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Stunning Australia

When Australia's national broadcaster, the ABC, aired an episode of current affairs program Four Corners called "A Bloody Business" on 30 May 2011, it showed cattle being slaughtered in Indonesian abattoirs without the use of stunning, and with the use of whips, blunt knives, and hoses. Cattle were being tripped up with ropes, tails and legs broken, eyes gouged, tendons slashed. Public reaction in Australia was intense. The website *banliveexport.com*, set up jointly by the RSPCA and Animals Australia (both organizations had conducted the initial investigation), crashed on and off for the first couple of days following the broadcast: too many hits and too many people wishing to voice their opposition. The cattle in the videos were from Australia and had been exported live to Indonesia, where stunning is not used in 90% of its abattoirs. Petitions were signed, downloadable letters to Government ministers made readily available, video statements recorded and made. The campaign's Facebook community went from 16,000 to 25,000 in 24 hours — and it organized a National Day of Protest. The Australian Government acted quickly to ban all live exports to Indonesia, a position from which Minister Joe Ludwig then backed away under pressure from such industry groups as Meat and Livestock Australia, as well as LiveCorp, and quite possibly, against the wishes of many of his own Labor party members: "Labor MPs told The West Australian there would be a 'riot' if the Government resumed the trade without guaranteeing all Australian cattle were stunned" (Wright, Probyn, and Rickard). No such riot eventuated and eventually Minister Joe Ludwig announced that the trade would be resumed, without any guarantee of stunning. In the months since then cruel practices within Australian abattoirs (in regional Victoria and New South Wales) were also exposed in the press. In these examples, stunning technology is available and used and also violently misused. Within weeks more footage of cruel practices in Indonesian abattoirs emerged, highlighting the government's failed efforts to reassure Australians that Australian cattle (as they were and still are repeatedly called) were not going to be subject to abuse when sent abroad.

Nobody who saw all this activity to end the live export trade (and to end animal cruelty in Australian abattoirs) could say that Australians did not care about the animals they had seen in the footage. What I want to tease out here is how the footage of cruel slaughter moved many, but moved most in the direction of insensibility, of advocating

stunning as a solution to what they had witnessed.¹ Stunning is a process of anesthesia that is used primarily to “render animals insensible to pain and distress prior to the act of slaughter” (Gibson, Johnson, et al. 94). In Australia, most abattoirs use what is called percussive stunning;² a rigid cast of steel is propelled at the skull of the cattle, designed to concuss but not fracture the skull. Performed *effectively*, Adams and Sheridan indicate that “stunning can make the act of slaughter free of pain and suffering” (x) because the percussive blast destroys the cattle’s capacity to perceive phasic and tonic pain faster than the pain receptors can process even the act of stunning (xiv). I shall return to this issue of effectiveness, and its relationship to pride, later in the essay. To begin with, I am interested to explore how stunning became such an important feature of public discussion, indeed, a point of national pride — something that Australians are *good at* and *good for*.

Insensibility and compassion. The technology of stunning, and its resonance with insensibility as a solution to distress, resonates with human nervous systems (and also computer systems), in a way that warrants further cultural analysis. Putting stunning in its broader cultural context situates it today as part of the intensification of factory farming over the last few decades, and the parallel intensification of social systems of denial that such farming practices also require. Stunning is, ultimately, a device for intensification; it crashes, numbs, overloads, destroys capabilities and sensibilities. It is both a “compassionate device” for “minimizing pain and distress,” and a device implicated in the “war on compassion” that Derrida describes as being central to the “unprecedented proportion” of this century’s “subjection of the animal,” in “conditions that previous generations would have judged monstrous” (394). This is something, in the Australian context, that I wish to focus on here: how stunning works to render insensible more than the cattle whose deaths begin with the act of stunning.

Derrida’s discussion of the “war on compassion” is very useful here. Derrida suggests that the “war on compassion” starts with the recognition of animal suffering. He quotes Bentham’s famous footnote on animal rights, directing us to ask not, “can they reason? Nor, Can they talk? But, Can they suffer?” (283). This, for Derrida, “changes everything” because it shifts the focus from the logos, anthropocentric speech and reason, to what is for Derrida “undeniable” and that is, animal suffering: “No one can deny the suffering, fear or panic, the terror or fright that humans witness in certain animals” (396). Derrida goes on to say that Bentham’s recognition of animal suffering leaves “No doubt either, then, for the possibility of our giving vent to a surge of

compassion, even if it is misunderstood, repressed, or denied, held in respect" (397). That is, animal suffering is recognized even in the act of its denial — to "deny," being "in denial" is thus still to know. Or, as Stanley Cohen writes in *States of Denial*: "Denial is always partial; some information is always registered. This paradox or doubleness— knowing and not-knowing — is the heart of the concept" (22).

Derrida describes a war being "waged over the matter of pity" and he posits two sides to this war: "those who violate animal life but even and also this sentiment of compassion" on the one hand, and "those who appeal to an irrefutable testimony to this pity" on the other (397). Stunning is one answer to Bentham's question "can they suffer?" But as an answer it does not "change everything," as Derrida suggests (396). Indeed, stunning accelerates the process of turning cattle into meat, making them easier to handle, without struggle. Stunning provides a remedy that expunges animal sensibility, animal fear, animal pain and distress, and isolates human recognition of or compassion for that suffering: as one report puts it "'stunning removes the hazards of pain and distress from the slaughter process" (Adams and Sheridan 75). As a technology of animal care and welfare, stunning has both human and animal applications. It puts animals out of our human misery, renders them and us insensible to slaughter, in different though interrelated ways. No doubt the desire for animals to be insensible to their own deaths is bound up with a human desire to be insensible to their deaths and to our hand in it.

James Serpell notes that cultures that routinely hunt or slaughter animals always have cultural mechanisms for expiating the death of the animal (185). These can include rituals of purification, thanks, myths of sacrifice, and ideas of animal inferiority. Brian Luke extends this by adding that a great deal of effort goes into blocking sympathies or compassion (136). Noëlie Vialles's ethnography of the abattoir also attests to how the cultural formation of the slaughterhouse is itself designed to distribute responsibility for the animal's death amongst many hands, thus easing, perhaps, any individual sense of responsibility. The abattoir's design might seek to avoid face-to-face, eye-to-eye contact with the animal, and the cultural implications of acknowledging the animal's gaze. Her ethnography of the French abattoir asks:

Who kills the animals? The person who stuns it, or the person who bleeds it? Not only is such a doubt formally possible; it exists in reality.... What we have here is not a series of operations but a disjunction — and even a double disjunction: between bleeding and death on the one hand; between death and suffering on the other. Indeed, the first man does not kill, he

anaestheticizes. The second (or third) does not really kill either, he bleeds an animal that is already inert and, in the terms that are in constant use “as if dead” ... we are left without any “real” killing at all. (159)

Distributing that “unreal killing” across many human hands reflects not simply an uncaring attitude towards the death of the animal, but the presence of caring, indeed the risk of caring, and in response, the construction of a “mechanism,” be it architectural or psychological, to “make killing somewhat more bearable” (136) to borrow Brian Luke’s phrase. The “unreal killing” that is performed across many hands also relies on detachment from others in the workplace, such that it is not “I” responsible for the death, but an Other. No doubt this compartmentalization affects any collective worker identity, and Charlie LeDuff’s examination of US slaughterhouses finds them to be racially stratified, intensely hierarchical, and beset by an annual 100% turnover of staff. Sixteen million pigs made into pork annually, and 100% staff turnover. Le Duff finds the slaughterhouse to be, not surprisingly, bad for humans and catastrophic for animals. The unreality of killing is also disjointed by time and place in remote industrialized factory farms, in plastic wrapped “cuts” of renamed and repackaged animal body parts (see Adams). The Cargill Beef slaughter plant manager describes his slaughter factory as being “like Henry Ford in reverse” (like a disassembly yard — a whole animal goes in and only parts come out) (“USA”). Behind closed doors, wire fences, public secrecy is very much part of our “ritual” to do what Serpell says is characteristic of meat eating cultures: to expiate guilt associated with the death of the animal (185). And when our rituals are confounded, as it is in the *Four Corners* footage, the reaction is intense. What Australian viewers might see in the Indonesian abattoir runs counter to our own rituals of slaughter. There was no secrecy in that Indonesian abattoir; indeed we were told that workers allowed themselves to be filmed. We expect closed doors, high fences. We expect shame, disgust. The footage allowed no stunning, of beast or viewer, and so we could not be oblivious to, or indifferent to, the reality of the cattle who are slaughtered and who struggle to survive it. The popular reaction against Live Export is thus not in any simple way about compassion for animals. It is also, following Serpell, a confirmation of the profound attachment to our own rituals of slaughter. The emphasis, indeed perhaps anxious over-insistence on stunning, as a solution to this, indicates the shock not only of being confronted with violence to animals, but the desire to be kept in a state of numbed indifference and ignorance to that which *we know not to know*. And what we know not to know is that unstunned cattle struggle against death, express interests and a desire to live.

Comments on media sites, such as this one below, were not uncommon after the screening of the *Four Corners* story:

ompman says:

May 31, 2011 at 11:42 am

iam a grown man this left me in tears an numb. (Ompman)

Numbness is a protective device, both physiological and psychological, to shield from pain and distress. Numbness, like the word “stun,” suggests a loss of feeling through having too many feelings. Numbed or stunned, we are left unable to act, diminished by witnessing terror, much like the steer in the footage who stares ahead at fellow cattle being slaughtered in front of him, trembling violently. Numbness can operate as one of those “complex obstacles between information and action” (295) that Cohen seeks to understand in his study of denial. The intensity of the feeling is such that people want to look away, to go out of their way to avoid having to have that feeling again. Those who close their eyes, do nothing, collude, enter a state of denial, knowing what it is that they wish not to know. They live with “elephants in the room” (Zerubavel), with public secrecy, and are probably unbothered by that. For the numb and stunned that seek redress, who go on websites and social media to join a community of like-minded others, denial is also a factor. As Kenneth Shapiro points out, for animal activists and for those active in expressing a concern for animal welfare there is still a need to filter out (154-57); think of Lyn White of Animals Australia with her camera in the slaughterhouse with those cattle as they are being slaughtered; she would have to close her mind to what was right before her, in order to do what she needed to. Denial is not something that we, on a basic psychological level, can do without. Denial is not a state of mind only held by those who are indifferent or politically numb. It is not the opposite of knowledge, or being in the know; it is more about “caring to know.” For Stanley Cohen, it is not knowledge that is the opposite of denial, it is acknowledgment that is “the active and infrequent opposite of denial” (249).

Denial is for Cohen a matter of individual and cultural habits. Taking up Cohen’s and Zerubavel’s discussions of denial, Deidre Wicks elaborates on the everyday social *tact* that goes into avoiding the subject of animal slaughter, in order to remain on the side of the well mannered:

Without conscious negotiation, people know which facts are better not noticed and which trouble spots to avoid. For instance, people do not

consciously repress mention of slaughterhouses when they are guests at a BBQ or dinner party where meat is being served. At the same time, they call on a common vocabulary to discuss the tenderness of the meat (not how young the animal was) and the “juiciness” of the steak (not how much blood and lymph fluid it contains). There is an unspoken, indeed unconscious agreement that such references would be bad manners or bad taste. This is why the mere presence of a vegetarian at a dinner table can make people uncomfortable. Their presence raises into consciousness all those ideas and images so carefully “not known” and “not seen.” (Wicks 188)

Stanley Cohen argues that colonial states (like Australia) that perpetuate public secrecy as a matter of course are “uncannily able to shut out or ignore the injustice and suffering around them ... not because of coercion but out of cultural habit” (5). Thus, Australia is well suited to value stunning because it is already attuned to a cultural habit of insensibility. The word “terra nullius” springs to mind as a good example of the cultural forgetting that W. E. H. Stanner described as an Australian habit, our “great Australian silence” when it comes to Aboriginal life and history (182). For Stanner, it is not that stories, facts, events of Australian colonial violence are actually “forgotten” in the sense of no longer known. It is, for him, a sort of violent unacknowledgment, what he calls a “structural matter,” “as if a view from a window” has been obscured (189). He complains of a “mass of solid indifference” to the fate of Aboriginal people and history, and locates the twin significance of “disremembering” and mythologizing; that we resurrect proud (even stunning) monuments in place of fracturing memories of colonial terror (94).

In terms of the Indonesian abattoir controversy, we are repeatedly reminded that the cattle were Australian, *citizen livestock* exposed to *foreign* cruelty. This again slips easily into the mythologizing and disremembering of Australian practices; cruelty is something *other countries practice; we are, instead, stunning*. The banliveexport campaign that took shape was cautiously focused on extending Australian standards abroad, something that complements colonial Australian sensibilities, particularly in regard to not be “seeing” our own practices in the ways that others might:

I don't know if I can bring myself to watch this, just hearing about it is upsetting, I don't understand why the religion requires cruelty, any

religion that requires torture of helpless creatures needs to be abolished, if that is truly what it endorses it needs to be outlawed. We have raised cattle on our property and have treated them well throughout their lives, made sure they were well fed, even treated them like pets. Then we get out a professional butcher who kills them with 1 shot to the head so they are dead instantly. Any sort of cruelty is totally unnecessary, people can still have meat on their table without animals suffering. Unfortunately for some reason treating animals humanely seems to be a western concept.
(Bindi)

Such a comment highlights Wicks's observation that "Animal cruelty and suffering is rarely (if ever) presented as part of our 'normal' daily life" (195). The ritual slaughter of animals, "pets," in this expression of national pride and pride in being "western" thus involves ritualized understandings of "care" itself and one which divorces meat eating (pets included) from any concept of harm to animals. Such comments demonstrate the ease with which rituals of slaughter are sanitized by cultural conventions that readily position other cultures as the source of animal suffering. This is where outrage at animal cruelty segues into radicalized and racializing expressions of shaming, or, more specifically, the racialized demand for shame; *they should be ashamed of themselves*. And Australians, in making this demand, draw national pride up alongside stunning as something to be proud of, thus turning the horror that they encountered on the screen into something that brings forth expressions of pride.

But how does national pride work to soothe in proximity to bodily terror: terror that is seen in the cattle in the footage and then accounted for, elaborated, shared, and mediated in countless online reactions from human viewers? These on-screen bodies in terror communicate that terror to the flesh of viewers trembling, moaning, and grimacing in front of the screen. How this gets translated or soothed by expressions of national pride is both fascinating and troubling. In their work with terror management theory, Goldenberg et al. propose that a "wide range of human behaviors ... are influenced by the uniquely human knowledge of mortality" (200) and that mortality salience (consciousness of death) brings a defensive "faith in one's worldview" or faith in a "cultural worldview" (202). What they call "distal defenses" rebuild self-esteem by esteeming the community of which we feel part. Their study reveals that distal defenses in the form of faith in a cultural worldview, are aligned with xenophobia, as in: "Mortality salience has been shown to have several outcomes: more positive evaluations of in-group members and those who praise one's culture, and more negative evaluations of out-group members and those who criticize one's culture"

(202). Using this approach we might say that the horror of *Australian* cattle being killed, resisting slaughter, provokes “mortality salience” which is, in turn, met by renewed faith in a cultural worldview; *they should be ashamed of themselves, while we have reasons for pride.*

Australia and Indonesia: odd neighbors. That the terror of the cattle and the terror of seeing the cattle so treated could manifest in expressions of xenophobia is not surprising given the specific qualities of Australia’s relationship with Indonesia. Kusumohamidjojo describes the two countries as “odd neighbours ... with almost nothing in common except the fact that they belong to the same part of the world” (145). Philpott notes that Australia demonstrates anxiety about Indonesia’s predominantly Muslim population (372), and as online comments regarding the *Four Corners* footage showed, Australian respondents still harbor a fear that Muslims are inherently cruel. This is despite Animals Australia pointing out on their website that Halal slaughter does not allow animal cruelty and that stunning is acceptable. A press release from the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils was again put into circulation to counter the belief that live exports were a necessary condition for trade with predominantly Muslim countries: “Australian Muslims are against animal cruelty.”

On the Australian media side, Kelly notes that “for nearly three decades Indonesia has been a bad news story for Australia” (36), while according to Kusumohamidjojo most of the “unnecessary trouble” is caused by the “self-righteous and noisy attitude of Australia mass-media” (146). Kelly indicates that the Australian media has constructed “two stereotypes” of Indonesians. The first is that Indonesians are “innocent victims, for example through the tsunami and military repression, who deserve compassion and support” (37) which, according to Rosihan Anwar is then underwritten by resentment towards Australian “self-satisfaction,” proclamations of “how generous we are” (qtd. in Reeve 74). The second stereotype of Indonesians that Kelly observes in the Australian media is that of the “intolerant, corrupt and brutal nation too ready to use military force to impose its will” (37). Kesavapany considers the strain in relations in terms of national “character” traits, which are themselves based on stereotypes, for example that Australia “is a young and immigrant culture in an ancient culture [that] retains much of the feisty, frontier ethic ... there is stress on speaking openly and frankly, on giving as good as you get, on values like mateship, independence, ruggedness and toughness’ (Kesavapany 28). This is contrasted with Indonesia’s “stylized discourse, the virtue of restraint, the art of politeness and refined behavior, the qualities of humility and

compromise, the language of indirect allusions" (28). Indonesian anxieties concerning Australia are, according to Reeve, "regularly expressed in the letters section of the Indonesian media" (70). Reeve lists the mutual suspicions as:

Australia's involvement in East Timor, along with Australia's treatment of traditional Indonesian fishermen; its alleged involvement in bugging the Indonesian embassy; suspicions that Australian NGOs in Papua are at least gleaning intelligence, at worst preparing for another East Timor in Papua; and, most recently, Indonesian astonishment over Australian reactions to the Corby verdict (Reeve, 2006: 70-71).³

The beef industry and live export have been chief amongst Australia and Indonesia's short list of reliable connections, a sector notable for immunity to Indonesian and Australian diplomatic spats, even in the wake of East Timor's independence referendum in 1999 and eventual statehood. Australia is the world's largest supplier of live cattle, and Indonesia is its largest single export market. Between 2003 and 2009, annual live cattle exports from Australia to Indonesia nearly doubled to 773,000 head, an average increase of 19% a year' and then in 2010 they dropped by 30%. In 2011, the Indonesian government announced it would ban all live exports from Australia "within a few years" (Cochrane).

Both Australian and Indonesian officials stated that this had nothing to do with the temporary ban on live exports (Roberts). So much mutual, official agreement between the usually mutually suspicious countries suggests that neither is interested in delving much further into the animal cruelty issues raised in both countries; both for the country that slaughters 90% of its cattle without stunning and for the country that knowingly sends them there.

These mutual anxieties between the "odd neighbours" provide a defensive "cultural worldview" (Goldenberg 203) for both. For Australians such anxieties about Indonesia might explain the expansion of a circle to include Australian cattle while closing the circle on those who abused them. If and when animal welfare issues are racialized it works both ways, and for me, the pride expressed in stunning technologies betrays a thin and fragile defense, but one familiar, even standard, within Australian discourses of willful forgetting. I for one became suspicious of the stunning refrain, and I wondered how many Australians actually knew what stunning was, and how it worked. I certainly didn't.

The technology of stunning. Welfare capabilities in Australian slaughterhouses are, from the data collected in reports such as David B. Adams and Allan B. Sheridan, far higher than those we can see in the footage of “A Bloody Business.” This is largely because of the use of stunning technology. When it works, stunning is undoubtedly better for the animal facing slaughter: “Effective stunning eliminates both phasic and tonic pain. In particular, it will eliminate all subjective sensations of the physical slaughter process if performed in advance of that activity” (Adams and Sheridan x).

Adams and Sheridan’s report is relevant to the controversies surrounding the Indonesian abattoir footage because it provided the initial investigation with scientific (read: credible) evidence for why stunning is preferable to slaughter without stunning. This report is also unique for its attempt to describe death as a “process” and to make the “biological issues related to slaughter without stunning more accessible to a wider audience” (vii). The report offers no “value judgment” along the lines of “social acceptability of any form of slaughter” (iv), but it does conclude in favor of stunning as a more humane process of death; “stunning removes the hazards of pain and distress from the slaughter process” (75). Despite its apparent desire to transcend “social” issues that involve value judgments,” the report is attentive to public policy; it seeks to “package evidence from science in a way that can inform public policy determination by decision makers in Australia” (iv). As such I am tempted to think of Australia as an added topic or subject of this report, let me be clear that I am not suggesting that national pride in stunning is an explicit topic or the concern of this report, but it may explain some of its mediations. As a public document this report entered into popular discourse with the Four Corners expose of the Indonesian abattoirs. It is the standards of animal welfare indicated in the report that help reproduce the vantage point from which Australians make those very value judgments that the report disavows.

Adams and Sheridan’s report makes for heady reading. I have never read anything quite like it. In aiming to describe “death as a process” it includes assessments of livestock fear, rage, anger, pain, cardiac arrest, blood loss, concussion, brain death, the various effects of these elements of death, and how they interrelate in the process of slaughter. I found the report profoundly disorienting. I admit that a good part of this disorientation may be disciplinarily based. As someone trained in literary studies I do not often come across texts that describe animal death in such terms, let alone describe the gruesome experiments done in order to establish, scientifically, what death is. No doubt these sensitivities to disciplinary boundaries exist on both sides. The report uses

science as if that were able to be separated from other discourses and disciplines such as history (see pages 9-10), philosophy and religious studies (8,9), and even discourses of animal studies, animal rights and welfare, represented as “anthropocentric supplementary concerns about the killing of animals ... [that] arise from the interests of people and are exemplified by the ethics of nature conservation and species conservation, which involve groups and populations rather than individual animals” (3). Such concerns/ethics are not the concern/ethics of this report. Its parameters are tightly measured but not controlled, because the very nature of the subject matter is intensely provocative.

Reading through this report made me highly agitated. Some sections more than others made me conscious of my heart beating (seemingly such a clumsy mechanism up against that word “exsanguination”) and I could feel my neck too much and as a vulnerable, sliceable thin skin with muscles to be cut through, bled out. In other words, as I read through these accounts of the death of animals, my mortality was made salient. The terror that they describe (in order to mitigate) was made palpable in me. And as I was reading this to find out more about the proposition of stunning pride, the source of Australian pride in stunning, I was not readily amenable to the reassurances that it provides to their “wider audience.” Reading this report, I found myself at odds with its discourse of objectivity (one might say this is a typical “arts” approach!) but also, perhaps more surprisingly, with its math and its sense of scale.

In 2010, Australians slaughtered approximately nine million cattle to support, in part, a cultural habit of beef eating that sees Australians consume approx 37.9 kg per person a year. By comparison, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that Indonesians annually consume 2.4 kg per capita (Cochrane). We’d better be sure that “stunning” is effective then, if we are to turn cattle into beef at such an accelerated rate. With nine million cattle slaughtered, a five per cent failure rate would see Australian abattoirs commit as many breaches of Animal welfare as the 500,000 “Australian” cattle exported live to Indonesia are subjected to. The sheer scale, the sheer number of cattle slaughtered in Australia, as well as those who are exported live, makes a significant difference when welfare capacities are imagined in relation to scale and in relation to the mere humans who operate the machinery.

Nine million 100% effective stuns; Australia’s top score. Ineffective stunning means that the percussive instrument, the “gun,” is misplaced on the cattle’s heads. They might suffer fractured skulls rather than loss of consciousness (Adams and Sheridan 45). They might regain consciousness after non-penetrating captive bolt stunning or

they might not be exsanguinated within the desirable twelve to twenty seconds. This time delay (between stunning and exsanguination) is a “major welfare issue” following a “reversible stun” (67). If a failure rate of up to five per cent is imaginable, or possible, then Australian slaughterhouses that practice stunning are, with the far greater number of cattle that go through the gates, not as far removed from the Indonesian statistics as might be initially assumed. And as Adams and Sheridan point out, cattle that are slaughtered with a “poor stun followed by a competent bleed” are “ranked equal in magnitude of its animal welfare impact to a ‘no stun with incompetent bleeding’” (17). Where an animal is not immediately “restunned, it will be a source of additional pain and distress creating a situation that is worse for animal welfare than bleeding alone” (17). However, they conclude that this “does not apply in practice” because a “competent operator can make stunning 100% effective in practice and makes the final stage during the process of slaughter free of pain and distress” (17). The mantra of 100% effective is repeated throughout the report (xv, 17, 48, 67, 68,72, 73), with few references to how many cattle actually get this 100% effective stun: “possible risks for misstunning *will not be realized* if equipment is well maintained and adequate for the classes of animals involved and competent personnel are involved and properly managed” (emphasis mine: 67). Surely these risk factors amount to a failure rate. And, as the authors indicate, “An unlikely occurrence in one of ten animals becomes a virtual certainty in large groups” (74). Adams and Sheridan make this point in relation to “unstunned animals,” but surely the amplification of risk in relation to size of the group applies also to stunned animals. I am thinking of Australia’s nine million stunned cattle in terms of the amplification of human and technical “errors” resulting in deaths that are more painful and distressing than “unstunned” and bled animal deaths. Might the “numbers” be more accurately brought together as a *shared problem* of animal suffering?

Adams and Sheridan’s report is classically “disembodied” in the sense that it inhabits a paradigm of objectivity that privileges narrative transcendence, sometimes conflated with lack of feeling, which is in turn conflated with truth. And yet their report is absolutely not lacking in feelings or bodies; bodies and how they feel are the topic of almost every single paragraph; how the animal body dies, in stages, how the body’s mechanisms for fight or flight have to be managed and how important it is to factor in animal rage and anger in the process of slaughter. Their preference for the word “distress” rather than “suffering” is also saturated with *feeling*. Distress “suggests a state or condition that can be relieved” (6); suffering is semantically and clinically *avoided*, cannot be relieved, and so will not be re-lived in the text. These feelings inhabit

this text as both cultural and biological phenomena — and they are produced by the text itself, even if its explicit mode strives for a “de-passioned” form of knowledge (Despret 131).

To deny the body in the text by the use of “depassioned knowledge” is linked to not knowing what to do with the “numbness” that comes from watching the terror of the cattle in the footage. Why? Because both seek relief, over-privilege relief from negative feelings by embracing stunning. This belittles both the object of concern, the cattle, and the connections that are made between bodies that feel the sorts of pain and suffering so visibly and scientifically made manifest. Rather than denying the embodied nature of our scientific (and unscientific) engagements with animals, we might think of using those mediations to widen the scope of investigation. Despret writes:

To “depassion” knowledge does not give us a more objective world, it just gives us a world “without us”; and therefore, without “them”—lines are traced so fast. And as long as this world appears a world “we don’t care for”, it also becomes an impoverished world, a world of minds without bodies, of bodies without minds, bodies without hearts, expectations, interests, a world of enthusiastic automata observing strange and mute creatures; in other worlds, a poorly articulated (and poorly articulating) world (Despret 131).

A poorly articulating world is numb, stunned, stupefied. A poorly articulating world is one that uses xenophobia as distal defense against confronting a shared problem of animal suffering, a problem shared between countries (Indonesia and Australia in this case) and shared between different kinds of bodies, both animal and human. The fact that we share this bodiliness with animals is routinely invoked as an existential problem to be overcome: “the body is a problem for humans because it reminds us of our similarity to other animals, which is threatening because it makes apparent our vulnerability to death” (Goldenberg et al. 203). But what is a problem here is also in the context of, say, transpecies relationships, a significant way forward to doing justice to our complex interdependence, as Despret’s work shows. The openness to affect, the openness to sympathetic imagination that is displayed by those who went numb (for instance) on watching the footage in the abattoirs, or those who shook and panicked alongside the cattle doing those same things, should not be required to deny their bodies’ affective engagement, their attunement (to borrow Despret’s term) with the cattle. If the body that you are in contact with is a body in terror, then you would feel that terror too. Learning to think with the body and its mortality rather than turning

from it *in terror* to *terrorize others* is a task akin to building something out of this attunement. Bruno Latour, following Despret, writes that “to have a body is *to learn to be affected*, meaning ‘effectuated,’ moved, put into motion by other entities, humans or non-humans. If you are not engaged in this learning you become insensitive, dumb, you drop dead” (205). Thinking about the body as that which feels, fights back, articulates, and communicates, and which affects those it is with (even via the screen) is one way to move beyond the expression of pride in distributing numbness. *Their* (Indonesian) “shameless” animal cruelty helps to hide this. Stunning is our own form of insensibility; a device that allows us to intensify and accelerate our consumption of cattle. We eat more, therefore we kill far more. Stunning, with its connotations of the sublime is, as a word and a concept, well placed to articulate what exactly happened to Australians when they took up stunning as a community standard, a point of national pride.

Notes

1. Glenys Oogjes, Animals Australia Executive Director, situates stunning as an Australian community standard and is very critical of the Farmer Review panel for neglecting to mandate stunning: “Much of the suffering documented in Indonesia and indeed by Animals Australia in other live export markets, is the result of un-stunned slaughter. To not even include stunning in a recommendation ignores the elephant in the room and is completely at odds with the wishes of not only the Australian community but with Australian cattle and sheep producers” (“Stunning”).
2. “Percussive stunning devices employing an explosive charge are probably the most widely employed in slaughter of cattle in Australia, whereas electrical stunning technologies are more employed for sheep, goats, poultry and ratites at the present time” (Adams and Sheridan 13).
3. Schapelle Corby is an Australian woman who was convicted of drug smuggling and is serving a twenty-year prison sentence in Indonesia for the importation of 4.2 kilograms of cannabis into Bali.

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