Voices of Guinness - Animal Labor & The Sociology of Work

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Animal Labour
& the Sociology of Work
This presentation is a response to Tim Strangleman’s ‘Voices of Guinness’ (Oxford 2019) presented to the School of Social Policy, Sociology, and Social Research November 14, 2019.
Animal Labor

- Role of nonhuman “workers” unexamined
- Nonhumans as coworkers
- Primary distributors of product
- Producers of eggs, breastmilk, and flesh
- Symbolic value in nonhuman representations

The sociology of work too frequently ignores Nonhuman Animals as producers, consumers, workers, coworkers, and commodities. Especially in the capitalist system, speciesism is fundamental to the economy.
Horses were an integral part of early Guinness operations distributing beer to the community, hauling thousands of casks, and providing comradery with human coworkers. Deindustrialization had an enormous impact on Western industries and the working class employees whose lives were heavily defined by work life. Nonhuman laborers, however, might be said to have experienced considerable relief from the move to automation.
As mentioned in Chapter 3 of Strangleman’s ethnography of the Park Royal Guinness brewery in England, the site’s early management style was heavily paternalistic and was also heavily vested in community-building. Beginning with Britain’s WW2 ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign, the Park Royal brewery began to turn over great parcels of its property to food production. Following the war, this production continued. This huge farming operation allowed the brewery to feed workers at no cost (or, later, at reduced cost) and to supplement its profits from the sales of surplus animal flesh. Guernsey cows were also kept, not only to produce breastmilk, but to maintain a pastoral-like setting in an era when urbanization threatened British sentiments about a fast-diminishing rural village life.
Guinness beer does not go vegan until 2017. Prior to this, isinglass, a gelatin derived from the bladders of sturgeon fish, was used to refine the product. The labour of nonhumans utilized as food and ingredients is too frequently overlooked by sociologists.
In addition to the physical labour nonhumans provide, they also provide psychological, emotional, and other symbolic purposes which are essential to maintaining a workforce and consumer-base.
Nonhuman animals, in fact, are a major part of Guinness advertising. John Gilroy’s advertisements from the mid-20th century continue to promote and popularize the brand today. What does it mean when nonhuman animals are objectified as advertising commodities?
Even today, nonhuman animals (especially the horse), feature prominently in Guinness advertising. Unlike other beer brands, Guinness is renowned for its exceptional advertising. Thus, the utilization of nonhuman animals holds particular importance to the longevity of the brand.
Animal Labor

- Cheery animals hyper-visible to public in adverts, artificial pastures, and delivery engines to support brand image and sell product
  - While grim, industrial labor of cooperage yards and farmyards hidden and forgotten
- Sociology of work can learn from nonhumans as workers, coworkers, and commodities
  - Capitalism exploits paid workers, but also the unpaid
- Ethnographies can tap into this with human coworker interviews and photographs which circumvent language barriers