemingly unremarkable, the content, design, distribution and responses to the ad represent a microcosm of themes dealing with human–nonhuman animal relations. What I want to do in this paper is highlight and discuss some of those themes, identifying ways in which users position themselves in relation to the ad, in relation to each other and in relation to wider conversations about the use and abuse of nonhuman animals.

Communities of shared values

To do this, I draw on the work of Jay L. Lemke and others, and especially on Lemke's notions of 'stance' and 'heteroglossic relations'.³ Stance, here, can be understood in three different, potentially

commercials per year. Around 70 per cent of those ads were for breakfast cereals, confectionery and fast food (Kunkel & Gantz 1992; Kunkel 2001; Wilcox et al. 2004). For more specific, qualitative studies on the advertising of animal-based products, see Delahoyde & Despenich 1994; Heinz & Lee 1998; Pendergrast & McGrath 2018, among others.

2 See, for example, van Dijck 2013; Allmer 2015; Pasquale 2018.

3 'Heteroglossia' is a term borrowed from Bakhtin 1981 [1935], which basically means different- or other-voiced. Bakhtin's heteroglossia is part of what has become more widely known as 'intertextuality' (see Kristeva 1984). Lemke's work (Lemke 1988, 1995, 1998) focuses on themes as diverse as homophobia, student–teacher relations and science discourse. While those themes do not extend to animal rights or human–nonhuman animal relations, I consider Lemke's work on stance and heteroglossic relations to be relevant and applicable to the themes and aims of this paper.

overlapping ways: how we position ourselves with regard to whatever it is we're talking about; how we position ourselves with regard to those we're talking to and their anticipated responses; and how we position ourselves with regard to the other people or texts we reference, respond to or invoke during those conversations.⁴ The kinds of relations that are set up between different participants – speakers, listeners and any number of third parties – are ones of varying degrees of alliance or alignment and opposition or disalignment, around which groups or communities of shared values, feelings and interests can be co-constructed.⁵ Those communities are 'imagined', not in the sense that they are not 'real' or don't matter, but in the sense that, while members may share similar interests, ideas, affinities and identities, they may not necessarily know each other or occupy the same physical or virtual spaces.⁶ Membership of such groups or communities is not necessarily fixed or stable, and affiliation or identification with one group or community does not have to be mutually exclusive of another.

How exactly we construe and align ourselves with certain value positions depends on a variety of factors that include choices of expression (what we say, how we say it, what we could have said, what we don't say), the kinds of ideas and emotions we're trying to convey (what we're talking about, what feelings we express) and contextual variables such as the setting, the participants, and the roles and relations of those involved.⁷ If we know something about some or all of those factors, we can make certain inferences about people's opinions and beliefs and the kinds of positions they might be willing or unwilling to take in relation to others.

4 See Lemke 1998, pp. 105–106; Baldry & Thibault 2006, pp. 89–90.

5 See Lemke 1988, 1995; Martin and White 2005. Note the considerable overlap here with related concepts such as communities of interest, communities of practice or discourse communities (e.g. Swales 1990; Lave & Wenger 1991).

6 Benedict Anderson uses the term 'imagined community' in reference to nationalism and national identity, but the concept can be usefully expanded to include other domains (Anderson 1991). Zappavigna (2012, 2014, 2018) uses the term 'ambient affiliation' to describe these relations in online exchanges.

7 See, for example, Halliday 2002, 2013; Lemke 1988; Martin & White 2005.

A microcosm of human–nonhuman animal relations

The film described above was posted on Facebook on 17 October 2017.⁸ At the time of writing, the film had been viewed over 293,000 times, ‘liked’ 310 times and shared 16 times.⁹ Thirty-eight comments had been added to the post by other Facebook users, including the publisher of the original post, a Norway-based food-and-drink producer and distributor.

The film is a 12-second-long advertisement for eggs, although its primary focus is on the producers of those eggs – the hens (as well as the farmer and the distributor) – rather than the products themselves. I first encountered the short film as part of Facebook’s ‘sponsored content’, advertising material that appears alongside and in the same or similar style as other user-generated content. A longer version of the film (1 min 24 sec), from which this 12-second segment is excerpted and adapted, has been posted elsewhere online.¹⁰

A number of themes were identified in the film and in the comments sections. Those themes are discussed below and cover a range of issues that are likely to be familiar to those interested in or involved with animal rights and animal liberation. The themes – animal welfare, ethical consumerism, property relations, entertainment, vegaphobia and national identity – are not intended to be exhaustive. Nor is their ordering here a reflection of their perceived importance, although I have attempted to group them loosely together, since many of the themes are closely related.

8 The video can be viewed at <https://bit.ly/3hj71s3> and <https://bit.ly/3aQvkLF>.

9 Facebook currently offers several single-click symbols that allow users to express a set of predefined responses or emotions: ‘like’ (a blue thumbs-up symbol), ‘love’ (a red heart-shaped symbol), ‘haha’ (a yellow laughing face), ‘wow’ (a yellow surprised face), ‘sad’ (a yellow frowning tearful face) and ‘angry’ (a yellow-red scowling face).

10 See URL <https://vimeo.com/355950251>.

Animal welfare and ethical consumerism: 'Good taste with a clear conscience'

As mentioned above, the film is not about eggs per se. There's only one egg in the 12-second film, in the opening shot, on the henhouse floor, in a scene dominated by the sight of 50 to 60 hens on perches. If you blink, you might miss it. Rather, the film is about the producers of those eggs and the kinds of conditions they live in. As the publisher of the original post writes: 'Nothing is better than eggs that come from happy hens. That's why we play classical music for them, and in return they give us delicious organic eggs.'¹¹ An additional comment reads: 'Classical music is just one of many measures our egg farmer has used to improve the comfort of the hens.' The post lists other measures such as being able to roam freely among fruit trees, access to water and showers, pebbles and sand-baths, and other 'installations that motivate increased activity and movement'. Some of these are shown in the longer version of the film.

The main theme, then, is animal welfare and, as the final caption in the film suggests, potential consumers can rest assured that if they buy and consume eggs from these hens, they're making the right ethical choice. The alternatives – presumably including large-scale farming and various battery-cage-like systems – are not made explicit in the film, but they are part of the backdrop for understanding why one might have a 'clear conscience' for buying eggs produced under these and not other conditions. Some users make this explicit in their comments on the video. For example, one writes

[I] buy organic eggs because the hens seem to have a better life. Don't like hens in such large flocks. can't possibly be good. We humans don't like overcrowding either over time. there's too much stress for it to be natural. We like nature and need its fresh air and tranquillity. Same for the animals.

11 Unless stated otherwise, all user comments reproduced in this paper are translated from the original Norwegian. Wherever possible, I have tried to retain the original orthography. Translations are my own.

Without this backdrop – the overcrowding and stress – the (ethical) choice to buy organic, free-range eggs seems ambiguous. In response to a series of negative comments from other users (see sections below), the film producer replies: ‘One can always ask questions about whether we should eat eggs, but if you want eggs we think this is the best way to do it.’ Part of this response acknowledges a potentially different ethical choice, one that is not a choice between organic and non-organic and/or between free-range and not free-range, but between eggs and not eggs. The film producer concedes the point, but the answers to questions about eating eggs are left to consumers to consider. Instead, the film producer argues that the choices it makes or offers are those ostensibly determined by the market and the individual consumer.¹²

From an animal rights perspective, animal welfare and ethical consumerism, while arguably more acceptable forms of exploitation, are still forms of exploitation. Animals exist for the purposes of human profit and consumption, and their lives are subordinate to those processes.¹³ Playing classical music for hens sounds like a wonderful idea, but if the music is intended to calm their nerves, the implication is that those animals are in some way nervous or anxious and that, without the music, they would not be calm, or certainly less calm. Similarly, freedom to roam and access to water, pebbles and sand-baths are all intended to make the lives of hens better, but only insofar as they maintain the livelihoods and profits of humans. A better life would be one that was free from captivity and not contingent upon the amount or perceived quality of eggs a hen produces. That, however, is not a position that most egg farmers and distributors are likely to adopt.

The following sections take up various critical responses to the ‘happy hens lay happy eggs’ (or animal welfare as market branding) position advanced by the film.

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- 12 This position is remarkably similar to the ‘lesser evil’ arguments often made by oil companies, arms manufacturers and political organisations in justifying some of the work they do and the kinds of choices they make or offer.
 - 13 For a recent review and discussion of animal welfare and ethical consumerism, see Pendergrast & McGrath 2018. For discussion of some of the differences between animal welfare and animal rights, see Regan 1997.

Just doing their job: Animals as property, animals as (forced) labour

'If the hens are going to do their job, and lay good eggs, nice eggs, strong eggs, then they have to be happy.' The farmer's comment in the longer version of the film emphasises the importance not just of happy hens, but of happy workers. The hens work for the farmer, and in return for their labour and the products of their labour, they are given food and shelter.

The idea of animals as workers is discussed at length by Hribal, who argues that animals who perform and produce for human consumption should be considered part of the working class, part of the exploited and excluded in society.¹⁴ Torres agrees to a certain extent, but also identifies aspects of animal slavery that go beyond the kind of 'wage slavery' typically associated with work.¹⁵ Apart from food and shelter, animals receive no recompense for what they produce: their own bodies, their bodily secretions or the bodies of their offspring. Often held in captivity, and almost always 'on the job', these animals' lives are precarious and expendable, but, Torres argues, they are qualitatively different from those of human slaves and human wage labourers.¹⁶

The comment in the film may simply be a turn of phrase, of course. 'Doing one's job' could be equated more generally with a specific role, function or behaviour. It doesn't have to refer to contracted, uncontracted or forced labour. However, it serves as a reminder of how society values nonhuman animal lives and how those lives exist first and foremost to fulfil humans' perceived needs and desires. It also emphasises the role of animals as commodities, as property to be bought, sold or exchanged on the market. Egg-laying hens are not only producers; they are also products in the commodity chain of animal agriculture.

With regard to captivity, exploitation and violence, one user draws parallels between animal agriculture and Nazi concentration camps,

14 Hribal 2010.

15 Torres 2007.

16 Torres (2007, p. 39) argues that animals, unlike humans, are generally unable to 'resist, plan, revolt, and [...] struggle for their own freedom'. Hribal (2010) claims, on the contrary, that animals can and in fact do resist their incarceration and exploitation.

by posting an image of a group of prisoners alongside a comment that sardonically echoes that of the film: “We play some music for them, so everything will be fine” <3.’ The image depicts the cramped, overcrowded and intolerable living conditions of a concentration camp and the emaciated bodies of prisoners.¹⁷ It highlights the plight of those prisoners, placed in captivity, forced into labour, abused and tortured, and awaiting possible execution. The post gets 20 ‘likes’ and one ‘haha’.

Comparison – the ‘dreaded comparison’ – with the plight of nonhuman animals is common, with well-known examples ranging from the relatively innocuous *Chicken Run* film to PETA’s more provocative and divisive ‘Holocaust on a Plate’ or ‘Captivity is Slavery’ campaigns.¹⁸ Such comparisons emphasise similarities between the horrifying abuses committed by humans against other humans and by humans against other animals. But these comparisons can be problematic. For example, they often fail to acknowledge or are less interested in highlighting the social, political, economic and historical reasons for such systematic oppression, persecution and slaughter and the qualitatively different conditions under which they occur. Moreover, as Aph and Syl Ko argue, ‘[n]ot only are these types of comparisons or connections absurd – even worse, these simplistic characterisations miss the ways in which these struggles and these wounded subjectivities relate to one another.’¹⁹ A particularly relevant example here is provided by Nekeisha Alayna Alexis, who explores at length the parallels between the discourses around contemporary ‘humane farming’ and 19th-century ‘slave romances’, and their remarkably similar rationales or defences for distinct yet overlapping forms of violence and oppression.²⁰

17 The specific photograph, taken in the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp complex, is a well-known image, taken in 1945 by Allied soldiers shortly after the camp was liberated.

18 See Spiegel 1988, as well as Molloy 2011, pp. 111–112, and Potts 2012, pp. 101–102.

19 Ko & Ko 2017.

20 Alexis 2018.

Entertainment: Why did the chicken cross the road?

‘arf arf arf! tweet, tweet, tweet!’ says one user in a GIF (graphics interchange format) image from the animated television show *Ed, Edd n Eddy* showing a character wearing shoes on its ears and flapping its arms like a bird. Another user writes ‘Hens enjoying themselves’ followed by a crying-laughing emoji, to which someone else replies ‘Lol’. It’s not difficult to understand who or what this laughter is aimed at, and it’s clear from both versions of the film that, in addition to projecting a caring, ethical, welfarist position towards hens, the film is meant to entertain.²¹

The ‘disnification’ – or, in the above example, cartoon-networkification – of animals is part of a process of representation that trivialises and belittles their lives.²² Animals, like other marginalised or oppressed groups, are often reduced to and portrayed as either ‘dangerous threats to “civilized” society or as comic buffoons’²³ Chickens are no exception: on the one hand, they carry the threat of avian flu and salmonella; on the other, they’re the dim-witted butt of poultry-related jokes and derisions. This has not always been the case, however. Hens and cockerels have also been admired for ‘their vigilance, courage and loyalty to family and flock’²⁴ According to Potts, the relatively recent trivialisation of chickens and other animals is largely a result of the industrialisation of animal agriculture and the subsequent distancing or dissociation of humans from other animals.²⁵

Nibert’s point about the process of trivialisation applying to both human and nonhuman animals is an important one here.²⁶ In the film, the source of entertainment is not just the hens; it is also the farmer. It’s the farmer who plays music for the hens, the farmer who talks to the hens, the farmer who paints landscapes and plays recorder, and the farmer who is, in the words of the film producer, ‘unlike other egg

21 Among the 310 general ‘likes’ the film has received, 12 of these are laughing-face ‘haha’ symbols.

22 Baker 2001, p. 174.

23 Nibert 2002, p. 205.

24 Potts 2012, p. 98.

25 Potts 2012, p. 98.

26 Nibert 2002, p. 205.

farmers'. Farmers are often portrayed like this, as simple or eccentric folks, as country bumpkins whose lives, or livelihoods at least, are ridiculed and generally have low status. Although the example here is a relatively simple one, it demonstrates how the marginalisation and interests of different groups, across species, can overlap and intersect.

Vegaphobia: Veg*ns Gonna Hate

'They play music for hens = Vegans still rage,' writes one user, who also includes a still image of a laughing Bryan Cranston from the television series *Breaking Bad*. Another user responds with 'TING GOES SKRRRAAA', based on a popular internet meme at the time featuring rap lyrics by comedian Michael Dapaah. (Each user gives the other a thumbs up.)²⁷ Both of these comments ridicule the idea that someone, in this case someone identifying as vegan, would find the video offensive and feel the need to express outrage.

This seems to be a relatively common sentiment regarding vegetarians and vegans, one that Cole and Morgan describe as a form of 'vegaphobia'.²⁸ In their study of British newspapers' representations of vegans and veganism, Cole and Morgan identify a series of derogatory discourses that include ridiculing veganism, as well as characterising veganism as asceticism, describing veganism as difficult or impossible to sustain, describing veganism as a fad, and characterising vegans as oversensitive and/or hostile. In a slightly longer comment by another user (see below), the criticism of veganism as a moralistic and elitist consumer practice is also raised, and the potential role of veganism in reducing hunger and pollution is dismissed in favour of 'local food movements' and self-sufficiency.

Lots of vegans here. Had we lived in famine-inflicted regions
... But [they] get exotic vegetables flown in and live 'morally/

27 Both posts are partly or fully written in English: 'Vegans still rage' and 'TING GOES SKRRRAAA'.

28 Cole & Morgan 2011.

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vegan.(?) [I] believe in local food and self-sufficiency in view of world hunger and global pollution <3.

So, do vegans rage, or are these comments directed more generally at some kind of vegan caricature? One of the longer negative responses to the film reads:

Is there really anyone who falls for this? What kind of life do you think these hens have? Almost all male chicks are killed as soon as they hatch, only hens are allowed to live. It's good that [company name] is making more organic products available, but organic eggs are by no means 'good'.

The user also includes a hyperlink to a vegan-community website with the heading 'Why Don't Vegans Eat Eggs?' The post gets 47 'likes', two 'sad' faces and one 'love' heart, more than any other post in response to the film, and another user responds: 'Agree with you! Repulsive the whole thing!!' In a separate comment, one user writes, 'should I laugh or cry?? fucking hell', to which another responds, 'I'm doing both, bloody idiots the whole lot'. Among the primarily visual responses to the film are GIF images that include actor Ryan Reynolds facepalming, a participant on a US television talk show shouting the words LIE LIE LIE flashed in progressively larger typeface, and actor Ola Ray screaming in the music video for Michael Jackson's 'Thriller'. Still images include prisoners in a concentration camp (see above) and a dead, plucked, eviscerated chicken on a chopping board.

The above examples express a range of responses and emotions that include anger, disgust, disbelief and mockery. Some, like the first comment, try to present reasoned responses to the film; others, like the LIE LIE LIE GIF, offer snappier retorts; while examples like the concentration camp image are likely to be considered more confrontational. All of these comments are essentially responses to the filmmaker's overall claim that 'Nothing is better than eggs that come from happy hens'. The 'happy hens = happy eggs' logic is one that runs counter to animal rights discourses. Animal welfare, as discussed above, may be all well and good, but it ignores and potentially reinforces the acceptability of commodifying, confining and killing

animals for human use – just so long as it's done humanely. While some of the above responses may seem inappropriate for this kind of forum and for this kind of film – after all, it's an ad for eggs, what would you expect? – the post is part of Facebook's 'sponsored content' and can potentially appear on anyone's feed, regardless of their interests (more on this below). If someone who identifies as vegan is presented with an ad for eggs, is it any wonder they respond? It may not be easy to engage critically in online forums that favour short-form responses and that are often portrayed as sites of incivility, 'flaming' or 'trolling', but ridiculing vegans or countering with appeals for sustainability seems to miss the point.²⁹ In the worst case, it can serve to marginalise veganism and obscure the exploitative and violent relations inherent in animal agriculture and the hidden or 'naturalised' ideology of consuming animal-based products that some users may be trying to highlight.³⁰

National identity: Edvard Grieg's 'Morning Mood'

The production and consumption of animal-based products are sometimes associated with discourses of national identity. Stuart, for example, discusses how beef-eating became an important part of British culture in the 18th century, connected in part with the strength and virility of the nationalist personification of John Bull.³¹ Similar narratives can be found around national dishes – most of which are animal-based – and meat, eggs and other animal-derived products are often emblazoned with flags, heraldry and other national symbols as part of marketing strategies to increase sales of domestically produced food and clothing.³² With regard to the context of the short film discussed here, Norwegian state authorities generally pride themselves on the claim that Norwegian farms produce salmonella-free eggs and poultry, and that Norway is more

29 Papacharissi 2004; Anderson et al. 2014.

30 See Cole & Morgan 2011, p. 149; and discussions of 'carnism' in Joy 2010 and Francione 2012.

31 Stuart 2006.

32 See Molloy 2011, pp. 106–110.

or less self-sufficient with regard to egg production.³³ Organic eggs accounted for 3.5 per cent of total egg production and 5.3 per cent of all egg sales in Norway in 2012 (compared with 1.7 per cent for the sale of dairy, 2.2 per cent for vegetables, 0.9 per cent for grains and 0.3 per cent for meat), and food safety and animal welfare are central to the *Nyt Norge* (Enjoy Norway) campaign.³⁴

In the comments section of the film, one user thanks producers and consumers for their commitment to animal welfare and takes the opportunity to criticise the treatment of animals in other parts of the world: ‘Thanks to all of you who contributed to what’s best for hens by buying eggs from free-range hens. Continue work by NOT buying fur clothing from China.’ The common narrative of pitching one nation against another is upheld here through an animal welfare chauvinism that, like other forms of nationalism, tends to overlook or ignore historical and contemporary similarities and emphasise perceived differences.

A central motif in the film is the classical music of Edvard Grieg’s ‘Morning Mood’. The piece is from Grieg’s incidental music for the Henrik Ibsen play *Peer Gynt* and is often associated with national romanticism and pastoral Norway.³⁵ The film’s soundtrack is likely to be instantly recognisable to a broad Norwegian-speaking audience.

‘Morning Mood’ plays a crucial role in construing for the film a harmonious henhouse, helping to create an idyllic scene of hens in a peaceful, tranquil environment. ‘All hens should have such a nice home <3’, writes one user. ‘Important to mix in a bit of jazz too’, comments another. And in a spin on the national identity narrative set up by the use of Grieg’s music, one user (also a hen-keeper) expresses a preference for Norwegian black metal band Dimmu Borgir and its recordings with the Norwegian Radio Orchestra, KORR: ‘Well, I’m playing Dimmu Borgir with korr for them now, probably as close as I get to classical :)’

33 Norwegian Food Safety Authority 2018.

34 Bye & Løvberget 2013, p. 29; Matmerk 2018.

35 The pastoral tranquillity associated with ‘Morning Mood’ is contrasted with its use in a scene in *Peer Gynt* in which the protagonist, Peer, finds himself in a tree in north Africa, fighting off monkeys.

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In the longer version of the film, first posted on 19 October 2017, the music played for hens is Mozart's 'Alla Turca' (often known as Turkish March) from Piano Sonata No. 11. Unlike the shorter version posted on Facebook, the longer film focuses as much on the unconventional farming techniques and lifestyle of the farmers as it does on the welfare of hens. The national and the pastoral are construed visually: a wide-angle shot of a fjord, hens wandering freely among fruit trees, a man painting a mountain scene, a ski hat bearing a Norwegian flag. Musically, Mozart's fast-paced rondo underscores the peculiarity or eccentricity of the farmers and the seemingly erratic head and body movements of the hens and cockerels (see section above on animals as entertainment).

It's not all about SoMe, or is it?

Social networking sites are commercial enterprises that profit from the commodification of social relations: the more a user engages in those spaces, the more data the platform can collect, and the more targeted subsequent advertising and promotion becomes. The kinds of 'sponsored content' promoted on those sites, however, can open up new (and possibly unintended) spaces for critical engagement. New texts and new situations can be created, and new alliances and oppositions can be formed. In the example discussed in this paper, users highlight and respond to a broad set of themes concerning human–nonhuman animal relations that critique and go beyond the issues of animal welfare and ethical consumerism presented in the promotional film itself. While all PR may be good PR, some of the 'talk around text' in this example may not be desirable or optimal for the content-promoter. The publisher of the original post is limited in how much it can manage or control the direction a particular discussion thread takes. Undesirable comments can be reported, deleted, ignored or otherwise contested, of course, but each of these options carries a certain risk, particularly if the content of the original post is intended to create goodwill. As an example of how discussions can unfold in new and potentially surprising ways, the film producer in this instance responds to user comments by choosing to acknowledge and concede the

problems of egg consumption while also defending its position to supply perceived market needs.

Film plays an important role in portraying animals' lives, and in representing and reimagining the production and consumption of animal-based products. Social media provide us with platforms to share and respond to those audiovisual representations in potentially innovative ways. This paper has focused on one film, shared on one platform, as an instance of some of the contested intersections between human and nonhuman animal interests. The themes discussed herein, while not exhaustive, overlap and intersect in complex and interesting ways; for example, the nexus of animal welfare and national identity, and the trivialisation of different marginalised groups. The analyses and insights in this paper – although restricted to a single discussion – should be relevant and applicable to other texts and wider discourses concerning our relations with other animals. They may also serve as a useful point of reference for activists using social media and other online forums to advocate and campaign for the lives and interests of all animals.

Coda

In October 2017, I came across a short film on social media, nestled between posts from friends and family. As I scrolled past, the film began to roll. I paused, read the first line of subtitles ('That's why we play music') and clicked for sound (cue Grieg). I watched it three or maybe four times, showed it to my partner and saved it for later reference. Since then, I've watched the film many times and I've read and reread comments left by other users. The result of this is not just the paper before you, but a transformation of the kind of sponsored content that typically appears on my social media timeline or feed. Now, when I log on, I'm met with all kinds of chicken- and egg-related promotional material: tips on how to boil eggs, reasons why Norwegian hens and eggs are the best in the world, even a video of dancing broiler chickens. The reason I mention this is not simply to point out that Facebook's algorithms have detected I have an interest in chickens. Rather, or in addition, it is to ask what effect this might have on how and why users

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respond to this kind of content. When users encounter videos of dancing chickens or classical-music-listening hens, their responses to those videos may be cumulative responses to a series of similarly themed sponsored posts (as well as any number of offline encounters) they've recently experienced. Responding to a film that is ostensibly about playing music for hens may just be the tip of a much greater online and offline 'iceberg'. Moreover, as users respond to these and similar ads, regardless it seems of the sentiments expressed, the effect is likely to be amplified, generating more of the same ads and encouraging more of the same responses until such time as users ask the site to stop – assuming, that is, users know how to do that and it has the desired effect.

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