

**THE IMAGERY OF SUE COE: MAKING VISIBLE THE INVISIBLE THROUGH  
LINES OF OPPRESSION**

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By Kim Maguire

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WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE,

HAVE APPROVED THIS THESIS

**THE IMAGERY OF SUE COE: MAKING VISIBLE THE INVISIBLE THROUGH  
LINES OF OPPRESSION**

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## Abstract

Critical animal studies is a growing field. Our cultural marker of humanness and therefore distinction is at last being questioned with authority in scholarly conversation. Ideology coming through eco-feminist and ideas of intersectionality are joining forces to throw light on the invisibility of unjust practices towards animals, their bodies and rights as living, sentient beings. This thesis examines that unjustness and discusses how “[...] species based hierarchy that places humans at the apex [...]”<sup>1</sup> continues “[...] exclusionary foundations [...]”<sup>2</sup> By critically analyzing images of animal brutality, (for this paper farmed animals), from visual representations of Sue Coe’s work, this thesis will explore the way oppressions intersect and how one oppression has force to give others more power. This thesis will further explore how ecofeminism, through such theorists as Carol Adams and Lori Gruen, have paved the way for this deconstruction of slaughterhouse imagery. I will use ecofeminist ideology to deconstruct and contrast imagery of rape and associated violence with the brutality that farmed animals experience. I will explore Foucauldian notions of power, institutions and the production of ‘docile bodies’ in relation to the intensive factory farming practices and slaughterhouses that Sue Coe bears personal witness to. Furthermore, this thesis will draw on writings such as that of Sigfried Giedion’s *Mechanization takes Command* to view modern day mechanization in slaughterhouse practices that objectify not only animal bodies and identities but the labor that processes them.

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<sup>1</sup> Maneesha Deckha, “Critical Animal Studies and Animal Law”, *Heinonline*, 18, *Animal L*, 207 (2011-2012), 235.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

In this thesis Sue Coe's imagery is analyzed exclusively. As an artist she devotes herself to the defense of the subjugated and objectified, much of her work focuses on the cruelty and suffering of animals. This thesis will examine those images that deal specifically with the cruelty against farm animals and, by extension, with the machine of capitalism, labor. These images reveal the intersectional forces of power dominations which flow over and connect to the brutality of all bodies that are viewed as the 'Other'<sup>3</sup>, such as violence against the body which includes rape. Coe has a unique witness position, often drawing at the site of the slaughterhouse, bringing us images through mixed media, lithographs and paintings that reveal the brutality of the institution that cannot be dismissed. Coe bears witness to the oppression, subjection and violence toward farmed animals in factory farming and slaughterhouse practices "to repair damaged subjectivity", so that viewers can also bear witness, revealing the capitalistic machine that consumes both animals and workers. In repairing subjectivity, she is also a visual reporter, (as she refers to herself), particularly of violence and acts of brutality toward the body of the 'other. Art about animals, particularly farmed animals caught up in cruel practices which are hidden from view for profit, is viewed as inferior. By extension, the artist is also viewed as inferior. This classification and belief toward the artist are socially constructed and mirrors the

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<sup>3</sup> The term "Other" in this thesis refers to the body of non-human or human animals denied ethical rights. This established hierarchy dominates and gives power whereby violence can be viewed as acceptable by socially constructed power formations.

power formations that enable the invisibility of cruelty toward farmed animals. The same constructs that show the blatant lies of happy cows on milk cartons is the also the one that purports the belief that exposing brutality is socially unacceptable. Therefore, political artists such as Sue Coe, who work outside the structures that enable, consistently brings the viewer the truth so that we may view these cruelties and have an ability to respond and take action. Lisa Kemmerer writes,

I have often wondered how empathetic women have the courage to repeatedly expose themselves to trauma- entering animal labs, factory farms and slaughterhouses to witness and record insidious treatment of non-human animals - while maintaining a semblance of emotional and psychological equilibrium. [...]In a world where unconscionable violence and pervasive injustices are the norm, they have come to see activism as the lesser of the two miseries. *These women have found that there only hope for peace of mind is to walk straight into that pervasive misery and work for change.*<sup>4</sup>

Coe's work allows us to view these pervasive injustices and to bear witness, and this thesis hopes to reveal the importance and stature of selected images from her body of work, which show the viewer that in her intersectional imagery, "violence runs along lines of oppression."<sup>5</sup>

## Overview

The current scholarly conversation in animal ethics revolves around post-humanist ideas that moves away from anthropocentrism and human superiority and privilege, toward a movement which is intersectional in its theory. It responds to a culture in which violence against animals is normalized. This 'Othering', which subjugates non-human animals can be considered through an ecofeminist reading of human- animal relations. Food politics and other animal issues benefit from this ecofeminist perspective and as Greta Guard writes in *Critical Ecofeminism*,

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<sup>4</sup> Lisa Kemmerer, *Sister Species, women, animals, and social justice*, Introduction, (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2011), ed. Lisa Kemmerer, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



critical ecofeminism “advances on the earlier findings of feminist animal activists [...]”.<sup>6</sup> Lori Gruen calls the scholarly connection to the activist images analyzed here as a shared “[...]normative commitment in all of these interdisciplinary fields and the movements they are connected to are ethical/political aspirations about eliminating the conditions that subjugate, erase, deny, violate, or destroy the subjects of study.”<sup>7</sup>

As an example of witnessing and ideology on the intersectional forces of oppression, Coe gives us *Intensive Hog Farm Built on the Site of Lete [sic] Concentration Camp*, (Fig. 2). A modern pig farm built on the grounds of a concentration camp in the Czech Republic. The comparison of the starkness of the dead watching the same ‘Othering’ and resulting violence to the pigs, which they themselves were subjected to can be deconstructed following ecofeminist theory through such theorists as Carol Adams, Lori Gruen and Greta Gaard. Eco-feminist theory is sophisticated in its ideology and centralizes an intersectional analysis to the current animal ethics conversation. This viewpoint reveals the overlapping structures in power formations.

Sue Coe, belonging to the radical tradition of activist, covers a wide range of subjects but is best known for documenting atrocities committed by people against animals. In *The Ghosts Of our Meat*, Stephen Eisenman writes, “She is not only an artist, she is a vegan activist who, by virtue of her books, illustrations, posters and prints, occupies a major place in the contemporary movement to end the exploitation and killing of animals”.<sup>8</sup> With a contemporary viewpoint Eisenman writes,

It has often been claimed that humans alone possess the capabilities and skills that morally entitle them to life, liberty and happiness. These capacities include sentience (the experience of pleasure and pain), language and tool use, emotion empathy, close family ties, and the possession of culture, the socializing instrument that allows

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<sup>6</sup> Greta Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, (New York, Lexington Books, 2017), xxiii.

<sup>7</sup> Lori Gruen, *Critical Terms for Animal Studies*, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2018), ed. Lori Gruen, Introduction, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Ghosts of Our Meat* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2013), 12.

intellectual, expressive and technological discoveries to be passed from generation to generation). Absent these abilities, it is argued, an animal cannot suffer from the denial of freedom or even the loss of life itself. Lacking appreciation of the sweetness of life, the deprivation of it cannot be bitter. But recent research concerning sentience, language use and consciousness, (including self-consciousness) in animals calls into question any capacities-based argument for the denial of moral consideration to animals.<sup>9</sup>

We can no longer hide behind the outdated ideas of human superiority. Drawing and analyzing connections of domination and the effects of power toward marginalized beings is at the core of all of Sue Coe's imagery. One of her ongoing visual themes is the slaughterhouse, (*My Mother and I Watch a Pig Escape The Slaughterhouse*, (Fig. 1), *Factory Pharm*, (Fig. 5) and *Veal Skinner* (Fig. 8). This repeated imagery of violence, fear and dominion shows Coe to be a reporter and witness. As Tom Regan writes in *Dead Meat*, "[...] slaughterhouses do not have glass walls. The architecture of slaughter is opaque, designed in the interests of denial, to ensure that we will not see, even if we wanted to look. And who wants to look?"<sup>10</sup>

### **Purpose and Objectives**

Analyzing imagery of species-based oppression and images of violence against females through the work of Coe, I ask the following questions: how do the artefacts chosen enter the current conversation in critical animal studies? And how does the centralizing cultural marker of humanness normalize brutality against animals, especially farmed animals?

The gap in critical theory is the conversation on speciesism. Analyzing these visual images strengthens this voice by presenting how reducing animals to the state of the "Other" reveals how intersecting oppressions relate and reinforce each other. Comparing imagery such as

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, ii.

<sup>10</sup> Sue Coe, Alexander Cockburn, and Tom Regan, *Dead Meat* (New York, Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995), 3.

Coe's *Muesling* and *Woman Walks into a Bar-is Raped by Four Men Whilst Twenty Men Watch*, (Fig. 7) and *Veal Skinner* (Fig. 8), informs this space and reveals similar markers of brutality against the body. Ecofeminist theory addresses these convergent ways that, "[...] sexism, heteronormativity, racism, colonialism, and ableism are informed by and support speciesism and how analyzing the way these forces intersect can produce less violent, more just practices".<sup>11</sup> Coe makes visible many converging factors of marginalization.

In the current conversation on animal ethics amongst scholars, the theorists Adams and Gruen (ecofeminism) and Deckha (race theory, post colonialism) are important authorities in unraveling the imagery.

## Literature Review

A barometer of contemporary cultural developments, *The New York Times* reports on movements towards undermining speciesism in food politics. Journalism around the increase in buying plant-based milk and reporting for and against meat eating, reveal a changing consciousness. "Lab Grown Meat That Doesn't Look Like Mush," describes an effort to construct laboratory-grown meat, researchers having devised a form of scaffolding made with gelatin. Sheikh writes that even carnivores may appreciate, "an ethical, sustainable alternative for meat raised for slaughter."<sup>12</sup> In the same movement away from animal-based products, the consumption of plant-based milk is increasing rapidly. The Plant Based Food Association reported the total plant-based market value increased to five billion dollars and "U.S. retail sales of plant-based foods [has] grown 11.4%"<sup>13</sup> in the past year. According to the PBMA, dairy

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<sup>11</sup>Carol Adams, Lori Gruen, *Ecofeminism*, (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Knuvl Sheikh, "Lab Grown Meat That Doesn't Look Like Mush," *The New York Times* (Oct 27, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> Plant Based Foods Association, Retail sales data, March 3, 2020.

milk sales are not growing but rather are staying at a flat rate. Tobias Linne and Ally McCrow-Young argue that the shift towards plant milk joins “[...] contemporary socio-environmental movements with roots in ecofeminism, deep ecology, and ecosocialism [...]”,<sup>14</sup> and within these movements there is a force to “articulate and practice alternatives, [...]. Plant milk exemplifies this trend.”<sup>15</sup>

In *Cry of Nature* Stephen F. Eisenman details periods in the history of the eighteenth century with the rise of the understanding that animals possess inalienable rights, and how, in philosophy, literature and arts, the movement was recorded. He moves his voice into the field of activism when writing on Sue Coe’s slaughterhouse imagery in *Ghosts of Our Meat*. He decries animals used in art practices by such artists as Damian Hurst and Murrillo Cattelan and says, “Coe heightens the ethical stakes in the dramas that unfold on the stage of her artworks. The slaughter of an animal becomes a murder, the butchering a desecration, and the sale and consumption of meat something ghoulish or macabre.”<sup>16</sup> Eisenmann records Sue Coe’s place in the history of painting and reveals her insistence “[...] that the viewers make a judgment about what they see.”<sup>17</sup>

Currently, feminist theology and animal advocacy have been building up the foundation of ecofeminism. There is no longer any confusion whether or not there should be a feminist perspective on the status of animals. Adams and Donovan concur and find the feminist perspective of speciesism can no longer be dismissed in academia; in *Animals and Women*, they say “[w]e support the radical feminist thesis that the male pattern of female subordination and

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<sup>14</sup> Tobias Linne, Ally McCrow-Young, “Plant Milk: From Obscurity To Visions Of A Post -Dairy Society” *Making Milk, The Past Present and Future of our Food*, ed. Mathilde Cohen, Yoriko Otomo, (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 208.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Ghosts of Our Meat*, (New York, Distributed Art Publishers, 2013), Introduction.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

degradation, which is nearly universal in human societies, is prototypical for many other forms of abuse”<sup>18</sup> and warn, “[f]or feminists to engage in this kind of denial, to support and participate in the oppression of the less powerful, [...] it is, we believe, a profound betrayal of our deepest commitments.”<sup>19</sup> Ecofeminism reveals these overlaps.

Adams began writing on animal ethics and feminism with *The Sexual Politics of Meat* in 1990, which at the time was controversial. It explored the interplay between society’s ingrained misogyny and its obsession with meat and masculinity. In writing *Neither Man nor Beast*, she establishes the links between cultural attitudes to women and animals and how modern Western culture has enabled the systematic exploitation of both. Finally, she co-edited *Ecofeminism, Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth* with Lori Gruen in 2015, which brings together leading feminist scholars and activists to explore feminist themes central to ecofeminism. Her writings move from misogyny and animal ethics through to the role of compassion. Editing many more recent publications, often with Josephine Donovan, she participates in the ongoing contemporary conversation with texts such as *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics* and *Animals and Women*. Many more publications around the theory of animal ethics are called upon for extra analysis, such as *Making Milk, Love Dogs, Eat Pigs Wear Cows*, and *Sister Species*, which add to this ongoing discussion.

Maneesha Deckha adds to the discussions of overlapping oppressions through ecofeminist theory to the conversation. Although she aligns herself with this theory, she finds it “rooted in the cultural feminist/ radical feminist realm.”<sup>20</sup> In, *Messy Eating, Conversations on*

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<sup>18</sup> Carol J. Adams, Josephine Donovan, *Animals and Women, Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, (Durham, London, Duke University Press, 1995) introduction, 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Maneesha Deckha, “Justice and Nonviolence”, *Messy Eating, Conversations on Animals as Food*, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2019), 93.

*Animals as Food* (2019), a collection of interviews, she proposes a “[...] post-colonial reading of human- animal relations was central to a critique of animals,”<sup>21</sup> and furthermore, that even though she was guided and influenced by the path of eco-feminist ideology, argues that, “[...] postcolonial analysis is necessary to properly contextualize issues; to understand how food issues, food politics and other issues involving animals are not only gendered, as feminists in this tradition talk about, but also very racialized issues.”<sup>22</sup> Deckha argues postcolonial theory brought the understanding and concept of ‘Otherness’ into the Western theoretical sphere. She proposes: “[...] post humanist feminist theory needs to engender feminist accounts that centralize the structural axes of race and culture.”<sup>23</sup> Western frames of viewing are central to her argument of justice and nonviolence.

One of the most recent writings from a disability activist and animal advocate is *Beasts of Burden, Animal and Disability Liberation* by Sunaura Taylor. She draws on her own experiences as a disabled person to ask us to consider what divides the human animal from the non-human animal, the disabled from the non-disabled. Considering what it might mean to break down those divisions suggests that issues of disability and animal justice, which have been presented in opposition, are in fact enmeshed. Compared in her life to many animals such as monkey, dog, lobster, and penguin, she writes,

Animals make powerful insults precisely because we have imagined them as devoid of subjective and emotional lives that would obligate us to have responsibilities toward them. Animals are a category of beings that in the Western tradition we have decided that we rarely, if ever, have duties toward—we can buy them, sell them, and discard them like objects. To call someone an animal is to render them a being to whom one does not have responsibilities, a being that can be shamelessly objectified.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Maneesha Deckha, “Towards a Post-Colonial, Post-Human Feminist Theory, Centralizing Race and Culture in Feminist Work on Non- Human Animals,” *Wiley Online Library*, 30<sup>th</sup> (April, 2012), Abstract.

<sup>24</sup> Sunaura Taylor, *Beasts of Burden, Animal and Disability Liberation* (New York and London: The New Press, 2017), 103.

She also writes of the profound vulnerability of objectification and, together with Deckha in *Messy Eating*, she also furthers the conversation by theorizing how “[...] ableism as a system of oppression affects non-humans.”<sup>25</sup>

Charles Patterson gives a broader consideration to the analysis of slaughterhouse imagery. In *Eternal Treblinka* he analyzes the origins of human supremacy and by describing the rise of industrialization in the slaughterhouse and its practices, relates them to the slaughter of people. The title of the book comes from a short story by the Yiddish writer and Nobel Laureate, Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904-91), (the book is dedicated to him), “The Letter Writer.” Animal exploitation is compared to the genocide of people through the machinery and philosophy of the production line of killing. In the preface of the book part of “The Letter Writer” is quoted, to explain ideas of supremacy and its resulting violence.

In his thoughts, Herman spoke a eulogy for the mouse who had shared a portion of her life with him and who, because of him, had left this earth. “What do they know- all these scholars, all these philosophers, all the leaders of the world- about such as you? They have convinced themselves that man, the worst transgressor of all the species, is the crown of creation. All other creatures were created merely to provide him with food, pelts, to be tormented, exterminated. In relation to them, all people are Nazis; for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka.”<sup>26</sup>

This viewpoint on the ideology of equality for all is at the heart of Coe’s working practice.

In *Slaughterhouse 1997*, Gail A. Eisnitz examines deregulation, increased line speeds, injuries from repetitive motion and disfigurement of the workers. She reports on the brutalizing effect the conveyor belt system and production line have on animals, workers and consumers.

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<sup>25</sup> Sunaura Taylor, “Disability and Interdependence”, *Messy Eating*, (New York, Fordham Press, 2019), 150.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka, Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust*, -Isaac Bashevis Singer, “The Letter Writer”, (New York, Lantern Books, 2002), 4.

Exploring meat as commodity, *Meat, Modernity and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse*, edited by Paula Young Lee, looks at the slaughterhouse in terms of capitalism and our relation to animals and nature.

Publications by Sue Coe, such as *Cruel, Bearing Witness to Animal Exploitation*, and *Dead Meat* adds the artist's own voice to the examination and discussion of her imagery, which gives greater richness and furthers the discussion.

### **Methodology**

To begin I want to go to the semiotic: how the meaning of the word “animal” is built. We employ the word to represent anything sentient that isn't human and utilize it carelessly without much consideration. Derrida, however, understands the link between the culturally negligent indifference of the term ‘animal’ and the resulting marginalization and violence. In an interview he states,

To put all living things that aren't human into one category is, first of all, a stupid gesture, theoretically ridiculous, and partakes in the very real violence that humans exercise towards animals. That leads to slaughterhouses, their industrial treatment, their consumption, all this violence towards animals is engendered in this conceptual simplification.<sup>27</sup>

Derrida questions traditional philosophies sanctioning the opposition between human and non-human animals, emphasizing the question of whether “humanity” has a right to call itself “human”, and “[...] asking whether what calls itself human has the right rigorously to attribute to man, which means therefore to attribute to himself, what he refuses the animal, and whether he can ever possess the *pure, rigorous, indivisible* concept, as such, of that attribution.”<sup>28</sup> He

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<sup>27</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Derrida*, Amy Kofman, Kirby Dick (Documentary, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed., Marie-Louise Mallet (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 135.



understands that the implications of negating recognition of subjectivity through the semiotic follows through to the negation of subjectivity to the corporeal.

To analyze the imagery of animal marginalization with other oppressions I will draw on ecofeminist writers and theorists Carol Adams, Lori Gruen and Greta Gaard. Adams intersects feminist studies and the relationships between feminist ideology, animal ethics and the earth. These studies of non-anthropocentric inquiry and the earth extends feminist ideology beyond human parameters and works to remedy the lack of animal advocacy and environmentalism in feminist theory. Adams and Gruen write “[...] ecofeminist theory exposes and opposes intersecting forces of oppression, showing how problematic it is when these issues are considered separately from one another.”<sup>29</sup> I use ecofeminist theory to show the interconnectedness of domination. These are sophisticated, important writings on gendered and sexist discourses which subordinate animals and women. Joining these theorists in the role of adding to the discussion on the intersectionality of oppressions Maneesha Deckha’s writings on feminist ethics of animal advocacy and her contemporary legal and cultural theories will be used to help formally analyze images. She theorizes and writes on critical animal studies, feminist theory, law and culture, animal law and bioethics.

Following institutional discourse in which the slaughterhouse, factory farm, stockyard and cattle truck serve as the institution, I will use the lens of Foucauldian theories to analyze images of power at these sites. Cartesian disciplinary power emerged in the nineteenth century in Western society to include such institutions as prisons, hospitals and schools. Intensive factory farming is comparable to these sites with respect to their production of ‘docile bodies’. For example, sow stalls, gestation crates, immobile pigs fed and bred for the fastest possible growth

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<sup>29</sup> Adams and Gruen, *Ecofeminism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1.

of saleable body tissue and the highest productivity, are disciplined through confinement technologies, their docility sought. Foucault writes, “The classical age discovered the body as objects and targets of power. It is easy enough to find signs of the attention that is paid to the body- to the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful and increases its forces”.<sup>30</sup> This is a precise description of contemporary factory farming. In the same way bodies are sought in workers who are required to operate within the system, “[...] as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines”.<sup>31</sup> Both animals and workers at the site of the institution become part of the hidden system of brutality, “thus disciplined bodies produce subjected and practiced bodies, “[...]docile” bodies,”<sup>32</sup> both coerced and obedient.

Sigfried Giedion in *Mechanization takes Command*, first published in 1948, examines the impact of mechanization on life and for this thesis is used with particular interest in the analysis of the assembly line and slaughterhouse practices. He examines the repercussions of modern production techniques and the role of capitalism in the growth of slaughterhouse production. Furthermore, he makes the historic connection to the disassembly of animal bodies to Fords use of the assembly line in car production, learnt from a visit to a slaughterhouse and seeing the use of the conveyor belt production system. Giedion makes the correlation of the complete objectification of rendering animal bodies into parts and the effect it has on labor, through this process of capitalism.

Kelly Oliver in *Witnessing* explores and gives a methodological framework to ideas of bearing witness to oppressive practices and the resulting violence shown in the imagery

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<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 181.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 182.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*.

analyzed. She defines witnessing from the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “[...] the action of bearing witness or giving testimony, the fact of being present and observing something [...].”<sup>33</sup> The artistic practice—of not only entering the slaughterhouse and recording immediately the scene first hand of slaughter, but also representing labor in an intertwined narrative, and furthermore juxtaposing this visual analysis with scenes of violence such as rape—represents a visual record or testimony.

## **Chapter Overviews**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction.**

### **Chapter 2: Witnessing: The Visual Journalist**

In this chapter ecofeminism is used to reveal intersecting structures of power formations. Furthermore, text by Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing, beyond recognition*, observes how Coe’s witnessing and bearing witness reveals Coe’s ability to give evidence, visually testify and report oppressions and their intersections in the two images analyzed, *My Mother and I Watch a Pig Escape from The Slaughterhouse*, (Fig. 1), and, *Intensive Hog Farm built on the Site of Lete[sic]Concentration Camp*, (Fig. 2). One is of a re-construction of a childhood memory- an animal trying to escape slaughter whilst onlookers laughed, and the other, an intersectional narrative around a slaughterhouse built on the site of a former Romani concentration camp in the town of Lete in the Czech Republic.

### **Chapter 3: The Slaughterhouse as an Institution of Power**

Three images of slaughterhouse practices, *Wheel of Fortune*, *Today’s Pig is Tomorrow’s Bacon* (Fig. 3), *Pigs Eaten Alive by Maggots*, (Fig. 4), and *Factory Pharm* (Fig. 5), shows the

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<sup>33</sup> Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing, beyond recognition*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 16.

industrial assembly line, factory farming and an imagined or heterotopic mechanized interior centralizing the never-ending production line and conveyor belt system. These images are analyzed using Foucault's theories on institutions, power and docile bodies. Sigfried Giedion in *Mechanization takes Command* gives a philosophical, moral and historical look at the rise of mechanization and the repercussions of industrialization and modern production techniques.

#### **Chapter 4: Objectification/Transgressive Images: Violence against the Body of the 'Other'**

This chapter will analyze images of brutality in, *Bedford, A Woman Walks Into a Bar- is Raped by Four Men Whilst Twenty Men Watch on the Pool Table*, (Fig.6), *Meusling, Cutting off Vaginal Folds with no Anesthetic*, (Fig. 7) and *Veal Skinner* (Fig. 8). Sue Coe uses the reporter/witness position to reveal and make visible the invisible, the violence toward farmed animal bodies and of rape. She shows us through imagery how intersecting structures of domination reinforces animals and women as the "Other." Analyzing the imagery using Adams and Gruen's ecofeminist theory and Deckha's post colonialism theories reveals the diverse ways that patriarchy, racism, sexism and ableism underpin speciesism and intersect.

#### **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

Findings and recommendations from a deep analysis of the imagery shows how Coe's imagery and narrative reveal multiple lines of oppressions and therefore connects with the current ideology in ecofeminism on Critical Animal Theory in scholarly conversations.

#### **Conclusion**

I analyze the visual imagery of such artifacts as Sue Coe's slaughterhouse work as a site for her artistic practice. Furthermore, contrasting images of female rape to the brutalizing of animals for food production using eco-feminist ideology, I consider how gendering oppresses women, animals, and other marginalized groups. Revealing how all oppressions

intersect/overlap, including speciesism, this thesis places and exhibits not only how Coe's work is, and always has been intersectional in its visual ideology, but also how the current discussion in scholarly ideology has caught up with her visual witnessing. My research focuses on the analyzed image to add to the gap of speciesism in critical animal theory. I posit that moving toward any contemporary ideas of a post-humanist vision of equality *must* include all beings.

## CHAPTER 2: WITNESSING – THE VISUAL JOURNALIST

In this chapter I will examine images of animal brutality using visual representations in which Coe shows us imagery of cruelty from the witness or reporter perspective: *Intensive Hog Farm Built on the Site of Lete[sic] Concentration Camp* (Fig. 1) and *My Mother and I Watched a Pig Try and Escape the Slaughterhouse* (Fig. 2).

Coe has been witnessing animal suffering through the institution of the slaughterhouse since childhood. Living as a child by a pig farm and a block away from the slaughterhouse she “[...] saw the transformation of animals into meat.”<sup>34</sup> This put Coe in the witness position early in life. As a recorder of events through images she continued to illustrate the sites of industrialized killings all over the world, often being allowed in with a sketchbook and pencil, a camera viewed as too contentious. She brings to us the intentionally hidden - away cruelties of farmed animal and slaughterhouse practices. Often, she witnesses the acts in real time, standing on the kill -floor drawing. She says in *Dead Meat* of her childhood experience, “[a] light came out of the hog farm roof and it was always on. Trucks would come at night, and there would be squeaking as the hogs were loaded. This was totally normal to us, the screaming animals from the slaughterhouse, the dog dragging the chain, the stench of the hog farm [...]”<sup>35</sup> As a child she began to understand the industrialized use of the bodies of animals that never ceased. She remembers, “As a child, I thought they would slaughter all the pigs they had, then stop. I didn’t understand the regularity of it.”<sup>36</sup> This early understanding reveals why she visually records the

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<sup>34</sup> Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Ghosts Of Our Meat, Cruelty* (New York, Distributed Art Publishers, 2013), 15.

<sup>35</sup> Sue Coe, Alexander Cockburn, *Dead Meat*, (New York, London, Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995), 39.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

unabated industrialized assembly lines of animals to meat, fundamental to the modern slaughterhouse.

Both images that I will discuss in this chapter are of violence, and both reveal the brutality against animals and people inherent in Western thinking when humans see and consider someone else as the “Other,” allowing such acts without question. Animals are slaughtered and people are murdered, the language we use assuages our guilt, we “see” this way, believing slaughter is just and murder is wrong. But here Coe brings to us the reality of these ways of “seeing,” through her images of unjust practices, slaughter, brutality and indifference “through the dynamics of the process of Othering.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Analysis of Two Images by Sue Coe.**

*Intensive Hog Farm Built on the Site of Lete[sic] Concentration Camp*, 2010 by Sue Coe is an image of brutality and witnessing. Here Coe reports whilst showing others watching and observing. This view is of a pig farm, the site of which was a concentration camp for the Romani people in the atrocities of the Holocaust. Only 5% of the Czech Romani people survived, they were sent from this camp in Lete in the Czech Republic to Auschwitz Birkenau. Coe often uses the witness position to make the visual message stronger, either she witnesses herself and shows the viewer what she sees, or she shows herself witnessing, drawing in the slaughterhouse as a child for example. In this particular image, Coe takes the reporter vantage point and is explicit in her message. She takes advantage of the distastefulness and disrespectfulness of using a site to kill pigs that was used as a site of genocide toward the Romani people. Coe mirrors this “Othering” showing the slaughter of animals on the site. In the foreground, filling the whole

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<sup>37</sup> Maneesha Deckha, “Towards a Postcolonial, Posthumanist Feminist Theory: Centralizing Race and Culture in Feminist work on Nonhuman Animals,” *Hypatia*, vol. 27, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 533.

front of the image, four men are taking part in the killing of pigs. Two of the men hold up a pig in an unnatural position; it is standing as if bipedal. They hold it by the arms, one on each arm and both lean out as if to drag the pig along more firmly. The pig looks out at the viewer, and we, the observers, look back. Coe is clever in this visual representation of the standing pig; she mirrors the human gait and body size, playing with the dimension for us to transpose pig with a person effectively. She reinforces the idea of the pig and the Romani people as the “Other.” She marks this visual as a representation of unjust practices, the vulnerability and despair of domination without recourse. Kelly Oliver in *Witnessing, Beyond Recognition* writes,

Relations of domination and oppression presuppose particular notions of subjects and others, subjectivity and objectification. [...] the dichotomy between subject and other, or subject and object is itself a result of the pathology of oppression. To see oneself as a subject and to see other people as the *other* or objects not only alienates one from those around him or her but also enables the dehumanization inherent in oppression and domination.<sup>38</sup>

Coe melds these two violent acts, the farming and killing of pigs with the history of the site of the farm, domination and oppression, by including the witnesses. She wants us to see how stripping people of their humanity and stripping animals of their right to “be” is the same position, has the same outcome: namely, it results in unfettered violence. Coe writes in *Cruel*: “In one twisted sense the pig farm makes the best possible memorial to those who died; it is a living echo of the past, producing fresh death and suffering daily.”<sup>39</sup>

In the background of the image Coe mirrors visually again. In the top right-hand corner of the piece are two officers in uniform. One is holding a camp inmate up by the

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<sup>38</sup> Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing*, introduction, (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 2001), 3.

<sup>39</sup> Sue Coe, *Cruel, Bearing Witness to Animal Exploitation* (New York, London, OR Books, 2012), 146.



hair whilst the other takes a stick or baton ready to strike. There is an air of nonchalance in the stance of this guard; he stands with one arm on his hip in a relaxed pose. These two figures, as part of the background narration are drawn smaller and lighter, suggesting past brutality. They are placed right above another man in the foreground who is bent down in the act of killing an animal. The eye therefore is drawn from the standing pig which reflects a person as the central image, over to the act of killing, to the moment of past brutality in the camp immediately above. Coe moves the eye around the picture plane with this narrative comparison. One man is ghost like in the middle foreground, Coe places him behind the two men holding the pig upright. He watches but is not yet involved in violence, although his placement, clothes and body suggest he is one of the workers. However, his feet resemble that of pig hooves the work boots imperceptibly transformed by lighter line, so the viewer hardly realizes the strength of the iteration. Coe has drawn him so that he resembles the standing pig more than the other men. His face is darkened with facial features obscured, his head the same size as the pigs which is immediately to his right and down. Coe is very subtle in this obscuration. She shows us one living body melting and melding into the other and her message is clear: there is no difference between killing or brutalizing one sentient being over another. A method of visual mirroring. The male workers are burly, well-fed, which contrasts with the bodies and body language of the former camp inmates in the background. They are unsurprisingly small, dressed in blue and white stripes, visually their bodies turned inwards, they hold on to each, take up less space, packed in. They watch the killing of the pigs in the foreground, and none of them looks to their left to the man about to be beaten.

In the very background of this piece Coe has put five huts or barracks; they are small and wooden, each the same and show numbers on two of the doors. The only other numbers in this work are on the skin of the pig being killed. This pig has a tattoo, a number denoting objectivity. Coe does not show an inmate with a camp tattoo and the image is stronger for it, cleverly playing on what the viewer would expect to be included in such a work as this. This absence leads us to think of the objectified person, marked and numbered, tagged as an object, which brings us back, from that reflection to a stronger connection to the animal's presence.

Objectification becomes embodied. Coe suggest that oppressions feed off each other. One oppression reinforces and strengthens the others, a concept that reflects the ideas in the new ecofeminist theory. In *Ecofeminism, Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, Adams and Gruen write, “[...] ecofeminist theory exposes and opposes intersecting forces of oppression, showing how problematic it is when these issues are considered separate from one another. This approach also identifies the shortcomings with mainstream “[...] animal rights treatment of speciesism.”<sup>40</sup> Ecofeminist theory reflects these intersecting oppressions, which Coe shows visually, between human objectification and the objectification of animals, especially farmed animals in the industrialized killing in slaughterhouses. Of the slaughterhouse on the site of Lete concentration camp, she observes:

Moving the farm would answer the Roma's immediate needs, but it begs another question: a new farm in some other location won't change living conditions for the pigs, or their ultimate fate. The Lete camp exchanged human torture for animal torture. What permits such torment and abuse to occur in the first place? A partial answer must include the practice of dividing living beings into Them and Us. This framing allows us to hide

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<sup>40</sup> Carol J. Adams, Lori Gruen, *Ecofeminism, Feminist Interactions with Other Animals and the Earth*, ed. Carol J. Adams, Lori Gruen, Introduction, (New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1.

Them, to ignore and forget Them. We hide Them from Us because we would rather not look too closely at the inequities- the ghettos jails factory farms and slaughterhouses—where They are condemned to live and die.<sup>41</sup>

Us and Them. With the visual of the upright body of the standing pig and that of the worker merging, Coe gives us a representational image of analyzing oppressive structures and practices.

The colors that Coe uses are dark, and she chooses where to use it judiciously to direct the viewer's eye. Color is in the red blood of the animals on the apron of the workers, blue and white stripes of the camp inmates and the faint pink of the pig's bodies. Overall the image is ominous; it is as if there is smoke in the sky that permeates the outside of the whole image. The darkness that surrounds the piece on every edge gives the viewer the message of no escape. Only three small trees with the palest hint of green show any break from the scene Coe depicts, and they are almost off the picture plane on top of a tiny hill. Hemmed in by the darkness of the edge, their bases are covered with a thick black line barricading them from anything living to reach them. Right at the back of the image is a guard tower, an illustration of power.

Coe shows visually her witness position in *My Mother and I Watch a Pig Escape from The Slaughterhouse* (Fig.2). In this image, Coe draws herself as a child standing with her mother. At the top of the image in almost banner form that fills the space, Coe orients us to where this visual came from. In her hand she writes, "My mother and I watched a pig escape from a slaughterhouse. The pig ran into traffic, weaving in and out of moving cars. She was chased by a man covered in blood and carrying knives. Groups of people clustered around laughing and pointing. I asked my mother, 'why is this

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<sup>41</sup> Sue Coe, *Cruel, Bearing Witness to Animal Exploitation*,146.

funny?’ She said it was not funny, the pig was going to be captured and killed. The slaughterhouse was next door to our house. It was then I knew all was not well with this world.” Coe has placed herself inside the slaughterhouse with her mother in this image. Viewers are looking into the scene from the front, watching the pig run. All is dark apart from a smaller, lighter open space in the middle front of the picture plane and a tunnel of space which Coe has carved out of the darkness. Mother and child stand side by side, directly facing the viewer but toward the back, quietly watching and witnessing. The pig runs past them into the small narrow tunnel of light that Coe has given her. Only the worker, who is shown with his back to us also stands in the lighter spot. He holds his arms around the space where the pig was, as if the moment the pig escaped from him, he became frozen in time. The whole piece has a feeling of stasis. It is as if Coe has pulled the memory from her childhood where it has been preserved and placed it on the canvas as a single instant: it is a moment of empathy laid down in paint. The worker has bloody hands and there is blood on his white coat and pants. Knives hang from his waist. Where is the pig heading in this image? Coe has not put an exit, the small lighter tunnel the pig heads down leads no-where. Coe shows it only leads to more blackness, a visual method to reveal to us that there is no escape, much like her use of the guard tower in *Intensive Hog Farm Built on the Site of Lete[sic] Concentration Camp* (Fig. 1). The other worker faces us, his face holds sadness. Nevertheless, he grabs at the two pigs in front of him, blood also covers his hands and white coat. He wears a small white hat, a type of uniform to go with the pants and coat, it seems such a ridiculous item of clothing, his hair pokes out at the sides. Given that the scene is that of fear, attempted survival and killing, it is as if Coe wants us to read the visual narrative as following practices, blindly,

uniformly. On the subject of uniforms and uniformity, Eisenman addresses this topic in *The Ghosts of Our Meat*, of the inequalities in modern slaughterhouses that add to the pressure and acceptance of violence. He writes, “Rapid turnover and punishing assembly-line work, combined with uniforms that disguise identities, creates anonymity in which violence may be more easily performed and cruelty more easily tolerated”.<sup>42</sup> If it wasn’t for the representation relayed by Coe of her and her mother and the memory, this scene would have been invisible. On this theme of making sure brutality in slaughterhouses remains invisible, Tom Reagan in *Dead Meat* writes, “Slaughterhouses do not have glass walls. The architecture of slaughter is designed to be opaque, designed in the interests of denial, to ensure that we will not see, even if we wanted to look”<sup>43</sup> Coe’s work fills in this space and makes perceptible, designed invisibility.

Around the sides of the image are chickens, hens, turkeys and geese. Their bodies are packed tightly in small, dark dungeon - like spaces at the sides and for the viewer their bodies seem as if they could go on into infinity. Their necks poke out from the bars or cages which are holding them; this creates a feeling of tension, of suffocation as we look at how tightly packed in they are. Coe presents us with realistic view of factory farming in this more imagined or heterotopic scenario. We are given the view from the front and the top of their faces and bodies, this modernist perspective strengthening the image by forcing us to see more than we would from one perspective. This gives the viewer more angles and visually heightens the feeling of suffocation, enabling our minds to piece together a more three-dimensional picture. The piece feels dark and silent. The

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<sup>42</sup> Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Ghosts of Our Meat*, 25.

<sup>43</sup> Sue Coe, Alexander Cockburn, Tom Reagan, “The Burden of Complicity” *Dead Meat* (New York, Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995), 3.

packed in birds almost appear as if on transportation trucks, the hollows where the birds are crammed together are painted as if they have been carved out of rock and then bars placed at the front. Surroundings are reminiscent of a cave or a mine, a long way from any light or freedom. The birds at the front are larger and painted with more detail. They are in various states of fear; one looks starved, one dead, one with legs splayed out, one has feathers that appear to have been plucked from the neck. They are indifferent to each other apart from their shared misery and together with the three pigs in the foreground, they seem passive, resigned, docile. The only animal, including the humans Coe has given any movement to is the pig trying to survive.

There is one pig toward whom the worker reaches. As his hands reach out to grab the pig's ear his face looks away, and he makes no eye contact with any of the sentient beings around him. On the issue of compassion and acts of violence, Eisenman in, *The Ghosts of Our Meat* writes, "Within groups, people may evade responsibility for acts that, if performed alone, would cause individuals to recoil or rebel,"<sup>44</sup> a comment on, as a group, slaughterhouse workers diffuse their responsibility which allows them to execute.

The color Coe includes, other than blacks, browns and greys, are pink or red hues. Her sweater is red, her mother's pink, mutating imperceptibly with ideas of meat, sentience and the belief in human superiority. These two colors are repeated throughout the whole painting, uniting what should be a rosy glow, but here is read as a bloodiness. Most of the birds have white bodies, (apart from the hens on the left whose bodies are painted brown). The white bodies of the geese, turkeys and chickens have heads and necks of red and pink tones. This is carried on to the pink in the pigs and the red in the

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<sup>44</sup> Stephen F. Eisenman, *Ghosts of Our Meat*, 25.

blood of the clothes of the men. The man who seems frozen with his hands around an imaginary pig has a face colored by the faintest of skin tone whilst his hands and wrists in contrast are bloodied, red. Mirroring very subtly the colors of the witnesses' clothes with the color of "others" going to slaughter, Coe invokes our sameness, our interchangeability. Tom Reagan writes,

So, beneath the many differences, there is sameness. Like us, these animals embody the mystery of wonder of consciousness. Like us they are not only in the world, they are aware of it. Like us they are the psychological centers of a life that is uniquely their own. In these fundamental respects, humans stand on all fours, so to speak, with hogs and cows, chickens and turkeys. What these animals are due from us, how we morally ought to treat them, are questions whose answers begins with the recognition of our psychological kinship with them<sup>45</sup>

This visual of mirroring and blending humans and animals, even just in terms of clothes, not even more salient embodiments such as skin is a method of Coe's that we receive, as the viewer, but it is done so finely and in such a muted way that we are not immediately aware of it. This makes for powerful work.

With regards to Coe's imagery, she has always visually exhorted us to consider the theory of enmeshed oppressive practices that is only now informing critical theory. Adams and Gruen write, "The practice of making connections between the oppression of women, people of color, indigenous people, workers and other animals has been going on for a long time"<sup>46</sup>

With her imagery Coe shows us the intersections of objectification, and restores power, if only through the witness position of the viewer in the recognition of brutality. Coe's work takes the subject/object position in both pieces analyzed. Oliver writes on this notion of subject/object position, "Contemporary theory is still dominated by conceptions of identity and

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<sup>45</sup> Sue Coe, Alexander Cockburn, Tom Regan, "The Burden of Complicity", *Dead Meat*, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Adams, Gruen, *Ecofeminism*, 2.

subjectivity that inherit a Hegelian notion of recognition. In various ways, these theories describe how we recognize ourselves in our likeness as the same or in opposition to what is (or those who are) different from ourselves”.<sup>47</sup> Coe gives us this recognition in *Intensive Hog Farm Built on the Site of Lete Concentration Camp*. Her image of the Romani people watching from the back of the image surrounded by barracks, a demarcation line of a paler tone in the mid to background, cut the drawing, not only in time but in a visual representation of recognition of objectification.

Through a post-colonial reading and a post-human extension, Maneesha Deckha suggests that the animal ethics conversation should move away from anthropocentrism, human superiority and privilege, towards a movement which is gendered and intersectional in its theology.

Deckha’s theory of centralizing post -colonialism and intersectionality to the current animal ethics conversation centers on inclusion of all rather than applying theory to only humans. She applies “[...] Western ways of knowing and seeing,”<sup>48</sup> the dehumanization of people, to animal critical theory, casting animals also as the ‘Other’. In *Messy Eating* she states “

[...] I always felt that these Western traditions about how to view animals in the Judeo- Christian ethic, that was a key problem, especially in Western societies, as to how animals are viewed. So, I felt that a postcolonial reading of human-animal relations was central to a critique of animals. And I didn’t see that as centralized in the feminist care traditions.<sup>49</sup>

She is influenced by, and comes through the theory of ecofeminist theory but perceives that a postcolonial analysis to be “[...] necessary to properly contextualize issues; to understand how food issues, food politics and other issues involving animals are not only gendered, as feminists in this tradition talk about[...].”<sup>50</sup> Her theories surpass ideas of whether or not it is morally

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<sup>47</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing*, Introduction, 4.

<sup>48</sup> Maneesha Deckha, “Justice and Nonviolence,” *Messy Eating, Conversations on Animals as Food*, ed. Samantha King, R. Scott Carey, Isabel Macquarrie, Victoria N. Millious, Elaine M. Power (New York, Fordham University Press, 2019), 93.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



acceptable to kill and eat animals, but rather the very way we view animals as “less than”, as the most crucial tenet. Ecofeminist theory joins Deckha but rather than taking a complete overview, Adams and Gruen state that ecofeminism looks at “[...] reinforcing logics of domination and drawing connections between practical implications of power relations has been a core project of ecofeminism, even before the word “ecofeminism” was coined.”<sup>51</sup>

The two images analyzed here show Coe to be visually at the forefront of the idea of how oppressions intersect and strengthen each other. By representing her childhood memory of the escaping pig, she shows us the brutal, desperate and isolating space of the slaughterhouse. Even though this piece is imagined, a heterotopic space, she orients us to the real witness position she held by the text, recalling the real event. Why does she add text to the image? She wants the viewer to know that this moment existed, the dash for freedom from slaughter is not just imaginary, although the interior space maybe. That this dark cavernous imagined replica of animals held in crushed spaces, themselves witnessing the killing of others is reality. In both the images there are no dead animals; Coe has placed all of them in a waiting position or at the moment of slaughter. This is not by accident or by aesthetics; rather, she purposely does this to make a connection visually from image to viewer, the relationship of “us” and “them.” She wants us to ask of ourselves, how would that position be for us? And to consider taking personal responsibility from that which she reveals.

## **Conclusion**

To begin to analyze the belief in human dominion over all other animals Derrida has given us this insight on the word “animal.” The ontology of non-human animals is discussed in

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<sup>51</sup> Adams and Gruen, “Groundwork,” *Ecofeminism*, 7.

his lectures, his belief that the signifier, the word “animal” itself, with which its very homogeneity obfuscates and eradicates the animal, describes a position: one that is other than us. Defining animals by the site of the signifier, its anatomy as a singular word, Derrida posits, centralizes animals in a negative way, also reducing and obliterating our recognition of the animality in humans. With this signifier, “[...] the violence done to the animal begins, he says, with this pseudo-concept of “the animal” with the use of this word in the singular, as though all animals from the earth-worm to the chimpanzee constituted a homogenous set to which “(the hu)man” would be radically opposed.”<sup>52</sup> He questions if humans have the right to the apex of importance, if, “[...] what calls itself human has the right rigorously to attribute to man, which means therefore to attribute to himself, what he refuses the animal, and whether he can ever possess the pure, *rigorous, indivisible* concept, as such, of that attribution.”<sup>53</sup> This questions the premise of our ideas of human attributes as, “pure, rigorous, indivisible,”<sup>54</sup> in other words, the idea of the human can be deconstructed and evidence of the belief of “humanness” can be refuted.

Coe’s images of the melding of brutality against animals with genocide atrocities show how intersectional forms of oppression and violence inform each other through the lens of the basic theology of ecofeminist theory. Maneesha Deckha discusses these dual intersections of ideas in “The Subhuman as a Cultural Agent of Violence.” She gives us a view of how, “[...] the human/animal hierarchy and our ideas about animals and animality are foundational for intra-human hierarchies and the violence they promote. The routinized violence against beings designated subhuman serves as a justification and blueprint for violence against humans.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I am*, New York, (Fordham University Press, 2008), ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, foreword, x.

<sup>53</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 135.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Maneesha Deckha, “The Subhuman as a Cultural Agent of Violence”, *JCAS* Volume VIII, Issue 3, 2010, 37.

Routine violence in slaughterhouses, prominent in both images analyzed here, are investigated through the writings of Patterson, he writes,

Throughout the history of our ascent to dominance as the master species, our victimization of animals has served as the model and foundation for our victimization of each other. The study of human history reveals the pattern: first humans exploit and slaughter animals; then, they treat other people like animals and do the same to them.<sup>56</sup>

If multiple intersectional forms of oppression and violence are the basis of ecofeminist theory, then we can view Coe's imagery of human/ non-human brutality, which reflect these dynamics, through this lens.

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<sup>56</sup> Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka*, ( New York, Lantern Books, 2002), 109.

### CHAPTER 3: THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE AS AN INSTITUTION OF POWER

In the previous chapter, ecofeminist theory was used to deconstruct multiple overlapping oppressions. In this chapter Michel Foucault's institutional critique will be used to examine Coe's imagery of slaughterhouses, *Wheel of Fortune*, *Today's Pig is Tomorrow's Bacon* (Fig. 3), *Pigs Eaten Alive by Maggots* (Fig. 4) and *Factory Pharm* (Fig. 5). Coe gives us imagery of the brutality inherent in the slaughterhouse, but more than this she shows us the mechanization of bodies into body parts unending. The images reveal animals consumed into this mechanization process becoming part of the machine, until we no longer understand them as kin, but parts without agency. She shows us in these images the results of mechanization, particularly the assembly line, and factory farming as its precursor. As Sigfried Gideon notes in *Mechanization takes Command*,

The assembly line is one of mechanizations most effective tools. It aims at an uninterrupted process. This is achieved by organizing and integrating the various operations. Its ultimate goal is to mold the manufactory into a single tool wherein all phases of production, all the machines, become one great unit. The time factor plays an important part; for the machines must be regulated to one another.<sup>57</sup>

This description of mechanization reveals sentient beings as just another part in the process, the whole operation is one enormous tool that animals and humans are consumed by- (and by extension consumers). These slaughterhouse practices form the basis of the critical imagery that Sue Coe gives us in the three works analyzed here. Through Foucault's ideas on coerced bodies that form institutional practices, we can deconstruct the narrative in Coe's slaughterhouse imagery.

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<sup>57</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization takes Command, a Contribution to Anonymous History*, "The Assembly Line and Scientific Management" (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 77.

## Brief History of the Slaughterhouse

The centralized municipal slaughterhouse is a modern invention. Over the course of the nineteenth century, hand slaughter by individual butchers was replaced by factory slaughterhouses, initially because of concerns over hygiene. Butchers often performed killings in back rooms, blood running down the streets. The commodification of animals and their bodies into meat now follows capitalist doctrines of standardization and productivity with profit in mind, mechanization moving into industry via the slaughterhouse. As Sigfried Giedion notes in *Mechanization takes Command*, “It is increasingly clear that the assembly line, as developed from the packing houses [...]”<sup>58</sup> became a “[...] sweeping influence.”<sup>59</sup> Through this automation, slaughterhouse and its practices became hidden, the invisibility procured purposefully. In *Meat Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse*, Paula Young Lee compares the slaughterhouse as an institution to a service structure, much like the sewer systems are marginalized and hidden for the same reasons. She contrasts the cathedral and library as “[...] representational spaces articulating lasting social value [...]”<sup>60</sup> rather than these colossal warehouse service structures, especially the slaughterhouse, its only purpose to kill, that are, “[...] massive in scale but without symbolic monumentality.”<sup>61</sup> In the years between 1807 and 1865, the Union Stockyards in Chicago “[...] perfected the production-line slaughter of living

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 118.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>60</sup> Paula Young Lee, “Introduction: Housing Slaughter”, *Meat, Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse*, ed. Paula Young Lee, (Durham, University of New Hampshire Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

creatures [....].”<sup>62</sup> For the first time in history slaughter became mechanized, huge complexes such as in the Union Stockyard in Chicago built to make transportation to slaughter as fast as possible, “[t]he animal body [as] part of the capitalist labor process [..].”<sup>63</sup> The slaughter of animals into food goes on in secret, behind closed doors and “[m]ost large slaughterhouses are better guarded than maximum security prisons,”<sup>64</sup> a practice that goes on today. In his 1906 novel *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair focused on the meatpacking industry in Chicago and revealed to the public the plight of labor, the unsanitary conditions and the cruelty to animals. Why are these practices hidden? The answer is profit. If most people could visit slaughterhouse, see the unending brutality and killing, the mechanization, the hell, they might opt out of buying neatly clean packaged body parts at the supermarket. Coe has an interesting take on this invisibility: rather than blame people for taking part in this brutality by their food choices she sees them as being used in this process, linking “Us and Them”<sup>65</sup> as another casualty of capitalisms. On this theme she writes,

If a consumer were invited into a slaughterhouse or factory farm before she ate her burger, would she find it so palatable? If she saw the piglets having their testicles torn off by hand, saw the calves punched and beaten, saw chickens making nests on the bones and feathers of their dead cage members, would she eat the chicken or that chicken’s eggs? If she saw a cow mourning her calf, that behind every glass of milk is a grieving mother, who cries for days and nights to find her child, would she want to drink? If she saw animals who had never walked on grass or seen blue sky or who had only a few inches of cage space, try and protect their offspring from slaughter would her appetite be whetted? If she saw the freeborn animals poisoned and trapped and hunted so cattle could become burgers, would she still opt for that burger? Perhaps. But many others would hesitate and start to consider alternatives.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Sue Coe, Alexander Cockburn, “A Short, Meat – Oriented History of the World from Eden to the Mattole” *Dead Meat*, (New York, London, Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995), 13.

<sup>63</sup> Sue Coe, *Cruel*, (New York, London, OR Books, 2011), 12.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

<sup>65</sup> Coe uses this term rather than “other” to exhibit the chasm in how we distance ourselves from animals in order to justify killing or using animals.

<sup>66</sup> Sue Coe, *Cruel*, 12-13.

This is an emotional description of why slaughterhouses are kept hidden and away from consumers, but the reality is animals are emotional beings, like us, and this method of invisibility to protect profits procures such writing.

Mechanized assembly lines used in industries comes from slaughterhouse practices, and as Patterson writes in *Eternal Treblinka*, “Most people are unaware of the central role of the slaughterhouse in the history of American Industry.”<sup>67</sup> This speaks to the level of detachment that these hidden sprawling industries that now process bodies into meat procure. Ford revealed in his autobiography that a visit he made to a Chicago slaughterhouse was his ‘inspiration’ for assembly- line production, especially the overhead trolley that the Chicago packers used, turning it into, as many industries did later, the assembling of automobiles. The efficiency of processing others into meat so impressed him that he adopted this moving conveyor belt of death into the assembly line of car parts. On this practice of the process of each worker performing a particular step in the slaughterhouse chain of production, Patterson writes, “This process which hoists animals onto chains and hurries them along from station to station until they came out at the end of the line as cuts of meat , introduced something new into our modern industrial civilization- the neutralization of killing and a new level of detachment.”<sup>68</sup> “Patterson is tying in the assembly line killing of animals, which renders them as objects to be brutalized without recourse, to the assembly line killings in genocide. The relationship he writes of is an effort to construct the immorality of this “seeing.” If we understand the relationship of slaughterhouse practices to the

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<sup>67</sup> Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka, Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust*, ( New York, Lantern Books, 2002), 73.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

assembling of cars then we can awaken to the hideousness of animals objectified into parts and take personal responsibility.

Workers in slaughterhouses are cogs in the industrialized mechanization process. Stephen S. Eisenman writes, “Given the nature and conditions of slaughterhouse labor, it is not surprising that meatpackers experience serious psychic trauma in the work place.”<sup>69</sup> As part of the process of capitalism and industrialization, mass mechanized killing helps workers not identify with the brutality: “[...] murder as routine, mechanical, repetitive and programmed as possible”.<sup>70</sup> Eisenman notes that slaughterhouses segregate their workforce, “[t]his intensive division of labor and racial hierarchy diminish compassion and increase aggression.”<sup>71</sup> If workers are purposefully disparaged and segregated, this callousness leads to indifference in the suffering of the animals around them. In *Cruel* Coe visits a Minnesota stockyard. She witnesses the stockyard filling up with horses, each animal having its own entrance. Whilst there the horses are unloaded, she sees the workers brutality to “downed” animals, (animals that are too sick, injured or starved to walk). She writes of the frustration of the workers trying to get a downed animal to move “[...] the worker will continue to whip and kick an animal as if the sheer labor of beating will miraculously transform a near corpse into a dollar on the hoof. The animals moan in terror but still cannot rise up. You would think there would be rage on their faces [the workers], but they are blank”.<sup>72</sup> Slaughterhouse workers experience punishing assembly line work together with rapid turnover, segregation of the workforce, accident and injury. Mechanization now inherent in the machinery of the slaughterhouse means workers are conditioned to have no compassion, no empathy, labor set up for control and power. For an insight into what production line work

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<sup>69</sup> Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Ghosts of Our Meat*, 26.

<sup>70</sup> Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka*, 110.

<sup>71</sup> Eisenman, 25.

<sup>72</sup> Sue Coe, *Dead Meat* “Minnesota Stockyard,” 103.



involves. In a series on race, *The New York Times*, investigated Smithfield Packing Company in Tar Heel, North Carolina, one of the largest pork producers in the world. With regard to the conveyor belt system, Leduff writes,

It is called the picnic line: eighteen workers lined up on both sides of a belt, carving meat from bone. Up to 16 million shoulders a year come down that line here at the Smithfield Packing Co., the largest pork production plant in the world, that works out to about 32,000 per shift, 63 every minute—that's one every 17 seconds, for each worker for eight and a half hours a day every day.<sup>73</sup>

The annual turnover in employment is high at slaughterhouses, often 100 percent. Workers often suffer accident or injury to hands and arms, as well as repetitive motion injuries.

### **Analysis of Three Images by Sue Coe**

Foucault's theories on power and institutions focus on the body being centralized and singled out as the "[...] object and target of power".<sup>74</sup> We can see how "[...] the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained; which obeys, responds becomes skillful, and increases its forces"<sup>75</sup> can be seen, not only to describe the institution of the hospital, school, or barracks, but also the very nature of factory farming and institutional slaughter practices. Mechanization, the conveyor belt system of producing body parts from the slaughter forces the practice of "[...] controlling or correcting the operations of the body"<sup>76</sup> of the slaughterhouse workers. Similarly, we can apply it to factory farming which produces the bodies of animals which then enter the slaughterhouse process. Factory farming exploits animal bodies. Veal farm babies are taken at birth from their

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<sup>73</sup> Charlie Leduff, "At A Slaughterhouse, Some Things Never Die; Who Kills, Who Cuts, Who Bosses Can Depend on Race", *The New York Times*, June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2000.

<sup>74</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, *Discipline and Punish, Docile Bodies* (New York, Vintage Books, 2010), 180.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

mothers and isolated in tiny areas until ready for slaughter at a few weeks of age, pigs are crammed into small gestation crates with no room to stand or turn around, feeding their babies through metal bars, their babies deemed for slaughter as soon as their bodies are monetarily viable, cows are hooked up to milking machines until they are unable to yield enough milk and are killed, chickens are crammed into tiny spaces, their beaks removed so in their panic and misery they cannot peck at the bodies of the others. As Foucault theorizes,

... the modality: it implies an interrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result, and it is exercised according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space, movement. These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed on them a relation of docility-utility, might be called “disciplines.”<sup>77</sup>

We can see these “disciplines” in factory farming and slaughterhouses by examining three images by Coe. The first image, *Wheel of Fortune, Today's Pig is Tomorrow's Bacon*, (fig. 3), is a multimedia process of materials. The image shows us the view of a slaughterhouse as if we the viewer were on a balcony, looking from the front, but positioned in the middle of the scene so we can see equally up and down. It appears from knowing Coe's practice of witnessing firsthand the slaughterhouse practice, an imaginary scene based on the interior of a real slaughterhouse. Instead of placing the conveyer system of killing and making of bodies into parts, Coe stacks up the process, much like the use of the layered perspective popular in the Renaissance. Coe does this deliberately so we can get an overall shortened view of the reality of the process, a whole sweeping image of stunning, death and disassembly. By this method the impact and narrative are heightened.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 181.

Coe uses the symbolic concept of “The Wheel of Fortune” to represent shifting circumstances and to visually relate to the viewer that fortunes fluctuate. The idea that life and bodily representation are unpredictable and ruled by fate is a visual statement that as the wheel can turn at any time therefore our position on the wheel is changeable. She reminds viewers that the turn of the wheel and the change can be more or less fortuitous.

The image is one of darkness, murky. It is rendered so darkly with no windows for light, that it is as if workers are actually slaughtering pigs in the dark, although we know rationally that is not possible. It is obvious that she uses this darkened method to relay the ‘darkness’ of the horror of continual, fast paced killing. She allows some light to fall in places to highlight the action she wants the viewer to focus on. One of these places of light is on the enormous wheel, which is central in the image: the hoisting machine which the pigs are hung on after stunning them on the kill floor. She gives us the image of one stunned pig hoisted upwards to have its throat cut, the next level of processing. The pig has light also thrown on its underside, revealing it to be hung with one back leg, its forearms dangling down. We cannot see his or her face. Coe has the pig with its front toward us. There is no attempt to draw in features of a face. Obscured, the snout ends in blackness: just another body. Another place of light she deliberately steers our attention to is a row of stunned pigs waiting in line to the right of the pig on the hoist. A worker slits a throat to kill the pig, just the top of the worker's head is lightened, and we can see he is wearing ear protectors. This visuality lets us know that the noise in this scene is deafening, the crying and squealing of the pigs, the noise of the huge wheel turning, the chains holding multitudinous bodies of pigs, bred to be so large they can hardly walk, grinding along. The pigs wear no such protection. If she shows us this then the viewer can make the connection to the human senses, the stench of blood and feces, fear. Another area of light is on the back of the man

directly below the hoisted pig, on the kill floor. He bends down; we cannot see who he is stunning for slaughter, ready to be hung on the vast wheel. Coe does nothing by accident in her imagery, these pigs are only suggested by the movements of the workers there, maybe to verify that these practices are purposely hidden from view. However, she makes sure we know who is there. To the immediate right is a terrified immobile pig sitting as far into the safety of the corner as he or she can get. This pig, Coe has colored pink, which directs our attention as does the use of light in the gloom, to the pig's position as likely next in line. Coe makes sure with color that we see this one individual pig, even with its body partially obscured by the kill floor wall we see fear in its face, ears down, defeated, resigned. In his theories on "docile bodies"<sup>78</sup> Foucault posits the reason for holding bodies in spaces thus, "[...] discipline sometimes requires *enclosure*, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself."<sup>79</sup> Not one of the three men on the kill floor looks at this pig, two are intent on stunning and hoisting, but Coe purposefully shows one worker looking directly at us, the viewers. His face is hardened, dead, he holds something in both hands, stunners? the top of the gate that allows the next set of beings in? All we know is that he and the pig are in some kind of dark space with no recourse. We are assured that Coe knows this scene intimately, visiting, drawing and witnessing in slaughterhouses for fifty years, so we can believe this visual she has given us. She throws light on a pen of crowded sheep positioned right next to the stunning, their heads up trying to breathe, waiting. She casts the most light on the workers at the top of the image. They stand on a metal platform, cutting the heads off a row of dead pigs. The dismembered heads fly off to the left, one head she lights more intensely, with a halo of brightness around it. This head's mouth is open in

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<sup>78</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Prison* (New York Vintage Books, 1995), 135.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

death, blood flying; it appears to be screaming on its way down to the pile. She wants us to hold that image.

Foucault theorizes on institutions and the use of power, coercion delivered in minute parts that come together to form a mechanization of behavior that has been coerced from within, without the subject's realization. In this scene we can see these theories in practice: animals stand quietly waiting to be processed, men go about the business of killing others and rendering them into unrecognizable parts quickly and methodically as is set by the mechanization process. He writes on these policies of coercion of the body that make up institutional behavior,

The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down, rearranges it. A "political anatomy," which was also a "mechanics of power," was being born; it defined how one may have hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed, and the efficiency that one determines. Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, "docile bodies."<sup>80</sup>

Docile bodies carry the coercion of power within. In this image the animals, bred in overcrowded factory farms, their bodies and minds forced into docility by the power inherently produced by the institution, stand mute, only the dismembered head cries out. The workers shown intent on their part, bodies meld as part of the conveyer belt system. Organic life in a metal cage of death. Foucault's uses ideas of energy and power reversed into utility and docility and the disciplines that produces these subversions, he writes,

Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it disassociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an "aptitude," a "capacity," which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it and turns it into a relation of strict subversion.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, 182.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

Here he describes the subversion of power from the institution to the body and from the body to acts of disciplinary power making up slaughterhouse practices, by which we can read Coe's imagery.

In *Pigs Eaten Alive by Maggots*, from 2010 (Fig. 4), Coe gives us a close up of factory farming practices. She shows us this view, through the image of two pigs putting us, the viewer, into the factory farm itself within the picture plane. She positions us as close as possible, as if we are there, walking down the unending row of pigs, kept solitary, in metal containers. There is one large metal bar running up through the image, essentially cutting us the viewer off from the pigs, and deliberately them from us. We stop to look at two pigs trying to get closer to each other, but the bars prevent them. She gives the attention to the pigs faces and to the metal bars to illustrate the reality of their entrapment. They are shown trying to reach each other, as would be natural for pig families. They both push through the bars as far as possible to touch each other. Their bodies bred to be enormous, commercial pigs weighing in over 600 pounds, only their snouts have any power to provide comfort in this man-made trap. They are both bleeding and Coe shows maggots eating away at the wounds. They are unimportant, their bodies to be used and consumed.

Again, Coe uses dark dank imagery with little light. Apart from the red blood from the wounds and the brown of the eyes the only color comes from where she has colored the pigs faces and snout in a pink tone. This coloring of the faces, the pink of the flesh, and the rich brown she has given both their eyes is to make a statement: they are *somebody* with rich emotional lives, not just bodies to be consumed.

There is a single fly at the bottom left of the image. Is it waiting to lay more eggs? or has that been done already? Coe isolates and shows us just one fly to procure greater impact of the

pigs bloody and desperate state, rather than showing us swarms of flies which would detract. Maggots crawl on the wounds, dropping off they crawl around on the floor. It is suggested in this image that the wounds are from straining against the metal bars to get to each other. Coe has rendered the wound on the right on the pigs face as a direct resemblance and shape of part of the bars. One pig looks to the side, the other looks at the viewer. They are still and silent in their misery, waiting, there is nothing else they can hope for. Coe wants us to know, she gives us this image as an activist statement, to ask us to make other food choices, to free animals from this hell. On the subject of factory farming, she writes on the invisibilities of cruelty against animal bodies thus:

The meat industry recognizes this: and so, food animals are hidden in long steel sheds and politicians are pressured to stop hidden video and testimony of the whistleblowers. And this is why animal rights activists are accused of terrorism. It's seductive to believe that all humans are innately greedy and cruel based on how greatly animals suffer, but the meat industry does not agree. If it did then we could openly visit factory farms and slaughterhouses. Our tasks now are to question why this is hidden, make the links demand transparency, and provide alternatives.<sup>82</sup>

We can use Foucault's understandings of the workings of factory farms, firstly by understanding he is talking about bodies, and factory farms only deal in bodies for monetary gain. Secondly, that body is coerced and manipulated by power, until that power, in and over the body becomes invisible, only showing up in the practices that are accepted and sustained, which removes power from the body. Factory farming practices exist to exert power over bodies, nothing else, more milk yields through hormones, pigs and chickens, their flesh bred to be so big they can hardly stand, "[...] disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link

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<sup>82</sup> Sue Coe, *Cruel*, 13.

between an increased aptitude and increased domination”.<sup>83</sup> Here Foucault is referencing labor, but this analysis can be applied to the imagery of the living bodies of farmed animals.

In the third image, *Factory Pharm* (Fig. 5), from 2004, Coe gives us a representation of a fully mechanized system. No workers are present and the whole image is one of madness. The animals no longer sit waiting for slaughter in pens or cages, frightened and resigned, here they travel gaily to their deaths through a giant automated system that carries, grabs sucks, throws and generally processes bodies into parts in one unending mass of continuous movement.

To refine the concept of this image for the viewer, Coe neither light parts of the image to draw our attention, nor give us a close up of cruelty as in the faces of the pigs in gestation crates. Here she renders the whole thing in black and white, regulating the surface so there is no disruption in line or mark making. This unification gives us a visual of the mechanization process of animals unending, fast paced, without question, the very insanity that it is. Without as much emotion attached to the real in the images of the slaughterhouse and factory farm, we can see for ourselves the incongruity. In other words, this piece is a representation of truth in the hyperreal. In the words of Giedion: “[..] production, ever faster production, production at any cost.”<sup>84</sup>

Metal claws lift chickens and cows, and chicks straight from the egg fall into tubes to be ground up. Giant conveyor belt systems take eggs, chicks, hens, and dismembered body parts along in a never-ending cycle that seems to fold back in on itself. Cows, calves, pigs, sheep and goats sit in mechanized seats moving steadily along to slaughter. Large and small syringes pierce the udders of cows standing as if waiting to be milked. Syringes held by metal claws materializing from outside the picture plane suggest that this process has no ending point, they

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<sup>83</sup> Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, “Docile Bodies,” 182.

<sup>84</sup> Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*, 121



pierce the bodies of chickens (alluding to hormones increasing body size for profit). On a row of cows at the far right who are entering the image from some unknown start on the conveyer belt line, we can see the words mad cow. Coe here put in a reference to mad cow disease, thought to have started by animals fed other sick animals, ground up for feed. Two razor-sharp, scissor-like claws hold chicks suspended in midair, one upside down by the legs, a reality in slaughterhouses. Coe's representation mirrors Giedion's, who refers to them as "[..] enormous jaws like the head of mythical birds."<sup>85</sup> There are cogs and metal platforms, ramps and chutes. These are all alluding to the real mechanization of the industry, but Coe splashes us with this notion, as animals are thrown, moved, swallowed, injected, hung, and devoured by machines, the viewer also consumed by the frenetic movement in the image. She purposefully gives no edge to the mechanization; the concept she is showing the viewer is the idea that the processing of animals goes on forever, never ending, one conveyer belt after another.

We can examine this image by using Foucault's ideas of institutions which focuses on the body, the body takes up rules and regulations which become the social body and therefore a representation of power that makes up the institution. Although he refers to parts of learned behavior as "subordinated cogs of a machine,"<sup>86</sup> he is talking metaphorically about cogs in the machinery that goes to make up the social body which the becomes part of a whole as an institution, I can relate the actual cogs in the image of mechanization as a direct representation of parts of the machine that is the modern-day slaughterhouse. Coe shows them as pieces of power that make up the whole, "[...] the meticulously subordinated cogs of a machine, not to the primal

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<sup>85</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *mechanization takes command*, 121.

<sup>86</sup> Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, "Docile Bodies", 187.

social contract but to permanent coercions, not to fundamental rights but to indefinitely progressive forms of training, not to the general will but to automatic docility.”<sup>87</sup>

In the middle, slightly to the right in the image there is a vast circular opening which is a visual representation in form of the hoisting wheel. Here she shows it as an open circular hole and it holds, even with all the imagery and movement, the most important visual place in the piece. Here Coe has left more light as if this hole goes on forever. Our eyes are drawn to this by Coe as it is one of the few empty places within the image. It is rendered, with this openness, in contrast to the rest of the crowded imagery and the viewer is directed to focus on animals disappearing unendingly into a void. Here cows, sheep, pigs and chickens are hurled into the middle, some by the aforementioned claws and some by means of what resemble metal mixing bowls. Cuts of ham or beef or pork stand right at the top of the picture plane as if in a supermarket ready to buy. Clean, processed, the final product. Giedion writes thirty years before Coe’s image of a view he saw in the future, which is given to us by Coe, “Again we are approaching the point where a continuous production line, with man serving only as an observer, is the objective.”<sup>88</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The images analyzed here show Coe voicing through her imagery that rather than centralizing and respecting life, mechanization and its tools, particularly the assembly line and the science behind it “[...] are essentially rationalizing measures.”<sup>89</sup> Rather than mechanization and the machine of the slaughterhouse following industry, industry learnt how to assemble parts as quickly as possible through applying the technique learnt from meat packers in

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Giedion, 118.

<sup>89</sup> Giedion, 121.

slaughterhouses, whereby, “[...] the assembly line moves to a key position in all industry.”<sup>90</sup> The images reveal the very idea that a process that suited the assembly of cars is crucial to reveal how farmed animals and their bodies are so devalued: that they can be disassembled and objectified in the same way.

These works reveal that mechanization and its labor are part of the invisible power of the slaughterhouse. Although the machinery is highly visible, Foucauldian notions of imposition are not visible, but rather lay in the learnt behavior of the industry, little by little until they become normalized. Here in the slaughterhouse and factory farms coerced bodies of workers and animals meet, this explanation by Foucault reveals why partially the slaughterhouse process grinds on,

Discipline “makes” individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. It is not a triumphant power, which because of its own excess can pride itself on its omnipotence; it is a modest suspicious power, which functions as a calculated but permanent economy.<sup>91</sup>

Foucault explains that which Coe represents here: how bodies are objectified, both labor and animal and further used as instruments to follow through with acting within its learnt boundaries and continuing formations of power unconsciously and permanently. It is ingrained, in these images revealed through Foucault’s ideology as part of the labor process under a capitalist system.

Foucault’s theories reflects Coe’s work in all of the three images analyzed here. She brings to us the reality of mass production when it involves living beings. She shows us “[...]”

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Prison*, 188.

continuous, regular movement [...]”<sup>92</sup> and how this continuous regular automation causes brutality to the animals and trauma to the workers. She leaves us with this thought,

Our strength as a species is that we collaborate to survive. Our weakness as a species is that we are now collaborating with economic forces that intend we do not survive. The large cities of the world are fed into by arteries of highways, with trucks moving through empty streets at night carrying millions of live animals to be rendered into meat while we sleep. What kind of species are we that breeds other animals only to murder them? It is we who are being genetically altered by both our diet and our forced isolation from reality, and faster than Darwin could conceive.<sup>93</sup>

This capitalist hidden system of trucks moving through the dark of the night carrying animals to slaughter, unending, Coe makes visible through her imagery, to us, the viewers.

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77. <sup>92</sup> Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013),

<sup>93</sup> Coe, *Cruel, Bearing Witness to Animal Exploitation*, 23.

## CHAPTER 4 OBJECTIFICATION/TRANSGRESSIVE IMAGES: VIOLENCE AGAINST THE BODY OF THE “OTHER”

Following the use of the lens of Foucault’s institutional theories to examine Coe’s slaughterhouse imagery in Chapter Three, I return to ecofeminist theory to observe intersectional patterns that arise in the oppressive structures represented and analyzed here. Other scholarly conversations are also utilized by such theorists as Sunaura Taylor and Maneesha Deckha, whom align themselves with ecofeminist intersecting ideologies. As discussed in chapter two, their conversations reflect and join with ecofeminism in their discourse on current writings on speciesism and give a further lens.

Furthermore, as previously in Chapter Two, the idea of witnessing or bearing witness through the theories of Kelly Oliver is crucial to understand the narrative in Coe’s work. In the images analyzed here, Coe as visual reporter and witness shows us the objectification of the body in her imagery enabling the viewer to also bear witness. This experience of objectification through the visual in Coe’s work enable “[s]ubjectivity [...to be] experienced as the sense of agency and response-ability that are constituted in the infinite encounter with otherness, which is fundamentally ethical.”<sup>94</sup>

Sue Coe gives us *A Woman Walks Into A Bar- is Raped by Four Men Whilst Twenty Others Watch* (Fig. 6), *Meusling* (Fig. 7), and *The Veal Skinner* (Fig. 8) showing the viewer through her imagery the intersections of the brutality of power, comparing how these oppressive practices operate, “[...] dividing living beings into “Them and Us.”<sup>95</sup> These images of cruelty:

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<sup>94</sup> Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing, beyond recognition*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 17.

<sup>95</sup> Sue Coe, *Cruel, Bearing Witness to Animal Exploitation*, New York, OR Books, 2011), 146.

rape, skinning and horrific mutilation in embodied transgressive form, animal, woman, man, labor, reveal to us the broader narrative in her work. Coe strives, through her artistic practice to bring these intersections to us, revealing in her work that one oppression makes other subjugations stronger. Intersections of power, shown in the three images analyzed here, reveal practices that are not only unjust but continue formations of power within and across species boundaries.

Adams and Gruen express this artistic practice of Coe's in *Ecofeminism, Feminist Intersections With Other Animals And The Earth*, writing on ecofeminist ideology, "[e]cofeminist theory provides ethical guidance to challenge inequities arising along racial, gendered and species boundaries [...] the insights of ecofeminist are more important now than ever."<sup>96</sup> This intersectionality challenges and "[...] identifies the shortcomings with mainstream "animal rights" treatment of speciesism."<sup>97</sup> Ecofeminism in the past has been criticized for concerning itself with too many issues; however, the ideology has been strengthened and bought into mainstream acceptance by the continuing [...] destruction of the environment,"<sup>98</sup> thereby bringing again into scholarly conversation "[...] feminist theory, animal advocacy, and environmentalism [...]."<sup>99</sup>

Joining these intersections in addressing "[...] the various ways that sexism, heteronormativity, racism, colonialism, and ableism are informed by and support speciesism [...]"<sup>100</sup> are such scholars as Sunaura Taylor. In *Beasts of Burden* Taylor addresses the ways in which she understands animal objectification and disability are not in opposition but in fact

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<sup>96</sup> Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen, "Introduction", *Ecofeminism, Feminist Intersections with Other Animals & The Earth*, ed. Adams, Gruen (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 5.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

entwined. Writing of her experience as a disabled person she examines “[...] animal oppression through the lens of disability studies [...]”.<sup>101</sup> Finding them to have intersections in objectification she writes, “[...] the more I looked the more I found that the disabled body is everywhere in animal industries. I also found that the animal body is integral to the ways disabled bodies and minds are oppressed in the United States today.”<sup>102</sup> This oppression of the disabled body and mind Taylor speaks of joins other scholars in the current conversation that reflects on these boundaries of unjust practices towards a particular embodiment that result in objectification and violence.

Maneesha Deckha contributes to this discussion of objectification and ‘Othering’ of animals in her theories of postcolonial theory and ways in which animals are caught up in these “[w]estern frames of viewing [...]”.<sup>103</sup> She follows ecofeminist theology of intersecting roles of power that result in unjust practices toward animals but criticizes the lack of centralization of Western societies’ ways of viewing how animals are placed in the role of “Other.” This “Othering” that she centralizes places this viewpoint in the ways “the levels of violence animals are facing, [and] the immense difficulty of mobilizing humans to see such violence as violence [...]”.<sup>104</sup>

To return to Coe and imagery of brutality against the body, all of these intersecting ideologies can be used as the lens through which Coe’s visual constructions are analyzed. Coe’s visualizations of brutality against the body of women, animals, and workers through “Othering,”

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<sup>101</sup> Sunaura Taylor *Beasts of Burden, Animal and Disability Liberation*, (New York, The New Press, 2017), Prologue, xv.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Maneesha Deckha, “Justice and Nonviolence,” *Messy Eating, Conversations on Animals as Food*, ed. Samantha King, R. Scott Carey, Isabel Macquarrie, Victoria N Millious, Elaine M. Power, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 93.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 98.

reflects the effect of unjust practices on animals and labor and how those intersections reinforce power formations resulting in continuing oppressive practices that are entangled.

### **Analysis of Three Images by Sue Coe**

*Bedford, A Woman Walks Into A Bar - is Raped by Four Men on the Pool Table* relates to her imagery on factory farming and the inherent violence that is poured on the female animal body. Coe reports on an incident in which a woman stops outside a bar in her car to buy a packet of cigarettes in Bedford, Massachusetts. The resulting rape to her by four men whilst the others watch passively shows the level of brutality that allows women and their bodies to be regarded as “meat.” This objectivity inherent in the doctrines of sexism relates to all female bodies and further connects to her imagery on slaughterhouse and factory farms. On this violence that the female animal body is subjected to, Coe writes, “[...] factory farming is an iron boot, crushing the female, as ninety percent of factory- farmed animals are young females.”<sup>105</sup> Coe here in this image of rape, based on a real moment in time, can be viewed through Kelly Oliver’s theories of witnessing, Oliver proposes that “[...] ethical obligation is at the heart of subjectivity [and] is inherent in the process of witnessing. Moving from recognition to witnessing provides alternative notions of ethical, social and political responsibility entailed by this conception of subjectivity.”<sup>106</sup> We see this ethical responsibility through this visual representation of the incident. Coe becomes reporter and witness, she witnesses as a means to prevent the invisibility of brutality against the body, just as she does with her imagery of the slaughterhouse, an ethical obligation, she allows us, the viewer to further witness through her artistic practice. The viewer

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<sup>105</sup> Coe, *Cruel*, 11.

<sup>106</sup> Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing, beyond Recognition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 15.



also watches the witnessing of the men who sat passively by, thereby giving another layer to the role of the witness.

There is a history to this image of rape that furthers the conversation on practices that allow this invisibility to continue. Only half the image was reproduced in a magazine, the naked woman was shown but the men were erased, cut out. This censure which Coe refers to as “the rape of the image”<sup>107</sup> repeats the structures of power formations which the lens of ecofeminist theory attempts to illuminate.

In this scene, rendered in black and white, the viewer is given the position from the back of the bar according to the edges of the picture plane. We are slightly above looking down on the rape, slightly to the left facing the splayed body of the woman on the pool table. This viewpoint allows Coe to put the viewer as close as possible to the body opened up and pinned down in its fullest, whilst still allowing her to show us the line of men waiting to rape. She wants to make sure we understand the cold power of brutality with this allowance of space for those brutalizing calmly. One man in line has his pants partly down, the other looks down to his pants, is in the act of readying himself. Neither of the men waiting in line look at the woman, Coe shows them engrossed in only themselves purposefully: this method heightens ideas of objectification. With this image of sexual violence, ecofeminist theory also calls out the problems in the animal activist community. Adams and Gruen write on this invisibility of oppression, “Many ecofeminists have discovered that this community has been particularly resistant to addressing issues of oppression within its ranks, including racism, sexual harassment, and sexual violence [...]”<sup>108</sup> Ecofeminism addresses sexual violence within the animal rights activism community, the ideology aligning and addressing Coe’s image of patriarchal violence.

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<sup>107</sup> Sue Coe, *Sound Recordings*, (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Open Ends, 1960- 2000).

<sup>108</sup> Carol J. Adams, Lori Gruen, “Groundwork” *Ecofeminism*, 34.

Coe has directed the viewer by means of light to the unclothed women splayed out and pinned down on the pool table. She gives the source of light by means of a light fixture hung from the bars ceiling, its cord out of the picture plane moving in an unnatural position. This enables the viewer to see the scene clearly without distraction but at the same time she uses the source to direct our eye. By using the light fixture to illuminate the woman's body she infers that the action is clear, not only to the viewer but to the perpetrators- the light, not from a natural source but the particular bright light that shines on a pool table so that the game can be seen clearly. There is a bottle of alcohol standing on the pool table to the upper left of the woman's head and pool balls laying all around her. This imagery is of nonchalance as shown by the rendering of objects. The bottle and pool balls relate to the woman viewed also as object, laying around for the men's use, as Coe makes clear in her visual description of the environment on the pool table surrounding her. In this witnessing of objectification, Oliver defines witnessing as,

*Witnessing*, is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as the action of bearing witness or giving testimony, the fact of being present and observing something; witnessing from witness, defined as to bear witness, to testify to give evidence, to be a spectator or auditor of something, to be present as an observer, to see with one's own eyes. It is important to note that has both the juridical connotations of seeing with one's own eyes and the religious connotations of testifying to that which cannot be seen, in other words bearing witness. It is this double meaning that makes witnessing such a powerful alternative to recognition in reconceiving subjectivity and therefore ethical relations.<sup>109</sup>

Coe bears witness, testifies, so that we the viewer may also bear witness through this image. We can look at this particular representation of rape through Oliver as meaning "[...] to bear witness to something in itself that cannot be seen [...]"<sup>110</sup> what cannot be seen is the subjective experience. This reflects all forms of procured invisibility that enables sexual violence. When

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<sup>109</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing, beyond Recognition*, 16.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

you objectify one you strengthen and give power to other objectifications resulting in violence, what Gaard refers to as “[...] the entanglement of alienation, hierarchy and domination.”<sup>111</sup>

Coe shows us in the image three men holding her down. One man holds her hair and her arm down at the same time, another holds her arm with both his hands putting his knee on the pool table for more strength and leverage. The attacker has his knee pushed down on her leg as he assaults her. Again, Coe shows none of the men looking at her but rather intent on assault. Of the eleven men she puts into the image only one takes a cursory glance at the rape over his shoulder whilst he is busy with something else, a slot machine or jukebox. The other ten look around the room, or at the pool table. All the men watching are rendered by Coe as completely relaxed. Three are sitting on bar stools at the bar. One is smoking and drinking, his body slouching, easy, one looks off to the left and one holds an object and looks into the distance. The bartender washes out a glass as if it’s just another quiet evening of pool and drinking; on his tee-shirt we can see in capitals the word BIG, as if it is part of some slogan, the rest of the text hidden but it makes either a sexual connection or ideas of the group dynamic of violence. He stares at the ceiling, not even at his chore, it’s as if Coe has purposely put him, rather than just passively looking away, actively looking away. The others are indifferent, but he moves his head to remove the sight, though his hands continue to be dexterous. There is one last man that Coe puts in the image and this person is the most hidden, quiet. He is in shadow with his body obscured by the open door as he holds the door handle and stands behind the door, his face looking up at us the viewer. Coe shows him as the only one looking at the viewer to heighten the image of the power he holds. Although he takes up much less space than the others and is partially obscured by the door, Coe shows him as the only one looking up at the viewer with an

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<sup>111</sup> Greta Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books, 2017), xxii.

expression of connection, the others are blank faced. This man stands holding the open door to the bar and the viewer can see the outside world, the car, the road, streetlights buildings, safety. At first glance he appears to be holding the door open, in some way enabling some kind of freedom, maybe escape or someone from the outside may see or enter the scene to help. He is the smallest figure, but he holds the most power by being so close to, and at the threshold of escape. As viewers we then realize that he is in fact closing the door, the timing with the rest of the scene seems off, but it is a strong visual representation from Coe how sexual violence works: power formations in groups protect and kept invisible furthering and enhancing oppressions. Again we can deconstruct this image through Adams, who writes in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, “One of the mythologies of a rapist culture is that women not only ask for rape, they also enjoy it; that they are continually seeking out the butchers knife”.<sup>112</sup> Here Adams is using the knife and butcher referring to cultural implications that the “[...] meat metaphors rape victims choose to describe their experience suggest that rape is parallel and related to consumption, consumption both of images of women and of literal, animal flesh.”<sup>113</sup>

Coe centralizes with the use of light the figure of the woman. She puts in no sign of where her clothes went or how they were removed. She draws her completely naked to express the absolute vulnerability of the body which makes the contrast of the men’s clothed and partially clothed bodies even more powerful. The woman is rendered almost as if she is Christ on the Cross, her body is stylized, emaciated. Her hands are open palms up and although there is no evidence of stigmata, the idea of sacrifice, of bodily sacrifice to patriarchy and its results of sexual violence are strongly suggested. Greta Gaard in *Critical Ecofeminism* writes that

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<sup>112</sup> Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat, A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 35.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

“[s]acrifice is effectively a nonreciprocal, imbalanced and instrumentalized relationship between privileged and subordinated groups[...].”<sup>114</sup> Coe gives us this image of sacrifice and unjustness that can be read through the ideology of ecofeminism and “[...] the interstructuring of sexism, speciesism, racism and classism through terms like “sacrifice”- historically used to legitimate ritualized killing of nonhuman animals, young girls and slaves [...].”<sup>115</sup>

In *Muesling* (Fig. 2) Coe gives us again a visual of brutality against the body of the female. The act of Muesling is removing strips of skin from the breech area of female sheep with sharp shears, specially made for this process, without anesthetic. Again, she places the viewer above the scene looking down. Of the three workers none look back at us but rather at the brutal act they are taking part in. However, Coe puts the faces of the first four sheep not only looking at the viewer but two actively crying out at the hideous pain and brutality inflicted on their bodies. She wants us to know that this invisible practice exists, sanctioned by law; she is asking us to witness, to know. She writes, “Human beings who attempt to speak for non-human animals feel isolated from the majority of their own species that routinely exploit and kill animals. Their empathy for others is the polar opposite of power and control.”<sup>116</sup> Historically power and control of the female body across species, race and class has been allowed, here, in this image, whilst alive and held down. This image of cruelty against the body of the female is part of the invisibility of institutional violent practices against farmed animals. With this image Coe recognizes that “[w]hile we have the basic capacity to empathize, compassion as a *moral* commitment must be developed”.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Greta Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 15.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Sue Coe, *Cruel, Bearing Witness to Animal Exploitation*, 10.

<sup>117</sup> Deane Curtin, “Compassion and Being Human,” *Ecofeminism, Feminist Intersections with Other Animals & The Earth*, ed. Adams and Gruen, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 44.

Coe shows that the sheep are herded into an enclosed pen where one of the workers holds the next one in line down. The sheep are to be placed in metal holding pens, their bodies upside down and the female genitalia exposed for cutting, legs locked, hooves in the air, only their heads can twist or move. Coe places the bodies of frightened exposed sheep in a never-ending row, moving from the front to the back of the picture plane, a visual suggestion that this line of production and misery is ongoing, this is not a one-time brutality. Body parts, the most sensitive area of a female body, are shown hacked off and strewn idly around the feet of the men and the floor of the enclosure. The parts pile up on top of one another like trash. They are bloodied to match the red blood on the mutilated body of the sheep. The only color in the piece is the red of the blood, it directs the viewer eye and soul to understand that this is a living breathing sentient body of someone. The red is used as a visual to heighten the strength of the reading of the overall picture plane, other colors apart from black, white and red would diffuse the message of the image. Although Coe uses red in an intuitional manner to direct the viewers gaze to the wounds and body parts of the mangled sheep, in their findings on the color red, Kunieki, Pilarczyk and Wichary found that “[..] the primary context of red seems to be an emotionally arousing one, not one that is calm and neutral.”<sup>118</sup> Similarly they found that “[...] provided that signaling is one of the most important functions of color, red should affect attention, particularly in emotional conditions.”<sup>119</sup> Coe uses this signaling technique of the color red to transmit the most important information in her image, that of the mutilated, brutalized genitalia of the female sheep and body parts laying around the feet of the men.

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<sup>118</sup> Kunieki, Pilarczyk, and Wichary, “The Color Red Attracts Attention in an Emotional Context,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, an ERP study, April 29, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fn-hum.2015.00212>

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

One of the workers in a further act of cruelty is outside of the pen holding the sheep upside down. Coe shows him in the act of sending the sheep bloodied and dripping on their way by kicking out at them. He holds a pair of sharp shears designed for the purpose by his right side covered in blood and Coe places the foot that is kicking at them right in line with the cut raw painful area. This is to remind us that brutality against farmed animals does not stop with this one act of cruelty but is endemic in the very nature of how we “Other” animals.

Through feminism and the broader range of ecofeminism we can look at this imagery in terms of social justice. Deckha writes,

From a spirit and collective struggle for social justice, it asks feminists, in order to avoid inconsistency and partial analyses, to subject the narrative and discourses that sustain species difference in our society to the same close scrutiny they receive when those narratives and discourses articulate claims about human differences. But while the argument privileges reason and logic, it calls upon our affective responses as well to imagine animals as possible candidates for personhood and rights, and, further, to question why being human should be a qualification for justice. And while the argument is directed at humans committed to humans, the goal is to motivate people to include animals in their ethical horizons not merely because it will create better strategies against human oppression, but because a line that once seemed immutable now wavers.<sup>120</sup>

Coe provides visibility to these wavering boundaries of ethics. Not only against the procured invisibility of unjust practices against farmed animals, but the imagery has a narrative of placing the viewer in the space, asking us to consider the idea of human rights, not as supreme beings as culture teaches, but rather that we place our bodies in that of the sheep and ask ourselves of this violation.

In *Veal Skinner* Coe uses the lithographic technique of drawing to show the face of labor and the faceless body of the baby animal. Veal calves are taken from their mothers immediately

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<sup>120</sup> Maneesha Deckha, “The Saliency of Species Difference for Feminist Theory,” *17 Hastings Women’s L. J. 1* (2006). Available at [https:// repository.uchastings.edu/hwlj/vol17/iss.1.4](https://repository.uchastings.edu/hwlj/vol17/iss.1.4).

and put in solitude until they are deemed big enough to kill and ready for consumers. Coe gives us a visual of consumption. The mother, the labor and the baby, part of the chain of the economic system that turns bodies into meat.

This is a beautiful gentle drawing that belies the narrative. Rendered monochromatically in black and white, the use of which reminds the viewer that blood has drained from the body of the baby, now just a dead torso. Front and back legs cut off, skin can be seen hanging from the front legs: the head removed. The worker looks out at us, his legs cut off below the knee in the image, mirroring the disassembled body of the veal calf, suggesting both the worker and the baby's lifeless body are caught up in practices that mutilate rather than respect life. The veal skinner's body is all black, just the outline of his form describes his body. In contrast his hands and face are drawn fuller, with compassion and care. The hands holding the body are large and are holding the back of the veal calf with an expressive gentleness rather than a roughness. The hand however shows the reality of years of removing hide from flesh: three of his fingers are missing. Coe, by means of not only lighter spaces within the drawing but the sensitivity with which she has drawn the hand, forearm and face of the worker together with the torso of the baby, makes the hands one which is central to the gaze of the viewer. The three missing fingers are part of the hand that holds the mutilated body of another, thus pairing labor with ideas of workers as "[...] the second victims of the meat industry, their life spans cut short by poor nutrition, lack of health care, lack of access to fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains, and, if their jobs are within the "food" industry, because they work in chemical soaked fields and inside slaughterhouses."<sup>121</sup> Coe shows us his face, it is turned towards the viewer and falling to one side as if moving away from years of this kind of crushing work, his mouth is turned down

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<sup>121</sup> Coe, *Cruel*, 10.



set rigidly, sunken cheeks, eyes are surrounded by dark areas. Eisenman writes of this image, “[...] he has been engaged for years, perhaps decades, in removing hide from the bodies of just killed baby cows. Are his mind and soul as mangled as his hands?”<sup>122</sup> This image can be viewed through the ideology of intersectionality of oppressions that forms ecofeminist theory, stressing “[...] the need to attend to context over universal judgments [...].”<sup>123</sup> In this context Coe gives us in the *Veal Skinner* as an image of the dualities in the effects of commodification, capitalism and objectification.

If we look at the *Veal Skinner* through Sigfried Giedion’s *Mechanism takes Command*, we can follow the route through the history of mechanization that tried to employ machines to skin carcasses. These inventions never produced the same effect as a human skinner: “Only the organic can conform to the organic.”<sup>124</sup> This ability of the organic to skin the organic shows in the imagery through the centralizing of the two bodies. There is no production line, no conveyor belt system, no wheel or cogs. The background is empty, there are lines and shadows which suggest not only the artists hand searching for the image but the history of the calves that went before and are now erased.

Adams terms this erasure “[...] absent referent [...].”<sup>125</sup> Animals’ lives precede and enable the existence of meat. If animals are alive, they cannot be meat. Thus, a dead body replaces the live animal. “Without animals, there would be no meat eating, yet they are absent from the act of eating meat because they have been transformed into food.”<sup>126</sup> This erasure of the calf is particularly harrowing, even hardened workers find it hard to kill babies. I read another

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<sup>122</sup> Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Ghosts of our Meat*, (New York, Distributed Art Publishers), 27.

<sup>123</sup> Adams, Gruen, *Ecofeminism*, introduction, 1.

<sup>124</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *mechanization takes command*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 240.

<sup>125</sup> Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 21.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

form of erasure in this image: the erasure of the mother, milked until she is no longer viable, she will then be sent to slaughter whilst her calf stands next in line for a life of violence. Continuing to show how living animals are removed from meat, Adams discusses the language we use to further this disassociation regarding this particular image, “[...] when we eat animals we change the way we talk about them, for instance, we no longer talk about baby animals but about veal or lamb.”<sup>127</sup> Using the term veal, we again employ what Adams names “absent referent,” babies become absent through the definition of language which again erases their embodiment.

### **Conclusion**

Through these three images, *A Woman Walks into A Bar*, *Muesling*, and *Veal Skinner*, Coe gives us not just three separate images but visually a way to see the intersectionality of brutality and unjust practices. Animals, women, labor, are all shown to be caught up in patriarchy, capitalism, mechanization, consumerism and economics. As Adam writes, “[...] the practice of making connections between the oppression of women, people of color, indigenous people, workers and other animals has been going on for a long time.”<sup>128</sup> Although the connections between intersecting oppressions have been made earlier, finally this ideology has moved into mainstream writings. Adams, Gruen, Taylor and Deckha plus many more scholars are joining together to bring ideas of oppressions and discriminations meeting: one oppression fostering and strengthening others. It no longer makes sense to consider race and postcolonialism (Deckha), disability studies (Taylor), or ecofeminism (Adams and Gruen) separately. These women and scholars mentioned here recognize the overlap and entanglement of issues that lead to unjust practices against the “Other,” and refuse to allow them to be presented in opposition.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Adams, Gruen, *Ecofeminism*, Introduction, 2.

The theory of Ecofeminism “helps us imagine healthier relationships: stresses the need to attend to context over universal judgements: and argues for the importance of care as well as justice, emotion as well as rationality, in working to undo the logic of domination and its material and practical implications.”<sup>129</sup> Adams and Gruen refer to this ideology as having “[...] significant insights.”<sup>130</sup> These significant insights have agency and force and provide a political blue-print for future scholars to re-assess ideas of intersecting persecutions.

The viewer has powerful reminders in these three images what happens when we continue exclusionary formations of, “Them” and “Us.” We see that oppressions are intertwined, the imagery embodying objectifications, revealing to us the brutality in single images, which form as one to reveal overlapping issues. We can view this through the lens of Taylor, whose understanding of the disabled body and the animal body bring fresh insights into the intersections that oppress and allow violence against the body. Having her own body compared negatively to animals’ bodies, she writes:

Animals make powerful insults precisely because we have imagined them as devoid of subjective and emotional lives that would obligate us to have responsibility toward them. Animals are a category of beings that in the Western tradition we have decided that we rarely, if ever, have duties toward—we can buy them, sell them, and discard them like objects. To call someone an animal is to render them a being to whom one does not have responsibilities, a being that can be shamelessly objectified.<sup>131</sup>

If we view the imagery through Taylor’s writings on the disabled body and why animal names make such powerful insults, we can appreciate how strongly objectification works. The dead calf, the brutalized woman, the mangled fingers and harrowed face of the worker and the

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Sunaura Taylor, *Beasts of Burden, Animal and Disability Liberation*, 108.

mutilated, ripped and bleeding genital area of the sheep show us these hidden practices and reveal the true nature of the violence that “Othering” brings. Maneesha Deckha gives voice to these intersections in imagery:

Cultural critics should be wary of excluding animals because the justificatory strategies that exclude animals today share an intimate history with those that exclude(d) marginalized humans. More precisely, the social meanings ascribed to abjected animals’ bodies were and are generated from the same discourses which produce(d) abjected human bodies. I wish to stress that I am not claiming that all oppressions emerge from the same historical trajectories and are identical in operation. Indeed, the difference makes is differentiated depending on the difference.<sup>132</sup>

We have looked at Coe’s three images through these ideas of barbarity through justification. The animals’ bodies, Deckha argues, shares the history of marginalization that allowed cruelty towards the abjected and objectified body of the human.

The works here reveal what Rina Arya calls “[...] the intimate relationship that artists have with transgression”.<sup>133</sup> These powerful transgressive images analyzed here are hard to view, but “Art and narrative offer additional channels for hope, vision and fresh perspectives, capable of transforming political, economic and social relations”.<sup>134</sup>

As Susan Sontag says: “[i]n each instance, the gruesome invites us to be either spectators or cowards, unable to look.”<sup>135</sup> Oliver gives us the subjective reason to look, and, as Coe does through her work, to bear witness.

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<sup>132</sup> Maneesha Deckha, “The Saliency of Species Difference For Feminist Theory”, 19.

<sup>133</sup> Rina Arya, *Abjection and Representation*, (New York, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2014), 193.

<sup>134</sup> Greta Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 185.

<sup>135</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, (New York, Picador, 2003), 42.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

This thesis fills in scholarship, not only on the lack of critical theory on Coe's imagery, but also joins the current conversation on speciesism through this analysis. Through the strength and power of imagery presented and analyzed here shows Coe's dedication to reveal the intersections of violence: violence against animals, women, labor and sentient beings under the ways of seeing that produces "Othering." This way of seeing and knowing forms patterns of unjust practices, oppressions, resulting in brutality against bodies and lives of others. Going into the slaughterhouse and drawing firsthand gives Coe a unique witness position, one that she shares with us through her imagery so that we may "[...] transform the notion of recognition beyond its limited visual- based -metaphors".<sup>136</sup> Coe, although presenting through the visual narrative, is able to give the viewer a recognition of subjectivity "[...] beyond the humiliation, subordination, and objectification of the gaze."<sup>137</sup> She also presents us with depictions of violence that result from a reporter position, for example, *Woman Walks into A Bar,- is Raped by Four Men on a Pool Table* (Fig 6). Furthermore, she shows us the horrifying results of mechanization that result in animals processed inhumanely and as quickly as possible, in both factory farming techniques and industrialized slaughterhouse practices, as in *Pigs Eaten Alive by Maggots* and *Phactory Pharm* (Figs. 4 and 5), revealing objectification and the resulting disassociation that allows animals to be turned into meat. In this same manner, labor—the workers—are portrayed as brutalized, themselves mangled in the mechanization process, speed inherent to the industrialized complex of the slaughterhouse, the brutalized brutalizing, as in *Veal*

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<sup>136</sup> Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing, beyond recognition*, (London, University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

*Skinner* (Fig 8). The intersectionality of power formations analyzed in these images reveal an artist committed to seeing and knowing how brutality flourishes in the striations of domination, and an artist who strives through representation and artistic practice to bring these power formations into visibility, so the viewer can further comprehend acts of dominion and can choose to take more personal responsibility within their own choices.

Within the intersectional methods of analysis and imagery, ecofeminist and feminist ideology is used to “[...] provide ethical guidance to challenge inequities arising [...]”<sup>138</sup> through gendered, labor, and “species boundaries.”<sup>139</sup> Adams in *The Sexual politics of Meat* uses the term “absent referent”<sup>140</sup> to examine how the animal is made absent through slaughter, meat providing a material form that reflects the animals’ body by an absence. By including analysis of the raped woman and slaughterhouse imagery of dead animals these interactions and intersections can trace “parallel trajectories.”<sup>141</sup> Adams writes,

I propose a cycle of objectification, fragmentation and consumption, which links butchering and sexual violence in our culture. Objectification permits an oppressor to view another being as an object. The oppressor violates this being by object-like treatment: e.g., the rape of women that denies women freedom to say no, or the butchering of animals that converts animals from living breathing beings into dead objects. This process allows fragmentation, or brutal dismemberment, and finally consumption. [...] Consumption is the fulfillment of oppression, the annihilation of will, of separate identity. So too with language: a subject first is viewed, or objectified through metaphor. Through fragmentation the object is severed from its ontological meaning. Finally, consumed, it exists only through what it represents. The consumption of the referent reiterates its annihilation as a subject of importance in itself.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Adams, Gruen, *Ecofeminism, Feminist Interactions with Other Animals and the Earth*, (New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), introduction, 5.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat, A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, (New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 26.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

Here, Adams uses the ontology of metaphor. Objectification, first through metaphoric language such as women as subject treated as “[...] a piece of meat [...]”<sup>143</sup> and further, animals, woman and labor are consumed by the annihilation of subjectivity into object, reflecting the imagery analyzed here.

In such depictions of the mechanization process now inherent in the industrialized process in slaughterhouses, and factory farming, as in *Factory Pharm*, *Wheel of Fortune*, *Today's Pig is Tomorrow's Bacon*, and *Pigs Eaten Alive by Maggots*, the representations are viewed through multiple lenses. *Mechanization Takes Command*, takes us through “the mechanization of death.”<sup>144</sup> Ever faster, the assembly production line moves, the slaughtering and disassembly of bodies moving from the meat packers of Cincinnati to the production line of assembling cars, industry using the slaughterhouse as model for manufacture. *Wheel of Fortune*, describes visually what Giedion refers to as “[...] murder machinery [...]”<sup>145</sup> he gives us the relationship “[...] between mechanization and death, [...], both are involved in the mass production of meat.”<sup>146</sup> The objectification inherent in the images of animals caught up in this industrialized slaughter can be read through this analysis, “[t]he symptom of full mechanization is the assembly line, wherein the entire factory is consolidated into a synchronous organism.”<sup>147</sup> Patterson in *Eternal Treblinka* continues the lens with his writings on every day genocide for farm animals, regarding the faster and faster line speeds in slaughterhouses, he reports such witness testimony described as the “[...] cruel, fast, tightly run, profit driven system of torture

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>144</sup> Giedion, *mechanization takes command*, 240.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Giedion, 5.

and murder in which animals are hardly thought of as living beings and are presumed not to matter in terms of their suffering and death.”<sup>148</sup>

With these lenses we can take illustrations such as the *Veal Skinner* and look at how the image can be deconstructed by considering labor as well as the young that are caught up in slaughterhouse practices. Coe shows us the overlapping mutilations in her depictions. Veal is babies. As one scholar stated: “Since the meat industry sends animals to slaughter as soon as they have enough flesh on them, (and not a day later), these very young animals live out only a small fraction of their natural lives. [...] Veal calves are four months old when they leave their crate and take their first walk to the truck that takes them to the slaughterhouse.”<sup>149</sup> The veal in the image Coe gives us is rendered invisible and difficult to recognize in death and bodily mutilation. Beheaded, its torso is hung from a rope by its sawn-off stubs of legs, the word veal used to cover up the unappetizing fact that the body is that of a baby, a way to disassociate; mechanization neutralizes killing. The worker, the skinner, an older man, holds the calf’s body, eyes closed, head drooping to one side. His fingers are missing from the hand up to the knuckles, showing the mutilation of the bodies of the workers also inherent in slaughterhouses. Both bodies are rendered mangled, “so beneath the many differences there is sameness,”<sup>150</sup> mirroring the effects on both animals and workers of “[.] subordination to the machine.”<sup>151</sup>

Labor in slaughterhouses ruins the body. Coe gives us this firsthand experience of watching workers at the conveyor belt system.

They are cutting and chopping, slicing and throwing the neat bits on the top belt. When I watch this, I can’t believe humans are capable of this type of labor. It’s just so hard. The conveyor goes so fast. I know they are making about 1,500 cuts

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<sup>148</sup> Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka*, (New York, Lantern Books, 2002), 64, note 29.

<sup>149</sup> Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka*, (New York, Lantern Books, 2002), 116.

<sup>150</sup> Tom Regan, *Dead Meat*, “The Burden of Complicity”, (New York, Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995),

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<sup>151</sup> Giedion, *mechanization takes command*, 126.



an hour. I understand why these workers get carpal tunnel syndrome, because these are the same forceful movements over and over.<sup>152</sup>

She spends time with the veal skinner, realizing the cost to his body too of industrialized killing, observing, “an elderly man, the skinner, waits [...]. The veal slides down, and the skinner expertly separates the hide from flesh. The furry hides fall to the floor like cast off dresses. I look at the skinner’s hands: there is something wrong. I look more closely and see each finger has been severed at the joint - he has only stumps and thumbs.”<sup>153</sup> We can read the starkness of the image, the focus and mirroring of the two bodies, the tiredness of the skinner, the mutilated hand, the calves body strung up by sawn off legs in Giedion’s description of the assembly line and labor.

The assembly line and scientific management can be put to work within quite opposite economic systems. Their implications, like those of mechanization as a whole, are not unilaterally tied to any one system. They reach into the depths of a basic human problem-labor- and the historical verdict will depend on how far one may expect the human being to become part of an automaton.<sup>154</sup>

From this assessment of the production line, we can see Coe’s representation of The *Veal Skinner* as an unrelatable organic part in the cogs, belts, hooks and wheels, as is the calf. Both pay with their bodies, the calf further, its very life and by extension that of the mother, caught up in the science, rational and profit of mechanization.

One of Coe’s most powerful narratives is *Intensive Hog Farm Built at the Site of Lete* [sic] *Concentration Camp*, (Fig. 2). This returns to ecofeminist ideology, that intersections in oppressive forces overlap and enhance power formations, and we can read the image through these intertwined forces. In this iteration we see the Romani people watching the marching of

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<sup>152</sup> Sue Coe, *Dead Meat*, “Abattoir-Montreal,” 51- 3.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>154</sup> Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*, 126,

the pig front and foremost. Held up by two workers, the pig shown bipedal to mirror the human gait, the image contrasts brutalities to the body and references the Romani people and animals objectified as the ‘Other’. In reading Deckha’s challenge on the subject of anthropocentrism, we see how these illustrated power formations “[...] make visible the connections of human-based oppressions with species hierarchies”.<sup>155</sup> This image of a killing machine built on the historic site of genocide further brings into focus Deckha’s ideas on the construction of hierarchies. She writes,

Species and ideas of humanness are social constructs similar to other intrahuman identity social locations that should be similarly deconstructed for the differences that are denied in order to facilitate one type of categorization over another. The “human” is a term that has been both deliberately constructed as exclusive of some humans and all animals despite valid and compelling reasons to alter its defining contours.<sup>156</sup>

Here we can view the image through the fact that “humanness” and perceived lack thereof is a social construct and therefore follows that the “animal” is further constructed. With these constructions of identity the bodies in the image can be seen to be brutalized because of these false “[...] product[s] of biological facts filtered through cultural discourses”<sup>157</sup>, thereby rendering the body as neutral with “no social meaning of superiority or inferiority until we construct it as such and choose to “see” the difference”.<sup>158</sup> However, these “[...]biological differences” that cause us to “see” inferiority in some constructed identities of people and animals give rise to the dual atrocities shown at the site of Lete concentration camp.

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<sup>155</sup> Maneesha Deckha, *Messy Eating, Conversations on Animals as Food*, “Justice and Nonviolence”, ed, Samantha King, R. Scott Carey, Isabel Macquarrie, Victoria N. Millious, Elaine M. Power (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 90.

<sup>156</sup> Maneesha Deckha, *The Salience of Species Difference for Feminist Theory*, 17 *Hastings Women’s L.* 1, (2006). Available at <https://repository.unchastings.edu/hw1j/vol17/iss1/2>, 19.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

At the site of *My Mother and I watch a Pig Escape From the Slaughterhouse* (Fig. 1), the figure of the child and her mother, transposed from the real event outside of the slaughterhouse into the imagined cave-like world of killing can be read through cultural observations on power. The two figures, mother and child are safe in this world, their belonging and acceptance in the social formations outside of the slaughterhouse allows them visibility. This cultural and social acceptance that allows the image to construct these two identities with those of the workers can be seen to contrast with the belief system that judicates and perpetuates violence against animals. This acceptance reveals “[...] the nature of power- diffuse, scattered, and contradictory, mediated by contingencies of time, space and culture.”<sup>159</sup>

Coe’s imagery promotes our understanding of speciesism and other forms of cultural and socially constructed identities. These power formations are best left to her own words, which, as her images give us, the viewer, a narrative of brutality rendered visible in intersecting oppressions.

Barbarity inflicted upon animals can spill into hatred for our own species. Written on a stockyard gate confining a herd of goats is the graffiti, “god help us we cannot change”. We need to rework concepts of good and evil, for after witnessing so much cruelty, all that comes to the stunned mind is that the perpetrators are evil. Theodor Adorno says, “Auschwitz begins whenever someone looks at a slaughterhouse and thinks: they are only animals”. My concern since being a child and growing up next to a hog farm and a block away from a slaughterhouse, is what goes on behind the scenes, what is being concealed, and how are we complicit by our silence.<sup>160</sup>

This thesis brings to light Coe’s artistry, not only in the images analyzed here, but by extension Coe’s whole body of work. Not only are the images here masterful in their line work, use of light, narration and representation, but Coe can be observed to have been leading the field of

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>160</sup> Sue Coe, *Cruel, Bearing Witness to Animal Exploitation*, 23.

scholarly theory in visual form throughout. Her work reveals to viewers multiple overlapping oppressive practices; practices she always understood to be connected.

## Illustrations



Fig. 1. Sue Coe, *My Mother and I Watch a Pig Escape from the Slaughterhouse*, 2006, oil on canvas. Copyright, Sue Coe. Courtesy of Galerie St. Etienne, New York.



Fig. 2. Sue Coe, *Intensive Hog Farm Built at the Site of Lete [sic] Concentration Camp*, 2010, gouache, watercolor and collaged lithograph. Copyright, Sue Coe. Courtesy of Galerie St. Etienne, New York.



Fig 3. Sue Coe, *Wheel of Fortune, Today's Pig is Tomorrow's Bacon*, 1989, mixed media.  
Copyright, Sue Coe. Courtesy of Galerie St. Etienne, New York.



Fig 4. Sue Coe, *Pigs Eaten Alive by Maggots*, 2010, graphite, gouache and watercolor. Copyright, Sue Coe. Courtesy of Galerie St. Etienne, New York.





Fig. 5. Sue Coe, *Factory Pharm*, 2004, graphite. Copyright, Sue Coe. Courtesy of Galerie St. Etienne, New York.



Fig. 6. Sue Coe, *Bedford, Woman walks into a Bar- is Raped by Four Men on the Pool Table*, 1983. Copyright Sue Coe. Courtesy of Galerie St. Etienne, New York.



Fig. 7. Sue Coe, *Muesling: Cutting off the Vaginal Folds with no Anesthetic*, 2004, graphite, gouache and watercolor. Copyright, Sue Coe. Courtesy of Galerie St Etienne, New York.



Fig. 8. Sue Coe, *Veal Skinner*, 1991, graphite. Copyright, Sue Coe. Courtesy of Galerie St. Etienne, New York.

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