UNNERVING IMAGES: CINEMATIC REPRESENTATIONS OF ANIMAL SLAUGHTER AND THE ETHICS OF SHOCK

by

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—Abstract—

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This dissertation forges critical connections between the industrial logic of cutting up animals to make meat and cinematic techniques of cutting up indexical images of animals to create spectacle. I begin by identifying the cinematic attraction of violent animal death. In Chapter One, I argue that social and material conditions prevent cinema from representing real (i.e., unsimulated) human death, and the medium in turn relies on animal bodies to register visible evidence of death. I contend that this displacement does not yield the definitive knowledge of death that it promises; reviewing scenes of animal death, we acquire no real knowledge of the “fact” of death, but rather approach an understanding that we share death—finitude, vulnerability, suffering—with animals. Cinema’s ethical potential rests on its singular capacity to lay bare this shared susceptibility, and I thus shift my attention to evaluating how seminal scenes of animal slaughter and fundamental techniques of film form fulfil or fail this ethical potential. I begin my wide-ranging analysis by identifying and critiquing, in Chapter Two, the methods of exposure that currently dominate cinematic representations of slaughter. Through readings of an animal-advocacy video made by PETA, an industrial film made by the Hormel Co., a documentary about a labour dispute at a slaughter plant, and two popular animated representations of the meat industry, I demonstrate that these methods aim to maximize the visibility of slaughter, yet in doing so they mobilise conventions that disconnect slaughter from daily life and disassociate the spectator from the
slaughtered animal body. I then look to representational strategies that destabilize the notion of slaughter as something apart. In Chapter Three, I question the enduring trope, inaugurated by Sergei Eisenstein’s *Strike*, of aligning indexical images of animal death with dramatic performances of human trauma and death; the production of this sort of dialectical conflict, I argue, elides the singularity and significance of animal life. In Chapter Four, I demonstrate, through close readings of Dziga Vertov’s *Kino-Eye* and Charles Burnett’s *Killer of Sheep*, the ethical value of non-dialectical formal strategies (namely, defamiliarization and juxtaposition) that develop connections between slaughter and daily life.
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I began thinking about this dissertation by casting a wide net, collecting texts and images that speak to a broad thematic: the ways humans represent and relate to animals through the literary and visual arts. At some point, the preliminary work of taking stock—of attempting to size up a vast discursive field—began to look like its opposite, and I found myself carving out a much more specific set of questions and deciding on a course to find their answers. These questions are, in brief, why do we look at documentary cinematic representations of violent animal death (specifically, animal slaughter), and are there ethical ways to construct and view such films? In retrospect, I can pinpoint two images that played a formative role in this transition—this narrowing of scope and intensification of purpose—and I discuss them here as a way of delineating the aims of this dissertation. I unfold these readings slowly and deliberately, with an eye to accounting for the central questions that motivate and structure this work as whole. The first reading, of Rainer Maria Rilke’s object poem “Schwarze Katze” (“Black Cat,” 1908), prepares my consideration, in Chapter One, of the medium-specific reasons for looking at animal death in film. The second, of the closing sequence of the documentary The Cove (Louie Psihoyos, 2009), explains the impetus behind my ethics-inflected analysis and evaluation, in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, of differing formal strategies for representing animal slaughter on screen.

The first image comes not exactly from Rilke’s poem but, more precisely, from Stephen Mitchell’s translation of it, which I reproduce here in full¹:

¹ My attraction to Rilke’s black cat—to the way this cat looks and is looked at—and the meaning I read in the poem rests largely on the looseness of Mitchell’s translation; I am content to follow his additions and deviations, and merely note these issues of translation so that discrepancies with the original text remain transparent.
Black Cat

A ghost, though invisible, still is like a place
your sight can knock on, echoing; but here
within this thick black pelt, your strongest gaze
will be absorbed and utterly disappear:

just as a raving madman, when nothing else
can ease him, charges into his dark night
howling, pounds on the padded wall, and feels
the rage being taken in and pacified.

She seems to hide all looks that have ever fallen
into her, so that, like an audience,
she can look them over, menacing and sullen,
and curl to sleep with them. But all at once

as if awakened, she turns her face to yours;
and with a shock, you see yourself, tiny,
inside the golden amber of her eyeballs
suspended, like a prehistoric fly.

I first read this poem in a graduate seminar on “‘The Animal’ and ‘The Human,’” and I
was immediately both captivated and disoriented by its relay of gazes; like the implied
reader’s look, I felt myself absorbed, mislaid, in Rilke’s lyrical performance of this visual
exchange. More than two years later, I remain riveted by the poem, yet I now also see that
its appeal lies precisely in the way it stages the look between human and animal in the
terms of a faltering recursivity. I have spent this time looking at films that look at animals
dying, and it now seems to me that, at their best, these texts at once promise a reciprocal
human-animal gaze and acknowledge that such an exchange is always already
undeliverable. In doing so, these films draw us in only to unnerve us, to unsettle what we
think we know about ourselves, our relationships to animals, and our relationship both to
their death and to our own. The title of this dissertation speaks directly to this affectively
unnerving potential, and also obliquely references the Soviet filmmaker Sergei
Eisenstein’s characterization of montage (editing, loosely defined) as cinema’s central
“nerve” (“Montage of Film Attractions” 44).
I am particularly taken in by the third stanza of “Black Cat,” in which Mitchell likens the cat to “an audience” and then proceeds to upend the conventional notion of an audience as an assemblage of spectators who look at a performance, characterizing it instead as a solitary individual who gathers in—who collects and holds close—glances cast astray by the performers on stage or onscreen. His articulation of the cat-as-audience metaphor struck me, on first reading, as particularly cinematic. In contradistinction to live theatrical performance, cinematic performance is marked by a lag between the time of production and the time of projection: the performers onscreen and the audience in the movie theatre or at home do not share the same time and space, and thus can never share a reciprocal gaze. The impossibility of this connection appears all the more stark when one considers that the relationship between film actors and viewers is largely sustained by the activity (or appearance) of looking in the other’s direction. The poem suggests a series of viewing relationships between the implied reader and the black cat that are similarly dislocated, albeit for different and more complex reasons. Like a film spectator, the poem’s reader (“you”) casts about for something substantive on which to fix his sight, yet, at the instant when it appears his gaze might be returned—when the cat “turns her face to” his—he is met instead with his own reflection. Also like a film spectator (and like a film actor, for that matter), the cat takes in, absorbs, “all looks that have ever / fallen into her,” yet she is unable to return these looks—or merely uninterested in doing so. In the first case, the implied reader falls into the patterns of narcissistic identification conventionally associated with mainstream narrative film; he looks at (the image of) an

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2 This comparison and its attendant connotations are the product of Mitchell’s pen. Rilke makes no simile (“Alle Blicke, die sie jemals trafen, / scheint sie also an sich zu verhehlen, / um darüber drohend und verdrossen / zuzuschauen und damit zu schlafen”) and a closer rendering of his words would look something like Edward Snow’s translation: “All the glances that have ever struck her / she seems to conceal upon herself / so that she can look them over, / morose and menacing, and sleep with them” (99). Yet it seems Rilke’s image of the cat somehow invites the creative addition of metaphor. Stephen Cohn imposes an altogether different simile: “It is as if she took and hid away / all of the looks that ever fell on her / and hoards them jealously, suspiciously, / and like a miser counts them night and day” (203, emphasis added).
other and sees himself. In the second case, the cat partakes in something akin to what Laura Mulvey has recently termed “pensive” and “possessive spectatorship.” Conceived in contrast to the fetishistic, voyeuristic spectatorship she so famously identified and critiqued in her 1975 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” these are modes of “delayed” viewing in which the spectator actively halts the flow of images so that she can contemplate and guard them—so that she can “look them over” and, when this reverie subsides, “curl to sleep with them.”

Explicit in Mulvey’s theory of delayed cinema and implicit in the poem is the idea that the spectator (or the cat) replays and reviews these captured images, searching out “some detail [that] has lain dormant, as it were, waiting to be noticed” (Death 24X a Second, 8, 161–96). I realize now that my relationship to “Black Cat” has been pensive, possessive, and that my reading of it has unfolded in a felicitous process of delay. In 2009, I pinned a photocopy of the poem to the bulletin board in my office, and every few weeks or so since I have idly perused its set of lyrical images, frozen on the wall above my computer. Once in a while, I saw in the poem something new or, more precisely, something that resonated in a new way with the arguments I was then developing. This dissertation maintains that similarly quotidian, repetitive habits of viewing film have the potential to generate perceptive and ethical insight. Such practices are inseparable from the technology that makes them possible. Mulvey stresses the significance of home-theatre technology such as VCRs and DVD players, the advent of which enabled individual spectators to pause and rewind films so that they could linger over favoured

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1 Here and throughout this dissertation, I alternate between genders in my use of pronouns. These pronouns assume heightened significance within the theoretical trajectory of cinematic spectatorship in which I read “Black Cat.” The female stars Mulvey describes in “Visual Pleasure” are stared down by male protagonists and stared at by male spectators; framed by narrative devices of sadistic voyeurism and cut up by cinematographic techniques of fetishistic scopophilia, these women cannot break through their status as spectacle and look back. Rilke’s female black cat, in contrast, is able to hold and withhold looks. Strictly speaking, though, her femaleness is more or less arbitrary, as the German noun die Katze is gendered female.
images or re-view sequences again and again, unearthing “hitherto unexpected meanings” (*Death* 144). This dissertation is more interested in the more recent innovation in digital technology of video-sharing websites like *YouTube*, which not only make a multitude of films (or, more frequently, parts of films) accessible to spectators who would otherwise never happen upon them, but also encourage spectators/users to view these films in ever-changing relationships with other films and clips, as well as within the larger textual surround of the Internet. In Chapter One, I argue that viewing unsimulated cinematic images of violent animal death on *YouTube*’s reiterative loop may press the spectator towards an ethical engagement with the sight of animal slaughter; that is, this inherently intertextual way of watching may spur her to recognize that these images index beings, practices, and institutions that are intimately connected to her own lived reality. The optimistic tenor of my argument is held in check by my sustained acknowledgement that fascination with animal death—a fascination that is often expressed in the form of a trained, unrelenting scrutiny—is also driven, to a certain extent, by sadism. For some spectators, the experience of viewing animal slaughter onscreen may begin and end here, in the vicarious pleasure of watching humans inflict pain and suffering on animals.⁴

To be sure, the analogical likeness between the viewing relationships and practices outlined in “Black Cat” and those enacted in cinema can only be pressed so far. For one, the poem describes disjunctions between looking at and being looked (back) at which derive not, as in cinema, from spatio-temporal discontinuities (or, as Mulvey’s early work indicates, from psycho-social gender dynamics), but rather from multiple,

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⁴ Or, as the film *Benny’s Video* (Michael Haneke, 1992) proposes, it may feed an active sadism. Benny is a socially isolated teenage boy who spends his free time watching violent films, in general, and re-watching a home video he made at his family’s country house of a pig being slaughtered, in particular. With seemingly little premeditation, he invites an awkward teen girl to his house and, with the captive bolt gun he stole from the farhmhands who killed the pig, kills her while his video camera is taping. The role that repetition plays in sadistic spectatorship is complex, and I return to it at the beginning of Chapter Four’s discussion of *Kinoglaz*, a film that, like *Benny’s Video*, explicitly stages the re-viewing or re-playing of the scene of animal slaughter.
long-standing, and profoundly entrenched divisions between humans and animals. Additionally, the practice of delayed viewing/reading is arguably insufficient (not to mention unseemly) if one considers that the larger aim implicit in any critical analysis of these divisions is to confront and somehow oppose what Jacques Derrida, the philosopher to whom this dissertation returns most frequently, aptly distinguishes as “the unprecedented proportions of the subjugation of the animal” today (“The Animal That Therefore I Am” 394, original emphasis). The cultivation of unhurried contemplation hardly seems an expedient strategy in the face of the most violent and pervasive manifestation of this subjugation—“the mind-boggling ways and numbers in which animals are killed in our time” (McHugh 15). These considerations notwithstanding, I began this dissertation with the aim of contributing to the thoroughgoing critique of the species divide that is presently unfolding in the emergent, interdisciplinary field of Human-Animal Studies (HAS); central to this critique is a reflection on the act of looking at animals. As I read “Black Cat,” then and now, it seems to me that thinking through the visual dynamics specific to cinema (to be precise, the apparatic join of performers, author, text, screening technology, and spectator) elucidates, often in remarkable ways, the structural impediments to this act; such thinking also discloses the means by which cinema produces its own framework for—and limitations to—looking at animals.

“Black Cat” suggests several additional connections with cinema that confirm the medium’s explanatory and transformative power over human-animal relationships. The most uncanny of these lies in Mitchell’s characterization of the cat-audience as a surface that both absorbs and shocks the reader. I refer here to the opposing ends which the

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5 There is much debate in Human-Animal Studies surrounding human-animal phraseology. The heated contention over the field’s name reveals as much; it is alternately called Animal Studies and Critical Animal Studies, among other things. Most scholars agree that the complementary terms “human animal” and “nonhuman animal” best suit the aims of posthumanist discourse; human animals, after all, are just one species among many. Although I wholeheartedly agree with this logic, over the course of this dissertation I employ the conventional dichotomous phrase “humans and animals,” precisely because it maintains the heightened sense of inter-species difference that I aim to interrogate.
reader’s look meets in the first and last stanzas: “…your strongest gaze / will be absorbed and utterly disappear,” and “… she turns her face to yours; and with a shock, you see yourself, tiny.” Mitchell’s description of the cat as simultaneously engrossing and astonishing aligns the poem, published in 1908, with a contemporaneous moment in modern visual culture that has been historicized as a reaction against spectatorial absorption in works of art and entertainment. Tom Gunning, the leading theorist of this period in film circles, borrows Eisenstein’s term “attraction” to sum up this striking shift in visual modes of consumption at the turn of the twentieth century (“The Cinema of Attraction[s]” 384). For Gunning, the “field of attractions” names a modern urban landscape crowded with new visual entertainments such as magic theatre and amusement park rides (subsequent scholars have elaborated this field to include train rides, panoramas, public morgues, wax museums, and slaughterhouse tours). This field primed the nascent movie-going public for the “cinema of attractions,” wherein techniques such as direct address and manipulation of the moment of projection (the transformation of the stilled image into movement) imparted to spectators the experience of “a conscious delectation of shocks and thrills” (“An Aesthetic of Astonishment” 120).

The cinema of attractions, the first stage of cinema proper, held from 1896 to 1906, when narrative film and its concomitant techniques (editing) and technologies (nickelodeons) began to rise to dominance. Yet it was not entirely superseded: “the cinema of attractions persists in later cinema, […] and] provides an underground current flowing beneath narrative logic and diegetic realism” (“Aesthetic” 23). The cinema of

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6 In the first stanza, Rilke’s words (“wird dein stärkstes Schauen aufgelöst”) indicate that the reader’s strongest gaze will be “dissolved” by the cat’s black fell; Snow translates accordingly (“your strongest gaze will be dissolved”), while Cohn renders this reaction in terms of heat (“even the fiercest looks are melted down”). In the final stanza, Rilke makes no mention of “shock,” and merely writes that the cat turns and looks back “suddenly” or “at once” (“Doch auf einmal kehrt sie …”); both Snow and Cohn are faithful to this temporal shift (“But all at once …”) (all emphasis added).

7 Gunning gives varying dates: he assigns 1906 as the end of the cinema of attractions in his first article on the subject (“The Cinema of Attraction[s]” 381), but he pushes this date forward to “1903 or 1904” in later work (“An Aesthetic of Astonishment” 121).
attractions likewise incorporates what came before it. To be sure, Gunning presents this “exhibitionist” cinema as a thoroughgoing rejection of “absorption,” art historian Michael Fried’s term for the way earlier nineteenth-century spectators were trained to engage with then dominant styles of painting, which, in Gunning’s words, constructed “self-contained hermetic world[s]” that positioned the viewer as an “unacknowledged voyeur” and thus invited her undisturbed stare; he asserts that this cinema’s “aesthetic so contrasts with prevailing turn-of-the-century norms of artistic reception—the ideals of detached contemplation—that it nearly constitutes an anti-aesthetic” (ibid. 123). However, Gunning’s choice of the name “attraction” suggests a more dynamic movement. As Wanda Strauven points out in her etymology, the OED lists as the first definition of attraction, “the action of drawing or sucking in.” The word was adopted into English in the sixteenth century from the French, which had derived its attraction from the Latin attractio, which comes from the verb trahere, “to draw.” With the proliferation of popular spectacle in the nineteenth century, attraction came to refer, in English, to any form of entertainment that draws a crowd, and this usage of the word then made its way back into French (17). This sense of attraction as an alluring, inward-pulling entertainment inheres in Eisenstein’s use of the term to associate his theory of cinema with the visceral experience of riding a roller coaster, and in Gunning’s later appropriation of it to distinguish the assaultive experience of the earliest cinema from the engrossed voyeurism later fostered by narrative cinema (“The Cinema of Attraction[s]” 384–85). Like Mitchell’s black cat, then, this cinema reaches out and confronts the spectator, yet it can only do so by simultaneously drawing him in. Just as the black cat

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8 Strauven’s etymology is imprecise. She defines trahere as “to pull,” when in fact means “to draw, drag, haul”; the verb tractare means “to pull” and the prefix “ad” means “to” or “towards.” Regardless, the significance of this etymology remains the same: attraction denotes, in the first place, an inward-pulling or inward-drawing movement that stands in opposition to the outward-reaching shock that Gunning highlights in the cinema of attractions.
both absorbs and shocks the reader, the cinema of attractions “addresses and holds the spectator” (“Aesthetic” 121).

My own fascination with “Black Cat” and the cinema of attractions lies in this shared countermovement—this polar gravitational force that at once pulls you in and reaches out to shock you. Gunning seizes on this tension so as to challenge the received view that early filmgoers were simply artless ingénues who, according to the mythic retelling of the first film screening (the Lumière brothers’ *L’arrivée d’un train à La Ciotat* at Paris’s Grand Café in 1895), mistook representation for reality (“Aesthetic” 115). His theory of attractions argues that the appeal of early cinema was far more sophisticated (i.e., self-aware): the spectator delighted precisely in the way this cinema called out to her and, in doing so, called attention to its own astonishing powers of illusion. In the context of this dissertation, the countermovement expressed in “Black Cat” likewise spurred me to question established and, to my mind, over-simplified accounts of why we look so insistently at animals. Around the same time I first read the poem, I had just begun to puzzle through John Berger’s “Why Look at Animals?” Written in 1977 and first published in *About Looking* in 1980, this essay is considered among the founding texts of Human-Animal Studies and the seminal text within subfield discussions of animals and visual culture; in the current, burgeoning scholarship on animals and visual representation, it is *de rigueur* to begin one’s argument with reference to Berger’s thesis, “everywhere animals disappear” (26). Reading “Black Cat,” I began to realize that engaging Berger’s titular question was no mere matter of convention, but rather a task of continued, immense import; I also began to see the limitations of Berger’s answers, and to seek out a body of work that extended beyond them.

Berger argues that we look at animals because that is the only relationship late capitalism affords us; we look at animals—or, more precisely, at compensatory images of
animals (stuffed animals, cartoon animals, animals on display at zoos)—because we no longer live with animals. As a result of the profound social and material ruptures introduced by modernity, the beings that once “constituted the first circle of what surrounded man” now linger in a perpetual state of vanishing (3). And as animals recede into images, they can no longer return our gaze: “Therein lies the ultimate consequence of their marginalization. That look between animal and man, which may have played a crucial role in the development of human society, and with which, in any case, all men had always lived until less than a century ago, has been extinguished” (28). “Black Cat” complicates Berger’s claim that we no longer live with, look at, and are looked at by real animals, as it reminds us of the obvious fact that many humans living in highly technologized societies do indeed live with animals—companion animals or, in vulgar parlance, pets. While Berger acknowledges the preponderance of pets today, he dismisses these very real animals as puppet-like appurtenances “co-opted into the family” for the sole purpose of affirming the human owners’ sense of self-worth (14–15). Rilke’s poem imagines a prosaic exchange that doubtless occurs between animals and humans all the time. While this visual encounter is fraught with an inability to return each other’s gaze, these beings’ regard for one another has by no means simply been “extinguished”; their gazes fall short or are short-circuited, yet they nevertheless cast them. If we are to rethink why and how humans and animals regard one another, it seems to me crucial that we begin with an acknowledgement that they share some sustained interest, however fragile, in one another.

Mitchell’s perhaps unconscious cinematic supplementation of Rilke’s words indicates, moreover, that our desire to look at (representations of) animals is predicated on factors far more complex than the ostensible extinction of animals from daily life, and his accentuation of the black cat’s alternating magnetism points, obliquely, to cinema’s
singular promise to fulfill that desire. In the context of his translation, the poem’s climax hints at the special purchase cinema holds on looking, in general, and on looking at death, in particular. It does so through its evocation, in the final stanza, of André Bazin’s “mummy complex.” In terms of film theory, this dissertation is most heavily indebted to Bazin, who articulates, across the four volumes of his monumental Qu’est-ce que le cinéma? (What Is Cinema?, 1958–62), an ethically inclined theory of filmic ontology that is keenly attentive to the relationships between humans and animals. Bazin’s theory begins, in large part, with his “mummy complex,” a concept he elaborates in “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” (1958) to explain the visual arts’ abiding yet uneven investment in realism. The impulse “to save being through the appearance of being” is, he asserts, among the central motivating forces of the visual arts. This drive finds its first and most direct expression in the mummification of pharaohs. According to Bazin, the all-encompassing aim of ancient Egyptian religion was to vanquish death, a condition viewed as inseparable from the material body. To this end, embalming the dead was a way “to make fast bodily appearance [and] to snatch it from the course of time, to stow it in the hold of life” (3). While it was, at the outset, “natural to preserve this appearance in the very reality of death, in its flesh and bone,” the arts of sculpture and painting shifted this fight against death, against time, from the physical to the “spiritual” register; these forms of representation strove to preserve not the materiality of being but rather a faithful impression or memory of it (3–4). This shift away from the preservation

9 The irony of arriving at an argument about cinematic specificity via a poem is not lost on me. Yet Mitchell’s cinematic supplement spurred me to recognize the medium’s particular and significant engagement with animals precisely because it throws into relief the literariness of Rilke’s cat. The speaker/reader of the poem can never return the black cat’s gaze because this cat is decidedly not, as Derrida insists of his own pet, “a real cat” (“The Animal That Therefore I Am” 374).

10 Serge Daney is largely responsible for highlighting Bazin’s animal affinities in his essay “The Screen of Fantasy” (published in French in 1983 and in English twenty years later.) Seung-hoon Jeong and Dudley Andrew’s “Grizzly Ghost: Herzog, Bazin, and the Cinematic Animal” (2008) and Jennifer Fay’s “Seeing/Loving Animals: André Bazin’s Posthumanism” (also 2008) are among the first and most significant scholarly attempts to take off from Daney’s foundational essay. This work is part of a larger movement to recover and refine Bazin’s film ontology that began in the late 1980s and continues unabated today.
of the original being—that is, this construction of the original as such through the creation of an acknowledged copy—also constituted a shift in focus from the preservation of individual lives, to a more all-encompassing move to create, to preserve, “an ideal universe in the image of reality” (4). Bazin sums up the history of Western painting as a series of defining moments of equilibrium and conflict between the two broad courses or “aspirations” that this image of reality assumed: the approximation of “spiritual” yet no less concrete realities (symbolism or “true realism”) and the simulation of “the outside world” (“the pseudo-realism of trompe l’oeil”) (5–6). With much relief, he recounts how the nineteenth-century invention of photography put an end to this potentially perpetual state of conflict/resolution, as the new medium “freed the visual arts from their obsession with resemblance” (6). Like the embalming of Egyptian pharaohs, photography is indexical: the light cast off objects passes through the camera’s lens and is imprinted on the light-sensitive negative, creating an image “out of the ontology of the model” (8). This mechanical process also promises an objective “re-presentation” of actual things in which “there is no human agency at work.” In Bazin’s view, the new medium’s indexicality and ostensible objectivity excused painting from its “vain” pursuit of realist illusion, and freed it to embrace the subjectivity inherent in the painter’s irregular brushstrokes (6).

Yet while photography constitutes, for Bazin, “both deliverance and fulfilment” of the visual arts’ persistent mummy complex, it is not without its own limitations (8). Namely, the static medium of photography can produce only stilled images of a world in

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11 The frequent mischaracterization of Bazin as a naïve realist derives in large part from a failure to register the subtlety of his argument about photography’s objectivity. While this is not the place to reclaim Bazin as a complex, compelling proponent of realism, I will note just one example of the easily overlooked nuance of his theory: “Photography’s objectivity confers upon it a degree of credibility absent from any painting” (7–8, emphasis added). In other words, his argument about photography’s objectivity is more precisely about a generalized perception of the medium as objective, real, or truthful.
constant flux. For this reason, the time-based medium of cinema holds a greater purchase on realism. In his ontology essay, Bazin makes a single extended remark about cinema:

Seen in this light, cinema appears to be the completion in time of photography’s objectivity. A film is no longer limited to preserving the object sheathed in its moment, like the intact bodies of insects from a bygone era preserved in amber. […] For the first time, the image of things is also the image of their duration, like a mummification of change. (8–9)

The reader of Rilke’s “Black Cat” confronts a petrified image that is strikingly similar to Bazin’s static photograph: the cat suddenly turns “and with a shock, you see yourself, tiny, / inside the golden amber of her eyeballs / suspended, like a prehistoric fly.” In both Rilke’s poem and Bazin’s essay, the images of insects preserved in amber call to mind the gleaming display cases of natural history museums and the dusty shelves of the cabinets of curiosity that preceded them. These shrines to knowledge present mummified animal bodies as specimens, as objects that exemplify and therefore invite display (both specimen and spectacle come from the Latin specere, “to look”). According to Bazin’s narrative, the advent of cinema shows in relief that the frozen form of display proper to museum artefacts and photographs inevitably falls short of true realism, because it transforms animate life into an immobile image; only cinema, with its privileged indexical relationship to time and movement, duration and change, can adequately represent the living, breathing world. In sum, Bazin’s narrative identifies the capacity to index movement—a capacity specific to cinema—as the technological prerequisite of genuinely realist visual art; his choice of Egyptian mummies as the starting point for this conclusion discloses, moreover, the moment at which this capacity holds particular power: death. (His knowingly quasi-mythical history of the arts would look quite different if he had selected, say, the cave paintings of Lascaux as his point of origin.)
In “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” Bazin does no more than gesture, by way of example, to the complex relationship between cinema, movement, and death; across his larger body of theory, he elaborates a history of cinema that implicates humans and animals as distinctive players in this relationship—a history in which, as Serge Daney puts it, “the essence of cinema becomes a story about animals” (32). I will return to Bazin’s telling of this animal story over the course of this dissertation, yet I begin where he leaves off in his ontology essay, at the realization of the peculiar promise cinema holds for representing death. With Bazin’s mummy complex in mind, I reframe Berger’s seminal and far-reaching question as an inquiry into why we look so insistently at cinematic representations of the specific phenomenon of violent animal death. In Chapter One, “Why Look at Dead Animals?,” I join a nascent body of scholarship that explicitly seeks to supplement Berger’s essay (see also, for example, Geoff Cox and Adrian Ward’s “Why Look at Artificial Animals?”). My engagement with looking at animals through the medium of cinema brings into focus questions and possibilities that Berger systematically elides through his insistence that mediated or imaged animals are de facto simulcral animals (i.e., not “real” animals), a position he is able to maintain only by limiting his film references to the stop-motion animated world of Disney (22). We need only adopt a slightly more comprehensive corpus to see that real (i.e., unsimulated) animals populate all forms, genres, and historical traditions of cinema; as Nicole Shukin points out, animal bodies also play a “visceral role” in photographic and film culture, down to the cattle-derived gelatin used to coat film stock (91). Moreover, as I demonstrate, cinema returns with remarkable frequency to the documentary depiction of violent animal death. In Chapter One, I bring together a discussion of cinema’s founding preoccupation with the movement of animal bodies and an analysis of several key instances of animal death onscreen—namely, Thomas Edison’s *Electrocuting an Elephant* (1903), Jean Renoir’s
Règle du jeu (The Rules of the Game, 1939), and Chris Marker’s Sans soleil (Sunless, 1983)—to explain the medium’s pervasive recourse to imagery that indexes animals in the throes of human-inflicted suffering and death.

The argument I elaborate in this first chapter confirms Anat Pick’s insight, made in passing in her recent Creaturely Poetics (2011), that “the veritable trend in art-house productions to include the real slaughter of animals [is] closely aligned to the remarkable flourishing, in quite other quarters, of the wildlife film” (169). In a footnote, Pick explains that the prevalence of these two ostensibly incongruous forms of animal imagery—the visually absorptive appeal of both animals writhing in pain and animals moving freely through the wild—makes sense in the context of cinema’s longstanding “fascination with the animal body as pure moving image” and its realization that “(as far as is legally possible), the animal continues to provide the ideal disposable body as a cinematic ‘attraction’” (219, n12). The peculiar attraction of cinematic representations of animal death suggests that there is more at stake than the satisfaction of sadistic spectatorial desires; the films in question, I maintain, present the dying animal body as a material—as a fleshy fact, a moving specimen—that stands in for human death.

My argument in Chapter One proceeds as a rereading of Vivian Sobchack’s reflections on cinematic indexicality and human death, with an eye to uncovering what her argument says about the ethical implications of cinematic documentations of animal death. In productive tension with Bazin’s mummy complex, Sobchack argues that cinema can never deliver on its promise to represent real/unsimulated human death, an event she aptly sums up as “the movement from being to nonbeing” (233). In her book Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture (2004), she underscores the complex social and material conditions that preclude us from ever really seeing human death on screen. These include the enduring and pervasive taboos against real-time representations
of human death in Western Culture; the deep-seated cultural belief that human death amounts to an interior (i.e., existential, religious, or spiritual) transformation that is therefore fundamentally invisible; and the cinematic medium’s profoundly paradoxical material relationship to duration, the state through which human death emerges as a radical discontinuity. In the first half of Chapter One, I establish and unpack this knot of conflicts around the cinematic representation of human death by pressing on the human-animal limits of Sobchack’s argument and by rereading her principle exemplar, Renoir’s *Règle du jeu.*

Over the course of this analysis, I identify in cinema a recurrent exchange that mirrors the climactic moment of self-reflection in “Black Cat.” Much like the reader turns to see her own reflection in the cat, I argue that cinema responds to the social and material limitations against documenting human death by staging real animal death in its place, and by inviting us to view this supplement as evidence of our own death. The medium’s offering of the slaughtered animal body presents a graphic example of the cruel sacrificial logic that governs Western thought and everyday life. I conclude this first chapter by proposing, however that cinema can never produce the visual knowledge of death that it promises. Its failure—a failure that constitutes a certain ethical possibility—is a product both of the historically and technologically determined ways in which we look at this imagery, and of the images themselves. Indexical images of violent animal death resist anthropomorphic metaphor because the very assumptions that allow us to code animals as facts—animals lack language, interiority, intentionality, etc.—prevent us from conclusively valuing these beings as knowable evidence (as facts and facts alone). Bruno Latour and Steven Woolgar’s identification of the paradoxical meaning of facts is here key: “fact,” etymologically speaking and in common parlance, refers in turn to something that is “made” and to something that is “out there” (*Laboratory Life*, 174–5).
Images of animal death are very much facts in this dual sense, and their status as such allows me to contend that the cinema enacts this sacrifice but is never able to complete it; there is always a remainder. The aforementioned practices of delayed cinema sharpen the spectator’s awareness of this excess, this residual *out-there-ness* of animal death. It is precisely because cinematic representations of animal death press us to recognize animals and their deaths as both made and “out there”—as both known and unknowable—that we can look to such films for ethical insight into the current practices of killing animals.

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The second image that played a decisive role in the development of this dissertation comes from the final sequence of *The Cove*, an Academy-Award-winning documentary exposé of Japan’s interlocked trade in dolphin meat and captive dolphins, the ground zero of which is a secret cove outside Taiji, a small whaling town south of Osaka. This sequence shocked me, but not in the same way as “Black Cat”: whereas I was startled by the cat’s stare and sensed that my own gaze was mislaid in its regard, I felt waylaid, struck dumb, by this sequence. This moment in the film likewise has stayed with me for over two years, but not with the same effect as the poem. While Mitchell’s translation drew me in and compelled me to turn over the poem’s exchange of glances again and again, the sequence pushed me out and impelled me to look elsewhere—to seek modes of representing animals and animal slaughter that held my attention rather than stunned it.

To fully appreciate the effect of this sequence, a somewhat extended description of the film as a whole is in order. For more than four centuries, Taiji’s cultural identity and economy has depended on its September-March dolphin-drive hunt, in which fishermen herd—not by way of clanging on submerged metal poles and creating a terrifying
wall of sound—hundreds of migrating dolphins into one of the town’s numerous inlets, which is easily accessible to the public. Trainers from dolphinaria and marine parks around the world await the animals there, and pay upwards of $150,000 apiece for the young, female bottlenose dolphins; they then transport the animals back to their respective parks, where they will be made to live in isolation and confinement, and trained to dazzle crowds with spectacular displays of intelligence and agility. The fishermen drive the remaining, less desirable dolphins into a smaller cove, concealed behind a bend in the shoreline, and slaughter them with harpoons. The dead dolphins are sold for comparatively paltry sums (around $600 per animal) to supermarket meat purveyors, who in turn falsely package their mercury-laden flesh as the high-grade meat of larger whales and unload it on an unsuspecting public. The film states that over 23,000 dolphins and porpoises are killed in Japan each year, and suggests that this number is most heavily concentrated in Taiji.

The activities of eating and watching dolphins coincide at Taiji’s own dolphinarium, which serves dolphin meat at its refreshment stand. In highlighting this coincidence, Psihoyos suggests that simultaneously eating and marvelling at dolphins is deeply hypocritical. While I agree that it is, I would like to point out that so, too, is eating hamburgers while watching the Nature Channel, for example. North American culture tends to draw a sharp distinction between the species of animals deemed appropriate for bodily consumption (cows, pigs, chickens, and fish) and those with entertainment value (in the main, the sorts of “exotic” species that populate zoos and wildlife films, and “cute” companionable species such as dogs and cats); in this culture, it is generally seen as unethical/immoral to eat an animal from the latter category, and boring to watch animals from the former. The Cove reaffirms this distinction in its adoption of the rhetoric of exceptionalism. It bases its critique of the abusive treatment of dolphins around recurring demonstrations of these animals’ singular self-awareness, and argues that it is unethical to kill dolphins (and keep them in captivity) because they possess a level of consciousness that is equivalent to humans. In making this argument, the film implicitly condones the eating of other animals, so long as they are not (perceived by humans to be) highly self-aware. The film’s articulation of this argument is bound up with, and at times covers over, its racist/primitivist construction of the Japanese fisherman as cruel barbarians and the Japanese public as almost suspiciously ignorant of the abusive practices going on in their backyard. That is, this argument is complicit with the film’s denigration of the Japanese as benighted and uncivilized, and its celebration of its Western protagonists as precisely the opposite—possessed of ethological knowledge, civilization, humaneness, and humanity.

This dissertation rejects arguments that endorse the protection of certain species based on their human-like abilities (not to mention the mobilization of such arguments to establish that certain groups of humans are more and less civilized), and inclines instead toward the Benthamian argument that the capacity for suffering—a negative capacity shared by all sentient life—determines our ethical responsibility to all species of animals. I detail my approach to this baseline in Chapter One.

My account of the situation in Taiji is based on The Cove’s “factual” reportage, the veracity of which has been contested by the film’s many opponents. It bears noting that, as with any documentary, these facts have been constructed and presented with a very specific rhetorical aim in mind. Readers concerned with the details of Taiji’s dolphin trade are urged to consult a variety of sources.
Yet *The Cove* is not so much about the dolphins’ plight as it is about the quest to obtain and disseminate shocking cinematic footage of it. Among the sleekest iterations of a recent wave of documentaries aimed at revealing the deplorable impacts of late-capitalist industry on animals and the environment, the film harnesses its own act of exposure as the driving force of its narrative. An early bit of voiceover commentary aptly sums up the film’s mission to infiltrate the titular cove, a “natural fortress” fortified by tunnels, barbed-wire fences, keep-out signs, and a bellicose security detail (members of which are armed with their own video cameras): Richard O’Barry, the film’s central activist, explains, “nobody has actually seen what takes place back there. And so the way to stop it is to expose it. They’ve already told us that: ‘Don’t take pictures.’ The sign says ‘Don’t take pictures.’ And so the way to stop it is to keep exposing it to the world.”

Psihoyos, a former *National Geographic* photographer and the co-founder of the Ocean Preservation Society, relies on the conventions of the heist movie to turn this exposure-driven operation into a dramatically riveting story—and, according to the film’s manifest intent, an acutely political and politicizing one.

From its start, *The Cove* assumes the heist genre’s archetypical three-act plot. In the first act, the director places himself in front of the camera to assemble and lead what is, in his words, an “Oceans Eleven-style” team of “rock-star” experts—passionate activists and conservationists, skilled film technicians, and daring free divers—capable of obtaining high-quality hidden footage of the gruesome activities at the cove. Psihoyos’s initial idea for the heist, he tells us, was inspired by a visit to a traditional Japanese rock garden, where he marvelled at the practice—alien to the norms of North American spectatorship to which he is accustomed—of finding pleasure in looking at inanimate objects, and mused, “what if the rocks looked back?” The team’s preparations thus centre on the installation of high-definition cameras in the rock face that looks onto the lagoon,
yet they also include the development of other, seemingly superfluous state-of-the-art devices, such as a drone-blimp in the shape of a dolphin. This show of cunning technical virtuosity complete, the film moves in its second act to the execution phase: in cover of night, the crew shakes off the security detail that has dogged them since their arrival in Taiji and sneaks into the cove’s craggy shoreline, where they stash an array of hidden cameras and sound-recording devices\textsuperscript{14} that will capture the slaughter slated to take place in the coming dawn. Shot with infrared handi-cams, this sequence constitutes the implementation of the heist, but it is not quite the heist itself (conventionally, these two are one and the same). This action proceeds towards completion the next day, when the crew reassembles in a hotel room to review the images and sounds stolen by their devices. Here, they listen—as do we, the viewers—to the recorded sound of the dolphins fearfully communicating with one another in the moments leading up to their death, and O’Barry remarks on the profoundly unsettling fact that similar sounds will be produced by different dolphins the next day, and the day after, and so on. His observation underscores the peculiar nature of the crew’s stolen goods: they have not removed the atrocity itself, but rather have made off with an image—an index—of it. For this reason, the film’s third act unfolds not, as generic convention would have it, by unravelling the heist, but rather by prolonging it as an act of displaying the goods—an act that will not end, the film promises, until the atrocities in the secret cove stop.

In \textit{The Cove}’s denouement, then, we are shown these goods directly, and we are shown footage of key players in the whaling industry and uninformed members of the public being shown the goods. The final, climactic instance of the latter did much to determine the direction of this dissertation. From the start of the film, the activist O’Barry is presented as the primary instigator and anchor of its mission. O’Barry first became

\textsuperscript{14} Psihoyos frames sound as integral to his aim of politicizing illumination, and the film’s lavish attention to the aural registers of animal abuses stands out as uncommon among other like-minded documentaries. I return to \textit{The Cove}’s treatment of sound in Chapter One.
famous for his contribution to the popularization of dolphins as spectacles in the 1960s; he captured and trained the five bottlenose dolphins who starred in *Flipper*, a television show that, along with the movie from which it was adapted, transformed the public’s perception of dolphins and gave rise to the multi-billion-dollar dolphinaria industry that flourishes—amidst allegations of animal cruelty—today. At the end of the sixties, O’Barry experienced a radical change of conscience when one of the dolphins that played Flipper died in his arms, in what he describes as a depression-induced suicide brought on by the deprivations of living in captivity. In the forty years since, he has dedicated himself to eliminating the dolphin entertainment industry that he (by his own admission) helped to create; to this end, he has spearheaded numerous initiatives to educate the public about the effects of captivity on dolphins and has released numerous captive dolphins back into the wild. This work brought him to Taiji, and his public rebuke of the town’s dolphin drive in turn drew Psihoyos and crew to the scene. If Psihoyos is the mastermind of *The Cove*’s mission, then O’Barry is its heart, and as such he is charged with its final act of exposure. In the last sequence of the film, he strides into a meeting of the International Whaling Commission with a portable video screen strapped to his chest and battery packs looped to his belt. The camera follows him as he makes a slow, deliberate circuit of the crowded conference room, pausing intermittently so that the commission members and the growing queue of photojournalists and videographers trailing him can see (and the latter can shoot) the screen. For the most part, O’Barry is filmed from oblique angles, the images on his screen too blurry for us to really make out. Yet we know from the palpable sense of discomfort in the room (studied silence, squeaking chairs) and the orangey-pink glow of the screen that O’Barry is screening the same graphic images we were previously shown of the massacre: the fishermen thrusting

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15 In addition to exposing the gruesome activities in the cove, the film works to reveal the IWC’s collusion—in the form of both incompetence and calculated complicity—with dolphin-hunting practices around the world.
their harpoons indiscriminately into the bodies of thrashing dolphins, the animals’ blood washing the cove from murky brown to opaque red. As if in confirmation, O’Barry is shuttled out of the room by security guards and there is a cut to a direct shot of the reddened, empty cove, and then to a crowded intersection in a Japanese city. O’Barry now stands in the middle of the street, the screen still mounted to his chest. In voiceover, he concludes, “I have to see this end in my lifetime. Right now, I’m focusing on that one little body of water, where that slaughter takes place. If we can’t stop that, if we can’t fix that, forget about the bigger issues. There’s no hope.” Crowds flood past him, their hurried disinterest heightened by the use of fast-motion cinematography. Timed to coincide with his last words, a small group of passers-by (decidedly young and urban) forms around O’Barry. They are drawn to and momentarily held by the scene of slaughter on his chest, and the film cuts to black.

Watching the images of O’Barry as a peripatetic human shock screen provoked a marked shift in focus in my study of the cinematic attraction of animals and animal death. The dolphin trainer-cum-saviour’s exhibitionist tour seemed, to me, to powerfully rearticulate the polar force I found in Rilke’s “Black Cat,” pushing to the forefront questions about the ethics and the political efficacy of representing and viewing animal slaughter. Especially in the context of the almost paramilitary scope of The Cove’s exposure mission (the arsenal of infrared cameras that detect “anything with a heartbeat,” the dolphin-shaped drone-blimp), O’Barry takes on the form and function of a mobile visual assault weapon, moving through the city and spraying bystanders with the sight of animal slaughter. His movement is confrontational, aggressive—his monstration an act of violence unto itself. By taking to the streets, O’Barry and The Cove flagrantly violate the expectations of consent tacit in cinematic spectatorship: we choose what films we will watch, and we decide when and where we will watch them. The film is not alone in its
transgressive and quite literal approach to exposing the public to moving images of animal abuse.\textsuperscript{16} Perhaps inspired by \textit{The Cove}, the animal-rights organization Mercy for Animals undertook a similar yet much more extensive initiative to screen its film \textit{Farm to Fridge}, an undercover exposé of the treatment of animals in an array of factory farms and slaughter plants. In 2011, the group outfitted a truck with three eighty-inch video screens and embarked on a tour of forty American cities, where they parked and gave more or less impromptu screenings of the twelve-minute film outside university campuses, shopping centres, sporting arenas, nightclubs, and other densely populated public spaces. At these events, organization volunteers circulated and screened the film on iPads attached to their t-shirts. Unlike most portable assault weapons, the screens wielded by O’Barry and the MFA volunteers are easily dodged, their effects arguably short-lived. As Susan Sontag observes of the viewing relationships enacted by shocking images of human pain and death, “Shock can become familiar. Shock can wear off. Even if it doesn’t, one can not look” (82). The unmoved expressions on the faces of the IWC participants and the crowds of office workers hastening past O’Barry demonstrate these two possibilities. The handful of young adults who pause to regard the screen indicates, however, that the images also attract—pull in and affectively move—some spectators. These spectators, we can cautiously speculate with Sontag, evidence the possibility that

\textsuperscript{16} Nor did \textit{The Cove} stop there, with O’Barry’s embodied exposure mission. In early 2011 Psihoyos sent Japanese-language DVD copies of the film to each of Taiji’s 3,500 residents. According to newspaper reports, the director was concerned that the town’s residents had limited access to the film; \textit{The Cove} was given a general release in Japan in 2010, yet several theatres refused to show it (McCurry). 

\textit{The Cove} and the \textit{Farm to Fridge} tour are, to my knowledge, the only major instances of crash screenings of animal-abuse films. However, the animal-rights organization People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals has long employed the tactic of placing public service announcements (PSAs) featuring arresting photographic images of animal abuse in heavily trafficked public spaces. Individual activists are encouraged to sponsor these PSAs, which can take the form of static billboards or mobile ads on taxis and buses (http://www.peta.org/mediacenter/sponsor-ads/sponsor-outdoor-ads-psas.aspx).

It bears noting here, too, that these animal rights films partake in practices of mobile screening that have been with cinema since its inception. Mercy for Animals’ cross-country tour recalls, in particular, the Soviet state’s practice of deploying “cinema trains” to exhibit revolutionary films in the early days of the Soviet Union (Villarejo 105).
“habituation is not automatic, for images (portable, insertable) obey different rules than real life” (82).

*The Cove’s* concise depiction of a range of spectatorial responses to the same shocking images of animal slaughter corroborates Jonathan Burt’s cogent evaluation of animal-rights videos as

[...] at the extreme end of an identifiable, cinematic language, which—although highly manipulative of the audience’s sensibilities—has very uncertain effects. This is reinforced by the emotive qualities inherent in all animal filmmaking. Indeed, if sadism is the main feature of this format, then it potentially is inflicted in all directions: on animals, as part of the thrill at seeing suffering; on the audience, as a possible way of torturing them. (“A Day” 350)

Burt makes this point in a 2005 review of *A Day in the Life of a Massachusetts Slaughterhouse* (1998), a feature-length documentary exposé produced by the animal-rights organization People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Its extremely high production values notwithstanding, *The Cove* is first and foremost an animal-rights film (or, to use Burt’s more capacious term, a “pro-animal film”). According to Burt, these films are unified in their quasi-religious belief “that conversion automatically will follow simply from exposure to this film” (349); to recall O’Barry’s words, “the way to stop it is to expose it.” Curiously, the film acknowledges the fallibility of its own logic in its final shots, which highlight unmoved crowds of spectators filing past O’Barry.

Burt’s review of *A Day* and his larger discussion of animal death in *Animals in Film* (2002) present one of the few concerted scholarly forays thus far into the aesthetics, ethics, and political efficacy of animal-rights films, in particular, and of films that document animal death and slaughter, in general, in the field of Human-Animal Studies. There is growing scholarship in the field of film history and theory on canonical narrative
films that document animal slaughter: the seminal text in this domain is Akira Mizuta Lippit’s “Death of an Animal” (2002), which delineates a privileged corpus of onscreen animal deaths that includes films such as *Electrocuting an Elephant, Stachka* (Strike, Eisenstein, 1925), *La Règle du jeu, Le sang des bêtes* (*Blood of the Beasts*, Georges Franju, 1949), *Unsere Afrikareise* (*Our Trip to Africa*, Peter Kubelka, 1966), *Sans soleil*, and *A Zed and Two Noughts* (Peter Greenaway (1985); as I will suggest at various points in this dissertation, Lippit’s stance (both in this article and in his reformulation of it in *Electric Animal* [2008]) on the relationship between indexical scenes of slaughter, everyday life, and the aims of academic discourse around animals remains abstract and altogether unclear. A handful of other scholars—most of whom are situated exclusively in film studies—have also elaborated close, individual readings of many of these films; in most cases, the practice of killing animals does not explicitly factor into their discussion. Thus while many of the existent analyses of both animal-rights and narrative feature films that document slaughter are cogent in their own rights, much work remains for HAS to truly invest in cinema’s potential to critique and challenge the human-animal divide as it pertains to the slaughter industry. Of animal-rights films, Burt writes, “the history of these films barely has been sketched, nor has their extensive proliferation and increasing accessibility via the internet, particularly in recent years, been addressed,” and he suggests that insight into these film’s effects on audiences might be gleaned from comparison with the gore-obsessed genre of horror (347). This dissertation responds to Burt’s call for further examination of conventional animal-rights films, yet I cast my comparative outlook instead towards more unlikely film genres and traditions (Soviet montage, surrealism), as well as to the elided attention to animals in film scholarship.

The structure of this dissertation reflects the turning point provoked by O’Barry’s shocking stroll. While the first chapter adopts a theoretically speculative outlook, the
remaining three chapters foreground evaluative formal analysis: whereas Chapter One asks why we look at animal death and slaughter on film, Chapters Two, Three, and Four ask how certain films represent these acts. In his recently published Developing Animals, Matthew Brower asserts, “We need to move beyond the question of why we look at animals. What needs to be understood is not the motivation for animal imagery but how it works.” Invoking Berger, he continues, “animal imagery does not simply soothe a nostalgic desire for direct contact with animals. It structures the understanding of animals. In short, we need to ask what do animal images do? How do we look at animals?” (xviii).

While I concur with Brower on the importance of undertaking a descriptive analysis of how we look, I disagree that such a project need be conceived as a “move beyond” any sort of interrogation of why we look. Certainly the answers to both these questions are and will continue to be mutually enriching, and I have structured the course of this dissertation to highlight the co-implication of these two inquiries.

After my examination in Chapter One of cinematic representations of a range of what Derrida would call “noncriminal puttings to death” (“Eating Well” 278), I narrow my analysis to films that document the highly systematized labour of killing animals to produce meat. Chapter Two thus initiates a recalibrated set of questions and a refined concentration on films that treat, in whole or in part, the particular topos of the slaughterhouse. As I earlier noted, the modern slaughter industry produces animal death by means and in numbers that are indisputably “unprecedented.” McHugh avers that this site’s “mind-boggling” techniques and capacities for killing are matched by “the mechanisms of rendering these processes invisible” (15). I agree, and would add that film too can serve as a powerful mechanism for rendering slaughter invisible. My analysis in Chapters Two, Three, and Four accordingly hinges on the way films engage the issue of slaughter’s (in)visibility, and the ways they mobilize shock in doing so.
Chapter Two is devoted to the examination of films that place their faith in the politicizing power of shocking revelation. Through close readings of *Food Inc.* (Robert Kenner, 2009) and *Glass Walls* (PETA, 2009), I begin this chapter by calling into question the representational logic of exposure (e.g., in *The Cove*) that proceeds from an uncritical acceptance of the belief that slaughter has been made invisible to us. I connect this logic to what Burt terms the “slaughterhouse aesthetic” and, through analysis of the industrial film *This is Hormel* (F.R. Furtney and the Hormel Co., 1965) and the labour-centred documentary *American Dream* (Barbara Koppel, 1990), I demonstrate that this mode of cinematic representation works to maximize the visibility of animal slaughter, yet it does so by relying on conventions that disconnect slaughter from daily life and disassociate the spectator from the slaughtered animal body. The use of these conventions is particularly problematic in activist films, as it obliges these films to reproduce the structures of fetishization and isolation that underwrite the very practices they aim to critique. I supplement my discussion of the visually oriented mandates of Burt’s aesthetic with an examination of the role of sound in several slaughterhouse films; this analysis underscores the instability of the aural evidence of slaughter, and thus suggests its unnerving potential. In a final move to counter the sense of separation that the slaughterhouse aesthetic reinforces, I conclude this chapter by moving from the shocking filmic sight of slaughter to the material site of the slaughterhouse. Drawing on recent historical analyses of slaughterhouses and of the once popular practice of slaughterhouse touring, I demonstrate the ascendancy of ocularcentric modes of witnessing or “processing” slaughter that work to contain its sensorial excess and ultimately to dissociate it from daily life. This exposition indicates the need for representational strategies that destabilize the notion of slaughter as something apart.

Chapter Three focuses principally on *Strike*, a film that likewise values shocking
images of slaughter for their capacity to unnerve the spectator, yet which enacts this visceral discomfiture for the express purpose of channelling it towards a decidedly anthropocentric political message. I ground my discussion of this trope in Eisenstein’s praxis of dialectical montage, a strategy premised on the conviction that the collision of dissonant elements produces—that is, makes visible—“phenomena of another order” (“Cinematographic Principle” 37). While I acknowledge the affective potential of such collisions, my analysis emphasizes the ways in which this particular representational syntax elides the singularity and significance of animal life. I argue that the production of this sort of dialectical conflict—which occurs in numerous films in addition to Strike—hinges on the conflation of individual animals with their species and on the naturalization of abrupt animal death as an inevitable “fact” of life. This latter critique highlights the concurrence of the swift, shocking blows of slaughter and the cinematic spectator’s experience of montage.

My examination, in Chapters Two and Three, of filmic formulations of shock as a sort of jarring enlightenment sets the stage for my discussion, in Chapter Four, of modes of filmmaking that make significantly different investments in slaughter’s shocking effects. To generalize, these modes value shock’s capacity to defamiliarize. I interrogate this conception of shock in close readings Dziga Vertov’s Kinoglaz (Kino-Eye, 1924) and of Charles Burnett’s Killer of Sheep (1977). My analysis rests on the idea that invisibility very often derives precisely from hyper-visibility. I argue that these films, particularly Killer of Sheep, employ distinctly non-dialectical formal strategies that work to render strange—and therefore distinctly visible—ordinary horrors that we have become habituated to not seeing. I contend, furthermore, that their particular force—their singular attraction—lies in their provocation of an ethical engagement with the sight/site of animal slaughter.
As this overview suggests, a definite narrative progression guides this dissertation. I take seriously the idea, suggested in the petrified reflection cast by the black cat’s amber eyes and in the mobile shock screen strapped to O’Barry’s chest, that cinema has the capacity not only to catch but to shape our regard for animals. With this potential in sight, I evaluate the formal strategies at work in a heterogeneous group of films that document animal death and slaughter. I consider, in particular, how these films implicate us in their address, and how we view them given the technological conditions at hand. It is my contention that ethical formal strategies and viewing practices can combine to help us rethink our relationships to animal slaughter, and this dissertation works, largely by increments, to establish this point of convergence.
—Chapter One—

Why Look at Dead Animals?

_The dissecting part impressed me not so much as the slaying. They were so excessively alive, these pigs. And then, they were so excessively dead._

—Rudyard Kipling, “How I Struck Chicago, and How Chicago Struck Me” (46)

I. Reading _Rules_, Facing Facts

Indexical images of animal slaughter figure with remarkable frequency in the history of cinema. They appear _in situ_ in the small yet often critically successful corpus of fiction and nonfiction films set in and around slaughterhouses: _Le sang des bêtes_ (Blood of the Beasts, Georges Franju, 1949); _Le cochon_ (The Pig, Jean Eustache and Jean-Michel Barjol, 1970); _Meat_ (Frederic Wiseman, 1976); _Killer of Sheep_ (Charles Burnett, 1977); _The Killing Floor_ (Bill Duke, 1985); _American Dream_ (Barbara Koppel, 1990); _Carne_ (Meat, Gaspar Noé, 1991); _Seul contre tous_ (I Stand Alone, Noé, 1998); _Slaughterhouse: The Task of Blood_ (Brian Hill, 2005); _Unser täglich Brot_ (Our Daily Bread, Nikolaus Geyrhalter, 2005); _Fast Food Nation_ (Richard Linklater, 2006); _The Lie of the Land_ (Molly Dineen, 2007); and _Food Inc._ (Robert Kenner, 2009). To this list we

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17 Here and elsewhere, I employ Charles Sanders Peirce’s phenomenological typology of signs, which he succinctly sets forth in “A Sketch of Logical Critics”: “I had observed that the most frequently useful division of signs is by trichotomy into firstly Likenesses, or, as I prefer to say, Icons, which serve to represent their objects only _in so far as_ they resemble them in themselves; secondly, Indices, which represent their objects independently of any resemblance to them, only by virtue of real connections with them, and thirdly Symbols, which represent their objects, independently _alike of any resemblance or any real connection, because disposi- _tions or factitious habits of their interpreters insure their being so understood_” (460–61). Mary Ann Doane’s gloss of Peirce’s index helps to clarify what distinguishes this type of sign: “Unlike icons and symbols, which rely upon association by resemblance or intellectual observations, the work of the index depends upon association by contiguity (the foot touches the ground and leaves a trace, the wind pushes the weathercock, the pointing finger indicates an adjoining site, the light rays reflected from the object ‘touch’ the film). The object is made ‘present’ to the addressee” (92).

Indexical signs assume particular significance in this chapter’s discussion of cinema, and it is necessary to make several distinguishing remarks about them here. All filmic images bear an indexical code, insofar as their signified (the _pro-filic event_) possesses a “real connection”—that is, a causal relation—with their signifier (images etched by light on celluloid). Documentary film’s indexicality is distinct, however, insofar as if functions to trace a causal link to the extra-filmic world (i.e., to the “real”). I use the terms “indexical” and “documentary” interchangeably, and readers may initially be perplexed by my usage of these terms in reference to fiction films; in these instances, I refer to shots, scenes, or sequences that index/document animal slaughter in the extra-filmic world, and that are interpolated into fictive diegeses.
could add a heterogeneous collection of “sponsored films”: advertorial films, such as *This is Hormel* (F.R. Furtney and the Hormel Co., 1965) and “The Stockyard Series” (Selig Polyscope Co., 1901), a set of 60-odd films commissioned by the meatpacking giant Swift and Co. which includes titles such as *Arrival of Train of Cattle, Stunning Cattle, Dumping and Lifting Cattle, Sticking Cattle, and Koshering Cattle*; instructional/training films, such as an untitled film from the 1920s, produced by the British Council of Justice for Animals and the Humane Slaughter Association, that explains how to slaughter pigs; educational films, such as *Meat: From Range to Table* (Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, 1955); and animal-advocacy films, namely PETA’s ever-growing catalogue and like-minded animal-rights videos that are currently proliferating on the Internet.

Images of animal slaughter are to be expected in dramas and documentaries about meat production; after all, they define the *mise en scène*. In a more perplexing phenomenon, images documenting the slaughter of animals repeatedly crop up in films that often have very little to do, subject-wise, with animal slaughter: *Kinoglaz* (*Kino-Eye*, Dziga Vertov, 1924); *Stachka* (*Strike*, Sergei Eisenstein, 1925); *Rien que les heures* (*Nothing But Time*, Alberto Cavalcanti, 1926); *Un chien andalou* (*Andalusion Dog*, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, 1929); *Las Hurdes* (*Land without Bread*, Buñuel, 1933); *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (Michael Curtiz, 1936); *La règle du jeu* (*The Rules of the

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18 Film archivist Rick Prelinger uses the term “sponsored” to demarcate industrial and institutional films; these films are made either for audiences internal to the sponsoring body or for customers, clients, or public groups which the sponsor wishes to attract or educate; as such, the films entail “the packaging of information from a particular corporate or institutional perspective,” and this corporate/institutional viewpoint takes the place of an author. The subject of meat-making highlights the range of Prelinger’s category, as it accommodates both films that plug and films that denounce the industry’s practices.

19 Burt discusses this film, which tows the line between instructional and advocacy filmmaking, in his review of *A Day in the Life of a Massachusetts Slaughterhouse*. He observes that it and other films like it “would have been shown at public meetings organized by the societies and accompanied by talks. This contrasts with the potential for private consumption offered by video, DVD, and Internet downloads” (350). Perhaps more significant than the public screening environment is the fact that these instructional films are the only films about slaughter that directly address the human workers involved in the industry.

20 I use the term “slaughter” in its broadest sense, which is perhaps best transcribed in Derrida’s phrase, “noncriminal putting to death” (“Eating Well” 278). For a discussion of the word’s nuances, see Chapter Two.
Game, Jean Renoir, 1939); Mouchette (Robert Bresson, 1966); Unsere Afrikareise (Our Trip to Africa, Peter Kubelka, 1966); Andrei Rublev (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1966); Week-end (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967); La hora de los hornos (The Hour of the Furnaces, Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, 1968); The Hart of London (Jack Chambers, 1970); Viva la muerte (Long Live Death, Fernando Arrabal, 1971); Pink Flamingos (John Waters, 1972); The Holy Mountain (Alejandro Jodorowsky, 1973); Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid (Sam Peckinpa, 1973); Touki Bouki (Djibril Diop Mambéty, 1973); Maîtresse (Barbet Schroeder, 1975); Moses und Aron (Moses and Aaron, Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub, 1975); Novecento (1900, Bernardo Bertolucci, 1976); The Serpent’s Egg (Ingmar Bergman, 1977); In einem Jahr mit 13 Monden (In a Year with Thirteen Moons, R.W. Fassbinder, 1978); L’albero degli zoccoli (The Tree of Wooden Clogs, Ermanno Olmi, 1978); Apocalypse Now (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979); Cannibal Holocaust (Ruggero Deodato, 1980); Heaven’s Gate (Michael Cimino, 1980); Sans soleil (Sunless, Chris Marker, 1983); Tampopo (Jûzô Itami, 1985); Benny’s Video (Michael Haneke, 1992); Brother’s Keeper (Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky, 1992); Japón (Japan, Carlos Reygadas, 2002); Cidade de Deus (City of God, Fernando Meirelles, 2002); Le temps du loup (Time of the Wolf, Haneke, 2003); Los muertos (Lisandro Alonso, 2004); Caché (Hidden, Haneke, 2005); and Retour en Normandie (Back to Normandy, Nicolas Philibert, 2007).

Whereas the first group of films attests to slaughter in the form of more and less mechanized butchery, many of the latter dramatic and experimental films document

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21 While this list is long, it is by no means complete. I encountered many of these films in scholarly literature on the intersection of film, animals, and death; for example, in the exceptionally thorough list Michael Lawrence addends to his examination of real animal death in Michael Haneke’s oeuvre (n7, 79–80). I am also grateful to the many colleagues and strangers who recommended titles. In the discussion to come of these and other films, I preserve the original title when the film in question is most commonly referred to as such in Anglophone contexts; this is often the case for French films, such as La règle du jeu and Le sang des bêtes. I use the English translation in cases in which it is more recognizable; this convention holds for Russian films, the titles of which are, in any case, accessible to non-Russian speakers only in transliterated form.
processes of slaughter that fall outside the logic of (post-)industrial food production: artisanal butchery, ritual sacrifice, sport hunting. What’s more, a number of these films simultaneously document the emergence of a new purpose for slaughter: the production of cinematic spectacle or special effects (Chien, Light Brigade, Règle, Mouchette, Andrei Rublev, Apocalypse, Tampopo, Benny’s Video, Los muertos, Caché).

We might also generalize that while images of slaughtered animals perform a very literal role in the diegeses of the first group, they circulate as portable metaphors in the second. These images are portable in two senses: they function as discrete, mobile units within the text, and their transmission to diverse audiences (linguistic or otherwise) requires no translation. Yet the basic function of slaughter imagery in these two groups of films is only outwardly—which is to say, thematically and generically—dissimilar. Even documentaries that position slaughtered animals primarily as literal elements of mise en scène attach some degree of metaphoricity to these mutilated bodies; at the extreme, they render these bodies symbols, and deploy them to make visible—or to heighten the visibility of—the sort of physical and existential human suffering that attends the labour of slaughter. It is thus possible to begin with a broad historical claim: in considerable (if inconsistently frequent) cases, cinema leverages the symbolic weight of indexical images of slaughtered animals. In what follows, I also contend that the medium regularly

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22 In many of these films, it is unclear if animals were killed for the sole reason of producing cinematic spectacle; whether this matters is, moreover, up for debate. For example, Tarkovsky orchestrated the killing of a horse for a scene in Andrei Rublev; according to accepted film lore, the horse was borrowed from a nearby slaughterhouse and, after it was killed (that is, after its killing was filmed), its body was returned and processed into meat.

23 Cynthia Chris ascribes this latter sense of portability to wildlife films (108). She borrows the term from Leo Braudy, who defines it as “the circumstances that allow the products of one culture to be absorbed and even co-opted by another.” Braudy maintains that Hollywood—and Western artistic production at large—has long deployed images of nature to create portable texts that can be read by globally diverse audiences (280). Burt’s discussion of the way different wildlife films use and reuse stock footage also speaks to the term’s first sense—to the idea that animal imagery is easily spliced or interpolated into diverse filmic contexts (87). Several of the experimental films listed above incorporate footage of indeterminate provenance (Hora, Chien); that this material may be found footage heightens the impression that scenes of slaughter are portable—that is, generic and reusable.
compels these images of dead and dying animals to stand in a textual space absented of analogous images of dead and dying humans.

My initial aim in this chapter is to explain why. I then consider how these reasons play into the ethics of viewing violent animal death on screen. Jane Giles posits a convincing reason for cinema’s reliance on “meat as metaphor” in her schematic overview of fiction and documentary films that thematize animal slaughter: “In both documentary and drama filmmaking,” she asserts, “the slaughterhouse has provided an enduring subject for its potential to deliver a clear political metaphor and [to] deal explicitly in images of unfaked visual horror” (42). Although she singles out the slaughterhouse as setting, her assertion can easily be extended to films that index humans torturing and killing animals, individually or en masse, in other environs and by other techniques. Indeed, her twofold claim speaks suggestively to a twinned tension that structures cinematic representations of animals at large: animal bodies are regularly made to oscillate between metaphor and fact, and they are frequently deployed as instruments of both didacticism and titillation. Yet Giles’s assertion amounts to a diagnosis, the supporting aetiology for which remains lacking. In response to this gap, the first half of this chapter attempts to account critically for cinema’s recurrent troping of the real bodies of slaughtered animals. To do this work, I begin by drawing out what the latter part of Giles’s claim takes as understood: slaughter imagery’s major appeal—its provision of bona-fide gore—is a condition of certain visual limitations on the cinematic representation of human carnage and death.

24 Giles focuses on Noé’s Seul contre tous and touches on the slaughterhouse films of Franju, Wiseman, and Duke.
25 Chris discerns this latter duality in her analysis of wildlife films, a genre she identifies as bearing “allegiances to both science and showmanship, to education and entertainment” (xxi). She points out, furthermore, that the genre accommodates the labels “high” and “lowbrow,” as it alternately calls on “high-value (legitimate) knowledge” and “incorporate[s] elements of spectacle and melodrama” (xii–xiii). Certainly many of the slaughter films catalogued here likewise employ animals to deliver both knowledge and thrills. (See also my comments in Chapter Two regarding Shukin’s insight into the flexibility of animal signs.)
Vivian Sobchack demonstrates that these limitations are both cultural and material in her provocative work on cinema’s documentation of (mostly) human death. She foregrounds the former cause (and I follow her lead), dexterously accounting for the “rupture between death and daily social life” that marks post-Victorian culture (Carnal Thoughts 228). She proposes that we have at turns become increasingly unfamiliar with and hence ill at ease when confronted with “natural” death (a gradual process that accedes to collective narrative), and increasingly familiar with and hence relatively unfazed by the public spectacle of violent and accidental death (228–230). This shift in cultural attitudes towards death manifests itself in a set of pre- and proscriptions regarding its depiction on screen. These rules bifurcate according to generic divisions: in narrative fiction film, a genre in which ill-fated characters tend to meet violent, dramatic ends, “death is generally experienced […] as representable and often excessively visible” (235). In contrast, documentary film’s specialized indexicality and its contiguity to spectators’ “extracinematic personal and social lives” ensure that the genre almost always “observe[s] the social taboos surrounding real death and generally avoid[s] explicit (that is, visible) screen reference to it” (235, 231). When indexical images of human death do appear onscreen in documentary film, Sobchack contends, they are necessarily framed by

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26 This chapter is considerably indebted to Sobchack’s complementary essays, “Inscribing Ethical Space: Ten Propositions on Death, Representation, and Documentary” and “The Charge of the Real: Embodied Knowledge and Cinematic Consciousness,” both of which are collected in Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture. My approach to Sobchack is best characterized as a reading for structural absences, as I focus on animal death, a category that appears only in the margins of her analysis; more precisely, I interrogate what her discussion of the cinematic regard of human death says about the values we place on animal death. I adopt this methodology from the exemplary meta-reading of John Ford’s Young Mr. Lincoln (1939) collectively performed by the editors of Cahiers du Cinéma in 1970. The Cahiers authors explain their approach in the following terms:

What will be attempted here through a re-scansion of these films in a process of active reading, is to make them say what they have to say within what they leave unsaid, to reveal their constituent lacks; these are neither faults of the work […] nor a deception on the part of the author […]; they are structuring absences, always displaced—an overdetermination which is the only possible basis from which these discourses could be realized, the unsaid included in the said and necessary to its constitution. In short, to use Althusser’s expression—“the internal shadows of exclusion.” (496, original emphasis)

27 Riffing on Roland Barthes’s description of photography as a “message without a code,” Sobchack asserts that documentary film is “indexical in code and function” (Music, Image, Text 44; Carnal Thoughts 231); fiction film, in contrast, is indexical in code only. For clarification of this distinction, see my n1.
one of five “ethical gazes.” In these extreme instances, the camera visibly asserts itself as possessing an “accidental,” “helpless,” “endangered,” “interventional,” or “professional” gaze in order to negotiate the ethical quagmire of filming and viewing death (249). In short, the largely unwritten ethical codes of documentary demand that films not only explain their recourse to images of violent human death, but also—and more importantly—justify their access to such imagery.

Although Sobchack does not focus on animals in her explication of the dialectical un/representability of death in fiction and nonfiction film, she circles around a textual example that is remarkably germane to the questions at hand: Renoir’s Règle du jeu, a frenetic comedy of manners in which an actor playing a human character (Roland Toutain as André Jurieux) pretends to die, and a dozen-odd rabbits and pheasants28 really die—all in the service of the fictional narrative. This example would seem to belie the central thrust of Sobchack’s own argument: although the film’s overall status as realist fiction accommodates the human character’s pretend death onscreen, the re/presentation of the rabbits’ and pheasants’ real deaths constitutes interpolated documentary footage (Carnal Thoughts 245–46) that does not conform to her typology of documentary depictions of death. The chasse sequence in which these animals die—the sequence in and for which they are killed—is not framed by any of her so-called “ethical gazes.” This sequence consists of three series of shots in which the camera inventories both the hunters and the quarry. The first series prepares the spectator for the onscreen deaths: several straight-on shots show a phalanx of beaters striking tree trunks and trumpeting hunting calls, and a dozen high and low angle tracking shots serve to itemize the rabbits and pheasants, respectively, as they flee the woods. The second series enumerates various members of

28 According to my own count. Sobchack provides a curiously reduced death toll: according to her account, “there are two instances of death in the film. […] The first to die […] is a rabbit. The second is a human character” (245). I return to this telling discrepancy in Chapter Three.
the hunting party: one aristocratic gentleman readies his rifle, while Christine (Nora Grégor), the film’s leading ingénue, expresses her boredom with the whole routinized enterprise. The third and final series of shots recapitulates the previous roll calls, but with a striking variation: here Renoir crosscuts between static straight-on shots of the hunters as they take aim and fire, and tracking shots of the animals as they run, fly, and die. Through this final exchange, the film replicates the hunters’ perspectives as they sight and shoot their prey. In doing so, it explicitly positions the spectator as hunter.

In contradiction to Sobchack’s own account of how onscreen death unfolds in documentary, then, Renoir’s camera clearly does not mark its gaze as happenstance, impotent, threatened, disruptive, or even clinical, and thus does not justify its violation of the taboos that surround filming/viewing death. Quite to the contrary, the camera relentlessly tracks the quarry, and could even be said to flout its violations of the strictures Sobchack outlines. Yet if one recalls the basic fact that the dead in question are animals, one can hardly consider Renoir’s depiction of their death to be a transgression of cinematic norms. Renoir does not violate any visual taboos, for the simple reason that indexical images of dead or dying animals—of animals dying at human hands—do not constitute taboo subject material. In the absence of social strictures, Renoir’s film

29 Or at least they did not at the time. A finer point needs to be made here. At the time of the film’s release, both the culture at large and industry-specific production codes tolerated the production of indexical images of animal death. To borrow Sobchack’s succinct phrasing, it was acceptable for animals to be “executed not only by but also for the representation” of narrative fiction film (Carnal Thoughts 247, original emphasis). Changing cultural values of humaneness and recent animal cruelty laws have put a check on this practice, at least in American filmmaking. As Lawrence points out, “it is predominantly in films produced outside the United States that we watch real animals being killed. The American Humane Association has, since 1940, sought to ensure that ‘no animals were harmed’ during the making of feature films” (64). Whether or not the AHA is consistently successful in this endeavour is the subject of another debate. Additionally, it should be noted that contemporary cultural and industry standards in the United States continue to tolerate the use of indexical images of animals executed by and for a party unrelated to the representation (e.g., a film shot today on location in a slaughterhouse—Fast Food Nation comes to mind—likely would not raise cries of protest, the assumption being that the animals were already destined to slaughter).

Robert Altman’s Gosford Park (2001) lends itself as an illustration of these changing values and practices, as it brilliantly parodies Renoir’s film. Altman sends up the original chasse sequence by turning Renoir’s fidelity to realism on its head; where Renoir shot real rabbits and pheasants, Altman orchestrates a clumsy farce of a hunt, in which a patently fake bird (it might as well be a rubber chicken) falls out of the sky and hits the ground with a cartoonish thud. It bears noting, however, that Altman is able to take such
openly concedes its complicity—indeed, its direct responsibility—in the animals’ deaths, and thus points up the existence of a gaze distinct from any of Sobchack’s “ethical gazes.” Avowedly cooperative and at times even participative in the production of indexical images of death, this gaze otherwise finds direct expression only in spurious cinematic legend—in what Sobchack describes as the “apocryphal” genre of snuff films (247).

Renoir’s reliance on a certain cinematographic staple, however, attests to the pervasive, if indirect, influence that this gaze exerts on all cinematic genres—and particularly those that thematize animals. Like most film footage that documents humans hunting animals or animals hunting other animals, the *chasse* sequence culminates in a series of tracking shots that lays bare the medium’s significant technological antecedents in the hunt. The structural influence of hunting on filmmaking is most patently manifest in Étienne-Jules Marey’s 1882 invention of a chronophotographic gun (*un fusil photographique*), a device modelled, as its name indicates, on rifle mechanics. The French physiologist used his gun to “shoot” birds in flight, producing the first moving images of animals (he went on to “capture” falling cats, trotting horses, and numerous other animals in motion) (Chris 7; Burt, *Animals* 108–11). In a related vein, Burt contends that the “tracking shot” is among several “aspects of the hunt” that structure a range of proto- and early cinematic documentary enterprises: Marey’s and Eadweard

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30 The etymological origins of “tracking shot” are contestable; while Burt suggests that it derives from “tracking” animals in the hunt, most textbook definitions indicate that it refers to the now-outmoded technique of rigging the camera to a “track” (see, for example, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson’s *Film Art*, 269). Additionally, Burt’s ascription of the movement of “tracking” to still photography needs finessing. Although photographs by definition do not index “tracking” (unless, of course, they are blurry), certainly such movement often precedes and indeed enables the framing and shooting of them. Given the
Muybridge’s animal locomotion studies, the emergent practices of wildlife photography and film, and the numerous actualités that documented animals in all manner of fin-de-siècle spectacle (zoos, circuses, horse races, bullfights, parades, ceremonies, and transport) (Animals 110–12). To Burt’s list we could add the popular genre of trophy-hunting films, such as Terrible Teddy, the Grizzly King (Edwin S. Porter, 1901) and Roosevelt in Africa (Cherry Kearton, 1910).  

Viewed diachronically, Marey’s camera-gun, the ubiquitous tracking shot, and early trophy-hunting films suggestively demonstrate the way in which apparatuses function, according to Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar’s gloss of Gaston Bachelard, as “reified theory.” Latour and Woolgar take Bachelard’s definition to mean that each successive iteration of a technology “embodies” or “harnesses” the particular constructions of knowledge that enabled the production of its predecessors (66–68). This understanding of epistemology’s material manifestations indicates that, even today, the cinematic apparatus mobilizes the technology and techniques of hunting. In this light, it is evident that the participative gaze of the chasse sequence does not make an anomalous cumbersome size and slow shutter speeds of most nineteenth-century cameras, however, it is implausible to think that early photographers, like hunters, sighted their animal subjects by moving their instruments in a swift tracking motion. Indeed, as Matthew Brower points out, prior to the instantaneity of the snapshot, the medium’s technology dictated that its animal subjects remain stationary, a requirement that resulted in copious “wildlife” photographs of domesticated and even taxidermied animals (“Take Only Photographs” 5).

Brower provides a more sound connection between the photographic term “snapshot” and the discourse of hunting: this term, he explains, derives from the hunter’s action of snapping the gun up to his shoulder prior to firing a shot (“Wildlife Photography Changed the Way We Look at Animals”). This etymology bears suggestively on the characterization of hunting and photography as analogous forms of possessing and mastering animals. As Alexander Wilson explains, “the snapshot transforms the resistant aspect of nature into something familiar and intimate, something we can hold in our hands and memories. In this way, the camera allows us some control over the visual environments of our culture” (qtd. in Armatage, 279).

Ironically, Kearton’s famous trophy film lacks visual evidence of animal trophies. As Kay Armatage notes, Kearton meticulously tracked Roosevelt’s year-long big game hunt in the Congo yet failed to capture footage of the president “bringing down game” or of lions in the wild; nevertheless, his film has come to be regarded as “one of the first commercial animal features” (274).

Bachelard develops the idea of reified theory or « phenomenotechnique» in Le Matérialisme Rationnel. See especially his introductory overview in « Phénoménologie et Matérialité» (1–36).
appearance in Renoir’s film, but rather surfaces in a remarkable range of films. Indeed, we could say that this gaze bears a trace in/on all encounters with the profilmic world.

I craft my explication of Sobchack’s propositions on death in documentary in rather circuitous terms so as to draw out a significant problem that is elided by her focus on human death. Read for structural absences, her work plainly indicates that the ethics of filming and viewing real death are species-specific: in short, the rules for game are different. Sobchack acknowledges as much in passing: “we know that it is easier to kill a rabbit than to teach it to play dead. We also know it is easier to teach a man to play dead (that is, to act) than to kill him. What is meant by easier in the ethical context of our culture and the economic context of cinema is ‘faster,’ ‘cheaper,’ and ‘less morally problematic’” (Carnal Thoughts 246). Her devastating synopsis of this pragmatic economic logic goes a long way toward explaining why cinema regularly resorts to animal proxies. Yet the medium’s recourse to animal flesh circumvents not only the social prohibitions and the high production costs that impede the documentation of human death, but also the material limitations—that is, the medium’s fixed physical parameters—that hinder such representations. An examination of these latter restrictions accounts more substantively, I think, for cinema’s abiding recourse to animals as subjects ripe for visual revelation.

To make this argument, I move now to Sobchack’s account of the material limitations that structure human death on film. She grounds her discussion in the

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33 As do Derek Bousé’s succinct definition of animals as “disposable subjects” (52) and, more figuratively, Michael Curtiz’s directive on the set of The Charge of the Light Brigade, “bring on the empty horses.” The Hungarian director meant to summon horses without riders to augment one of his film’s elaborate cavalry scenes, but his awkward wording—to be fair, the only alternatives English offers are the formal “unmounted” and the potentially imprecise unqualified “horses”—provoked hilarity on set and came to circulate as a quotation that summed up his terse persona (the British actor David Niven even used it as the title for his 1975 chronicle of Hollywood lore). Unwitting as it may have been, Curtiz’s order eerily underscores the film’s treatment of horses as throwaway props and speaks to a more generalized attitude, recurrent in cinematic history, that animals are expendable, empty vessels. Dozens of horses were killed in and for The Charge of the Light Brigade, and its excessive brutality led Congress to ban the use of trip wires in filmmaking.
resemblance between contemporary culture’s episodic narrativization of “natural [human] death” and the material discontinuity that necessarily founds cinema’s indexical representation of it. She builds on Philippe Ariès’s characterization of the present-day experience of death as “a technical phenomenon [that is] dissected, cut to bits by a series of little steps, which finally makes it impossible to know which step was the real death, the one in which consciousness was lost, or the one in which breathing stopped” (229).

No longer a singular event experienced in and collectively witnessed by a community of relatives and peers, Ariès maintains, natural death now unfolds as a blurred series of movements towards and beyond an end point (the typical trajectory proceeding from health to managed care to the hospital bed and finally to the mortuary and the grave) (qtd. 229). Sobchack points out that documentary film likewise re/presents this activity of approximation: the incremental structure of death in contemporary everyday life “is paralleled by the initial recording of death by the film moving through camera and projector in twenty-four ‘little steps’ per second and, finally, in always disappointing post hoc attempts to ‘find’ and ‘see’ the exact moment of death in nonfiction films through a close inspection of every frame recording the event” (234, original emphasis).

It bears underscoring here that both the cultural and cinematic mediation of death as a

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34 Sobchack cites the televisual footage of John F. Kennedy’s assassination as illustrative of the inevitable disappointment of (re)viewing real human death on screen. The media’s coverage of the 1986 Challenger explosion presents an additional example of extreme historical import. Hayden White provides a pertinent gloss of Michael Turits’s analysis of the space shuttle’s explosion and the 1988 collision of three Italian jet planes at a German air show:

Turits likens the impact of their endless re-presentations on TV to the ambiguating effects of those televised replays of crucial events in sporting contests. Turits observes that, “when the [Challenger] blew up and the Frecce tricolori collided, the optical geometrics yielded by endless replays far outran the capacities of the network techno-refs to make a call.” What had been promised as a clarification of what happened actually produced widespread cognitive disorientation, not to say a despair at ever being able to identify the elements of the events in order to render possible an object analysis of their causes and consequences. […] The networks played the tapes of the Challenger explosion over and over. In response to the question of why they had done so, the news commentator Tom Brokaw said: “What else could we do? People wanted answers.” But, as Turits remarks, the tapes certainly provided no answers. All that the “morphing” technology used to re-present the event provided was a sense of its evanescence. It appeared impossible to tell any single authoritative story about what really happened—which meant that one could tell any number of possible stories about it. (73; Turits 34–35)
fragmentary process produces subjects/spectators who can never “know”—can never discern, distinguish, see—death. In short, whether it is meted out in end-of-life stages or in filmic frames, the movement towards and around death expresses itself as a problem of visibility.

In Sobchack’s analysis, this problem derives from a knot of material paradoxes that structure both the medium and death itself, and which coincide to keep the “object” of our probing vision out of sight. She articulates the first thread of this knot—cinema’s requisite depiction of death in incremental stages or frames—by calling on two of Zeno’s paradoxes. The first, Zeno’s racetrack paradox, demonstrates that time can be dissected ad infinitum: the runner’s sprint—and, Sobchack analogizes, the filmstrip—bisect at a midpoint, and a midpoint of a midpoint, etc. This perpetual halving shows up the logical impossibility behind our belief in the existence of finite temporal endpoints: just as Zeno’s runner can never reach the finish line, cinema can never grasp the instant of death. In other words, Zeno’s runner runs on, and “all we see is dying” (234–5, n11). Zeno’s arrow paradox in turn demonstrates that space is infinitely dissectable: objects cast into space (arrows, filmic images) can only occupy a single “point,” and as such lack duration, the constitutive element of motion. Sobchack thus explains, “every moment of the representation of [dying] is itself motionless and without duration, and the temporality that makes the distinction between human life and human mortality meaningful does not exist” (235, n11). Each of Zeno’s paradoxes isolates one variable of the space-time continuum to the exclusion of the other: his racetrack paradox indicates that, divorced from space, the time of death “never really happens,” whereas his arrow paradox shows that without time, any spatialized representation of death is “impossible” (234–235, n11). The paradigms at work in these paradoxes remain discrete only in exercises of abstract thought, however. Film necessarily joins them, as it fundamentally performs two
operations: it first breaks down and then reconstitutes time and space. In deconstructing and (very often seamlessly) reconstructing this continuum, the medium at turns lays bare and veils the paradoxical limits of its mode of representation. Sobchack is thus able to conclude that film’s dialectical movement between acknowledgement and concealment of the paradoxes on which it is founded ultimately “leave[s] us with the continuing mystery and unrepresentability of [death’s] actual fact” (234).

This “actual fact”—the second paradoxical thread in Sobchack’s analysis—lies in the absence of a signifier for death itself. Or, as she puts it: “The representation of the event of death is an indexical sign of that which is always in excess of representation and beyond the limits of coding and culture: Death confounds all codes.” As an indexical sign, the signifiers we typically associate with death (blood, death rattles, corpses) trace a line back not to the signified of death, but rather to “the activity and remains of the event of dying” (Carnal Thoughts 233, original emphasis). The actual event of death, meanwhile, marks a rupture between two ontological orders: that of the living, in which “the ‘having of being’ [is] animated concretely in action that is articulated in a visible world,” and that of the no-longer-living, a space-time of “nonbeing” that does not accede to the visible. As such, this rupture itself cannot be represented: “it can only be pointed toward, the terminus of its indexical sign forever offscreen, forever out of sight” (233). Given this representational impossibility, death demands to be told according to a before-and-after narrative: it “can only be represented in a visible and vigorous contrast between two states of the physical body: the body as lived body, intentional and animated—and the body as corpse, a thing of flesh unintended, inanimate, static” (236). Such a narrative,
of course, necessarily elides the moment of death itself—the avisual interval between being and nonbeing.

Much like the social restrictions previously outlined, this knot of material limitations does not, it seems, apply to animal death. Examining cinema’s documentation of animal death and the reception thereof, one realizes that this event does not confound the medium’s codes; indeed, it is regularly perceived as validating them. To phrase it slightly differently, the medium’s documentation of animal death is precisely that: a form of verification, confirmation, proof. This sense of validation surfaces in Gerald Mast’s synopsis of Renoir’s *chasse* sequence:

The gruesome, pathetic, and horrifying effect of all the slaughter arises from our seeing the actual expiration of a living being before our eyes. A rabbit bounds across screen. The crack of a rifle suddenly halts the animal in the middle of its progress. Its legs stretch out and seem to stick together. Its body, completely out of the animal’s control, flips over, and then stops. No movement at all. Motion has been converted to stasis. It is this essential element of motion pictures (the ability to differentiate between bodies in movement and at rest) that Renoir uses to depict the horrifying effect of death. (45–46)

I borrow Lippit’s term “avisual,” which he derives from Derrida, to distinguish the various ontological orders of invisibility (death and its representations are never simply invisible—if they were, no one would speak of the sense of “impossibility” or “disappointment” that inevitability befalls those of us who pursue its image). In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida designates two modes or orders of invisibility. He marks the first with a hyphen: “in-visibility.” In-visibility is simply that which is visible but which is out of sight: hands placed under a table, a heart beating within a chest. With operations of varying complexity, the in-visible can always be rendered visible. Derrida terms the second, more nebulous order “absolute invisibility,” and defines it as “whatever falls outside of the register of sight, namely the sonorous, the musical, the vocal or phonic (and hence the phonological or discursive in the strict sense), but also tactile and odoriferous” (90). The absolute invisible does not just remain out of sight; it adheres to an ontological order distinct from the register of the visible. Death is, in a word, absolutely invisible; it is not the “mark of an emptiness,” but rather an unmarked emptiness (*Of Grammatology* 144). This unbounded absence is perhaps what drives our desire to locate death in the register of the in-visible, where death remains just out of sight, unattainable. The cloak of in-visibility holds out the promise—a promise that at once induces anxiety and provides immense comfort—of a future visibility. (If death is in-visible, then someday, somehow, it will be rendered visible—that is, knowable.) Cognizant of the co-implication of the “absolute in(-)visible,” Lippit coins the term “avisual” to accommodate both of Derrida’s orders (*Atomic Light* 31). Lippit’s neologism aids in understanding Sobchack’s discussion of the elusive visibility/visuality of death in documentary.
Mast describes a viewing experience unaffected by the sense of impossibility or disappointment that, according to Ariès and Sobchack, plague witnesses of human death; indeed, he affirms the sufficiency of the before-and-after narrative of animal death. The sense of satisfaction he expresses is bound up with the gratifying thrill Giles ascribes to slaughterhouse imagery (the vicarious pleasure of viewing “images of unfaked visual horror”). With death pared down to a simple conversion of energy—to nothing more than the transition from movement to stasis—, the material and social paradoxes that attend its indexical representation are rendered null and void. Read against the grain of Sobchack’s propositions, Mast’s exegesis thus suggests that the documentation of animal death makes good on a promise that the cinematic medium cannot otherwise fulfil: it provides visible, finite knowledge of the “actual fact” of death. As Kipling marvelled of Chicago’s Packingtown, such representations allow us to see first life, then death, in all their bodily excess.

Chris Marker’s Sans soleil provides an additional, arresting demonstration (and, I suggest at the end of this chapter, a provocative deconstruction) of the medium’s recourse to animal death. Marker’s disjointed film essay loosely aligns generically heterogeneous images from various locales (Japan, Iceland, San Francisco, Guinea Bissau) with a woman’s voiceover reading letters from the fictional cameraman who presumably obtained this footage. A particularly complex sequence joins scenes of humans mourning a human, humans mourning animals, and a human killing an animal. The sequence begins with a steady zoom out on a close shot of chrysanthemums. White-gloved attendants hand the flowers to Japanese mourners, who file into a service off screen (the deceased, who remains unseen and unidentified, is presumably human and important—perhaps the prime minister). The film cuts to the scene of an annual memorial service for animals that have died at the local zoo. This and last year’s ceremony “have had a pall cast over them,” the
narrator tells us, by the deaths of two beloved pandas: “people really cried.” The image track collates shots of casually dressed mourners—many of them children—who also lay chrysanthemums on a makeshift altar, and the narrator recounts her interlocutor’s reflections on the service: “I’ve heard this sentence: ‘The partition that separates life from death does not appear so thick to us as it does to the Westerner.’ What I’ve read most often in the eyes of people about to die is surprise.” The film cuts abruptly to a giraffe loping through unfamiliar scrubland and then back to the young mourners at the zoo. The woman’s lilting voiceover continues: “What I read right now in the eyes of Japanese children is curiosity, as if they were trying, in order to understand the death of an animal, to stare through the partition.” A dated television clip of an assassin shooting a gun introduces another spatial and temporal dislocation. The assassin’s shot acts as a bridge back to the giraffe, the bullet entering from off-frame to pierce the animal’s slender neck. The giraffe falls and quickly rises. Another shot follows; blood spurts from distinct entry and exit wounds, and the giraffe totters and falls to the ground a second, final time. The film cuts to a close-up of its face, then zooms out to show its writhing body. A hunter’s needling gun and then the hunter himself enter the frame; he shoots the giraffe in the head. The film cuts back to the initial close-up of chrysanthemums, and then back to the scrubland. Vultures swoop in and peck out the giraffe’s eyes.

The scene of the giraffe’s death is visually phrased as a cutaway to a time-space that is at once imagined and all too real (it is simultaneously hypothetical and indexical). As such, it functions most immediately as what Christian Metz terms an “explanatory insert.”

Metz defines this type of “autonomous shot” as “the enlarged detail, in a

36 Marker’s complexly constructed film resists all categorical definitions, and does a particularly good job of undermining Metz’s neat delineation of filmic “syntagmas.” The giraffe footage could in fact be read as any of the four inserts or “syntagmatic interpolations” that Metz defines; it functions (perhaps simultaneously) as a nondiegetic, subjective, displaced, and/or explanatory insert (125). That said, the sequence’s editing most explicitly phrases the scene as an explanatory commentary on the other two interwoven scenes of mourning.
magnifying-glass effect. The detail is removed from its empirical space and is presented in the abstract space of a mental operation” (125). The footage of the giraffe’s death, unfastened to any of the film’s layered diegetic contexts, appears to explain or to illustrate the thought processes that the film and its interlocutors project on those facing death—those facing their own death, on the one hand, and those facing up to the knowledge of death, on the other. In the first case, the image of the running giraffe appears to illustrate the look of surprise that grips “people about to die” (the film’s spectators, of course, can only make this connection retroactively, after the ensuing footage has revealed why the animal was running). In the second, the film poses the unflinching documentation of the giraffe’s death—the three bullets almost methodically penetrating its body—as a visual supplement to what the curious child mourners are ostensibly looking for or endeavouring to understand. The children, the narrator tells us, want “to stare through the partition,” to see the passage from being to nonbeing. The film simultaneously offers us projected images of this crossing onscreen. In its recourse to this footage, the film seems to assert its own capacity to render visible this otherwise avisual threshold—to stare down gruesome animal death and to re/present it as a coherent, linear movement.

Mast’s reading of the *chasse* sequence and Marker’s employment of the giraffe’s death are consistent with cinema’s long-standing recourse to animal bodies. According to its most cited origin story, the medium is founded in part on the recognition that animal bodies can be made to render visible the paradoxical relationships of time and space; this story also begins to explain why and how cinema calls on animal bodies to manifest the enigmatic “fact” of death.\(^3^7\) In 1874, the tycoon Leland Stanford enlisted Eadweard Muybridge to determine whether a horse in gallop has all four of its hooves airborne at

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\(^{37}\) Alexander Wilson draws attention to what is, to my knowledge, an unremarked study by Muybridge. Sometime in the early 1880s, “Muybridge also staged and photographed a tiger attacking a buffalo at the Philadelphia zoo, setting a precedent for the sacrifice of animals that became a standard for TV entertainment” (124; noted in Armatage, 272). This example suggests the photographer was directly interested in scrutinizing animal violence, if not death.
once. With the help of an engineer, Muybridge constructed an elaborate rig of cameras with accelerated shutter mechanisms that were electromagnetically triggered to take a series of photographs; he also invented a device, called a zoöpraxiscope, which projected these static photographs in the same rapid succession in which they were taken, and he thus simulated motion some twenty years before the official invention of cinema (Chris 6). Muybridge eventually ascertained, in 1878, that galloping horses do in fact fully depart *terra firma* for a split second, and he went on to conduct numerous analyses of other facets of human and animal locomotion. By 1926, one film historian had dubbed his equine series “the accepted first chapter of Genesis” in the then still incipient history of early filmmaking (Chris 5); Bazin later christened them “the first-ever series of cinematic images” (“The Myth of Total Cinema” 14). Although disputes over Muybridge’s status as the progenitor of cinema have flared up over the years, this contestation has only served to augment the extensive body of scholarship that surrounds his work (Williams n321).

Much of this scholarship manages to ignore the central subjects of Muybridge’s proto-cinematic gaze; that is, it pays little attention to *why* or *how* his gaze fastens so insistently on animals. One could allow that the disciplined animal bodies that move across the frames of his “films” have simply been eclipsed by his own mythology. To be sure, the apocryphal explanation for Stanford’s peculiar inquiry—he supposedly needed to settle a high-stakes bet—suggests the photographer arrived at his primary subject purely as the result of fantastic chance (Williams 321, n6). Yet while mythical flourishes and strange circumstances certainly make for a good story, they also conveniently foreclose any further critical analysis. This particular instance of critical negligence is, moreover, indicative of film scholarship’s general disinterest in questions around the medium’s instrumentalization of animals—its profound failure to wonder *why* animals, and particularly dead animals, appear with such frequency onscreen. Lippit is perhaps the
most prominent theorist to broach an explanation for Muybridge’s animal fixation (and, more generally, for photographic and cinematic media’s many affinities with animals).  

“What is remarkable in Muybridge’s work, what immediately seizes the viewer’s attention,” he observes, “is the relentless and obsessive manner in which the themes of animal and motion are brought into contact—as if the figure of the animal were predestined to serve as a symbol of movement itself” (Electric Animal 123–24). Lippit’s proposition that animals are fated to serve as cinematic symbols elides the very real conditions that produce the medium’s wholesale figuration of these beings (it should go without saying that the burden of symbolization is never immanent). I thus want to add to his claim a more tangible wager: by arrogating popular and scientific culture’s ascription of a totalizing facticity (the condition of being a fact) to animal bodies, cinema renders these bodies—their movement, the cessation of their movement—imminently representable. An understanding of this valuation explains in great part why the medium’s beginnings are so intensively bound up with, and why the medium continues to invest heavily in, the representation of animals in general and animal death in particular.

I arrive at this conjecture regarding cinema’s figuration of animals as fact through both scholarly and poetic insight. In “The Origins of Porno,” the poet Albert Goldbarth intimates that Muybridge’s endeavour to freeze frame equine motion brings together a longstanding faith in the facticity of animal bodies, and an emergent investment in

38 Brower also stands out for his attention to the role of animals in photography’s beginnings. He contends, “photography was driven by a desire to photograph—or capture—animals” (“Wildlife Photography”). He also argues that, beginning with Muybridge’s equine studies, “photographic representations of animals have been seen as offering us access to an otherwise inaccessible ‘truth’ of animals. But this access had come at the cost of devaluing the unmediated experience of animals. After Muybridge’s photographs, traditional representations of the horse in motion have become unsatisfactory as viewers expect representations to conform to the truth of the photographs even though this truth is inaccessible to their senses” (Developing Animals xix).

39 Lippit formulates a similar proposition in an earlier essay, in which he cites Hervé Aubron for support: “The animal inevitably questions the origins of cinema because the animal was its first model. But also because cinema was fused with animals in its earliest stages” (trans. and qtd. in “Death,” 12).

40 As its title suggests, the poem locates the emergence of a pornographic gaze in Muybridge’s work; Linda Williams uses the poem to initiate her own scholarly search for the beginnings of hardcore pornography (34–57).
reproductive media’s capacity to produce factual representations. To the question, “Is there ever a moment when all four feet leave the ground,” the speaker observes, “There’s a dark compelling muscle framed by the flanks. […] There’s a question of time, there’s a sepia exactitude” (qtd. in Williams, 34). This small fragment of verse brilliantly condenses an idea central to the interrogation of the ethical representation of animals on film: Muybridge and company’s motion studies, and the cinematic medium that materializes in their wake, are founded in large part on the conviction that animal bodies are facts (and facts alone). Reckoned as such, animal corporeality poses no threat of escaping or exceeding the frame. As Goldbarth’s speaker suggests, animal bodies are in fact doubly framed: they are circumscribed by their own corporeality (their “muscle framed by the flanks”) and by the directed gaze of the cinematic apparatus (the “sepia exactitude” of film). This doubled framing ensures that animal bodies cannot but reveal themselves entirely to the apparatus’s scrutinizing gaze—cannot but offer up the “compelling” contours of their physicality.

Cynthia Chris’s and Paul Sheehan’s recent work on animals in cinema helps to ground Goldbarth’s discernment in contemporary film scholarship. Chris and Sheehan each draw attention to a basic fact that is too frequently forgotten in retrospective discussions of the motion studies performed by Muybridge and his contemporaries (namely Marey, but also Felix-Louis Regnault and Jules Janssen): the fundamental purpose of these projects was not to simulate motion, but rather to stop it (Chris 8; Sheehan 119). Chris characterizes nineteenth-century motion studies as deconstructive and points out that these investigations were driven by the desire “to scrutinize phenomena that could not be perceived by the unassisted human eye” (8). For his part, Sheehan observes that Muybridge and Marey operated according to a paradigm that viewed animal movement as a “mysterious dynamism.” Their singular contribution to
visual culture, he explains, lay in their invention of the technological means to arrest this enigmatic force, to submit it to a process of rationalization wherein it “could first of all be fixed, and then deciphered” (119).

Chris’s and Sheehan’s twinned insight is consistent with the characterization of nineteenth-century scientific and popular culture as newly preoccupied with rendering visible all manner of phenomena previously located outside the bounds of human vision: the interiority of the human body and psyche, the spatio-temporal dynamics of the metropolis, environmental topographies of extreme scales, etc. Current scholarship in this area indicates that the animal body assumed a privileged position among other enigmatic phenomena, particularly in the arena of emergent cinematic technologies. For example, in her examination of the development of modern medicine through the lens of visual culture, Lisa Cartwright asserts that the turn-of-the-century development of physiological cinema “is marked by a drive not only to segment, to measure, and to quantify movement, but also to render visible parts of the living body that were previously considered too interiorized, too minute, or too private to be seen by the researcher’s unaided eye” (23). While Cartwright repeatedly refers to “living beings” and to the “living body,” she takes the overwhelming majority of her examples from photographic and (proto-) cinematic representations of specifically animal bodies: John Macintyre’s X-ray cinematography of a moving frog’s leg; Ludwig Braun’s cinematography of a dog’s beating heart; Marey and J.B.A. Chaveau’s kymographic tracing of a horse’s beating heart. Gunning makes a similar move in his discussion of the educational imperatives apparent in early twentieth-century actualités; his generic reference to this mode implies films documenting a broad range of quotidian phenomena, yet he offers as a lone

41 It bears noting here that Marey was anti-vivisection. According to Brower, he opposed the scientific practice of cutting up animals because it offered insight not into living animals, but dead ones; he designed his circular, chronophotographic gun so that he could fix and study—with controlled, scientific precision—the intact bodies of living, moving animals (“Photography”).

42 This characterization emerges in the work of theorists such as Walter Benjamin, Lisa Cartwright, Jonathan Crary, François Dagognet, Michel Foucault, Linda Williams, Gunning, and Lippit, among numerous others.
example *Unseen Worlds*, a 1903 screening series run by the film director, producer, and distributor Charles Urban that “presented magnified images of cheese mites, spiders and water fleas” (“An Aesthetic of Astonishment” 124). These examples indicate that turn-of-the-century optical technologies relied heavily—perhaps even disproportionately—on animal bodies. As Goldbarth’s poem indicates, these bodies’ avowed facticity explains why they served as particularly rich sources of material to-be-made-visible. Their functionality, I contend, hinges on the qualities they possessed (pulsing muscles, beating hearts) and those they putatively lacked (affect, interiority).

Jane Desmond’s analysis of the practice of taxidermy—an artisan craft governed by many of the same codes and conventions that structure documentary film’s preservation of animal bodies—shows up the significance of the equation of animals and facts. Desmond locates the entrenchment of distinct, species-specific restrictions on the display of dead bodies in the same cultural moment as the aforementioned transformations in optical technology. She explains that “the range of morally and legally acceptable practices associated with the preservation and display of dead animal bodies is wider than that for human bodies” (168); indeed, she contends that the disparity between these practices is so great that it constitutes “one of the defining lines of division between humans and animals” (164). In short, whereas the display of dead human bodies is

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43 Desmond identifies a general rule of practice, to which there are of course a number of exceptions. Gunter von Hagens’ Body Worlds presents the most notable breach of the conventions around displaying the human dead. The show features the plastinated bodies of both humans and animals, but is known primarily for its display of the former (its official tagline is “The Original Exhibition of Real Human Bodies” and, of the seven Body Worlds’ exhibitions currently open around the world, six are devoted to human subjects). Plastination, a preservation technique invented by von Hagens in the 1970s, entails dissecting or partially dissecting bodies (which, in the case of humans, are willed by their “owners”) and replacing their store of water and fats with special plastics; this process halts decomposition and creates specimens that can be touched and whose interior workings are visible. Von Hagens, the German anatomist who invented the technique, indicates that his show’s appeal lies precisely in its transgressive treatment of human death: “The anatomist alone is assigned a specific role—he is forced in his daily work to reject the taboos and convictions that people have about death and the dead. I myself am not controversial, but my exhibitions are, because I am asking viewers to transcend their fundamental beliefs and convictions about our joint and inescapable fate” (52).

The widely accepted practice of displaying animal bodies is not without exceptions, either. The Berlin Zoological Garden recently sparked a heated controversy when it announced its decision to stuff and
largely limited to short-lived and mostly private funerary rites, we view dead animal bodies in a variety of forms and contexts: as specimens in museums and scientific laboratories, as taxidermied objects in art and craft exhibitions, and as hunting or fishing trophies on barroom and living room walls. (Of course, we also regularly encounter fragments of dead animal bodies in clothing and household décor, in supermarket freezers and on dinner plates.) These different/double standards have long been in place (*depuis le temps*, as Derrida says), yet Desmond demonstrates that they solidify in particularly nineteenth-century conditions of visual culture. This particular historical moment produced specific “discourses of art, home décor, science, and manhood” that “culturally sanctioned” a broad range of practices for displaying dead animal bodies; at the same time, nineteenth-century culture circumscribed the display of dead humans within an increasingly narrow set of conditions (164).

According to Desmond, this divide rests on display Knut, a young polar bear who became a media darling and the most beloved resident of the zoo—indeed, one of the most beloved zoo animals of all time—after he was rejected at birth by his mother and subsequently raised by hand by zookeeper Thomas Dörflein. The duo’s time together was short-lived; Dörflein died of a heart attack in 2008 and Knut died abruptly from a seizure that resulted in drowning in 2011, at the age of four and a half. The Berlin Zoo’s announcement, one month after Knut’s death, that it would use a technique called dermoplastik to preserve his body for museum display was met with outrage from many of the bear’s grieving fans. The leader of the protest movement, Jochen Kolbe, summed up the sentiment behind the opposition: “When someone dies in your family I think you don’t want him stuffed in a museum. Knut is not only a polar bear for people, he is a friend, a family member” (Slackman).

Body Worlds and the controversy over Knut’s planned taxidermy are both exceptions that prove Desmond’s rule: Body Worlds attracts millions of curious spectators because it breaks a firmly entrenched taboo against displaying dead humans; Knut’s fans oppose the preservation and display of his body because they have so thoroughly anthropomorphized him. Desmond provides an example of the latter that will be familiar to cinema scholars: the *salle d’exposition* at the Paris Morgue, which in the 1860s emerged as a popular destination for flâneurs, gawkers, and ordinary curious citizens alike. In a significant article on the origins of cinema, Vanessa Schwartz contends that the Morgue, along with the verisimilitudinous wax displays at the Musée Grévin and the numerous panoramas that peppered fin-de-siècle Paris, played an integral role in configuring the “new, mobilized gaze of the pre-cinematic spectator.” She argues that by incorporating movement, shifting perspectives, and sensational narratives, these spaces encouraged spectators to develop a “taste for reality” and thereby primed them for the experience of viewing the first films (88). Although visitors ostensibly flocked to the morgue with the altruistic intent of helping to identify missing persons, Desmond contends they were in fact drawn by the promise of a spectacle that, taken alongside newspaper headlines and neighborhood gossip, “embedded” the bodily remains of their fellow urban dwellers “in implied narratives of sensationalism” (164). This example appears at first to belie Desmond’s point, insofar as it refers to the display of dead humans on a mass, institutionalized scale. However, she points out that the *facticity* and *anonymity* of these human bodies in fact authorized their display. These two values are reserved, in the main, for animals, and ascribed to humans only in limit cases. Desmond is thus able to contend that the attribution of these values to Paris’s unidentified dead “removed [these human corpses] from the normal conventions of death, placing them close to the category of the nonhuman” (165). She likewise accounts for other, similar exceptions,
Western culture’s ascription of distinct values to the bodily remains of humans and animals: whereas the former “stands as a relic of a person,” the latter “often takes on an overwhelming facticity—it becomes a specimen, standing for itself or for a category of animals like it, and not for the ‘being’ which ‘inhabited’ the living body” (169).

It bears reiterating here that facts cannot accommodate competing values; we understand fact to be facts, and facts alone. Sheehan’s assertion that animals are “anti-performance” serves to locate this property of exclusion in the medium of film. He maintains that cinema inherits from the theatre a tradition of acting that locates “the vital, imperishable core of the self” as the site of truth, and argues that this privileging of psychic interiority produces “a phenomenology of performance” that, much like Sobchack’s phenomenology of death and Desmond’s dichotomy of the display of the dead, bifurcates along species lines. On one hand, there are human actors, to whom the audience almost automatically ascribes “a history of behaviour and experience.” On the other hand, there are “screen animals,” beings that are neither “actors” nor “performers.” “Screen animals,” Sheehan explains,

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\text{do not possess histories, as such, and can only “perform” in the sense of being trained (or perhaps rather compelled) to carry out certain tasks for the camera.}
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Unlike with human performances, the repetition of these tasks does not connote the visible outline of an interior activity. Screen animals are, to borrow Heidegger’s expression, “poor in world,” if by “world” we mean the inner life projected by human actors. (122, original emphasis)

such as the frequent display of Egyptian mummies and of the skeletons of indigenous peoples in museums; here, she argues, “the ‘thingness’ of the less-than-fully human facilitates the display” (165).

45 Sheehan refers to the “dominant acting tradition of the West” that emerges after the “theatre revolution inaugurated by Henrik Ibsen” (122). Given his focus on narrative feature films, it makes sense that Sheehan locates cinematic performance in the context of character-oriented drama. However, it is important to note that other equally significant strains of cinematic performance—namely, Soviet montage, French Surrealism, and American avant-garde (examples of which I discuss in this and the following chapter)—derive, at least in part, from traditions that place differing values on characters’ identities and psychic interiorities.
Screen animals, we imagine, are coterminous with the visible, factual contours of their image; they possess no secret recesses, no invisible or avisual storage for things like souls, memory, creativity, intentionality, or experience. Sheehan extracts an emancipatory potential from this asymmetrical dichotomy of performance: it is precisely because animals are refused Heidegger’s “purposive world,” he maintains, that they are able to “bring a kind of indeterminate otherness into the frame, the otherness of the non-manipulable. […] They] are thus always to some degree ‘troubling,’ as they break through the falsely protective aura of the image, the aura that rules out the accidental and the unintentional” (122, original emphasis). His assessment suggests that the reduction of animal bodies to nothing more than screen images—to nothing more than factual material—is a move that always already folds back on itself: by stripping animals of any outward manifestation of subjectivity, intentionality, or agency, cinema also necessarily constructs their bodies as unpredictable and fundamentally unknowable.

While I hesitate fully to endorse Sheehan’s celebration of the contingency of the animal body, his argument does suggestively open up the discussion of why we watch animal slaughter to include a consideration of the variegated ethical dimensions of this type of spectatorship. It is my contention that an ethically ambivalent desire for visual knowledge of death in part drives the spectatorship of slaughter. In this light, Sheehan’s characterization of the animal body as a surface that disrupts epistemological certainties—as a material that resists or turns on this desire—lends itself to the task of thinking through the ethics of the human-animal encounters staged in and by slaughter imagery. With his valuation in mind, then, I move now to a theoretical exploration of the ethical dimensions of slaughter cinema.

46 Jonathan Auerbach’s description of Electrocuting an Elephant, a film I presently discuss in detail, is here apposite. Auerbach wagers that the film “is so creepy […] precisely because we know that the animal is incapable of acting its death” (“McKinley at Home” 831).
II. “Again and Again”

The latter half of this chapter connects Sheehan’s recuperation of the factual body of the screen animal, as well as the human-animal dichotomies detailed by and through Sobchack and Desmond, to the figure that grounds this dissertation, Derrida’s *supplément*. As I explain in my Introduction, this dissertation repeatedly presses on the rhetorical frame of supplementarity as an alternative to the negative teleologies of substitution and displacement that structure many contemporary accounts of human-animal relationships in postmodernity. The narrative logic of these latter accounts, I argue, necessitates a capitulation to nostalgia (at worst, it entails the projection of a sort of pre-diluvian harmony between humans and animals). Its coherence, moreover, demands that sets of terms like past/present, presence/absence, animal/human, and self/other be understood as antagonistic. The concept of supplementarity, in contrast, reflexively thickens—and thereby destabilizes—the line that defines binary relationships and, in doing so, throws into question the tenability of ontologies that centre on oppositions. This frame thus urges us to appreciate the unquantifiable reciprocity that binds terms, and to reconsider how certain terms—particularly presence/absence and plenitude/lack—move in, around, against, and toward one other.

To explicate more precisely how this frame operates, it is necessary to detail Derrida’s work on/with the *supplément*, a term that emerges as a particularly active agent in his critique of phonocentrism and remains so up through his critique of carnophallogocentrism. In *Of Grammatology* (1967), Derrida deconstructs Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s proposition, made in his *Confessions*, that “languages are made to be spoken: writing serves only as a supplement to speech” (qtd. 144). Unquestioningly employing the French *suppléer* in both of its valences (“to supplement” and “to supplant”), Rousseau...
maintains that writing is a “dangerous” supplement, for its technical artifice not only adds to but also threatens to replace the ostensible naturalness and immediacy—indeed the plenitude—of the spoken word. Derrida in turn scrutinizes the ambiguity housed in suppléer, and points out that speech’s very want of a supplement points up its own “infirmity or deficiency” (144). If writing adds to or supplants speech, it follows that speech does not originate in/as a state of wholeness or completion. Writing’s so-called supplementarity, Derrida thus contends, evidences the absence or gap that marks speech—its “originary lack,” as David Macy puts it (371). In sum, Derrida dismantles the logic of supplementarity in order to render visible the “undecidability”—that is, the irrevocable yet always unknown co-implication or co-constitution—of the relationships that structure speech and writing, nature and culture, and other ostensibly binary divisions. To take a longer view, Derrida engages supplementarity as a method of reading différance, the similarly homophonous word (différance plays on différer, which means both “to differ” and “to defer”) he uses to show that, given Saussure’s proof that signs mean only insofar as they differ from one another, the final meaning of signs is always already deferred (Macy 99).  

Following Derrida’s lead, I mobilize the supplément as a rhetorical frame that lays bare the undecidability—and, more importantly, the ethical obligations this undecidability demands—of cinema’s documentation of animal death. At this juncture, readers may well ask the concrete question: How, exactly, do we figure this frame? To recall, the previous section demonstrated the presence of a troubling relationship between indexical images of human and animal death: the cultural and material restrictions on documentary depictions of human death result in what is perceived as a lack of such imagery in cinema; a small but no less significant number of films in turn supplement this ostensible lack with

48 To this view, it is worth noting here that Derrida supplements his own supplément with the parergon, a method of reading the margins of the visual image (supplementarity explicitly reads the margins of linguistic communication).
images that index—and often not only reproduce, but produce—horrific animal death. Reflexively aligning indexical images of human and animal death with the Rousseauian partitioning of speech (original) and writing (supplement) presents an extremely productive evaluative frame. To be sure, cinema’s documentation of animal death and the scholarly discussion thereof underscores the limitations that structure the representation of human death; in other words, examining these representations shows up the “deficiencies,” as Derrida would have it, that define images of human death. Yet because these documents index the killing of real animals, they also oblige us to consider their production, circulation, and consumption from an ethical perspective. How do we make sense of a discursive terrain that at once presents and sometimes even produces the deaths of one class of beings, and conceals those of another? How do we make sense of our own desire to see or know death? How do we judge—can or should we judge?—this desire?

On the face of it (and, indeed, as I have thus far articulated it), cinema’s supplementation of animal-for-human death begs to be categorically denounced as unethical. The indefensibility of this practice emerges in sharp focus when considered in the light of two equally established, if highly disparate, bodies of ethical discourse. The first is what we might call conventional animal rights rhetoric. Cinema’s use of animal death structurally resembles the many institutionalized uses of animal bodies as supplementary material that this doctrine expressly seeks to combat. Specifically, the medium’s use of animal bodies as material proxy for the ineffable, avisual moment of human death outwardly resembles nothing more closely than the social and hard sciences’ abuse of animals as stand-ins for humans in laboratory research. In Animal Liberation (1975), a treatise that helped to codify the field of animal rights proper, Peter Singer roundly—and, I think, quite persuasively—critiques this practice on both logical and ethical grounds: “either the animal is not like us, in which case there is no reason for
performing the experiment, or else the animal is like us, in which case we ought not to perform on the animal an experiment that would be considered outrageous if performed on one of us” (52). Singer’s ultimatum for scientific research is easily re-phrased as a condemnation of cinema’s instrumentalization of animal death: either the animal’s death is not like ours, in which case it serves as an insufficient stand-in, or else its death is like ours, in which case we cannot, for all of the reasons Sobchack so adroitly outlines in regard to the documentation of human death, pretend to adequately or ethically represent it on screen.

Mulvey’s now canonical “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975) and the rich lines of feminist film theory it opened also underscore the unethical nature of cinema’s supplementary representation of death. In her seminal essay, Mulvey rigorously critiques the gendered viewing positions that classical Hollywood film constructs through its formal and thematic insistence on woman’s “to-be-looked-at-ness.” More specifically, she argues that this particular corpus of films contains the dangerous lack that woman represents by carving up the female figure in close-up shots that present her as an icon or fetish (fetishistic scopophilia) and by advancing narratives that task the male protagonist with scrutinizing the danger inevitably lurking within the heroine (sadistic voyeurism) (715–18). The previous section outlines a complementary model of spectatorship, one in which images of animal slaughter circulate as socially acceptable and materially sufficient supplements that work to satisfy spectatorial desires for violent visual Imagery. Readers will recall that I drew out this relation of supplementarity by excavating Giles’s claim that cinematic representations of animal slaughter fill a demand for images of “unfaked visual horror.” Giles does not elaborate, other than to offer an

49 This body of work does not explicitly phrase itself in ethical terms. However, as Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton demonstrate in their examination of the intersections of ethics and cinema studies, it lends itself to being read “as properly ethical, since it addresses head-on the relationship between subject and other, and a dynamic of pleasurable possession that may be embraced or rejected” (6–7).
analogous assertion. She wagers that crush films (a pornographic subgenre that documents humans torturing small animals for sexual gratification) fill a demand left open by interdictions on snuff films: “material documenting the torture and murder of animals,” she observes, “seems to provide a stop-gap for the hungry, sadistic eye” (42). Taken together, her compressed conjectures locate the desire to view violent animal death onscreen in a sort of sadistic voyeurism—that is, in a viewing position in which the spectator derives pleasure and a sense of mastery from watching the scene of another being’s violent suffering and death. (As I show in Chapter Two, sadistic voyeurism finds its compositional complement in the fetishistic framing techniques of what Jonathan Burt terms “the slaughterhouse aesthetic” [Animals 174].) Viewed alongside feminist gaze theory, this position violently forecloses any potential for an ethical encounter.

Although both Mulveyian critiques of sadism and scopophilia and Singer’s assessment of the structuring fallacy of scientific experimentation pose instructive analogical likenesses, the ethical frameworks they mobilize and the correctives they recommend are ultimately too restrictive for the aims of this dissertation. If Giles’s own dispensation of explanation is any indication, the diagnosis of sadistic voyeurism is a rather limiting one. That is, attributing the spectatorship of violent animal death exclusively to a sort of ego-driven cruelty tables any discussion of the attendant ethical implications (how could we judge the self’s latent desires?) or, perhaps worse, confines it to dead-end moral judgments (cinema’s nourishment of “hungry, sadistic eyes,” most would easily agree, is wrong). Furthermore, Mulvey’s essay works toward the destruction of the phallocentric visual pleasure promulgated in/by classical Hollywood film (713). While this objective sparked the creation of a rich strain of feminist filmmaking that worked to invent new forms of pleasure, it also urged the wholesale abandonment of the
classical model. Although I would certainly like to hold onto the productive potential that Mulvey’s directive holds for future films made of/about animal slaughter, I am more concerned here with mining the ethical possibilities embedded in the films that have played—and will no doubt continue to play—defining roles in our visual imaginary of animal life and death. Changing tracks, Singer’s utilitarian philosophy remains circumscribed within a narrow conception of ethics, which takes for granted both the practicability of judging “right” from “wrong” and of determining the degree of “rightness” required to counteract a given quotient of “wrongness.” According to Singer’s logic, killing an animal for the sake of a film would be acceptable if it produced some quantifiable gain that outweighed the harm done to the animal. The unanswerable questions this statement introduces—What would constitute a gain? Who would decide?—show up the danger of leaning on Singer’s critique. Art and science, after all, are not uniformly consilient fields. Whereas science could conceivably adhere to the utilitarian logic that Singer advances (whether it should be made to is a question for philosophers of science), art cannot withstand rigid calculations of use value. Indeed, this dissertation implicitly wagers that artistic representation’s very existence and definition are to a certain extent predicated on its resistance to conclusive cost-benefit analyses.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that I find more constructive support for the frame of supplementarity in current art theory. In an article that asks whether contemporary art can “productively address the killing of animals,” Steve Baker observes that although contemporary film, literature, and visual art are representational forms that accommodate “the killing of animals […] as a subject,” these forms constitute an

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50 Numerous of Mulvey’s successors realise the potential to be found in alternative readings of classical film. See, for example, Tania Modleski’s “The Master’s Dollhouse: Rear Window.”

51 Baker singles out “nondocumentary film” but never explains why. He is a scholar of postmodern visual art, and his identification of complementary modes is intended, I gather, as a signpost for other scholars who wish to expand on his analysis; as one of those scholars, I see no reason why documentary film does not fit into this “field” (indeed, why it does not stand out in this field).
ethically and aesthetically ambiguous terrain in which “it is not necessarily clear how the field can usefully contribute either to the knowledge of the other-than-human or more-than-human world or to what might broadly be called the cause of animal advocacy” (“You Kill Things” 70, emphasis added). Baker offers this observation in part as a defence of his prior *Postmodern Animal*, which also centres on contemporary art that materially implicates the animal body—very often the dead animal body. In that text, he asserts that this thematically constituted body of work makes a peculiar formal move towards what he terms “botched taxidermy.” These works, he discerns, share a way of “getting it wrong,” of failing to strive for and achieve the markers of naturalistic verisimilitude typical in modern representations made of real animals (namely, conventional taxidermy). In their wrongness, he argues, these works open themselves up to being read collectively, in Derridean terms, as “questioning entities” (*Postmodern* 104—Baker retains Derrida’s emphasis). In response to a critic who insists that art made of the material of dead animals presents not “‘an epistemological problem’ but simply ‘a dead animal,’” Baker reaffirms his use of the designation “questioning entity” and, moreover, its implicit assertion that such art possesses an indeterminate utility (“You Kill Things” 71–72). This unfixed use value resides, to remain with Derrida, in its introduction of a frequently disconcerting undecidability (or, to recall Sheehan, in its installation of “the indeterminate otherness of […] the non-manipulable”). As if to confirm this quality, Baker notes that numerous contemporary scholars attest that these sorts of artworks “do things to viewers, and they make it genuinely difficult to differentiate the ethical and the aesthetic strands of the arguments they raise. They do, it seems, ‘address’ things, though the question of how coherently they can do so has yet to be considered” (“You” 78). He then proceeds to stage his own open-ended readings of a

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52 Derrida names humans “*questioning entities*” in “Eating Well” (267). Baker does not specify his use of the term (fittingly enough), but rather indicates that the works that fall under its label “prompt a moment of perplexity and non recognition, of genuine thinking” (*Postmodern* 75).
number of these works, over the course of which he rigorously considers but ultimately never determines how they address us. His intervention in this unfixed field, then, is best understood as a move to safeguard its undecidability—to defend it from an analytical tack that would render it coherent and decide its particular usefulness.

This section builds on Baker’s intimation that we can glean ethical value—that we can discern but never quantify a degree of what he calls “effectiveness” in relation to “animal advocacy”—from art made of and about killing animals only by opening ourselves up to its fundamental ambiguity (“You” 95). It does so by arguing for an understanding of the cinematic spectatorship of slaughter as culturally and psychically overdetermined. As the preceding section began to establish, compelling evidence indicates that filmic documentations of humans killing animals must be understood not only as satisfying sadistic desires, but also as responding to a demand for visual knowledge of death (implicit in this claim is the belief that these two motives are not merely two sides of the same coin). Attending more fully to this second account—or, more precisely, to its uncertain relation to the first—permits us to consider the possibility that slaughter imagery may indeed move spectators towards an ethical encounter with the dead and dying animals onscreen. To borrow Cary Wolfe’s descriptive language, it allows us to appreciate the “radically ambivalent” ethical contours of cinematic representations of animal death (Posthumanism xiii).

Lisa Cartwright’s discussion of the reception of Thomas Edison’s Electrocuting an Elephant (1903), a three-shot film that indexes the execution of an allegedly murderous elephant named Topsy, is here instructive. Her account speaks suggestively to the commingling spectatorial desires that fuelled the popularity of this founding cinematic documentation of human-inflicted animal death. To begin, she asserts that the film

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53 Topsy’s death is unique among the acts of humans killing animals discussed in this chapter in that it was
“functioned as a means for lay-audience participation in the ‘scientific’ pleasure of conducting visual analysis and thereby vicariously exerting control over a living being’s life and death” (18). Her identification of the film’s provision of a sort of vicarious pleasure resonates not only with Giles’s claim that slaughterhouse imagery delivers “unfaked visual horror,” but also with Dorothee Brantz’s and Roger Horowitz’s related assertions that the practice of slaughterhouse touring (a phenomenon I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Two) was largely motivated by the sort of thrill-seeking we now commonly associate with horror films and amusement parks (Brantz “Recollecting,”118; Horowitz 14). Read together, these accounts present a view of turn-of-the-century spectatorship in which human violence against animals essentially excited a feeling of titillation in both live and cinematic spectators. This view conforms, moreover, to Gunning’s conception of a fin-de-siècle “cinema of attractions” and a concomitant “aesthetic of attractions.” In a move calculated to counter the prevailing characterization of the first filmgoers as artless naïfs terrorized by the images projected by a newfangled medium, Gunning situates these early spectators “at the climax of a period of intense development in visual entertainments” (“Aesthetic” 116). By contextualizing these spectators in a visual field that included magic theatre and amusement park rides (and, we can extrapolate, slaughterhouse tours and public executions), he shows their terror to be “a conscious delectation of shocks and thrills” (120, emphasis added). He shows, moreover, that this field proffered pleasurable thrills of “a particularly complicated sort”:

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an execution. She was put to death for killing three humans (Cartwright 17). It is reasonable to assume that a sense of justice, however unfounded or misplaced, was thus also at work in the pleasure spectators experienced when watching her death. While I gloss over the pleasure associated with retribution in this chapter (as does Cartwright), it bears noting that this sentiment is not altogether anomalous. The formal litigation and public punishment of animal “criminals” has a storied history that dates to the ninth century, and as such it surely informs more recent spectacles involving animal death. For more on this historically significant juridical process (and its resistance to historical verification), see Jeffrey Kastner’s “Animals on Trial.”

54 Gunning conceived of this cinema of attractions in collaboration with André Gaudreault. For a detailed history of the concept’s origins, see the Introduction and Dossier section of The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded.
it incorporated fascination with science (particularly with scientific technology’s ever expanding capacities of revelation), played on curiosity’s proximity to revulsion, and appreciated that the successful provocation of thrills requires “a controlled threat of danger” (121–24).

While Cartwright’s claim speaks more and less directly to each of these complicating factors, it of course stresses the role that popular interest in science played in the popularity of Edison’s film and, presumably, in the sizeable live audience at Topsy’s execution (some fifteen hundred people attended the execution at Coney Island’s Luna Park). More significantly, her full claim adds another layer to the pleasure Gunning’s “cinema of attractions” describes. She conjectures,

The Edison Manufacturing Company must have banked on the fact that in 1903 audiences would have paid not only to observe an intervention in the “regulated activity” of the “living being” but to study this intervention again and again on film, just as the laboratory scientist might watch just such a film over and over to analyze the execution of “life.” (18)

Cartwright here draws attention to the film’s material status as a text that can be and very frequently is viewed repeatedly (in Derridean language, to its iterability—I return to this term presently). In doing so, she highlights a distinguishing formal factor in Gunning’s visual field of attractions: whereas live spectators (at Luna Park, at Chicago’s Packingtown slaughterhouses, at amusements parks and World’s Fairs) presumably experienced a short-lived vicarious pleasure—a deeply visceral yet “conscious delectation of shocks and thrills”—, filmgoers could re-enact this pleasure in a bid to sate their curiosity. In what follows, I argue that attentiveness to film’s iterability (a gesture Cartwright initiates but does not fully realize) allows us to understand the visual pleasure
of cinematic spectatorship as uniquely bound to the ethically undecidable impulse of curiosity.

As previously mentioned, Gunning also takes note of the import of curiosity as he reframes early cinema: “the cinema of attractions,” he maintains, “solicits a highly conscious awareness of the film image engaging the viewer’s curiosity” (“Aesthetic” 121). By “film image,” Gunning means the material status of film as moving image; the viewer’s curiosity, he maintains, is piqued not so much by the content of images as by the cinematic apparatus’s extraordinary illusionistic capacities (ibid. 118). Gunning develops curiosity’s significance by calling on Augustine’s inclusion of the category of curiositas in his gradation of the “lust of the eyes.” He observes that curiositas, for Augustine, is a sinful visual desire: it leads “not only to a fascination with seeing, but a desire for knowledge for its own sake, ending in the perversions of magic and science. […] It possesses only the power to lead astray.” This power is dangerous insofar as it diverts one’s energy from “the contemplative and vigilant model of Christian life” (ibid. 124). In his reconstruction of a “cinema of attractions,” Gunning retains the theologian’s association of curiosity and distraction, yet refrains from explicit moral or ethical judgment. Building on Walter Benjamin’s “Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” he asserts that the Industrial Revolution’s massive expansion and transformation of technology and commerce proliferated novel visual curiosities, and in turn upended the “prevailing turn-of-the-century norms of artistic representation—the ideals of detached contemplation” (or what Michael Fried calls absorption) (ibid. 123). Furthermore, much like Benjamin, Gunning ascribes ambivalent values to the shocks and novelties that feed the curiosity of fin-de-siècle spectators: this new field of attractions
ensures that “the spectator does not get lost in a fictional world and its drama, but remains aware of the act of looking, the excitement of curiosity and its fulfilment” (ibid. 121).\textsuperscript{55}

Cartwright codes curiosity in much less ambiguous terms. In short, she characterizes the impulse as another manifestation of the sadistic spectatorial desire for mastery (here, mastery of knowledge). This impulse appears all the more gratuitous in light of her claim that film’s particular iterability allows spectators to validate it with the sort of epistemological claims sanctioned by the noble aims of science. In this way, her account fits into Wolfe’s broader critique of humanism’s dependence on the trope of “visuality-as-mastery.” In a passage that resonates with the previous section’s discussion of the avisuality of death, Wolfe asserts that “the core fantasy of humanism’s trope of vision is to think that perceptual space is organized around and for the looking subject; that the pure point of the eye (as agent of ratio and logos) exhausts the field of the visible; that the ‘invisible’ is only—indeed, merely—that which has not yet been seen by a subject who is, in principle, capable of seeing all” (Posthumanism 131–2). In other words, humanism understands vision as the way that the subject at once makes and masters the world and his/her central place in it.

The intersection of Levinasian ethics and film theory presents the ethical frame most resistant to the trope of “visuality-as-mastery,” and I thus first want to read briefly Cartwright’s account of Edison’s film through it.\textsuperscript{56} Levinas qualifies ethics in the following terms: “We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my

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\textsuperscript{55} In Benjamin’s account, mechanical reproduction poses consequences for the auratic experience of the original work of art that are simultaneously destructive and emancipatory (222–26).

\textsuperscript{56} My reading is indebted to Saxton’s exploration of the applicability of the philosopher’s ideas to film, which is included in Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters, a volume she co-edited with Lisa Downing. Building on his assertion that “ethics is an optics” (Totality and Infinity 23), Saxton suggests that his conception of ethics is particularly “conducive to reflection on a medium which has historically appealed first and foremost to our sense of sight” (95). However, she explains that the philosopher proceeds to complicate and perhaps even refute this association (95–96).
thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics” (43). His circular definition disallows prescriptivism and, in its place, conceives of ethics as an encounter that engenders the self’s sustained questioning of its place in relation to other beings in the world. His insistence on the “absolute, unanticipatable alterity” of the Other who enacts this interrogation is often read as a resistance to images (that is, to visual mastery). Libby Saxton reads his adherence to the Bilderverbot (the Judaic suspicion of and prohibition against images of beings) as “a denunciation of a certain reductive or acquisitive mode of thought”—as a rejection, in the philosopher’s own words, of “an intelligibility that one would like to reduce to knowledge” (98; *Alterity and Transcendence* 125). Saxton extends this view to a generalized reading of his work: Levinasian ethics, she maintains, precludes stringently optical encounters, particularly those premised on the Self’s curiosity for visual knowledge of the Other. Yielding to the desire to see (to know, to understand) compromises any potential radical acceptance of the Other’s alterity, because vision—the acquisition of knowledge, the making intelligible or the making of sense—entails “incorporating [the Other] into a pre-existing totality” (Saxton and Downing 4).

Cartwright’s claim that *Electrocuting an Elephant* lured spectators with a sensational opportunity to “conduct visual analysis and thereby vicariously exert control over a living being’s life and death” corroborates—that is, forcefully demonstrates as only the worst-case scenario can—Levinas’s denigration of vision as a form of violent possession. If the film’s first flickering frames introduce an encounter with a strange, unknowable Other, its overtly presentational style and succinct Aristotelian narrative invite an unflinching scrutiny that eradicates the possibility of an ethical,
unassimilationalist meeting. At the same time, Cartwright’s account also accommodates an alternate reading, one that begins with the following question: what happens that the Edison Manufacturing Company did not bank on? To be sure, Cartwright neither poses nor answers this question. However, her attention to the film’s iterability—to the material conditions that allowed spectators “to study this intervention again and again”—opens up a space in which such an inquiry can take place.

To begin, Edison’s filmic reproduction of Topsy’s death constitutes, as Bazin says of all cinematic deaths, an “ontological obscenity” (“Death Every Afternoon” 31). Bazin maintains that film’s particular capacity to reproduce or repeat death is among the medium’s few features that “justify the term […] cinematic specificity.” He allows that other media—namely, the “mechanical arts” of radio and phonography and the “temporal art” of music—can repeat or at least replay death. However, cinema stands out given its indexical connection to the visual space and time of the real: the medium is uniquely “based on lived time, Bergsonian ‘durée,’ which is in essence irreversible and qualitative” (“Death” 30, original emphasis). Bergson conceives of time as a “mobility,” an indivisible duration, that is irreducible to the spatial metaphors that scientific and mathematical methods of measurement impose on time (Metaphysics 43–45). Bazin in turn conceives of cinematic indexicality as a form of continuity or contiguity between the filmstrip and the real: “the celluloid makes a mould both spatial and temporal” (“Death” 30). If cinema is contiguous to the durée of the real, then the medium cannot, as Sobchack alleges, “cut it to bits”; the real is always already indivisible. Yet while Bazin’s Bergsonian ideas conflict with the specifics of Sobchack’s propositions (and in particular

57 Of course, a far more direct reason prevents us from entertaining the possibility of any sort of Levinasian encounter between human viewing subjects and screen animals: for Levinas, the self and Other are always human (this identity is a founding presupposition of Totality and Infinity). The specific purposes of the discussion at hand necessitate that I gloss over this massive and thorny issue, and focus instead on the aspects of Levinas’s work that immediately shed light on the ethics of spectatorship. For more on Levinas’s jettisoning of animal Others, see Derrida’s “Animal I Am” (381).
her use of Zeno’s paradoxes), he poses an argument that is fundamentally similar to hers: death “must be experienced and cannot be represented […] without violating its nature.” For Bazin, the nature of death is, in a word, singular: “For every creature, death is the unique moment par excellence.”58 After all, “we do not die twice.” In this sense, cinema’s proficiency in repeating death—its capacity to reanimate life in order to render it inanimate again “at the flick of the switch”—emerges as a “metaphysical” or “ontological obscenity” (30–31).

Bazin details cinema’s representational perversion of death in his reading of La course des taureaux (Bullfight, Pierre Braunberger, 1951), a film that dispassionately documents the deaths of several bulls and horses, as well as the possibly fatal wounding of a toreador. That he should discern this perversity in a film that graphically indexes animal death while suggesting human death supports my claims so far regarding supplementarity. Bazin surmises that the film, which adopts a somewhat “didactic” style, appeals to both bullfighting aficionados and “the uninitiated [who] will go out of curiosity” (28). He argues, moreover, that it approximates reality even as it transgresses real death’s singularity: “I have never been to a bullfight, and it would be ridiculous of me to claim that the film lets me feel the same emotions, but I do claim that it gives me its essential quality, its metaphysical kernel: death” (29). Indeed, he speculates, the film’s potency derives precisely from its cinematically specific (or singular) capacity to repeat death59: “The representation on screen of a bull being put to death […] is in principle as moving as the spectacle of the real instant that it reproduces. In a certain sense, it is even

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58 Several commentators connect Bazin’s acknowledgement that “every creature” experiences a singular death to the theorist’s autobiographical affinities with animals. Seung-Hoon Jeong and Dudley Andrew assert that “although [Bazin] inherit[ed] western metaphysics, including the existentialism and phenomenology that were rife in his day, he was also, since boyhood, a fanatical naturalist who lived among animals and studied their behavior” (3). Serge Daney notes, “Bazin loved animals and lived with an iguana” (35).

59 The repetition that absorbs Bazin occurs at the level of re-presentation—that is, the film re-presents, repeats, the real. Yet Bullfight is itself repetitive; according to a 1956 review, the film presents “frequent repetitions of phases and even of episodes” (Crowther).
more moving because it magnifies through the contrast of its repetition” (31). Seung-Hoon Jeung and Dudley Andrew constructively elucidate the theorist’s claim: “Bazin felt the cinema capable of staring at the otherness of animals with a preternatural eye, just as it can expose (make a time exposure of, though not capture) the otherness of death.” According to their reading, the medium’s documentation of animal death “can (or should) shock us into reappraising life and death” (3). In other words, cinema’s capacity to denature death—a capacity it exercises predominately in its regard of animal death—moves us to rethink the bounds of both metaphysics and representation.

Both Cartwright and Bazin identify curiosity as the impulse that drives the spectatorship of animal death; however, whereas Cartwright contends that the medium’s repetitive representation of this death supplies the spectator with clinical scientific knowledge, Bazin asserts that it provokes a profoundly “moving” experience. In turn, I attempt to articulate an understanding of slaughter spectatorship that attends to the connection between knowledge and affect. To do this, it is necessary to explain in detail my use of Derrida’s idea of *iterability* in relation to the medium specificity of film.

“Iterable” means repeatable; its derivation from the Latin *iter* (“again”) tells us as much. Yet as Derrida points out in *Signature Event Context*, “iterable” also implicates the Sanskrit *itara* (“other”), and herein lies “the logic that ties repetition to alterity” (7). Derrida is first drawn to this logic—a logic akin to *différence*—because it lays bare the co-implication of repetition and difference on which writing is predicated. He asserts that for writing “to retain its function as writing, i.e. its readability, it must remain readable despite the absolute disappearance of any receiver, determined in general. My communication must be repeatable—*iterable*—in the absolute absence of the receiver […]” (7). Having introduced the term/concept in his own signature iterative style (to be readable is to be repeatable is to be iterable), Derrida goes on to submit the other
constituents of “semio-linguistic communication” to this proof (12). It turns out that “what holds for the receiver holds also, for the same reasons, for the sender or producer”: “for a writing to be a writing,” he explains, “it must continue to ‘act’ and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written” (8). He finds, moreover, that what he initially posits as exclusive to writing is also constitutive of speech. These ostensibly oppositional modes of communication share iterability, but not for the same reasons: whereas the absence (absentability) of the sender and/or receiver conditions writing’s iterability, the absence (the possibility of the nonpresence) of the referent decides speech’s repeatability. Derrida is thus able to “insist on”

the possibility of disengagement and citational graft which belongs to the structure of every mark, spoken or written, and which constitutes every mark in writing before and outside of every horizon of semio-linguistic communication […]

Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the current sense of this opposition), in a small or large unit, can be cited, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. (12)

Given the “possibility of disengagement,” writing and speech—all discursive forms, really60—gain a certain autonomy and velocity. This motive force at once allows repetition and introduces difference.

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60 While Derrida avows that iterability or citationality obtains outside language, his analysis remains close to the “horizon of semio-linguistic communication.” Judith Butler’s discussion of the role repetition plays in all discursive performances—namely those of sexuality and gender—thus stands as a necessary supplement. In Bodies That Matter, Butler asserts,

Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that “performance” is not a singular “act” or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance. (95)
Derrida’s idea of iterability charts the course by which repetition embeds both identity and difference in/through discourse. On the face of it, film presents a case that challenges this model. By design, the material and mechanics of the film apparatus (light-sensitive film, spools of celluloid, projector) work to ensure repetition without difference. Daniel Boorstin reminds us as much with his aphoristic observation that film—along with its counterparts in nineteenth-century reproductive media, photography and phonography—is dedicated to “making experience repeatable” (qtd. in Auerbach, “Chasing Film Narrative,” 803). To be sure, we can repeat the experience of engaging with any text: we can recite poems, reread novels, revisit paintings in museums. These repetitions clearly invite the sort of difference Derrida envisions; we misremember lines, skip chapters, find new paintings on our way to the old. In contrast, the circular technology specific to film promises to do away with this differential messiness. Central to this technology is the film reel, which ostensibly guarantees mechanical repetition—what we might call a pure or faithful repetition—across the stages of production, circulation, and exhibition: the cameraperson runs film through her machine, indexing (reproducing, repeating) the profilmic event; the lab technician submits this copy to numerous mechanical procedures, namely development, printing, and the making of additional copies; the projectionist spools the finished product through his machine, seamlessly transmitting it to the screen. Yet as any filmgoer knows, these processes of...
duplication (themselves doubled or redoubled) never exactly duplicate the experience of
the profilmic world or the experience of viewing that world on film; difference always
intervenes. Moreover, film’s material and social conditions are in fact what occasion
difference. That is, although we might characterize mechanical reproduction and mass
culture as homogenous or homogenizing forces, they never actually realize exact
sameness or identity: no two copies are ever exactly alike, just as no two audiences are
the same.\textsuperscript{62}

If we allow that there are as many possibilities for difference as there are copies of
films and audiences for films, it becomes clear that reading iterability in cinema requires
historical context. The introduction to the 1905 \textit{Complete Illustrated Catalog of Moving
Picture Machines, Stereopticons, Slides, Film}\textsuperscript{63} indicates that the technology and
practices specific to film exhibition in its early days generated distinct forms of cinematic
iterability. The catalogue explains that the projection devices in use in 1896, the first full
year of public film screenings, “were so constructed that the films ran endlessly upon a
rack and through the moving picture mechanism, the two ends of the film having been
joined, and it was possible to project a 50-foot film for any length of time by repetition”
(rep. in Pratt 40). Additionally, relatively few films had been produced at this very early
stage, and those that existed drew on a limited range of subject material. The earliest film
screenings, then, either presented the same film—which was typically one minute long or

\textsuperscript{62} My remarks are directed at analogue film. To be sure, digital technology allows for endless, accurate
reproduction. As Nadia Bozak explains, “Digital imaging involves a conversion by a digital processor that
translates received signals of light and movement into a binary code which is then reconverted back into an
image. While this conversion introduces an extra step to the image-making process, digital is advantageous
because by representing recorded images as numbers, reproduction is carried out with complete accuracy;
nothing is lost, a copy is an exact replica and not the slightly degraded version an analog print would be”
(19). Digital film’s imperviousness to “degradation” holds only in regards to its code. In terms of reception
(i.e., screening contexts, audience demographics, position alongside other films) digital films are equally, if
not more, susceptible to difference and variation as are analogue films. I am ultimately most concerned with
the stakes of reception, and the broader strokes of my argument are easily extended to digital film. I discuss
the material specificity of digital film in the conclusion of this dissertation, and thereby establish the terms
of future scholarship that encompasses both analogue and digital technology.

\textsuperscript{63} I encountered this catalogue, of which they are few extant copies, in Auerbach’s citation (“Chasing Film
Narrative” 803). For a full reproduction of the catalogue’s introduction, see Pratt (39–42).
less—in a perpetual loop or looped together multiple films with redundant subject material (the catalogue lists “Railroad Trains” and “Cavalry Charges” as examples of common subject groupings). The catalogue characterizes the subsequent half-dozen years of cinema’s development as a period of intense and largely consumer-driven change that saw a substantial increase in the number and duration of films, as well as a diversification of content and a move towards narrative. Indeed, these changes took effect so rapidly that by “1897 the use of the rack for endless films was practically discontinued” (rep. in Pratt 41). The almost immediate obsolescence of the rack and the rapidly increasing supply of new and different films inaugurated a second-generation mode of exhibition that held roughly from 1897 to 1904. During this time, established theatres, community spaces, and travelling exhibitors screened comparatively heterogeneous programs of films, with each film being projected a single time. This second generation or iteration of film exhibition is, to recall a previously introduced paradigm, Gunning’s cinema of attractions.64

To bring this discussion around, the Complete Illustrated Catalogue complicates Cartwright’s reconstruction of the original reception of Electrocuting an Elephant. According to the catalogue’s description of the technologies and conventions in place in 1903, spectators were more likely to view Topsy’s execution alongside other, potentially disparate films than they were to study her death “again and again.” According to Gunning, film programs at the time “consist[ed] of a series of attractions, a concatenation of short films […] that] may have some thematic structuring and build toward a climactic moment, a final clou […]” (“Aesthetic” 122). His use of the word “concatenation” is key: the structural logic of the series was not necessarily internal to the films (that is, it did not have to derive from thematic resemblances), but rather emerged from their connection as

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64The third iteration of film exhibition (c. 1904–1911) is tangentially related to the discussion at hand. Gunning characterizes this as the period in which narrative film rose to dominance (“Aesthetic” 121). Pratt, drawing on The Complete Illustrated Catalogue, explains that “nickelodeons sprang up like mushrooms” in the first half of this period (1905–08).
a series. Gunning here emphasizes the exhibitor or showman’s involvement in staging these connections: the significance of her role, he asserts, “underscores the act of monstration that founds the cinema of attractions” (122). In sum, he depicts early film screenings as charged intertextual events in which any given film’s meaning unfolded in relation to both the other films on the billing and to the exhibitor’s extra-textual (supplementary) address. The unstable juxtapositions at work in these screenings generated differences about which we could endlessly speculate. To make just one conjecture, spectators were not likely to view films within an exclusively scientistic frame (or within any similarly circumscribed frame, for that matter). And if they viewed films in mutable configurations and through a multiplicity of frames, it follows that they engaged with them on multiple ethical planes.

I make this conjecture not to dismiss Cartwright’s account, but rather to thicken it. It is worth pointing out that the mode of repetitive spectatorship she envisions is not altogether incompatible with Gunning’s programs of attractions. Even within the historical parameters outlined by Gunning and the Complete Illustrated Catalogue, her account remains perfectly plausible; spectators bent on sadistically studying Topsy’s death “again and again” simply could have attended multiple screenings. Yet there is more at stake here—there is more to be said for the larger questions this dissertation asks—than historical technicalities. To usher these stakes into the present, spectators today are most likely to encounter Electrocuting an Elephant on YouTube, a mode of exhibition that fuses Cartwright’s one-track recursivity with Gunning’s concatenated attractions. This video-sharing website’s streaming technology gives the spectator limited control of iteration: after viewing a video, he can choose to replay, share, or watch a selection of related videos automatically generated by the site’s own complex of algorithms. With its built-in promptings to repeat and create intertextual relationships,
YouTube is a strikingly recognizable relative of much earlier modes of cinematic exhibition. As with its antecedents, we could hypothesize at length about the differences its technology proliferates by posing films in mutable configurations. Yet at the risk of reiterating myself, I continue with Cartwright’s outwardly unchanging repetition for the remainder of this chapter. While the “again and again” she envisions speaks explicitly to a sadistic scientism, I wager that it also expresses a type of curiosity struggling against the bounds of interspecies knowledge and knowability—a type of curiosity that turns on an ethical impulse.

This curiosity returns us to Baker’s identification of the peculiarly aestheticized postmodern animal as a “questioning entity.” Baker rearticulates this (anti-)taxonomic move in an article that takes its title from one of visual artist Damien Hirst’s more discomfiting statements, “I like ideas of trying to understand the world by taking things out of the world. You kill things to look at them” (Hirst 285; qtd. in Baker, “You Kill Things,” 84). This chapter’s first section outlines a cinematic method that looks uncannily like Hirst’s avowed artistic praxis: cinema, over the course of a number of significant films, presents images of violent animal death as a supplement for representations of our own death; it takes animals out of the world so that we may see, know, understand the finitude of our own place in the world. Hirst’s assertion is tremendously unsettling—or, as Baker puts it, it is “disingenuously naïve”—precisely because it openly concedes the affective potency (“I like”) of a particularly cruel anthropocentric logic of sacrifice. Cognizant of the perversity of Hirst’s statement, Baker risks the following endorsement: “Hirst’s aphorism ‘You kill things to look at them’ does at least have the value of recognizing that what is at stake here is an intense and inventive looking, a rigorousness of investigation, which has to be coldly unapologetic in its attitude to the looked-at being” (92). I conclude this section by adding to Baker’s gamble: the “intense and inventive
“looking” that slaughter imagery invites, I contend, does not neatly enact a violent, visual mastery of the animals onscreen; rather, this mode of looking undoes—and is undone by—the status of animals as “looked-at beings,” or, more precisely, as beings “to-be-looked-at.”

As the first section of this chapter begins to establish, the ascription of an “overwhelming facticity” designates animals as to-be-looked-at. To reformulate this claim: Berger asserts that if modernity (metonymized in the figure of Descartes) equates animals with machines, postmodernity or post-industrial modernity further reduces animals to “raw material” (11). He indicates that, for the most part, humans process this material (they produce and consume it) in two related ways: as food and as spectacle—as things to-be-eaten and/or to-be-looked-at (11–13). The modern zoo, for Berger, exemplifies the latter form of processing—a form he significantly characterizes as working to “guarantee [animals’] longevity as specimens” (23). Reading Berger, Anat Pick puts it this way:

Relations to animals, which in premodern societies comprised both likeness and mystery, have gradually shifted into the arena of facts and the abstract order of data. […] The disappearance of animals from daily life that renders them utterly visible—that re-presents them—as objects of mastery and knowledge has only intensified under the conditions of endangerment. (104)

As I demonstrate in the previous section, cinema is complicit in this endeavour to freeze and frame animals as specimens, examples, facts. Yet as I indicate with reference to Sheehan’s reading of screen animals, the move to invest animals with a resolute facticity always folds back on itself: the very assumptions that allow us to code animals as facts—animals lack language, interiority, intentionality, etc.—prevent us from conclusively valuing these beings as knowable evidence (as facts alone).
This resistance obtains from the unstable paradox that defines all facts. As Latour and Woolgar point out, “‘fact’ is derived from the root *facere, factum* (‘to make’ or ‘to do’).” Yet the word is commonly “taken to refer to some objectively independent entity which, by reason of its ‘out there-ness’ cannot be modified at will and is not susceptible to change under any circumstances” (174–5). Sheehan’s evaluation certainly bears out this unsettling paradox: cinema at once relies on its capacity to make animals do things—animals are “trained (or perhaps rather compelled) to carry out certain tasks for the camera”—and on the spectator’s belief in animals’ “out-there-ness,” in their status as unprocessed entities that shore up the cultivation, agency, and performative agility of human actors.

It is my contention that slaughter imagery invites an “intense and inventive looking”—a gaze irreducible to sadism or solipsism—that catches on the incoherence at the centre of the animal-as-fact, the animal as material to-be-looked-at. The medium’s limitless iterability ratchets up the intensity and inventiveness of this look, generating spaces for difference to intervene. The curious spectator watches “again and again,” scanning the screen for visual evidence of the “*exact* moment of death.” Yet cinema can never fulfil this desire, can never make good on its own promise to reveal “the partition that separates life from death.”

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65 Latour and Woolgar reiterate, “the term fact can simultaneously mean what is fabricated and what is not fabricated” (236). Their quasi-anthropological examination of the processes by which science constructs facts offers additional suggestive insights into the way cinema constructs animals as facts. One of their founding propositions is that the production of facts is contingent on “inscription devices,” which they define as “any item of apparatus or particular configuration of such items which can transform a material substance into a figure or diagram which is directly usable by one of the members of the office space” (51). The film apparatus is, arguably, such a device; it transforms material substances into representational images that are then put to use in the construction of filmic texts. Latour and Woolgar identify two consequential features of inscription devices: the inscriptions they produce “are regarded as having a direct relationship to ‘the original substance’”; once these inscriptions or “end products” are obtained, “all the intermediary steps which made [their] production possible are forgotten” (51, 63). The film apparatus manifests these same features: the filmstrip lays claim to indexicality, to an unbroken connection to the originary, profilmic world. In re/presenting this world as image, moreover, the apparatus effaces the processes at work in the construction of images.
Woolgar, the animal’s paradoxical facticity embeds a perceptible “noise” in cinematic representations of animal death—a noise that disrupts or obscures the spectator’s potential visual mastery of the “facts” onscreen.

I recall Sans soleil here because it so deftly documents the medium’s impossible promise to render animal death visible. Marker’s film visualizes this endeavour with a cutaway to a cinematic documentation of the real death of an animal, a giraffe. The film assigns this endeavour to child mourners, but they of course are not privy to the footage of the hunt (it takes place at a diegetically indeterminate spatial and temporal remove). The children, then, stand in for the film’s spectators; we are the ones who attempt to stare down the partition onscreen. Yet as the film cuts between the scene of the giraffe’s death and the memorial service at the zoo, we realize we have come no closer to seeing death than the child mourners have. We watch as the children place flowers on the altar, and we imagine their young minds contemplating, perhaps for the first time, the “actual fact of death.” We watch as the giraffe runs, falls, rises, and falls again, and we contemplate, for the untold time, this same “fact.” The film re/presents the evidence to us with the unabashed gaze peculiar to the documentation of animal death, tracking the giraffe from the moment it recognizes the threat of death to the point at which its body becomes inert material. Yet if the film’s unrelenting cinematographic style asserts its capacity to stare at and capture death, its editing simultaneously stresses the step-by-step movement of dying. Marker’s almost systematic crosscutting works to punctuate the hunt; his movement between the giraffe’s death and the entwined scenes of mourning stresses that we can only see “the activity and remains of the event of dying.” We will never know the death of this or any other animal.

To move towards a conclusion, the cinematic spectatorship of violent animal death has the capacity to undo our certitude that we may know or understand death—our
own death or that of other beings, human or nonhuman. This chapter’s epigraph is taken from Kipling’s account of his tour, in the early 1890s, of a Chicago slaughterhouse. The writer’s marvel at the contrast between beings who are “so excessively alive” and then “so excessively dead” encapsulates the founding argument of this chapter: visual fascination with animal slaughter, particularly as it is cultivated in cinema, is vested in a conception of the animal body as a material capable of rendering visible the transition between life and death. Kipling concludes his account with a description of a fellow slaughterhouse tourist, a woman, who “looked with hard, bold eyes, and was not ashamed” (48). In this chapter, I have argued that cinema adopts a similarly brazen, unflinching stare at violent animal death and slaughter. With attention to the medium’s specific technological conditions (namely, to its indexicality and sequentiality), I have demonstrated that it repeatedly frames the sight/site of animal death as socially acceptable, relatively speaking, and materially sufficient evidence of death at large.

The iterable nature of cinema allows us to view this evidence “again and again,” and therein lays the double-edged power of this particular mode of slaughter spectatorship. On one hand, the opportunity to review scenes of slaughter can be said to foster a scrutiny that aims sadistically and/or solipsistically at the acquisition of visual proof of our own death. Yet on the other, this very pursuit of definitive knowledge is bound to failure. In an essay that precedes Carnal Thoughts, Sobchack observes,

Knowledge is the magic which will save us; cataloguing will restore our crumbling sanity; inspection will cure our anxiety. […] To know violence is to be temporarily safe from the fear of it. […] Of course, our belief in our sophistication, our comprehension of violence lasts about as long as it takes to walk from the theater to the subway or to the car—and sometimes not even that long. We quickly realize that the orgies of blood on the screen have told us
nothing really *useful*. Our fear returns, and makes us return to the theatre to see more, hoping against hope that we will finally understand. (“The Violent Dance” 116–17, original emphasis)

Her remarks are in reference to the proliferation of dramatic performances of human-centred violence and death in post-1960s cinema, but they apply just as well to the desire for supplementary knowledge of real human death that likewise incites the production and reception of cinematic representations of violent animal death. As Zeno’s paradoxes show us, this desire can only ever be a perpetual approximation—a grasping after an always already elusive endpoint, a futile search for “useful” meaning and where there is none. Sobchack here suggests that this desire produces an almost obsessive repetition, and I concur that repetitive, unthinking viewing practices present a distinct possibility for many of the spectators drawn to the sight of slaughter. Yet I also wager that such practices, by dint of the difference that reiteration generates, can bring the spectator to realize the impossibility of her desire to know death—her own or that of any other being. This recognition is, I believe, the fundamental first step towards an ethical engagement with the site/sight of slaughter.

In Chapter Two, I argue that cinema’s potential to level our assumptions about death holds ethical promise, as it supports the Derridean project to complicate the human-animal divide (and, in particular, to thicken the Benthamian “insuperable line” of suffering). Before moving to that chapter and argument, I should stress that the inventive looking that slaughter spectatorship invites—a way of looking that moves toward ethical recognition—does not lessen animals’ violent deaths or cinema’s involvement (and indeed our own complicity) in the production of these deaths. It is an ethically bound way of looking, but not a compensatory one.
“Put a video camera inside and show it”: The Ethics of Exposing Animal Slaughter

The effort wasn’t just to show the slaughter. You want to capture something that will make people change.—Louie Psihoyos, The Cove

I. Framing Animal Slaughter

The burgeoning critique of factory farming has a distinct taste for the apocalypse. This is not so much to say that participants present the current arena of agribusiness as a doomsday scenario, but rather that they recognize the rhetorical use value housed in the term’s etymology (the Greek apocalypse means an “unveiling” or “revelation”). Diverse critics are united in their assertion that correcting the food industry’s ills entails, first and foremost, unveiling them to a mis- or uninformed public. Thus, while many avail themselves of the graphic imagery and emphatic tenor associated with end-of-days tales, they do so with the aim of delineating a situation that is imminently reparable: according to their logic, the solution to the industry’s horrors—horrors that rival, many critics aver, the limit cases of human-on-human atrocities (slavery, the Holocaust)—resides in their exposure.

Robert Kenner’s documentary exposé Food Inc. (2009) lends itself as a ready example, as it foregrounds its reliance on the rhetoric of unveiling. Indeed, the film’s opening sequence explicitly stages a revelation of the incommensurability of the idyllic

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66 I take my title from Temple Grandin’s narration in Taking the Mystery out of Pork Production, discussed presently.

67 A number of bestselling nonfiction books likewise stand out: Eric Schlosser’s Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001); Michael Pollan’s Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006); and, most recently, Jonathan Safran Foer’s Eating Animals (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009). As it happens, Schlosser appears as a talking head in Food Inc., and he explains in passing that “the idea of this world deliberately hidden from us” by the fast food industry is precisely what prompted him to become an investigative journalist and to write his book, which has also been adapted to screen (Fast Food Nation, Richard Linklater, 2006). Taken together, these books and films comprise the rapidly growing corpus of North America’s alternative food movement; this critically and commercially successful body of work descends directly from the muckraking tradition, one of the founding texts of which is, of course, Upton Sinclair’s 1906 exposé of the meatpacking industry, The Jungle. I return to Sinclair’s novel several times at the end of this chapter.
idea of farming and the brutal facts of industrial food production. The camera roves an ordinary American supermarket, taking an inventory of the too bright foodstuffs that neatly line the shelves. It lingers on the generic pastoral imagery that adorns the packaging, allowing the viewer ample time to register the labels’ pretence and to note the film’s credits, which are cleverly styled as product logos. The penultimate shot rests on a shrink-wrapped package of ground beef, printed with the cartoon silhouette of a cheery cow and Kenner’s directorial credit. The shot is matched to an image of a real, gaunt cow—the literal, ashen shadow of its brand image. The image track then cuts back to a sweeping panorama of a terrifyingly immense factory farm, and the cow is immediately lost amid a vast expanse of similarly sickly shapes. At this juncture, a voiceover intones forthrightly, “There’s this deliberate veil, this curtain, that’s dropped between us and where our food is coming from. The food industry doesn’t want you to know the truth about what you’re eating, because if you knew, you might not want to eat it.” The film proceeds to disclose this truth in exacting detail, pausing periodically to reiterate the value of revelation. A particularly apposite instance occurs towards the end of the film, when Joel Salatin, the owner of a successful small-scale farm and a well-known proponent of alternatives to mass-produced food, affirms, “If we put glass walls on all of the mega-processing facilities, we would have a different food system in this country.”

Salatin’s hypothesis riffs on an unofficial slogan of sorts for the vegetarian movement: “If slaughterhouses had glass walls, everyone would be vegetarian.” PETA solidified this saying’s currency in 2009 with its release of Glass Walls, a short video narrated by the aphorism’s self-proclaimed originator, Paul McCartney. The former Beatle in fact prefaces his commentary by asserting his authorship: “I’ve often said that if slaughterhouses had glass walls […].” His lead-in prepares the viewer for the video’s

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68 Salatin, owner of Polyface Farms in Swoope, Virginia, stars as the innovative purveyor of homegrown foods in Pollan’s chapter-length history of a “local” meal in The Omnivore’s Dilemma. Salatin is himself the author of a half-dozen books on holistic farming.
realization of its titular logic (a logic its intertitles repeat no less than seven times in thirteen minutes): PETA may not be able to replace the physical facades of slaughterhouses, but it can, through its use of the techniques of investigative journalism (most notably hidden cameras), render visible the horrifying interiors of these edifices in excruciating detail. Glass Walls thus enacts a particularly lurid performance of apocalyptic rhetoric, relentlessly cataloguing one abomination after another. In doing so, the video points to an obvious but no less significant premise of what we may identify as the dominant strain of activist food criticism: the successful critique of the food—and particularly the meat—industry hinges on the provision of shocking visual evidence. Empirical knowledge in the form of facts and figures will not suffice; moving images—images that both move the viewer and index movement—are required to effect individual and political change.

The use of apocalyptic rhetoric in the critique of agribusiness and its effects on animals is so pervasive that it appears plausible that even Derrida, the orator most unlikely to adopt this style, will do just that. In his “Animal I Am” address, Derrida begins to differentiate between an atemporal and comparatively benign human-animal divide (we have subjugated animals “depuis le temps,” he points out) and the historically specific entrenchment of this division in the modern regime of industrialized food production (370, 393–94). In order to forge this distinction, he begins to tally up “the unprecedented proportions of [modernity’s] subjection of the animal” (394, original emphasis). According to his itemization, the magnitude of modernity’s mastery over animals derives principally from its vast and comprehensive demographic expansion of

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69 I borrow the pun on moving specifically from Shukin (101), Linda Williams, and Sobchack, who employs it in the subtitle to her Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture. As Williams points out, the two sense of moving—being in motion and the production of emotion—imbue the movies from their start, “first in the prehistoric and primitive spectacles of cinematic body movement itself, and then in genres that focus on particular kinds of body movement and body spectacle—musicals, horror films, low comedies, ‘weepies’” (iv).
farming; precipitated chiefly by the introduction of genetic manipulation and production for global consumption, this relatively recent radical transformation of how humans treat animals is tantamount, he makes clear, to “the worst cases of genocide” (394–5). Yet at the juncture when his discourse should, according to generic conventions, give way to the provision of gruesome evidentiary details, the philosopher draws back with an anaphoristic reminder:

*Everybody knows* what terrifying and intolerable pictures a realist painting could give to the industrial, mechanical, chemical, hormonal, and genetic violence to which man has been submitting animal life for the past two centuries. *Everybody knows* what the production, breeding, transport, and slaughter of these animals has become. (395, emphasis added)

Derrida’s veer towards unveiling turns out to be a feint, a move that ultimately underscores that rhetorical mode’s complicity in humans’ “organized disavowal” of their systemic torture of animals (395). To “thrust” on his audience pathetic imagery of humans’ exaction of pain on animals “would be both too easy and endless” (395). It would also be grossly redundant. We already know.

II. It Matters How You Slice It

The preceding synopsis positions the “realist paintings” of popular expository documentary and Derrida’s discursive repudiation of graphic revelation at two extremes. In the present chapter and the chapters that follow, I endeavour to complicate the space in between—to populate or multiply its limits, as Derrida would say. The argumentative lines I advance in the remainder of this dissertation are largely formal ones. In *Glass Walls*, McCartney matter-of-factly states, “Suffering is suffering, no matter how you slice
I agree with McCartney that physical sensations of suffering ought not be graded, much less submitted to hierarchical valuation. Yet I submit that representations of suffering demand evaluation; specifically, I contend that there are more and less ethical ways to document animal suffering and slaughter. With film theory’s abiding fixation on the cut in mind, I affirm that it matters how representations of suffering are sliced and spliced. That is, I insist on the ethical dimensions of editing.

In adopting this evaluative outlook, foremost in my mind is Jean-Luc Godard’s oft-cited claim, made in a 1959 discussion with Alain Resnais, that “le travelling est une affaire de morale” (“Tracking shots are a question of morality”). Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton lucidly gloss Godard’s aphorism in the language of ethics: “any formal decision (e.g., a fixed camera, a tracking shot, or a cut) functions as an imprint of the film’s ethical valences. If we accept that filmmaking takes place in the realm of the ethical since these decisions involve a negotiation between desire and responsibility […], then every aesthetic decision has an ethical dimension” (18). To rephrase their explication for the purposes of my discussion of cinematic representations of animal slaughter, formal elements and generic conventions (tracking shots, cuts or edits, and even outwardly banal textual features such as establishing shots) collectively serve to imbricate the spectator in a network of ethical relationships.

The editors of a collection of socio-anthropological studies on the labour of meat-making make a similar assertion with the title of their volume, Any Way You Cut It: Meat Processing in Small-Town America. The editors do not explicate their choice of title, and so I can only deduce its intended rhetorical thrust: no matter how you “cut” or formulate them, the contemporary labour practices around meat processing are wholly inadequate. Like McCartney’s adamantly unsentimental claim, the title’s insistence on the irrelevance of framing works to affirm the immensity of the circumstances at hand; to that end, the denigration of “slicing” or “cutting” can be said to buttress Derrida’s avowal that what is going on is “undeniable” (396, 97). That said, this denigration also amounts to a disavowal of its own status as a frame. And in the case of the book, the title’s declaration obscures the fact that the collected articles share a methodological approach (one towards which I am quite sympathetic) that is very much concerned with how researchers frame their object of study. As the editors outline in their Introduction, the essays’ joint objective is to “begin with insights from segmented market-market theory while striving to carry these insights further, beyond the confines of the labour process. […] This manner of exposition—community-within-community studies—derives from the professional orientation, common among anthropologists, to consider local and apparently small-scale processes in relation to national and international developments” (9).
That said, it is also my position that questioning a film’s “ethical valences” means thinking not just about its textual form, but also about the ways spectators engage (and are meant to engage) with these forms. To draw on Downing and Saxton once more: “ethical meaning does not reside purely in the flow of images but emerges more urgently in the course of the reception and circulation of these images” (20). I endeavour to address this dimension of cinema by situating my analysis at what we might call a critical limit of textual analysis and issues of spectatorship: the question of shock. The disparate films I examine all value shock as a constitutive element in the representation of animal slaughter, yet in doing so they rely on distinct models of shock. The remainder of this dissertation is structured around a chapter-by-chapter analysis of three appreciably different models of slaughterhouse films.\footnote{My use of the category “slaughterhouse films” references Bosley Crowther’s critique of the “glorification” of violence in New Hollywood cinema of the late 1960s, wherein he labels such as \textit{For a Few Dollars More} (Sergio Leone, 1965) and \textit{The Dirty Dozen} (Robert Aldrich, 1967) as “slaughterhouse films” (“Movies to Kill People By” 51). Whereas Crowther applies this label to an emergent subgenre constituted by dramatized human-on-human violence, I use it in a very literal sense to describe films that document slaughterhouses.} 

Films phrased in the apocalyptic rhetoric previously described (\textit{Food Inc.}, \textit{Glass Walls}, \textit{The Cove}) place their faith in the politicizing power of shocking revelation. Here, the provision of explicit imagery is meant to shock the spectator out of her complacency about and complicity with the current conditions of the meat industry.\footnote{More often than not, I suspect, this strategy amounts to a policy of shock and awe—to a barrage of horrific imagery that overwhelms and ultimately immobilizes the spectator. While my analysis refrains from attempting to draw concrete connections between cinematic spectatorship and individual lifestyle choices (vegetarianism, political involvement), the following distinction is worth keeping in mind. Roger Horowitz asserts of muckraking texts such as \textit{The Jungle} and \textit{Fast Food Nation}: “if these exposés sought to make change by shocking the public—hitting Americans in the stomach, as it were—the long term patterns of meat consumption show no lessening of our taste for meat. Americans born since World War II eat more meat than at any other time in the country’s history. The principal effect of sensational criticisms of the industry has been in the area of regulation, not consumption levels” (1). Horowitz refers specifically to Sinclair’s famous lament, “I aimed at the public’s heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach” (Sinclair was enormously dismayed that the novel he had intended as an exposé of labour abuses led instead to outrage at the sanitary conditions of meat production and eventually to the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906). Horowitz’s observation indicates, more generally, that shocking exposés of meat-making do not upset the fundamental conviction that meat-eating is acceptable; if anything, these images merely suggest that meat-making needs improvement. Timothy Pachirat indicates a slightly different tack in his political ethnography of industrialized slaughterhouse work in the U.S. in the mid-2000s. He notes that his ethnographic work builds toward a}
rejoin that the method of shocking reportage is not at all specific to the slaughterhouse; indeed, diverse media outlets regularly pull back the curtain to reveal all manner of reprehensible subjects (genocide in far-flung nations, sordid celebrity affairs). In light of this context, my analysis may be read metonymically as a critique of the ethicality of any sort of exuberant unveiling. My precise aim, however, is to demonstrate the particular stakes of applying this rhetorical strategy to representations of animal slaughter. The present chapter begins to articulate these stakes by connecting this form of unveiling to what Burt terms a “slaughterhouse aesthetic.” This mode of cinematic representation works to maximize the visibility of animal slaughter, yet it does so by relying on conventions that disconnect slaughter from daily life and disassociate the spectator from the slaughtered animal body; the use of these conventions is particularly problematic in activist films, insofar as it obliges these films to reproduce the structures of fetishization and isolation that underwrite the very practices they aim to critique. In the latter part of this chapter, I counter the sense of separation this aesthetic reinforces by moving from the shocking filmic sight of slaughter to the material site of the slaughterhouse. Drawing on recent historical analyses of slaughterhouses and of the once popular practice of slaughterhouse touring, I demonstrate the ascendancy of ocularcentric modes of witnessing or “processing” slaughter that work to contain its sensorial excess and ultimately to dissociate it from daily life. This exposition indicates the need for representational strategies that destabilize the notion of slaughter as something apart.

In Chapter Three I undertake an extended analysis of the slaughter sequence that concludes Eisenstein’s *Strike*. Eisenstein similarly values shocking images of slaughter for their capacity to unnerve the spectator, yet he enacts this visceral discomfiture}

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...critique of what he calls a “‘politics of sight,’ or concerted, organized attempts to create ruptures in zones of confinement, to render the hiddenness of the repugnant visible in an attempt to produce political and social change” (146). While he never quite arrives at this critique, his wording is suggestive (if unintentionally so), as it points *not* to the revelation of the repugnant, but to the revelation that repugnant things have been hidden.
precisely so that he may channel it towards a decidedly anthropocentric message. Perhaps following Eisenstein’s lead, a small but critically significant group of films likewise presses the generative potential of shocking images of slaughter into the service of more and less discrete narrative plotlines or themes: *La règle de jeu*, *Week-end*, and *Apocalypse Now*, to name only the most well-known examples. I ground my discussion of this trope in Eisenstein’s praxis of dialectical montage, a strategy premised on the conviction that the collision of dissonant elements produces (that is, makes visible) “phenomena of another order” (“Cinematographic Principle” 37). While I acknowledge the affective potential of such collisions, my analysis emphasizes the ways in which this particular representational syntax elides the singularity and significance of animal life. I argue that the production of this sort of dialectical conflict hinges on the conflation of individual animals with their species and on the naturalization of abrupt animal death as an inevitable *fact* of life.

My examination, in the present chapter and in Chapter Three, of filmic formulations of shock as a sort of jarring enlightenment sets the stage for my discussion, in Chapter Four, of modes of filmmaking that make significantly different investments in slaughter’s shocking effects. To generalize, these modes value shock’s capacity to defamiliarize. I interrogate this conception of shock in close readings of Vertov’s *Kino-Eye* and, more extensively, Burnett’s *Killer of Sheep*. Suffice it to say here that my readings of these films rest on the idea that invisibility very often derives precisely from hyper-visibility. I argue that these films employ distinctly non-dialectical formal strategies that work to render strange—and therefore distinctly visible—ordinary horrors that we have become habituated to not seeing.

As the above overview indicates, the question of shock provides a methodological through line for thinking about a heterogeneous set of texts. Perhaps more significantly, it
enables me to ground my analysis in the evaluative framework of the *ethics of representation*. My precise aim is to engage with ethics as it relates to cinematic representation; to this end, I lean on the contours of Derrida’s thinking on the ethics of representation. Derrida of course never names this work as such; rather, he invokes “ethics” through his repeated insistence on “responsibility,” and he refers to the observation of this responsibility—to the *responsibility of observation*—with the words “witnessing,” “testimony,” and “auto-biography” (“Animal” 396–97). Derrida’s contemplation of what it means to look at images—and particularly at images of animal suffering—is at once penetrating and oblique. For this reason, it is necessary to situate his stress on suffering not only within a larger set of philosophical preoccupations with the experience of suffering, but also alongside his own questioning of the subject. This contextualization demonstrates that the philosophical fixation on the exaction and experience of corporeal pain (on the *subject of suffering*) often displaces the more fundamental question of who is *subject to* suffering.

III. The Place of Suffering

As the introduction to this chapter suggests, I do not think revelatory images of appalling suffering respond ethically to the (post-) industrial regime of animal slaughter. At this juncture, I must clarify that suffering is not the only, or even the central, question posed by this regime. To draw out this distinction, I read Derrida’s aforementioned feint toward realist revelation alongside the work of several adjacent interlocutors (namely, Singer, Cora Diamond, and Cary Wolfe).

Derrida invokes and then turns from the all-too-visible evidence of animal suffering...
suffering with the following elliptical observations:

If these images are “pathetic,” if they evoke sympathy, it is also because they “pathetically” open the immense question of pathos and the pathological, precisely, that is, of suffering, pity, and compassion; and the place that has to be accorded to the interpretation of this compassion, to the sharing of this suffering among the living, to the law, ethics, and politics that must be brought to bear upon this experience of compassion. […] It is in thinking of the source and ends of this compassion that about two centuries ago someone like [Jeremy] Bentham, as is well known, proposed changing the very form of the question regarding the animal that dominated discourse within the tradition, in the language of both the most refined philosophical argument and everyday acceptation and common sense. (“Animal” 395)

Derrida’s passing reference to the familiarity of Bentham’s reformulation of the “question regarding the animal” presents a telling trace and, as such, it affords a way into teasing out the logic behind his remarks. As it happens, Bentham’s intervention—“the question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but, can they suffer?” (Introduction 311)—has only recently begun to circulate as common knowledge in and around the field of philosophy; as Paola Cavalieri points out, Bentham’s statement had languished in a recondite footnote to his 1789 Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation until Singer, a philosopher in the Utilitarian tradition Bentham helped to found, put it to use in his 1975 Animal Liberation (60; noted in Wolfe, Posthumanism?, 63). Singer’s manifesto distilled Bentham’s radical revision of the criteria of animal difference and the Utilitarian credo “the greatest good for the greatest number” into the maxim “the least suffering or pain for the greatest number of human and nonhuman animals.” It also launched Animal Liberation, a social movement whose unequivocal emphasis on
Bentham’s rubric has, I think, enabled it to sustain its position as the most consolidated and popularly recognizable brand of animal rights doctrine in the West.

In short, attention to suffering now permeates overlapping discussions around animals and animal rights, from hard-line rights rhetoric to deconstruction. The primacy these discourses accord to suffering explains why Derrida credits Bentham’s statement with “changing the very form of the question regarding the animal” in traditional philosophical thought and quotidian practice. Bentham’s proposal sought to reframe the contestation of human-animal difference, muting post-Cartesian thought’s logocentric preoccupation with language and reason (and all of the so-called capacities that derive from them: to memorialize, to dress, to bury, to invent) and foregrounding in its stead “what is undeniable” (“Animal” 395). Yet suffering’s primacy also invites us to question Derrida’s simultaneous insistence that this seismic shift in the terms of the debate has yet to be met with a commensurate recognition of “our responsibilities and our obligations with respect to the living in general.” On the heels of his acknowledgement of Bentham’s immense contribution, Derrida wagers that, were we to face up to animal suffering and to the “fundamental compassion” it demands, we “would have to change even the very basis […] of the philosophical problematic of the animal” (395). That is, Derrida at once affirms the transformative power of Bentham’s proposal and decries its failure to elicit an adequate response to the very sea change it inspired.

Derrida’s paradoxical assessment makes sense if we consider that ubiquity does not necessarily amount to consensus. Examining a range of critical responses to Singer’s application of Bentham’s question helps to clarify this distinction and its consequences for Derrida’s discussion. Singer’s utilitarian logic has inspired an army of adherents and provoked a number of critics. Opponents typically pin their allegations of rhetorical fallacy on one of two argumentative registers. First, there are those who assert that it is
just plain wrong to privilege the capacity to suffer as the determining criterion of a
prescribed human-animal relationality. These interlocutors envision Bentham’s
“insuperable line” as a dividing line and propose to hitch it elsewhere. To choose an apt if
controversial representative of this group, consider Vicki Hearne, a dog trainer turned
animal philosopher who unequivocally proclaimed in a divisive 1991 Harper’s article
that “the problem with the animal rights advocates is not that they take it too far; it’s that
they’ve got it all wrong” (60). Hearne contends that the boundary should rest at a being’s
“capacity for satisfaction that comes from work in the fullest sense—what is known in
philosophy and in [the United State’s] Declaration of Independence as ‘happiness’” (60).
In her curious rubric, then, the “insuperable line” distinguishes a select group of
companion species (dressage horses, golden retrievers) endowed with the capacity to
uphold a Protestant work ethic alongside their human partners. Cary Wolfe observes that
the philosopher Martha Nussbaum makes a similar and equally problematic move in her
attempt to redraw the line at “capabilities” and “flourishing” (Posthumanism? 78). Wolfe
shows that Nussbaum’s line, much like Hearne’s, re-entrenches the idea of the human as
an active, able agent (67).

Other critics, meanwhile, allow that the capacity to suffer may be a valid criterion,
but it is not ipso facto a compelling one; that is, it does not necessarily provide a
persuasive frame for political activism or individual change. Kennan Ferguson, for
example, sets out to debunk the “the erroneous presumption that abstract categorical
expressions of ethical responsibility must predominate over personal and quotidian
emotional existence” (385), and to account, in its place, for the contradiction pithily
expressed in the eighteenth-century humanitarian Oliver Goldsmith’s observation, “They
pity, and they eat the objects of their compassion” (240). Ferguson asks, in other words,
how we can explain why so many well-meaning humans simultaneously eat factory
farmed meat and wear cosmetics tested on animals, and expend a good deal of time, energy, money, and love on their pets. Ferguson discerns that the logic of utilitarian arguments for animal rights is not lost on these humans, but that this logic doesn’t automatically translate into the prescribed reactions. He thus quips, “Peter Singer thinks he knows that logic, not love, compels people to act and to sacrifice” (388). Singer, however, doesn’t realize that “treat[ing] reason as coercive is as absurd as treating it as irrelevant” (391). Ferguson’s insight into reason’s fundamental inconsistency—a condition that precludes us, he recommends, from embracing or abandoning it outright—is important, and I urge readers (and myself) to keep it in mind over the course of the coming analysis.

At least one interlocutor has effectively questioned both registers of the rubric of suffering. Cora Diamond demonstrates that emphasizing this criterion to the exclusion of all others typically installs a framework that is both incorrect and ineffective. The utilitarianism of Animal Liberation, Diamond reflects, “implies that there is absolutely nothing queer, nothing at all odd, in the vegetarian eating the cow that has obligingly been struck by lightning. That is to say, there is nothing in the discussion which suggests that a cow is not something to eat; it is only that one must not help the process along” (“Eating” 96, original emphasis). Her plainspoken observation challenges the strategies of containment that inevitably obtain from suffering-centric animal rights rhetoric, and which gloss over the central structural problem of the human-animal divide.

Diamond elucidates this divide by cannily building on the laboured provocation of one of Singer’s chapter starters: “For most human beings, especially those in modern urban and suburban communities, the most direct form of contact with nonhuman animals is at mealtime: we eat them” (Animal Liberation 95). She reworks this formulation in order to implicate the quotidian meal-time encounter in the formation and maintenance of
the human-animal divide: “We learn what a human being is in—among other ways—sitting at a table where we eat them. We are around the table and they are on it” (“Eating” 98, original emphasis). She continues with an assertion that echoes Derrida’s admonition that “everybody knows”:

The difference between human beings and animals is not to be discovered by studies of Washoe or the activities of dolphins. It is not that sort of study or ethology or evolutionary theory that is going to tell us the difference between us and animals: this difference is, as I have suggested, a central concept for human life and is more an object of contemplation than observation (though that might be misunderstood; I am not suggesting it is a matter of intuition). […] It is clear that we form the idea of this difference, create the concept of the difference, knowing perfectly well the overwhelmingly obvious similarities. (“Eating” 98)

Just as Derrida underscores the redundancy of “realist paintings” of animal suffering, Diamond points out the superfluity of complicated inquiries into the differences that are alternately used to excuse and condemn that suffering. In a separate article, she points out that latching onto such sites of difference or distinction makes perfect sense, insofar as it reaffirms our own sense of self. The alternative is too unsettling; it “is capable of panicking us.” Indeed, it is so unnerving that it is understandable that we “prefer to return to moral debate, in which the livingness and death of animals enter as facts that we treat as relevant in this or that way, not as presences that may unseat our reason” (“Difficulty” 74, emphasis added).

The alternative Diamond discerns returns us squarely to Derrida, for Diamond also identifies suffering as the condition that at once solicits and fails to respond to the ethical dimensions of what has, following Derrida, become known as “the question of the animal.” For Diamond, the acknowledgement of suffering entails “the awareness we each
have of being a living body, being ‘alive to the world,’ [which] carries with it an exposure to the bodily sense of vulnerability to death, sheer animal vulnerability, the vulnerability we share with them” (“Difficulty” 74). Diamond’s rhetorical movements (or rather my reiteration of them) draw out a distinction that remains implicit in Derrida’s address: the means and ends for stressing suffering are multiple. Wolfe articulates the range of possibilities perhaps more eloquently that I can in his own comparative analysis of the interlocutors in question. He contrasts Derrida’s and Diamond’s valuation of suffering as a shared site of “vulnerability, passivity, and finitude” to rights- and capacities-oriented arguments (exemplified by Singer, Hearne, and Nussbaum), in which these qualities “are recuperated as a ‘being-able’ and a ‘transitivity,’ thus ontologizing and hypostazing the split between the human and the other—all its others—across which the human then reaches in an act of benevolence toward an other we imagine is enough like us to warrant ethical treatment” (Posthumanism? 85). In other words, conventional animal rights rhetoric (that is, activist doctrine) seizes on suffering in such a way that it reinstates the human-animal divide as a question of capacities: we have the capacity, and thus the responsibility, to mitigate their suffering. Diamond and Derrida, in contrast, see suffering as the one standard capable of flattening or levelling (which is not to say effacing) the human-animal divide.

To sum up, I read Derrida’s enigmatic appraisal of the Benthamian criterion of suffering as a critique of this standard’s unrealized potential. Mindful of his and Diamond’s intervention, in the present and following chapters I attempt to recalibrate suffering’s significance in my own analysis of images of animal slaughter. This endeavour entails, in the first place, that I question not only the ethicality of representing suffering, but also the relationships of self and other (human and animal, viewer and viewed) implicated in the production of suffering. It also demands that I consider the way
in which the prevailing emphasis on suffering grafts familiar models of identification and empathy onto situations or relationships that are ultimately incongruous with these predominantly reassuring narrative processes.

My own research experience has shown up the obstinacy with which I attach my responses to images of slaughter to the affective registers of suffering. As several discerning readers and listeners of my preliminary work have helped me to clarify, filmic documentations of slaughter are shocking not because they show suffering; indeed, many actively work to elide the visual evidence of suffering (spectators may project or map suffering onto the scene of death). To be precise, then, what is shocking about these images is the animals’ obstinate fleshy stillness. They are unnerving insofar as they produce a weighty, material inertness within the moving image; they introduce a dead stillness into what Mulvey describes as “the fleetingness of sequence in process” (*Death* 189). As I argue in Chapter One, the cinematic medium locates the animal body as a site susceptible to registering the transition from animate life to still lifelessness; I limit my scope in this chapter and the subsequent two, and postulate that the medium further privileges the violent abruptness of animal slaughter for its particularly shocking depiction of this movement. Within this narrowed thematic, I endeavour to evaluate the ethical valences of the distinct formal strategies that individual filmmakers employ to animate the shock of slaughter. It is my contention that this shock, properly phrased, is capable of articulating the sort of radical intransitivities—the expression of “the power at the heart of nonpower”—that Derrida recognizes in Bentham’s question (“Animal” 396).

The textual evaluation to come sustains Chapter One’s interest in cinema’s fundamentally sequential structure, and for this reason I focus predominantly on the framing and editing strategies that determine the sequences and films at hand (my analysis here will extend to film’s aural register, and will thus supplement this
dissertation’s emphasis on the visual properties of slaughter cinema). It is with this priority in mind that I turn, by way of concluding my own sequential overview, to Derrida’s thoughts on subjectivity—on being a subject. Derrida’s conception of suffering as intransitive is best understood, I think, as part of his larger move to render visible the undecidability of the subject—the undecidability of “the living” in general. He avers, We cannot “cut” once and for all where we would in general like to cut. [...] I am speaking here of very “concrete” and “current” problems: the ethics and the politics of the living. We know less than ever where to cut—either at birth or death. And this also means that we never know, and never have known, how to cut up a subject. (“Eating Well” 285)

I take Derrida at his word here, and transpose his assertion of the ethical and political difficulty of “how to cut up a subject” onto the question—a very concrete, current problem if ever there was one—of how film cuts up the subject of (those subject to) slaughter. Like Derrida, I affirm the necessary incertitude of this knowledge; I contend, moreover, that film form is distinctly equipped to represent this undecidability. Yet to signal the contours of my larger formal argument at the outset, my textual evaluation will incline toward Bazin’s ideal of a cinematic form that is “capable of expressing everything without chopping the world up into bits” (“The Evolution of Film Language” 104, emphasis added). And although my analysis will complicate Bazin’s faith in formal unity, it will ultimately support his advocacy of a nondialectical film form.

IV. Naming Slaughter

Scrutinizing slaughter entails paying attention to the framing strategies not only of visual representation but also of language. I thus begin my analysis with a brief discussion of naming, the semiotic system that perhaps most succinctly demonstrates the
course through which wildly ambivalent meanings proliferate around the slaughter industry. This discussion is largely etymological, yet I prefer to characterize it as a sort of “thick description,” the methodology Sobchack identifies as proper to phenomenology. Sobchack describes this method as an “attentiveness to language [that is] aimed at really listening to and reanimating the rich but taken-for-granted expressions of vernacular language and of rediscovering the latter’s intimate and extensive incorporation of experience” (5). In other words, this attentiveness presses on the indexical substrate of symbolic language, and suggests that experience also motivates this semiotic register (it does so not so much to disprove Saussurean linguistics, but to show that competing accounts are at least plausible). I rejoin that this indexicality moves both ways: symbolic language motivates experience. Mindfulness of this reciprocal relationship is, I think, integral to understanding and evaluating the ethicality of slaughter and its manifold representations.

Adams’s thick description of mass term offers a useful preliminary proof. This mathematical term refers to names for substances or qualities that cannot be counted; for example, regardless of how much there is of it and of the vessel in which it is contained, red will always be red. Adams asserts that mass terms regularly edulcorate our perception of animal slaughter and our relationship to the animals we consume on a daily basis; terms such as beef and pork “signal the thingification of beings” (Pornography 22, original emphasis). Most would allow that a hamburger is easier to swallow than are ground-up particles of an individual cow’s body. Like inviting product packaging or glass display cases, then, mass terms function as frames that permit us to easily digest our quotidian consumption of animal bodies; in this they recall Marguerite Yourcenar’s

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74 The method of thick description derives from the anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” (The Interpretation of Cultures). Since the essay’s publication in 1973, the term has gained currency in a range of disciplines in the social sciences and, to a lesser extent, in the humanities.
remark, “Cut into slices which are carefully wrapped in wax paper in the supermarket, or conserved in tins, the flesh of an animal ceases to be thought of as having once been alive” (145). Termed as mass, as meat, this flesh becomes nothing more than “something to eat.”

Adams’s assertion of the euphemistic power of mass terms is convincing, yet the conclusion that immediately issues from it reproduces the logic of the “glass walls” maxim: if we called meat what it really was, we’d all be vegetarian. This logic is specious on two counts. First, in the cases of certain species, we do use the same word to denote both the living animal and its consumable flesh (fish, chicken). Second and more importantly, many of the words that make up slaughter’s lexicon are not euphemistic—or at least not exclusively so. Indeed, the names for the industrial apparatus that makes possible meat and other, similar mass terms persist despite—or, I submit, because of—their much more ambivalent relationship to euphemism. The words slaughter and slaughterhouse, and their French counterparts, abattre and abattoir, slide between circumlocution and blunt denotation. In the following section, I describe a set of filmic conventions that are perhaps best defined by their movement between understatement and unflinching demonstration. The semiotic ambivalence that characterizes the key words of slaughter works in an analogous fashion; that is, these words’ semiotic capaciousness enables them both to minimize and maximize the unnerving truth of slaughter.

The French abattoir demonstrates this capaciousness most clearly. It turns out that the word, which to my mind signifies the most gruesome terminus for “thingified beings,” has almost sanguine origins. In her ethnographic account of abattoirs in the Adour region of southern France, Noëlie Vialles traces the term’s etymology to the verb abattre:

75 My discussion of semiotic capaciousness is indebted to Shukin’s insight into the “singular mimetic capaciousness” of the signifier “the animal” (4).
The general meaning of *abattre* is “to cause to fall” or “to bring down that which is standing.” It is primarily a term in forestry, where it refers to felling; subsequently, it came to be used in the mineral world, where it denoted the action of detaching material from the walls of a mine tunnel. It also belongs to the vocabulary of veterinary surgery, and particularly when applied to a horse it means to lay the animal down in order to operate on it […]. (22–23)

Vialles notes the apparent euphemistic intent behind the appropriation of the term from the industries of forestry, mining, and veterinary medicine, and she points out that this appropriation served to “vegetalise” a carnivorous motivated act (23). The verb’s various meanings collectively connote passivity, even benevolence, and in this they describe the sort of effaced agency particular to modern industry (compare “to cause to fall” to “to push over”). Vialles identifies this euphemistic movement as complicit with Napoleon’s plan to modernize, industrialize, and, most importantly, sanitize the business of animal butchery in Paris; *abattoir* as a synonym of, and ultimately as the replacement for, the terms *tuerie* [from *tuer*, “to kill”] and *écorcherie* [from *écorcher*, “to flay”] first appeared in 1806, just as Napoleon was setting in motion his initiative to relocate slaughter to the suburbs (15–17). In short, she locates the elision of the unequivocal violence of slaughter’s terminology within the larger project to overhaul the industry’s modern image.

Yet Vialles is also careful to note the euphemism’s perhaps inevitable failure. Unlike the United States, Britain, and Germany, France did not endeavour to supplement its newly isolated slaughter industry with a spectacular tourist economy; rather, it sought to comprehensively banish the barbarous violence of pre-industrial butchery from the civilized space of the city. Within this context, Vialles contends that the conferment of even the most reassuring euphemism would run counter to the country’s thoroughgoing
disavowal of meat production: giving it a name “still gave it too much existence” (22). This intransigent remainder is evident in abattoir’s derivative, les abats, which describes ‘offal,’ ‘entrails,’ ‘viscera’—that is, the leftover and frequently discarded bits of the slaughtered animal body. Yet even removed from these particular cultural-historical circumstances, abattoir cannot fully realize its euphemistic intent. To anyone conversant with French, the violence of battre (“to beat”) and se battre (“to fight”) is intractably lodged in abattre and only slightly attenuated in its derivative abattoir. To my native English ears, meanwhile, abattoir has always connoted an old-world, rustic grimness; the use of this word in English—that is, a speaker’s choice to use it over the English slaughterhouse—bespeaks a comparable smallness of scale, only partial mechanization, and the persistence of artisanal labour. These connotations arise from my own personal experience, yet they nevertheless demonstrate the impossibility of the term abattoir’s total reduction to a space of vegetalisation.

The usage and etymology of the English slaughter and slaughterhouse, meanwhile, would seem to openly defy any euphemistic impulse. As Kathryn Gillepsie matter-of-factly points out, both the name and the act of slaughter are “inherently violent” (22). Gillepsie provides a succinct etymology:

‘Slaughter’ comes from the Icelandic slatr, which means “slain flesh,” but is a modification of slaught or slaht, which comes from the Anglo Saxon sleaht or sliht, which means “a stroke” or “a blow.” These words come from the root of the English word slay. Slay may come from the Latin lacerare, which means literally “to tear to pieces” and is also cognate with the word sledge (a large hammer).

Synonyms of ‘slaughter’ are carnage, massacre, butchery, murder, and havoc. (3; Gillepsie works from Webster’s International Unabridged Second Edition, 1931) On one hand, the resolute force that endures in slaughter makes sense given the American
context of slaughterhouse tourism. As I demonstrate in the final section of this chapter, this supplementary economy performed a strange balancing act, as it carefully contained the affectively potent images of animal disassembly within the consumerist frame of visual spectacle; the violent facticity of \textit{slaughter} and \textit{slaughterhouse} may well play into the shocking thrill promised by that site. On the other hand, it is also the case that \textit{slaughter} functions as a euphemistic synonym for \textit{to kill/killing} and \textit{to murder/murder}. As Burt reminds us in his epigraphic reference to recent British legal codes, “Slaughter is generally defined as the killing of animals for food. ‘Killing’ in relation to an animal, means causing the death of the animal by any process other than slaughter; ‘slaughter,’ in relation to an animal, means the death of the animal by bleeding” ("Conflicts around Slaughter" 120; Burt cites 1995 UK Government Regulations). To paraphrase Derrida, \textit{slaughter} is the name we give to “the noncriminal putting to death” of animals ("Eating Well” 278).

In sum, \textit{slaughter/slaughterhouse} and \textit{abattre/abattoir} accommodate much more than euphemism. Their semiotic capaciousness is, I think, precisely what explains their persistence as the key words of the meat industry. I expand on this insight in the sections to come, and demonstrate that complex and frequently contradictory forces likewise motivate the visual economy of slaughter.

V. The “Slaughterhouse Aesthetic”

“When I first tried to visit a slaughter plant, they wouldn’t let me in. And I thought, ‘what’s so mysterious in this place they won’t let anybody in?’” So recounts Temple Grandin in “Stairway to Heaven,” an episode of Errol Morris’s documentary TV series \textit{First Person} (2001) devoted to her life story. She continues, “I wanted to find out what happens when you die. Regular religion was way too abstract; it was just
meaningless. But the slaughterhouse was real. I walked up to the front lobby [of the Swift slaughterhouse] and they said, ‘no, we don’t give tours of this plant.’ ‘What?’” Grandin is autistic, and she identifies her need to align metaphysical ideas with concrete “pictures” as a product of her condition and the scientific outlook it has fostered. She is also persistent. Several years after she was turned away from Swift, she met the wife of the plant’s insurance salesman at the grocery store: “Two days later I was in the Swift plant. The door to opportunity opened.” That door led to a sideline career as a consultant to the livestock industry that has grown to complement her principal work as an animal scientist, author, and professor. She has not only designed a third of the livestock-handling facilities in the United States, but has also gained recognition as a forthright spokesperson for the “humane” principles that govern her designs. In one of countless recent cross-media appearances, Grandin provides the onscreen introduction for Taking the Mystery out of Pork Production (2011), an advertorial Internet video produced by Smithfield Foods, the world’s largest pork producer (and a competitor of Swift and Co.).

I was really pleased when Murphy-Brown [Smithfield’s livestock subsidiary] came to me and said they wanted to make videos just showing how a modern pig

76 Swift and Co. is among the largest American meatpackers (it is currently a subsidiary of a Brazilian firm that is the world’s largest producer of beef and pork) and has long relied on cinema as part of its branding strategy. In addition to its recent Internet infomercials, the company’s sponsored films include The Big Idea (1951), the plot of which Prelinger describes as “a woman reporter from an iron curtain country and an American newspaperman […] tour a Swift plant and […] come to realize that capitalism is the system that provides the greatest degree of worker freedom (12), and Carving Magic (1959), a home economist’s hands-on demo of how to carve meat. Prelinger notes that Herschell Gordon Lewis, the credited director of Carving Magic, “later gained a reputation as a director of low-budget gore films”(17), and I can’t help but surmise that his experience with Swift informed his later success in filming dramatic scenes of human butchery.

77 Grandin claims authorship of this third of designs in “Stairway to Heaven.” Various scholars have repeated her claim, among them Cary Wolfe (Posthumanism? 128). In her book Thinking in Pictures, Grandin makes a different claim: “In fact, one-third of the cattle and hogs in the United States are handled in equipment I have designed” (3). Dominick LaCapra cites the latter figure in his discussion of Grandin’s career (95). If one takes into account the vast differences in scale among American livestock facilities, one realizes that the 1:1 ratio posited by these two statistics is wildly inaccurate. Grandin’s designs are primarily intended for and implemented in large-scale operations like Murphy-Brown, which “handle” a disproportionately large percentage of American livestock; it follows that significantly more animals meet their ends through the “humane” means she has designed. I note this significant discrepancy as a reminder of the frequently spurious accounting of animal death.
farm works—showing sows, showing finishers, showing other parts of the farm—because a lot of the public has no idea what goes on inside a hog farm. And we just need to show it. You know, it shouldn’t be a mystery. There’s nothing mysterious that goes on inside a pork farm. You know, put a video camera inside and show it.

It is an unsurprising irony that the footage that follows in fact serves to obscure the processes of pork production; the video carefully details the “safe, comfortable, and healthy” conditions afforded the pigs at various life stages, but does not show the processes of slaughter that determine the end of their lives. Grandin’s prelude to Smithfield’s bucolic rendering of pork production thus reproduces her own mystifying first attempt to see animal slaughter (one could say that it thereby testifies to her transformation from a curious, frustrated spectator to an expert insider).

Read in tandem with her anecdotal remarks in “Stairway to Heaven,” Grandin’s introduction does shed light on the modern meat industry’s vexed relationship to its own visibility. Her incredulity at her summary dismissal from Swift’s lobby and her subsequent assertion of the value of transparency can be read as symptomatic of the confusion produced by the meat industry’s oscillating apportionment of visual knowledge about itself. In brief, the industry’s stance on self-display has both shifted significantly over time and contained contradictory impulses within more narrowly defined historical periods. Recognizing these diachronic and synchronic inconsistencies is necessary to understanding and appraising the means by which film in turn endeavours to produce visual knowledge of the industry and, in particular, of its ineluctable “noncriminal putting to death” of animals.” Shukin’s observation of modern slaughter’s complicated visibility is helpful in this regard:

There seems to have been a historical “window” in which slaughter enjoyed and
capitalized on its visibility rather than sought invisibility, a window in which tours of abattoirs were immensely popular and the industry played a large role in publicizing the modern nation’s efficiencies. This window did not stay open for long, however; although tours of slaughterhouses have continued across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first [...], the space of slaughter has become increasingly identified with resistance to graphic exposure, so that films of slaughterhouses circulated by animal rights organizations such as [PETA …] have been seen as forced glimpses into a clandestine space barred from the public view.

(255, n24)

It bears remarking that Shukin’s somewhat vague note (“There seems to have been…”) appears in her otherwise meticulously researched cultural-materialist account of the modern slaughterhouse’s role in constructing proto-cinematic modes of spectatorship (an account to which the present chapter, and indeed this entire project, is greatly indebted). That is to say, her relative imprecision is indicative of the incredibly slippery logic of slaughter’s visibility. This logic accommodates the outwardly incommensurable appraisals of public knowledge about slaughter with which I opened this chapter. Moreover, it is within this logic that Shukin’s final point assumes significance: filmic imagery of slaughter does not merely respond to the industry’s outwardly static self-image, but also participates in shaping that image.

The present and final sections of this chapter expand on the relationship between the filmic sight of slaughter and the material site of the slaughterhouse, with a longer view to describing a cinematic praxis that ethically responds to what Shukin calls “the complicit logics of animal disassembly and filmic assembly” (257, n40). My analysis here consists of three threads. First, I build on Burt’s discerning classification of what he

78 Shukin notes that these complicit logics “are intensified when slaughter is itself the subject, or the content, of film, as in Georges Franju’s Sang des bêtes” (257, n40). She does not discuss any such films, and I read her annotation as the mark where my work here begins.
calls the “slaughterhouse aesthetic” in order to delineate the prevailing cinematic methods for representing the topos of the slaughterhouse. These methods adhere, in short, to Grandin’s imperative to “put a video camera inside and show it.” Burt succinctly highlights the problems with the conventions of the slaughterhouse aesthetic, and I do not belabour his critique; rather, I flesh out his observations in brief readings of two films that take up the aesthetic with markedly different intentions. I then turn my attention to the aural registers of slaughterhouse films. Burt indicates that the slaughterhouse aesthetic trims away the visually excessive features of slaughter—the actual sight of killing, as well as the animal body’s material resistance and its unpleasant visceral residue. Burt’s focus on the visual contours of film elides the significance of sound as a formal feature; alternatively, his silence suggests that the slaughterhouse aesthetic simply eliminates sound. My preliminary discussion of sound in turn suggests that while the framing and editing conventions of the slaughterhouse aesthetic may cut out the visual excess of slaughter, this mode of filmmaking cannot—short of muting—contain the affectively potent aural evidence of slaughter. Finally, I connect the framing and editing strategies Burt identifies to recent work by Shukin and other scholars on the now largely outmoded practice of slaughterhouse touring. This staggered exposition defines the conventions for documenting slaughter and locates them in historical context. It is also highly attuned to the relationship between convention and deviation (or theme and variation), and it thereby provides a foundation for my analysis, in Chapters Three and Four, of divergent filmic forms of representing slaughter.

Burt observes that disparate film modes make use of similar conventions for representing slaughter: “imagery of mechanization and anonymity appears interchangeably whether in art film, documentary or animal rights videos on the meat process. One might almost call it a slaughterhouse aesthetic.” This “static aesthetic
“frame” is born of two mutually reinforcing conventions: mechanised tracking shots and rhythmic, linear editing (*Animals* 173–74). Burt critiques the ways in which the cinematographic and editing techniques of the slaughterhouse aesthetic, in their drive towards mimesis, reproduce the alienating effects of mechanized animal disassembly:

The fetishization of animal death as part of an industrial process renders visible that which we rarely, if ever, see. Few films, however, actually explore the relationship between this revelatory imagery and other aspects of culture, preferring instead to reinforce its sense of separateness. Magnetized as the eye might be to the act of animal killing, whether through fascination, repulsion, or a combination of the two, the sense of isolation that the act has behind the walls of the abattoir is in fact reinforced. (174–75)

Films that adopt the slaughterhouse aesthetic succeed in exposing a site that, in Owain Jones’s words, is “customarily closed off from [a] conventional ethical gaze” (268), yet they do so at the expense of obscuring this space’s connections to daily life. As with the apocalyptic films previously described, their acknowledgement of the horrors of the meat industry functions as a disavowal of this institution’s embeddedness in the fabric of the world.⁷⁹ As Burt explains in a separate analysis of the material conditions of slaughter, the meat industry proliferates changes, connections, and conflicts in the overlapping spheres of economics, ecology, politics, labour, transportation, and advertising, and it powers “particular configuration[s] of technology, the animal, and discourses of efficiency, breeding, health, and ethics” (“Conflicts around Slaughter in Modernity” 122, 124).⁸⁰ In its effort to show slaughter to the exclusion of all else, the slaughterhouse

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⁷⁹ To clarify, these two styles or aesthetics differ chiefly in tone: whereas I characterize apocalyptic rhetoric as voicing a certain bravado, Burt likens the “slaughterhouse aesthetic” to a “dispassionate camera in the abattoir” (*Animals* 173). Given that my primary concern lies with these styles’ structural similarities, the reader is invited to think of them as closely intertwined.

⁸⁰ Burt aptly connects these connections to *The Jungle*’s most enduring catchphrase, “They use everything about the hog except the squeal”: “Just as all parts of the animal are used for everything […] so too are all
aesthetic renders these links invisible.

Burt develops his working definition of the slaughterhouse aesthetic through concise readings of Frederic Wiseman’s *Meat* (1976) and PETA’s feature-length video *A Day in the Life of a Massachusetts Slaughterhouse* (1998). His choice of illustrative documentaries—Wiseman claims impartiality on animal welfare issues while PETA of course advocates vociferously on animals’ behalf—demonstrates that the aesthetic’s effects of fragmentation and isolation hold “regardless of the sympathies of the filmmaker” (*Animals* 174). His comparative gesture evinces a particularly convincing critique of the revelatory approach adopted by so many animal activist films: insofar as these films reproduce the formal logic of fetishization that underwrites the industry of slaughter, they undermine one of their central messages—that animals are not simply bits and pieces of flesh fated for human consumption. Following Burt, I highlight the limitations of the slaughterhouse aesthetic through a comparative discussion of two films that document the same corporate space of slaughter from (not altogether) antagonistic perspectives: F.R. Furtney’s *This Is Hormel* (1965), an educational film produced by the Hormel Corporation in the waning days of slaughterhouse tourism, and Barbara Kopple’s *American Dream* (1990), an observational documentary that follows the local meatpacking union’s fight for fair wages and benefits at Hormel’s headquarters in Austin, Minnesota. Like Burt, I ascribe a largely negative value to the aesthetic conventions at hand; however, I also submit that these conventions, by dint of their susceptibility to deviation, possess a productive potential.

It is worth noting here that Hormel’s primary claim to fame is its development of the networks of modernity—transport, labor, technologies—implicated in the manufacture” (“Conflicts” 121).

81 Burt lists Wiseman’s *Primate* (1974) as an additional exemplar. The film’s penultimate scene documents the dissection of a chimp, and is framed and edited with a rapid-fire nonchalance that replicates the unrelenting precision of the scientists’ scalpels. Burt pithily sums up *Primate* and *Meat*: “In these films, little is explained and much is seen” (173).
the much-mocked mystery meat SPAM (Austin consequently bears the unfortunate nickname Spamtown, USA). My initial reading of *This is Hormel* and *American Dream* stressed the ways in which the two films formally resonate with their shared thematic concern with the production of SPAM, a low-grade pork that is ground down to a rubbery, uniform consistency and coated with a gelatinous aspic. Both films, I thought on first viewing, submit their documentary footage from inside the Hormel plant to an analogous process of homogenization and thereby present meat production as an easily digestible process; the SPAM analogy is perhaps stronger in the case of *American Dream*, as it repeatedly quotes *This is Hormel*, seamlessly incorporating that film’s footage into its own materiality.\(^2\) Repeat viewings have since led me to nuance my initial stance that the conventions at work in these films uniformly expunge the messiness of animal slaughter. Thus while the following analysis confirms Burt’s insight that the “static aesthetic frame” overrides authorial intentionality, it also troubles the attendant implication that this frame necessarily grinds all scenes of slaughter into homogenous sameness.

Given what I now regard to be a partial misreading of my own exemplars, it bears emphasizing at the outset that no film entirely escapes or adheres to the conventions in question (the contingency signalled by Burt’s “one might almost” is thus crucial). In a word, film fragments. As my discussion of Zeno’s paradoxes in Chapter One shows, the medium is built on the atomization of time and space—the disassembly and reassembly of the profilmic world. It seems filmmakers have long realized that certain spaces (or,

\(^2\) The provenance of Kopple’s incorporated footage is unclear. Towards the beginning of *American Dream*, she quotes the introductory sequence of a dated educational film titled *Hormel*. She then intermittently splices in sequences that are ostensibly from this film, yet which are identical to bits and pieces of Furtney’s *This is Hormel*. Given the extreme portability of industrial and educational film footage, I presume that both *Hormel* and *This is Hormel* are constructed of stock footage compiled by Hormel in the mid-1960s (that is, they are simply different iterations of the same material). Kopple also intermittently cuts in her own footage of the Hormel plant. Neither her documentary footage nor the quoted *Hormel* footage directly participate in *American Dream*’s narrative; rather, they function as Barthesian “reality effects.”
more precisely, technologies of space) lend themselves to the atomized linearity of the filmstrip. In particular, the mobile, rectangular windows of speeding trains and the ceaseless lateral ebb of assembly lines constitute mise en scènes wherein alignment with the cinematic apparatus can be mined for visually pleasing symmetries. Modern Times (Charlie Chaplin, 1936) stands out among the many films that formally and thematically address the assembly lines of modern mass production (it does, moreover, with an opening ovine metaphor that likens the denizens of modernity to innocent, unthinking sheep). Chaplin’s careful choreography of factory work shows up the ease with which the mindless, repetitive flow of mass production breaches the assembly line, subsuming everyday life into the stuff of monotonous labour: in one famous scene, Chaplin’s tramp becomes so fixated on his assigned task that he extends it to the factory’s surrounds, and attempts to tighten the “bolts” of a woman’s blouse. Yet this scene also highlights the precariousness of the assembly line’s systematicity: the tramp’s monomania causes a delay, and the line disastrously breaks down. In short, Chaplin exploits to critical, comic

83 Lynne Kirby brilliantly unpacks the cinema’s fascination with the railroad: “the cinema finds an apt metaphor in the train, in it its framed, moving image, its construction of a journey as an optical experience, the radical juxtaposition of different places, the ‘annihilation of space and time.’ As a machine of vision and an instrument for conquering space and time, the train is a mechanical double for the cinema and for the transport of the spectator into fiction, fantasy, and dream. […] These compelling overlaps, however, are embedded in a myriad of cultural, social, and historical relations linking these two modern institutions” (2). I am indebted to Shukin for this connection between the railroad and the assembly line’s affinities with the cinematic production of mobile images, and for the reference to Kirby’s work (100). Following Kirby and Shukin, I endeavour not only to identify these alluring symmetries and “compelling overlaps,” but also to probe their stakes in material culture and representation.

84 Metropolis (Fritz Lang, 1927) and Entuziasm: Simfoniya Donbassa (Enthusiasm: Symphony of the Donbass, Dziga Vertov, 1930) also come immediately to mind. Baraka (Ron Fricke, 1992) presents a more recent example that attests to the photogenie of the convergence of mechanical assembly and animal disassembly: a brilliant sequence nestled in the interior of this non-narrative, kaleidoscopic inventory of “Civilization” splices together monolithic vistas of the industrial processing of both computer innards and fluffy chicks.

85 Bazin observes that Chaplin’s comedy as a whole hinges on his “non-adherence to things and events,” or what we might describe as his play on iterability: “Because he never foresees an object’s future usefulness, he quickly develops a sort of mechanical cramp whenever he is involved with an object for any period of time. […] Charlie’s deadly sin, which he does not hesitate to use to make us laugh at his expense, is to extend in time a way of being appropriate to the moment—i.e., repetition” (“An Introduction to the Charlie
effect the assembly line’s capacity to mesmerize and its vulnerability to disruption. These competing ocular interests—the thrall of repetition and the shocking interruption of it—characterize the cinematic tracking of mechanical assembly, in general, and the slaughterhouse aesthetic, in particular. My reading of Kopple’s American Dream attends specifically to this relationship between convention and deviation, and considers the extent to which the cinematic representation of slaughter requires the co-presence of both structures. In this regard, my analysis underscores, more generally, that if the cinematic medium is built on fragmentation, so too is perspective built into the apparatus. This latter, equally fundamental material condition disallows the exact duplication of the profilmic world, forecloses the possibility of a perfect reproduction of the “bits” of animal slaughter.

To return to Burt’s definition, the mimetic representation of slaughter produces fragmentation on two levels: the individual animal body and the systemic processes of slaughter. (To employ different terminology, this form of representation introduces ruptures on the levels of shot composition and of narrative.) Perhaps not surprisingly, the framing and editing choices in This is Hormel typify this twofold segmentation. The film primarily consists of neatly matched series of static, straight-on medium shots, which track increasingly reduced and segmented corporeal forms as they advance through processes of progressive refinement. Medium close-ups of the nascent meat products punctuate the steady tempo of these sequences: a time-lapsed shot presents an instantly smoked ham, still inserts of advertising images display simmering stews and succulent cuts of beef. The film’s insistent compositional segmentation reinforces what surely must have been among Hormel’s aims in commissioning the film: to present slaughter as a

Chaplin Persona” 32–33).

Walter Benjamin reads Chaplin’s movement through space as metonymic of cinematic movement: “Every one of his movements is composed of chopped up bits of motion. Whether you focus on his walk, or the way he handles his little cane or tips his hat—it is always the same jerky succession of tiny movements, which applies the law of filmic sequence to that of human motorics” (qtd. in Mulvey, Death, 177–78).
mechanical marvel—and a remarkably hygienic and efficient one at that. The film’s narrator persistently voices this message, as he emphasizes the highly specialized technology (automated bacon cure injectors, a saran-wrapping machine) to the exclusion of the other entities present in the factory. In this regard, the constant onscreen presence of the diminishing animal bodies and the humans who facilitate the various processes seems almost perfunctory; these animals and humans are the requisite material by-product and expeditors, respectively, of the polished machines.

*This is Hormel*’s uniform framing and editing also consistently enact what Adams calls “body chopping,” a term that aptly evokes the methodical violence performed by the pornographic representational strategies with which she associates it. In her extensive examination of contemporary North American advertising and journalism, Adams demonstrates that many mainstream outlets of visual culture employ this technique to depict women and animals (*Pornography* 74). She argues that the resultant fragmented images of the body serve as “cues for violability.” That is, the visual representation of the body as a series of discrete, chopped up parts invites the spectator to imagine her violation of the parts that appear within the frame, all the while forgetting that those parts constitute an unseen whole (107). As a matter of course, the slaughterhouse aesthetic compositionally cuts up a particular type of body: the living-then-dead animal body. In doing so, it solicits a specific form of violation: consumption. *This is Hormel* proves exceptional in this endeavour, however, as it excises the scene of slaughter—the exact moment of death—from its overview. According to the film’s constructed geography, the kill line is located in a separate, unseen space. The film’s sequential overviews of pork and beef production each begin with carcasses, and thereby suggest that meat production begins with raw, inert material. By divorcing the act of killing from the production of

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86 Adams’s argument resonates with Mulvey’s identification of classical Hollywood film’s penchant for carving up female characters in close-up shots that present them as icons or fetishes (“Visual Pleasure” 715–18), and with Burt’s discussion of fragmenting frame of the slaughterhouse aesthetic.
meat, the film renders consumption—the routinized violation of the animal body—all the more inviting.

This is Hormel sustains its fragmented, mechanical style for its 30-minute duration, as it connects one sequence of disassembly to another. The sequences are grouped according to types of meat (pork, beef, and amalgamations of the two) and, further, according to types of products: ham, bacon, pickled pigs’ feet, gelatin, SPAM; ground beef, cowhides, prime beef cuts; wieners, chili, Dinty Moore stew. This arrangement produces a familiar taxonomy of meat processing; indeed, its internal organization curiously resembles Glass Walls’s inventory of industrial horror, which is organized according to species in a hierarchy of cognitive capacities (first pigs, then cows, chicken, and fish). More significantly, the film’s insistent movement from whole to parts constructs the various processes of meat production as an interminable procession: corpses are skinned, halved, quartered, cut, sliced, ground, emulsified. By aligning itself with the machinery’s relentless reduction of the animals’ bodies, the film affirms the inexorable logic of refinement. Within this logic, the animal body amounts to nothing more than raw material.

Adams’s work on the intersections of gender, meat, and pornography is again apposite. In a recent lecture, she described contemporary advertising’s fondness for images of women adorned with raw meat as indicative of “the resurgence of the raw as

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87 Burt likewise notes the “neat symmetry” with which his exemplars are organized. Meat, for example, extends its first hour to documenting the course cattle travel, from feedlot to transport truck; an Intermission punctuates this footage, and the film then retraces this trajectory, only with sheep (173–74).

88 Lady Gaga’s September 2010 appearance at the MTV Video Music Awards in a gown, boots, a hat, and a purse made of slabs of raw meat presents the most recent and most publicized instance of this trend; the pop star also donned a meat bikini for her cover shoot for the September 2010 issue of Vogue: Hommes Japan. Gaga’s meat couture explicitly recalls Jana Sterbak’s installation “Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic” (1987), in which a live model posed wearing a dress sculpted of skirt steak, as well as Zhang Huang’s performance piece My New York (2002), in which Huang wore a bodysuit tailor-made from fresh cuts of beef as he strolled through post-9/11 New York City, releasing doves from a cage. These artists’ shocking sartorial statements beg to be read as critiques of the ways in which women and, more generally, humans are reduced to “pieces of meat” (whether these they are successful in doing so is a matter of debate). In contrast, the advertisements Adams discusses—print and television ads for beers and barbeque
real (with the raw, there’s always more)” (“Pornography”). Her aside acerbically indicates that rawness connotes plenitude. The mimetic representation of the circular technology of animal disassembly reinforces this suggestion: the “bits” of raw material glide along conveyor belts and across the screen, with no end in sight. Furthermore, as Sobchack and Shukin suggest in their respective reworkings of the structuralist metaphor of the raw, the quality of rawness is also frozen in the future perfect: to be raw is to be not-yet-cooked or, perhaps more accurately, to-be-cooked. In these entwined senses, This is Hormel’s unremitting procession of raw material bespeaks an infinite supply of meat, at the ready for our consumption.

This is Hormel’s sequences seamlessly connect in a coherent expository narrative, yet this narrative is itself presented as discrete. The film brackets its exposition of the inner workings of the Hormel plant within the timeworn frame of a tour: two young brothers, their gee-whiz curiosity piqued by a passing Hormel freight train, are granted a tour of a local plant. The tour, cheerfully conceived, is an orderly narrative that guides the uninitiated across a threshold, and asks him to observe what lies beyond. It is also a detour or diversion into a sphere detached from the tourist’s lived reality. This is

joints, for the most part—uncritically deploy this equation in a bid to appeal to chauvinistic consumer desires.

89 Sobchack directly connects her observations on “raw” footage to Levi-Strauss’s founding articulation of the cooking metaphor in Le Cru et le cuit (The Raw and the Cooked, 1964). In that work, the first of his four-volume Mythologiques, the anthropologist asserts that culture “cooks” or processes “raw” nature. Sobchack insinuates the constructedness of rawness as it obtains in film: “we do tend to experience single-shot and raw, unedited footage as representing the event of death more immediately: as unshaped and uncooked (to use a pertinent metaphor from structuralism)” (256).

For her part, Shukin indicates that “rawness” shares overlapping connotations with facticity, a concept introduced in Chapter One. In her reading of a Maclean’s cover that maps Canadian national identity onto a diagram of a dissected beaver, she asserts that the visual dissection of the animal body codes that body as a fact or specimen. This sort of fragmentation, she argues, confers on the animal body “the raw facticity of the specimen” (3). Her use of “raw” implicitly subverts the structuralist metaphor. In line with Latour and Woolgar, Shukin’s reading stresses that facts and the related quality of facticity are always already cooked; in other words, her reading underscores the processes through which facts are culturally constructed. Attached as it is to “facticity” and “specimen,” Shukin’s reference to rawness speaks directly to the fetishization performed by a scientistic gaze. Yet fragmentation’s connotation of rawness of course also obtains outside the laboratory; indeed, it perhaps coheres most potently in the slaughterhouse, where the animal body is broken down into pieces of raw meat. Latour and Woolgar’s connection (made via Barthes) between facts and fetishes solidifies the resemblances between the terms in question: “(Both fact and fetish share a common etymological origin.) In both cases, a complex variety of processes come into play whereby participants forget that what is ‘out there’ is the product of their own alienated work” (n259).
*Hormel*’s flimsy excursive structure accommodates this dual mandate of instructional observation and self-contained entertainment. Indeed, the film’s title deictically circumscribes its educational and spectacular value; like Roland Barthes’s Photograph, it declares “*that, there it is, lo!* but says nothing else” (*Camera Lucida* 5, original emphasis). The establishing shot that initiates the narrative proper echoes the title’s declaration: tree branches, a narrow bridge, and a small swatch of water picturesquely set off an anonymous industrial facility. To be fair, the film’s reinforcement of the plant’s “sense of separateness” results in large part from the fact that, within the specific industrial conditions of mid-twentieth-century American slaughter, the production of meat was isolated, at least in geographic terms. As the film’s final sequences detail, Hormel’s Austin facility at that time employed a small army of administrative workers, lab technicians, electrical experts, and machinists—in short, an onsite labour force that enabled a certain degree of autonomy. Yet the image of neat self-containment advanced by the film asserts much more than geographic isolation; certainly diverse material relationships constellated around the plant, yet they have all been subsumed in *This is Hormel*’s sanitized tour.\(^90\)

Comparative analysis of *American Dream*, a *cinéma vérité* look at an embittered labour struggle in late-eighties Austin, highlights not only the pervasiveness of the conventions of the slaughterhouse aesthetic, but also the substantive impact that even

\(^{90}\) Hormel maintains this illusion of isolation today. Ted Genoways provides an updated “establishing shot” of the Austin plant and its picturesque surrounds in his 2011 exposé, “The Spam Factory’s Dirty Secret”: “On one bank stands the Hormel plant, with its towering six-story hydrostatic Spam cooker and sprawling fenced compound, encompassing QPP [Quality Pork Processors, Inc., Hormel’s current corporate identity] and shielded from view by a 15-foot-privacy fence. When I asked for a look inside, I got a chipper email from the spokeswoman: ‘They are state of the art facilities (Nothing to be squeamish about!) but media tours are not available.’ On the other bank is the Spam Museum, where former plant workers serve as Spambassadors, and the sanitized history of Hormel unfolds in more than 16,000 square feet of exhibits, artefacts, and tchotchkes” (1). Indeed, following Genoways’s description, it seems that the company has redoubled its efforts to contain its innerworkings and sanitize its image, trading the potentially volatile medium of film for the comparatively stable marketing tool of the company museum and the trusted barrier of the fence. See Genoways’s article for a detailed critique of Hormel’s current (mis)management of labour unions and workers’ health issues.
slight deviations from them can produce. The film’s establishing shot compositionally recalls that of *This is Hormel*: a medium long shot frames the slaughterhouse in silhouette against a purple twilit sky. As before, the shot situates the slaughterhouse as a space that will be revealed to the spectator—and therefore as a space that is separate from her (of course, one could well rejoin that this is the basic mandate of documentary). The muted din of animal squeals overlays the picturesque image, and the shot folds into the introductory sequence. This sequence reads, outwardly, as an abridged tour of the plant and its processes: it follows the sequential movement of the line, tracking the reduction of whole, live pigs into plastic-wrapped strips of bacon and softball-sized lumps of pork. The sequence lasts less than a minute, then cuts abruptly to a black screen, over which a stylized title shot stamps—or, perhaps more accurately, brands—the patriotically rendered words, *American Dream*. The film then enters a montage of televiusal images and sound bites detailing Reagan-era labour politics, and finally turns its full attention to documenting the struggle at Hormel.

*American Dream*’s bracketing of the scene of slaughter within its introductory sequence initially works to support the film’s prioritization of the human struggle for just working conditions. The film positions the sequence in a primary position (it comes first), yet even as it does so it establishes the animals as secondary—or worse, incidental. To put it quite cynically, the sequence’s discrete survey of animal slaughter seems designed to establish at the outset that the human labour at the centre of the ensuing dispute is highly proficient and valuable (i.e., alienated and worth rooting for). Its message reads: you will care about the workers, because here you see their difficult work. In its initial unfolding, then, the opening sequence detaches itself from the film’s diegesis; it becomes

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91 It likewise recalls a haunting introductory image of Packingtown from *The Jungle*: “The line of the buildings stood clear-cut and black against the sky; here and there out of the mass rose the great chimneys, with the river of smoke streaming away to the end of the world. It was a study in colours now, this smoke; in the sunset light it was black and brown and gray and purple. All the sordid suggestions of the place were gone—in the twilight it was a vision of power” (34).
metaphor, a succinct display of evidence that the spectator is to keep in mind. As the film plays out, however, it reintroduces the stark visual facts of slaughter. With no overt explanation or motivation, bits and pieces of graphic footage from inside the plant flash up with irregular frequency. Eleven minutes into the film, an eight-second-long shot of the disassembly line interrupts a series of interviews with various parties of the labour dispute; the shot frames an expressionless worker as he severs the necks of suspended pigs, and then pulls back to show the unending looped line of drawn bodies. At the 33-minute mark, an equally brief sequence connects a shot of the plant’s parking lot to one of workers passing cuts of meat down a conveyor belt; these shots bleed into slightly dated footage of a similar operation taken from Hormel. These flashes or fragments are diegetic yet only tenuously tethered to the narrative, and their insertion in the film intermittently reminds the spectator of the bloody site from which the labour controversy emanates. Through them, the film initiates a potent critique of the conditions that prop up slaughter. One could even argue that it stages the sort of suppression so evident in films like This is Hormel, precisely in order to lay bare the messy social, political, and economic relationships seething beneath the surface of slaughter.

Yet if American Dream introduces these connections, it refrains from rooting them in any substantive questioning of slaughter’s place in the dreamwork of America. It is difficult to fault the film for falling short here; it is, after all, unabashedly concerned with the human component of slaughter. Curiously, though, the film’s emphasis on the human actors is precisely what interrupts its outwardly “static aesthetic frame.” That is, the film’s particular anthropocentrism obliges it to deviate from the aseptic, fetishizing conventions of the slaughterhouse aesthetic. Here it is necessary to loop back to the introductory sequence, and to look more closely at its attention to the human hands that animate the process of slaughter. Capturing the forceful, dexterous movements of these
hands requires a fair amount of camera movement: the minute-long sequence contains slightly unstable handheld footage, several zooms, a vertical tracking shot that cuts against the conventional horizontal axis of slaughter, and a disorienting swish pan. The sequence’s attention to the hands—and the disordered movements such attention necessitates—shows up the sinister intimacy that the labour of slaughter requires; these hands do not impassively convey the raw material forward, but rather drive the bolt stunner into the pigs’ shoulders and wrestle with flesh that does not slide easily off the bone. The soundtrack likewise adheres to the conventional sequence of slaughter, but the rapid succession of noises effects an eerie superimposition—a kind of aural flattening: the pigs’ squeals are muffled by the grinding wail of the chainsaw and the metallic whetting of a knife, and then by the crisp crease of wax wrapping paper.

In sum, the sequence participates in the slaughterhouse aesthetic, but in such a way that it disallows the spectator’s adoption of a “dispassionate gaze.” Its distinctly unsettling quality derives from its disruption of procedure. The sequence’s blunt depiction of the breaking down of animal bodies resists easy alignment with the filmstrip’s systematic dismantling of space and time into ordered frames. The sequence follows the incremental logic of slaughter (whole to part), yet the violence of each discrete task overwhelms any potential sense of progression. To make a convenient

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92 These shots underscore the obdurate, idiosyncratic fleshiness of the animals, the manipulation of which often requires the dexterity and responsiveness of human hands. In his otherwise triumphalist chronicle of the changing dynamics of modern meat production in America, Horowitz repeatedly falters on this singular quality. Indeed, his account establishes the intransigent materiality of the animal body as the lone factor that has frustrated—and will likely continue to obstruct—the full mechanization of slaughter. He asserts, “animals’ bodies resist becoming an expression of our will. To this day the meat industry remains tethered to a natural product, hemmed in and constrained by the special feature of its source. The dilemma of a meat-eating nation is that meat comes in irregular sizes and begins to deteriorate the instant its vessel, the animal, is killed” (Putting Meat on the American Table, 2). William Cronon makes a similar conjecture, but in the historical context of Packingtown: “Chicago would go much further [than Cincinnati] with mechanization, but ultimately the organic irregularities that make each animal unique also made human eyes and human hands indispensable for most of the packing process” (229). Brantz echoes his claim, “The disassembly-style production enabled the stunning mechanization of slaughter, but it could not supplant manual labor completely. The individuality of animal bodies prevented the standardization of slaughter, which up to this day—despite technological sophistication—still often requires the human hand and its flexibility with a knife” (“Recollecting” 121). By calling attention to the ways in which meat gets in the way of making meat, these authors underscore the peculiar status of animals as objects of mass production.
comparison: whereas *This is Hormel’s* sequential presentation of animal disassembly slides across the screen as an uninterrupted procession of fleshy material, *American Dream’s* stutters forth as an accretion of shocking assaults on living-then-dead bodies. A perhaps obvious but no less significant distinction is here in order: slaughter differs from other modes of mechanized, mass production in its procedural trajectory (it *disassembles* rather than *assembles*), and also in what it processes—living-then-dead bodies.\(^93\) It strikes me that, in documenting slaughter, filmmakers have at their disposal a range of techniques that can alternately efface or emphasise the process’ stark singularities. *American Dream’s* introductory sequence clearly works toward the latter; its formal qualities brush against the smooth succession of mechanical disassembly, reminding the spectator of the material bodies from which meat derives. Its representation of animal slaughter does not achieve the sort of ethical engagement that I will describe in Chapter Four, but it is at least unnerving.

VI. The Sound of Slaughter

The slaughterhouse aesthetic has becomes so entrenched in contemporary visual culture that it now serves as the stuff of parody. The American fast-food burrito chain Chipotle, for example, recently disseminated a stop-motion animated video, titled “Back to the Start,” advertising its corporate philosophy of “food with integrity.”\(^94\) The advertisement doubles as a music video for Willie Nelson’s cover of the band Coldplay’s song “Back to the Start,” the lyrics of which climb from plaintive to exultant. The video begins with an idyllic scene of a family on their small farm, complete with chirping birds and snorting pigs. A panoptic tracking shot steadily charts the process by which the basic

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93 Shukin insists on this procedural distinction (93), as does the documentary *Slaughterhouse: The Task of Blood*.

94 The video appears on the company’s website (www.chipotle.com) and on *YouTube*, where, as of May 2012, it had been viewed over six million times. It was broadcast as a commercial during the 2012 Grammy Awards Show and ran as a pre-film commercial in American movie theatres in the spring of 2012.
accoutrements of their husbandry multiply into the convoluted infrastructure of intensive factory farming (silos, feedlots). The camera assumes a rigid horizontal movement and tightened frame as it passes over the sprawling processing plant—a move that highlights the need for greater control when composing the scene of animal disassembly—and then opens up slightly to follow the farmer-father as he contemplates the by-products of this intensive industrialisation (caged animals, toxic sludge). To signal the farmer’s—and Chipotle’s—rejection of this new, brutal regime, Nelson belts out “I’m going back to the start,” and the camera trades its fixed horizontal track for a more mobile perspective. Adopting a fluid, zigzagging movement, the video concludes with the farmer dismantling the walls and fences of his industrialised farm, and returning to green, open pastures. The song fades out to the chirping of birds and the snuffle of a pig.

Long before Chipotle appropriated the conventions of the slaughterhouse aesthetic, the popular television cartoon *The Simpsons*—perhaps the one show in television history that has consistently engaged with the ethics of eating meat—submitted them to parody. In “Lisa the Vegetarian,” an episode that originally aired in 1995, Principal Skinner shows an educational film titled *Meat and You: Partners in Freedom* after Lisa asserts her newly adopted vegetarian politics in the classroom. Presented by “The Meat Council” and tagged “Number 3703 in the ‘Resistance is Futile’ Series,” this cartoon mockumentary parodies the conventions of mid-century industrial/educational films like *This is Hormel*. Troy McClure, a cowboy turned educational film narrator, guides an inquisitive boy named Jimmy through the process of meat production. Their tour of a hyper-generic meat-processing facility conforms to the slaughterhouse aesthetic: it is shot in familiar tracking shots and proceeds along the conventional trajectory, beginning in a high-density feedlot and ending with a delivery truck brimming with processed beef. Yet *Meat and You* outdoes the anesthetized educational films it parodies,
glossing over the interior space of animal slaughter and disassembly entirely. When McClure guides Jimmy inside the facility to see the killing floor (which, he reassures the boy, “is more of a steel grating that allows material to sluice through so it can be collected and exported”), the camera remains outside. An exterior tracking shot suggests their movement through the line, but offers no visible proof of what the two see. The grisly nature of what occurs inside the plant is evidenced only by Jimmy’s ashen face upon exiting and the sound that accompanies the exterior tracking shot. A fusion of panicked moos and wet squishy noises, this auditory confirmation of the unseen killing floor is at once comical and unsettling.

*Meat and You* thus expertly parodies the way in which films styled in the slaughterhouse aesthetic proclaim to “show” everything but, in effect, tell us nothing. The exterior tracking shot of the slaughter plant’s façade falsely promises to grant visual access to the scene of slaughter; it is synched, however, to a mix of sounds that, within the diegetic world of this cartoon-within-a-cartoon, index the living-then-dead bodies inside. Amid the lurid, postmodern pastiche of *The Simpsons*, this bit of sound is but another darkly comedic effect. Yet even as it pokes fun at the hyper-efficiency of the modern meat industry, this condensed cacophony of frightened moos and “sluiced material” unnervingly insists on the unremitting material logic that grinds animals into meat. In this way, *Meat and You*’s brief treatment of the noises of the killing floor points to sound’s status as a particularly unstable formal element in the tradition of slaughterhouse films.

In Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906), the guide who introduces the characters to the Chicago slaughterhouse where they will soon toil famously quips, “they use everything about the hog except the squeal” (38). His observation identifies the animal sounds of slaughter as uniquely resistant to the meat industry’s unyielding drive to extract
use and/or exchange value from every last scrap of animal material and human labour. The presumed uselessness of such sounds is not entirely true: the sounds produced by animals being slaughtered—or by those awaiting slaughter—were integral to the thriving trade in slaughter as spectacle in nineteenth-century slaughterhouse tourism (a point I return to in the following section). Continuing in this tradition of gory spectacle, horror films such as The Exorcist (William Friedkin, 1973) and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Tobe Hooper, 1974) mix sounds sourced from slaughterhouses to heighten thrilling scenes of carnage. Yet if the squeals, cries, moans, shrieks, and bleats occasioned by slaughter promise to titillate spectators, they also threaten to appal, to repulse, to sicken, and to sadden. It is not just that sound excites the spectator’s affect in unpredictable ways, but also that the spectator often cannot modulate its length or intensity; as Sontag points outs, “sight can be turned off (we have lids on our eyes, we do not have doors on our ears)” (118). It would be more precise to say, then, that the sounds of slaughter are indeed “useful” (insofar as use is allowed an affective utility), yet these sounds are not as easily framed and instrumentalized as are images of slaughter.

The instability—and therefore the potency—of the animal sounds of slaughter are bound up with questions of verisimilitude and with animals’ particular physiognomy of suffering. These connections crystallize when we consider the sound of slaughterhouse films in dialogue with Linda Williams’s discussion of the function of sound in hardcore pornography. Much like the cinematographic and editing strategies of the slaughterhouse aesthetic, this type of pornography is organized, according to Williams, around “the principle of maximum visibility” (53). She further defines this genre in contradistinction to its softcore counterpart: a hardcore pornographic film or video “tries not to play

95 To be sure, at-home viewing technology frees the spectator from the compulsion to listen that operates on spectators in movie theatres (or, for that matter, on slaughterhouse tours). Speaking from my personal experience of viewing and reviewing the films in this dissertation, I hit the mute button far more frequently than I shut my eyes.
peekaboo with either its male or its female bodies. It obsessively seeks knowledge, through a voyeuristic record of confessional, involuntary paroxysm, of the ‘thing’ itself” (49). The correspondences between hardcore’s pursuit of the “thing”—that is, of visual evidence of sexual pleasure—and the way in which cinema, as I show in Chapter One, strives to index the “exact moment of death” are striking; most notably, these two efforts to document events that are always already elusive (if not invisible) are articulated according to a shared logic of supplementarity.

According to the evolutionary history William elaborates, the object of hardcore’s gaze is, increasingly, not just sexual pleasure but the precise moment of its climax—that is, of orgasm. The genre has developed conventions for fixing this revelatory moment: namely (and quite evocatively, given the subject of this dissertation), these include the “meat shot,” which is a close-up shot of penetration that verifies that an unsimulated sexual act is ongoing, and the “money shot,” which is industry jargon for a shot, usually a close-up, of a penis externally (i.e., visibly) ejaculating (72–73). Williams points out that meat and money shots can only deliver so much visible proof or knowledge: the former confirms that sex is happening (but only suggests that pleasure is being had), while the latter evidences male pleasure. As she pithily puts it, “knowledge of the hydraulics of male ejaculation, […] though certainly of interest, is a poor substitute for the knowledge of female wonders that the genre as a whole still seeks” (94). Compared to the external, visible transformations (erection, ejaculation) that unmistakeably index male pleasure, female pleasure remains elusive and even invisible. Williams thus conjectures that hardcore pornography charges the soundtrack with supplementing the proof of female pleasure: “in the sexual numbers a dubbed-over ‘disembodied’ female voice (saying ‘ooh’ and ‘aah’) may stand as the most prominent signifier of female pleasure in the absence of
other, more visual assurances.” That is, the “articulate and inarticulate […] cries of women” stand in as evidence of their otherwise unrepresentable pleasure (122–23).

William’s argument resonates with the supplemental logic I trace out in Chapter One. I argue there that social and material conditions prevent cinema from documenting real human death, and the medium in turn relies on animal bodies to register visible evidence of death—or at least of the bodily transformation it enacts. I contend that this displacement from humans to animals does not yield the definitive knowledge of death that it promises; reviewing scenes of animal death, we acquire no real knowledge of the “fact” of death, but rather approach an understanding that we share death—finitude, vulnerability, suffering—with animals. Williams likewise argues that the hardcore film’s displacement of its fact-finding mission from the image to the soundtrack never really turns up evidence of female pleasure. In discussions of mainstream narrative film, the advent of sound in cinema is often historicized as an innovation that aids realism, “bolster[ing] the diegetic illusion of an imaginary space-time and the human body’s place within it” (122). As in mainstream feature films, the inclusion of sound in hardcore films does heighten the “realist effect,” but with a crucial difference: sound in hardcore films is typically recorded asynchronously—before or after the images are recorded, in a studio separate from the set—using microphones placed close to (or even taped on to) the actors’ bodies, and then dubbed over the image track (123). The effects of this process are twofold: the proximity of the microphones to the sound-emitting bodies achieves “an effect of closeness and intimacy” (frequently at the cost of the spatial reality that sound otherwise effects); and the post-dubbing process allows for imperfect sound-image synchronicity, such as scenes in which characters’ voices do not match the movement of their lips. With these effects in mind, Williams remarks that the sometimes “surreal” sounds of pleasure in hardcore film “seem almost to flout the realist function of anchoring
body to image, halfway becoming aural fetishes of the female pleasures we cannot see” (122–24). The adverb “halfway” is crucial: the sound of hardcore only pretends to evidence female pleasure—“to offer the ‘spectacular’ aural equivalent of the close-ups of ‘meat’ and ‘money.’” In effect, “the aural ‘ejaculation’ of pleasure, especially in post-synchronized sound, gives none of the same guarantee of truth that the visual ejaculation does” (124–25). As Williams goes on to argue, the hardcore film continues to invest in the soundtrack, not for its power to augment realism (and in spite of the production processes that prevent the genre from doing exactly that), but for its power to surround the spectator in sounds of pleasure and thereby to augment “the hard-core auditor-viewer’s pleasure in sound” (125).

By way of their connections with the argument advanced in Chapter One, the supplementary relationships Williams identifies in hardcore pornography bear productively on the present discussion of sound and the slaughterhouse aesthetic. Sound, she explains, does not accede to easy analogy with the evidentiary frame of the image track, in hardcore films or in any other mode or genre. The discrete unity of the shot and the linear sequentiality of the image track—the two cinematic properties central to Chapter One’s discussion of the re/presentation of animal death—possess no analogue in the realm of sound. As Williams points out, the production and experience of cinematic images and sounds are incommensurate. Whereas images can be “framed” (isolated and scrutinized), sound cannot be sectioned off into discrete parts; as Mary Ann Doane observes, it “envelops the spectator” (qtd. in Williams 125, original emphasis). In the case of hardcore, the close microphones used in post-dubbing intensify the spectator’s sense of envelopment and incite “a sense of connectedness with the sounds they hear” (124–25).

Sound’s capacity to bring the spectator into proximity with the images onscreen certainly holds the potential to disrupt the fetishizing frame of the slaughterhouse
aesthetic and to unnerve the spectator. For this reason, the inclusion or exclusion of the
direct animal sounds of slaughter in films that treat the slaughterhouse has significant
political and ethical stakes. My preceding account of the cartoon renderings of the
slaughterhouse aesthetic clearly (if somewhat simplistically) suggests that the decision to
include—and, moreover, to mute or to amplify—the sounds of slaughter has ideological
implications. Chipotle’s “Back to the Start” not only silences slaughter, but also brackets
it with bucolic farmyard sounds; this aural whitewashing contributes to the
advertisement’s message that the meat industry can be made more pleasant. Meanwhile,
*The Simpsons’ Meats and You* condenses the before-and-after sounds of slaughter into a
compact din that satirizes the meat industry’s “sluicing” of animal bodies. Yet in its
inclusion of this bit of sound, the mockumentary momentarily veers from the stable
ground of cartoon parody and opens up to a more affectively charged response (the same
can be said of *American Dream*, the opening sequence of which also distils the aural
effects of slaughter into a potent concentrate).

As with the gendered visibility of pleasure that Williams discusses, the affective
potency of the sounds of animal slaughter derives, in large part, from the sense that we
cannot really see animals’ pain and suffering. To be sure, animal bodies visibly register,
often in very demonstrative ways, the physical and psychological trauma of being killed
and slaughtered: they shake, convulse, flail, thrash, and fall in pain. Yet whereas we
immediately recognize these movements as bodily signifiers of pain (and, indeed, of
resistance to its infliction), we perceive animals’ facial expressions of suffering as
unfamiliar and even illegible. The grimaces and facial contortions of animals in pain are
typically viewed as, at worst, mere physical reactions to stimuli and, at best, as possessing
a depth and specificity that is always already inaccessible to humans. Yet if the animal
physiognomy of suffering is easily dismissed as unimportant in its superficial physicality
or illegible in its profound alterity, the animal sounds of pain and suffering—the “voices” of animals dying—are comparatively difficult to ignore. In this way, the sound of slaughter stands to supplement—that is, to add to and to supplant—the image track’s evidence of animal disassembly.

To further illustrate this supplemental logic, I conclude this section by returning to *The Cove*, a film I discuss in detail in the Introduction. In his onscreen narration, Psihoyos explains that the success of his film’s mission to expose and stop the slaughter of dolphins depends on the crew’s ability to reveal more than the visual field:

I wanted to have a three-dimensional experience of what’s going on in that lagoon. I wanted to hear everything that the dolphins were doing, everything that the whalers were saying. The effort wasn’t just to show the slaughter. You want to capture something that will make people change.

This “something” is of course the aural experience of slaughter in the cove, which the film records using state-of-the-art, high-fidelity sound technology. In line with Williams’s reasoning, Psihoyos’s statement indicates that the film’s recourse to the sonic registers of slaughter is intended to augment the reality of the gruesome visual scene of the cove. Yet, as with all supplements, this aural evidence comes to supplant the visual footage.

Psihoyos and his team invest so heavily in sound not only because the sounds of animal suffering and death are, in general, affectively powerful, but also because the sounds that live, healthy dolphins make are considered to be markers of their intelligence, self-awareness, and sociality—in short, of all the qualities that, according to *The Cove*, make killing dolphins an unpardonable offence.96 The film’s reliance on sound as an

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96 As with other cetaceans, dolphins are “acoustic creatures”: their primary sensuous experience of the world is aural, and they communicate with one another in language that is audible at extreme distances. Psihoyos rhetorically aligns *The Cove*’s attention to dolphins’ verbal language (i.e., to their intelligence) with biologist Roger Payne’s 1967 discovery and dissemination of the singing of humpback whales. Following Psihoyos’ declaration of his commitment to aural fidelity, there is a cut to archival footage of protesters in Trafalgar Square in 1971, listening to a recording of humpback whales. Psihoyos explains, “In
index of dolphin’s intelligence and sociality—in other words, of their consciousness and therefore their right to life—ups the affective intensity of the sounds it reproduces of their agonizing death. Psihoyos also stages, within the film itself, the profoundly unsettling experience of hearing dolphins about to die. As I explain in the Introduction, in a scene midway through the film, Psihoyos, O’Barry, and several other crewmembers retire to a hotel room to “process” the footage they have lifted from the cove. The film locates them in a circle around a laptop computer, out of which streams the recorded sound of the dolphins fearfully communicating with one another in the moments leading up to their slaughter. We hear these chilling sounds, and we hear and see the crew’s disturbed response to listening to them. O’Barry remarks to his colleagues, “that’s an eerie sound, isn’t it? The dolphins we’re hearing now are all dead. Tomorrow there will be another group replacing them.” Speaking from my own experience, viewing/hearing this scene—which takes place in an aseptic, white-walled hotel room—proves far more unnerving than watching the subsequent footage of carnage in the blood-soaked lagoon. As Williams observes of sound in hardcore films, the sounds of the dolphins’ panicked chirrups evoke an immediacy and proximity that the later, visually oriented scenes lack. To be sure, this immediacy is driven by the film’s anthropomorphic treatment of dolphin communication; knowing what the film has told me about the language of cetaceans, I hear these sounds not as inarticulate cries of fear but as the dolphins’ desperate attempt to crowd source an explanation of—and a plan of escape from—the suddenly altered cove. The enveloping quality of these haunting sounds is amplified by the diver’s comment that the dolphins’ verbal response to death stands to be unceasingly reiterated. For the diver, the possibility that these sounds could resonate in perpetuity—that the same sounds of

the 1960s with the IWC wasn’t doing anything about the slaughter of large whales, there was one guy, Roger Payne, who helped start the whole save-the-whale movement by exposing to the world that these animals were singing. That was profound.”
terror could be produced by different actors again and again—is intolerable. Given sound’s unsettling supplemental logic, it may well prove unbearable for the spectator, too.

VII. The Slaughterhouse as a Site of Proto-Cinematic Spectatorship

In setting slaughter apart, the slaughterhouse aesthetic adheres to the conventions established by its nineteenth-century antecedent, slaughterhouse touring. Touring slaughterhouses may sound like a macabre Victorian eccentricity, yet recent scholarship on the practice effectively locates it as constitutive of the development of modern forms of spectacular consumption. Much of this work echoes Jane Giles’s attribution of the twentieth-century demand for filmic slaughter to the public’s taste for “images of unfaked visual horror” (42). Dorothee Brantz wagers, “Before there were theme parks and movie theatres, people flocked to slaughterhouses in order to quench their thirst for thrills derived from horror” (“Recollecting” 118). Roger Horowitz likewise remarks, “There’s a little of that amusement park horror. It’s the same impulse that pushes people to see scary movies. People would go, see their gore. And then they would go home and eat a steak” (“Holiday at the Abattoir” 14). The explanation of slaughterhouse tourism as a vehicle for visual horror tells only part of the story; the sense of disconnect built into the spectacle may have enabled tourists to follow their entertainment with a steak dinner, but so too did the numerous ways in which the tours instructed them that cows are, to recall Diamond’s words, “something to eat.” To phrase it more directly, the ostensibly morbid practice of slaughterhouse tourism also articulated pedagogic and consumerist functions, which were in dialogue—and sometimes at odds—with one another and with the overarching aim of spectacle. This practice’s significant intersections with cinematic representation demand, at the very least, an abbreviated examination. The following analysis highlights the framing strategies at work in two significant nineteenth-century cities: Paris, the
metropolis that perhaps most acutely demonstrates slaughter’s dislocation in modernity, and Chicago, a burgeoning industrial zone that popularized slaughterhouse tourism. Moving between formal and historical registers, I loosely connect these framing strategies to the cinematic techniques of the slaughterhouse aesthetic.

The very existence of the modern industrial apparatus of the slaughterhouse speaks to the need to edit or even to censure the public’s engagement with slaughter. The relocation of the unpleasant business of animal butchery to suburban abattoirs was integral to Napoleon’s reorganization of Paris and, to an even greater extent, to Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s radical streamlining of the city in the 1860s. The Baron considered his design of La Villette, a complex of abattoirs and markets crisscrossed by railroads, rivers, and bridges, to be among “the most considerable works accomplished by [his] administration” (Brantz “Recollecting,” 119).97 The reformation and relocation of slaughter came at enormous effort and expense in Paris, as it required the disturbance of existing infrastructure; other European cities such as London and Berlin faced similar obstacles, yet they adhered closely to the successful model set by Paris (ibid. 119–121). Chicago, meanwhile, emerged as America’s slaughter capital thanks largely to its relative inchoateness. The Midwestern metropolis only began to come into its own in the 1830s, and was thus able to allocate a secluded district to meat production. Packingtown was strategically “located six miles southwest of the downtown and isolated from adjacent neighbourhoods by polluted streams and acres of railroad tracks” (Horowitz, Meat, 50).98 Geographical segregation is integral to slaughter’s industrialization; that is, the move to physically isolate the practice is bound up with the material needs of large-scale

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97 A curious side note: the abattoirs of La Villette were dismantled in 1974 and, between 1984–87, the former space of slaughter was rebuilt as La Parc de la Villette. The park’s architect, Bernard Tschumi, was heavily influenced by Derrida and sought the philosopher’s input for his Deconstructivist designs.

98 Size, age, geography, and existent infrastructure prevented America’s other slaughter cities, New York and Cincinnati, from sequestering slaughter. According to Horowitz, these cities’ residents and visitors were perpetually “dismayed by the omnipresent meat industry” (50).
industrialization—namely, sufficient space for large buildings and feedlots, and access to water and transportation lines (Horowitz, *Meat*, chapter two). Yet this move was also, in part, a response to a societal push to expunge the unclean by-products—namely, the abject sight—of back-alley butchery from the environs of daily life. As Brantz explains, appeals to public hygiene also helped to push slaughter to the city’s periphery. The promotion of sanitation regulations exerted a substantive influence on “evolving conceptions of urban space,” and it did so by “advocating a peculiar mix of morality, social welfare, and environmental control” (“Recollecting” 119).  

Two somewhat incongruous hypotheses follow from the preceding description of slaughter’s dislocation in modernity. One: slaughter could only become a thrilling spectacle once it was divorced from quotidian reality. Two: the integrality of a moralizing or sanitizing influence among the multiple forces that contributed to the industry’s exile disproves the notion that the tourist economy burgeoning within suburban slaughterhouses was fuelled exclusively by horrific spectacle. Shukin points out, after all, that the goal of this auxiliary economy, from the industry’s point of view, was to “persuade a nation to desire meat as a regular part of its diet” (96). In his overview of modern American meat consumption, Horowitz nuances this claim: through site tours and other advertorial measures, he explains, the industry aimed to train the public, which for the most part already consumed meat on a daily basis, to desire specific cuts, brands, and types of meat; it also sought to impress the public with its sanitary, efficient, and modern modes of production and packaging (*Meat*, chapter one). I bring these two hypotheses together in order to situate the modern American public’s ocular fascination with slaughter within a thickened frame: slaughterhouse tours at once worked according to the

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99 Brantz explains elsewhere, “To accommodate the changing notions of civilised life and to facilitate mass production, reformers throughout Europe called for the establishment of public slaughterhouses located in the industrial outskirts of the city, and hidden from public view.” Among the cities that ceded to this demand were Paris (1818), Vienna (1851), Brussels (1865), and Berlin (1881) (“Stunning Bodies” 169, n7).
logic of disassociation that accurs to any spectacle, and catered to spectators’ often competing senses of horror, curiosity, marvel, and consumer desire. Within this intentionally porous frame, it is possible to distinguish several precise ways in which slaughterhouse tours framed the spectacle of animal disassembly.

To do so, it is necessary to bring in Shukin’s remarkable reading of slaughter tourism as a mode of protocinematic spectatorship. Riffing on the vivid language of The Jungle, Shukin challenges Sinclair’s aforementioned admonishment that modern meatpackers “use everything about the hog except the squeal”:

Chicago’s stockyards […] revolved not only around the rationalized reduction of animals to meat and the myriad commodities rendered from animal remains but around a supplementary economy of aesthetic consumption built into the line, with the kill floor doubling as a “circus amphitheatre” where the raw footage of the “slaughtering machine” rushed at a staggering pace past visitors. Moreover, tours of slaughterhouses involved much more than the visual consumption of the commotion of slaughter. The stockyards were also an overwhelming olfactory and auditory theatre, filled with the “sickening stench” of blood and the death cries of animals. (95; Shukin cites the New American Library edition of The Jungle [New York, 1960])

In her analysis, Chicago slaughterhouses rendered\(^{100}\)—that is, trimmed off and recycled—the visual, aural, and olfactory by-products of animal slaughter, and sold them

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\(^{100}\) Here I cannot resist recapitulating one of Shukin’s central moves in Animal Capital: to mine the incongruous polysemy of rendering and to explore the relationship between its two most common definitions: “the mimetic act of making a copy,” and “the industrial boiling down and recycling of animal remains” (20). She affirms that the duality housed in rendering is “deeply suggestive of the complicity of ‘the arts’ and ‘industry’ in the conditions of possibility of capitalism”; indeed, it poses “a provocation to analyze the discomfiting complicity of symbolic and carnal technologies of reproduction” (20–21). To note just one apposite example of Shukin’s articulation of this complicity: when Chicago hosted the World Columbian Exhibition in 1893, more people (around one million) visited Chicago’s Packington than the official attractions of “the White City” (93). She unpacks this ostensibly coincidental convergence, noting the presence of various photographic and pre-cinematic technologies on prominent display at the former: Muybridge’s zoopraxiscope, George Eastman’s portable Kodak camera, Edison’s Kinetoscope, and flexible
back to spectators in the form of guided tours that were at once exciting and educational. These tours sought to contain the stomach-turning excess of animals’ screams and smells, and to foreground the strikingly mobile images of animal disassembly. In doing so, Shukin argues, they primed viewers for “new modes of visual consumption” (93). Here she aligns her argument with Lynne Kirby’s contention that the railroad, another nineteenth-century technology bound up with the invention of cinema, contributed heavily to the formation of “a subject invested in the consumption of images and motion—that is, physical displacement—for entertainment” (8; qtd. in Shukin, 100). Drawing a compelling framework of formal analogies and historical connections, she asserts, “animals hoisted onto moving overhead tracks and sped down the disassembly line constituted one of North America’s first ‘moving pictures’” (92).

Shukin describes this moving picture as unfolding “raw footage” at a “staggering pace,” yet she also clearly indicates that tour operators carefully framed and edited the tours, with specific attention to the tourists’ affective and sensorial experiences. She explains that “the business of slaughterhouse touring promised significant returns,” yet, as The Jungle’s incendiary effect proved, it was “a risky business, one that meatpackers needed to mimetically manage in order for the affective surplus of animal disassembly to be converted into capital rather than into political agitation of the sort inspired by Sinclair’s novel” (95). Perhaps not surprisingly, the meatpackers’ strategies of “mimetic

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film (93). According to Shukin, this is no happenstance, but rather a charged moment that is indicative of the uncanny proximity of “the seemingly incommensurable (yet arguably supplementary) practices” denoted by the word rendering (20).

It is also worth noting that rendering comes from the old French rendre, “to give back” (Shukin 20). As I previously argued of abattoir, the word owes its survival in modern usage to slaughter’s ambivalent relationship to euphemism.

101 To thicken the parallels, it is worth noting that Shukin situates her account as a Foucauldian excavation of the slaughterhouse’s connections to the automobile assembly line. Noting Henry Ford’s acknowledgement of his line’s indebtedness to the disassembly lines of Packingtown, she asserts that the auto line is “mimetically premised on the ulterior logistics of animal disassembly [which] it technologically replicates and advantageously forgets in a telling moment of historical amnesia” (87). Ford’s slaughter-influenced assembly line is regularly cited as having served as a model of efficiency for the Holocaust. It is with this connection in mind that J.M. Coetzee’s Elizabeth Costello asserts, “Chicago showed us the way; it was from the Chicago stockyards that the Nazis learned how to process bodies” (Elizabeth Costello 97).
management” bear striking resemblances to the conventions of the slaughterhouse aesthetic detailed above. Mapping cinematic language onto Shukin’s analysis, their strategies likewise express a preoccupation with managing spectatorial identification, and they articulate this concern through attention to the entwined issues of perspective and process.

In regard to perspective, Shukin emphasizes the guided nature of slaughterhouse tours. As evidence of their rather obvious overtures at instruction, she offers Swift and Company’s 1903 Visitor’s Reference Book, an advertorial pamphlet given tourists upon completion of the tour. This textual supplement renders the tour in the crisp, clean lines proper to elementary school textbooks, and employs as its animated/animating narrator a spruce white girl. Shukin contends that the pamphlet’s “designers intuitively chose to recapitulate the tour through the eyes of a little white girl no older than six or seven years old. […] She models the proper response to slaughter, one that [they] may at some level have cannily understood becomes more difficult to recognize as pathological or sadistic when embodied by a little girl” (96–97). Industrial films like This Is Hormel can be said to replicate, and even to replace, the experience of slaughterhouse tourism. In Furtney’s film, the delegation of the earnest, inquisitive brothers and their obliging Pa as surrogate tourists duplicates Swift and Company’s decision to frame the tour from the point of view of a cheerful, curious child. In both the brochure and the film, moreover, the careful choice of guides demonstrates an awareness of the need to anchor the potentially overwhelming sight of slaughter in an identifiable, individualized gaze. Comparative recourse to American Dream shows this exercise of control in relief: in keeping with its observational stance, the film’s introductory scene of slaughter does not invest in an onscreen gaze, and it thereby prevents the spectator from aligning (much less modeling) his response with that of diegetic witnesses (this refusal of perspective is, I think, integral
to the film’s unnerving potential). The conscientious cueing of curiosity evident in the Swift pamphlet and *This is Hormel* exert a much greater degree of control on the spectator’s affective response to slaughter.

Shukin’s discerning decoding of the race politics inscribed by the Swift pamphlet’s choice of girl-guide points to the myriad ways in which slaughterhouse tourism managed a complex web of profoundly asymmetrical race, class, and gender relationships. I discuss these constraints in greater detail in Chapter Four’s analysis of *Killer of Sheep*, yet it bears remarking here on one of the tours’ more extreme strategies for framing race. According to Horowitz, sliced bacon today partially owes its normacy to slaughterhouse tourism:

Sliced-bacon departments were created in the 1910s […] in part as a site for tourism. They would glass-in the walls and hire only white, native-born women for that department. There’s no blood with bacon. It’s cured and dried and cut already, so it looks really clean. It was a sign of the changing nature of the tours—this increasing idea that slaughterhouses should actually look clean and bloodless. […] The subtext in how these slaughterhouses were presented on tours was “There are no black hands touching the meat.” But of course there were all kinds of black hands touching the meat—that was just happening in other parts of the slaughterhouse. (“Holiday” 14)

In other words, sliced bacon does not derive exclusively, as one might expect, from a consumer demand for uniform pieces of cured pork (or from the supplier’s creation of such a demand), but rather in conjunction with the industry’s realization that it could profitably dovetail production and advertising needs in the “clean, well-lit rooms in which neatly dressed white women performed their tasks while seated comfortably at long tables” (Horowitz, *Meat* 68). Horowitz’s story of sliced bacon is remarkable in that it
identifies slaughterhouse tourism not merely as a supplementary economy that re/presented slaughter, but as an apparatus that exerted a substantial influence on the industry of slaughter. In short, it demonstrates that the tours’ framing strategies not only trimmed off slaughter’s affective surpluses, but also shaped its procedural means and ends.

The entwined issues of perspective and process coalesce in the tours’ management of what we might call the syntax of slaughter. As I have repeatedly noted, slaughterhouse tours and the subsequent cinematic conventions of the slaughterhouse aesthetic adhere to the sequential nature of slaughter. Shukin intimates that this basic structuring principle—the decision to align tourists’ trajectories with that of the animals being slaughtered—proved to be among the tours’ most fundamental means of “mimetic management.” While this alignment seems only obvious (indeed, natural), Shukin points out that it was also risky: the tours’ construction of a “parallel path of tour-goers and animals” invited the same sort of “mimetic identification of human and animal” that caused such an outraged, affective outpouring to *The Jungle*. Yet if the tourists’ ambulatory tracking of the successive dismemberment of one animal (one individual in an endless succession of members of the same species) threatened an unsettling identification, Shukin suggests we consider the potentially more disconcerting alternative: witnessing the reconstitution of bits of meat into whole animals.

She elaborates her hypothesis based on Vialles’s observation that “seeing round an abattoir in the opposite direction would be like watching a film backwards; it would mean reconstituting the animal from the starting point of the carcass, and that would be at

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102 This influence carries over into the framing strategies that structure the retail of meat. To note just one connection, consider the importance of refrigerated glass display cases, which became indispensable soon after their introduction in the early 1900s. Horowitz refers to an industry catalogue’s exhortation that meat retailers adopt the use of such cases: “Your customers are the same people that buy from department stores. They like to window shop, and are influenced by what they see” (*Meat* 35).
least equally disturbing” (53–54). It so happens that cinema has realized such a moment. In *Kino-Eye*, the Soviet director Dziga Vertov uses reverse motion to show the unsimulated un-slaughtering of a bull, as well as the un-doing of numerous other quotidian events: the un-diving of a swimmer, the un-baking of bread. Vertov’s realisation of Vialles’s imagined scene of slaughter on rewind is, indeed, substantially more unnerving than any of the procedurally sequential representations of slaughter discussed here, and I return to it in Chapter Four. Yet in order to fully appreciate Vertov’s reconstitution of a bull, it is first necessary to examine Eisenstein’s contemporaneous dismemberment of a member of the same species in *Strike*. For this reason, in the following chapter I undertake an extended analysis of Eisenstein’s scene of animal disassembly and a critique of the dialectical mode of representing slaughter that it inaugurates. This penultimate chapter sets the stage for my examination, in Chapter Four, of films that implicitly reject the aggressive, oppositional tactics instantiated in Eisenstein’s montage. It is my contention that these films instead work to deconstruct the formal limits of slaughter/cinema and thereby to render strange (and therefore newly visible) the banalised sight of animal killing.

Before moving to these analyses, I want to cast one more backward glance and review the ground just covered. The principle aim of this chapter has been to establish and critique the representational logic of exposure that dominates cinematic depictions of animal slaughter. This logic, I have demonstrated, hinges on the historical separation of slaughter from lived daily life and the construction of the slaughter industry as invisible—that is, as something to be made visible, to be exposed. Although this exposure can be calibrated to exact a range of responses in the spectators, it has historically oscillated between titillation and education. These two ends are firmly embedded in the etymology of slaughter’s keywords and in the nineteenth-century practice of slaughterhouse tourism,
and they continue to play a structuring role in contemporary pro-animal films, such as *Food Inc.* and *Glass Walls*, which place their faith in the politicizing power of shocking revelation. Building on Burt’s insight into the slaughterhouse aesthetic, I have argued that the conventions at work in these films reproduce the sense of separation between slaughter and daily life, and thereby reinforce the slaughter industry’s operative disconnect. In posing this argument, I have signalled the potential that key elements of film form—namely, editing and sound—hold for destabilizing the sense that animal slaughter is something apart. As noted, the remaining two chapters are devoted to fleshing out these representational possibilities.
---Chapter Three---

**Shocking Blows: Dialectical Montage and the Attraction of Slaughter**

*In these chutes the stream of animals was continuous; it was quite uncanny to watch them, pressing on to their fate, all unsuspicious—a very river of death. Our friends were not poetical, and the sight suggested to them no metaphors of human destiny; they thought only of the wonderful efficiency of it all.—Upton Sinclair, The Jungle (37)*

I. Introduction to Eisenstein’s Montage and *Strike*

“I should call cinema ‘the art of comparisons,’” submits the Soviet filmmaker and theorist Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein in his 1924 essay “The Montage of Film Attractions.” The medium merits this designation, he explains, because “the exposition of even the simplest phenomena in cinema needs comparison (by means of consecutive, separate presentation) between the elements which constitute it: montage (in the technical, cinematic sense of the word) is fundamental to the cinema […]” (41). The French *montage* translates as *editing* in English and, as such, the term commonly circulates as a catchall for the cutting and splicing entailed in the composition of any film; it carries an additional meaning in the context of mainstream North American cinema, where it is frequently applied to sequences in which continuity editing techniques are used to seamlessly condense temporal change. (While the most familiar examples of this secondary definition come from fiction films such as *Citizen Kane* or *Rocky*, this use of montage is not entirely irrelevant to the films I discuss in this dissertation; indeed, many films that depict the transformation of animals into meat could be said to make use of this self-effacing method for representing change over time—see, for example, my description of *This Is Hormel* in Chapter Two). Eisenstein’s conception of montage as the installation of contrast through sequence allows us to draw an even larger circle around the term: every element of film, he asserts, is structured by contrast, “from the film as a whole to the slightest movement of the performer” (*ibid*. 58). Montage, then, is
discernable in everything from Fernand Léger’s linear compositions to Charlie Chaplin’s repetitive gestures ("The Dramaturgy of Film Form" 165, "The Montage of Attractions" 34). In this broad sense, montage is not even specific to cinema; it plays a formative role in Eisenstein’s theatrical productions and, as I demonstrate presently, it structures his theoretical writings.¹⁰³

Yet across Eisenstein’s work (if not in common parlance), this broad understanding of montage exists alongside a more circumscribed definition of the form: the aggressive, deliberate assemblage of disparate images and spectacular “attractions” to impress thematic or conceptual meaning on the spectator. Eisenstein identifies this form most concretely as *associational montage*: “the case of emotional combinations not merely of the visible elements of the pieces but principally of the chains of psychological association” ("Dramaturgy” 174). This associative method takes additional names in Eisenstein’s work and in the scholarship surrounding it. It may be called *intellectual montage*: this form of juxtaposition, as he saw it, “is an essential method and device in any cinematographic exposition. And, in a condensed and purified form, it is the starting point for ‘intellectual cinema’” ("Beyond the Shot” 139). It may be termed *dialectical*: Eisenstein consistently posits his brand of montage as an artistic distillation of the dialectical system, which is governed by “syntheses that *evolve* from the opposition

¹⁰³ Eisenstein’s thoughts on montage precede his involvement in cinema. He began to formulate his ideas on the form in the early 1920s, while producing theatre with the support of the Proletkult, a Muscovite organization “devoted (at least in theory) to the creation of art by the masses for the masses” (Nesbet 22). *Strike*, the film with which the present chapter is primarily concerned, was also made in collaboration with Proletkult.

It also bears noting here that montage is often used to designate a multiplicity of practices in the visual, plastic, and literary arts. Martin Zeilinger’s definition of montage as it operates across the fields of artistic production is in this context useful: “‘montage,’ most generally, concerns the import (positive or negative) of the production, appropriation, and creative reproduction of artworks, commodities, or ideas that are inherently composite in their nature, and that often openly acknowledge this very fact” (88). This definition, which highlights the centrality of composite materiality, develops the mechanical foundation present in the term’s mid-eighteenth-century etymology: the “operation of assembling the parts of a mechanism to make it work” (*OED Online*). The idea that montage is, first and foremost, a workable form of mechanical assemblage subtends my analysis of Eisenstein’s *Strike*. 
between thesis and antithesis” (“Dramaturgy” 161, original emphasis). Or, following Eisenstein’s interest in Japanese hieroglyphics, it may be designated copulatory:

The point is that the copulation—perhaps we had better say the combination—of two hieroglyphs of the simplest series is regarded not as their sum total but as their product, i.e., as a value of another dimension, another degree: each taken separately corresponds to an object but their combination corresponds to a concept. The combination of two “representable” objects achieves the representation of something that cannot be graphically represented. (“Beyond” 139)

These iterative explanations delineate a form of montage that is governed by a precise structural logic: the combination of two images generates a meaning that cannot reside in any image alone. As Eisenstein indicates, this method of articulating meaning is to be valued for its capacity to systematically (i.e., predictably) incite spectator responses that are at once psychological, intellectual, and physiological.

The present chapter examines the use of this form of montage to represent animal slaughter. I henceforth refer to this form as dialectical, because that descriptor so succinctly captures its driving generative force—its “yearning,” as Gilles Deleuze puts it, “to gain new dimensions, that is, to leap formally from one power into another” (36). I concentrate on the closing sequence of Eisenstein’s first feature film, Stachka (Strike, 1924–1925),105 which cuts between documentary footage of a bull’s slaughter and the simulated massacre of hundreds of striking workers in order to provoke the spectator to a sort of visceral outrage at the workers’ unjust demise. Through cross cutting, the

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104 Anne Nesbet identifies and employs this label in Savage Junctures (19).
105 Russian does not have articles, and it is thus a matter of preference whether one translates the film’s title as Strike or The Strike. I have chosen to forego the definite article in order to retain the title’s duality as a noun and a verb. I should also note that Strike was produced from April to November of 1924, and was released in April 1925 (Beller 140, n3). This chronology is relevant to my discussion to come of Vertov’s Kinoglaz (1925).
sequence unfolds two parallel, progressively linear trajectories: first a series of long shots shows hundreds of workers scrambling over an escarpment; then three shots condense the bull’s moment of death into three flashes (a hand thrusts an axe in a downward motion, the weapon strikes the bull’s head, and the animal instantly collapses); there is a cut back to the woods, where the militia is closing in on the workers; it then returns to the bull, with a staggered series of shots of its bloodletting; it closes with several long shots of the fallen workers. Eisenstein declared Strike to be “the first instance of revolutionary art where the form has turned out to be more revolutionary than the content” (“The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form” 59). My analysis foregrounds the formal qualities of the film’s closing sequence, yet it is also intently concerned with its content. Indeed, my principal aim is to determine if the sequence’s form has anything revolutionary to say about its most striking content—the images of the bull’s slaughter. To this end, I describe and evaluate the representational ethics articulated by the sequence’s various stylistic features, and I pay particular attention to how these features engage—and, to a certain extent, are meant to engage—the spectator.

My analysis of Strike’s closing sequence centres around the succinct economy of dialectical montage—what Eisenstein called its “laconicism” (“Beyond” 139). To be sure, the minute-long sequence brilliantly displays the form’s capacity to “simplify,” “condense,” and “purify” abstract and/or thematic meaning. Yet this show of proficiency rests on a number of less clearly defined representational choices. Much like the “semiotic capaciousness” I discern in the terminology of slaughter in Chapter Two, Eisenstein’s theory and practice of montage accommodate a range of frequently competing functions and meanings; his work is remarkable—and remarkably productive—precisely because Eisenstein remains, even at his most dogmatic moments, open to revision. It is my aim to unpack his capacious praxis and to consider its ethical
implications. To this end, in each of the following sections I read the sequence with an eye to a specific tension; this iterative mode of analysis brings to the surface the sequence’s differing—and often competing—ethical valences. I begin by scrutinising the sequence’s basic structural mechanics and the ways in which it stretches Eisenstein’s prescriptive theory of dialectical montage. The principal purpose of this analysis is to show that the sequence is not bound to the unilateral process of human identification that Eisenstein envisions for it; indeed, its structure allows for a much more ambivalent identificatory response. Next, I consider how the sequence’s starkly efficient structure contributes to its express function as metaphor. I assert that its stringent metaphorical economy hinges on the conflation of the singular and the abstract; this slippage encourages the spectator to view the death of an individual animal as a factual example of animal death, and to suture this evidence into his experience of the spectacle of the massacre of a generalized human multitude. I assert that this slippage also occurs in films that more loosely adopt the metaphorical economy of montage (for example, in La Règle du jeu, a film which I discuss in detail in Chapter One and briefly return to here), and I argue that it manifests itself in film scholarship as a problem of counting animal death. In the third and final section of this chapter, I draw connections between the succinct, visceral shock Eisenstein sought to induce in spectators through the projection of dialectical montage, and the animal-rights argument that the “humane” or “ethical” way to slaughter animals is to kill them swiftly and unexpectedly (i.e., to shock them). These two types of shock admittedly transpire in very different registers; that is, there are substantive qualitative differences between the shocks set off by disconcerting image combinations and those produced by stun guns or pole axes. With these differences in mind, I read these forms of shock against and alongside one another in order to highlight
the profoundly ambivalent values we attach to shock. This reading questions the ethical investments we make in certain economies or temporalities of violence.

Some readers will find my ethics-inflected analysis of Strike’s slaughter sequence anachronistic. After all, the killing of animals for meat (and the representation thereof) was hardly up for debate in 1920s Russia; besides, Eisenstein intended his film to agitate on behalf of workers’ rights, not animals’. It is not my intention to read into the film a political message that simply is not there, or to take the film to task on issues that only began to take hold decades after its release. Indeed, my interest in Strike derives in part from the fact that its origins lie outside of contemporary discourse on the treatment of animals; as such, the film affords an opportunity to reflect on the possibilities and limitations of asking current questions of films from the distant (in terms of cinema’s relatively short history) past. In Chapter One, I contend that present-day technologies such as YouTube foster a mode of iterative spectatorship that empowers viewers to find new meaning in old films. I put that argument to the test here, and assert that this film, made in 1924, speaks inventively—if also imperfectly—to twenty-first century debates around animal slaughter.

Strike’s recourse to images of violent animal death, moreover, set in motion what has proven to be an enduring cinematic trope. The most patent example is the climactic sequence of Apocalypse Now (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979), which splices documentary footage of a group of Filipinos performing a ritual sacrifice of a water buffalo into the dramatic murder of the character Kurtz; Coppola’s reworking of Eisenstein’s figuration of animal killing may well be called an homage to Strike’s canonical slaughter sequence. La

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106 In Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker’s Apocalypse (Eleanor Coppola, George Hickenlooper, and Fax Bahr, 1991), a documentary about the making of Apocalypse Now, Eleanor Coppola explains how she chanced upon a similar ritual and encouraged her husband to incorporate it into his film; this exegesis is woven into footage of the couple attending a sacrificial slaughter. Popular lore around Apocalypse Now holds that Coppola shot in the Philippines in order to avoid the American Humane Association’s sanctions against animal cruelty in film; Eleanor Coppola’s anecdote suggests that the production of the buffalo’s slaughter scene was less calculated.
règle du jeu is another frequently cited example; the film’s famous chasse sequence positions a hunting party as a metaphor for the predatory nature of the bourgeoisie in pre-war France. A number of French films follow Renoir’s lead. In Mouchette (1966), Robert Bresson reprises the chasse as a frame for his eponymous protagonist’s picaresque journey from one misery to another. The film opens with a poacher setting his traps and then gives itself over to detailing the countless indignities and misfortunes Mouchette suffers; in the final sequence, the protracted death of a rabbit, killed by an offscreen hunter, presages Mouchette’s eerily calm suicide. Jean-Luc Godard (who, incidentally, arranged the haunting trailer for Mouchette) casts the debauched descendents of Renoir’s mannered aristocrats in Week-end (1967) and deploys the almost perfunctory slaughter of a pig to amp up the hallucinogenic horror of their weekend getaway gone horribly awry. In Viva la muerte (Long Live Death, 1971), Fernando Arrabal splices the gruesome slaughter and perverse desecration of a bull into the anarchic, surrealistic dreamscape of his young protagonist Fando, whose psyche is torn between his Oedipal fantasies and his outrage at his mother’s betrayal of his Republican father during the Spanish Civil War (the film also includes footage documenting the killing of lambs, a beetle, and a turtle). More recent films also trope the “noncriminal putting to death of animals,” to call again on Derrida’s apt phrasing (“Eating Well” 278). In Los Muertos (2004), Lisandro Alonso tracks a newly released convict’s trek through the Argentine countryside and, with Bressonian detachment, uses the protagonist’s slaughter of a stranded Billy goat to suggest the journey’s macabre ending. As one reviewer describes the film’s open-ended conclusion, “Alonso knows that one carcass will evoke others, and the entire tease of his film depends on our mental substitution of goat guts with human entrails” (Lee, n.p.). The coupling of excessively visible real animal death and offscreen fictional human violence is a leitmotif in the work of Austrian director Michael Haneke. As Lawrence points out,
“violent animal death […] functions in an overdetermined relation with the deaths of fictional human characters” in several of Haneke’s films: *Benny’s Video* (1992), *Le temps du loup* (*Time of the Wolf*, 2003), and *Caché* (*Hidden*, 2005) (65). The figuration of real animal death is not, as this preliminary list might suggest, the sole province of the art film; it also permeates the genre of horror. *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1980) is perhaps the most infamous example, yet the metaphorization of real animal slaughter also structures *Wake in Fright* (Ted Kotcheff, 1971), *The Food of the Gods* (Bert I. Gordon, 1976), and *Cannibal Ferox* (*Make Them Die Slowly*, Umberto Lenzi, 1981), to name just a few. The horror genre also realizes this trope’s applicability to the sound track: both *The Exorcist* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* layer sounds sourced from actual slaughterhouses to render more sinister the human-centred terror onscreen.107 In sum, numerous and diverse films juxtapose, in greater and lesser proximity, real animal slaughter and dramatic human violence. While the films enumerated here do not make precise use of the editorial mechanics of dialectical montage, they do engage the fundamental premise underlying Eisenstein’s praxis: the collision of dissonant elements produces—that is, makes visible, audible, or otherwise perceptible—“phenomena of another order” (“Cinematic Principle” 37). Subtending the analysis to come, then, is the assertion that *Strike*’s legacy bears substantively on present-day discussions of the representational ethics of animal slaughter.

II. The Mechanics of Dialectical Montage

Eisenstein repeatedly positions *Strike*’s closing sequence as an exemplar of his prized form of dialectical montage. In “The Montage of Film Attractions,” he cites a

107 The diversity of these examples recalls Chris’s observation, noted in Chapter One, that animal imagery is distinctly flexible and portable insofar as it at once promises “high-value (legitimate) knowledge” and “incorporate[s] elements of spectacle and melodrama” (xii–xiii; see my n7). That indexical imagery of animal death is most prevalent in highbrow European art cinema and schlocky horror films certainly attests to this duality.
substantial portion of the sequence’s original montage script\textsuperscript{108} to illustrate how this form works for “thematic effect” (43). In “The Dramaturgy of Film Form,” he quotes a smaller section of the same script to demonstrate that the form’s fundamental utility lies in “emotional dynamisation” (176). Eisenstein’s characterisation of the sequence as typical of dialectical montage is outwardly clear-cut: the images of the bull’s real slaughter (thesis) collide with those of the workers’ pretend slaughter (antithesis) and thereby enact an unmistakeable metaphor (synthesis)—the proletariat is brutalised, treated like an animal. The affective force of this juxtaposition seems equally patent: the finale’s unflinching comparison of the workers’ defeat to the methodical, gruesome slaughter of an exceedingly valiant and productive animal cannot but galvanise the spectator to empathise with and perhaps even to act on behalf of the human working class. The certainty of this exchange is evident in Eisenstein’s own explication of the sequence’s structural logic: the indexical footage of the bull’s death, he maintained, should “stir the spectator to a state of pity and terror which would be unconsciously and automatically transferred to the shooting of the strikers” (“The Soviet Cinema” 222; noted in Bordwell, 61).

Yet as my own viewing experience and that of scholars such as Anne Nesbet and Lippit attest, the sequence does not, as Eisenstein promised, neatly channel the affective potency of the bull’s slaughter into a human-centred drama: I, for one, remain unshakeably haunted by the images of the bull’s slaughter. In this regard, one could argue, the sequence merely demonstrates that dialectical montage loses its masterful grip on the spectator when viewed outside its intended context and/or by non-ideal spectators (Eisenstein acknowledges as much, and I return to this condition in the final section). It is

\textsuperscript{108} Nesbet notes the numerous discrepancies between this script and the final edit of the film (29). For my purposes, the most significant inconsistency lies in the number of bulls that die: although the script Eisenstein cites in “The Montage of Film Attractions” calls for a shot of “two dead skinned bulls’ heads,” the shots included in the film derive (according to my own scrutiny of the sequence) from the slaughter of one bull (44).
my contention, however, that the affective intransigence of the bull’s death is built into the sequence: the indexical nature of the animal’s death is simply too great to be absorbed into the film’s political point. Moreover, closer examination of Eisenstein’s theory of montage underscores the way in which this form disallows the sublimation of any one element or term in a sequence. In what follows, I examine the sequence against Eisenstein’s writing on montage and alongside several contemporary commentators’ elucidation of his theory and practice of montage. This thick reading calls attention to the deeply ambivalent structure of Eisenstein’s dialectical method and, in so doing, recommends a reconsideration of the form’s ethical valences and possibilities.

To begin, a closer look at Eisenstein’s theoretical approach to dialectical montage is in order. Eisenstein consistently defines his technique against the relational method of Lev Kuleshov, in which editing functions as a form of orderly assemblage: “If you have an idea—phrase, a particle of the story, a link in the whole dramaturgical chain, then that idea is expressed and built up from shot-signs, just like bricks” (Kuleshov 91; qtd. in “Beyond” 143). Eisenstein categorically rejects this conception of editing as a form of ever progressive building: “in my view montage is not an idea composed of successive shots stuck together but an idea that DERIVES from the collision between two shots that are independent of one another (the ‘dramatic’ principle)” (“Dramaturgy” 163, original emphasis). In his view, the meaning of montage resides in the eruptive, productive intersection of images.

The insistence with which Eisenstein, throughout his writings, contrasts his montage to that of Kuleshov indicates that his method can only emerge in opposition to its antithesis—that is, dialectical montage is always already articulated dialectically. The following elaboration succinctly expresses this structural necessity:
The shot is an element of montage. / Montage is the assembling of these elements. / This is a most pernicious mode of analysis, in which the understanding of any process as a whole (the link: shot—montage) derives purely from the external indications of the course it takes (one piece glued to another). / The shot is by no means a montage element. / The shot is a montage cell. Beyond the dialectical jump in the single series: shot—montage. / What then characterises montage and, consequently, its embryo, the shot? Collision. Conflict between two neighbouring fragments. Conflict. Collision. (“Beyond” 143–44, original emphasis)

Eisenstein here enacts a concise dialectical movement: he glosses Kuleshov, counters with his own method, and distils from this exchange the essential difference between their respective forms of montage. This difference, he suggests, lies in the forms’ distinct approaches to film’s material condition as a sequential medium. Kuleshov’s relational editing, he reiterates in a later essay, is “fundamentally false” because it “defines an object exclusively in terms of its external course (“Dramaturgy” 163). That is, it allows the material condition of sequence to determine the method by which films are edited: the filmstrip unfurls images in series, and montage therefore serves to construct texts that unfold images in series. In Kuleshov’s framework, sequence enacts causal and logical order; each shot or brick builds on that which preceded it, and thus a clear line of relationships runs through any given assemblage. Eisenstein’s dialectical method, in contrast, recognizes sequence not as an imperative to be followed but rather as an opportunity to be seized and manipulated; sequence “plays not merely the role of an unfortunate technical condition but of a condition necessary for the thorough inculcation of the associations” (“Film Attractions” 41). Sequence—the ordering of images one after another—is precisely what allows the skilled monteur to create contrast. Moreover, in order to create effective, palpable contrast, the monteur orders images not according to
their immediately discernable connections, but rather according to their productive dissonances. In doing so, he is attentive first and foremost to these combinations’ capacity to set off jarring associations in the spectator’s mind. To sum up, then, the following formulae succinctly express the central distinction Eisenstein draws between Kuleshov’s approach to editing and his own: whereas relational montage is constituted by the sum of related images \((A + B = AB)\), dialectical montage is conceived as the product of disparate images \((A \times B = C)\).

This transcription needs but one additional layer of detail in order to serve as a comprehensive synopsis of Eisenstein’s approach to dialectal montage. Eisenstein provides this nuance in his later remarks on the relationship between montage and the material condition of sequence. In “The Dramaturgy of Film Form,” an essay published in 1929, he connects montage to the concepts of persistence of vision and the after-image (topics of much debate among early cinema scholars who sought to explain the phenomenological mechanics of film projection and spectatorship). As in the passage cited above, he begins by glossing the conventional wisdom regarding cinema’s ability to transform still images into moving pictures:

We know that the phenomenon of movement in film resides in the fact that still pictures of a moved body blend into movement when they are shown in quick succession one after the other. / The vulgar description of what happens—as a blending—has also led to the vulgar notion of montage mentioned above. (164)

He then counters with his own take on the mechanical relationship between film sequence and persistence of vision: “in fact each sequential element is arrayed, not next to the one it follows, but on top of it. For: the idea (sensation) of movement arises in the process of superimposing on the retained impression of the object’s first position the object’s newly visible second position” (164, original emphasis). His rejoinder asserts that the received
view of persistence of vision erroneously maps the linear sequence of the filmstrip onto the ocular experience of film spectatorship (proponents of relational editing, we can infer, are guilty of promoting this “vulgar” misconception). In his view, the spectator does not perceive filmic images as unfolding in a linear chain; rather, she perceives each image through superimposition—that is, as a rapid-fire layering of one meaning atop another. To phrase it slightly differently: in a technical, material sense, montage sequences proceed horizontally, yet the spectator perceives them in a vertical fashion. This vertical orientation endows the sequence of film with depth, as meanings are layered atop one another.

My aim here is neither to validate nor to dismiss Eisenstein’s intervention in the debate around persistence of vision, but rather to highlight what it means within his form of dialectical montage. In short, Eisenstein insists that we recognise the centrality of superimposition in our experience of film. In a very technical sense, superimposition governs film at large. That is, all moving pictures rely on superimposition to create the illusion of movement. Dialectical montage, however, calls on superimposition to create layered meaning. One of Eisenstein’s other animal-centric montage sequences provides an instructive case in contrast. Following the celebrated Odessa steps sequence in *Bronenosets “Potemkin”* (*Battleship Potemkin*, 1925), he superimposes images of three lion sculptures—one sleeping, one awakening, one rising into a roar—to effect a staccato animation that signals the workers’ galvanization. Eisenstein relegates this example to the status of alogical montage or “symbolic pictorial expression.” It is “one of many “primitive-psychological cases”—using only the optical superimposition of movement (“Dramaturgy” 172–174, original emphasis). This categorisation shows up a significant contrast: whereas the superimposition of the sculptures produces the concrete effect of movement (animation), the superimposition of the bull onto the workers of Strike
produces an abstract meaning (metaphor). This distinction notwithstanding, it is crucial to note here that, in any given superimposition, both of the layered images will remain visible (however fleetingly), and their layering will produce a third image. Superimposition is, in this light, the ideal operation for rendering visible the dialectical process.

Having elaborated Eisenstein’s approach to dialectical montage, I now want to return to his primary exemplar. As I previously noted, Strike’s forceful closing metaphor seems an obvious choice of illustration. There is, moreover, a distinct symmetry in the biological metaphor that runs through his definition and case study: he describes his montage as a generative process in which the shot functions as a “cell” or “embryo,” and he enacts this process in Strike with the cells of a real animal body. Yet Eisenstein’s explication of his intentions for the sequence rests uneasily within his own definition of montage as a form of productive, vertical superimposition. Indeed, in asserting that the spectator’s response to the bull’s slaughter will be “unconsciously and automatically transferred” to that of the workers, he suggests that the sequence functions not so much as a dialectical exchange, but rather as an act of transubstantiation.

This distinction bears elucidation. Transubstantiation entails a conversion, the transformation of a form or substance into something entirely different. Within Eisenstein’s prescriptive logic, the sequence literalises this act in the blood that courses from the bull’s neck. The latter third of the sequence consists of a shot of the militia closing in on the workers, a staggered series of shots of the bull’s bloodletting, and several final shots of the fallen workers. This arrangement elides the “actual moment” of the workers’ death (to recall Sobchack’s remarks, discussed in Chapter One, on cinema’s incapacity to visually represent human death per se). In the seconds separating the before-and-after of the workers’ movement to nonbeing, the spectator is transfixed by the
outpouring of the animal’s blood. Yet just as the rush of blood subsides, his gaze is transferred to the prostrate workers. In the final lingering shots of the battlefield, according to Eisenstein’s plan, his affective response to the bull’s viscerally shocking death is converted to outrage at the unjust demise of these human forms. As David Bordwell puts it in his gloss of Eisenstein’s calculations for the sequence, “the documentary shots dwelling on the bull’s torrential bloodletting and thrashing legs aim less to tease the mind than to arouse a revulsion that will take the massacre as its object” (61)

In sum, the process of transubstantiation that Eisenstein projects onto Strike’s finale is at odds with his own view of dialectical montage, which is structured around the precipitous accretion of visual meaning. I point this out not to belabour a classificatory error, but rather to call attention to the significant stakes embedded in the form’s spare structure. As Eisenstein’s declaration of intent indicates, it is possible to reduce the form of dialectical montage to a vehicle for channelling—or, perhaps more precisely, siphoning—the spectator’s response from one referent to another. Yet it is also possible—and closer to Eisenstein’s fully articulated praxis—to appreciate the form as a means of developing and fixing concurrent referents. By reinscribing Strike’s slaughter sequence within the mechanical frame of superimposition, we can hold onto the “retained impression” of the bull’s death. This reading promises a decidedly more ethical engagement with the text, for the simple reason that it does not disavow the bull’s death. To reiterate a point made in Chapter One with regard to Electrocuting an Elephant (Thomas Edison, 1903), this reading does not defend the film’s recourse to images of slaughter as ethical (much less its possible complicity in the production of such images), nor does it profess a compensatory value. Rather, it grapples with the sequence’s metaphorisation of animal death, and affirms that its structure presses the spectator to
recognise the material reality on which this metaphor rests. What each individual spectator does with this recognition is a matter of speculation; my sole contention here is that the sequence’s structure ensures that few spectators will soon forget the shocking reality of the bull’s slaughter.

Watching the sequence, I immediately perceive the bull’s slaughter as real (i.e., unsimulated), and I cannot imagine that other spectators would view it any differently: this brutal killing simply cannot be faked. Extratextual information supports my impression: Eisenstein suggests, but does not explicitly state, that the footage of the bull is taken from a manufacturing newsreel (“Problem” 62). That Eisenstein would draw on found footage is consistent with his previous filmic work: immediately prior to making Strike, he collaborated with Esfir Shub, the creator of what are now considered to be the first compilation films, on a state-sponsored re-edit of Fritz Lang’s 1922 Dr. Mabuse (Stollery 89). For the purposes of my argument, however, extratextual awareness of the footage’s documentary status is not sufficient; it is necessary to identify the internal formal features that mark it as real. To be sure, this footage is, in and of itself, incredibly realistic. Its proficient display of violence connotes as much: the deliberate downward thrust of the knife, the instantaneous buckling of the animal’s legs, the effusion of blood. However, I am also wholly aware that all of these markers can indeed be faked and that a convincing cinematic image of death does not necessarily—or even very often—bear a direct connection to a death in the profilmic world. Yet this issue is in fact beside the point in the case of Strike, given that what marks the slaughter as real does not reside in the footage itself, but rather arises in a twofold relation to the material with which it is cut (the dramatic images of the workers’ fall).

109 If this is indeed the case, it is worth noting that spectators in 1920s Russia would likely have been very familiar with the generic conventions of manufacturing newsreels (propagandistic newsreels that showcased various aspects of Soviet industry) and would have immediately recognized the slaughter footage’s origins in them.
To begin, the footage of the bull’s death is nondiegetic, and its incursion into the world of the film is noticeable, if not arresting. The discernable rupture it introduces in the film’s diegetic and nondiegetic registers is, in part, precisely what renders the realness of the bull’s slaughter undeniable. Before I elaborate my larger claim, it is worth considering in greater detail the effect of this interpolation of non-diegetic material. On one hand, there is Kuleshov’s view. A vocal early critic of Strike, he maintained that the “scene in the slaughterhouse, unprepared by a second, parallel line of action, is deficient” (qtd. in Nesbet, 25). That is, he perceived the slaughter scene to be wholly unmotivated and unexplained—a hasty addition that disrupts the film’s already tenuous hold on unity and further confuses the already bewildered spectator. On the other hand, Bordwell demonstrates that the spectator is indeed prepared for the film’s culminating animal metaphor by a carefully laid series of human-animal associations. He observes that the film’s narrative tug of war relies, from its outset, on both implicit and explicit human-animal identifications. The film initially equates the capitalist antagonists with animals and positions the proletarian protagonist as “being in control of animals”: one remarkable early sequence overtly animalizes the capitalists by enumerating their motley gang of spies according to zoomorphic monikers (Monkey, Bulldog, Fox, and Owl) and superimposing corresponding images of animals on their human bodies, while various other scenes depict the workers as confident guardians of domestic and circus animals. Bordwell asserts that the film concludes by rerouting this triangulation of associations, so that “it is the workers who are equated with an animal—the bull, slaughtered by a casually proficient butcher likened to the soldiers” (54). The film in fact begins to invert

110 It bears noting that Eisenstein’s penchant for animal metaphors is not exclusive to Strike, but runs through his filmography. To take just two examples from his rich cinematic bestiary: in Oktyabr (October, 1928), he cuts between images of the vain leader of the Provisional Government and a mechanical peacock to comic effect; in Staroe i Novoe (The Old and the New, also known as The General Line, 1929), he cuts between images of supplicating worshippers in an Easter procession and shots of a herd of sheep.
these associations at its midpoint, with an ominous image of two hanged cats that graphically recalls the body of the conscientious worker who, wrongfully accused of theft, hanged himself and thereby unwittingly stirred his comrades to strike; by this juncture, the capitalists, the apparent culprits behind the felines’ lynching, have decidedly gained the upper hand. This discrepancy notwithstanding, I concur with Bordwell’s assertion that the film’s regular recourse to animal metaphors prepares the spectator for its final shocking sequence. I would clarify, however, that this preparation (an example of the type of training or dressage I discuss in Chapter Four) only serves to consolidate the rhetorical force of the zoomorphic metaphors dispersed throughout the film; it does not at all diminish the startling affective weight of the final metaphor.

Strike’s (arguable) diegetic disjointedness is, furthermore, but one of two structural relationships against which the realness of the bull’s death emerges in relief. The sharp contrast between the blunt depiction of the animal’s death and the stylised allusion to the workers’ death also contributes—and perhaps even more substantively—to the legibility of the former’s reality or indexicality. A number of commentators have noted that the two strands of the sequence operate as foils for one another. Nesbet writes,

At the end of Strike, tenor and vehicle seem turned almost inside out: the real blood of the slaughterhouse is brought in to supplement the inadequate realness of the acted massacre. Their blood, the film tells us about the workers, was like…real blood. As a necessary corollary to this message, the dying of the actors becomes abstract, more formal play than simulacrum of the real. (24)

Indeed, the images of the attack on the workers are compositionally consistent with the film’s overall propensity to foreground line, form, and shape: sharp diagonals (steep hills, a falling fence) slice through the mostly static long shots of the workers and their assailants, so that their encounter unfolds as a graphically arresting confrontation of two
mobile, many-bodied forms. This move towards abstraction is all the more apparent when viewed alongside the more tightly framed and comparatively unembellished shots of the bull succumbing to slaughter. Building on a critique that remains implicit in Nesbet’s observation, Michael Lawrence casts this juxtaposition as a formal failure: “the inclusion of real animal death in Strike removes the potential power of the simulation of human death by emphasizing that it is mere simulation” (68). In this view, Eisenstein’s attempt to enhance the staged human massacre with indexical images of animal slaughter—to render the massacre verisimilar by association—backfires, and the documentary death ends up showing the dramatic deaths for what they are: an ersatz recital of “the activity and remains of dying” (to recall once more Sobchack’s remarks on cinema’s limited capacity to represent death [Carnal Thoughts 233, original emphasis]).

Nesbet and Lawrence discern that the sequence operates according to Derrida’s logic of the supplement (see Chapter One for a detailed explanation of this term): Eisenstein calls on the slaughter footage to do what his diegetic fiction cannot, and in doing so he calls attention both to that fiction’s lack and to the documentary footage’s almost excessive reality (the one underscores the other, and vice versa). Lippit makes the same observation, yet whereas his contemporaries dismiss the supplemental structure of the sequence as a deficiency, he finds in it a productive potential. Lippit’s perspicacious analysis adheres to the supplemental reading strategy this dissertation advocates, and for this reason I conclude the present section by examining his remarks.\textsuperscript{111} This exposition

\textsuperscript{111} Lippit extends his parergonal take on animal death from individual films to the level of the cinematic medium and, in his movement away from specificity, he reduces a productive methodology to an untenable (and at times even inscrutable) assertion about cinema’s history. Because this claim elides the significant material stakes posed by representations of animal death and slaughter, a brief critical digression is in order.

For Lippit, Eisensteinian montage, particularly in its theoretical embodiment, is but one instantiation of cinema’s genetic structure—a structure in which animals ineluctably emerge in/as recessive genes. The provocative hypothesis subtending Electric Animal is not just that animals are a privileged material for the cinematic medium, but that animals \textit{are} a medium. Lippit shores up this argument by constructing a historical claim that is remarkably homologous to John Berger’s nostalgic view (discussed in my Introduction) that modernity strives to recuperate its lost intimacy with animals in representation. Jonathan Burt identifies this connection, observing that Lippit “follows Berger in his account of the way modernity
allows me to clarify what I take to be the sequence’s central strength, before I proceed to outlining its more equivocal features.

Lippit foregrounds Eisenstein’s description of dialectical montage as the “central nerve” of cinema (“Dramaturgy” 163), and thereby elucidates the form’s likeness to genetic experimentation. Building on the genetic analogy, he observes that Eisenstein’s montage occasions relationships of sustained, if asymmetrical, co-existence among the various terms in a given sequence:

dissolves the empirical animal into pure spectrality”; he points out that Lippit’s film apparatus “is the funerary monument to wildlife that was Berger’s zoo” and concludes that “Lippit has, in essence, outlined a concept of the animal-machine brought up to date for the radio age” (26–27). Lippit begins by observing the simultaneity of several major shifts at the turn of the twentieth century: the hastening of industrialisation, the ascension of new technology and media, and the “elimination of animals from the immediate environment” (23). Building on the coincidence of these changes, he contends, “Not only were animals thematized, they were also appropriated by the technological media for the symbolic and actual powers they represented—‘horsepower’ in engines, electrocuted animals in direct current, animated animals in early cinema” (23). He reiterates, “technology, and more precisely the technological instruments and media of [the late nineteenth century], began to serve as virtual shelters for displaced animals. In this manner, technology and ultimately the cinema came to determine a vast mausoleum for animal being” (187). Lippit’s ascription of causality is pointedly vague; it is unclear whether the eradication of animals from the lived material world of modern industrial culture merely coincided with the arrogation of these endangered beings to the overlapping realms of technology and media, or whether it in fact provoked this displacement. It likewise remains ambiguous why cinema, in particular, came to play host to the animals exiled from modern reality (or, for that matter, how the medium could at once serve as a mausoleum—an edifice that stores dead bodies—and as a shelter—a site that provides refuge for living beings). While “cinema, communication, transportation, and electricity drew from the actual and fantasmatic resources of dead animals” (187), it seems that cinema alone developed, indeed embodied, animal traits as a gesture of mourning for the disappearing wildlife. The figure for nature in language, animal, was transformed in cinema to the name for movement in technology, animation. And if animals were denied the capacity for language, animals as filmic organisms were themselves turned into languages, or at least, into semiotic facilities. The medium provided an alternative to the natural environment that had been destroyed and a supplement to the discursive space that had never opened an ontology of the animal. (197)

The only explanation I can glean from Lippit’s remarks is that the perpetually mobile animal folds naturally into the flexible materiality of the filmstrip, and these materials/mediums further coalesce on the seam of linguistic undecidability.

Both Burt and Shukin cogently critique Lippit’s seductive essentialism. Burt asserts that in Electric Animal (as in Berger’s “Why Look at Animals?”), “the disengagement from the animal, its reduction to pure sign, reinforces at a conceptual level the effacement of the animal that is perceived to have taken place in reality even whilst criticising that process” (Animals 29, original emphasis). Shukin succinctly observes that Lippit is able to make his argument “only by speculating in the animal as a rhetorical currency transcending its material body” (41). I likewise read Lippit’s argument as a particularly dangerous deployment of supplementarity that elides the material stakes of slaughter spectatorship. To return this criticism to the context of Eisensteinian montage, this argument asserts that screen animals are meaningful only insofar as they are vestigial—a reminder of what once was and is no longer. According to Lippit, animals at large—and Eisenstein’s bull in particular—subsist as recessed genes, etched beneath the surface of the filmic body or text; Eisenstein’s bull, then, is not a real bull, but a spectral, haunting reminder or remainder of what once was.

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According to Eisenstein’s fantasy, filmic shots, like genetic structures, comprise dominant and recessive traits: when they are crossed, certain features are exposed upon the surface of the filmic body while others perform a subliminal function, sustaining the linkage between shots. Cinema cannot exhibit all of its features: as with any genetic code, certain materials are made manifest while other information remains recessed. (Electric Animal 193)

To reframe Lippit’s speculation within the context of Strike’s slaughter sequence: whereas the workers’ fictional death assumes a dominant position in the sequence (and therefore in the spectator’s experience of the film), the bull’s real slaughter remains as a recessed trait or trace. Configured as genetic code, the slaughter’s affective power is subdued but never permanently harnessed; it threatens always to flash up, to break through the film’s cellular hierarchy.

Lippit’s attention to the genetic intransigence of terms in Eisenstein’s intellectual montage dovetails with his view that Strike’s index of slaughter persists somewhere between metaphor and material fact:

Eisenstein inserts the documentary footage of animal slaughter to make a rhetorical point—that workers in the factory are treated like cattle. But the actuality of the animal slaughter supersedes the metaphor and imposes from outside the diegesis a taste of death, of the real. Eisenstein’s animals are parergonal, never fully inside nor outside the diegesis but against, beside, and in addition to it, surrounding Strike with an animetaphorical frame. (“The Death of an Animal” 14)

Lippit here calls on Derrida’s parergon, a concept that, like his supplement, insists on the co-implication of binary terms: inside and outside, original and copy, documentary and fiction. Read alongside his explication of the genetic structure of Eisensteinian montage,
Lippit’s application of parergonality indicates that it is precisely the realness of the bull’s death that guarantees its adherence in the spectator’s experience of the film’s climax; the resolute indexicality of the footage disallows the sublimation of the bull’s death into metaphor, and even pushes it to supplant the scripted drama of the workers’ death.

To conclude this section, then, both Eisenstein and Lippit identify the indexicality of the bull’s slaughter as the determining feature of Strike’s final sequence, yet they assign contrary functions to this quality. For Eisenstein, the sequence’s successful metaphorization of the bull’s death hinges on the authenticity of the footage: the images of brute violence and bodily rupture can only arouse the appropriate disgusted outrage if they are perceived as real. In contrast, Lippit contends that the spectator’s recognition of this reality prevents her from neatly transferring her response to the film’s fiction: the slaughter’s realness shows the workers’ death for what it is (a dramatic simulation), and its incision in the narrative leaves a “taste of death” that lingers long after the credits roll. Lippit thus counts Eisenstein’s bull, along with Renoir’s rabbits and pheasants, as particularly powerful instances in which screen animals are able to resist metaphorization. “Strike and Règle,” he contends, “offer two examples of animal death that problematize the figurative value of such representations” (“Death” 13).

Lippit’s reading of Strike gestures towards the recuperative potential I identify in contemporary slaughter spectatorship in Chapter One. A parergonal or supplementary valuation of the film’s final sequence allows us to view the bull’s slaughter as more than a term designed to be subsumed in a dialectical set piece; it is a death that unnerves us with its resolute material reality, and as such it pushes us—perhaps only tentatively—towards an ethical recognition. However, attention to the sequence’s additional constitutive features complicates this optimistic view. As I show in the following two sections, the metaphoricity specific to the form is founded on the conflation of the
particular and the abstract, and on a temporality that subjects both viewer and viewed to an abrupt and visually/viscerally shocking violence.

III. “A demonstration of the real”; or, the problem with (re)counting slaughter

Eisenstein’s recourse to animal slaughter in Strike bears out Shukin’s convincing argument that the particular discursive potency of animal signs derives from “the double sense of animals’ material and metaphorical currency.” Shukin contends that “‘the animal,’ arguably more than any other signifier by virtue of its singular mimetic capaciousness […] functions as a hinge allowing powerful discourses to flip or vacillate between literal and figurative economies of sense” (5). Strike’s slaughter sequence negotiates this double signification with remarkable dexterity. Eisenstein’s choice of animal supplement is not coincidental: the bull carries a particular material and metaphorical weight that is perfectly suited to the film’s political rhetoric and the formal strategies used to advance it. Materially speaking, it is a massive animal and, to put it quite bluntly, its imposing stature makes for a visually impressive death. Speaking from my own viewing experience, the instant of its collapse proves to be the most affecting element of the sequence; as with Topsy’s death in Electrocuting an Elephant, my stomach drops each time I experience the visual thud of this enormous animal’s instantaneous fall to the ground. The immediacy of the bull’s death is also a product of the animal’s individual presence. As I explain in the previous section, the slaughter of the bull consolidates the film’s meticulously symmetrical framework of human-animal associations. In their function as the film’s collective protagonist, the workers are equated with a single animal, and it is only fitting that this animal be both especially formidable
and clearly associated with labour.\textsuperscript{112} Thus the bull’s weighty oneness bleeds into its metaphorical force. An animal steeped in mythology and folklore, the bull represents unflagging strength, tenacity, and male fertility. By likening the workers to the bull, Eisenstein suggests that the Soviet proletariat is beaten but not entirely defeated; this collective body may have fallen, yet it possesses the resilience to rise again in the future.

Or at least this is the sequence’s ostensible design—its “obvious” symbolic meaning, to invoke Roland Barthes’s reading of stills from Eisenstein’s penultimate film, \textit{Ivan Groznyy} (\textit{Ivan the Terrible}, 1945).\textsuperscript{113} In his essay “The Third Meaning,” Barthes asserts that this symbolic level of signification forces itself upon me by a double determination: it is intentional (it is what the author wanted to say) and it is taken from a kind of common, general lexicon of symbols; it is a meaning which seeks me out, me, the recipient of the message, the subject of the reading, a meaning which starts with SME [Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein] and which goes on \textit{ahead of me}; evident certainly (so too is the other) but \textit{closed} in its evidence, held in a complete system of destination. (319, original emphasis)

The other meaning to which Barthes opposes this obvious meaning is the “obtuse”: “the third, the one ‘too many,’ the supplement that my intellection cannot succeed in absorbing, at once persistent and fleeting, smooth and elusive” (320). The mode of reading I proposed in the previous section apprehends something akin to (but not altogether the same as) the obtuse in \textit{Strike}’s slaughter sequence: Barthes’s third meaning lies in excess of signification, and my earlier reading likewise recognises that the bull’s death possesses an intransigent indexicality that exceeds its intended function as

\textsuperscript{112} Jonathan Beller gestures towards this association in his discussion of the role of animality and animalisation in \textit{Strike}: “animals, the raw material of humanity, have a proximity to labour, the raw material of industrial society” (136).

\textsuperscript{113} I owe my knowledge of Barthes’s writing on Eisenstein to Beller, who mobilises Barthes’s “filmic” or “third” meaning in his own reading of \textit{Strike} (103).
metaphor. Because it throws up an obstacle to figuration and thereby obliges the spectator to confront the material reality of the animal’s death, I suggested that this excessive remainder opens up the possibility for an ethical encounter. The present section puts that sanguine view on hold and steps back to consider the ethical implications of the sequence’s obvious meaning. Here I take Barthes at his word, and consider the weight of a meaning that is “closed in its evidence.” The sequence’s intended symbolic meaning locates the bull’s slaughter as compelling visual evidence of violent death at large. In doing so, it reduces the animal’s real death to a free-floating abstraction; the bull becomes a symbolic specimen of slaughter. As I demonstrate through attention to scholarly recounts of the sequence (as well as of Règle’s chasse sequence), this reductive bias cuts short the potential potency that lies in recognising the material reality of this bull’s death.

To make this point, it is necessary to return to a line of argumentation from Chapter One. There I called on Jane Desmond’s assertion that the individual animal body is often ascribed “an overwhelming facticity” that obliges it to “become a specimen, standing for itself or for a category of animals like it, and not for the ‘being’ which ‘inhabited’ the living body” (169). Desmond indicates that the figuration of animals as facts renders individual beings interchangeable with the species to which they belong or, more troubling still, suggests that they are meaningful only insofar as they represent or stand (in) for their species. Building on Desmond’s insight, I argued that this metonymy licenses cinema’s display—and occasionally its production—of dead animal bodies. Moreover, the medium frequently codes this display as edifying: just as the taxidermied specimens that populate science and natural history museums serve to educate visitors

114 Eisenstein possesses a degree of awareness of this risk: “As soon as the film-maker loses sight of this essence [emotional dynamism of the subject] the means ossify into lifeless literary symbolism and stylistic mannerism” (“Beyond” 177). Yet while he diagnoses this ossification in his October, he does not acknowledge its occurrence in Strike.
about anatomy, biology, etc., the imaged specimens that appear in films function as instructive metaphors.

This metonymic logic is precisely what guides the obvious meaning of *Strike*’s provocative slaughter metaphor. Eisenstein’s practice of dialectical montage is motivated by a rigid pragmatism: “in the selection and presentation of this [montage] material,” he insists, “the decisive factor should be the immediacy and economy of the resources expended in the cause of associative effect” (“Montage of Film Attractions” 46). By “economy,” Eisenstein has in mind the careful management of both material resources and aesthetic effects; in practice, this frugality manifests itself as a stripped-down semiotic system, in which the least amount of—and the least complicated—material is used to create the maximum effect. *Strike*’s juxtaposition of the bull’s death and the workers’ massacre appeals to the notion of slaughter that circulates, to recall Barthes, in our “common, general lexicon of symbols”: the indiscriminate killing of large numbers of people is akin to the everyday, mass killing of animals. Eisenstein realises that to articulate this meaning, he need not go to the potentially elaborate lengths required to show the slaughter of many animals; the emphatic depiction of one animal’s slaughter suffices to suggest a systemised mass killing of animals. His description of the sequence in “The Montage of Film Attractions,” written in the same year he produced *Strike*, indicates this economic and aesthetic thrift: “the shooting is shown only in ‘establishing’ long and medium shots of the 1,800 workers falling over a precipice, the crowd fleeing, gunfire, etc., and all the close-ups are provided by a demonstration of the real horrors of the slaughterhouse where cattle are slaughtered and skinned” (43, emphasis added). That the bull only appears in Eisenstein’s explication in the metonym “close-ups” is telling: made to demonstrate the “real horrors of the slaughterhouse”—that is, made to stand in for the countless cattle and other species of animals subject to slaughter—the individual
bull disappears. It ceases to be a particular animal that has died a particular death, and instead stands as an evidentiary example or representative fact of slaughter.

The reduction of the slaughtered animal body to a mere specimen is ethically problematic insofar as it allows the spectator to view animal slaughter from a tolerable remove (a remove significantly greater than the distance necessarily engendered by filmic mediation). Viewing the bull’s slaughter in Strike is indeed discomfiting, yet not overwhelmingly so. Framed as fact, the unnerving material reality of the animal’s violent death recedes from view, and the spectator soon loses sight of its most rudimentary contours. Symptomatic of this detached vantage point is the carelessness that pervades the critical readings of Strike (as well as La Règle du jeu) with which this dissertation is in dialogue. Consider, for example, Lawrence’s description of Strike’s finale: “Documentary footage of bulls being killed in an abattoir punctuates the sequence, which depicts the massacre of hundreds of workers” (67–68). Or, by the same token, Lippit’s explication of this “filmed slaughter of animals” (“Death” 14):

Eisenstein’s depiction of class struggle between the forces of capital and those of labour concludes with a massacre. Striking workers are attacked, pursued, and destroyed by armed soldiers, like cattle in a slaughterhouse. And then real cattle appear, lacerating the diegesis with animal figures—actual and metaphorical. As the soldiers eliminate the striking workers, the film audience sees scenes from a slaughterhouse. The final sequence of Eisenstein’s film concludes with a trope: the slaughter of the striking workers is like the killing of defenceless animals. (“Death” 13)

Although Lippit’s attention to the various ontological registers in which the scene’s animal exists may warrant his use of the noun of assemblage, the actual mise-en-scène does not. One bull appears; one bull is killed. Lippit’s description of the setting as a
slaughterhouse is also imprecise. This footage in fact documents a transitional moment in the history of slaughter: the move from artisanal butchery, a labour practiced by small groups of highly skilled workers in rustic environs and urban back alleys, to modern slaughter, a mechanized process carried out by a much larger labour force in industrial, factory-like spaces. The bull’s slaughter in *Strike* takes place somewhere between these two extremes: several workers corral the bull in an open-air enclosure that is likely part of a small abattoir, and each in turn perform the specified steps of a highly codified ritual. These details are crucial to an appreciation of the bull’s singularity and of the historical specificity of its death.

This sort of miscounting recurs in discussions of animal slaughter and film. Whereas Lawrence and Lippit overestimate the number of animals killed in *Strike*, numerous commentators significantly underestimate and otherwise misconstrue the number of fatalities in *La Règle du jeu*. To recall from Chapter One, Renoir’s famous *chasse* sequence posits the hunt as a graphic metaphor for the sort of feckless predation practiced by the film’s upper-crust characters. As in *Strike*, graphic imagery of animal death supplements fictional human death; to borrow Amos Vogel’s phrasing, the animals’ deaths possess a “ferocious reality” that the character’s later death will lack (qtd. in Sobchack, 247). However, this supplemental relationship does not transpire in precisely the same fashion as in *Strike*: here the scenes depicting the animals’ and the human’s deaths are both diegetic, and they occur at different stages in the narrative. As I noted in Chapter One (see my n8), Sobchack provides a curiously reduced death toll in her reflections on *Règle*: “there are two instances of death in the film. […] The first to die […] is a rabbit. The second is a human character” (245). André Bazin, the film’s dedicatee, likewise writes of the hauntingly affective power of the “onscreen death of a
rabbit” (“Theatre and Film [2]” 194). Lawrence’s description of the “large number of wild rabbits” killed in the chasse sequence—as well as his citation of Raymond Durgnat’s epithet for it, “the massacre of the rabbits”—is more accurate, yet it also omits the fact that numerous pheasants are also killed (66; Durgnat 201). Lippit, meanwhile, offers a description of the sequence that is simply baffling: “Shots of animal killings, mostly rabbits and pheasants, appear to depict actual killings” (“Death” 14). His qualification “mostly” implies that additional types of animals are killed, which is not the case; his equivocation “appear to” is, moreover, left unexplained. By my count, approximately eight rabbits and six pheasants are shot and killed in and for the sequence, which lasts less than four minutes; my tally is admittedly approximate, as even after repeat viewings I found it difficult to keep my eyes open and my mind focused on counting. Alexander Sesonske provides a meticulous reckoning in his liner notes for the Criterion Collection DVD: “In a film whose shots often run for a minute or more, here fifty-one shots appear in less than four minutes, in a mounting rhythm of cutting and movement that culminates in an awesome barrage of gunfire as, in twenty-two shots—fifty-three seconds—twelve animals die. Surely one of the most powerful scenes in all of cinema.” Of course, Sesonske’s count and my own consider only the deaths indexed in footage that was incorporated into the film’s final cut. As Durgnet explains in an unsparing anecdotal aside, many additional “shots” ended up on the cutting room floor:

The sequence proved astonishingly expensive, since rabbits shot in mid-course and dying are not the most obliging of extras. An enormous number of rabbits, which had first to be collected and loosed, ran the wrong way, or were missed by the marksman, or died in a visually or dramatically unsuitable manner. (186; qtd. in Lawrence, 80–81)

The indefinite singular article appears in the original French: « la mort visible d’un lapin » (« Théâtre et cinéma, II » 160).
In light of these complicating factors, the most faithful account of the hunt may be Gerald Mast’s plainspoken reckoning: “there is so much slaughter in so little time” (44).

In a certain light, the lack of precision in scholarly accounts of cinematic slaughter makes sense; it may even be justified by the critic’s methodological approach and/or the particular historical moment he inhabits. Sobchack’s revisionism, for example, is easily explained by her phenomenological mode of address; she is not performing formal analysis, but rather questioning her own personal viewing experience (one which she notes took place decades ago). Moreover, even had she viewed the film more recently or more closely, the chasse sequence’s rhythm and its investment in a diegetic gaze somewhat explain her error. The film is shot almost entirely in languid long takes, yet during the hunt Renoir abruptly switches to accelerated editing. The minute-long sequence consists of twenty-four shots with an average duration of two and a half seconds (Morel 56); framed as it is by the blasé stares of the hunting party, the resulting barrage of gunshots and filmic shots is deliberately difficult to process. The sequence’s final shot, however, lingers ever so slightly on one fallen rabbit; its hind legs are splayed back, and its tail twitches in a final, faint paroxysm. Consequently, when Sobchack writes, “Renoir’s rabbit stays with me” (268), I know exactly which rabbit she is talking about, and why its image alone endures in her memory. Meanwhile, Lawrence’s and Lippit’s misreading of Strike’s slaughter footage as depicting a mass killing of animals makes sense if we consider their particular vantage point in twenty-first-century North America, where animal slaughter almost always means the industrialised killing of numerous animals; in this light, we can reasonably assume that these critics have simply mapped more familiar, present-day models of slaughter onto the antiquated version depicted in Strike.
While the preceding justifications offer insight into some of the extratextual factors that influence film spectatorship, they do not entirely excuse the faulty memory work that all too often crops up in scholarly accounts of filmic slaughter. This consistent imprecision, I contend, must also be recognised as symptomatic of the way in which dialectical montage—and forms of editing that more loosely adopt this structure—reduce slaughtered animals to mere specimens of violent death. Once diminished to the status of evidence, animals lose all specificity. A being’s particular identity—its individuality, its species membership, etc.—ceases to matter, and it becomes simply a fact. For this reason, I do not think it incidental that Lippit, Sobchack, and other scholars wildly over- and underestimate the number of animals that appear and die in the slaughter sequences in question. Their miscalculations demonstrate the ease with which we, attentive scholars included, consign animal life to reductive categories. Furthermore, if we consider these scholars as representative spectators, their analyses may be read as indicative of the ways in which Strike and Règle—as well as other films that deploy similar metaphorical strategies—construct slaughter as something that is performed on the reduced and all too easily dispensable category of “the animal.” Their imprecise descriptions resonate with Derrida’s critique of the tendency to collapse an infinitely diverse range of life into this singular noun. Derrida eloquently indicates the pernicious ends to which the word “animal” and its ubiquitous lexical sidekick “the” have been made to function:

Confined within this catch-all concept, within the vast enclosure of this definite article (“the Animal” and not “animals”), as in a virgin forest, a zoo, a hunting or fishing ground, a paddock or an abattoir, a space of domestication, are *all the living things* that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbours, or his brothers. (“Animal” 402, original emphasis)
The inexactitude that plagues scholarly accounts suggests that an analogous erasure occurs in these sequences; framed as “demonstration[s] of the real,” the very real bull, rabbits, and peasants of Strike and Règle become interchangeable examples of “the Animal.”

IV. “The swift blow as the ethical blow; the swift blow as ethics”¹¹⁶

The syntax of Strike’s closing sequence constructs the slaughter of the animal body as a distinctly abrupt action. A visual rhyme links the bull’s slaughter to the diegetic narrative: a shot of the irate capitalist leader swinging his fists is matched to a series of three shots, taken from progressively longer distances, of the butcher’s downward striking blow. These staggered shots stress the suddenness of the fatal action, a quality that is driven home when Eisenstein cuts back, in the third and final shot showing the instant of the assault, to a medium shot distance that frames the entirety of the animal’s enormous body as it collapses.¹¹⁷ As I previously remarked, the finality with which the bull’s massive body hits the ground is a more unsettling marker of death than even the blood that flows—and then flows some more—from its neck. To recall Chapter Two’s etymological discussion of abattoir, this thud manifests the violence latent in the noun’s root, abattre, ‘to fell.’ Moreover, by reiterating the shots of the swift blows that initiate the killing, Eisenstein produces a piercing punctuation that has a ballistic effect on the spectator.

¹¹⁶ This phrase is taken from Angela Cozea’s video essay, which I discuss presently.
¹¹⁷ Eisenstein’s accentuation of the shocking abruptness of slaughter is, parenthetically, the feature to which Coppola remains most faithful in his reworking of Strike’s climactic montage in Apocalypse Now. Coppola inverts Eisenstein’s progressive expansion of shot distance, yet his telescopic movement inwards nevertheless replicates the tempo of Strike’s closing sequence: as The Doors’s song “The End” rises in a feverish crescendo, the initial impact of a machete against the buffalo’s flesh is reprised in three successive shots, each framed from increasingly closer angles.
This final section considers the ethicality of the swift blow at the centre of dialectical montage—a swift blow that is dealt in turn to unsuspecting animals and to film spectators. To do so, I shift analytical registers: whereas in the previous two sections I employ strategies of close reading to determine the kind of ethical values spectators may glean from Strike’s ending, in this section I bring together insights from philosophy, history, and cultural studies in order to question the ethical valences of the experience of shocking, abrupt violence that the film asserts its animal subject undergoes and, in doing so, imposes on it viewers. To put it another way, in this section I stray from exacting textual analysis and instead follow the more speculative path set off by the images of the butcher’s thrusting axe. My inquiry begins with a perplexing paradox that crystallises in this sequence’s homologous form and content, in Eisenstein’s writing on the spectatorship of dialectical montage and the larger philosophical discourse of modernity from which it emerges, and in the longstanding debate about “humane” or “ethical” methods of animal slaughter. On one hand, Eisenstein’s theory and practice of dialectical montage, as well as the historical-philosophical framework to which it is loosely bound, conceives of the shocking blows of unnerving image combinations as a humanising incitement; these blows awaken spectators, long devitalised by the sensorial surfeit of modern daily life, and oblige them to perceive—and even to act on, to transform—realities previously experienced as deadening. On the other hand, an abiding current in the discussion of how best to implement animal slaughter conceives of the shocking blows dealt to animals with stun guns and poleaxes as a measure of humaneness—that is, as a show of compassion or even benevolence; these blows are believed to anaesthetise animals and to deaden their consciousness and experience of death.

My interest in these two conceptions of the shocking blow originates with this seeming irreconcilability: how and why is it that these similar actions can be envisioned
alternately as a means of enlivening and deadening perception? To be sure, the weight and object of these blows are very different—perhaps even incommensurable. Eisenstein’s dialectical montage delivers “a series of blows to the consciousness and emotions of the audience” (“The Montage of Film Attractions” 39); this audience is of course composed of human spectators, and their experience of shock is limited to a more or less temporary period of psychic disturbance. The experience of animals bound for slaughter is physically and irrevocably traumatic: for them, shock initiates their death. Given these distinctions, the paradox described above could simply be resolved as a difference of metaphorical and literal applications. Yet it is my contention that these two modes of shock present more than a provocative, if inconsequential, analogical likeness. In what follows, I situate these two engagements with shock in overlapping historical contexts, with an eye to demonstrating that they are predicated on a fundamentally similar—and profoundly problematic—reductive view of the beings subject to shock. This exposition indicates that the way we think about and represent slaughter would benefit from a more nuanced understanding of how human and nonhuman animals engage with the various stimuli projected on and at them.

My comparison of Eisenstein’s cinema and the modern material apparatus of animal slaughter builds on the connections forged by previous scholars, namely Nesbet and Jonathan Beller. Beller draws a direct link: “for Eisenstein, awakening spectators to their human state requires that they be shocked and stimulated as animals are” (136). While he rightly discerns that the production of shock shapes both Eisenstein’s montage and the practice of animal slaughter, Beller fails to look closely at the latter apparatus and thus mistakes this shared structuring principle as working towards the same end (the shocking of animals is of course intended to deaden, not stimulate, their physiological and nervous reactions). That said, Beller goes on to make the related and more substantive
observation that Eisenstein’s montage resembles the experimental dissection of animals: “Eisenstein sees his films as a form of vivisection, a hewing of fragments from world historical reality with ‘the axe of the lens’ and arranging them in such a way as to forge the audience’s psyche. ‘In cinema, by selective treatment [the director] recarves reality’” (Beller 137; Eisenstein, “Problem” 64). Beller’s characterisation of Eisenstein’s montage as a “hewing of fragments” echoes Nesbet’s assertion that montage (understood broadly—and problematically so) is affined with the disassembly line of industrial slaughter. Nesbet establishes this connection with reference to one of Kuleshov’s lesser-known filmic experiments, in which he splices together images of different women’s body parts in order to create the illusion of a single, coherent female figure:

The actor, like the workers in Upton Sinclair’s slaughterhouses, is turned into a creature with a body as susceptible to manipulation as that of a hog or cow, to be taken apart and put together again at the pleasure of the one who controls the process, the editor or filmmaker. […] Montage, then, can be seen as the incursion of the assembly line into old aesthetic institutions, as filmmaking becomes an industrial process, based on and in some respects similar to such paragons of industrial efficiency, the Ford factory and the Chicago packinghouse. Cinema, we

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118 Beller’s association of dialectical montage and scientific experimentation finds support in Bordwell’s reading of Strike. Mining the “pluralistic approach” and “eclecticism” Eisenstein adopted in his first film, Bordwell indicates that Strike served as a filmic laboratory of sorts, a space in which the director experimented with and began to systematize a battery of motifs, symbols, tropes, and editing techniques aimed at creating conflict (59–60). To take a somewhat perverse view, Eisenstein’s montage experimentation could be said to reject the speciesist logic that typically governs scientific experiments on animals. As Peter Singer, the foremost critic of this logic, points out, “we ought not to perform on the animal an experiment that would be considered outrageous if performed on one of us [humans]” (52). Eisenstein adheres to this egalitarian principle, as he views humans and animals as equal fodder for his experimental montage.

119 Kuleshov recounts his experiment thusly: “I photographed a girl sitting before her mirror, making up her eyes and eyelashes, rouging her lips, lacing her shoes. Solely by means of montage we showed a living girl, but one who did not actually exist, because we had filmed the lips of one woman, the legs of another, the back of a third, the eyes of a fourth. We cemented these shots, fixing a certain relationship among them, and we obtained an entirely new personage, using nothing but completely real material (qtd. in Maltby, 391). Richard Maltby is quick to point out this experiment’s relevance to feminist film theory’s critique of the fragmentation and fetishization of the female form (391), which are in turn relevant to my discussion, in Chapter Two, of the slaughterhouse aesthetic’s fragmentation of the animal body.
are tempted to conclude, is the ideal vehicle for a modern, defamiliarized view of
the world not only because it is a cyborg art, dependent on machines, but because
it is so close in some respects to butchering. (44)

Nesbet’s argument is founded on the conflation of oppositional forms of Soviet montage
and of the concepts of montage-as-editing and montage-as-cinema—conflations that this
chapter takes great pains to avoid. Nevertheless, in drawing this analogy between modern
meat- and film-making, she identifies a significant ethical problem with the latter mode of
production: it reduces its subjects (human or animal) and its spectators (human) to a sort
of bare materiality that ostensibly exists solely to be manipulated. Beller discerns this
precise reductive impulse in Eisenstein’s declaration, made in a 1925 essay with reference
to Strike, that “a work of art (at least in the two spheres in which I work: theatre and
cinema) is first and foremost a tractor ploughing over the audience’s psyche in a
particular class context (“Problem” 62, original emphasis). As Beller points out, “this
phrase shows that for Eisenstein, human subjects not only are homogenized as raw
material by cinema but are made interchangeable, exchangeable” (126).

With the parallels between dialectical montage, vivisection, and slaughter in mind,
I begin my own analysis by locating Strike’s slaughter sequence in the wider conceptual
field of Eisenstein’s montage of attractions, which I then briefly read against Gunning’s
cinema of attractions and the larger philosophical discourse on the experience of
modernity in which Gunning’s work is rooted. As in his iterative delineation of his
approach to editing, Eisenstein uses Strike’s iconic slaughter sequence to illustrate the
montage of attractions: “the method of the montage of attractions is the comparison of
subjects for thematic effect. I shall refer to […] the finale of my film Strike (“Film
While for Eisenstein the terms *associational, intellectual,* and *dialectical montage* all denote a method of film construction in which the juxtaposition of dissonant images is central, the montage of attractions conjures the cinematic field—the join of audience, auteur, and apparatus—in which such generative combinations take place. In short, his montage of attractions simply extends the logic of his dialectical montage, so that it encompasses not only the shocking combinations that occur *in* films but also the shocking relationships that emerge *between* films (and between films and other particularly modern cultural sites, such as dancehall and the circus) (“Montage of Attractions” 35).

The term *attraction,* meanwhile, holds a very precise meaning for Eisenstein. According to Gunning, “then as now, the ‘attraction’ was a term of the fairground,” and it appealed to Eisenstein because it “primarily represented [his] favourite fairground attraction, the roller coaster” and thereby evoked an emergent mass culture given to provoking vertiginous sensual and psychological thrills (“The Cinema of Attractions” 32). Yet in addition to this highly probable pop cultural connotation, the term seems to carry for Eisenstein an additional, and somewhat incongruous, measure of calculability. He first uses *attraction* in a 1923 essay on theatre to describe “any aggressive moment in theatre, […] verified by experience and mathematically calculated to produce specific emotional shocks in the spectator” (“The Montage of Attractions” 34). He later elaborates in the context of cinema:

An attraction is in our understanding any demonstrable fact (an action, an object, a phenomenon, a conscious combination, and so on) that is known and proven to exercise a definite effect on the attention and emotions of the audience and that,

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120 Bordwell expands usefully on his choice of illustration, noting that the bull’s slaughter “is wholly nondiegetic, pushing the sequence into a realm of pure ‘attraction.’ The last reel is virtually a detachable short film, a showcase of Eisenstein’s ‘free montage of attractions’ that, operating independently of narrative, stimulates strong emotions and wide-ranging concepts” (52).
combined with others, possesses the characteristic of concentrating the audience’s emotions in any direction by the production’s purpose. From this point of view a film cannot be a simple presentation or demonstration of events: rather it must be a tendentious selection of, and comparison between events, free from narrowly plot-related plans and moulding the audience in accordance with its purpose.

(“Film Attractions” 40)

As it migrates from theatre to cinema, an attraction is transformed from a “moment” (a fleeting event) to a “demonstrable fact” (an ostensibly immutable detail). This shift recalls my critique, in the previous section, of the metonymic impulse behind Eisenstein’s dialectical montage. Viewed in the context of attractions, Eisenstein’s move to position Strike’s slaughter footage as a “demonstration of the real” (43) takes on an additional and equally problematic significance: it assumes that these attractional image combinations, given their seemingly patent facticity, will perforce produce the desired response.

Eisenstein’s approach to montage is founded on the assumption that film and theatre are necessarily able to “influence [the] audience in the desired direction through a series of calculated pressures on its psyche.” Indeed, Eisenstein “consider[s] it superfluous to expatiate on this (‘agit’) approach to cinema and theatre since it is obvious and well-founded” that these media can and should “deliver […] a series of blows to the consciousness and emotions of the audience” (“Montage of Attractions” 39, original emphasis). Read alongside his aforementioned description of film as “a tractor ploughing over the audience’s psyche,” these statements demonstrate Eisenstein’s conviction that his audience will respond appropriately. In their seemingly total susceptibility to his carefully calibrated shocks, these imagined spectators appear to be exceedingly malleable and unsuspecting. Yet Eisenstein’s assumption that his audience will comply with the obvious (i.e., intended) meanings of his films derives not from a reductive view of them
as uncritically obeisant, but rather from his enormous—and perhaps necessary—faith in his own skilled laconicism. As Nadia Bozak points out, his sparing style is rooted in a post-revolutionary economy of material scarcity in which not only filmmaking supplies (cameras, film stock) but also textual meaning were at a premium. In this light, the signature marks of frugality in his films—e.g. the use of shot repetition—must be read as a means of both rationing material resources and carefully controlling meaning (57). As Bozak puts it, “subtlety and suggestion were luxurious; in a climate of political transformation and material impoverishment nothing could be left to randomness and chance. If the audience did not respond as predicted, the entire enterprise would be lost to its anathema: the gratuitousness and decadence of narrative cinema” (124–25).

Diverse strands of film theory (not to mention literary theory) have, in the nearly a century that has passed since Eisenstein’s first forays into montage, dismantled the notion that a direct line runs between authorial intent and audience reception. Yet readers may be surprised to find that Eisenstein himself drew some of the first fault lines in the myth of the acquiescent spectator (to be clear, Eisenstein did not single-handedly fashion this myth, but he certainly helped to cultivate it). He soon came to appreciate Strike’s slaughter montage as a glaring example of the potentially decisive power that spectators’ class formations can exert over a film’s reception. In an essay published soon after Strike’s release, he acknowledges that the sequence’s intended effect is wholly contingent on the spectator’s extracinematic familiarity with the sight of animal slaughter (familiarity with slaughter is, after all, a fairly reliable marker of class):

Bozak makes this point in a discussion of Kristin Thompson’s theorization of a “cinematic excess,” a term indebted to Barthes’s aforementioned “Third Meaning” essay. According to Thompson, “at that point where motivation fails: excess begins.” Bozak clarifies that cinematic excess “does not simply mean an accumulation of gratuitous formal indulgences. Rather, it is that which makes the viewer aware of the very materiality of the film itself, drawing attention to itself as a consciously conceived system. In [Stephen Heath’s] terms, excess describes those incongruous parts which do not fit the otherwise homogenous filmic system, and it is this nuance that Thompson traces to Roland Barthes’s evocation of ‘obtuse meaning,’ whose self-reflexivity and self-effacement signals a form of excess in that it actively subverts and thus challenges the very system from which it arises […]” (124).
Its exaggeratedly bloody associative effect on a certain stratum of the public is well enough known. The Crimean censors even cut it along with the latrine scene. [...] But on a worker audience the slaughter did not have a “bloody” effect for the simple reason that the worker associates a bull’s blood above all with the processing plants near a slaughterhouse! While on a peasant, used to slaughtering his own cattle, there will be no effect at all. (“The Method of Making a Workers’ Film” 65, original emphasis)

The irony here—an irony Eisenstein deemed a “hilarious failure”—is that while Strike is about and is intended in large part for workers, its carefully crafted climax unwittingly targets spectators who are unused to seeing, and thus easily shocked by, the work of slaughter (“Method” 65). Eisenstein’s belated recognition of his sequence’s ill-considered address points to the diversity of audiences and, in doing so, intimates the necessary heterogeneity and unpredictability of any given film’s reception. Eisenstein only pushes this recognition so far, however. As the above-cited essay’s title suggests, his realisation yielded only a closer attention to his spectators’ class affiliations; that is, it did not upset his fundamental belief that carefully chosen stimuli invariably produce the desired response, but simply taught him the necessity of taking a more than cursory account of who is being stimulated. (Such an account is founded on its own set of reductive assumptions—namely, that spectators with extracinematic visual knowledge of animal death will also react uniformly.)

To push Eisenstein’s realisation further, I return to a concept that was central to my discussion, in the Introduction and in Chapter One, of why we look at dead animals on film, Gunning’s theory of an early cinema of attractions. Gunning’s retooled history of early cinema is heavily indebted to Eisenstein’s montage praxis; indeed, he draws directly on Eisenstein’s use of the term attraction to name and articulate his understanding of an
early cinema “that directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle—a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself” (“The Cinema of Attractions” 284). Gunning’s early cinema remains close to Eisentein’s montage of attractions in its general contours: just as Eisenstein viewed the production and juxtaposition of attractions as a way for the director to divest herself of “narrowly plot-related plans,” Gunning sees the theorisation of a field of attractions as an alternative to “the hegemony of narrative films” that, at the time of his writing, structured film history (“Cinema” 281). For both Eisenstein and Gunning, furthermore, the revolutionary potential of cinematic attractions lies in their inseparable form and content: emergent and frequently interconnected forms of popular entertainment (vaudeville, cinema, amusement parks, the circus) promise to free spectators from the chains of contemplation previously imposed by comparatively static older forms of visual and literary art and from the “diegetic absorbtion” promised by the increasingly dominant narrative cinema (“Cinema” 284). The serialisation in and of these popular attractions sets off unexpected associations and jolts the spectator into a newfound awareness of modern reality (232).

For Gunning, however, this awareness consists more precisely in the spectator’s recognition of—and even her delight in—the complex and novel mediations of modern reality. This distinction points to the most significant difference between the field of popular attractions Gunning describes and Eisenstein’s attractional praxis of montage in post-revolutionary Russia. Gunning’s cinema of attractions “solicits a highly conscious awareness of the film image engaging the viewer’s curiosity”; indeed, it is driven by the spectator’s “conscious delectation of shocks and thrills” (“An Aesthetic of Astonishment” 121, 120). In other words, the nascent movie-watching public of the early twentieth century was prepared and even eager to be stimulated—to be startled, tricked, baffled,
stunned—by the new medium’s remarkable capacity to produce moving images. This is not to say that Gunning’s spectator is equipped with an endless store of critical savvy and individual agency. He is cast, rather, in the mould of Benjamin’s modern city dweller, whose sensorium “technology has subjected […] to a complex kind of training”; habituated to the chaos of modern daily life, this urbanite has “a new and urgent need for stimuli [that is] met by the film” (Benjamin, “Baudelaire” 174–5). All the same, Gunning’s cognisant spectator emerges in sharp contrast to the tractable audience Eisenstein envisions for his attractions. More to the point, his variation upends Eisenstein’s surety that his montage will be received as he intended: by demonstrating the spectator’s knowingness, it suggests that the spectator’s response is also an unknown variable.

While a more thoroughgoing analysis of the many complex factors weighing on montage’s reception is certainly in order, I foreground Gunning’s intervention because it bears productively on the parallel discourse surrounding the practice of shocking or stunning animals bound for slaughter. With his suggestion of what we might call the undecidability of the modern cinematic spectator in mind, I turn now to the coexistent discussion of shocking animals. My remarks here pivot on the rhetoric of Temple Grandin, who, through numerous engagements with a range of media, has emerged in recent years as one of the most prominent advocates for what is variously termed “ethical,” “sustainable,” “humane” and even “happy meat”—that is, meat derived from slaughter practices that almost invariably centre around shocking and stunning animals.

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122 When referring to the techniques used to prepare animals for slaughter, I use the terms shocking and stunning more or less interchangeably. I should clarify, however, that shocking refers to the use of electric current, while stunning to the use of a captive bolt gun. In Canada, England, and the United States (among other countries), federal law requires that all mammals (except for rabbits) be shocked/stunned prior to slaughter; certain exceptions are made (not without controversy) for religion-bound techniques of slaughter, such as the Jewish custom of Shehitah.

123 Kathryn Gillepsie provides an insightful overview of these terms in the draft of her article “How Happy is Your Meat?” She highlights the dissonance of terms such as humane slaughter by replacing the component words’ with various of their synonyms: “‘altruistic carnage,’ ‘considerate massacre,’ ‘merciful
I focus on Grandin for two reasons. One, while she is by no means alone in her promotion of the ethical dimensions of shock, she has come to serve as a particularly recognisable mouthpiece for a rapidly growing segment of the meat industry. Two, much like Eisenstein, Grandin’s regard for animal killing is fundamentally an expression of a concern for human death.

In her capacity as a consultant and spokesperson for various entities in this industry, Grandin regularly organises her advocacy around the given of shock. She sums up her approach to meat production in the television episode “Stairway to Heaven”: “I think using animals for food is an ethical thing to do, but we’ve got to do it right. We’ve got to give those animals a decent life and we’ve got to give them a painless death.”

According to Grandin, a painless death is guaranteed by the implementation of two complementary sets of controls: physical parameters should prevent animals from sensing—and especially from visually perceiving—their impending death, and proper techniques and tools should ensure that death arrives instantly. In short, animals bound for slaughter are to be shocked/stunned in both senses of the words: their death must take them by surprise and it must originate in a sudden bodily assault that instantaneously robs them of consciousness. These imperatives guide Grandin’s architectural designs for livestock-handling facilities, which, by her estimate, have been implemented in one-third of America’s slaughterhouses (Stairway; Wolfe, Posthumanism? 128). Her “stairway to heaven” structure (from which Morris’s film takes its title) presents the most explicit murder,’ ‘kindly tearing to pieces,’ ‘compassionately slain flesh,’ or a ‘sympathetic blow.’ These combinations, she points out, produce “phrases which describe the contradiction of modifying a violent act by attaching a term that implies care” (1–3). This substitutive wordplay thickens an oxymoronic term that is quickly gaining currency as a legitimate descriptor for ethical practices of production and consumption. I discuss Grandin’s involvement with the meat industry in more detail in Chapter Two. An additional, enigmatic similarity links Grandin to the subject of the present chapter: she frequently describes her autism as a condition that gives her insight into the experience of animals, since it enables her to “think in pictures” (Thinking in Pictures: My Life with Autism). Eisenstein, meanwhile, understands montage as a sort of aesthetic manifestation of what he takes to be our basic structure of thinking: it works “in exactly the same way as the primitive thought form—thinking in images—is displaced at a certain stage and replaced by conceptual thought” (“Beyond” 140).
instantiation: the various features of this structure—namely, its spiral structure, opaque walls and single-file chutes—work together to ensure that cattle will proceed toward their slaughter in complete ignorance of what is to come. Grandin parses their fate upon reaching the structure’s endpoint (i.e., heaven) in clear-cut terms: “they’re shot in the head with a cap bolt stunner that kills them instantly.”

In her video essay “On Torture,” Angela Cozea suggests that Grandin’s recasting of slaughter as humane—a recasting predicated on the assumptions clustering around shock—entails a recasting of ethics. Cozea critiques Grandin’s embrace of abruptness as constitutive of a particularly modern valuation of life and death. She reminds her listeners that “of course, we all prefer that the killing of the animal be swift; the humane thing to do. We: that is, the ones who believe that there may be something possibly ethical in such a gesture. The swift blow as an ethical blow; the swift blow as ethics.” Cozea suggests that we in fact prefer to tell ourselves that slaughter is swift. This model of humane slaughter enables a narrative of animal slaughter that is immensely appealing on two fronts: on one hand, it allows us to “satisfy that which we call our conscience: we have been kind to the animal, to the cow, to the thousands upon thousands of cows, by slaughtering them swiftly, by not letting them know they were going to their death.” On the other hand, this narrative provides a “model of what has become our own death”; here, death arrives “without suffering, and more importantly, in the morphine-induced ignorance of our own dying.” Cozea’s critique is particularly provocative in its suggestion that the advocacy of shock has very little to do with animals’ experience and consciousness of death; it is, rather, an easing of our conscience, and a projection of the death we wish for ourselves.

To substantiate Cozea’s point, it is necessary to place Grandin’s focus on shock as a means for eliminating the pain of slaughter—as, in other words, a justification of
slaughter—within a larger discursive trajectory. While her reform rhetoric implies (as all such movements for improvement do) that her correctives present novel approaches to outmoded practices, recent scholarship shows that shocking/stunning animals prior to slaughter has long been a central concern of both the modern meat industry and animal welfare/rights advocates involved in movements to ameliorate the industry. In his work on slaughter and other animal-welfare reform movements in nineteenth-century England and America, Burt foregrounds the “strong visual component to animal ethics and notions of humane treatment” in order to resolve the larger paradox at the centre of our present-day conception of nineteenth-century England and America as, on one hand, the apogee of modern empire and nation building and, on the other, as an era known for its immense extension of “sympathy” for both human and nonhuman others (Animals 22). He contends that the nineteenth century’s burgeoning preoccupation with sympathy or humane behaviour—an interest manifest in the concurrent formation of vegetarian movements, the founding of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the implementation of labour laws—directed its energy towards the surface appearance of societal comportment. He writes, “humane behaviour is not simply a matter of deeds but is also a matter of being seen to behave humanely. […] The appearance and treatment of the animal body become a barometer for the moral health of the nation” (36). As support, Burt cites the passage of copious bills and amendments that “sought to regulate the treatment of animals in public places [and] also determined what was appropriate and inappropriate for the public to see” (36). These visual proscriptions included, among other things, banning vivisections from public scientific lectures and forbidding children from witnessing the killing of animals. They also included a legislative act that may strike readers—particularly those familiar with Grandin’s work—as peculiar: the 1876 Act to Amend the Law Relating to Cruelty to Animals, which extended the policing of the
visibility of animal suffering and death to include the vision of those very animals, stating that “No animal shall be killed in the sight of any other animal awaiting slaughter” (37). Yet in light of Burt’s characterisation of the nineteenth century’s codification of humaneness as ocularcentric and fixated on surface appearances, this act makes perfect sense: it is the next logical step required in a regime that transposes the profound ethical questions asked by slaughter onto the manageable site of vision. Grandin’s emphasis on shock—in particular, her insistence that animals be shocked (i.e. surprised) by the unexpected blow of the captive bolt gun—merely presents an updated, modernised version of this law.

Brantz likewise frames the rise of stunning in imperial Germany within the modernising nation’s deeply conflicted social values; her analysis, she asserts, “offer[s] valuable insights into the historical problematic of negotiating a social ethos that justifies mass production and destruction, while simultaneously making ambitious claims about the improvement of humanity and civilisation” (“Stunning Bodies” 169). Whereas Burt argues that the move to shock (i.e., to surprise) animals bound for slaughter is indicative of the way in which the burgeoning British and American animal welfare movements directed their energy to superficial solutions, Brantz asserts that the move to stun (i.e. to instantly deafen the consciousness of) such animals in Germany was made possible by a superficial grasp of the technique’s efficacy. She writes,

Stunning was a powerful concept because it suggested a gradual less violent death. However, because animal protectionists were so wedded to the idea that

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125 The preoccupation with vision and humaneness in the discourse surrounding slaughter predates the nineteenth century, but until this time it centres on humans’ access to the sight of slaughter. As Martha Nussbaum notes in her discussion of Immanuel Kant’s “cruel habits claim,” British custom in the eighteenth century dictated that doctors and butchers should not sit on juries because their daily work inured them to the shocking sight of death (330). This custom in turn realises one of the ideals of Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), the leaders of which “suffer none of their citizens to kill their cattle, because they think that pity and good-nature, which are among the best of those affectations that are born with us, are much impaired by the butchering of animals” (57). I return to the longstanding belief in the corrupting influence of the sight of slaughter in Chapter Four.
stunning equaled humane treatment they overlooked the often blatant discrepancy between their theoretical notions and actual practice, since many of them relied on their sense perceptions and sentiments to determine the alleged cruelty of slaughter. Equating appearance with suffering, they considered any movement of the animal’s eyes or convulsions of its body a sure indicator of pain. (“Stunning Bodies” 173)

This critique questions the practicability of stunning on at least two counts. One, it calls attention to the practice’s inconsistent results. As with the administration of any anesthesia, stunning does not always work; animals may not entirely lose consciousness, or may regain it during the latter steps of the process of slaughter. Secondly (and more significantly), the measure of stunning’s efficacy is fundamentally anthropocentric. It assumes that the visible signs that index the suffering of animals closely resemble those of humans, and it is satisfied by the display of familiarly human markers of unconsciousness (glazed eyes, stilled bodies). This measure fails to take account of the complex and often unknown variations in sensual experiences (of life, death, suffering) across species. To touch on just one area of variation, for many animals, experience is not as strongly shaped by vision as it is for humans. For these animals, it makes little sense to organise the visual field so that death comes as a surprise, since they will likely perceive this impending event—as well as witness the deaths of their fellow animals—through other sensory means.

To sum up, Strike’s closing sequence presents a succinct, if anachronistic, provocation to interrogate the entwined tactics of shocking cinematic audiences and shocking animals bound for slaughter. The sequence’s convergence of form and content forces a comparison of the shocks dealt by unnerving image combinations and by pole axes/stun guns. As I have demonstrated in this section, although these shocks are
drastically different in qualitative terms (enlightenment, death), they are fundamentally similar—and similarly problematic—insofar as they presume that the beings subject to them are wholly susceptible. This valuation of beings (human and animal) as always already receptive to shock is not only inaccurate but also unethical: it casts the recipients of shock as uniformly reactive surfaces, and makes no allowance for the range of responses that are contingent on individual context and species membership.

V. Efficiency and Excess

I conclude this chapter with a few words about my choice of epigraph: “In these chutes the stream of animals was continuous […], a very river of death. Our friends were not poetical, and the sight suggested to them no metaphors of human destiny; they thought only of the wonderful efficiency of it all” (37). Sinclair’s description in *The Jungle* of his protagonists’ first unflinching view of the Chicago slaughterhouses in which they will soon toil resonates most immediately with Eisenstein’s realisation of the “hilarious failure” of *Strike*’s slaughter sequence; both novelist and filmmaker assert that the affective potency of viewing slaughter is bound to a class-based familiarity with the practice and labour of killing animals. Yet in forging this connection, *The Jungle* and *Strike* adopt different strategies for negotiating their literal and metaphorical meanings. Sinclair’s reflection on his characters’ literal-minded response to their first look at the American slaughter industry can be read as a cautionary reminder to his reader that his novel’s political message does not trade in metaphor; that is, this narrational remark guides the reader to take the novel’s harrowing descriptions of slaughter—and, more precisely, the human labour of slaughter—on a literal level. The viewer of *Strike*, in contrast, is given no such advice regarding how to navigate the film’s competing metaphorical and literal meanings. This absence of explicit authorial guidance may in part
explain what Nesbet characterizes as “the admiring but flummoxed reactions of critics” upon Strike’s release in 1925; as she explains, many of the initial reviews of the film agree that Eisenstein’s innovative and incredibly rapid montage would be met with the audience’s incomprehension (21–22). Foremost among these critics is Kuleshov, who asserts of Strike’s montage, “there’s too much excess in it, there’s an as-yet-unsystematized infatuation with rapid changes” (qtd. in Nesbet, 24).

This chapter’s analysis of Strike seizes on this ostensible excess as a way into considering the film’s competing meanings and the ethical implications thereof. The film was not, as Kuleshov and other early reviewers predicted, met with universal incomprehension; rather, its “unsystematized” yet nevertheless rigorously layered meanings and operations have yielded—and continue to generate—a rich store of frequently conflicting readings. In joining this body of work, this chapter has considered the film from several perspectives and through a number of methodological lenses. In the first section, I scrutinize the mechanics of Eisenstein’s dialectical montage, and wager that his formal praxis insists, almost in spite of itself, on the co-presence of thesis and antithesis; in the case of Strike’s slaughter sequence, this operation sustains the spectator’s awareness of the bull’s very real slaughter and thus makes possible her ethical recognition of this animal’s death. The second and third sections of this chapter present a less optimistic view; these sections foreground the ways in which the sequence constructs the bull’s slaughter as, on one hand, a factual and ultimately forgettable exemplar and, on the other hand, as a disposable conduit of shock. These latter strands of analysis indicate, moreover, that in its expression of metaphor, Eisenstein’s brand of dialectical montage necessarily divides the world into vehicle and tenor. In doing so, it operates antithetically to the Bazinian ideal of a cohesive film language that this dissertation attempts to articulate—a language that is “capable of expressing everything without chopping the
world up into bits (What is Cinema? 4). This chapter’s variegated readings of Strike’s
slaughter sequence thus work, by and large, to establish a critical comparison between
montage’s forceful collisions—what Nesbet calls its “savage junctures”—and the looser
techniques of abutment and limitrophic play that I examine in Chapter Four.
—Chapter Four—

**Binding and Loosing: On the Ethics of Making Present**

*I imagine the supreme cinematic perversion would be the projection of an execution backward like those comic newsreels in which the diver jumps up from the water back onto his diving board.—André Bazin, “Death Every Afternoon” (31)*

*Ethics is always about a view from somewhere; the important place we’re at now is that the somewhere doesn’t have to be human.—Cary Wolfe, “Biopolitical Thought and Non-Human Animals”*  

I. Catching Life Unawares: Dziga Vertov’s *Kino-Eye*

I begin this final chapter by looking back at a film that takes as its central formal gesture the act of looking back, Vertov’s *Kinoglaz* (alternately translated as *Kino-Eye, Cine-Eye, Cinema Eye, Life Unrehearsed*, and *Life Caught Unawares*, 1924). I concluded Chapter Two with reference to this film’s use of reverse motion to show the un-doing of various everyday activities: the un-diving of swimmers, the un-baking of bread, and, most important for my purposes, the un-slaughtering of a bull. This last undoing anticipates Noëlie Vialles’s speculation, made seventy years later, that “seeing round an abattoir in the opposite direction would be like watching a film backwards; it would mean reconstituting the animal from the starting point of the carcass, and that would be at least

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126 I borrow the expression “binding and loosing” from the title of a poem by my mother, Laurie O’Brien (42). She had in mind the overlap between these two terms’ usage in dog agility training, and their religious meaning and origins. In the sport of agility, the techniques of creating a bond between human and dog are commonly referred to as binding, while in the New Testament, Jesus tells the apostle Peter, “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:18; see also Matthew 16:19). Jesus’s wording comes from the Torah and Jewish legal phraseology, where “bind” means to declare something forbidden and “loose” to declare it allowed; this legal sense applies to objects, not persons. My mother uses the expression as a way to describe and think about the relationships one effects (with humans and nonhumans) and lets go of in and through life and death. I likewise intend it to evoke an ongoing state of negotiation—a becoming—of ties between humans and animals. I also intend a string of secondary resonances. With regards to binding: books are bound together, apprentices are bound to their employers, and animal by-products are commonly used as binding agents in a variety of products (see, for example, Shukin’s account of the role of gelatin or “animal glue” in the invention of the cinema [104]). Moreover, one often finds oneself in moral or ethical binds, from which one may or may not be loosed; in addition to being freed from such obligations, one may be loosed from a physical restraint or a state of confinement. In sum, I translate loosely (i.e., not literally) and use the expression “binding and loosing” to evoke representational strategies that would perform the limitrophic ideal of connecting—but not levelling the differences between—humans and animals. Furthermore, I retain the admittedly awkward gerund “loosing,” to remind the reader of its homophonic relative, “losing,” particularly in the sense of ceasing to possess something.
equally disturbing” (53–54). The preliminary aim of this chapter is to corroborate Vialles’s wager and, moreover, to situate Vertov’s methods of “catching life unawares” as a form of defamiliarization that presents a significant step towards an ethical representation of animal slaughter. I then move to an extended examination of *Killer of Sheep* (Charles Burnett, 1977), a neo-realist American drama loosely centred on a slaughterhouse worker and his immediate circle of family and friends in post-riots Watts, L.A. (Burnett shot the film in the early 1970s and completed it in 1975, but was not able to release it until 1977). *Killer of Sheep* likewise renders slaughter unfamiliar, but also employs a number of idiosyncratic formal strategies that effectively bind this site/sight and its animal constituents to the lived reality—and particularly to the domestic space—of the film’s human players. I argue that the film’s combination of these techniques achieves an ethical engagement with the sight/site of slaughter.

Before I undertake this staggered argument, it is worth re-articulating what I mean by “ethical.” To this end, I want to distil the various references I have made to this term over the course of this dissertation and my extended discussion of it in Chapter Two. To recall, I adopt Badiou’s descriptive appraisal of the current usage of “ethics” as a highly unstable “principle that governs how we relate to ‘what is going on’” (2). At a number of points in this project, I suggest an evaluative definition of ethicality by identifying what is unethical. Principally, I charge that films that resort to the fetishizing conventions of the slaughterhouse aesthetic are unethical, insofar as they present animal slaughter as a contained and containable entity that operates outside or apart from the discourses, institutions, cultural practices, and everyday habits that structure our lives; the inverse of this argument is that films that connect slaughter to our lived reality are ethical. This is

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127 Nesbet explains that Vertov “began his documentary […] with the claim that it would catch life ‘vraspllok,’ a term meaning ‘unawares’ but also ‘unexpectedly,’ and indeed throughout *Cine-Eye* the tension persists between presenting a documentary portrayal of Soviet life and showing everyday things unexpectedly” (32–33). Readers will recall from Chapter Three that “shock,” particularly as it is invoked in the discourse of the slaughter industry, bears a similar semiotic tension.
indeed my contention, but not the entirety of my argument about ethics. In Chapter Two, I consider the weight accorded suffering in current discourse surrounding animals—that is, in the interlocking critiques of the human-animal divide and advocacy movements for animal welfare/rights. Many HAS scholars and animal activists agree that the baseline for challenges to anthropocentrism and its attendant ills should rest at the Benthamian argument, “Can they suffer?” I concur with these interlocutors, but I take issue with their tendency to recast suffering within the very sort of capacities-based approach that Bentham’s question promises to undo. As I argue in dialogue with Derrida, Diamond, and Wolfe, an interest in animal suffering is all too easily and often translated into a celebration of humans’ ability to alleviate the suffering of helpless (i.e., incapacitated) animals. This approach re-entrenches an anthropocentric worldview and shuts down the potential that Bentham’s question has to level the human-animal divide. As Derrida remarks, “‘Can they suffer?’ amounts to asking ‘can they not be able?’” By implication, this question also asks, can we not be able? Coming to terms with this shared “nonpower,” Derrida argues, presents “the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion” (“The Animal” 396). Following Derrida, I argue that ethical representations of slaughter not only connect the practice of killing animals to our lived reality, but also underscore the way in which suffering binds us to animals. By pressing the spectator to acknowledge the suffering and finitude she shares with animals, such representations do not foster impassivity or apathy; quite the contrary, they press spectators to respond to the “undeniable” (to use Derridean language) imperative to address and redress “what is going on”—and, in the context of the slaughter industry, what is going very wrong—with humans and animals today.

To begin at the beginning, I return to *Kino-Eye*. Vertov announces the indefinite
generic status of his film in the opening credits, with a title that proclaims it to be “the
first nonfictional film thing.” An assemblage of vignettes centred on the Young Pioneers’
unflagging efforts to promote the new values of communism, the film both follows and
departs from Vertov’s previous newsreel series Kino-Pravda (Cinema-Truth, 1922–
1925). The 23 issues of Kino-Pravda seek a higher “truth” in the spontaneous, unadorned,
and frequently candid documentation of daily life. Kino-Eye likewise strives to capture
the quotidian reality of an increasingly industrialised Soviet state, but here Vertov’s
growing investment in the cinematic apparatus’ technical capacities of revelation—
capacities that, for him, far exceed those of the human eye—accommodates his
intermittent use of unconcealed staging and conspicuous post-production manipulations.
The most remarkable instances of these truth-seeking artifices occur in the reverse-motion
sequences—particularly the ones depicting the transformation of bread into lustrous
wheat and cuts of beef into grazing cattle—that Vertov interpolates into his chronicle of
the Pioneers’ activity and activism. As Nadia Bozak observes, these sequences prefigure
the stunningly aseptic long-takes of Our Daily Bread (2005), which neatly realise the
“eco-conscious society’s urge to render transparent the industrial processes embedded in
our common consumer goods—in this case what we eat” (100). Bozak’s comparison is
easily extended to two films roughly contemporary with Kino-Eye: in Rien que les heures
(1926), a bourgeois man’s glance at his lunch plate gives way to a superimposed image of
the slaughterhouse from whence his entrée derived; John Grierson’s Drifters (1929),
meanwhile, reconstructs the journey of North Atlantic herring from sea to market as, to
use the intertitles’ descriptive terms, “an epic of steam and steel.” Bozak’s comparison
applies as well to more commercial recent fare such as Fast Food Nation (2006) and

128 Anat Pick makes note of Cavalcanti’s film and groups it with the “so-called city films of the 1920s”
among which Vertov’s Man With a Movie Camera is the most famous). In her estimation, the sequence’s
obvious meaning/function is allegorical, a symbolic act of “violence fractur[ing] the civilized façade of
middle-class life”; she allows, however, that it also “carries an inalienable literal power” (215, n1).
Food Inc. (2008). Vertov’s reversals of meat- and bread-making introduce one of the central questions asked by these later films and by the larger critique of industrial food production and consumption to which they belong: do you know where your food—and particularly your meat—comes from? Bozak is quick to point out, however, that whereas Vertov’s reverse-motion sequences rhetorically pose this question in order to answer with a “celebration of collectivization and socialized labor,” the more recent films frame their response as an unsettling “exposure of the guts of what might be considered quite the opposite—industrial agri-business, whose cheap and anonymous migrant workers put cheap food in the mouths of anonymous citizens located offsite, off camera, elsewhere” (101).

If Kino-Eye as a whole is an encomium to the values and virtues of collectivized life and labour, its reverse-motion sequences extol, more precisely, the virtuosity of the cinematic apparatus. Vertov adopts an overtly self-reflexive stance in these experimental sections, the purpose of which is to expound the remarkable feats of the “Kino-Eye” or “Camera-Eye,” the name he uses to designate his method of filmmaking, as well as the documentary movement and group he founded and led (and of course this eponymous film) (Vertov, ed. note, 5). In his writings, Vertov describes the Kino-Eye most evocatively as “‘that which the eye doesn’t see,’ / as the microscope and telescope of time, / as the negative of time, / as the possibility of seeing without limits and distances, / as the remote control of movie cameras, / as tele-eye, / as X-ray eye, / as ‘life caught unawares,’ etc. etc.” and he defines it most concretely as “the documentary cinematic decoding of both the visible world and that which is invisible to the naked eye” (41, 87).\footnote{129} Narrowly affined with the mechanical and ostensibly unhuman eye of the

\footnote{129} Just as Eisenstein articulates his approach to dialectical montage over the course of numerous theoretical essays and films, Vertov develops his Kino-Eye—a method in many ways antithetical to Eisenstein’s praxis—in copious articles, manifestos and films.
camera, the Kino-Eye aims for a “decisive cleaning up of film language, for its complete separation from the language of theatre and literature” (83). Yet Vertov cannot at once cast off the dramatic conceits that, in his view, atavistically endure in cinema; rather, these devices form a scaffold that is stripped away with each new filmmaking venture, until it is almost entirely dismantled in his vertiginous *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929). Whereas Vertov opens that film with (irony of ironies) a title card boasting of its creation “without the help of intertitles,” in *Kino-Eye* he makes regular use of this blunt tool of expository guidance. It is as if Vertov does not, at the outset, entirely trust the Kino-Eye to show (in Gunning’s terms, to monstrate), and so also relies on the intertitles to simultaneously tell the audience (to narrate) what they are being shown. This didacticism turns out to have a certain advantage for 21st-century spectators (as it may or may not have had for spectators in 1924): long habituated to the manipulations of reproductive visual media, we need reminding that these operations often serve, or at least are intended to serve, very particular functions. We may also need reminding that cinema’s once novel modes of revelation retain their capacity to astonish; to this end, the arguably redundant intertitles solicit a renewal of wonder, helping us to “recover something of [this technology’s] original strangeness” (Gunning “Re-Newing Old Technologies” 45).

The intertitles in each of *Kino-Eye’s* reverse-motion sequences direct the spectator’s attention to a distinct value of the Kino-Eye’s faculty for decoding. In this regard, they establish the film as the structural precursor to what Lev Manovitch conceives as the “database” of *Man with a Movie Camera*. Manovitch prizes Vertov’s

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130 For a thorough refutation of the myriad claims (including Vertov’s decidedly exuberant one) for the “autonomy of technical processes,” see Jean-Louis Comolli’s “Technique and Ideology: Camera, Perspective, Depth of Field” (213).

131 I have in mind here Wanda Strauven’s riff on showing and telling: “Monstration (showing) is to narration (telling) what presentation is to representation or, in Gunning’s terms, ‘exhibitionism’ to voyeurism” (15).
1929 film because its multitudinous effects “are motivated by a particular argument, which is that the new techniques of obtaining images and manipulating them […] can be used to decode the world.” The film’s veritable “orgy of cinematography” thus constitutes, for Manovitch, a database of “the full range of possibilities offered by the camera” (xxvii or 243). If the spectator of *Man with a Movie Camera* can access this structured set of data from multiple points (as a database, by definition, works), the viewer of *Kino-Eye* is to a certain extent limited by the direct signposts of its intertitles. To continue Manovitch’s analogy, these titles act as a sort of fixed filing system. The diving sequence stresses the apparatus’s power to enhance—and even to fundamentally restructure—empirical knowledge. Prefaced by an intertitle that reads “Kino-Eye shows how one dives properly,” the sequence presents a series of dives first at regular speed and in forward motion, and then in reverse slow motion. While the slowed speed allows the spectator to better scrutinise the divers’ form, the reverse motion presents the familiar movement from a radically new perspective; in this, the sequence resonates with Benjamin’s insistence that cinema’s innovation of visuality “does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject” (“Work of Art” 236). The bread sequence, meanwhile, does not promise insight into the mechanics of bread-making, but rather asserts the Kino-Eye’s ability to turn back time and render visible an idealised former state—the doughy becoming of collectivization. Several intertitles explain that the Kino-Eye has been summoned to realise a Young Pioneer’s wish to “return the bread to the bakery”; the

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132 It bears noting that I intend this analogy loosely and not entirely literally (as does Manovitch, I surmise). Databases and filing cabinets possess a depth that is at odds with the flattened linear materiality of the filmstrip; thus a cinematic spectator, especially one viewing an analogue film in a theatre, does not enjoy the same unfettered access to entry points as a database user (or even a file clerk, for that matter). The analogy is useful insofar as it provides a concrete, generative model for thinking through the varying degrees to which film structures invite or dissuade the spectator to, in Noël Burch’s words, “get into” the film and its component parts (shots, scenes) (qtd. in Williams 65). In my analysis of *Killer of Sheep*, I identify a structuring logic similar to, but perhaps even more accessible, than the database.
hands of a clock swing into counter-clockwise movement, and the Kino-Eye tracks the thick loaves as they are shaped by the hands of workers at the bakery, the mill, and the wheat field. In a letter outlining his plans for the sequence to Goskino, the company that would produce Kino-Eye, Vertov indicates that his backward glance is fundamentally future-oriented. He explains that by manifesting this return, the Kino-Eye opens up space for a possible future of collective ownership: “In disclosing the origins of objects and of bread, the camera makes it possible for every worker to acquire, through evidence, the conviction that he, the worker, creates all these things himself, and that consequently they belong to him” (34). Finally, the reverse slaughter sequence asserts the Kino-Eye’s capacity to revivify. This sequence attracts my attention for obvious reasons, yet it is also fair to say that it assumes a privileged position in the film’s filing system.

The slaughter sequence is in fact the first and longest of Kino-Eye’s reverse-motion sequences, and as such it is the first and most compelling proof of the “nonfictional film thingness” to which the title sequence lays claim. The sequence commences as several lines of action converge at a privatised meat market: two girl Pioneers hang a placard at the market’s entrance; inside, vendors count change, heft pieces of meat; a boy Pioneer inquires into the cost of beef (which, according to the vendor’s answering scowl, is unapologetically exorbitant); a woman attempts to bargain; another woman pauses to study the placard. This last woman’s gaze reveals the sign’s exhortation to shop instead at the cooperative, and her compliance is signalled by the film’s smooth shift into reverse motion; her steps take her back to the cooperative, where she is absorbed in a fade. Meanwhile, an intertitle explains that the co-op obtains its meat

133 Nesbet discerns a similar movement but argues that it works in the opposite direction: “Vertov’s metonymic chain of backwards motion ends up in what should (spatially, temporally, and ideologically) be marked as the past: the pastoral idyll in the country meadow, where the renascent ox can once again kick up his heels with his friends.” She argues, moreover, “to some degree, in fact, the film becomes stuck in the countryside; instead of returning to [the] shopping expedition, the film moves on to the subject of a Pioneer summer camp and the broader topic of friendship between town and country” (34).
directly from the slaughterhouse. Freed from the limitations of the woman’s embodied perspective, the film asserts its autonomous powers of reanimation with an intertitle that reads, “Kino-Eye moves time backwards.” Several re-establishing shots locate the spectator outside a gated building, and a static medium shot of an imposing statue of a bull, facing west (i.e., looking back), announces that it is the slaughterhouse. A medium close-up of hanging slabs of beef brings the spectator inside, and another intertitle identifies the quivering masses as “What twenty minutes ago was a bull.” The following series of shots neatly reconstitute the animal: its not-quite-inert flesh becomes a skinned and disembowelled carcass; a dressed and intact corpse; a convulsing, prostrate body; and, finally, a living, moving animal. These shots are punctuated by intertitular declarations of the Kino-Eye’s death-defying powers: “We give the bull back his entrails,” “We dress the bull in his skin,” and “The bull comes back to life.” The bull is then led from the holding pen into the stockyard, absorbed into a herd of cattle, packed onto a freight train, and dispatched to the farm from whence it came. The train masks the transition back to forward motion. Abstracted in close-up shots, it is impossible to tell whether this machine (second in Vertov’s oeuvre only to the camera) is coming or going; thus as the train returns the cattle to the field, the film fluidly rights itself in a forward progression.

The sequence’s insistently self-referential intertitles place it squarely in the tradition of the cinema of attractions. In historicising this field, Gunning highlights the significant role of the exhibitor in early film programs. This showman, who often also played a part in directing, producing, and/or projecting the film(s) on display, provided a running commentary before and during projection, and thereby mediated the inchoate relationship between the cinematic apparatus and the audience. Gunning’s contention is that the exhibitor’s live voiceover accompaniment frequently “stress[ed] the actual act of
display.” He describes, for example, J. Stuart Blackton and Albert E. Smith’s exhibition of *The Black Diamond Express* (James A. White, 1896), one of many films to imitate both the subject matter and projection technique of cinema’s inaugural *L’arrivée d’un train à La Ciotat* (*The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*, Auguste and Louis Lumière, 1895). Blackton and Smith arranged the projection to begin with a frozen image of the train, over which Blackton voiced a suspenseful commentary. Gunning describes this performance in the following terms:

> Like a fairground barker, he builds an atmosphere of expectation, a pronounced curiosity leavened with anxiety as he stresses the novelty and astonishing properties which the attraction about to be revealed will possess. This sense of expectation, sharpened to an intense focus on a single instant of transformation, heightened the startling impact of the first projections. (“An Aesthetic of Astonishment” 120)

The stilled image was then released, and the train rushed towards the audience. The spectators’ alleged shrieking response (namely to White’s and the Lumières’s trains, but also implicitly to other early cinematic spectacles) is what is at issue in Gunning’s cinema of attractions: these were not the screams of naïve spectators who feared the locomotive would burst through the screen, he argues, but rather the bodily expression of an intense yet calculated “excitement of curiosity and its fulfilment” (121). The significant appeal of the practice of beginning projection in suspension, Gunning ventures in a footnote, indicates that early spectators’ “conscious delectation of shocks and thrills” (120) was often rooted in what Annette Michelson describes as the “frisson” produced by the “instance of motion.” Yet he also wagers that Louis Lumière’s *Démolition d’un mur* 134

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134 The exhibition practice of highlighting the “instance of motion” begins, significantly, with Muybridge. According to Williams, “the high point of his [animal locomotion] ‘show’ was the moment when, after presenting various still slides of horses for purposes of analysis, he hand-cranked his zoopraxiscope to project shor, larger-than-life motion sequences. As one reporter commented, ‘So perfect was the synthesis
(The Demolition of a Wall, 1896), presents “a possibly equally rich projection trope.” A single-shot of a wall being razed, this film was typically “projected first forwards and then in reverse, creating the magical effect of the wall reassembling” (131, n8).

The trick of reverse projection/motion was indeed among the most popular special effects in early cinema. In his account of the role of projection in early Russian cinema, Yuri Tsivian recounts how Louis Lumière, perhaps in response to the discovery of the audience’s glee at viewing the destruction and immediate reconstruction of a crumbling factory wall, made Les bains de Diane à Milan (The Baths of Diana in Milan, 1896), the first film shot with reverse projection in mind. In the 1900s, reverse motion began to be shot in-camera and certain mundane, process-oriented actions (diving, driving, smoking, eating) emerged as particularly photogenic at the hands of reversal.135 Such sequences continued to appear as stand-alone tricks or plot-driving devices into the 1920s, at which point they began to surface more frequently in self-referential and/or experimental films by the likes of Vertov, René Clair, and Buster Keaton (57–58). Tsivian demonstrates, furthermore, that the technique of “tempus reversus” enjoyed something of a cross-media heyday in the first decades of the twentieth century in Russia: writers employed it in theatre (Velimir Khlebnikov’s 1912 play The World Reversed) and in poetry (Vladimir Mayakovsky’s 1916 Futurist poem “War and the World”), and its popularity as a cinematic effect is apparent in frequent and enlivened journalistic and scholarly exegeses of the various reverse-motion sequences that peppered both Russian-made and imported films (57–65). He contends that the cinematic device’s appeal derived, in a general, international context, from its compatibility with turn-of-the-century developments in

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135 I mean photogenic in roughly the same sense that Jean Epstein conceives of photogénie: the “cinematic mystery” by which “an object situated in a dramatic action that also possesses a photographic character, reveals anew its moral character, its human and living expression when reproduced cinematically” (29). While Epstein describes photogénie in almost mystical terms, its operations correspond in large part to the concrete methods of defamiliarization.
popular science (e.g. filmic reversals presented dynamic illustrations of emergent theories about thermodynamics and relativity) and, in the Russian context, from its suggestion that the Revolution of 1917, the “one moment in time above all others that begged to be rewound and replayed,” could be endlessly reiterated and re-imagined (57–58, 62).

*Kino-Eye*’s reversal of slaughter certainly speaks to these two discursive aims, expressing both a scientific empiricism and a utopian political ideal. However, its primary frame remains the realm of attractions. That is, the sequence demands to be read first and foremost as an attraction—as an astonishing entertainment wherein the source of amazement lies not in form or content, but in the very means of production. By the time Vertov began making newsreels in post-revolutionary Russia, narrative cinema had of course long supplanted the cinema of attractions (which, in Gunning’s account, held from 1895 to 1906). Vertov’s later “nonfictional film things” demonstrate, though, that the new dominant order of narrative film did not entirely replace the short, visceral form of attractions, but rather unevenly absorbed it; as Gunning puts it, “the cinema of attractions does not disappear with the dominance of narrative, but rather goes underground, both into certain avant-garde practices and as a component of narrative films” (“The Cinema of Attractions” 382). *Kino-Eye*, in particular, fluidly incorporates the extra-textual devices that defined the cinema of attractions. Most notably, the film’s intertitles take up the role played by the earlier showman-like exhibitor; just like Blackton’s live commentary, they “stress the novelty and astonishing properties” of the film’s three reverse-motion sequences (the only difference being that they punctuate, rather than preface, the unfolding attractions). In the case of the slaughter sequence, these textual incursions code a potentially unnerving series of images as an awe-inspiring spectacle, with the Kino-Eye’s repetitive pronouncements of its powers of revivification calling to mind the spine-tingling narration of a macabre stage illusion or fairground show.
In her reading of *Strike*, discussed in detail in Chapter Three, Nesbet draws a number of astute comparisons between Eisenstein’s and Vertov’s slaughter sequences. Using the vocabulary of play and experimentation, she gestures to the fundamentally attractional nature of *Kino-Eye*’s reversal of meat-production. She points out that Vertov “turns to a slaughterhouse for the footage that most dramatically demonstrates the power of the movie camera to triumph over the usual limitations of time and space.” She contends, though, that the sequence’s playful, mischievous character—“its tone of omnipotent good humour”—undercuts the ambitious move to reverse “the moment of death, that point where the one-way direction of time in our everyday universe is most unforgiving.” In the end, Vertov “transforms the slaughterhouse into a playroom” (33–34). Nesbet’s reading suggests that, ultimately, the bull’s presence and death are more or less arbitrary. That is, Vertov avails himself of the matter of meat-making because, to recall the founding argument of Chapter One, it presents a material peculiarly responsive to the Kino-Eye’s methods of making visible; to use Deleuzian terminology, the process of slaughter—much like the gallop of Muybridge’s horse—offers a “privileged instant” in cinema’s analytical drive to capture, catalogue, and scrutinise “any-instants-whatever” (5). In this regard, the sequence holds little ethical value. It delights and awes spectators, but does little to make them reconsider the practice of slaughter; indeed, its incredible mechanical prowess may even preclude a thoughtful engagement with the material being processed.

Yet to dismiss the sequence as devoid of ethical potential would be to assume that the cinema of attractions from which it so clearly derives is exclusively the terrain of novelty and stupefying leisure. As he applies Benjamin’s concept of shock to his field of attractions, Gunning is careful to retain the “fundamental ambivalence” that structures the German philosopher’s view of modernity; he reminds us, for instance, of Miriam
Hansen’s observation that shock, for Benjamin, promises both to impoverish experience and to supply it with “a strategic significance—as an artificial means of propelling the human body into moments of recognition” (128–29; Gunning cites Hansen’s *Benjamin, Cinema*, 210–11). If, as Rudolf Harms says of early reverse-motion cinema, the slaughter sequence transforms reality “into a free soaring frolic with an actuality otherwise strictly bound by the laws of space and time,” it may also provoke the spectator’s recognition of aspects of that actuality that often go unobserved and unquestioned (qtd. in Tsivian, 57).

To follow this thread, it is necessary to return to Vialles’s conjecture that slaughterhouse tours would have been equally, if not more, disturbing (i.e. shocking) had they begun at the end of the process and presented spectators with the illusion of animal re-assembly.

Vialles’s hypothesis is easily tested by a second-order reversal: a simple push of the rewind button on a VCR transforms *Kino-Eye*’s reverse-slaughter sequence into a quickened version of the conventional syntax of slaughter. More precisely, hitting rewind enables a side-by-side comparison of Vertov’s reversal and the standard forward march of filmic representation that it overturns. The upshot of this comparison is not surprising: viewing Vertov’s “reconstitut[ion of] the animal from the starting point of the carcass” proves to be far more unsettling than watching a straightforward (in this case, rewound) scene of animal disassembly. Vertov’s reversal enthrals, as each step back plays to the spectator’s curiosity: we know what will happen but not what it will look like, and we are astonished by each incremental move back towards life. Played next to

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136 Of course, to perform this precise comparison (to reverse the reversal) one must also have access to the film in video format and to a VCR. Given the growing obsolescence of video technology, spectators today are likely to encounter *Kino-Eye* in this format only if they seek it out at a library and that library, like mine, has yet to update its holdings; the film was released in North American markets on video in 1999 and on DVD in 2002. All the same, present-day spectators who view the sequence in other formats (DVD, streaming online) will likely recall more conventionally phrased scenes of slaughter from other films and will read Vertov’s sequence against them. Speculating on the viewing experiences (and particularly the intertextual reference points) of audiences in the 1920s and the decades immediately following is more difficult. Released in 1924, *Kino-Eye* is among the first films, if not the first, to present a step-by-step documentation of slaughter, albeit one in which the steps were reversed. If audiences at the time compared the slaughter experience to anything, it would have been to their own in-person experience of viewing slaughter.
the original, the righted or rewound sequence holds none of this power: it merely confirms what we know and have seen. Having performed this comparison several times, for me the most striking effect of Vertov’s intervention remains the way it discloses the surreal material practicalities of slaughter. The reversal of the bull’s disembowelment, for example, immediately reminds me—as it does Nesbet (33)—of the operation of hurriedly packing a suitcase: the Kino-Eye “give[s] the bull back its entrails” and then deftly zips it up. In Chapter Two, I argue that films styled according the slaughterhouse aesthetic insist on a linear progression that enacts the “thingification” of the slaughtered animal body. Vertov’s reversal of this progression turns the process in on itself: the bull becomes too much of a “thing” or, rather, its “thingness” becomes absurd. That is to say, this reversal or reiteration introduces an estranging effect into the typical progressive rhythm of mechanical animal disassembly. Re-phrased as the piece-by-piece reassembly of a dead-then-living animal, the sequence brings into focus the surreal (in the term’s literal sense, the “super real”) mechanics of taking animals apart.

The incitement to perceive reality in all of its bizarre banality defines Vertov’s cinema. Scholars agree, more specifically, that his Kino-Eye is closely affined with the technique of defamiliarization famously advocated by the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky. As Michelson writes, Vertov’s opposition of “representation and ‘the feel of the world’ recall[s] to us Shklovsky’s command: ‘We must recover the world; we live as if coated with rubber’” (xxv).137 Shklovsky begins “Art as Technique” (1917) with the observation that “as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic” (11). He continues,

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137 Michelson transposes Shklovsky’s statement, made in “Form and Material in Art.” It reads in full: “We live as if coated with rubber. We must recover the world. Perhaps all the horror (which is little felt) of our days, the Entente, the war, Russia, can be explained by our lack of feeling for the world, by the absence of an extensive art. The purpose of the image is to call an object by a new name. To do this, to make the object an artistic fact, it must be abstracted from among the facts of life” (np).
And so life is reckoned as nothing. Habitualization devours work, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war. [...] And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar,” to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important. (12, original emphasis)

For Shklovsky, Leo Tolstoy’s way of inhabiting unconventional perspectives so as to describe “an object as if he were seeing it for the first time” exemplifies defamiliarization, and he refers at length to the author’s recurrent use of this method of “pricking the conscious” in War and Peace (1869) and “Kholstomer: The Story of a Horse” (1886) (13). Vertov’s reversal of the bull’s fatal trajectory works much like Tolstoy’s estranging perspectives, although, as Nesbet points out and as I have emphasized, in Kino-Eye “defamiliarization [is] being wielded not so much for the creation of high art as for amusement (‘see what the camera can do’) and edification (‘see what you have missed’)” (33). That is to say, Vertov’s revivification of the bull explicitly serves, as indexical animal imagery so often does, the dual purpose of titillation and instruction. Yet if we disregard Kino-Eye’s filing system for a moment, it becomes clear that the sequence’s inversion of the familiar sequence of slaughter also does something else: it obliges us to see a process we have become habituated to not seeing. Vertov’s look back (or look again) invites us to perceive a procedural logic of killing as if we were seeing it for the first time. This reiteration is precisely what Deleuze has in mind when he names Vertov “the inventor of properly perceptive montage” (70).
As it works to defamiliarize or make perceptible, *Kino-Eye*’s reverse slaughter sequence approximates an ethical representation of slaughter. If it falls short, it is because it conforms all too well to Shklovsky’s dictum “the object is not important.” Vertov’s disregard of his object—that is, his failure to regard the bull and its death as more than a material to-be-made-visible—is ultimately a product of the *Kino-Eye*’s thinly veiled anthropocentrism. As previously indicated, although Vertov insistently styles this apparatus as an autonomous, truth-producing machine, it is of course a prosthetic for the human eyes of both the filmmaker and spectator. In Nesbet’s words, “when examined closely […] the ‘kino-glaz’ turns out to be haunted by the flesh it would leave behind. What—or who—is this ‘cine-eye’? Camera lens, camera operator, film editor, spectator? All at points seem to be alluded to; no single identity works all the time” (31). The “who” behind the *Kino-Eye* does make several concrete appearances in Vertov’s oeuvre: in the *mise en abyme* of *Man with a Movie Camera*, s/he is alternately embodied by the eponymous man with a movie camera as he darts through the city, by Elizaveta Svilova (Vertov’s wife and editor) as she splices together his footage, and by the audience as they watch the film-within-the-film in rapt attention. This “who” also makes an uncanny appearance in one of Vertov’s essays: “*Kino-Eye* plunges into the seeming chaos of life […]. To edit; to wrest, through the camera, whatever is most typical, most useful, from life; to organize the film pieces wrested from life into a meaningful rhythmic visual order, a meaningful visual phrase, an essence of ‘I see’” (88). It is indubitably this same “I” who sees in *Kino-Eye*. Framed as it is by the woman shopper’s consideration of the

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138 The *Kino-Eye*’s incessant activity of wresting and organising life into a meaningful visual order recalls Wolfe’s assertion, referenced in Chapter One, that “the core fantasy of humanism’s trope of vision is to think that perceptual space is organized around and for the looking subject; that the pure point of the eye (as agent of *ratio* and *logos*) exhausts the field of the visible.” To be sure, Vertov conceives of the *Kino-Eye* as a mechanical supplement for the imperfect human eye. Yet this supplement does not detract from human vision, but rather seeks a form of vision that is more human, or super-human; it strives after a visuality that older modes of humanism could only dream of, “a subject […] capable of seeing all” (*Posthumanism* 131–2).
placard’s denouncement of privatised meat, the slaughter sequence in particular unfolds as a human-centred act of inquisitive observation or, as Eisenstein sniffed, “contemplation” (“Materialist” 64).

In sum, regardless of whether it is projected forward or in reverse, the gaze of the Kino-Eye is unidirectional. With its one-way look, Kino-Eye seems to fit squarely into the decidedly more crowded of the two categories into which Derrida divides Western thought. (Derrida is explicitly concerned with philosophers and, to a lesser extent, writers; I extend his rubric to filmmakers, since they certainly think as well. What is more, the visual medium in which they work necessarily implicates a network of gazes.) In his “Animal That Therefore I Am,” an address built on the intersection of the philosopher’s gaze with that of his cat, he proposes that this first category is composed of those texts signed by people who have no doubt seen, observed, analyzed, reflected on the animal, but who have never been seen seen by the animal. Their gaze has never intersected with that of an animal directed at them (forget about their being naked). If, indeed, they did happen to be seen seen furtively by the animal one day, they took no (thematic, theoretical, or philosophical) account of it. They neither wanted nor had the capacity to draw any systemic consequence from the fact that an animal could, facing them, look at them, clothed or naked, and in a word, without a word, address them. They have taken no account of the fact that what they call animal could look at them and address them from down there, from a wholly other origin. (382, original emphasis)

This mode of addressing the animal—that is, this form of textuality that operates under the assumption that the animal cannot reciprocate the address—is “by far the most frequent” (382). It is indeed so common as to be ubiquitous, “bring[ing] together all philosophers and all theoreticians as such” (382). Does not its omnipresence render null
the existence of a second category, another mode of address? Derrida answers this question, hesitantly, in the affirmative:

As for the other category of discourse, found among those whose signatories are first and foremost poets or prophets, […] those men and women who admit taking upon themselves the address of an animal that addresses them […], I know of no statutory representative of it […]. I have found no such representative, but it is in that very place that I find myself, here and now, in the process of searching.

(“Animal” 383)

The collapsibility of Derrida’s two categories promises to lay bare the undecidability of categorical distinctions. It becomes especially apparent on second glance that Derrida’s second category is an empty one—a space he carves out in anticipation of a future affiliation. In joining up its members, it follows that this second category will necessarily draw from the first category’s pool of constituents (seeing as the first encompasses “all philosophers and all theoreticians”). Yet as he constitutes this first category, Derrida indicates that it, too, is more accurately conceived of as an empty one: “But since I don’t believe, at bottom, that [being seen seen] has never happened to them, or that it has not in some way been signified, figured, or metonymized, more or less secretly, in the gestures of their discourse, the symptom of this disavowal remains to be deciphered” (383). The first category only holds in theory, then. It is possible, Derrida conjectures, to find in the first group of texts an acknowledgement, however reluctant, of the animal’s capacity for address. That is, it is possible to find in the first category traces of the discourse that is proper to the second, or even to evacuate the first category entirely, placing all of its texts and authors in the second.
This loop undoes the classification of *Kino-Eye* as a film that disallows the possibility that an animal could look back (indeed, it undoes all classification as such). This look is in fact “signified, figured, or metonymized” in what is cut out or trimmed away from the reverse-slaughter sequence. Remarkably, Vertov’s demonstration of revivification elides the exact moment of death. To return to my description of the sequence above, the segment in the abattoir in which “The bull comes back to life” progresses from a medium shot of the prostrate bull, whose convulsing legs seem to propel it upright, to a close-up of a butcher whetting his knives, to a shot of the bull being led outside; no shot corresponds to the instant when the knife pierces flesh. Moreover, the action of the bull being led out of the slaughterhouse is filmed from behind, so that the bull’s gaze as it approaches death is off-screen, inaccessible, else-where. These elisions or obfuscations are not the result of a simple failure to acknowledge the bull’s capacity for address, but an outright refusal to engage with its gaze (a decision which, it bears noting, contains the sequence squarely within the realm of play, of attractions). This overt disavowal is significant insofar as it suggests that the bull’s gaze (the gaze of all screen animals, in fact) is folded into *Kino-Eye*, there to be met in a future viewing—if not of this particular film, then another one.

This possibility fits into the founding argument of this dissertation. In Chapter One, I argue that the “visual pleasure” of viewing animal death is overdetermined. Vertov’s reverse-slaughter sequence exemplifies my contention that a number of frequently competing conditions—visual pleasures and even sadistic desires; scientific,  

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139 This is not to dismantle Derrida’s argument or my own. One could trace and retrace the oblique contours of Derrida’s categories ad infinitum. At some point, it might seem far simpler to readjust the terms of the categories, or simply to collapse the categories into a single discourse that, with varying degrees of self-awareness, acknowledges the animal’s address. This streamlining might not be without its benefits, but it would render invisible what Derrida endeavours to demonstrate through the de/construction of his own categories: that the way philosophers and theorists (and filmmakers and novelists, and even poets and prophets) have addressed the animal—and, more generally, the way we (“we” being modern, Western, post-industrialized and hyper-technologized humans) think and talk about the animal—hinges on the misuse of categorical distinctions. Derrida aims not to abolish categories, but rather to stress their permeability.
philosophical, and political epistemologies; technological constraints—shape the way we view animal death and slaughter on screen. As the preceding analysis enumerates, the following conditions or discursive undercurrents are at work in this sequence: ideological values of labour, process, and revolution; emergent scientific theories of space and time; and, most palpably, a modern visual field of attractions. No doubt other as yet unnoticed elements also course through it. My point is that while these currents exert varying degrees of force on the spectator, they all are present and thus have the potential to act on the spectator.

Mulvey’s reading of *Man With a Movie Camera* is here apposite. She describes in detail the famous moment in which the film seems to most revel in its own construction: a spirited montage of the camera man filming the bustling city (cars, trams, horses and carriages, pedestrians, trains) slows into a series of stilled shots of the hubbub, the framing of which discloses more and more of the cinematic apparatus—the edges of the film strip, spools of celluloid, racks of film reels. The film springs back into motion with a shot of Svilova cranking a film reel, and then begins to alternate between the editor working and the product of her splicing. Of this “instance of motion,” to borrow Michelson’s phrase, Mulvey writes: “As she sets the filmstrip back into motion on the editing table the moving image gradually reintegrates the sequence back into the course of the film. But the spectator is brought back with a heightened consciousness of the blending of two kinds of time” (*Death* 15–16). Mulvey is drawn to Vertov’s freeze-frame reverie because it so deftly performs “delayed cinema,” the utopian-tinged viewing practice that, for her, (re)defines cinematic spectatorship in the age of new media: thanks to the pause button, “in the stilled image, moments of beauty or meaning can be found and then, as the image is reactivated, continue to affect the image once returned to movement” (28). As I noted in my description of *Kino-Eye*, Vertov closes—sews up—the
slaughter sequence with an analogous gesture, employing shots of the train to ease the film back into a forward progression. The difference here is that whereas *Man With a Movie Camera* brings together movement and stillness (duration and the instant), *Kino-Eye* imbues spatial/temporal progression with its reverse. Together, these movements epitomize the way in which cinema regularly enfolds experiences of radical encounters and undoings into the familiar march of reality. As Mulvey contends, today’s technology enables—indeed, encourages—spectators to intervene in this march and to discover the meanings looped within it.

Derrida’s mutually inclusive categories and Mulvey’s delayed cinema operate within a contemplative hermeneutics in which the reader/spectator turns over texts to uncover their latent meanings: confronted with the self-eroding distinction between texts that do and do not acknowledge the animal’s address, the reader of Derrida’s “Animal I Am” begins to discern traces of interspecies recognition and disavowal in all texts; likewise, Mulvey’s pensive spectator reviews films, searching out “some detail [that] has lain dormant, as it were, waiting to be noticed” (*Death* 8). This dissertation is committed to a like-minded deconstructive reading strategy, yet I am also convinced of the value of taking texts at their word. In this regard, I propose to take Derrida’s discursive categories literally for the remainder of this chapter, and I submit Burnett’s *Killer of Sheep* as a representative of his all but empty latter category, which, to recall, is comprised of texts whose “signatories […] admit taking upon themselves the address of an animal that addresses them.” Henceforth, my aim in this chapter is to describe the formal features by which this film registers and/or provokes a sense of being “seen seen” by animals. The point of my analysis is to begin to articulate a cinematic praxis for engaging with the ethical issues that constellate around animal slaughter and its representation. To this end,
my analysis of *Killer of Sheep* can be read as a preliminary set of suggestions for filming slaughter.

II. Nous revenons à nos moutons: Charles Burnett’s *Killer of Sheep*

The penultimate slaughterhouse sequence in *Killer of Sheep* contains a shot of some dozen sheep being herded into the paddock where they will await their death: the camera lingers on several of the animals, and they turn slightly and look directly at it.

Like the direct address employed by the showman-like exhibitors and performers of the early cinema of attractions, their look back is unsettling insofar as it reminds us of the presence of the camera and thus precludes our complete absorption in the text. More than that, their gaze is unnerving because it expresses a solemn curiosity that goes beyond a basic awareness of the surroundings and because, due to its odd placement in the sequence and to this sequence’s relation to the preceding sequences of slaughter, it seems to direct a look of supplication not only to the slaughterhouse workers but also to us, the audience. Rather than appearing at the beginning of the sequence, as the linear narrative logic of slaughter would insist, the image of the sheep being led to slaughter follows a series of shots detailing the various processes of disassembly (hide removal, dismemberment, clean-up); this image comes, moreover, at the end of the film’s third of four sequences in the abattoir. Within this reshuffled syntax of slaughter, the sheep appear

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140 Eisenstein uses this idiomatic expression in “The Dramaturgy of Film Form” (179). As translator and editor Richard Taylor explains, the phrase means “literally, ‘let us return to our sheep’ and metaphorically, ‘let us go back to what we were talking about.’” Taylor speculates that Eisenstein borrows this “old French catchphrase” from Rabelais (318, n68). Eisenstein’s willful affectation of the French reminds me, perhaps not altogether arbitrarily, that one of Saussure’s primary proofs for the interdependence of linguistic values is *mouton*. In his *General Course on Linguistics* (1916), he observes, Modern French *mouton* can have the same signification as English *sheep* but not the same value, and this for several reasons, particularly because in speaking of a piece of meat ready to be served on the table, English uses *mutton* and not *sheep*. The difference in value between *sheep* and *mouton* is due to the fact that *sheep* has beside it a second term while the French does not. / Within the same language, all words used to express related ideas limit each other reciprocally […]. Conversely, some words are enriched through contact with others […]. (115–16). Saussure’s point here is that the meanings of words (or of any other linguistic unit) exist only in relation to other words/units. This insight informs much of the Derridean work on which this dissertation draws.
to look back at—to witness—their future death and dismemberment. Through this disruption, the film and its maker register the possibility that, in Derrida’s words, the “animal could, facing them, look at them, clothed or naked, and in a word, without a word, address them.”

Derrida’s reference to nakedness belongs to the specific context of his daily encounters with his cat in his bathroom, and speaks directly to the shame of feeling shame before a being which, within the framework of traditional humanist thought, is held to be incapable of shame. Yet his remarks on the denuding potential of the animal’s address are also bound up with his use of the French dressage (in English, “training”) to describe “a habit or a convention that would in the long term program the very act of thinking” (“Animal” 369). The way we come to see the world can certainly be thought of as a type of dressage—a training that in the long term programs the very act of looking, and specifically the act of looking at animals and at violent animal death. (I am thinking here of Benjamin’s observation in “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” that modern technology—and particularly cinema—“has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training” [175]). Certainly the English usage of dressage—a type of equestrianism that emphasizes obedience, flexibility, and balance—calls to mind a focused rationalization of our relationships, visual and otherwise, to animals and particularly to animal bodies. As David Wills allows by keeping the French dressage in his translation of “The Animal I Am,” the French has the curious advantage of evoking the English “to dress”: we dress ourselves up in clothes, and also in logic and in reason—in short, in all the accoutrements of “the human.” Read in the context of this dissertation’s focus on visuality, the term dressage thus intimates that the way we train our gaze on animals has much to do with our desire to distance ourselves from them. Killer of Sheep, I will argue
in dialogue with Derrida, reconfigures our relationships to animals in the terms of a faltering, undecidable proximity.

The disquieting gaze of the sheep also returns us to the technique of defamiliarization. As noted, Shklovsky develops his theory of defamiliarization in part with reference to Tolstoy’s “Kholstomer,” a short story that juxtaposes the life and death of the benevolent horse Kholstomer (Strider) with that of his selfish, ineffectual owner. Shklovsky contends, specifically, that Tolstoy’s adoption of the horse’s perspective to describe the institution of private property exemplifies the technique of defamiliarization (13–15). Nesbet in turn points out that Shklovsky somehow neglects to mention the moment in this story that speaks most directly to the technique’s “perceptual effects” that would most interest him: this moment occurs at the end of the tale, when “poor Kholstomer learns about defamiliarization at the hands of the people who slaughter him. It is then, as he feels his blood spill out of his neck, feeling ‘more surprised than afraid,’ that ‘everything became new for him.’”¹⁴¹ Nesbet contends that Tolstoy’s attention to the horse’s awareness and experience of death has the following effect:

It is not the sacrificers—the slaughterers, the embedded audience—who are to benefit from this surging forth of “real blood”; these groups, on the contrary, must treat the sacrifice as entirely routine. Rather, the miracle of defamiliarization and its renewal of life is worked on the victim itself (the slaughtered beast) and on the audience at second remove, the readers or viewers. (35)

While I cannot speak for the sheep’s experience, the fleeting image of their glance back provokes a similar sense of estrangement as I watch and re-watch Killer of Sheep. Emerging as it does from the proverbial flock, the animal’s gaze disrupts the customary progression of slaughter. It interrupts, if only for an instant, this seemingly inexorable

¹⁴¹ Nesbet translates from a Russian edition; see also Tolstoy 262.
procession. Yet whereas this interruption in “Kholstomer” inspires, for Nesbet, a feeling of wonder at life’s inexhaustible capacity for renewal, in *Killer of Sheep* it provokes, in me, a dissimilar response. I feel both a sense of dismay at the accretive, cyclical violence of slaughter, and the smallest hope that it *does* have a limit—that the look back may indeed be sufficient to halt it. Nesbet’s description of the sanguine sense of wonder provoked by the horse’s self-narrated slaughter is, I think, symptomatic of the limits of defamiliarization. According to Shklovsky, art’s highest aim—perhaps its only aim—is to slough off the rubbery film of habitude that coats everyday life and obscures our critical perception of it. This project is not entirely unlike the tactics of exposure that I have critiqued elsewhere in this dissertation; the methods of disclosure proper to defamiliarization (namely, the adoption of new perspectives) are far more understated and penetrating than those found in films such as *The Cove* and *Food Inc.*, yet they are nonetheless aimed at revelation—at casting off the opaque coating of familiarity and showing life anew. While I agree that this endeavour holds great value, I insist that it alone is not sufficient; used to the exclusion of other formal methods, defamiliarization ends—as Nesbet’s appraisal of “Kholstomer” suggests—with a provocation of short-lived wonder. For cinema to engage an effective critique of the slaughter industry, it must prompt the spectator not only to wonder about it, but also to perceive its imbrication in daily life.

The sheep’s arresting gaze is, then, but the starting point of my reading of *Killer of Sheep*. This literal, even stark, instantiation of the reciprocal gaze Derrida seeks prompts my consideration of the film’s form as a whole, particularly the way in which it joins defamiliarizing gestures with techniques of alignment, juxtaposition, and abutment; in this way, the film not only undresses our habits of looking at animals, but also suggests how we might redress this training. Baker asserts that for Derrida, “it is clear that the
killing of animals can indeed be productively addressed through the turning of the looking and through philosophy’s adoption of the vantage of the animal” (Postmodern 93). It is less clear how exactly one makes this turn. How, in effect, does one cultivate animalséance—Derrida’s word for the unease one feels when looked at by an animal (from malséance, ‘unseemliness’) (“Animal” 372)? Killer of Sheep generates a powerful methodology for this project through its surrealist-tinged approach to coupling radical difference and contradiction. Although the film neither begs the label “surrealist” nor fits squarely into that movement’s genealogy, I believe it shares what Adam Lowenstein describes as surrealism’s commitment to “a radically altered vision [that] restores unseemliness” (“Films without a Face” 41). Lowenstein makes this remark in reference to Le Sang des bêtes (George Franju, 1949), a categorically surrealist documentary that weaves together scenes of WWII-era Paris and its slaughter complex La Villette; this film opens, as Lowenstein puts it, with “a kaleidoscope of wildly contrasting Surrealist images that underline the impossibility of a soothingly familiar world to comfort us before we descend into the nightmare of the slaughterhouse” (41).142 Killer of Sheep achieves a similar end through different means.

The crux of my argument is that the film’s distinctive engagement with a constellation of boundaries—between sound and image, waking and dreaming life, human and animal—works to loosen the visual field and to make room for an ethical recognition of the complex relationships imbricated in the practice of slaughter. This

142 Burt cites Franju’s perambulatory view of Paris and La Villette, the suburban slaughter complex that fed the city from the 1860s to the 1960s, as a rare exception to the slaughterhouse aesthetic, the name he gives to the conventions by which cinema regularly sets slaughter apart. Although Franju begins his film by emphasizing the abattoir’s enforced exile from the metropolis (the title on the first frame reads “Aux portes de Paris”), he proceeds to weave together the industrial site of slaughter and the desultory urban landscape, suggesting that the two are only outwardly at odds. As Burt puts it, “by moving between the invisible practice of slaughter and the highly visible city, his film follows a more transgressive course by making killing more than merely a confined act.” He furthermore observes that Le sang des bêtes bares a “tension between images of networks and fragmentation” (Animals in Film 176). The limitrophic movements I identify in Killer of Sheep achieve a similar effect, binding and loosing the connections between human life and animal death.
loosening realises the visual artist Eduardo Kac’s recommendation, “more than making visible the invisible, art needs to raise our awareness of what firmly remains beyond our visual reach but, nonetheless, affects us directly” (qtd. in Wolfe’s Posthumanism? 161; Kac 236). Kac offers this prescription in a manifesto about transgenic art, yet it serves equally well to describe the operations at work in the comparatively lo-fi registers of Killer of Sheep. While Burnett makes use of a number of film styles (an admixture I explore presently), his method of filmmaking is best characterised as an expression of Bazinian realism. According to George Kouvaros’s eloquent summation, for Bazin realist cinema is “not an attempt to show ‘things as they are,’ but rather [is] grounded in moments of sensory experience in which the contingency and finitude of everyday life is brought to the fore.” As he puts it, Bazin prizes the “capacity of the cinematic image not simply to represent a sense of material contingency, but to make it present on screen” (Kouvaros 377, 381; qtd. in Pick, 113). Read together, Kac’s prescription and Kouvaros’s description confirm that defamiliarization alone is insufficient to rethinking the predominantly violent relationships between humans and animals in our post-industrial, postmodern, and arguably post-human society. Cinema can participate substantively and ethically in the reconfiguration of these relationships by “making present” or perceptible—which is distinct from making visible, knowable—the contingencies and limits that bind humans and animals.

Set in Watts, L.A. roughly five years after race riots convulsed the neighbourhood, Killer of Sheep principally follows Stan (Henry Gayle Sanders), a man who supports his family by working at a slaughterhouse. Stan suffers from insomnia, a condition presumably induced by the anxieties of his domestic life and the deadening conditions of his job. The film’s title thus introduces its organizing pun: by day Stan kills

143 Kac works in the vanguard artistic media of genetic engineering and implantation. For his most famous and controversial piece, “Alba” (2000–?), he commissioned a French laboratory to create a glowing bunny by implanting a rabbit with Green Fluorescent Protein, a gene derived from jellyfish.
sheep and by night he counts them. This conceit is at once playful and damming. It functions, on one level, as an ironic critique of the new strain of metaphorical and material violence that late capitalism has introduced into human-animal relationships: after all, if Stan were a shepherd, a gentle husbandman in a pre-modern pastoral economy, he would count sheep literally rather than figuratively. This wordplay also serves, more generally, to anchor Stan and the sheep in an ineluctable and decidedly imbalanced relationship: Stan plays a decisive role in the sheep’s lives (he slaughters them), just as the sheep play a decisive role in his (their existence as a class of beings that elicits a “noncriminal putting to death,” as Derrida would put it, debases his life). In its title alone, then, the film initiates a critical engagement with, on the one hand, longstanding anxieties that the human labour of animal slaughter threatens to contaminate human life, and, on the other, abiding associations between marginalized, disenfranchised humans and powerless animals. The film’s power, I will argue, lies in its refusal to tidily confirm or discredit these overlapping spheres of influence and association between humans and animals.

*Killer of Sheep*’s placement in and negotiation of these spheres is best approached through a thick description of the film’s production context, its narrative and style, and the criticism it has so far received. It bears stressing at the outset that this negotiation is embedded in a particularized context of race and class relations. The film is, first and foremost, a political expression of the lived reality shared by a community of working-class African Americans in South Central Los Angeles in the wake of the sixties, and it demands to be read not only in relation to the fallout of the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, the Watts Riots, and the general social upheaval of the era (Skoller 128), but also as a response to the racially exclusionary practices of Hollywood film, to that cinema’s perpetuation of the stereotype of disempowered black masculinity,
and to more broad-based initiatives (namely, the Moynihan Report of 1965) that condemned African-American families and communities as pathologically self-destructive (Massood 24, 31). Because it is more of an expression of a time and place than a carefully plotted story, *Killer of Sheep*’s narrative resists retelling. It is episodic and consists of three outwardly disparate strands: mostly interior scenes of Stan, his family, and his friends engaged in the mundane details of domestic life and the prosaic activities of the neighbourhood; interior scenes of Stan working at the slaughterhouse; and exterior scenes of children, including Stan’s son and daughter, playing in back alleys, train yards, and razed lots. These threads are stylistically dissimilar: conforming most closely to the conventions of cinéma vérité, the domestic scenes play out in long, static takes with seemingly little directorial intervention; the scenes of Stan’s work life, meanwhile, are characterized by frenetic camera movement and relatively rapid editing; finally, the scenes of children at play are distinguished by a deeper focus and looser framing, and thus by a greater sense of movement and space. Burnett does not fit these strands into a conventional narrative arc; things happen in the film, but not in the typical story-telling terms of cause and effect, conflict and resolution. Its “(non)fictional film thingness” (to recall Kino-Eye’s proud self-categorization) is, then, more effectively conveyed through a consideration of its form and of the ways in which Burnett’s formal choices relate to both the human and nonhuman subjects of his film. As indicated, key to this descriptive reading is the way the film represents this family and this community through an assemblage of idiosyncratic styles.

Burnett made *Killer of Sheep* as his thesis film for his MFA at UCLA’s School of Theatre, Film, and Television, and it has since become, according to the words of one critic and to the mythologizing flourishes that tend to adorn its reviews, “the world’s most legendary student film” (Stables 94). Yet the film did not come out of nowhere. At
UCLA, Burnett belonged to the first-wave of a group of African-American and African graduate film students known as the L.A. Rebellion or, alternately, the Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers. This cohort of up-and-coming filmmakers, which included Haile Gerima, Billy Woodberry, Larry Clark, and Julie Dash, to name just a few, helped to forge a black independent American cinema that, in various strains, remains vital in the present day (the group proper disbanded in 1978). The group rejected the representational norms of Hollywood cinema, particularly the then emergent genre of black exploitation films, and embraced as its primary influence the anti-colonialist ideology and aesthetics of Third Cinema. Ng tongela Masilela, a member of the group, characterizes its films as being imbued with the sense that “imagination [is] explicitly wedded to political and cultural commitment” (107). He observes that its early output, of which *Killer of Sheep* is a cornerstone, is moreover preoccupied with “redefining the relationship of history to the structure of the family” (*ibid.* 111). Burnett came to UCLA in 1967 and began work on *Killer of Sheep* soon thereafter with a budget of less than $10,000 and a cast of non-professional actors. The film’s completion was considerably delayed due to the incarceration of one of these actors. When Burnett managed to complete the film in 1975, he could not afford to secure the rights to the music, and consequently the film’s official 1977 release was limited to the festival circuit. It garnered high praise, including the International Critics Prize at the 1981 Berlin International Film Festival and the honour of being among the first fifty films chosen for the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress in 1990. Despite this acclaim, the film more or less languished in storage facilities until 2007, when UCLA restored it to 35mm and released it in theatres. It was subsequently released on DVD and is only now beginning to reach larger circles (Thompson “Good Moments” 32). Largely as a result of its troubled reception history, *Killer of Sheep* has received relatively little scholarly attention. Its recent re-release
garnered unanimously glowing reviews, but it has so far been rigorously discussed in only two journal articles and one book chapter (passing mention of it is regularly made in scholarship on black independent American filmmaking). Fortunately, the three detailed analyses offer a great deal of insight into the film, and I want to position my own examination of the film in dialogue with them.

The existent analyses of *Killer of Sheep* are remarkably coherent in their reading of Burnett’s distinctive visual and aural style as a direct engagement with the race dynamics that subtend the past, present, and future of this community and America at large. Paula Massood focuses on the film’s local context—its setting in Watts and its place in the L.A. Rebellion—and demonstrates that Burnett’s assemblage of a range of filmmaking styles serves to create a potent and profoundly nuanced filmic antidote to the sensational and racially charged televisual images of the riots, which since 1965 have laid claim to the public imaginary of Watts (22–23). She mines the film’s recognized resemblances to Italian neo-realism and to Third Cinema, and cogently establishes its significant debt to and departure from both Griersonian observational documentary and *cinéma vérité* (24–29). Within this frame of references, she situates Burnett’s alternation between such disparate techniques as static long takes and handheld camera work; vernacular speech and stilted, patently scripted conversation; and direct sound and synch sound as a measured “formulation of an aesthetic that dialogue[s] with and refract[s] a unique set of cultural conditions” (38–39). Massood also makes the persuasive argument that the film’s narrative, the episodic nature of which draws as much from African oral traditions as it does from the films of Vittorio De Sica and Roberto Rossellini, “expands what first appears as a sole focus on a singular hero and suggests that Stan’s existential dilemma is undeniably linked to a larger community crisis” (28, 144). Citing Burnett’s own affirmation, “*Killer of Sheep* is supposed to look like a documentary,” Massood provides a meticulous account of how the film brings together conventions from fictional and documentary modes to represent what Grierson called “the drama of the doorstep” (26–27).
Meanwhile, Inez Hedges positions *Killer of Sheep* as an example of “signifyin’”, a set of rhetorical strategies in African-American vernacular speech that, in Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s formulation, are “not engaged in the game of information giving. Signifyin’ turns on the play and chain of signifiers, and not on some supposedly transcendent signified” (np). (To put it another way, signifyin’ exploits the gaps between denotative and connotative language.) Hedges contends that Burnett and other independent black filmmakers of the period deploy signifyin’ as a counterhegemonic strategy; *Killer of Sheep* not only represents characters in the act of signifyin’ (in, for example, the many scenes that revolve around jokes and put-downs), but absorbs signifyin’ into its visual and aural style. Hedges identifies the following as formal examples of signifyin’: Burnett’s ambiguous treatment of the trope of innocent sheep, his use of music as an ironic counterpoint to the image track, his way of framing shots so as to heighten their affective intensity, and his eschewal of point-of-view shots. She contends that these stylistic choices “decenter the spectator, creating uncertainty about the image” and open up a critique of hegemonic culture (np). Finally, in a chapter of a book dedicated to demonstrating avant-garde film’s oft-overlooked commitments to political history, Jeffrey Skoller locates *Killer of Sheep* within the discourse of trauma, and argues that its visual style works to evoke or make present the inheritances of slavery, a centuries-long regime of violence that “visibly ended generations ago” but which continues to shape the present in profound, if often invisible, ways (119). He identifies Burnett’s use of duration (both the continuous take and the long shot) and high-contrast, black-and-white film stock as the primary means by which the film “reveals the ways in which legacies of events from the past actually inhere in the present, invisibly inflecting daily life with a force that is powerfully tangible” (129, 119).
Together, these readings demonstrate that *Killer of Sheep*’s idiosyncratic form develops—in the photographic sense of making visible or perceptible, but also in the musical and mathematical senses of elaborating, modifying, or expanding a theme—connections between the local and the diffuse, the individual and the collective, the past and present, and the dominant culture and its margins. For all their focus on the film’s work of de-centring, though, they remain firmly centred on its human elements. My reading offers a vital supplement. It is only by attending as well to the presence of animals in *Killer of Sheep*—to, specifically, the means by which it renders animals present alongside humans—that we may fully comprehend the film’s concurrent proliferation and destabilization of a diffuse network of boundaries. My aim is not to efface the established analytical frame of race, but rather to thicken it. In a recent lecture, Wolfe affirmed, “you can’t talk about race without talking about species.” By this he means that one cannot disentangle discourses of race and species because “both categories—as history well shows—are so notoriously pliable and unstable, constantly bleeding into and out of each other” ("Biopolitical Thought"). The flip side to this recognition is that talking about race strengthens discussions about animals, just as talking about animals enriches discussions of race. In the specific context of *Killer of Sheep*, for example, Massood’s contention that “Burnett shifts conventional narrative identification from the individual to the community” and thereby “disput[es] blaxploitation’s assertion that an empowered lone male figure leads to salvation” (37) is only bolstered by the acknowledgement that the community to which Burnett shifts focus decidedly includes animals. If we allow this enlarged view, it becomes apparent that the film unseats the individual human hero precisely by, among other things, extending its regard to animals.

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145 Wolfe made this remark in reference to Foucault’s discussion of race and biopower and *Society Must Be Defended*. 
With the supplementarity of race and species in mind, my reading, alongside the nascent scholarship on *Killer of Sheep*, can be understood as complementary efforts to read and understand the film’s limitrophy. Derrida coins this term to characterize his aspirations for his “Animal I Am” address, and he defines it as “what abuts onto limits but also what feeds, is fed, is cared for, raised, and trained, what is cultivated on the edges of a limit” (397). He maintains, moreover, that his address “is designed, certainly not to efface the limit, but to multiply its figures, to complicate, thicken, delinearize, fold, and divide the line precisely by making it increase and multiply” (398). As Massood, Skuller, and Hedges persuasively demonstrate, the limitrophic nature of *Killer of Sheep* emerges in Burnett’s pronounced movements in, around, and across the edges of film form. My analysis concentrates on the film’s peculiar juxtapositions of sound and image and its distinctive cinematography and editing. These gestures populate the limits between on- and off-screen space, past and present, waking and dreaming life, and between the outwardly disparate narrative threads. It is my contention that in doing so, these movements “complicate, thicken, delinearize, fold, and divide the line” between humans and animals.

As indicated above, Stan’s job at the slaughterhouse introduces two significant sites of potential human-animal association: on one hand, Stan’s life is presumably debased by his work of killing animals, and, on the other, the conditions of his life and the lives of the humans around him—in particular, his own children and the kids in the neighbourhood—are, arguably, made comparable to those of animals (to put it another

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146 Limitrophy is not specific to Derrida’s “question of the animal” but is, rather, among the fundamental ambitions of his lifelong project of deconstruction. This work begins from the idea that language, representation, and experience regularly elide what Derrida calls “différance,” a term he describes as “the systematic play of differences, of traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other” (*Positions* 27, original emphasis). Throughout his work, Derrida attempts to draw out these spaces: he endeavours to stress that which has been suppressed, repressed, or merely left unstressed, to lay bare the economy of the supplement—in short, to engage in limitrophy. These performances are intended to underscore the inextricability of the systems and texts that structure our lives “so that,” as Lucy Niall puts it, “the difference between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the work is rendered undecidable” (136).
way, the presence of the sheep renders the human characters susceptible to zoomorphic metaphor). My analysis is ultimately more concerned with the latter—that is, with Burnett’s gamble with the trope of animalization. Yet insofar as these sites or spheres feed into one another, it is worth addressing the former in some detail. Anxiety over the interpersonal effects of killing animals dates at least as far back as Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), in which the leaders of the eponymous society “suffer none of their citizens to kill their cattle, because they think that pity and good-nature, which are among the best of those affectations that are born with us, are much impaired by the butchering of animals” (57). In Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, the belief that violence against animals begets violence against humans is expressed as a commonsensical rule of nature: “There is but scant account kept of cracked heads in back of the [stock]yards, for men who have to crack the heads of animals all day seem to get into the habit, and to practise it on their friends, and even on their families, between times” (23). Finally, the formative nature of slaughter serves as the premise—and arguably a parodic one—of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), a pioneering slasher flick released to cult acclaim while Burnett was completing *Killer of Sheep*. In Hooper’s film, a group of day-tripping friends pick up a hitchhiker and, as they pass by a slaughterhouse, he spells out their fate with the proud declaration, “my family’s always been in meat”; sure enough, the friends soon fall into the chainsaw-wielding, cannibalistic clutches of the hitchhiker, his brother Leatherface, and their grandfather.147

In contrast to these earlier texts, *Killer of Sheep* is distinguished by its refusal to neatly assert that the practice of slaughtering animals engenders violence towards—or cruel detachment from—one’s fellow humans. To be sure, the film repeatedly attests to

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147 Notably, the hitchhiking younger brother tells the friends that he did not work at the slaughterhouse with his brother and grandfather. Rather, he accompanied the older men to work, where he marvelled at the “wonderful efficiency of it all” and took photographs. The film thus connects violence against humans not only to the age-old practice of animal slaughter, but also to the more modern practice of viewing animal slaughter.
the connectedness of Stan’s work and home life: at the start of the film, Stan’s friend Bracy half-jokingly riffs on Stan’s entwined activities of killing and counting sheep, and Stan suggests several times that finding a new job will solve his problems at home. Yet the associations the film draws between Stan’s work and domestic malaise are multiple and profoundly ambivalent. According to the texts cited above and to the popular myths in which they are embedded, violence against animals automatically gives rise to violence against humans. Yet Burnett goes to great lengths to portray Stan as both a competent slaughterhouse worker and a man—a son, a father, and a husband—who is opposed to violence. The film opens with a dream sequence that is only loosely tethered to the narrative: a man chastises his adolescent son, whom the audience will likely later presume to be a younger version of Stan, for hitting his brother. If this obscure introduction to the world of *Killer of Sheep* establishes anything, it is that Stan was raised according to values of non-violence. The film never returns to this primal scene, but rather alludes to it in later episodes: in one, Stan tries to reprimand his own son for bullying his sister, while in another he refuses the attempt of some neighbourhood toughs to enlist him in a murder-robbery. In both cases, Stan’s reticence causes him to fall short: Stan Jr. runs off before he can voice his disapproval, and Stan’s wife intervenes to disabuse the thugs of their recruitment plans. Stan’s attempts to quietly refuse violence brush up against the images of him at work. As Massood astutely observes, Stan appears most active and alive when at work in the slaughterhouse: in these sequences, the otherwise mostly immobile camera swings into action, following his purposeful movements and once even catching him with a “rare smile” (35). Massood asserts that the formal incongruity between the oppressively static domestic scenes and the almost exuberantly mobile slaughterhouse sequences disproves readings of *Killer of Sheep* that focus on Stan’s “job as the primary cause of his crisis” (35). More radically, this
dissonance could be read to suggest that his work of killing and disassembling sheep constitutes a reprieve from a life of overwhelming monotony and hopelessness; it is impossible, however, to press this observation further and to argue that Stan finds any sort of escapist, sadistic pleasure or morbid satisfaction in slaughtering sheep. In sum, *Killer of Sheep* elaborates a frame of connections—Stan practices non-violence with people but capably slaughters animals, his malaise is partly caused by a job at which he sometimes seems comfortable and even content—that does more than confirm the formative nature of killing animals and/or highlight the hypocrisy of a politics of non-violence that does not extend to animals. The film works precisely to make present or palatable the connections between Stan’s work and his generalized unease, and it works because it refrains from concretizing or synthesising them in a definitive critique.

It is worth pausing here to question the decision to cast Stan as a killer of sheep. To create the film, Burnett drew largely on his own experiences as a long-time resident of Watts, and it would have been just as easy—if not easier—for him to develop a protagonist who, say, worked as an electrician, just as he did before attending film school (of course, this would have left him with a much less provocative title and thematic underpinning). What I am getting at here is that Burnett made Stan a slaughterer and he made a number of formal choices that link the animals he slaughters (in addition to the other animal figures in the film) to the lives of the people that circulate around him; that is, he made a film that invites the metaphor “like animals.” To my mind, the most significant question asked by the film is, then, what do we do with this potential metaphor—how do we read its very suggestion? A number of critics take it at face value. Skoller affirms, for example,

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148 This reading also surfaces in a number of reviews of *Killer of Sheep*. Aida Hozic remarks that Stan’s “existence is as bounded by invisible threads of hopelessness as that of the sheep that he is forced to kill each day” (471). Clifford Thompson enumerates the “subtle and even brilliant ways” that Burnett connects the people in Stan’s community and domestic life to the animals in his workplace. Thompson recounts, for
These moments at the slaughterhouse that show the sheep unknowingly being led to slaughter are placed in relief against the activities of the adults and children.

The metaphor of the archetypal image of the innocent lamb being led to slaughter is the only specific comment the director makes about the condition of his characters. (122)

Burnett’s comment is ostensibly so specific—so explicit, so unequivocal—that Skoller deems it unnecessary to recapitulate it; we can surmise, however, that he thinks Burnett uses images of the soon-to-be-slaughtered sheep as a potent visual metaphor for the collective socio-historical trajectory of his disempowered human characters.\(^{149}\) Reading *Killer of Sheep* as a film that uncritically likens its human characters to animals holds dangerous implications. To begin, such a reading suggests that, in the impoverished conditions of a racially stratified society, life is pared down to some sort of brute essence—to mindless toil and emotionless interpersonal exchanges, or, as Armond White puts it in his written commentary for the DVD release of the film, “to random scenes of stasis and anomie” (1). Such a reading implies, in the extreme, that the humans are reduced or degraded—that they are “animalized.” The trope of animalization is of course enormously vexed, perhaps nowhere more so (with the exception of the Holocaust) than in discourse surrounding racial oppression and, specifically, African-American slavery.

The very suggestion of any resemblance between animals and African-American slaves example, the above-mentioned scene in which one of the thugs attempts to justify his recourse to violent crime with the assertion “animal’s got its teeth, man’s got his fists,” a statement Thompson reads as indicative of what he takes to be the film’s message—that, “for these characters, morality is synonymous with staying alive, and whatever it takes to do that” (“Good Moments” 32).

\(^{149}\) Skoller adds that the “the black and white of the film creates a much more abstract and metaphorical world than a realistic one. There is no clearer instance of this than the graphic quality of the white sheep disappearing into the black space of the chute in the slaughterhouse. The contrast between black and white is made even more potent when the image of the white sheep going to slaughter is reversed in the viewer’s mind—through the film’s central metaphor—into the black skins of the film’s subjects” (125). If we press on Skoller’s logic, it breaks down: within the metaphor (the black characters are like the white sheep), does Stan figure among the sheep (the black community) or does he remain the leader (the one who leads to slaughter)? If it is the latter, then does Stan lead his children, his community, to death? Is this not precisely the damning critique of black masculinity that the film works so hard to resist?
constitutes “the dreaded comparison,” to borrow the title of Marjorie Spiegel’s book-length consideration of this abiding trope. To affirm that Killer of Sheep simply trades in this comparison is to overlook the myriad ways in which the film critically engages with the socio-historical legacy and present-day reality of human-animal comparison.

Hedges moves toward an acknowledgement of Killer of Sheep’s self-reflexive treatment of the trope of animalization with her observation, “It’s never clear that the fate of the children is equated with that of the sheep—it’s just a nagging anxiety” (np). It is my contention that the film not only instils this anxiety, but also—and more importantly—presses the spectator to question it. Within the context of this dissertation’s investment in the ethical treatment of animals, the trope of animalization poses a specific danger: condemning the reduction of humans to being “like animals” threatens to subsume any ethical recognition of the deplorable conditions in which many animals live and die. In his explication of the term “speciesism,” Wolfe develops a small lexicon that helps to explain my point. He explains that the term, famously codified by Singer in Animal Liberation, “suggests (like its models racism, sexism, and so on) not only a logical or linguistic structure that marginalizes and objectifies the other solely based on species, but also a whole network of material practices that reproduce that logic as a materialized institution and rely on it for legitimization” (Posthumanism? 101, original emphasis). Wolfe envisions this network or institution as a grid, and maps onto it four increasingly polarized categories: animalized animals, humanized animals, animalized humans, and humanized humans (101). These designations elucidate a rhetorical move that is too frequently overlooked in discourse around animals: in order to animalize humans, we must first animalize animals; likewise, in order to humanize animals, we

150 The comparison provokes extreme discomfort precisely because slavery entailed putting the trope of animalization into practice on a vast, institutionalized scale. As Mark S. Roberts explains, the American slave trade’s particularly “egregious abuse and exploitation of humans” was largely licensed by “the Aristotelian reduction of the slave to human property and the subsequent equating of humans and domesticated animals” (66).
must first humanize humans. The failure to recognize this hierarchical exchange makes possible a profoundly speciesist ethical contradiction: it allows one to condemn systems or instruments of power that reduce humans to the state of animals (e.g. slavery), all the while taking it as given or natural that animals exist in conditions of extreme violence, deprivation, and suffering. This speciesist logic holds in readings of *Killer of Sheep* that maintain that the film depicts a society that reduces humans to the status of animals. More to the point, it effaces what I take to be one of the film’s definitive ethical gestures: its refusal to subsume the animalization of animals within the animalization of humans.

This refusal emerges in Burnett’s careful positioning of animals in the visual and aural registers of the film. The presence of animals in *Killer of Sheep* is initially perceptible on the soundtrack: the viewer is introduced to Stan, drinking tea in his kitchen with his friend Bracy (Charles Bracy), their ebbing conversation competing with the noises of dogs barking and, as the night wears on, crickets chirping and a car engine wheezing. Animals are regularly invoked in the characters’ dialogue, appearing as the stuff of metaphor in insults, nursery rhymes, and poetic reverie: a woman calls her bawdy nephew “a dirty dog,” children recite “knick knack paddy whack give a dog a bone,” and Stan’s wife (played by Kaycee More—she appears frequently but remains unnamed) likens her memories to “rabbit skins stretched on the backyard fence.” More often than not, these references are expressed in voiceover dialogue, and thus these invocations are twice removed. Animals likewise play a figurative role on the image track: Stan’s young daughter Angie, for example, first appears wearing a rubber dog mask, her own hangdog expression veiled by a surrogate animal one (in the background, birds chirp in unison with the squeak of a chain link fence). Finally, animals sporadically appear onscreen in the flesh: the sheep in the abattoir, a pack of feral dogs in the street. In sum, animals populate various registers of the film, yet they remain always at the periphery. The
placement of the animals at the limits of the narrative and the edges of the screen manifests a sort of Derridean supplementarity. Through choices of sound, framing, and editing, the film explicitly codes its nonhuman subjects as marginal. Yet it does so precisely in order to fold the underlying logic of this move back on itself, making visible the indivisibility of the supplement and that which it ostensibly augments—or, to use Derridean shorthand, rendering undecidable the reciprocity that binds human and nonhuman animals.

Burnett’s peculiar combinations of sounds and images in and around the slaughterhouse sequences lay bare this supplemental relationship; more precisely, they make present the highly ambivalent relationships between the domestic sphere and the killing floor. An extended description of these sequences is here in order. In my discussion of American Dream in Chapter Two, I remark on the way in which bits and pieces of footage from inside the Hormel plant intermittently flash up, piercing the narrative’s focus on the meatpackers’ labour struggle and reminding the spectator of the bloody site from which this controversy emanates. Burnett embeds the slaughterhouse sequences in Killer of Sheep in a similar, if more extensive, fashion. A number of sound bridges and graphic visual rhymes bind these sequences to the other parts of the film, with the end result being that they unfold as diffuse yet connected episodes.

The aforementioned scene of Stan and Bracy’s dilatory conversation ends when Stan’s wife enters the kitchen, whistling, and the film cuts abruptly to images of Stan cleaning up at the slaughterhouse. Our first glimpse of this grungy, industrial space is presumably taken from the end of Stan’s workday and, save for a skinned carcass and a tray of cutlets, the sheep are markedly absent. As Massood observes, Burnett makes two significant deviations in this and the following slaughterhouse sequences: he trades the static camera and direct sounds (conversations, background noises) of the domestic
scenes for rapid, handheld camera work and an asynchronous, nondiegetic musical soundtrack (34). In this first sequence, the swing-like second movement of William Grant Still’s “Symphony No. 1: Afro American” accompanies the images of Stan working and, as if to keep up with the score, the camera becomes almost exuberantly mobile; as in the introductory sequence of *American Dream*, several jarring swish pans announce that this is not exclusively a space of regimented movement. On one hand, the playful melody and camera movement seem an incongruous accompaniment to the site of slaughter, with its cold, metal surfaces and rationalized activity of killing; on the other, the music and enlivened camera movement come as a welcome reprieve after the preceding scene in Stan’s kitchen, in which the lengthy silences and claustrophobic, static framing border on oppressive. Burnett reverts back to the more sedate stylistic conventions of the home and the neighbourhood immediately upon leaving the slaughterhouse: the voices of children singing “This Old Man” play over a series of oddly placed establishing shots of the weathered façade and ruinous post-industrial surrounds of the Plano Meat Co., and the desultory lullaby leads back to the kitchen, where Stan’s wife arranges her hair in a dulled reflection cast by the lid of a pot. Massood observes that the lullaby functions as a sound bridge that “links the abattoir with the kitchen not only because both spaces are connected to Stan, but because the spaces affect his psychological state. [It] relates Stan’s job to the themes that most define the family scenes, fatigue and malaise, thus suggesting that his condition has become a vicious cycle in which work effects home and vice versa” (35). I agree, yet I think we can press these sites of connection further. For one, home and abattoir are bound not only by the lullaby, but also by the faint echo of Stan’s wife’s whistle in the melody of Still’s “Symphony.” Indeed, the prosaic sounds of the wife whistling and the children singing serve as an aural bookend for the jaunty melody that accompanies the images of Stan working.
Burnett stitches the site/sight of slaughter ever more closely into the domestic and social realms in subsequent sequences featuring Stan at work. Footage from the slaughterhouse next appears between a scene of children playing in a vacant lot and the abovementioned scene in which the neighbourhood toughs try to recruit Stan. The impossibly deep bass of Paul Robeson serves as the sound bridge in this sequence. His rendition of “The House I Live In” plays over the images of the desolate lot, his words “The children in the playground / The faces that I see / All races and religions / That’s America to me” layered—perhaps ironically—over a close-up of a top spinning and a long shot of boys seated on a crumbling wall, aimlessly throwing rocks. Burnett cuts to the slaughterhouse, where a white worker hangs and wipes down the hooks onto which the bodies of dead sheep will soon be hoisted, and Stan in turn spaces out the hooks. Robeson’s voice is cut off by the sound of forced air and the cold, metallic whir of the hooks skating against the track. A close-up shows the torso and hands of the white worker as he whets his knives, and a longer shot follows him from behind as he turns and exits. Burnett cuts to silence and to a corridor where two rams stand, seemingly undecided; the space is clearly a part of the meat-production facility, but its precise geographic relationship to the killing floor is unclear. Robeson’s voice returns, this time singing the lines “Lots of folks gathered there / All the friends I knew” from the spiritual “Going Home.” Burnett holds the shot, and some dozen sheep traipse down the corridor, toward the rams; the animals turn first right, then left, and the line “All the friends I need” repeats. Finally, Burnett cuts to silence and an exterior shot of Stan’s house. As in the previous sequence, the sound serves as bridge on either end of the slaughterhouse footage, yet here Robeson’s voice links the abattoir not only to Stan’s home but also to the nation (“The House I Live In”) and to Home, heaven (“Going Home”).
The third iteration of the slaughterhouse footage integrates visual rhymes in addition to aural linkages. It begins with the image, described at the beginning of this section, of the sheep turning and looking. Burnett then cuts to a streetscape, shot with a telephoto lens so that its contents—three mangy dogs, an abandoned bicycle, a beat-up car—appear flattened into one plane. Three boys run out of the frame, and a closer tracking shot follows them as they round a corner, laughing. Burnett matches to a shot of a homologous mass of sheep being hoisted onto the hooks. Little Walter’s “Mean Old World” begins to play over images of human hands grasping at the hides. A longer shot reveals a row of men skinning the animals, and a choppy series of shorter shots shows that a few deft cuts and yanks are all that is needed to undress the sheep (the easy rhythm and perfunctory movements of stripping these large animals is unsettling, and calls attention to the fragility of dressing as such). A shallow-focus shot frames the skinned heads and necks of two sheep, backed by a blurred-out row of similarly sickening shapes; here, Little Walter’s bluesy harmonica momentarily aligns with the image track to suggest that the bobbing carcasses are dancing. Burnett then cuts to the film’s most graphic image: a shot of a sheep’s skinned head, staked upside down on a metal post. A worker neatly slices out its gullet and tosses it into a bin. The music tapers out and Burnett cuts back to the footage of the live sheep, which, as before, occupy a disparate and geographically indeterminate part of the facility. The direct sound recommences; the sheep mew and, again, look at the camera. The sheep turn right and, as if startled by an off-screen sound or movement, quickly turn left and begin to run. A static medium shot frames the long line of animals as they cross and exit the horizontal frame, en masse. This composition replicates the soporific, bedtime-story image of sheep bounding over the horizon, and the introduction of a boy’s voice counting (“one Mississippi, two Mississippi”) confirms the resemblance and ties it to the film’s title and central conceit.
Burnett cuts to a porch: two of the boys who were previously running have flung themselves upside down in a handstand contest. The third boy crouches to the side, counting; when he falters, one of the upturned boys chides him, “Boy, can’t you count?”

This sequence bleeds into the fourth and final iteration of slaughterhouse footage, and the two can thus be read as one long, diffuse sequence. A medium shot frames a girl hanging white sheets on a line, and she looks back at a group of boys who have just thrown dirt at her clean laundry. Burnett cuts to the slaughterhouse, to yet another shot of a sheep looking back—this time, a ram nuzzles an older female. The lilting voice of Dinah Washington singing “This Bitter Earth” plays over images of sheep being hoisted onto the line. It is a deliberate repetition: the same song accompanies a previous scene, in which Stan and his wife slow dance, and Stan coldly refuses her romantic advances. This last glimpse into the abattoir ends with a shot of Stan, brandishing a white cloth as he herds the sheep down a narrow hall.

This description of the slaughterhouse sequences begins to explain the logic according to which the disparate actors and scenes of Killer of Sheep are made to abut one another. I will return to Burnett’s peculiar use of sound, but I first want to highlight the way his editing and cinematography generate a series of morphological consonances between the film’s humans and animal actors or agents. The last sequence described above typifies the film’s use of modified matches-on-action and graphic matching. A technique central to continuity editing, a match-on-action is an edit that carries a movement across the interval of two shots.151 A simple match-on-action might, for example, look like this: shot #1 of a person beginning to stand up; cut to shot #2 of the person completing the movement of standing up. As this example indicates, the subject in a typical match-on-action remains the same from one shot to the next; indeed, the point of

151 For detailed definitions of formal terminology, see Bordwell and Thompson’s glossary in Film Art (477–81).
the device is to produce the illusion of an individual subject’s continuous movement. In *Killer of Sheep*, in contrast, Burnett uses matches-on-action to join the movements of disparate subjects—namely, to make continuous the movements of human and animal actors. In the sequence described in the preceding paragraph, he uses matches-on-action to connect, first, the running boys to the swinging sheep and, second, the upended sheep back to the upside-down boys. These matches do not seamlessly blend the boys and the sheep together but rather, with a sort of clumsy elegance, make them adjacent, contiguous. Moreover, they join the film’s disparate narrative threads—the abattoir, the neighbourhood, and, more tangentially, the home. Burnett makes use of the technique of graphic matching or rhyming to similar ends. A graphic match consists of joining two successive shots so that their compositional similarity is strengthened or even pronounced. The sharpest example in *Killer of Sheep* occurs near the end, in an exterior sequence that shows children leaping from one tenement roof to another. Burnett films the children from below, positioning the camera at ground level and between the walls of the buildings. The effect is eerie: one by one, the children leap over the open threshold, their graceful bodies recalling, again, the sleep-inducing image of sheep bouncing over the horizon. The shots of children bounding over the firmament are among several instances in which the human characters are made to graphically rhyme with their animal counterparts: in the sequence described above, a young girl hangs laundry in a dusty yard, and the billowing white sheets recall the images of the sheep suspended from hooks (this rhyme also refracts the image of the boys holding headstands).

We could allow that Burnett constructs these moments in order to represent a society that imposes equivalent limitations on certain of its human and animal subjects. Yet this would gloss over the film’s much more nuanced critique of the very field of human-animal comparison. The desire to engage that critique prompts my earlier
characterization of *Killer of Sheep* as a film that adheres to Bazin’s ideals of realist filmmaking. What I have in mind here is not simply that Burnett abides by the tenets of duration that have come to be associated, somewhat reductively, with Bazin, but that he practices an idiosyncratic form of cinema that realizes Bazin’s advocacy for “a film narrative capable of expressing everything without chopping the world up into bits—to reveal the hidden meanings of beings and things without breaking up their natural unity” (“The Evolution of Film Language” 104). Readers may object that my coupling of Bazin and Burnett is somewhat perverse: Burnett may achieve Bazin’s ideal, but it is only by using the very techniques—namely, editing—that Bazin eschewed. I would respond, first, that *Killer of Sheep* documents a set of specific socio-historical conditions in which the shared reality of humans and animals (among other ontological categories or fields) is always already chopped up into bits, and the film therefore works not to uncover a natural or objective unity, but to remind us that connections persist and even proliferate within this highly fragmented field; to this end, Burnett has no choice but to rely on inventive (in Bazin’s terms, additive) techniques of editing, as well as imaginative cinematography and asynchronous sound. I would add, secondly, that while Bazin is most frequently remembered for his aphoristic disavowals of editing, he in fact viewed it as a perfectly acceptable element of film language, but one that should be used sparingly and only when other means (deep focus, extended takes) were unavailable. The strict letter of his preference reads, “‘Whenever the essential aspect of an event depends upon the simultaneous presence of two or more agents, editing is prohibited’” (“Editing Prohibited” 81). As my above description of the slaughterhouse sequences suggests,

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152 Burnett does use duration. As Skoller puts it, “The formal style [of *Killer of Sheep*] is constructed around two major kinds of shots: the long shot, in which the entire object shown is contained in the frame; and the long take, in which the duration of the shot is continuous. These shots emphasize complete actions and images of whole objects. These types of shots emphasize the real-time continuity of an action rather than the expansion or elision that results from putting together individual shots to make up a whole action” (121–22).
Burnett uses editing (as well as cinematography and sound) precisely to make present the two agents—human and animal—upon which his filmic reality depends. Moreover, he bends editing—which, according to Bazin, “by its very nature, is opposed to ambiguity”—into the service of fostering ambiguity (“Evolution” 101).

To pursue a slightly different tack, Killer of Sheep resonates with Jennifer Fay’s assertion that Bazin’s particular “ethos” as a film theorist and critic hinges on “his surrealist attraction to films that momentarily showcase the objective co-presence of radically different entities” (42). Fay is not alone in noting the surrealist undercurrent of Bazin’s realism; Lowenstein asserts, “Bazin must be understood not as the naïve realist he is so often mistaken for, but as a complex film theorist whose work reminds us of the realism within surrealism, and reveals to us the surrealism within realism” (“The Surrealism of the Photographic Image” 59). These characterizations of Bazin find an uncanny echo in Killer of Sheep’s central stylistic tension, as the film shifts between gritty neo-realist melodrama and the somewhat unlikely bedfellow of surrealist art and filmmaking. As I enumerated through my overview of the extant scholarship on the film, Killer of Sheep makes use of almost every signature formalized by the Italian school of neo-realism: it was shot on-location amid urban ruin, it employs non-professional actors in scenes that are both more and less scripted, it favors natural lighting, and it unfolds as an episodic narrative (many of these elements are inseparable from the film’s documentary visual approach, which both Massood and Skoller stress). Yet if the film adopts the principle conventions of neo-realist filmmaking, it also draws on visual and aural techniques more readily associated with the avant-garde, and particularly with surrealist filmmaking. These latter techniques provide the motivating force of the film’s limtrophy.
Killer of Sheep works, by and large, in the low registers of understatement. Against this backdrop of restraint, Burnett’s use of an asynchronous and wildly incongruous musical soundtrack in the slaughterhouse sequences emerges as the film’s most arresting formal feature. In its deliberate incongruity, Burnett’s use of sound and image to link Stan’s home and work life resembles an analogous, albeit even less subtle, gesture from Un chien andalou (1929), a surrealist masterpiece that likewise couples overwhelmingly sinister images and jaunty music. Towards the middle of Buñuel and Dali’s frenetic associative free-for-all, a reveal discloses that the male protagonist is dragging not just two pianos, but two pianos stuffed with the bodies of two slaughtered donkeys. Like Burnett’s incongruous pairings of sound and image, this surrealist image ushers into the domestic realm all of the terror that humans daily inflict on animals. In both cases, the introduction of slaughter into the home remains unsettling—indeed, terrifying—precisely because the films do not explain it away. In Un chien andalou, the material of slaughter seems to lodge itself in the living room, the inert bulk of the dead donkeys unreadable, unmovable. The connections Burnett forges are comparatively more dynamic, as they suggest an incalculable give and take between the spaces in which humans live and animals are killed. To be sure, the use of incongruous sounds and images to connect sites of radical difference is not an exclusively surrealist practice. Massood asserts, for example, that Burnett’s “juxtaposition of sound and image is an adaptation of a Soviet approach to filmmaking for an African American cultural context (35). She does not qualify her reference, and I assume she alludes to Eisenstein, V.I. Pudovkin’s, and G.V. Alexandrov’s “Statement on Sound,” wherein they decry the use of additive or explanatory sound that serves “the satisfaction of simple curiosity” and in its place advocate a “contrapuntal” use of sound that provokes “a sharp discord with the visual images” (113–14). However, Burnett’s pairings of sound and image work not to establish
counterpoints—to build contrast—between these sites of difference, but rather to provoke open-ended associations between them; in this sense, they are properly considered surrealist.

Burnett’s surrealist gestures also work on the image track. The most palpable instance occurs at the beginning of *Killer of Sheep*, in a series of riveting images of Stan’s daughter Angie (played by Burnett’s niece, Angela Burnett) wearing a rubber dog mask that bears a preposterously forlorn expression. She first appears in the kitchen where, silent and masked, she observes her father as he simultaneously repairs the floor and talks to friend who has stopped by unexpectedly. Stan Jr. swoops into the frame and grabs her by the snout, and his violent play synchs with the off-screen voice of Stan’s friend, who coolly greets the young boy with the words, “Hey, killer.” Stan rises to scold Stan Jr., but the boy darts out of the house. The scene in the kitchen continues to unfold, and Burnett returns briefly to Angie a few moments later: still wearing the mask, she slumps against a chain-link fence and looks, vacantly it seems, at a small boy who has joined her outside.

We could of course interpret these images as a distanced and potentially ironic critique of a society that treats humans, and particularly human children, like animals. But much more is contained in this gesture. Inexplicably grafted onto Angie’s small frame, the mournful dog mask calls attention to its own act of effacement; we cannot but question what exactly is being veiled here, and why. The splicing of human and animal in Angie’s mask produces an inscrutable image, yet one that we can at least begin to read in the context of the film’s sustained acknowledgement of an incalculable human-animal reciprocity. The image of Angie and her mask spurs my comparison to surrealism as it recalls iconic works such as René Magritte’s inverted mermaid and even Man Ray’s Minotaur. While the splicing of human and animal in visual art dates to antiquity, a resolute inscrutability binds this image of Angie specifically to the halfbreeds and hybrids
of surrealism. To put it another way, these figures are alike in their resistance to overt metaphorization or narrative causality.

The images of Angie also recall surrealism insofar as they contribute to the film’s thickening of the boundary between waking and dreaming life. Thompson is the sole critic who considers the film’s dreamlike texture in any depth, and his attention to this register prompts him to connect the film with surrealism. In an early piece for Cinéaste, he asserts, “Stan’s true problem is not that he can’t get to sleep but that he seems to be in one long, tiresome dream from which he can’t rouse himself; episodes in the film, as in a dream, don’t conclude so much as blend into different episodes” (“The Devil” 24). He refined that view a decade later, explaining in a follow-up article that “it now seems to me that the foray into the world of dreams in Killer of Sheep is deeper and more deliberate […]; deeper, even, than that in such surrealist films as Luis Buñuel’s Un Chien andalou or L’Age d’or” (“Good Moments” 32). Thompson may well have been thinking of the introductory scene in Stan’s kitchen when he made his revision, as it demonstrates the film’s disturbance of the boundary of dreams on the level of both narrative and style. At one point, Stan holds his teacup against his cheek and compares its warmth to the feeling you get “when you’re making love to a woman.” His reverie inserts a distinctly Proustian moment into the narrative: like Marcel’s nibble on a petite madeleine, Stan’s caress of the teacup lends him access to involuntary memory and the world of dreams. While I agree with Thompson’s rereading (and would note that the fact that he revised attests to the film’s lasting effects), I hesitate over his choice of words on several counts. He describes the film’s slippage into the world of dreams as a “foray,” yet this movement (here and elsewhere) does not, as that word suggests, express itself as a sudden incursion—as a fantastical exercise in style. That is, the film does not transgress any clearly marked boundaries, as is typically the case with dream sequences. Burnett’s approach here
closely resembles cinéma vérité: the scene in Stan’s kitchen, for example, unfolds principally in extended static shots with seemingly little directorial intervention, and Burnett favours awkward angles and close framing, effectively rendering the setting confining and the characters confined. These qualities lead me to my second disagreement with Thompson’s wording: where Thompson describes the film’s slippage between waking and dreaming life as a “blending,” I insist that it is a flattening. In this scene in particular but also in other moments, the film expresses the same urge toward flattening that is evident in abstract art, from Gauguin to Cézanne to the Cubists. Burnett, who was the cinematographer for Killer of Sheep, generates this effect by combining a number of peculiar cinematographic choices: he allows shots to protract and extend just to the point of directionless tedium; he films from extremely high and low angles, and sometimes from canted ones; he frequently uses a telephoto lens in the exterior scenes; he tends to move the camera frenetically, or to not move it at all; he frames shots of human figures so that heads and limbs are lopped off; and he dispenses with point-of-view shots (I owe these last two observations to Hedges, np). I agree that the film’s framing (and editing) create ambiguity, but argue that something more specific is at stake. By flattening the image’s affective and compositional properties, Burnett graphically “populates the limits” between his human and animal actors. To put it another way, he brings into focus the kaleidoscope of connections and boundaries that run between Stan, his family, and the human and nonhuman beings in their surrounds.

This is not to say that Burnett’s formal movements foster a chaotic or muddled cacophony—quite the contrary. Over the course of my analysis, I have circled back several times to the early scene of Stan and Bracy drinking tea in Stan’s kitchen. This scene concludes with a jarring, high-angle shot over Stan’s wife’s shoulder that reveals that the two men are playing dominos. The inclusion of this shot can be read to adumbrate
the film’s formal structure and the concomitant mode of reading it obliges. That is, it serves as a miniature model of the film’s construction and thereby guides our reading of it. While there are numerous ways to play dominos, the game essentially entails culling tiles—which, coincidentally, are referred to as “bones”—from a stock or “boneyard” and arranging them in mutually productive configurations. Players take turns aligning the tiles so that their values correspond, these correspondences generate new combinations, and so on. *Killer of Sheep* can productively be understood as working in an analogous fashion. On my first viewing of the film, I was discomfited by its loose structure—by the way its scenes and disparate threads bump up against one another according to an unexplained logic—and my instinct was to insist on identifying causal links between the different strands. Yet I soon gave myself over to discerning transversals—that is, to distinguishing through lines and appreciating the interdependence of the fragments and their subjects. In this way, viewing the film is akin to playing the interactive and regenerative game of dominos. To recall an earlier structural analogy as a point of contrast, this experience is quite unlike using a database. For Manovitch, *Man With a Movie Camera* constitutes a structured set of data, “the full range of possibilities offered by the camera,” which the user may access through various entry points. Given its layering of sound and image, *Killer of Sheep* is perhaps “deeper” than *Man With a Movie Camera*, yet its “data” is in constant flux. Burnett’s idiosyncratic use of sound and image, as well as his cinematography and editing, effect a continuous slippage between adjacent elements and thus unsettle a series of frontiers—waking and dreaming, human and animal. This slippage, at once breathtaking and understated, imbues everyday life with the terror that

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153 Different versions of the game may of course adumbrate very different formal structures. In his reading of *Amelie* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 2001), Dudley Andrew identifies a masterful series of shots of tumbling dominos as emblematic of the film’s neat storyboard aesthetic and of director Jeunet’s way of clicking off brief shots: here the dominos “model the overall strategy of one shot falling into the next, which brings its neighbor to fall until the entire suite renders the pleasure of patterned reality. Of course, the dominos have to be milled to be homogenous, then lined up just so” (49).
humans daily inflict on animals; that is, it effectively brings this violence home. It also disallows the spectator a stable entry point, and instead obliges her to constantly look anew at the relationships that, to recall Derrida’s definition of limitrophy, complicates the lines between the film’s actors and spaces.

I conclude by returning to my opening premise, that *Killer of Sheep* undoes the way we have been trained to look at animals and animal slaughter, and loosens the visual field to accommodate an ethical recognition of the ways in which the killing of animals imbues everyday life. As I have demonstrated, the film brings together or abuts a series of peculiar layers—incongruous sounds and images, flattened compositional and affective planes, eerie matches on action and graphic rhymes. The film’s limitrophic treatment on these planes, moreover, enables it to access alternative ways of visualizing relationships between perceptual modes of experience, waking and dreaming life, and humans and animals. In this way, *Killer of Sheep* not only strips away the centuries-long accretion of assumptions that inform our understanding of what humans and animals mean to one another, but also underscores the immense value to be had in reconfiguring these relationships. In sum, the film undresses us, and it also urges us to redress our relationship to animals and to animal slaughter.
—Conclusion—

As with most sustained endeavours of this nature, this dissertation’s primary virtue is also its primary limitation. Across every stage of this project, I have fixed my attention on the material substrate of cinematic representation; that is, I have endeavoured to maintain the pressure of my analysis on the animal bodies subject to slaughter, and on the filmic shots and cuts by which they are rendered subjects of our gaze as spectators. My deliberate insistence on the material register constitutes the central ethical gesture of this work. As I have demonstrated, cinema’s documentation of violent animal death and slaughter has the capacity to press us to recognize the reality—the vulnerability, suffering, and finitude—of animals that are disassembled by the apparatuses of industrial slaughter and film, and then reassembled as meat, spectacle, metaphor, and evidence. In this capacity lies cinema’s singular ethical promise to spur the spectator to acknowledge, and perhaps even to rethink, her relationship to slaughter. My stress on the indexical nature of cinema furthermore corrects the pervasive scholarly neglect—both in strands of film theory and criticism proper, and in HAS-inflected initiatives in film studies—of the specificity and individuality of the animal lives represented in documentary scenes of slaughter. My insistent emphasis on the significant material relationships between animal bodies and filmic frames has come at the cost of attending, in the full rigour they demand, to the following questions: how does digital technology affect the documentary status of film? How do images, scenes, and sequences of slaughter relate to the larger narratives in which they circulate? And, perhaps most pressingly, how do we extend an ethical regard to both animals subject to slaughter and to humans tasked with the labour of slaughter? Subsequent stages of my research will, in keeping with my commitment to Bazin’s film theory, address these issues by adopting a deep focus that embraces new media theory, accommodates attention to both the audio-visual and narrative formal features of film.
(and indeed to their co-constitutive relationships), and more even-handedly realizes that the pursuit of ethics implicates all human and nonhuman animals. To be sure, these concerns emerge in the present work, and my aim will thus be to elaborate an approach that holds them in focus along with the insights thus far gleaned into the material logic of cinematic slaughter.

The Derridean argument of supplementarity will continue to prove generative in this endeavour, and future iterations of the work presented here promise to both enhance and indeed supplant the current points of emphasis. Because of my insistent attention to the filmic shot as an index of the materiality of slaughter, the film analyses in this dissertation centre, by and large, on details of shot composition and editing. To put it another way, my readings privilege both the film frame—the structuring device by which stilled images are placed in sequence—and the analogue film technology from which it derives. This emphasis has enabled me to isolate significant affinities between the practices of cutting up animal bodies and images of animals, yet it has also engendered fragmentation of the level of my own analysis. Lessening my grip on the film frame will enable me to attend to the overlapping questions raised by narrative, digital, and human elements. This loosening will not attenuate my investment in the ethical potential of cinematic indexicality, but rather will—as Derrida’s supplement teaches us—open up the field of analysis to a sustained inquiry into the co-presence of shot and story (spectacle and narrative), analogue and digital film, animals and humans.

As I see it now, this work will take one of two directions—or, perhaps, it will negotiate a path between them. On one hand, it might remain firmly embedded in the terrain of representation. For example, as I indicated at several points in this dissertation, the representation (the representability) of human and animal death is intimately bound up with the representation of sex. Indeed, the social and material constraints that delimit
the representation of death are matched in complexity only by those structuring the representation of love, sex, and desire, and at key junctures these sets of constraints merge and feed into one another. As Bazin puts it, “Like death, love must be experienced and cannot be represented (it is not called the little death for nothing) without violating its nature” (“Death Every Afternoon” 283). Future work might explore the interrelated (im)possibilities of showing death and desire on screen, and examine how animals and animal sex figure in cinema’s visual economy of love and death; attention to the proliferation of sex-centric images and narratives on the Internet would, I think, prove central to this project. Yet I am also intrigued by the possibility of taking a different and perhaps broader tack, and attempting to situate questions of human and animal life and death in a biopolitical framework. Foundational to this endeavour would be Jonathan Beller’s *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle* (2006), which lays the groundwork for an understanding of cinema’s special role in capitalizing perception—that is, in turning looking into a form of productive labour. Beller offers incredibly important insights into the way capital, through the medium of cinema, redistributes human activity and passivity in the twentieth century, and his work elaborates a cinema of attractions for our time that holds immense political (and, more implicitly, ethical) consequences. However, he leaves unsaid any critical awareness of the way this current cinematic mode of production produces workers/spectators who are, precisely, human. I am interested in asking how cinema’s fascination with and constant recourse to animal life and death participates in constructing a specific form of “the human,” and in interrogating the values contemporary biopolitics places on this human spectator.

Regardless of the course I decide to follow in future work, I will remain insistently focused on the ways in which humans and animals are imbricated in larger
systems of power, and particularly in cycles of production and consumption. This
dissertation’s central gesture has been to discern how modes and techniques of “chopping
the world up into bits”—of shocking, stunning, flaying, slicing, and skinning—constitute
failed ways of seeing and perceiving beings, places, and process that have become
unseen, and to identify alternative ways of seeing and perceiving ourselves and animals.
There is, I am sure, immense worth in bringing this critical practice to bear on adjacent
realms of human-animal life.
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