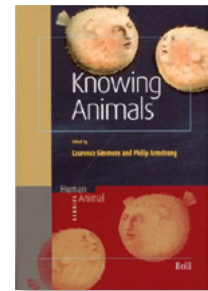


## ENGLISH TEXTS

### Extended Written Texts (Non-Fiction)

Simmons, Laurence and Armstrong, Philip (eds). *Knowing Animals*. Brill (2007). Extracts from chapter 5 – *Farming Images: Animal Rights and Agribusiness in the Field of Vision* (pp. 121 & 122). Armstrong, Philip.



The website and marketing of KFC worldwide, for example, invariably excludes images of live chickens, showing instead the familiar, kindly face of Colonel Harper Sanders amongst his pots and pans. Indeed, KFC posts a disclaimer, repeated on various pages on the site, that seeks to distance its brand from the live animal altogether:

KFC does not own or operate any poultry farms or processing facilities. Instead, it purchases chickens from, at any given time, approximately 16 different suppliers who collectively operate up to 52 facilities around the country. (KFC, “About KFC”)

In place of these distant and invisible animals, KFC’s website offers welfare-related assurances that display the generous latitude characteristic of such codes of practice, with all the weight placed on terms amply open to subjective interpretation: “Birds... must be treated in a humane manner... Suppliers must provide adequate space... [and] should formulate feed in order to deliver proper nutrition” (KFC, “About KFC”).

Such tactics again evoke the banishment of the animal to a non-visual realm far distant from the viewing consumer. Even while displaying the industry’s apparent response to (a selection of) animal advocates’ demands, welfare-friendly branding reifies animals as products more completely than ever before. Each reassurance of partial good practice rhetorically contributes to the animal’s representation as no more than a series of cuts and processes, reducing it—even prior to slaughter—into a collection of body parts and husbandry practices. Just as in scientific writing, where “the living animal becomes coded as an assemblage of parts” (Birke 1994, 7), KFC’s Poultry Welfare Guidelines are described under headings such as “Breeding,” “Raising,” “Comfort and Shelter,” “Catching,” “Handling,” “Transport,” “Stunning,” “Humane Slaughter” (KFC, “About KFC”). The animal is no longer even “what meat was before it was meat” (Berger 1971, 1042); rather, it is always already meat.

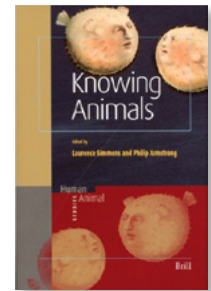
#### *A Taste of History*

Actually, there is a name for what these birds were before they were meat. The ubiquitous but unseen animals frying around the globe in the outlets of Colonel Sanders’s franchisers are usually termed ‘broiler chickens’, or even less euphemistically, ‘meat chicks’. These are also the birds whose bodies fill the frozen chicken sections of supermarket iceboxes. They thus have the dubious honor of being at the same time the rarest of beasts to be seen live on camera, and yet the most prolifically visible in death.

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Even in the absence of visual images, the plight of the battery hen is easily conveyed by other strategies familiar to animal advocates, for example that of theriomorphism: asking the human viewer to imagine themselves in the animal's place (Baker 2001, 232). A classic instance of this tactic is provided by a recent cinema advertisement shown in New Zealand cinemas in 2002. The advertisement asked viewers if they were "sitting comfortably" before inviting them to "imagine that the area you are sitting in is a wire cage," and so on (SAFE 2002). This commentary was accompanied by a visual sequence showing only abstract representations of wire, eggs, and feathers: indeed, the condition for acceptance of this advertisement by cinemas was that it should not contain any actual footage of animals *at all*. This, then, is the obvious advantage of theriomorphism: it offers a way of visualizing the invisible.

The situation of the broiler chicken, however, is hard to visualize either by means of the emotive snapshot image, or via the imaginative effects of theriomorphism. A photograph taken from inside a broiler chicken shed simply does not look that bad. Broilers are usually well-feathered; they are by definition plump; they are not kept in cages but in huge flocks; they are amply provided with food and are housed under dim lighting and in warm conditions. To the uninformed eye—that is, that of the average consumer, systematically screened from detailed information about meat production methods—they look both comfortable and healthy (especially by comparison with their scrawny, featherless, mad-eyed, imprisoned relatives in battery sheds).

Establishment of a theriomorphic identification between human and broiler chicken proves equally problematic. As Franklin puts it, in animal rights and welfare literature,

the language used to describe the broilers is, unintentionally no doubt, less humanized. . . . [T]he sympathy of the readers for such animals is blurred by the language of human deviance imputed to the birds: "Selective breeding for 'greedy' birds, and the addition of growth-promoters to the feed, have ensured an end-product twice as heavy at seven weeks as *chickens should be*—and were, before the poultry and *drug* industries *moved* in. The result? PROFITS for producers and SUFFERING for the *sick* and *deformed* birds" . . . Drug-crazed and greedy, deformed and unnatural in genetic make-up, practice and body, this highly manufactured animal accrues the aberrant qualities that derive from its origins in the wicked manipulation of nature. So far removed from true nature, humans can react to it with

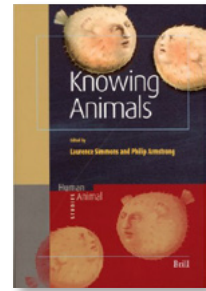
the same moral indifference as other manufactured "products." (Franklin 1999, 139, his emphasis)

Unable to rely on immediacy—the instant shock or sympathy generated by a snapshot or theriomorphic image—animal advocates have to find other strategies in their attempt to bring the issue of the broiler chicken into public view. Most importantly, they must attempt the return to visibility of that most easily obscured and unpalatable of knowledges—that of history.

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the British RSPCA uses the internet's unprecedented reach and versatility to intervene in the global visual archive in a different but compatible way. The webpage on factory farmed chickens centers upon a striking GIF image, which shows a sequence of snapshots in the growth of a meat chick, compared with that of an egg-layer: both are shown at three days of age, eleven days, three weeks, four weeks, and finally six weeks—slaughter age for the meat chick. The impact here is diachronic rather than synchronic: a single-image comparison would merely reveal a big bird next to a smaller one, neither showing evident signs of ill-health or distress, but the time-lapse comparison conveys both the gross acceleration of the meat chick's metabolism, and the drastic foreshortening of its lifespan (RSPCA, "Campaigns: Chicken Farming").

The global panic about avian influenza suggests that opening this kind of production history to public view may be as urgent as it is difficult. So far, the visual representation of the scare in the mainstream news media has concentrated on health inspectors in white suits decontaminating sheds, footage of birds consigned to bonfires, dead or alive, and lines of airline travelers wearing face masks. Meanwhile, health and food authorities in many places have begun to administer the removal indoors of free-range flocks. But a very different picture—and along with it, different preventive strategies—would appear if authorities and media were to undertake a rigorous and publicly-visible examination of the history of intensive poultry farming practices, and in particular the ways in which they produce the perfect conditions for rapid evolution of new bacterial and viral agents: extreme overcrowding, low standards of hygiene and care, severe physiological and metabolic stress, careless use of antibiotics (Greger 2006).