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Was Blind but Now I See: Animal Liberation Documentaries' Deconstruction of Barriers to Witnessing Injustice

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Was Blind But Now I See: Animal Liberation Documentaries' Deconstruction of Barriers to Witnessing Injustice

Carrie P. Freeman and Scott Tulloch

> 'You will see some images of animals suffering.
> You will also see how these same images motivated one person
> to make a difference' – Disclaimer for *The Witness* (2004)
>
> 'The images you are about to see are not isolated cases.
> These are the industry standard for animals bred as pets, food, clothing, for
> entertainment and research. Viewer discretion is advised'
> – Disclaimer for *Earthlings* (2005)

'You better hope the anti-vivisection people don't get a hold of this film,' laughs a laboratory worker as she videotapes herself tormenting a scared monkey during shock treatments – a video that prophetically ends up in the activist documentary *Behind the Mask* (Keith 2006). This is just one of dozens of examples of video footage that industries never meant to see the light of day, but which documentarians critically showcase for public scrutiny. While some footage in animal liberation documentaries was created by animal-exploitative industries as in-house training or private research videos, most documentations must be filmed by activists themselves via covert operations designed to uncover what is concealed in industries profiting from agriculture and fishing, fur, marine parks, circuses, and biomedical research.

Activists circulate these disturbing visual images on the internet or in leaflets, and, increasingly, they are weaving them into feature-length documentary formats where the narrative structures define nonhuman animals as morally relevant victims, animal rights activists as heroes, and animal exploiters as villains. These documentaries warrant attention not only because they often win film festival awards, but also because they function as a critical counterpoint to the hegemony of speciesist rhetoric circulating in the public sphere. Documentaries about the exploitation of animals and animal liberation activism are not a new phenomenon, but the explosive proliferation of these films the past decade further justifies critical inquiry.[i] In this chapter we analyse seven recent animal liberation documentaries, their use of undercover images, and their rhetorical function as social change advocacy. Utilising the power of nonfictional moving image, the seven documentaries introduced below challenge anthropocentrism by making nonhuman animals a central character and plot point, characterizing their treatment (however legal) as criminally abusive.

The first three documentaries, *The Cove* (Psihoyos 2009)*, Dealing Dogs* (Simon 2006), and *Fowl Play* (Durand 2009), all centre on activist undercover campaigns to document abuses of specific species: dolphins, dogs, and hens, respectively. *The Cove,* 2009 Academy award winner for best documentary, features dolphin-trainer-turned-activist Ric O'Barry's quest to stop the slaughter of dolphins in a cove in Taiji, Japan. In an 'Oceans 11' spy adventure format, he and his volunteer team risk arrest setting up underwater cameras that successfully expose the slaughter. The HBO documentary *Dealing Dogs* follows 'Pete,' an investigator for Last Chance for Animals, as he works incognito at an Arkansas kennel that sells dogs to research labs. His laborious attempts to visually record violations of the Animal Welfare Act culminate in the arrest of the nation's most notorious 'B-dealer' of randomly sourced dogs. *Fowl Play* focuses solely on rescuing egg-laying hens. Activists from Ohio's Mercy for Animals sneak onto egg factory farms at night to conduct open rescues (without concealing their identities), recording the miserable conditions, occasionally rescuing some hens from trash bins or manure pits, and gaining exposure for the footage in the news media and schools.

Human moral development is the theme of two 2004 Tribe of Heart documentaries by Jenny Stein: *The Witness* and *Peaceable Kingdom*. In *The Witness*, an unlikely animal activist, Eddie Lama, a Brooklyn metals contractor, narrates his personal journey from first cat-sitting for a girlfriend, to rescuing strays, going vegan, and becoming an anti-fur activist, even outfitting his company vans with anti-fur banners and screens airing undercover fur footage that shocks passersby on Manhattan streets. *Peaceable Kingdom* talks with ex-farmers and farmed animal rescuers to examine America's disconnected and abusive relationship with animals used for food. The film features footage from stockyards, hatcheries, factory farms, and slaughterhouses. The message is one of personal growth and redemption, as viewers meet farmers who have opened their hearts to befriend and protect the very animals they used to kill.

The last two films, *Behind the Mask* (Keith 2006) and *Earthlings* (Monson 2005), are comprehensive in terms of promoting protection for all animal species, with the former focusing on activists and the latter on the victims who inspire their commitment; both barrage the audience with fast-paced montages of animal suffering designed to stir outrage and pity. *Behind the Mask* provides a sympathetic introduction to radical activists, such as those in the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), who don ski masks and risk arrest to liberate animals from labs and fur farms. The documentary's images fulfil one of ALF's guidelines: 'to reveal the atrocities committed against animals behind locked doors.' *Earthlings*' hard-hitting exposés on animals used for pets, food, clothes, entertainment, and science 'demonstrates in five ways how animals have come to serve mankind' as explained by narrator and Oscar-winning actor Joaquin Phoenix. The beginning and ending actively promote animal rights and more ethical relations by emphasising the connection among all species as fellow earthlings.[ii]

In the sections that follow we begin by explaining how this collection of animal liberation documentaries' prominent use of undercover footage functions as a

reverse panopticon, where the underdog activists gain surveillance power over industry by shining the light of scrutiny on their actions – elevating the audience above the barriers to witness prisoner conditions. Barriers to seeing are not just material, however; they are also conceptual. The hegemony of humanism is a basis for justifying discrimination and exploitation of other animals. Consequently we also examine how and when the films deconstruct the problematic human/animal dualism, promote animal rights ideology, and function as posthumanist cinema.[iii] This form requires viewers to identify not only with activists as protagonists, but also with nonhuman animals, and to disidentify with industry antagonists. The rhetorical construction of antagonisms in these films disrupts viewers' comfortable belief systems, and visuals of cruelty reveal a chasm between humanity's self-concept as humane and the brutal reality of our domination over other animals. Antagonisms function to create identity crises for viewers which filmmakers hope viewers will resolve through moral development, mirroring that of the protagonists. Far from being 'objective' narrators, these documentarians serve as critical rhetoricians who construct storylines that promote and legitimise animal rights activism by framing activists as freedom fighters protecting the innocent. This situates animal rights in the respected vein of civil rights, adding credibility to the animal cause and further bridging the human/animal divide.

The Power of Seeing (or Not Seeing)

Indicative of the films' strategic function and form, there is fundamental power in what is (not) seen. Industries intentionally obscure animal suffering. There are material barriers, fences and buildings that prevent seeing, and animals are kept hidden in the dark by industry and governments that profit immensely from animal products. But, we would be in error to say that only powerful entities and material objects conceal industrial spaces of animal suffering from the public's view. Much of the public is complicit in the obstruction of these spaces, as psychological and emotional barriers serve to support self-deception. The public consumes animal products, as well as innumerable products tested on animals, in alarming proportions. These finished products, themselves void of visible suffering, are part of the core fabric of everyday life. But to see the blood and maltreatment these products inherently entail would be to furnish a painful dissonance with the comfort provided by these products in our lives. Thus, much of the public voluntarily opts out of seeing the industrial spaces of animal suffering (Joy 2010).

Animals are treated like raw materials and processed as manufactured commodities in postindustrial society. There is a confluence between industry's strategic obstruction and the public's blissful ignorance that leads John Berger (1980: 24) to claim, 'everywhere animals disappear.' There are, however, other forms of exploitation of animals that are extremely visible. Entertainment industries like circuses, rodeos, bullfighting, and zoos rely on the animal being seen. However, these manufactured forms of visibility are compensatory, and such theatrical displays are further manifestations of how animals have been 'rendered absolutely marginal in society' (Berger 1980: 24). In these forms of visibility the animal is reduced to a

spectacle, an object subject to the human gaze and consumption. Liberation films run the risk of generating contrived displays of animals too. However, it is precisely the malign (in)visibility of the animal that adumbrates the radical potential of posthumanist films rendering the nonhuman animal visible. By thrusting nonhuman animals onto the 'public screen' (Peeples and Deluca 2002), undercover footage functions to shatter obstructions and reconstitute the industrial spaces of animal suffering with glass walls. Films such as *The Cove*, *Dealing Dogs*, *Fowl Play*, and *The Witness* all represent the extreme measures activists take to capture and disseminate moving images of the these spaces.

In *The Cove*, under the suspicious and watchful eye of Japanese and local officials, Ric O'Barry and his team plant cameras disguised as rocks and sensitive audio equipment positioned by world-class free divers to bring the images and squeals of dolphin slaughter to the public screen. Similarly, in *Dealing Dogs,* false identities, sophisticated phones and software to communicate with fellow activists, miniature cameras and microphones enable Pete to capture and relay footage of the horrendous conditions and illegal treatment of dogs at the kennel. Films such as *Fowl Play*, *The Witness, Behind the Mask* and *Peaceable Kingdom* present montages of undercover footage. Common among all the documentaries in our sample are a plethora of grainy, low-resolution images that typify undercover footage captured on concealed handheld cameras. The films are shaky, momentarily a piece of clothing or a body breaks into the frame, and dates and times often appear in the corner of the image. However, this quality, or lack thereof, does not detract from the effect of the films. As a semiotic encoding of authenticity, the low-tech style enhances their effect, serving as an unambiguous cue to viewers that the footage had to be captured undercover.

Further emphasising the importance of seeing, protagonists in *The Cove* and *The Witness* construct makeshift mobile-audiovisual display devices to publicly expose animal suffering. In *The Cove*, O'Barry straps a television to his body and walks into an International Whaling Commission meeting, strategically injecting brutal footage of fishermen spearing dolphins, showcasing it to bureaucrats and members of the news media. Similar actions are taken in *The Witness* as Eddie Lama converts his van to display undercover footage of fur industrial spaces on Manhattan's crowded streets. If we follow through with the analogy of *The Witness*'s title, having witnessed the crime and violence committed against animals, the viewers are now expected to do something: report the crime, testify and seek justice on behalf of the victims.

The truth of a violent human/animal hierarchy is covered in dark recesses. Hence, seeing functions as a strategic resource for activists. Derrida (2002: 372) recognizes a strange power in seeing the animal (see us), contending that in the moment of seeing the animal (see us) we are forced to cross the border and see the 'animal in me.' Derrida contends that by seeing 'the animal in me,' we may recognize the artificial line society has constructed between the human and animal and the violent subjection that anthropocentric subjectivity has enabled. These films direct a spotlight on the pervasive violence committed against animals. And, witnessing this treatment of the animal makes a mockery of our self-image as humane. Derrida (2004:

71-73) suggests that violence against animals must and will change, particularly because the 'spectacle man creates for himself in his treatment of animals will become intolerable' due to the negative 'image of man it reflects back to him.'

Theoretical support for the presumed power of (not) seeing is buttressed in the corpus of Foucault who was preoccupied with the practices of seeing. According to Foucault (1994: 107), it is through the gaze that clinicians of the 19th century accumulated knowledge, displacing religious doctrines and crude classificatory systems for medical diagnosis and treatment. In this moment of medical history, Foucault (1994: xii) argues, seeing, speaking, and knowing converge: 'The relation between the visible and the invisible – which is necessary to all concrete knowledge – changed its structure, revealing through the gaze and language what had previously been below and beyond their domain.' In relation to the undercover footage and films explored here, Foucault's case study of clinical medicine reveals the contingency between practices of seeing and the transformation of power, knowledge, and truth regimes. The films in our sample generate discursive disruptions, including legislative amendments and the closure of spaces of animal suffering, such as the Martin Creek Kennel, which was closed down largely because of the undercover footage Pete captures and which *Dealing Dogs* further disseminates. The act of seeing (the previously unseen) spaces of industrial animal suffering is a precondition for the constitution of a broader public discourse and discursive transformations.

Foucault's relevance to the analysis at hand can be further extended through his theorization of the relationship between seeing and power relations. Foucault (1995) references the panopticon, a space that enables hierarchical surveillance. The panopticon is a circular prison with a tower in the centre where anonymous observers may watch any prisoner at any one time. However, the incarcerated never can tell whether they are being watched or not. The ceaseless potential of being seen, a sense of intense monitoring of bodily conduct, imposes self-discipline and rigid adherence to the expectations of behaviour. The panopticon can be extended to represent how power relations and the gaze function in other social contexts of the modern institution, such as the school, factory, etc.

These films take the form of a reverse panopticon. We add the preface 'reverse' for several reasons. First, as a subversive tactic, the reverse panopticon is divergent from the top-down hierarchical structure associated with the traditional panopticon. Through undercover footage, the marginalized ideology and discourse of animal rights asserts itself through the gaze and directly challenges the powerful and vested interests activists oppose. The traditional panopticon is about maintenance of order and discipline; the reverse panopticon form of these films aims at discursive disorder. While the traditional panopticon enables the privileged gaze of one or several individuals, the reverse panopticon form undermines this privileged perspective, inviting all viewers willing to bear witness. Although much of the public still avoids these films, this form of surveillance power exponentially extends the vigilant gaze on violent practices.

The notion of a reverse panopticon does not ignore that undercover footage is difficult to obtain or neglect that activist's surveillance is sporadic at best. Notions of

a reverse panopticon revolve around these challenges and power differentials, opposed to traditional notions of the panopticon where surveillance is unabated and relatively constant. However, even the irregular surveillance of the reverse panopticon is enough to generate apprehension among exploitative industries about the anonymous and ceaseless potential of activist's undercover surveillance.[iv] The exposed images convey to actors in exploitative industries that they may always be watched, by anyone among them. There is unique power in the reverse panopticon as surveillance is decentralized, not emanating from a fixed location situated prominently in space as with the traditional panopticon. While the traditional panopitcon is a defensive strategy, part of the calculated management of a power/knowledge regime, the reverse panopitcon is an offensive tactic of the marginal other on enemy terrain (Certeau 1984: 36). Surveillance in the reverse panopticon is agile, multiple and amorphous. In each of these films protagonists are repeatedly interrogated as to whether they are undercover activists. Anyone new or unfamiliar in these violent industrial spaces cannot be trusted, a paranoia that is arguably the consequence of the reverse panopticon. The vantage of the reverse panopticon can loom anywhere, in the apparently loyal employee, or in the dark of night as activists with cameras slip in and out of facilities. With the proliferation and broader dissemination of undercover film that these documentaries permit, the uncertain threat and incessant fear of activists' surveillance may impose self-discipline and gradually alter the treatment of animals in these horrible spaces. However, the radical characteristics of these films are not limited to these elements and are expanded in the films' subversion of the human/animal dualism.

Animal Rights Ideology and Deconstruction of the Human/Animal Dualism

To qualify as posthumanist cinema in the twenty-first century, these documentaries must push beyond mainstream animal welfare views towards animal rights. To distinguish the two ideologies, animal *welfare* is largely limited to prohibiting 'wanton cruelty' or suffering in excess of what is 'necessary' while humans use other animals for human benefit (Francione & Garner 2010). Alternately, animal *rights* asks that humans stop using and domesticating other animals (Regan 1983), legally categorize sentient nonhumans as individuals not property (Francione & Garner 2010) and combat species-based discrimination to fairly consider the interests of nonhuman animals (Singer 1990).

Animal rights principles challenge the human/animal dualism (Freeman 2010). From a Derridian standpoint, this binary does not merely represent a neutral categorization but rather serves as a 'violent hierarchy' (Derrida 2002b: 41) where *human* dominates and is defined in opposition to the so-called *animal*. In support of deconstructing this discriminatory opposition, we examine how these films strike a balance between emphasising kinship and embracing difference among humans and other animals to avoid privileging only those animals that resemble humankind. Additionally, while these films frequently portray nonhumans as victims in need of human mercy and rescue, which could be construed as a patronising reinforcement of stewardship models that are more indicative of animal welfare than rights, we explore

how they also enable animal agency, voice and dignity. Thus, we critically analyse how these films simultaneously shatter and reify human/animal dualisms.

In support of animal rights, our analysis reveals that all these documentaries privilege the lives of featured animal species as inherently valuable sentient beings that should not be forced to suffer at the hands of humans, particularly in an industrial setting. The moral of most of these documentaries fits animal rights ideology in terms of discouraging the use of animals for food, clothes, science, and entertainment. Industry's mistreatment and cruelty toward animals is constructed as the films' major conflict. Resolution comes primarily in terms of animal activists rescuing victims, but some films also ask viewers to play a role in resolving the conflict by eating vegan (*Peaceable Kingdom, Witness, Fowl Play, Earthlings)* or eschewing captive exhibits (*Cove*) and fur (*Witness*). Whenever an abolitionist solution is not clarified, the viewer may infer that tougher laws and regulation are an implied resolution.

In defining and promoting animal rights philosophy, *Earthlings* is the most explicit documentary, being the only one to use the word *speciesism* or cite Singer's (1990) utilitarian principles according to which it is wrong to privilege the trivial interests of one's own species by sacrificing the major interests of another. Joaquin Phoenix's narration critiques humanity's power to dictate when and how domesticated animals will die and to force wild animals into permanent retreat, disregarding that 'they have the right to be here just as much as humans do.'

The Cove's protagonist Ric O'Barry expresses a rights sentiment when he declares 'it's all about respect now, not exploitation.' The film emphasises dolphin freedom specifically, as O'Barry is shown liberating many from captivity. The documentary frames the taking of dolphins for entertainment or meat as kidnapping and murder rather than just a welfare issue. Viewers learn that O'Barry has sacrificed an opportunity to be a millionaire in the dolphin trade because he refuses to see them as tools for human amusement or profit. The advocacy for dolphin rights is overt, but the limitation of rights to cetaceans here, however appropriate to the narrative focus, inadvertently may have audiences questioning if they have any obligations toward other species, such as non-mammals or those used for food. For example, fish are the most ignored species amongst the documentaries, despite their pervasive exploitation for food. When fish are featured, only in *Earthlings* and *The Cove*, they tend to be discussed in scientific terms, as members of ecologically vital species or as a food source, rather than as the sentient individuals that mammals or land animals are.[v]

The paradox for animal rights is that it needs to emphasize similarities between human and nonhuman animals in order to deconstruct the dualistic thinking that separates and privileges humans, yet one must also respect diversity found across the species spectrum (Freeman 2010). *Earthlings* strikes this balance saying 'beyond the many differences there is sameness,' and *Behind the Mask* features Steven Best noting that humans do not have a license for moral superiority, as nonhumans are superior in some capabilities and humans in others. To challenge the hierarchical human/animal dualism, one would expect to see direct comparisons between humans and other animals. While *Earthlings* uses the term 'nonhuman animal' several times, the dualistic terminology used by most documentaries fails to acknowledge humans'

animality; consider the caption in *Behind the Mask* that reads 'no animals or people were hurt in this action.' Yet while most documentaries do not refer to humans as animals, many make the link by directly comparing the suffering and capabilities of nonhumans to those of humans. It is popular (*Behind the Mask, Fowl Play, Cove*) to have scientists and doctors bridge the species gap, presumably to add credibility by citing scientific evidence of nonhuman cognition or sentience. At other times the films make definitive statements, such as Phoenix in *Earthlings* emphasising the kinship between all animals as fellow earthlings and noting that, like humans, other animals are 'psychological centres of a life that is uniquely their own' and that 'they too are strong, intelligent, industrious, mobile and evolutional.'

Earthlings does not shy away from making an overt and often controversial comparison between the slaughter of humans and nonhumans, citing Isaac Bashevis Singer's quote comparing humans' treatment of other animals to the worst racist practices of the Nazis. *Earthlings* launches an additional direct attack on humanity's moral superiority by citing Mark Twain's quote that man is the most detestable species because he inflicts pain for sport – a sentiment bolstered by sadistic scenes of angry men beating animals in a variety of sports and industries, undermining notions of a humane civilisation.

Throughout *The Witness*, Eddie Lama stresses that the difference between humans and other animals is merely conceptual rather than real, implying speciesist prejudices can be unlearned. As a subtle way to compare human and nonhuman animals, Lama occasionally employs ambiguous terms for subjects, such as 'someone' or 'anyone,' to allow viewers to envision any sentient individual experiencing that scenario, human or nonhuman.

But even when documentaries avoid direct comparisons to humans, all seek to convince viewers that other animals have consciousness and sensitivity – in essence, agency. Viewers can then interpret animals' screams, confinement, and wounds as indicative of physical and emotional pain. To emphasise the significance of nonhumans as some*one* not some*thing*, films often feature rescued animals with names or mention them in the dedication or credits. Documentaries afford animals agency in terms of presuming they have a perspective and desires for a better, freer, more natural and familial existence for themselves. For example, *Witness* and *Earthlings* clarify that no animal would choose to be harmed or killed, and in *Peaceable Kingdom*, Lyman, a former rancher, says that no cow goes 'hippy skippy' to the slaughterhouse begging to be a burger. The scene in *Earthlings* where the elephant Tyke goes rogue at the circus, attacking her trainers and busting out of the gates, indicates she is exercising revenge on her oppressors and asserting her independence from tyranny, at least until men kill her in a torrent of bullets. Viewers also witness many instances across documentaries of animals vocally protesting and struggling to escape their confines, demonstrating their preference for freedom.

While animal rights ideology includes empathy and some notions of pity and mercy, the overriding value sought is respect. Respect comes with not only seeing others as conscious individuals capable of suffering, but conversely in seeing them as dignified, vibrant, independent survivors. We contend that documentaries do this best

when they show images of 'wild' or free animals enjoying their lives in a natural habitat. *Earthlings* features many wildlife scenes at the beginning and end, *Witness* does so with fur-bearing animals, *Behind the Mask* does so with liberated beagles and bunnies, and *The Cove* does so with free-swimming dolphin and whale families – especially when activist Dave Rastovich describes how a dolphin saved his surfer friend from a shark attack, allowing the dolphin to be the hero and rescuer. *Earthlings* quotes Henry Beston saying that humans err when they view other animals as incomplete or underlings, as they are gifted, 'finished and complete,' 'other nations caught within ourselves in a net of life and time'.

A vital part of affording animals respect, dignity and agency is to allow them a voice. While these documentaries are largely about *humans* enacting heroic rescues or experiencing moral development, the audio-visual medium offers opportunities for viewers to visually and viscerally experience nonhuman communication, usually in the form of cries and struggles of protest or gazes where fright, frustration, or pain is written on their faces. *Earthlings* has viewers look into the soft and conscious eyes of a skinless fox, red and raw as a piece of meat, slowly expiring after her fur was ripped off. Akira Lippit (2000: 168-169) notes the power of the animal gaze to speak in terms of posing a nonverbal challenge to the human/animal dichotomy: 'the animal's pathic projection pierces the global divide, facilitating an encounter between the human and animal *topoi*,' where their 'gaze exceeds the 'thingness' of a nonhuman being and penetrates the human sphere.'

The notion of nonhuman animal voice is complicated by the fact that animals cannot vocalize in English; some film characters acknowledge this as putting animals at a disadvantage in terms of expressing their desires in a way that humans respect. In *The Witness*, Lama describes pigs as helpless because they cannot say 'please, please don't kill me and the kids for a pizza with sausage.' *Behind the Mask* shows activists speaking on behalf of animals by spray-painting a laboratory wall with the phrase 'Experiment on yourself. We are free. The animals.' And the lead singer of Goldfinger sings songs from the nonhuman perspective saying 'Free me – I just want enough space to turn around' and 'I'm a happy dog, someone saved me today.' *The Cove* critiques the one-way human communication with dolphins, as we teach them sign language despite their lack of hands, instead of being humble enough to learn what they have to teach us about communication.

As humans privilege storytelling, filmmakers utilize human spokespeople to give voice to other animals by narrating their stories. While the story of humans in the documentaries is a journey of moral development, the rescued nonhumans develop mainly in terms of becoming healthy and happy, making friends, and showcasing their personality (a personality that reveals itself once they are freed from stressful, abusive conditions). *Peaceable Kingdom* tells the story of Snickers the cow and his mother, not just in terms of their rescue to Farm Sanctuary, but also in terms of how Snickers interacts with or 'rescues' Harold Brown, a former animal farmer. Recognizing Brown, Snickers runs up and presses his nose into Brown's chest. Brown tears up as he explains 'he knew just where to hit me,' meaning Snickers opened his heart to loving 'food' animals the same way that he loves dogs and cats. *Behind the*

Mask features undercover lab worker Michelle Rokke choking up over her inability to save James, a primate with whom she had bonded through grooming and feeding until he lost trust in all humans, eventually being killed for product testing. And *The Cove* features O'Barry describing how the dolphin Cathy, who played Flipper, chose to commit suicide via drowning after saying goodbye to him. These stories demonstrate agency, not just via the life choices made by these animals, but also in terms of their positive influence on their human friends.

Filmmakers recognize that it is not only the voices of the *nonhumans* which deserve foregrounding but also those of *human* activists working on their behalf, and the next section examines how filmmakers provide a supportive venue for the voices of animal activists who are otherwise marginalized in a commercially-dominated public sphere.

Documentarian as Critical Rhetorician

Unlike so-called 'objective' journalism, the documentaries we explore are polemical and do not neutrally document activism. As the activists in the films advocate for animals, the filmmakers advocate for the activists as underdogs whose ideology society unfairly marginalizes. By helping to frame activist image events, the filmmaker serves as a critical rhetorician. DeLuca (1999) suggests that critical rhetoricians function to 1) legitimise activist actions and 2) put activism in historical context in relation to other social justice movements. While DeLuca is primarily referring to scholars, we contend that the documentarians in our sample also fulfil this role as critic by strategically constructing preferred readings of the activism they document. Raymie McKerrow (1989: 91) also provides a fitting definition of critical rhetoric as a critique of domination with an emancipatory goal: 'a critical rhetoric seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power.' Activists and documentarians that produce image events demystify structures of power through their strategic use of the following rhetorical tactics: 1) antagonism (foregrounding moral inconsistencies, such as visually undermining the façade of industrial and moral 'progress' by exposing its dirty and unjust foundations) and 2) (dis)identification (showing human protagonists siding with the nonhuman, placing themselves among those who are vulnerable and at risk from human antagonists) (DeLuca 1999).

The films' most overt strategic deployment of antagonism is to prove the industrial and callous nature of any legally-sanctioned business that views nonhumans as commodities for profit. This is accomplished through repeatedly showing the dingy, bloody, mechanistic, filthy, painful, and unnatural conditions in which industries position animals. Industry workers are never shown being caring or affectionate, and the animals are never shown as vibrant, clean, healthy, and happy (until they are rescued by activists). In line with the demystifying function of critical rhetoric, filmmakers juxtapose the dark side of industrial production with the industry's false-consciousness-inducing cheerful advertising, benign architecture, and attractive products which consumers willingly purchase. Protagonist commentary suggests the public is unaware of the ugliness and cruelty, presuming laws protect

animal welfare. Thus, the films attempt to reveal the antagonism between an inhumane reality and an omnipresent perception of a humane and 'civilised' society.

Another major antagonism is humans' *self-conception* as humane while simultaneously supporting widespread, unnecessary animal exploitation. Viewers are left to resolve the cognitive dissonance resulting from witnessing the brutality and injustice of a system *they* implicitly sanction as consumers and citizens. This assault on viewers' moral integrity is exacerbated by provocative questions about why it is acceptable to eat or mistreat certain animals when we would not approve the same mistreatment of a companion animal.

These antagonisms help build (dis)identification – a strong rhetorical technique where viewers are expected to identify with protagonists (human activists and nonhumans) while disidentifying with antagonists (industry management, its workers, and other abusive individuals). Documentarians construct narratives to have broad resonance and not just preach to the converted using insider language. These films' widely resonant narratives establish a probable subject position for the films' viewers: primarily American, probably meat-eaters, and concerned about animal welfare but not yet convinced about the necessity for an animal rights movement. As emancipatory critical rhetoric, documentaries seek to raise awareness so viewers experience, via antagonistic provocations, a change of heart about animal use, reconceiving it as a criminally unjust exploitation deserving of boycotts or government regulation. To avoid being labelled self-righteous elites, activists often express populist sentiment, drawing upon their own conventional roots (ex-meat-eaters from rural communities or tough streets) or concern for siding with the underdog. This fits strategic advice that social movements build unity through a collective identity that avoids being narrow or elitist (Tarrow 1998).

The documentarian justifies animal activism by linking it to historic actions to help *human* victims of injustice, adding credibility to animal rescues by framing activists as heroic, self-sacrificing freedom fighters in the familiar, culturally-accepted vein of civil rights, abolitionism, and women's rights. This tactic follows social movement scholar recommendations to lend familiarity to new ideas by linking them to iconic cultural figures defining moral progress (McAdam 1996; Tarrow 1998). *Behind the Mask* makes the most frequent comparisons between animal rights and human rights, referencing Martin Luther King, Harriet Tubman, and Nelson Mandela. Rather than convincing viewers to change their view of *nonhumans*, *Behind the Mask* seeks to change viewers' impressions of imprisoned ALF *activists*, so animal exploiters are viewed as the real terrorists.

Despite the films' denigration of exploitative humans, they optimistically suggest that humans can change their oppressive ways, as racists and sexists have changed over time. This offers hope that animal-loving humans can re-identify with humanity if they can get humankind to actually *be* kind, a notion especially expressed by rancher-turned-vegan Howard Lyman in *Peaceable Kingdom* with his reference to the reformed slave-trader's lyrics in Amazing Grace, 'was blind but now I see'. Also, *Earthling's* final message that 'we are all earthlings' optimistically promotes a universal identification with all living beings.

When protagonists in *The Witness, Peaceable Kingdom,* and *The Cove* narrate their own transformation from animal-eaters, farmers, trainers, or researchers, to newfound vegans and activists, this implies they share the common-sense pragmatism of 'regular' folks in the audience, as they were once just like them. Their journey of moral development models a path that viewers are implicitly encouraged to follow. Reformed farmers discuss how they once purposely disidentified with farmed animals so they could kill them, while allowing themselves to identify with dogs and cats. They now recognize they were denying their true and natural identification with cows, pigs, and chickens based on peer pressure from the farming community. *Earthlings* is the most aggressive documentary in terms of asking people to see themselves as guilty parties, charging 'Ignorance has prevailed so long because people do not want to find out the truth.' By highlighting antagonisms over moral integrity, *Earthlings* asks viewers to identify with their own guilt in complicity aiding the documented animal exploitation, to end their state of denial and take accountability for what they have witnessed. This highlights these documentaries' normative nature, as their critical rhetoric prescribes hopeful alternatives for change (McKerrow 1989).

Toward Posthumanist Ethics and Action

The intensified frequency of posthumanist documentaries that feature undercover film of animals and activists counter their 'invisibility' and provide alternative narratives to the hegemonic discourses of postindustrial society and a commercialised public sphere. This essay demonstrates that these documentaries serve several vital functions in the strategic arsenal of animal rights activists. Three specific functions of these films have been emphasised here, including: 1) thrusting clandestine spaces of animal cruelty onto the public screen and exerting a reverse panopticon pressure on industries; 2) challenging the human/animal dualism, the violent hierarchy it justifies, and the (imagined) humane self-image of society; and 3) serving as a critical rhetoric that constructs dissonance-producing antagonisms, (dis)identification, and legitimacy of the movement.

The potential power of posthumanist films and their functions should not be underestimated. However, nowhere in this chapter have we levelled claims that these films have precipitated a radical reordering of society or emancipation from a more powerful constellation of discourses that naturalize and obscure violence against animals. This chapter is not intended to be a romanticisation of these films and their social effects. We do, however, strongly contend that the films strive to propel the necessary *preconditions* for emancipatory social transformation: witnessing and acknowledging that injustice is being committed; challenging injustices by deconstructing powerful binaries, including their structural and linguistic manifestations; and critiquing injustices by demystifying the complex power relations they entail and positing alternative orders. Undercover footage and cinema offer a powerful vessel to fulfil these preconditions and is a strategic resource for social movements.

So the old hymn goes, 'was blind, but now I see.' But, advocates of social change will aptly recognise this adage is incomplete. Beyond the broader proliferation

of these images, beyond these preconditions for change (seeing, knowing, critiquing and the imagination of alternative social orders), a crucial question remains: What will actually galvanise the broad social action necessary to expansively alter discourse(s) and produce significant material transformations in space and the social order? Requisite to achieving these emancipatory ends is the construction and internalisation of a universal posthumanist ethics paired with sustained action. With the unabated use and abuse of animals, this utopia is distant, but not unreachable. There the proverb is revised, 'was blind, but I now I see, believe, and do'.

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Notes

[i] *The Animals Film* (Schonfeld 1982) is evidence of the sustained presence of this documentary film genre and its tactical pertinence for animal rights and liberation activism.

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[ii] On *Earthlings*, see also Anat Pick's essay, 'Three Worlds,' in this collection,

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[iii] We define posthumanism as a non-speciesist worldview envisioning the human animal as one animated, morally-relevant subject among many who share a larger ecological community, where human interests do not automatically warrant privilege over the interests of other species.

[iv] In the U.S. context industry fear of the activist gaze is evident in recent legislative efforts, the increased proposal of 'ag-gag laws' (Bittman 2011) designed to silence

activists and reinforce barriers to seeing in states such as Iowa, Minnesota, and Florida. These laws would make it illegal to obtain and distribute video, audio recording, or photography without farm owners' written consent.

[v] The exception is the sport-fishing segment of *Earthlings* where Phoenix explains the fishes' complex nervous systems, comparing them to humans, while viewers witness a marlin suffocating and bleeding to death on a boat.