

'Animal Machines': the public response to intensive poultry production

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Introduction

Since Ruth Harrison¹ described the industrialised treatment of animals in *Animal Machines* (1964)² and the subsequent food scares of the 1980s and 1990s, the rise of alternative methods production has been steady. As economic geographers have observed, while the production and consumption of food has been increasingly standardized and industrialized, the demand for 'natural and locally embedded foods ... everything from the small-scale niche production of farmhouse cheese to the large-scale production of free-range eggs' has increased.³ As Gordon and Charles have argued, with reference to poultry products, though there are consumers who are still motivated to purchase by price, an increasing number are prepared to pay the premium placed on organic and niche products.⁴ In 2008 the free range and organic end of the sector accounted for over 30% of eggs put through the packing stations – 35% of eggs sold in the retail sector. The fact that consumers buy eggs produced under these systems even though they cost more is interpreted by DEFRA as being indicative of the value that consumers place on animal welfare.⁵ By conservative critics of animal rights activists, alternatively, it has been seen as a form of conspicuous consumption – as the 'affluent are especially concerned about animal care and possible presence of drugs, antibiotics, and pathogens in meat,' US agricultural economist Luther Tweeten argues, so 'they are willing to pay more for meat that is certified drug free and organic.'⁶ Without further demographic study (which lies outside the scope of this paper) this is unproven, but what is interesting is the way in which the conceptualization animal welfare can become entangled with concepts of class, and consumer power.

Many of those like Tweeten who criticize campaigners on animal rights issues, but also farmers and veterinarians, themselves lay claim a genuine interest in the wellbeing of farm animals, on the basis that animals in industrialized modern agricultural systems are protected from the vagaries of nature – including: illness, food shortages and attack by their own kind and/or other animals.⁷ This is because the rhetoric deployed by critics such as Tweeten depends upon the shifting meanings that can be attributed to the concept of 'welfare', which may be interpreted to refer to what David Fraser has outlined as 1) 'affective states,' i.e. an animal's feelings/emotions, including pain, pleasure etc., 2) the degree of 'naturalness' in an animal's life, i.e. its ability to exhibit natural behaviors, and

¹ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

² Ruth Harrison, *Animal Machines: the new factory farming industry* (London, Vincent Stuart Ltd. 1964)

³ J. Murdoch, T. Marsden, J. Banks, 'Quality, Nature, and Embeddedness: some theoretical considerations in the context of the food sector' *Economic Geography* Vol. 76, No. 2 (Apr., 2000), p. 120

⁴ Gordon & Charles, *Niche and Organic Chicken Products*, pp. 15-16

⁵ 'Animal Health and Welfare Indicators: Core Indicator 5.1' Available online

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/ahws/eig/indicators/5-1.htm> [03.09.08]

⁶ Luther Tweeten, *Terrorism, Radicalism, and Populism in Agriculture* (Iowa State Press, 2003) p. 96

⁷ E.g. Tweeten, p. 102

to access natural resources such as fresh air, or 3) freedom from predation, disease, exposure to the elements, injury etc, measurable through the animal's growth and physical condition. Sometimes these definitions overlap, but they are different enough to mean that pursuit of one alone may not improve the welfare of animals as judged by the other two.⁸ Fraser posits that those who criticize factory farming (anti-industrialists) have a pastoral worldview, that those who believe in industrialized agriculture might be seen more as wedded to concepts of progress. Both seek to improve animal welfare, but where the former '[valued] a simple, natural life,' the latter 'valued a life improved through science and technology'.⁹

However, as I will argue, what we see in the public response to factory farming and consequent conceptualization of welfare in the 1960s, is not a kind of Agrarian nostalgia, nor an attempt to step back in time as critics like Tweeten often characterize it, i.e. the seeking of access to an idealized countryside in the mistaken belief that it is somehow inherently different from and superior to industry.¹⁰ It is also a growth in some consumers demanding the material reality of what they had long seen in the advertising imagery – in the case of eggs: images of the farmer's wife, of nests and chicks, sunlight, hens roaming in the open air – the rhetorical deployment of what Raymond Williams would have referred to as 'rural virtues'¹¹ to criticize the present, and the consequent response to that critique of those working in and with the industry.¹² Sales of all agricultural produce rely on consumer confidence in the 'thing' that they are buying, and that confidence is secured through purchase of what is perceived, even in the case of eggs produced on battery farms, to be a 'natural' commodity. However, as social geographer Peter Atkins has argued with reference to milk, such a commodity is a construct shaped by 'scientific, technological, commercial, and legal influences'¹³, to which list I would add public protest/debate, consumer 'choice', legislation, and voluntary action by industry.

Ruth Harrison, *Animal Machines* and the debate about factory farming

There was already rising debate about animal welfare in the 1950s. In 1951 W. P. Blount felt the need to include a chapter entitled 'Hen Batteries: are they cruel?' in *Hen Batteries*, his summary of battery systems for the industry.¹⁴ Blount dismissed such concerns as being characteristic of the 'townsman, who is not familiar with either hens or batteries' and argued that 'the chance of cruelty was diminished in the well-managed hen

⁸ D. Fraser, 'Understanding Animal Welfare', *Acta Veterinaria Scandinavica*, 2008, 50 (Suppl 1):SI oral presentation from 'The Role of the veterinarian in animal welfare: animal welfare: too much or too little? The 21st Symposium of the Nordic Committee for Veterinary Scientific Cooperation' Denmark 24-25th Sept 2007, <http://www.actavetscand.com/content/50/S1/S1>, pp. 2-3, 4

⁹ Fraser, pp. 4-5

¹⁰ Lefebvre, pp. 269, 325, 344; Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp. 10-11

¹¹ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 12

¹² Lyle Munro discusses the way in which both sides of the debate acquire respectability by engaging 'in "the social construction of moral meanings" (Dowie, 1995).' And argues that the emergence of 'a countermovement signals that the social movement is doing its job.' L. Munro, 'Contesting Moral Capital in Campaigns Against Animal Liberation', *Society & Animals: Journal of Human-Animal Studies*, Forum, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1999, <http://psyeta.org/sa/sa7.1/munro.html> (27/10/2008) p. 1

¹³ P. Atkins, 'Laboratories, Laws, and the Career of a Commodity' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 2007, Vol. 25, p. 984

¹⁴ W. P. Blount, *Hen Batteries*, (Baillière, Tindall & Cox, 1951).

battery where every bird received adequate food, water, and attention; was free from bullying and major infestations by parasites and attacks by predatory animals.’¹⁵ On this basis he criticised the R.S.P.C.A.’s hostility to the system, which prevented the birds from exhibiting natural behaviours such as ‘scratching for ... “food”, which in nature’ he believed, consists of uncertain quantities of grass, seeds, worms, berries, leaves, etc. ...One must remember,’ Blount goes on, ‘that during the cold, wet, snowy winters, there is little pleasure in hems scratching Mother Earth trying to find an elusive worm’.¹⁶ Under the battery system, he believed, there was reduced mortality, the birds gained weight, and laid more eggs.¹⁷ This argument was to become characteristic of support for the battery system, grounded in the idea of welfare secured by progress and evidenced by the physiological response of the birds. Blount additionally argued that the battery system allowed the poultry man to inspect each individual bird daily, a system that he contrasted with any ‘which allows him only to view them *en masse* – i.e. as a flock, comprising perhaps several hundred birds.’¹⁸ No one can see the world from the hen’s point of view, he argued, but the experienced poultry man could recognise the sounds that the hens make to express ‘contentment or dissatisfaction’; the calls that he has heard, Blount testifies, are all representative of ‘cheerful and inquisitive’ i.e. happy birds.¹⁹

Though agriculture at this point was typically framed by media representations of farming technology, through human interest stories, and the occasional political piece on pricing etc.,²⁰ the concerns about animal welfare that Blount tried to dismiss built through the 1950s, and increasingly caused concern in government circles.²¹ They also fed into the leaflet that Ruth Harrison read – ‘Crusade Against All Cruelty to Animals’ – which led to her investigation of factory farming.²² In this respect, Harrison’s publication was timely.²³ It was also extremely well publicised, two extracts from the book appeared in *The Observer* before publication, with editorial comment,²⁴ and its serialisation was advertised widely.²⁵ Letters responding to the extracts were printed in *The Guardian*, *The*

¹⁵ Blount, p. 245

¹⁶ Blount, p. 246

¹⁷ Blount, p. 247

¹⁸ Blount, p. 247

¹⁹ Blount, p. 247

²⁰ E.g. ‘Farmer Moving South’ Dir. John Taylor & Charles De Lautour, (1952) British Transport Films; ‘Farmer Glanfield Defies CEA’ (21/12/1956) ITV News; ‘Turkeys’ (18/12/1957) ITV News; ‘Good Servant’ Dir. Alan Harper (1958), Films of Scotland, BUFVC; ‘Farm Subsidies Interview’ (10/03/1960) ITV News.

²¹ R. D. Ryder, ‘Ruth Harrison’ *ODNB*

²² The leaflet itself cited a *Daily Mirror* editorial from 16th July 1960, a report from 13th Nov 1960 and the launch of a campaign against cruelty to farm animals by that paper on 8th Dec 1960. It also referred to an *Observer* report on broiler chickens 8th March 1959, and pieces on the poor taste of meat produced under intensive systems published in *The Telegraph* 15th Aug 1960 and *Farmer and Stockbreeder* 13th Sept 1960. Van de Weerd, Heleen, ‘Bringing the Issue of Animal Welfare to the Public: A Biography of Ruth Harrison (1920-2000) *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* Oct. 2008, Vol. 113, No. 4 pp. 404-410, Fig. 2 (a) & (b)

²³ Van de Weerd, refers to *Animal Machines* as a tipping point.

²⁴ *Observer* 1 March, 1964, p. 21-22; *Observer* 8 March 1964, pp. 21, 28; *Observer* editorial 1 March 1964, p. 10. The second extract was published the day before publication. The book itself was advertised in *The Observer* 22 Mar 1964, p. 26; it was reviewed in *The Times* on 19 Mar. 1964, p. 16

²⁵ E.g. *Observer* 23 Feb, 1964, p. 2; *Guardian* 28 Feb, 1964, p. 11; *Times* 28 Feb, 1964, p. 17

Observer and *The Times*.²⁶ Following publication, factory farming was then discussed on TV and radio,²⁷ led to the establishment of organisations to protest against factory farming, a petition,²⁸ demonstrations,²⁹ debate about the building of new ‘factory farms’ on planning grounds,³⁰ a play,³¹ and even entered the fashion pages as a cause celebre.³² When questions were asked in Parliament the term “factory farm” was queried, but it was quickly accepted that further investigation ought to take place.³³

Finally, at the end of the year the *Times* Agricultural Correspondent’s citation of *Animal Machines* set out the context for the debate that was about to emerge between agriculturalists and campaigners. The term “factory farming,” the correspondent says:

has come to have two quite different connotations according to the circles in which it is used. Among small livestock producers it carries their apprehension about the effects of vertical integration and the competition they face from very large-scale enterprises, such as those which dominate poultry and egg production. To a fair section of the non-farming public it conjures up the horrors so graphically described in Mrs Harrison’s *Animal Machines*.

For all its exaggeration and misreading of evidence, this book, like Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, started fresh thinking among those who had been inclined to take new techniques for granted. June saw the setting up of a committee to

²⁶ E.g. *Guardian* 9 Mar, 1964, p. 8; *Guardian* 13 Mar, 1964, p. 12 *Observer* 15 Mar, 1964, p. 30; *Times*, 25 Mar. 1964, p. 15

²⁷ Referred to by Kingsley Martin, a correspondent to the *Times* 11 July 1964. Later, there was a ½ hour programme on the subject ‘Farming: Animal Machines’ 9th Jan 1965, BBC1. Radio: ‘Factory Farms’ 26 Sept 1965, 10:10 Home service.

²⁸ *The Times* reported on a petition of 250,000 signatures asking for the ‘end of factory farms’, delivered to the Ministry of Agriculture by 200 people who marched from Trafalgar Square – the petition was reportedly added to in the process. ‘Factory Farming Petition’, news *Times* 28 Sept, 1964, p. 5

²⁹ E.g. a ‘four-hour mass rally in Trafalgar Square’, at which Ruth Harrison spoke, was reported in the *Observer* 25 Apr 1965, p. 4. This was organised by ‘the Animal Machines Action Group’ led by the Dean of Llandaff, the Very Rev. Eryl Thomas.

³⁰ *Times* 02 June 1964: East Suffolk County Council’s planning committee refuse permission for the British Beef Company to build ‘16 covered cattle yards for beef on a £750,000 “factory farm”’ at old Newton Suffolk.

³¹ Peter Terson, “The Ballad of the Artificial Mash”, put on at the Victoria, Stoke on Trent, ‘a jolly knock at the factory farms which are pouring so many chemicals down our throats.’ Listed in *The Guardian*, 18 Sept., 1967, p. 2.

³² ‘I am aware that it is probably sacrilege to wear vivid colours if you are going to follow any blood sport, but after reading the recent extracts from Ruth Harrison’s book it is to be hoped you will not anyway. It is bad enough having to eat broiler chickens in town. At least getting away from it all to the country should mean that no reader plans to go round killing anything over the Easter weekend.’ Mary Holland, ‘Style for a holiday weekend’ *Observer*, 22 Mar 1964, p. 32

³³ Disseminated by the *Guardian* ‘MPs to Seek Debate on ‘factory farms’, *Guardian* 13 May 1964, p. 19 and by the *Times*: Mr Rankin (Glasgow, Govan, Lab.) raised the initial question, followed by Mr Brockway (Eton & Slough, Lab.); Mr Soames (Bedford, C.) the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, replied; Mr Bullard (King’s Lynn C.) asked for constraint in the use of the term ‘factory farm’, as an animal housed ‘in small, warm, well-bedded quarters can be more healthy and health-giving than one kept out on open moor.’ – which gives Soames the chance to reply that they are not suffering because they ‘thrive’, but that a committee will be established to investigate: given ‘the growth ... of intensive livestock production, it is necessary to see whether standards should be laid down.’ *Times* 12 May 1964, p. 16

consider what changes might be necessary in the law governing the welfare of farm livestock in the light of the new farming.³⁴

Indeed, thanks to these connotations for the ‘non-farming public’ the term “factory farm” quickly became absorbed into much wider critiques of the condition of the countryside as a whole, as something inherently un-British, a rhetorical device that conjured up an almost Orwellian vision of the future.³⁵ As it progressed, the Brambell Committee’s work was followed closely in the press, and *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Observer* continued to receive extensive correspondence on the subject of inquiry, then subsequently on the committee’s findings and the codes that the Ministry of Agriculture produced.³⁶

Reception of Ruth Harrison

The *Times* Correspondent’s summation is typical of the more measured agricultural response to Harrison’s work, though the response in the farming press was often, unsurprisingly, extremely hostile and frequently highly gendered. Those who believed in

³⁴ *Times*, 28 Dec 1964, p. 12

³⁵ The Duke of Edinburgh gave a speech in support of the work of the National Trust at Mansion House, in which he argued that ‘without some remnants of the countryside which had inspired and warmed the hearts of generations of British people, life in these islands was going to be reduced to the level of animals on a factory farm. ... The Duke invited the gathering to try to imagine what things were going to be like by the end of the century, with the increase in population, the shorter working week, and the pressure on land for housing and somewhere to work. “Agriculture will inevitably more industrialized and less of a compromise with nature” he said. “New roads must also be squeezed in somehow. Into this pattern we must attempt to fit the facilities for recreation which a greater proportion of a great total population will expect. In fact, everything is growing and expanding except, most unfortunately, the physical dimensions of the British Isles.” Into this ‘rather dismal situation’ the National Trust had launched Enterprise Neptune – “a burst of renewed hope”.’ *Times* 12 May 1965. Earlier, focusing on the animals themselves, but drawing implicitly on established images of the rural for rhetorical impact, Kingsley Martin, in his correspondence to the *Times*, wrote: ‘a TV commentator suggested the other night, that, if the present trend continues, there will no longer be sheep on the Downs, and that all the lambs, among other creatures, will be in prison.’ 11 July 1964. A review published by *The Guardian* of a book entitled *Brave New Victuals*, E. Huxley (Chatto & Windus), cited both Harrison and Carson, *Guardian* 12 Nov., 1965 p. 9.

³⁶ E.g. Information on the establishment of the technical committee, its terms of reference and its membership, ‘Inquiry on Factory Farms’, *Guardian*, 30 June 1964, p. 2; a letter on the public health issues raised by the use of antibiotics, not covered by Brambell, *Guardian* 1 Jan 1965, p. 8; news report on evidence submitted by the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare to the Brambell committee, ‘Factory Farming Methods Criticised: Livestock Legislation Urged’ *Times*, 27 Jan, 1965, p. 5; a review of the Home service report on ‘Factory Farms’, *Guardian*, 2 Oct. 1965, p. 6; the recommendations made by the Ruth Harrison Advisory Group to the Brambell Committee were published in *The Guardian*, ‘Charter Suggested for Farm Animals’ Condition’ *Guardian*, 25 Nov. 1965 p. 13; a member of the Animal Machines Action Group intervened at the International Poultry Show dinner, following publication of the Brambell report the week before, *Guardian*, 9 Dec, 1965, p. 5; letters, *Guardian*, 5 Dec. 1965, p. 30; letters, *Guardian*, 12 Dec. 1965, p. 36; the response of a poultry farmer to the Brambell Committee’s report led the Agricultural correspondent’s report in *The Guardian*, ‘Brambell report Praised’ *Guardian*, 6 Jan. 1966, p. 2; letters, *Observer*, 30 Oct., 1966, p. 34; Ruth Harrison was among those who corresponded with the *Times* on the slow progress made after the committee reported ‘The Welfare of Farm Animals’ letters to the editor, *Times* 11 May, 1967, p. 11 – signed Eve Balfour, J. R. Bellerby, Tristram Beresford, Ruth Harrison, Margery Perham, W. H. Thorpe; ‘A Compromise Code’ Editorial *Times* 24 Sept 1968, p. 9; Ruth Harrison’s continued efforts, as a member of the official Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, to put pressure on government to implement the Brambell Committee’s recommendations were reported in *The Observer*, ‘Woman Writer Protests over Factory Farming’ *Observer*, 29 June, 1969, p. 3.

intensification responded angrily, characterising her work as emotional, and likely to lead to world shortages of food. A review of her book in *Poultry International* entitled ‘A Wish to Go Backward’³⁷ for instance argued vociferously that her book was likely to ‘undermine all efforts to solve the nutritional problems of the underdeveloped world.’³⁸ And stated that the ‘situation [needed to be] looked at with an objective rather than an emotional eye’.³⁹ *Agriculture*, the journal of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food, was much more measured & welcoming in its reception of the book, agreeing with her ‘that in husbandry there is an obligation not to add to pain, nor to occasion any considerable discomfort.’⁴⁰ The key disagreement was, as with Blount, on the meaning of welfare. ‘Mrs Harrison,’ the reviewer in *Agriculture* went on, ‘argues that an animal has a right to fresh air and sunshine, but she ignores the penalties which accompany these in the wild state, or even in extensive farming; varying degrees of hunger, frequent fear, anguish from predators and parasites, and suffering from severe weather.’⁴¹ Yet, even in this publication the tenor of Harrison’s book is said to be ‘emotional’ and likely to ‘cause distress to many well-meaning persons’ unfamiliar with farming.⁴²

Looking at the responses beyond the specialist press, we can see that these views were echoed by those who had a stake in agriculture, be they representatives of organisations or farmers/farmers’ relatives. Again, Harrison’s work is feminised through statements about its ‘emotive’ language and inaccuracies.⁴³ The proof that intensive systems are benign often rests on statements about the animals’ contentment, and the necessity for the animals to be happy in order for them to be productive. In other words, the new systems of observation and control that emerged around intensification, and which shaped the bird’s spaces of confinement, were simultaneously being shaped by the responses of the birds to those spaces [ref Hog futures etc]. This can be seen in some responses from farmers/farmers’ wives who argue that if the birds weren’t happy, then they wouldn’t be productive. ‘If stock are not content they do not thrive and the owner of unthrifty animals will very soon have a very unhappy bank manager and will not long remain a farmer’, a farmer’s wife argued in a letter to *The Times*, following that paper’s review of *Animal Machines*.⁴⁴ In other words, it makes business sense for animals to be well treated. Often such statements rest on the assumption that the farmer knows their stock well, and continues to use established farming techniques as well as the new methods. This was a rhetoric which – sometimes politely, sometimes rudely – pitted the farmer and stockman’s expertise against the public’s innocent concern and naivety, though it begged the question raised by Fraser: where do you locate compassion/ethics; in protection from disease, bad weather, predation, or in freedom to express ‘natural’ behaviours? Moreover,

³⁷ Francis E. Bryan, ‘A Wish to Go Backward?’ Review of *Animal Machines: the new factory farming industry* by Ruth Harrison. (Vincent & Stuart Ltd. London) *Poultry International* October 1964 p. 64 This was the pen-name of a journalist who wrote for the American Agricultural News Service, which reported on American agriculture to European farm magazines, Iowa State University library lib.iastate.edu:9060/collections/agri/ag09html [10.09.08]

³⁸ *Poultry International*, October 1964, p. 64

³⁹ *Poultry International*, October 1964, p. 64

⁴⁰ H.G.S., ‘*Animal Machines* Ruth Harrison, Vincent Stewart’, *Agriculture*, Vol. 71 April 1964, p. 197

⁴¹ *Agriculture*, Vol. 71 April 1964, p. 197

⁴² *Agriculture*, Vol. 71 April 1964, p. 197

⁴³ S. P. Cosgrove, letter, *Observer*, 15 Mar., 1964, p. 30

⁴⁴ *Times*, 25 Mar, 1964, p. 15

at each point there was debate about what exactly “factory farming” meant, and who had the right to define it.⁴⁵

However, despite initial protestation from agriculturalists, Harrison’s work effectively secured the public meaning ‘factory farm’ to refer to intensive production in agriculture.⁴⁶ By 1974 the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England* stated quite calmly that ‘Mrs Harrison, ... defined factory farming as indoor farming, but exempted the systems which are “clean, bright, well bedded and allowing a large measure of freedom.”⁴⁷ This debate about definitions impacted in particular on consumer awareness of what they were buying and a number of letters to the press either exhorted “the housewife” to buy, or demonstrated a desire to purchase, agricultural products, especially eggs, that came from non-intensive systems. Among some of these exhortations, “the housewife”, characterised as a rather ‘silly’ creature,⁴⁸ effectively took the blame for intensification by buying cheaply without due care and attention.⁴⁹ But, among such correspondence it was often noted that the British Egg Marketing Board failed to distinguish between battery eggs (the majority) and those produced under non-intensive systems.⁵⁰

Strikingly, however, the British Egg Marketing Board itself never seems to have responded to these critiques. Indeed, during 1964, while Francis E. Bryan was arguing in his review of *Animal Machines* for *Poultry International*, that the ‘first and foremost duty of every agricultural worker, researcher, or scientist would appear to be to provide new and efficient methods of production and cheap, but wholesome food for the world’s underfed ... people’⁵¹ the British Egg Marketing Board were flagging up the problems of

⁴⁵ The Brambell committee also struggled to define ‘intensive livestock production’, but the meaning was likely to change according to Biglin. P. Biglin, ‘Intensive Livestock Production’ *JRASE* Vol. 135, 1974, p. 122

⁴⁶ Earlier uses are rare, but in late 1920s to the 1930s – when the term was last current – it referred simply to larger units of production, with an eye to improved economies of scale. E.g. ‘The British association: Population and Food Supply: Sir Daniel Hall’s Warning’ Special Correspondents *Times* 10 Aug, 1926, p. 7; ‘Factory Farms: An Experiment From the Continent’, Christopher Turner, letter to the *Times* 01 Dec 1930, p. 20; *Times* 11 Sept 1934, p. 6. The term then seems to vanish, and reappears early in 1964 matching the usage described by the *Times* Agricultural Correspondent ‘Factory Farms Worry Small farmers: Impact of Mass Production’, report on NFU meeting, news *Times* 29 Jan 1964 p. 6. This usage, which focused on the impact of vertical integration, continues and appears in ‘N.F.U. Group Report the Week on “Factory Farming”’ *Times* 11 Jan, 1965, p. 12. It is worth noting that Mr Soames was sceptical about the use of the phrase, in announcing the set up of the technical committee he states in parentheses: ‘– not of factory farming, because I do not know what Mr. Rankin’s interpretation of that would be –’ *Times* 12 May 1964.

⁴⁷ P. Biglin, ‘Intensive Livestock Production’ *JRASE* Vol. 135, 1974, p. 122

⁴⁸ ‘The really interesting aspect of Ruth Harrison’s book “Animal Machines” is its revelation, or rather its confirmation, of the incompetency and laziness of the average housewife when it comes to the purchase of food-stuffs of any kind. ... These same silly creatures who devote half their lives to fiddling and fussing with clothing fashions ... do not know the difference between a forequarter and a hindquarter; ... “Three pounds of peas, please, “ not “Three pounds of Onward peas.” ... any kind will do, and any kind of egg, and any kind of chicken, ...’ W. Best Harris, letter, *Guardian*, 13 Mar, 1964, p. 12

⁴⁹ A point reiterated by a farmer speaking at a conference organised by the Ruth Harrison Advisory Group in October 1966, according to a report on the event in *The Guardian*. *Guardian*, 17 Oct., 1966, p. 4

⁵⁰ E.g. Alan Long, London Vegetarian Society, *Guardian*, letters, 14 May, 1967, p. 31

⁵¹ F. E. Bryan, Review ‘A Wish to Go Backward?’ *Poultry International*, October 1964, p. 64 ‘Francis E. Bryan’ (the pen name of Fred E. Breth) developed and wrote for the American Agricultural News Service, reporting on American agriculture to European farm magazines. Iowa State University, E-library, Special Collections Department, Agricultural Collections: Journalism & Broadcasting:

widespread overproduction.⁵² Ruth Harrison herself noted that ‘the industry’s more hopeful protagonists would have us believe that these methods might go some way towards the solution of the food problems in underdeveloped countries. [But the] World Poultry Congress of 1962 recognised the economically unsound conception of any long-term disposal of surpluses of poultry and eggs’ by simply sending surpluses to ‘the East’, and she ‘hoped that care will be taken to avoid [the] wasteful methods we have in the West’.⁵³ A point reiterated at a conference organized by the Ruth Harrison Advisory Group in October 1966.⁵⁴ These concerns in turn spilled out to campaigns directed against specific businesses, such as that of J. Eastwood – of JB Eastwood Ltd – and against the building of battery farms (increasingly due to their environmental impact as well as issues of cruelty and, more recently, public health fears e.g. bird flu⁵⁵).

Within these campaigns the question of when a farm is not a farm was raised. ‘Where does one draw the line’, one correspondent to *The Guardian* asked in 1964, ‘between the traditional farmer and his confrontation with the elements and these new industrialised farmers who create their own hazards (and our consumer hazards) by treating their stock as belt-conveyor units?’⁵⁶ Many of the largest farmers, such as Eastwood, about whom this correspondent was writing, were looking to establish integrated concerns mirroring the vertical integration that had already begun to take place in the USA. Though there were grave concerns expressed by farmers in Britain at the time about overproduction being stimulated by state subsidy,⁵⁷ the adoption of high-yielding intensive methods became commonplace among specialist producers like Eastwood, who then experienced an additional public outcry at the proposed development of this sort of farm.⁵⁸ In this sense, the two definitions of “factory farm” described by the Times agricultural Correspondent coincided. Moreover, within the official processes of inquiry, bodies such

<http://www.lib.iastate.edu/spcl/collections/agri/ag09.html> (last accessed 5th Aug 2010) Though, like Tweeten after him, writing from the perspective of American agriculture, the rhetoric was very similar to much of that in the UK agricultural press.

⁵² E.g. BEMB advert, *Times*, 11th March 1964; 29th Aug 1964; 8th Dec 1964. Lefebvre has argued that industrialized agriculture as an expression of modern capital in ‘advanced countries’ is engaged in ‘permanent overproduction’, without any impact upon ‘the suffering of millions ... in the so-called underdeveloped nations,’ while access to natural resources in the West, including ‘natural space’, that once had no value have become scarce commodities. H. Lefebvre *The Production of Space*, trans D. Nicholson-Smith (Blackwell, 1991) pp. 328-9

⁵³ Harrison, *Animal Machines*, pp. 174-5

⁵⁴ A point reiterated by a farmer speaking at a conference organised by the Ruth Harrison Advisory Group in October 1966, according to a report on the event in *The Guardian*. *Guardian*, 17 Oct., 1966, p. 4

⁵⁵ E.g. in Amersham, <http://www.amersham.org.uk/forum/ipb/index.php?showtopic=49> This process is similar to the resistance to mega-hog farms described by Coppin. Though it does not draw on nationalist/patriotic languages it does clearly question what a ‘farm’ is? (See Coppin 611). In this instance, the campaign includes references to bird flu. Question of ‘what a farm is’ also arose re the Eastwood legal case in 1971 – pushed boundaries of statutory definitions & is still cited in case law. [insert refs]

⁵⁶ Marjorie D. Hollowood, letter, *Guardian*, 18 Mar, 1964, p. 10.

⁵⁷ Indeed, there were specific fears that JB Eastwood Ltd. itself, which sought to establish a 2 million-bird egg laying unit in Lincolnshire, would put 50,000 farmers – a seventh of all producers – out of business. *Poultry International*, July 1964, p. 20.

⁵⁸ As it turned out, planning permission was refused, but Eastwood nonetheless supplied almost 10th of the market nationally from the 1960s until the business was sold to Imperial Tobacco in 1978 for £40 million. Obituary Sir John Eastwood, *The Independent* 4th Oct 1995, available online at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_19951004/ai_n14010087 [04.09.08]

as the Farm Animal Welfare Standing Advisory Committee (later the Farm Animal Welfare Council) included industry representation not just ethologists such as W. H. Thorpe and critics like Harrison.⁵⁹ In this way, the industry became an active participant in the formation of the voluntary and then legislative controls that would limit it.⁶⁰ There is therefore a complex history here of the networks of power linking change on the farm to integrated agribusiness, legislation, consumer choice, and resistance.⁶¹ This has often been articulated, as Watts has observed, as intensive vs. traditional agriculture,⁶² and this opposition can certainly be seen in the public response to the emergence of intensive agriculture that has been traced here. However, Holloway argues, it is not possible ‘to simply contrast the ‘domination’ of animals in industrial farming with a ‘freedom’ granted by other modes of farming, ... Instead, particular farming systems produce varying and related effects of freedom and domination according to their use of particular technologies, spatialities, knowledges, and so on.’⁶³[ref]

Conclusion

What commentators like Harrison highlighted in reaction to the increased spatial control of farm animals was their apparently new invisibility resulting from confinement. ‘Chickens, like other animals,’ she suggested ‘are fast disappearing from the farm scenery.’⁶⁴ This takes us to a fundamental issue in the public response to intensification: the importance of observation and literal sight of animals. Coppin rightly argues that the animals within factory farms are subject to much greater levels of surveillance, and therefore control, than those in traditional agriculture. In fact, this is what Blount highlights as a guarantor of welfare. Nevertheless, observation is also crucial to the emergence of critiques of such systems. The use of environmentally-controlled windowless buildings, ever greater flock sizes and intensive production systems that rely on automation for the animals’ care, i.e. reduced expertise (as against Blount’s belief that expert care remained in place) led, Serpell has argued, to much higher levels of ‘concealment’ and ‘detachment’ than existed in traditional farming practice; distancing devices that in turn came to allow for easier exploitation. Factory farming and increased specialisation together, he has suggested, hid the birds from the public at large, widened the spatial separation between the farmer and their stock, and permitted the producer and the consumer to “shift the blame” for slaughter up and down the line to the breeders, abattoirs and meat-packers. These aspects of intensive livestock husbandry, Serpell

⁵⁹ W. H. Thorpe ‘Welfare of Domestic Animals’ *Nature* Vol. 224, 4th October 1969 pp. 18-20; R. Harrison ‘Case Study: Farm Animals’ in R. J. Berry (ed.) *Environmental Dilemmas: ethics and decisions* (Chapman & Hall, London, 1993), pp. 120-125; Nb industry is still represented on welfare board & seeks to limit its impact – e.g. see <http://www.britisheggindustryCouncil.com/WhatistheBEIC/Welcome.asp>

⁶⁰ Michael J. Watts, ‘Afterword’ in C. Philo & C. Wilbert (eds) *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places – new geographies of human-animal relations* (Routledge, 2000) p. 296

⁶¹ Coppin, p. 613

⁶² Watts, p. 301

⁶³ The behaviours and experiences of chickens will vary depending on whether they are reared for intensive egg production and live in cages, are kept in a niche system – which may use the same breed and is still geared for year-long production – or kept casually by a hobby farmer etc. Holloway therefore suggests, with reference to cows, that there is a historical dimension to the subjectivity of farm animals, which includes their presence in law, their welfare judged by their behavior.

⁶⁴ Harrison, R. (1964), *Animal Machines: the new factory farming industry*. London: Vincent Stuart, p. 37.

maintains, have reconfigured the animal into an abstract unit of production,⁶⁵ as we can see when the birds themselves are referred to in the specialist literature⁶⁶ in terms of “flocks”.

The disciplinary regime that Coppin describes had its roots in the nineteenth century with the gradual removal from urban centres of animals such as cows, sheep and pigs driven to slaughter. With the animals’ spatial separation from the progressive human world of the modernising city⁶⁷ “farm” animals came to be controlled and treated as just that, “farm animals”. It is subsequently the tearing away of such concealment (i.e. exposure) that media-sponsored critiques like Ruth Harrison’s, have promoted. These challenges to contemporary poultry production, based on spectacle, have remade the birds into peculiarly vulnerable victims of intensification within the discourse of welfare and have continued to lead to regular moments of public outcry.⁶⁸ As a result, the battery hen has become a key signifier in animal rights literature. Public resistance to intensification went hand in hand with the development of the routine practices of what came to be called ‘factory farming’.

At the same time, consumers increasingly came to associate animal welfare with older farming practices. In 1973 *Poultry International* ran a special edition on egg marketing, which stated that ‘the industry must learn to merchandise eggs, a term which covers all aspects of packaging and promotion, ... and being prepared to employ every available gimmick that will tempt the housewife to leave the supermarket with more eggs in her shopping basket than she originally intended to buy.’⁶⁹ [Image: egg boxes 1976] The Museum of English Rural Life holds a few British egg boxes from this period. The imagery on these perhaps unsurprisingly uses the wider iconography associated with rural life.⁷⁰ Where the Griffin Farm egg box shows stylised eggs on wheat – suggesting nature reigns – a woman holds a basket-full of eggs On the Deans Farm box, thereby picking up

⁶⁵ Serpell, pp. 186, 191-6

⁶⁶ By 1978 there were 21 major farm magazines dedicated to ‘poultry & poultry products’ in the USA alone, these being part of a trend towards increasingly specialised publication at the time and ranked 7th in a table of 19 different types of farm magazine. Brian W. Ilbery, *Agricultural Geography: a social and economic analysis* (OUP, 1985), p. 77

⁶⁷ Witnessing cruelty to such working animals as horses, Kean argues, allowed campaigners to argue for reform and permitted prosecutions to take place within an emerging legislative framework that aimed to prevent such rough treatment. Observation in this respect, of both humans and animals, lead to new practices when it came to the handling of those animals which remained in the cities. The animals themselves, “driven mad by the treatment they receive” were figured as dangerous and a threat to the human social order (Anon, 1845, cited by Kean, p. 61) pp. 48-54, 61

⁶⁸ E.g. in Jamie Oliver’s *Fowl Dinners* he asked his ‘guests’ to sex day-old chicks, which they did with great care. The male chicks were then all slaughtered, as they are throughout the poultry industry, to the distress of the audience, who had come to see the birds as subjects rather than objects. Michael J. Watts discusses popular perceptions of the chicken in this regard, pp. 300-301

⁶⁹ *Poultry International* March 1973, p. 6

⁷⁰ What is perhaps more surprising is that a study in carried out in America at the same time by Eric C. Oosterle, referred to in the *Poultry International* article, on the merchandising of eggs suggested that ‘customers respond more to pictures on the cartons of eggs in the cooked form than to pictures of chickens and farms.’ E. C. Oosterle, ‘Merchandising Eggs in Supermarkets’ in W. J. Stadelman & O. J. Cotterill (eds), *Egg Science and Technology* (1973), pp. 122-23

on nostalgic associations of small-scale production and women as poultry-keepers.⁷¹ These images were used at a point when industrialised egg production had almost reached a peak having undergone rapid development from the early 1950s. Indeed, by this point *Poultry International* carried a large number of ads for automated (battery) production, [image: **Farmer-Automatic, 1973**] and while the small-scale producer certainly remained significant in the UK, employing deep-litter and free-range production methods, Deans Foods was not one of these.⁷² All of which meant that the process of production was a long way from the image by 1976 when it was finally withdrawn. What the image did, by drawing on nostalgic constructions of the farmer's wife, was to create a message of trust: egg sales rely on confidence. At the same time, it becomes clear through the press that public debate stimulated by critics such as Harrison meant that people began to want to buy what they thought they were already buying: happy chickens, that see the sun.

Today packaging communicates safety via the lion mark (an old guarantor of Britishness and now, following the salmonella scares of the 1980s, also of health), and the well being of hens (reared free-range or organically) by reference to older, supposedly more 'natural' methods of production. As Williams argued in *The Country and the City*, there was – and still is – a common formula in representing idealised country life and ways as lost and gone forever. He described a constant of regret, an 'escalator' that takes us back in time, a perpetual sorrow at the loss of a better way of life, a "golden age" that can be followed back through History, before the first World War, before the Victorians, before Milton.⁷³ In Fraser's understanding of welfare debates, ethologists and critics like Ruth Harrison are placed into the band of pastoralists, agrarians who resist technological change/progress. However, drawing on Williams, we might reinterpret both consumer attempts to buy what they have been sold by bodies such as the egg Marketing Board, and animal welfare critiques not as a matter of 'historical error, but [of] historical perspective.'⁷⁴ In Williams' view, the unreachable past is perpetually used to criticise the present, so that 'Old England, settlement, the rural virtues---all these, in fact, mean

⁷¹ Another, free range egg box has a happy hen & chick on a 'natural' nest with the rising sun in the background to connote 'naturalness' and freshness, another has two hens wandering in the open again to suggest naturalness and to quickly signify 'free range'.

http://www.rhc.rdg.ac.uk/olib/images/objects/90s/92_109.jpg accessed 12th Aug 2005. Box, egg: cardboard container for 6 free range eggs / from Stokes Farm, Wokingham. egg box: cardboard; good condition; colour printed image on top of lid showing chicken and young; white sticker also on lid giving date and farm details; inscribed in red on side: '6 free range eggs'; 15 x 10 x 8 cm [l x w x d]. MERL 92/109. http://www.rhc.rdg.ac.uk/olib/images/objects/70s/76_216.jpg. 2 egg boxes from Goldenlay Eggs Ltd.; one in light pink coloured card, the other in blue polystyrene; details printed on lid include: 'Goldenlay natural fresh eggs'. - 3 egg boxes from Deans Farm; two in grey coloured card and one in beige coloured card; printed on lid with name of farm is image of woman holding basket full of eggs. - 1 egg box from Griffin Farms Ltd.; beige coloured card; name printed on lid in red lettering, with image of eggs and stem of [wheat?] to one side. Each box 15.5 x 10 cm [length x width]. MERL 76/216/1-6.

⁷² Deans Foods originated in 1938 as a small family business; Dalgety, a feed manufacturer then bought them out in 1969 as part of a longer process of vertical integration
<http://www.deansfoods.com/pages/aboutus.htm> accessed 12th Aug 2005

⁷³ Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp. 10-11; 'Where indeed shall we go,' he asked, 'before the escalator stops?'

⁷⁴ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 10

different things at different times, and quite different values are ... brought into question.⁷⁵ Such ideas, he observed, simply 'express...human interests and purposes for which there is no other immediately available vocabulary.'⁷⁶ The retrospect for each period in consequence has its own nuance.⁷⁷ In the case of the rise of intensive agriculture and the public response to that rise, we also see it feed into the production and re-production of an apparently 'natural' commodity: the egg.

⁷⁵ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 12

⁷⁶ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 291

⁷⁷ Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp. 9-12, 289-91 Where the country retains its imaginative power its persistence relies on pastoral, but the exact images, forms and ideas within that pastoral change over time, and their function is to interpret different kinds of experience to different eras.