

The *Changing* Social Politics of Meat:

**a systems psychodynamic exploration of the complex
dynamics surrounding behaviour and conversations
about the treatment of animals and meat eating**

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Statement of Authorship

I, Margo Elizabeth Lockhart, certify that:

- Except where due acknowledgement has been made, this work is that of the candidate alone.
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Abstract

Using a systems psychodynamic approach, this thesis explores the social defences and complex dynamics (conscious and unconscious) surrounding behaviour and conversations about the treatment of animals and meat eating. It is an exploration of the 'social politics of meat', in other words, what people talk about, and don't talk about, with regards to the eating of animals. A major intent behind the research is to raise awareness and encourage discussions about the current plight of farmed animals, particularly those within industrial agriculture, i.e. factory farms, in Western, developed countries.

Within the field of anthrozoology, much research has been done on how humans relate and interact *with animals*, but to date there has been little study into how people relate *to one another*, about the eating of animals. Taking a wide interdisciplinary approach, the thesis integrates the fields of systems psychodynamics and anthrozoology and presents many parallels between the two. Using the systems psychodynamics research methods of auto-ethnographic stories, socio-analytic interviewing, socio-analytic drawing and focus group discussions, as well as background knowledge from the discipline of anthrozoology, the research explores the core question: what are the current social politics of meat in Australia, as representative of Western, developed countries?

The thesis also narrates the journey of the researcher as she explores the core question, stumbles through the ethical minefield of asking others to help her explore discomforting topics, and 'lives' the research. Constantly questioning herself, her views, feelings, power and influence is a key part of the work.

Three hypotheses are presented on the issue. The first suggests a collective social dynamic coined by the researcher as 'meat-eating fragility'. A second discusses the entwined systemic influences which all encourage and promote the eating of animals, creating an almost impenetrable barrier to change. The third suggests that the phenomenon of meat-eating fragility is both a defence against change, *and* a sign of change, as is the small group of outliers challenging the dominant invisible ideology of carnism.

This thesis explores and challenges hidden paradigms, worldviews and values around the eating of meat. The exploration uncovers collective denial, dissociation, and collusion about the plight of farmed animals in Western, developed nations. Nonetheless, the final hypothesis and suggestions for further research are both optimistic and hopeful.

'What I have learned from animals all my life is that we are part of the animal kingdom and not separate from it. As recently as the mid-1960s, scientists were saying humans were separate. They literally were saying there's an uncrossable line, with us here and all the other animals on the other side. So, I wasn't supposed to talk about animals having personalities, minds capable of problem solving and emotions, even in chimpanzees, our closest relatives. Fortunately, I'd learned from my dog, which I had as a child, that of course animals have personalities, of course they can work out problems and of course they have emotions like happiness and sadness and fear. And the way we treat them, knowing that, is so shocking, so despicable...'

Jane Goodall. 'A speech for history' UNESCO conference, October 2024.¹

¹ Full speech available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= qnWuPHJwy4>. (Accessed 2 November 2024)

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Prologue

Vignette 1: The beginning of the journey

I vividly remember the first time I linked group relations with my relationship with animals. It was 1999, and I was studying Leading, Following and Group Dynamics at Swinburne University. The subject was Culture and Diversity. The class was fairly equally divided between men and women, and we were exploring gender as a cultural impact on ourselves. The teacher set up a fishbowl discussion, where the men first sat in an inner circle and were asked to talk about 'Your first memories of being male'. The women sat in an outside circle and listened. Fascinating stories came up such as 'chasing little girls in the playground', 'being told off for wearing mum's shoes' and 'dad telling me not to cry'. The situation was then reversed; the women were put in the centre circle and asked to talk about 'Your first memories of being female'. The memory that suddenly came to me (and I shared) was this:

I remember at around the age of 10 going to Auntie Mary's every week with my brother and two sisters. She had three kids about our age, and we loved going there to play with our cousins. We'd all go down to the dam together to swim and muck around. But I hated arriving at her house, because whenever we all got out of the car her dog, Rusty, would come straight for me and try to hump my leg. It never went for anyone else, just me. Everyone - my siblings, cousins, Auntie Mary and mum - would all say, 'Oh, Rusty's gone for Margo again'. I was consumed with shame; I thought I must have had a doggy smell or something. The whole experience felt sexual, dirty and wrong.

Retrieving that memory was important to me. I hadn't thought about the experience since those childhood days and recalling the shame felt significant. But along with the shame came other feelings: an embarrassed sort of pride that animals always liked me, a curiosity about the connection between the animal (Rusty, but by extension all animals) and me, and a wondering about the animal in me. The study was about humans connecting with humans, with gender as a frame, but my frame seemed to be about humans connecting with animals. I pushed this to one side of my mind for another 18 years.

Eighteen years later, doing a PhD held very little appeal to me. I was in my 50s, had an established, interesting and satisfying career, was busy and comfortable in my family life, and

was proud of finally having just completed a master's in leadership and organisation dynamics. I had clear memories of the torment some of my university friends went through when they embarked on the 'PhD journey' and had decided long ago this was not something I wanted to do. But one thing leads to another. An offhand comment in a Group Relations conference had left me with a nagging feeling of shame, which led to some personal therapy with the wonderful Eve Steel, who helped me become more deeply aware of my passion for animals and my distress about the way they are treated in the world today. I still remember Eve suggesting 'this could be your PhD, Margo'. I remember nodding, thinking 'yeah, sure'. But the distress, which I now know as 'vystopia', remained, and was noticed by Susan Long in a final master's class. Susan encouraged me to write my first piece for the journal *Socioanalysis* on the links I saw between system psychodynamics and our treatment of animals, and with her guiding hand I started the journey. Or rather, we started the journey.

Chapter 1: Introduction

'... ultimately, we are all only human beings embedded in social systems. Finding a link to what the other is saying is just the beginning of a potentially deepening, mutual discovery, not a surrender.'

Ed Shapiro, *Speaking Out*, Ed Shapiro responds, *Organisational and Social Dynamics*, 2022 (1), p. 125

1.1 Introduction

This opening chapter introduces the research. In section 1.2, I provide the thesis statement. In section 1.3, I explain the rationale for the research topic. In section 1.4, I build on the prologue to explain my personal motivation for the study. In section 1.5, I suggest possible implications of this research. In section 1.6, I explain the structure of the PhD by giving an outline of the thesis chapters. Finally, in section 1.7, I offer some notes on the writing style used throughout the PhD.

1.2 Thesis statement

The aim of this research is to explore the social defences and complex dynamics (conscious and unconscious) surrounding behaviour and conversations about the treatment of animals connected to meat eating. The core research question, 'What are the social politics of meat?' indicates an attempt to uncover how people talk about (and don't talk about) the animals they eat, and what is hidden in these discussions, both consciously and unconsciously. This includes an exploration about beliefs about the relationship between humans and animals, assumptions about the animal agricultural industry, power dynamics between people and groups (including animal groups), and the stories we tell ourselves and others about animals and meat eating. Subsidiary research questions include:

- How do people interact with each other on the issue of animals bred for food?
- What are the conscious and the unconscious dynamics of the social politics of meat?
- What is "allowed to be said", and what is disavowed, in Western culture, on the issue of eating animals?
- If certain things are disavowed, what is the impact of this?

1.3 Rationale for the research topic

This research is driven by concern about the treatment of animals in factory farms. Approximately 70 billion farm animals are reared and slaughtered for food in the world each year, with an estimated two thirds of these reared on factory farms (FAO, 2023). This system of industrialised farming is causing miserable existences and immeasurable pain to the billions of animals unfortunate enough to be part of the system (Evans, 2019; Ricard, 2016; Singer, 1975), and is damaging both our own environment and human health in the process (Monbiot, 2022; Oppenlander, 2012; Walsh, 2023). And yet meat consumption, particularly in Western, industrialised countries, continues to increase at a phenomenal rate (FAO, 2023). In my mind this is one of the most important ethical and humanitarian problems of our times. It seems that the problem is not merely one of economics and human behaviour, but a whole system of conscious and unconscious assumptions (Joy, 2010). I am curious about cultural and collective denial and would like to build on the work of Steiner (1999), Marshall (2014), Long (2015), and others on this issue. I am also interested in whether there is evidence that societal views are shifting on the issue of animal abuse and meat eating, and if so, what impact such a 'shift', or movement, might have on group and cultural dynamics in Australian society.

1.4 Personal motivation for the research

My hope is that a study into the current dominant paradigm and unconscious dynamics of eating animals, focussing primarily on Western developed countries (as represented in Australia), may contribute to understanding and addressing this complex and fraught issue.

I am personally drawn to systems psychodynamic thinking because I find the field encourages deep exploration into both the rational and irrational, the conscious and unconscious, and all the stuff in between. Within this discipline I feel 'allowed' to be confused, to be unsure, to wonder out loud, and to value my feelings. The notions of collective unconscious denial (Steiner, 1999), the 'unthought known' (Bollas, 1987), and an understanding that we are all influenced by so much more than is obvious, have drawn me into this world. In essence I have never felt 'certain' about much, and systems psychodynamic thinking encourages such curiosity and openness (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020).

I grew up surrounded by animals. My family owned a wheat and sheep farm on the Murray River in Southern NSW, so feeding the chickens, raising pet lambs, playing with the farm dogs, riding the horse, and observing the beautiful native birds around the river were all everyday activities for me and my siblings. One thing was always clear to me: each animal had its own personality. The chickens had their own social order and various dispositions, the dogs had distinct temperaments, some pet lambs were highly spirited, others were docile.

Looking back, I can see that as a family group we saw ourselves as good custodians of the sheep: they had large, lush paddocks to live and graze in, plenty to eat and fresh water to drink. When they went 'off in the trucks', it was out of sight, out of mind. We simply didn't think about them anymore. The psychoanalyst John Steiner calls this 'turning a blind eye' (Steiner 1999). He uses the Oedipus narrative to explain how humans will unconsciously, and sometimes even consciously, turn away from a reality because it is unpleasant or disturbing. That certainly was the case for me.

My own 'blind eye' was challenged at university when a friend gave me Peter Singer's book *Animal Liberation* (1975) to read. I was horrified to read about the predominance of factory farming, but also to read Singer's descriptions of some of the farming practices I had become used to, such as mulesing, tail docking and castration of lambs. I had believed, because I wanted to, that these were largely painless to animals, but Singer and other animal rights advocates have proven this to be an accepted lie within the industry. I toyed with vegetarianism, but being a being a largely disinterested and rather hopeless cook meant my cashew loaf was left uneaten in my student household.

In my twenties I worked as an English teacher; being a lover of ideas and language it was a profession which gave me much satisfaction. Branching out into adult education was a logical step, and a course in what was called 'Organisation Dynamics' at Swinburne University introduced me to the field of systems psychodynamics. By then I was working as a freelance facilitator and coach, mainly with junior or mid-level managers and leaders in a whole range of organisations. Notions such as the 'organisation in the mind' (Armstrong, 2005), the importance of leaders being 'containers' of heightened emotions (Winnicott, 1971) and the need for leaders to hold paradoxes in mind and spirit (Smith & Berg, 1987) were very helpful in my practice.

Twenty years passed before I really held up the mirror again to my own turning a blind eye. The notion of a highly personal paradox had intrigued me when I had been pregnant with my only child seventeen years ago and found myself to be both delighted and terrified. Exploring these very opposite emotions was helpful to me as a person about to embark on the journey of single parenthood. Accepting and exploring my inner contradictions, my own hypocrisies, and my own inconsistencies – often between how I felt and how I acted- was hard but enlightening.

Eventually, part of this “enlightenment” was my very painful epiphany about my love for animals and the fact that I still ate them. I began to read and explore what was happening to animals in the world and it horrified me to hear of the systemic mass abuse inflicted in the food industry, clothing industry, medial experimentation and even in the entertainment industry (Ricard, 2016). I had been in denial. Suddenly, I could see so many connections between what I had studied during my master’s in systems psychodynamics, and what was happening to animals in Australia and everywhere in the Western world: they were victims of a culture of ‘uncare’ (Weintrobe, 2021), and a systemic process of collective denial (Oppenlander, 2012).

An epiphany sounds wonderful, but mine was far from it. When I came across the word “vystopia” (Mann, 2018), I realised there was a name for my feelings of shame, horror and anguish. Coined by vegan psychologist, Clare Mann, Vystopia is defined as ‘an existential crisis experienced by vegans, arising out of an awareness of the trance-like collusion with a dystopian world’ (p. 19). It involves intense grief at the enormity of ubiquitous animal abuse. Intense grief is what I felt. Fortunately, I was encouraged to focus and make use of this grief by beginning a PhD focussed on an as-yet unexplored area of systems psychodynamics: human relations to animals.

Beginning the work led me to a whole new field, the field of anthrozoology. Also known as Human Animal Studies (HAS), this is an interdisciplinary area that explores the ‘spaces that animals occupy in human social and cultural world and the interactions humans have with them’ (DeMello, 2012). Exploring the links between the two fields of system psychodynamics and anthrozoology has opened up new ways of thinking for me and helped me deal with the feelings of despair and grief I have experienced as I have explored the ‘social politics of meat’.

In short, the personal motivation for this research comes from my childhood experience of a life with animals, my appreciation of systems psychodynamics as a way of understanding the world, and my concern about the welfare of animals raised for food in today's world.

1.5 Implications of the research

In studying the way humans relate *to one another* about the animals in their lives, including animals they may eat, I have taken a somewhat widened and interdisciplinary approach to systems psychodynamics. Clearly, *how we relate to one another about animals* invites and includes an exploration of *how we relate to animals*. As far as I know, there has been very little research to date within the field of systems psychodynamics on human-animal relations. Yet human-animal relations is a fast-growing area of research (Amiot & Bastian, 2015; DeMello, 2012). Already, climate change psychology is widening the view of systems psychodynamics to include how we relate to other species and the natural world. My hope is that this doctoral research may play a part in encouraging other researchers to apply this type of widened lens to our human-to-animal relations, and to the conscious and unconscious dynamics of our human/animal systems, be they family systems, work systems, organisational systems, political systems, or societal systems.

The research aims to raise awareness of the plight of farmed animals in today's Western developed countries. Increased awareness may not immediately lead to a change in conditions for these animals, indeed Hanni Biran (2006) has observed that 'consciousness is insufficient for creating a change in our lives' (p. 87), but awareness *and* conversations may well lead to change. Small tweaks can lead to big shifts. Hence, holding focus groups, interviews, discussions with study groups, and even the odd conversation with someone interested in my PhD journey, has perhaps planted seeds of awareness into the conditions farm animals experience, and the link between eating habits and those conditions.

As many climate scientists have warned, 'our biosphere is sick and is behaving like an infected organism' (Burbon, 2011, p 5). We face a monumental humanitarian and environmental crisis because of carbon emissions, deforestation, soil erosion, water misuse and a whole host of other problems. Animal agriculture and the meat industry have contributed significantly to environmental damage through methane emissions, forest clearing for agriculture, intensive water use, water pollution, and carbon dioxide released through feed crop production (Evans, 2019; Walsh, 2023). Thinking broadly and deeply

about the links between how we treat animals and the state of the earth is crucial in addressing the present environmental crisis.

Finally, our treatment of animals is important to our own internal state. The way we treat any 'other' is reflected in our own living and can indicate our assumptions, our values, and our beliefs about the world. As society develops increased awareness of animal sentience, cognition and complex dynamics (Andrews, 2020; Grandin, 2005; Singer, 1975; Wohlleben, 2016), we are challenged to examine the way our human systems treat animals, and we can potentially gain valuable insights into our own internal state and relationship to the world.

1.6 Thesis outline

Following this first chapter, Chapter 2 gives a detailed overview of relevant literature to this topic. This includes a synopsis of the field of systems psychodynamics, with particular emphasis on social defences and the social unconscious. It also includes an outline of the emerging field of anthrozoology (human /animal relations), and the ethics of how we treat and use animals. Literature on the way capitalism impacts how we treat other species is also engaged. Finally, the chapter synthesises scholarship and literature on the issue of eating (or not eating) meat and the rise of veganism.

In Chapter 3, I explain my research approach and philosophical positions in attempting to answer my core research question, 'what are the social politics of meat?'. I outline my ontological position, my epistemological position and my ethical stance in the conducting of the research, and I finish the chapter with an exploration of whether an activist can be a credible researcher.

Chapter 4 details the methodology and methods used to explore how people interact with one another, in both conscious and unconscious ways, on the issue of animals. I give an overview of the four methodologies I have utilised within the research: Action research, Psychoanalytic observation, Critical Discourse Analysis, and the Transforming Experience Framework. I explain how these methodologies link with the specific methods used to collect data: auto-ethnographic journaling, focus group discussions, socio-analytic drawing and socio-analytic interviews.

Chapter 5 describes the data analysis process, explores the weaknesses and challenges in the methods used for data collection, and presents eight key findings from the data analysis.

The chapter finishes with a creative narrative, written with the purpose of integrating the various ideas and themes from the auto-ethnographic journaling, focus group discussions, socio-analytic drawing and socio-analytic interviews.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I present conclusions and hypotheses from the research, drawing parallels with my research findings and related existing systems psychodynamic and sociological theories. I explore why meat consumption is increasing so rapidly in Western, developed countries, and present a theory on the systemic influences creating this momentum. I outline areas and ideas for future related research, before finishing with a reflection on the impact of this work on myself, both as someone who cares deeply about animals, and as a researcher within the field of systems psychodynamics.

1.7 Note on style

There are a few matters to note regarding the style of writing in this thesis.

First, vignettes are used to give samples of my thinking throughout the auto-ethnographic journal writing (Ellis, 2004), one of the methods of data collection explained in Chapter 4. Mostly, the vignettes appear at the start of each chapter, introducing the themes and tone of the chapter, and are referred to or explained throughout the chapter. My intention is to make sense of my own experiences, thoughts and feelings on the issue of the social politics of meat, to integrate those with the research process and findings, and to add some 'colour', by way of a personal touch, to the thesis.

Second, my writing style in this thesis may not be as neutral in tone as many doctoral theses. Systems psychodynamics is a field in which the researcher explores the conscious and unconscious dynamics of their core topic. Part of this exploration often involves the researcher's own emotional experience, their values and their beliefs. This doctoral study is values driven, my aim in completing the PhD is in part to raise awareness about the way farmed animals are treated in Western, developed countries. The question of whether values-driven research can be rigorous, thorough and accurate, is a question many climate scientists have been grappling with for a few decades. In most cases the work they do is research based on sustainability values and a desire to do good. Peattie (2011) comments that sustainability researchers are often criticised for doing research based on values and a desire to do good while *real* research is seen as value-free, dispassionate and objective. I do

not pretend that this research is value-free, dispassionate and objective. It is quite the opposite: values-driven, passionate and hopefully both objective *and* subjective. I would argue that is what makes it *real*. I explore this quandary more thoroughly in Chapter 3, where I examine the question ‘can an activist be a researcher?’.

Third, throughout the thesis I generally use the term ‘meat’ as opposed to ‘animal’ (or ‘dead animal’). Occasionally I use both, or a variation, such as ‘animal flesh’. I have chosen to mostly use the word ‘meat’, because it is common practice, and I do not wish to confront the reader with too much of the above: values-driven, passionate, subjectivity. Nonetheless, the splitting of ‘meat’ from ‘animal’ is a key aspect of the social politics of meat. This is explored in depth at the end of Chapter 2, where I explain the concept of the ‘meat paradox’, and also in Chapter 6, where one of my key findings is about the difficulty of bringing the *animal* into discussions about meat.

Finally, this thesis includes numerous drawings, some drawn by me as researcher, other drawn by participants in focus or discussion groups as part of the data collecting and research process. These drawings are not intended to be a detailed analysis of the subjective views and state of the person who created the drawing. They are intended to represent the *collective* conscious and unconscious aspects of our experiences of, and feelings towards, animals. The idea of the collective, or associative unconscious (Long & Harney, 2013), is more fully explored in Chapter 2, where I describe the relevant literature on the social unconscious, and also in Chapter 3, where I explain how I have attempted to explore the conscious and unconscious aspects of our interactions with each other about the animals we eat for food within this research.

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained the rationale, and my motivation, for undertaking research into the the social defences and complex dynamics surrounding behaviour and conversations about the treatment of animals connected to meat eating. I have described the implications of the research study and given an overview of the structure of the thesis. The next chapter is an explanation of how this research connects to other scholarship in related fields, from the seemingly separate fields of systems psychodynamics and anthrozoology, to research which explores the impact of capitalism on the way we see ourselves as a species, and finally scholarship and literature on the issue of eating meat and the rise of veganism.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

'It is not to see something first, but to establish solid connections between previously known and the hitherto unknown, that contributes the essence of discovery. It is this process of tying together which can best promote true understanding and real progress.'

Hans Selve, M.D., *The Stress of Life*,
quoted at the beginning of Gabor Mate's, *When the Body Says No* (2019).

Vignette 2: Vystopia

*I read Matthei Ricard's **A Plea for the Animals** and cannot get the images out of my mind. I can see the 'turning of a blind eye' I have done for most of my life. I feel deep shame for my hypocrisy. I claim to love animals, yet I have eaten them for most of my life, and I wear and use products made from dead animals. I am surrounded by such duplicity. I sit in a Masters class where everyone talks fondly of their pets; then we go out for lunch and almost everyone orders a meat dish. As I walk through the 'fresh meat' section of a supermarket I see carcasses. I decide to become vegetarian. My action feels small and insignificant when I think of all the factory farms, where hundreds, no thousands, no millions, no billions, of animals are treated as products during their life and slaughter. I cannot stop weeping.*

2.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the explanation in Chapter 1 of my personal and philosophical reasons for the research, to show how this study relates to other scholarship in related fields, and to show why this particular research focus is needed.

The chapter demonstrates that while the field of systems psychodynamics provides deep insights into conscious and unconscious individual, group and societal behaviour, and the field of anthrozoology has considerably expanded our understanding of human-animal relations, combining the two fields to explore how humans relate to one another about the animals in their lives (including animals they may eat) is, as yet, a relatively unexplored niche. Of course, a study of the 'social politics of meat' is about much more than simply combining systems psychodynamics with anthrozoology. It is also about understanding the

power of capitalism and the way this profit driven economic and political system impacts the way we interact with each other about the animals on our plates. Hence, in this chapter I give an overview of the foundation knowledge applicable to my research in systems psychodynamics, in anthrozoology, in the ethics of eating meat, and in recent academic work which explores and challenges the way capitalism impacts the way humans treat other species on earth.

Section 2.2 gives an overview of the field of systems psychodynamics, with particular focus on object relations theory, social defences, the social unconscious, and recent developments within the field of systems psychodynamics, and related fields, in understanding widespread denial, particularly related to climate change. Section 2.3 outlines the growing field of anthrozoology, the study of the interactions and relationships between human and nonhuman animals. Matthieu Ricard's book mentioned in the vignette above is outlined in this section, along with other published research on the ethics of how we treat and use animals, and research done on understanding human violence towards animals. Section 2.4 provides an overview of research which explores the impact of capitalism on the way we see ourselves as a species, and how we treat other species as a result of that dominant perspective. Finally, Section 2.5 synthesises scholarship and literature on the issue of eating meat and the rise of veganism. In this section I explain the concept of 'vystopia' as coined by Clare Mann and used as the title of the above vignette.

Each area is outlined as a separate section below, each treated as a separate 'foundation knowledge' area, although of course there are connections between all of them. All are connected with my core question, 'what are the social politics of meat?', and all five areas interact around denial and disavowal as key themes.

2.2 Systems Psychodynamics

Systems psychodynamics is an interdisciplinary field which integrates the insights from group relations theory, psychoanalysis, and open systems theory (Gould, Stapley and Stein, 2001). The approach seeks to engage with the emotional experience and the collective psychological behaviour within and between groups. The researcher looks to the underlying group dynamics beyond what is obvious (Long, 2013). A systems psychodynamic approach draws on object relations (Klein, 1985) where the researcher (subject) experiences the research system as an internal as well as an external object. This involves a close

examination of the researcher's subjective experience, enough self-awareness to tune into their own emotions, bodily responses and thought processes, as well as the capacity to think psychoanalytically. In this way, the researcher uses him/herself and their emotional experience as data. This can be confronting and uncomfortable, but also provides important information about the research topic. In this section, I discuss some of the key contributors to systems psychodynamics theory, and some of the key concepts in this field that are particularly relevant to a study of how humans relate to one another about animals, including the animals they may eat.

Briefly, from the field of systems psychodynamics the following concepts are crucial for research into the social politics of meat:

- An understanding of the unconscious in individuals (Freud, 1991), but also in the collective (Fromm, 1962; Hopper, 2003; Long, 2013; Weinberg, 2007).
- An understanding of social defences against uncomfortable emotions such as anxiety and guilt. Such defences might include denial, splitting, projection, attacking and alienating (Long, 2008; Ringer, 2017; Stein, 2019; Steiner, 1999).
- Such defences, in Kleinian terms, are more likely placed in the paranoid schizoid position than in the depressive position (Klein, 1998).
- A safe 'holding environment', or containment, is needed for development to occur (Bion, 1989; Winnicott, 1971). Within the research, this means defined boundaries around time, space, and frequency (as represented by clear and kept meeting times, information and consent forms, and clarity of task).
- Many of our habits are so deeply embedded in socio-cultural norms and narratives it is difficult to even observe those norms, let alone think and analyse them objectively (Climate Psychology Alliance [CPA], 2024).

I now expand on these concepts to give a fuller explanation of the relevant foundation knowledge and how this foundation knowledge connects to the social politics of meat.

2.2.1 Freud and the unconscious

Sigmund Freud, known as the founder of psychoanalytic theory, made extraordinary contributions to our understanding of the unconscious mind. Freud's conceptualisation of

the mind involved three levels: the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious minds. The unconscious mind, likened to the bulk of an iceberg hidden beneath the waterline, holds thoughts, memories, and emotions that are outside of awareness but continue to influence behaviour (Long, 2016).

Freud believed that the unconscious mind is the primary source of human behaviour, containing repressed thoughts, hidden memories, desires, and reactions. Memories and emotions stored in the unconscious can impact behaviour without individuals being consciously aware of these influences. His work emphasised that unresolved or repressed ideation from the unconscious can manifest in subtle ways, such as in dreams or through slips of the tongue (Freudian slips), or neurotic symptoms. Freud's therapeutic method involved making the unconscious conscious through techniques like free association to uncover repressed desires and memories (Long, 2013).

Freud (1991) wrote of two kinds of denial, 'negation', when something known is repudiated as not true, not there, or not happening; and 'disavowal' when something is completely dismissed (Climate Psychology Alliance, 2024). Negation and disavowal are particularly relevant to the question of why we might turn a blind eye to animal cruelty. How can we pat our dogs and claim to be animal lovers on the one hand, while eating another animal for lunch or dinner?

2.2.2 Klein and object relations theory

Melanie Klein, known for her work in child analysis, was the primary psychoanalyst in the development of object relations theory. This theory emphasises the profound impact of early childhood relationships, particularly of primary caregivers like the mother, on an individual's emotional development and interpersonal interactions (Klein, 1998). Klein's contributions to psychoanalysis have led to a deeper understanding of early relational dynamics and their lasting impact on individuals' psychological development. A Kleinian approach focuses on internalised mental representations of self and others, shaping one's sense of self-worth and relationships. Klein (1998) placed great importance on interpersonal relationships, highlighting the nurturing role of the mother and the child's early experiences within the first few months after birth. In object relations theory, "objects" refer to significant others with whom an individual relates, often their internal representations of the mother, father, or primary caregiver. Klein's theory of unconscious "phantasy" explores how

infants process anxieties around feeding and relating to others as objects or part-objects, as distinct from conscious fantasies in older children or adults. Klein observed how children projected anxieties onto drawings and toys, acting out aggressive phantasies and desires for reparation.

The paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions are fundamental concepts in object relations theory. The paranoid-schizoid position is characterized by the splitting of self and object into good and bad, with little integration between them, typically hypothesised in infants. This position involves projecting loving and hating feelings onto separate parts of the mother, leading to a division of the maternal object into a 'good' and 'bad' breast. The establishment of a good internal object (i.e. a positive psychological and emotional impression of another person, as experienced by the child) is crucial for healthy progression to the depressive position.

In contrast, the depressive position involves integrating the good and bad aspects of self and others. It is reached by the infant when he recognises his mother and other people as real persons. In clarifying the depressive position as described by Klein, Hannah Segal (2019) explains, 'where earlier he was aware of 'split' objects – ideally good or overwhelmingly persecuting – now he sees a whole object both good and bad' (p. 386). Segal adds, 'but this new constellation ushers in a new anxiety situation: where earlier the infant feared an attack on the ego by persecutory objects, now the predominant fear is that of the loss of the loved object in the external world and in his own inside' (p. 386). Nonetheless, depressive phantasies 'give rise to the wish to repair and restore' (p. 387), and therefore the position is seen as essential for developing mature relationships and emotional growth. The depressive position involves tolerating contrasting feelings such as love and aggression, and the difficult emotion of guilt. Klein emphasised that successful integration in the depressive position is necessary for healthy psychological development, as it allows individuals to move beyond splitting (the mental separation of objects into 'good' and 'bad' parts) and towards a more integrated view of themselves and others. It is important to note that in Kleinian theory, these positions are not stages but rather ongoing mental states that can influence an individual's relationships throughout life. In other words, we flux from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position throughout our lives. This concept is helpful in understanding the complexities and dynamic nature of human development and human

relationships, with each other, with ideas, and even with other species on earth. I certainly know that I can fluctuate from being judgemental and moralistic, where I view issues through a polarised lens (right and wrong, good guys and bad guys, us versus them), before I bring myself back to a state of compassion, equilibrium and shared responsibility. The polarised, paranoid schizoid position may be easier to sit with because it silences all dissent, nuance and complexity. It may even be necessary at times, such as when we need to protect ourselves against destructive behaviour. But there is no doubt that in most situations such right/wrong thinking is unhelpful and perhaps even destructive to self and others.

Klein (1998) further developed the concepts of projection and projective identification to explain the process of finding other repositories for unwanted feelings and experiences when the anxiety of those feelings and experiences is too much to bear. In projection, we split off unwanted parts of the self (personal qualities, feelings, or capacities) and we locate them in another person (object). Consequentially, the object may be either admired or dreaded, since it possesses the subject's projected qualities. Projective identification occurs when the other person (object) is pulled into the experience and behaves in the way expected by the subject (Gilmore and Krantz, 1985). Splitting, projection and projective identification are unconscious processes important in understanding defences against aspects of ourselves we may be uncomfortable with, and even in understanding ingrained behaviour about difficult or painful issues, such as the treatment of animals bred for food. Indeed, many Anthro-zoologists are now exploring the effect of the 'meat paradox', the fact that we can both love and eat animals, the cognitive dissonance caused by this paradox, and the unconscious defences used to deal with this dissonance (see section 2.5).

2.2.3 Winnicott and the concept of holding

Donald Woods Winnicott is also known for significant contributions to understanding the mother-child relationship. Like Klein, Winnicott emphasised the importance of the mother's care in child development and introduced the idea of a "holding environment" where healthy development occurs. His work focused on the space between inner and outer life, highlighting the significance of the environment in shaping an individual's growth.

Winnicott (1971) developed concepts such as the 'good-enough mother', the 'holding environment', and the 'transitional object'. The term "good enough mother" stresses that mothers do not need to be perfect but rather need to be responsive, sensitive, and adaptive

to their children's needs and developmental abilities. He believed that children benefit from imperfect parenting because it helps them develop resilience and adaptability to life's challenges. In other words, by failing children in manageable ways (such as mistakenly leaving their favourite toy at a friend's house), mothers can support their children in becoming healthier and more adaptive adults. The notion of the "holding environment" emphasises the importance of providing a supportive and nurturing space for children or clients, a helpful notion in creating psychologically safe spaces in both consulting and learning environments. The "transitional object", often a favourite blanket or toy from Winnicott's observations of children, lessens anxiety and helps infants adapt to change or stress. The item embodies a transitional process in the infant's emotional development. It represents both "me" and "not me". The significance lies not in the object itself but in how it is used: as a bridge between the child's inner world and external reality, as a defence against separation anxiety, and as something which enables play and creativity. The ideas of the good enough mother, a holding environment and the transitional object have all been applied to group dynamics and organisational studies (Long, 2013).

Connected to the importance of play and creativity is Winnicott's distinction between the 'true self' and the 'false self' (Winnicott, 1997). In other words, he emphasised the importance of authenticity and spontaneity in individuals. A false self may be developed as a protective mechanism, for instance, a child becoming inordinately 'polite' to protect him/herself against highly critical parents. This raises the issue of healthy defences as against destructive defences. The defences of meat eaters may well be protective of the human while not of the animal. This is the contradiction and paradox my research explores. For Winnicott, creativity is a crucial part of psychological well-being and development. The use of drawing as a technique used in group relations work is a significant development of this valuing of play and creativity (Nossal, 2013). Drawing oneself in role, and in relation to others, can provide rich personal data and help people to think creatively and openly. Exploration of such drawings can also provide a 'holding environment' for an otherwise open-ended and perhaps difficult conversation. Such was the case with the focus group drawings used within this research. A drawing process was used to help participants authentically explore their own relations with the animals in their lives, and to share their ideas in a contained and safe space (see Chapter 4, Methodology and Method).

2.2.4 Bion and containment

Somewhat similar to Winnicott's concept of the holding environment, Wilfred Bion's theory of the container and the contained (1989) is a fundamental concept in psychoanalysis, which focusses on the dynamic relationship between the individual (contained) and their environment or caregiver (container). This theory includes the role of safe containment in emotional development. In this framework, the container may represent the nurturing and holding function; while the contained might be the emotions, thoughts, and experiences that need containment and processing. The idea has been a crucial element of systems psychodynamics, where consultants, researchers and facilitators may need to contain high levels of anxiety or other strong emotions in the groups they work with.

Bion also developed important theories about unconscious group behaviour, which have been consistently applied and developed further within the field of systems psychodynamics. His theory of groups includes the distinction between the "work group" mentality and the "basic assumption group" mentality (Bion, 1961). The work group mentality focuses on the primary task or work of the group, with members who are aware of their purpose, work co-operatively, and learn from their experiences. Conversely, the basic assumption group mentality operates "as if" certain unstated assumptions are held by its members, hidden in the group subconscious. Bion identified three types of basic assumption groups: Dependency (baD), in which a group behaves as if it must have its needs met and protected by one individual or designated 'leader'; Fight-Flight (baF), when a group behaves as if it has come together to fight or run away from an enemy; and Pairing (baP), when a group focusses on two of its members, as though they have come together for the purposes of reproduction and the creation of a saviour, or a saving idea, for the group. Further basic assumptions mentalities have been developed since Bion's initial theory. In 1974, Turquet identified a 'one-ness' mentality where members 'seek to join a powerful union with an omnipotent force, unobtainably high, to surrender self for passive participation' (Turquet, 1974). In 1996, Lawrence, Bain and Gould identified an almost opposite mentality which they called a 'me-ness' basic assumption, where group members 'work on the tacit, unconscious assumption' that the group is not a group but a composite of individuals, essentially a 'non-group' (Lawrence, Bain & Gould, 1996). Interestingly, in writing about large group mentality, Hopper integrated these fourth and fifth basic assumptions into a form of

oscillation where the group swings between massification, where the assumption is that we are all one and the same, to aggregation, with the collective assumption that we are not a group (Hopper, 1997).

One further important aspect of a systems psychodynamic approach stemming from Bion's work is what he called a stance of being 'beyond memory, desire and understanding' (Bion, 1984). Bion was referring to the need for a good analyst to be in the here and now with the analysand, feel their experience without judgement or rushing to find a solution. For him, the only way to be open to receiving the projection that the analysand might be giving is to sit and receive it. Feel the full weight of it, not deflect it, deny it or refuse to accept it.

Applying this to the field of systems psychodynamics means practitioners and researchers need to put aside past knowledge, avoid desiring or wishing for a particular result, set aside judgements or a need to understand the other, and allow surprises to emerge. In this way we hope to discover what might be there but isn't yet known. This is a simple, yet difficult concept, which involves what has become known as 'negative capability', a phrase first used by the poet John Keats in the early 1800s to describe the ability to sit with uncertainty and ambiguity, rather than making quick judgements based on our own preconceptions. Within this research, this was obviously very difficult for me, having such clear views on the ways animals are treated within human systems. I have been very aware throughout the research of my memory, desire and understanding getting in the way of really feeling the full weight of other's experiences and sitting with their projections onto me and others.

2.2.5 Jacques and social defences

Elliot Jacques, known for his work on social defences against anxiety (Jacques, 1955), introduced the concept of unconscious collusions within groups. Social defences theory posits that organisations, especially those dealing with high-stress situations or potential loss of life, may unconsciously create systems and procedures that shield their members from anxiety. Defence mechanisms like denial arise to protect individuals within these groups from unbearable emotions, but also inhibit those individuals and organisations from learning from their experiences, adapting to change and perhaps even achieving the organisation's primary goals. Isabel Menzies-Lyth (1960) contributed significantly to this theory through her study of the nursing system in a general hospital. She observed several hospital practices that seemed to serve as social defences to protect nurses from emotional

bonds with patients. Close personal bonds may have caused pain and suffering to the staff, so these distancing practices served as a form of emotional protection. Such defences included *depersonalisation*, nurses were discouraged from forming close emotional bonds with patients; *detachment*, constant rotation of duties and patients served to prevent deep attachments; *ritual task performance*, adherence to rigid procedures, even when they were not strictly necessary; *collusive social redistribution of responsibility*, to avoid individual accountability; and *denial of feelings*, nurses were encouraged to 'control their feelings, refrain from excessive involvement, avoid disturbing identifications, and ...maintain professional independence' (p. 102). Menzies Lyth uses examples of the way nurses often talked about patients, not by name, but by bed numbers or their illnesses: 'the liver in bed 10' or 'the pneumonia in bed 15' showing 'a kind of depersonalisation or elimination of individual distinctiveness in both nurse and patient' (p. 102). The theory of social defences against anxiety is a crucial aspect of understanding organisational dynamics and the impact of emotions on work and social environments (Armstrong and Rustin, 2015). Certainly, the use of social defences against the anxiety and guilt of eating animals is one very relevant to this research.

John Steiner (1999) examines such social defences in his exploration of the phenomenon 'turning a blind eye' (p. 86), where there is access to adequate knowledge but because it is so unpleasant and disconcerting, we choose unconsciously, and sometimes consciously, to ignore it. He uses the Oedipus narrative to explain the reasons for, but also the dangers, of collective denial. Oedipus, Jocasta, Creon and the "blind" Tiresias grasped the truth: Oedipus had killed his father and married his mother as prophesized, but they colluded to ignore it, partly to protect Oedipus, but partly to avoid the chaos that would likely unfold had they faced the truth. We too, according to Steiner, turn a blind eye to dangers and horrors that confront us, despite the abundance of evidence that if we do not radically change the way we are behaving, catastrophe is inevitable. Reality is not just evaded; it is distorted and misrepresented. Steiner goes so far as to name the collective illusory mindset: 'where we believe something against the evidence of our senses because it suits us to do so.....that is the factor of **collusion**. He argues that a 'cover-up requires conspirators who agree either covertly or tacitly to collaborate' (p. 99). Robin DiAngelo's notion of 'white fragility' (DiAngelo, 2018) in the field of racism fits into this type of collusive denial. She argues that

the 'smallest amount of racial stress', such as being given feedback that one has used a word that is offensive to a person of colour, is intolerable to white people, and leads to a range of defensive emotions such as anger, fear and guilt, which in turn lead to 'behaviours such as argumentation, silence and withdrawal' (p. 2). DiAngelo explains that we generally think of racism as an individual act by an individual person, rather than as a complex, interconnected system. She points to the collusive and systemically powerful nature of such responses:

'Though white fragility is triggered by discomfort and anxiety, it is born of superiority and entitlement... it is a powerful means of white racial control and the protection of white advantage.' (p. 2)

I have wondered about 'meat-eater fragility'. Could the discomfort caused by having a vegan at the dinner table lead to defensive emotions such as anger and guilt, which in turn lead to defensive behaviours such as argumentation and dismissal? Many writers have commented on the dismissive criticism of vegans (Castle, 2019; Joy, 2010; Pacelle, 2011). This is further explored in section 2.5, where I give an overview of the foundation knowledge on the issue of eating animals (or not).

Like DiAngelo, sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel (2006) views denial as cultural, but also political: the keeping of "open secrets". Children learn from adults what to ignore as "irrelevant". Taboos, euphemisms, tact, and avoiding the obvious are all examples he gives of cultural and political denial. Zerubavel argues that conspiracies of silence exist at every level of society, ranging from small groups to large corporations, from personal friendships to politics, and he illuminates the social pressures that cause people to deny what is right before their eyes. One might think of the collective blind eye turned against seeing the cruel history endured by indigenous populations in many colonised countries such as Australia. Historian Henry Reynolds writes of only a few humanitarian 'whistleblowers' living in pioneering times who listened to the 'whispering in their hearts' and fought for justice for indigenous people when doing so left them isolated and criticised by their fellow whites (Reynolds, 2018). In the field of systems psychodynamics, Long (2015), writes of the collective blind eye on the issue of climate change: 'it is important that denial is not seen simply in terms of the individual. Denial becomes a systemic process that can shape a whole culture, and therein lies its most insidious harm' (p. 248). Further, collusion is not just a social, psychological issue. Menzies Lyth (Armstrong & Rustin, 2015) explains how defences get built into organisational

structures and tasks. Defences and collusion become a socio-technical issue. On the topic of eating meat, for instance, one might think of the invisible power of meat advertising, or the usual custom of having meat on the menu of a restaurant or café.

Ernest Becker (2020) takes the concept of collective denial to the realm of life and death in his 'denial of death' theory, which posits that human behaviour is fundamentally motivated by the fear of death and attempts to deny or repress this fear. He argues that humans are a unique species in that we are aware of our own mortality, which creates deep anxiety and dread. To cope with this death anxiety, people create symbolic systems of meaning, such as religion and a 'hero' culture, that provide a sense of purpose and significance. Underscoring Becker's theory is the idea that what frightens humans most is our smallness in the big scheme of things, our vulnerability, and insignificance. Hence, our unconscious collusions serve to prevent us from feeling powerless and inconsequential.

One could easily surmise that unconscious collusions, created to prevent us from experiencing highly uncomfortable feelings and perpetuated through social pressure, play a large part in the multifarious reasons humans continue to eat meat, despite environmental, health and ethical arguments to reduce or eliminate it from our diets. Perhaps an awakening to this collusion explains my 'vystopia', described in the vignette at the start of this chapter. My realisation of the many assumptions, social pressures and social defences, all encouraging us to treat sentient animals as commodities, led to strong feelings of despair and shame.

2.2.6 Fromm and the social unconscious

Erich Fromm, a German American psychoanalyst and philosopher, proposed the idea of a social unconscious, highlighting how societal structures and norms become embedded within individual psyches:

'... each society determines which thoughts and feelings shall be permitted to arrive at the level of awareness and which have to remain unconscious. Just as there is social character, there is also a "*social unconscious*".' (Fromm, 1962, p63)

Fromm links the social unconscious with repression, 'these commonly repressed elements are those contents which a given society cannot permit its members to be aware of if the

society with its specific contradictions is to operate successfully' (p. 63). Interestingly, he also links unconsciousness with, not just society, but the whole universe:

'... unconsciousness represents universal man, the whole man, rooted in the cosmos; It represents the plant in him, the animal in him, the spirit in him it represents his past, down to the dawn of human existence, and it represents his future up to the day when man will have become fully human, and when nature will be humanised as men will be "naturalised".' (p. 88)

Many others have also written of the social unconscious. Sigmund Henry Foulkes (1971) also emphasises the 'value of thinking in terms of a concept which does not confine mind, by definition, to an individual' (p. 224). Earl Hopper (2003) argues that the social and cultural contexts are important and probably underemphasised in psychoanalysis:

'The concept of the social unconscious refers to the existence and constraints of social, cultural and communicational arrangements of which people are unaware: unaware, in so far as these arrangements are not perceived (not 'known') and if perceived not acknowledged ('denied'), and if acknowledged, not taken as problematic ('given'), and if taken as problematic, not considered with an optimal degree of detachment and objectivity.' (p. 127)

This definition has me wondering: are the problems (environmental, health and ethical) of industrial animal agriculture known (perceived)? Is, for instance, the massive environmental damage done by land clearing for beef farming simply not acknowledged? Or not taken as problematic? And if seen as a problem, for some reason, not viewed with detachment and objectivity? Are we simply welded to the eating of meat? Why is it so hard to view this issue objectively?

Further developments on the notion of the social unconscious may provide clues. Haim Weinberg (2007) also defines the social unconscious:

'... the co-constructed shared unconscious of members of a certain social system such as community, society, nation or culture. It includes shared anxieties, fantasies, defenses, myths, and memories.' (p. 312)

This description might give some answers. Meat is part of our collective memory - mealtimes and dinners are in many ways our significant community and family events. Meat

also carries myths and fantasies: the myth of happy animals in idyllic green pastures, the myth of red meat being the essence of manhood, the “protein myth”, the claim that animal protein is the best or only source of a protein rich diet².

Long (2016) argues that the concept of the social unconscious, as defined by Fromm, Foulkes and Hopper, can add ‘an almost wilful non acknowledgement of social and cultural issues that are harmful to work and wellbeing.... it shares the idea of collective denial and of turning a blind eye, but it adds a political dimension’ (p. 76). If one considers the power of the multinational meat industry, which I elaborate in Chapter 3, we can see the political dimension of the meat industry and its influence on the practice of meat eating as a cultural norm.

Along with a political dimension comes an ‘us versus them’ collective mentality which can arise with regard to arguments about eating meat or not eating meat. Of relevance is the notion of an ‘opinion block’, introduced by Martin Ringer (2017) to describe groups or social systems which enact a collective defence against ideas in adjacent systems. Such groups become ‘collectively righteous’, retreat into their own group narrative, and establish a deadlock where members ‘cast the other party in a bad light and their own party in a good light’ (p. 25). Such phenomena, Ringer claims, ‘can appear as a form of social insanity’ (p. 27) which basically eliminates curiosity from the issue. Ringer underlines their pervasiveness: ‘My experience is that these systems are so powerful that they draw in even the most intelligent, sophisticated, fair-minded and self-reflective among us’ (p. 27).

Also, on the theme of alienating and stigmatising, Mark Stein (2019) has examined the issue of whistleblowing and offered a new explanation for understanding why whistleblowers are frequently hated and stigmatised. He argues that, rather than representing the ‘other’, whistleblowers could represent the lost good ‘self’ of others in the organisation or group that the whistleblower has exposed for a wrongdoing. Whistleblowers ‘represent the functions of honesty, integrity and candidness, of asking why things happen as they do, of knowing and facing the whole truth, and thus represent these functions of organisational members they have lost and cannot retrieve’ (p. 7). As a result, hatred is directed towards

² World Resources Institute. People are Eating More Protein than They Need. Especially in Wealthy Regions Available at: [People Are Eating More Protein than They Need—Especially in Wealthy Regions | World Resources Institute \(wri.org\)](https://www.wri.org/publications/2013/01/people-are-eating-more-protein-than-they-need-especially-in-wealthy-regions)

whistleblowers because, ‘representing the loss of the good self that staff members find too painful to bear – the very existence of such whistleblowers unconsciously alludes to the failure of the staff group, and this is felt to be intolerable’ (p. 15). One might well wonder: are vegans ‘whistleblowers’ on the issue of eating meat? Do they represent our ‘lost good self’ with regard to how we treat other species?

It is important to add that the social unconscious has not simply been presented as a repressive force which exposes how humans might delude themselves and deceive others. Hopper (2003) observed that the socially unconscious mind involves the possibility of creativity, facilitation and development. The social unconscious is multi-faceted, dynamic and complex. It both shapes individual and collective behaviours within a group or society *and* is created or reinforced by those behaviours. The social unconscious reflects the shared beliefs, attitudes and behaviours passed down through generations within a culture, contributing to a collective identity and influencing group dynamics. It is intricately linked to cultural norms and values, and therefore of great importance to an examination of the ‘social politics of meat’. Our unconscious defensive behaviours allow us to function together in a good enough manner, while minimising the pain of dissonant realities. However, a great deal of our collective humanity can be lost in some norms, and to speak the truth of that loss can be deeply resented.

2.2.7 Climate psychology

I have included this section on climate psychology because I see the following links between the study of how humans are responding to the climate crisis, and study of human-animal relations:

- Industrial animal agriculture is a major contributor to global warming. Livestock emissions are primarily generated by cows’ methane-rich burps, animal manure, and the corn and soy produced to feed farmed animals. Globally, the sector accounts for 15 to 20 percent of greenhouse gas emissions and is the leading driver of deforestation, which further exacerbates climate change (Brown, 2009; Hawkin, 2017; Monbiot 2022; Torrella, 2024; Walsh, 2023;). Animal agriculture is not the cause of climate change, but it is a major contributing factor in this complex world crisis. The climate crisis and animal agriculture are intricately linked.

- Climate psychology explores and addresses the complex psychological defence of collective denial, which is one of the key issues apparent when one starts to delve into how we relate to animals, and to each other about animals, including the animals on our plates.
- Climate psychology also focusses on the guilt, anxiety and mourning experienced as people face up to and confront the real challenge of climate change. These emotions are common for people experiencing 'vystopia' – strong feelings of guilt, depression and mourning experienced by vegans as they realise the extent of systemic animal abuse (Mann, 2018).

Climate psychology is a relatively new field, aimed at understanding and supporting human responses to the climate crisis. The field draws on psychoanalysis and other psycho-social approaches to explore the nature of the human relationship to the rest of the natural world, the defences people use to avoid engaging with climate change, and the experiences of loss, anxiety, grief and mourning people go through when they do face the climate crisis. It is a fast-developing field, aimed at not just a theoretical understanding of the climate crisis, but also supporting people and organisations working to act on climate change (CPA handbook, 2024).

Some key figures in the field of climate psychology

Harold Searles (1972), a psychoanalyst who specialised in treatments of schizophrenia challenged the psychoanalytic world in 1972 for its lack of environmental thinking and argued that 'We psychoanalysts must make some real contribution, along with our brothers in other fields of science, towards meeting the ecological crisis' (p. 373). Since then, and particularly since the 1990s, ecopsychology, a field that integrates ecology and psychology, has developed. Theodore Roszak, a key figure in this movement, argues that the core of the mind is the 'ecological unconscious', that repressing ecological connection leads to societal madness, and there is a synergistic interplay between planetary and personal well-being (Roszak et al. 1995). Mary Jane Rust has more recently written about eco-psychotherapy, 'one of the many eco-therapies which arise out of the field of ecopsychology' and adds, 'psychotherapy invites us to tell the story of our human relationships; eco-psychotherapy

expands this to include our earth story, the context in which our human relationships sit' (Rust, 2020, p. 1).

Since the turn of the century climate psychology has accelerated. Joseph Dodds argues that psychoanalysis, with its focus on unconscious aspects of behaviour, needs to have a prominent place in climate change science. His book *Psychoanalysis and Ecology at the Edge of Chaos* (2011), offers a psychoanalytical approach to the ecological crisis, linking this field to the science of complexity and chaos theory, arguing that 'this moment of crisis can also offer us an opportunity for a more open vision of ourselves, as subjects, as societies, and as a species among the interconnected life systems of the earth' (p. 201). Prominent psychoanalytic academics such as Paul Hoggett, Sally Weintrobe, Rosemary Randall and Wendy Hollway have highlighted how coping responses to the ecological disaster are not solely individual psychological processes but are deeply embedded in socio-cultural norms and structures. They have identified cultural mechanisms such as collective denial, entitlement, and exceptionalism that contribute to maintaining unsustainable behaviours like mass consumerism and hinder effective responses to climate change (Hoggett, 2012; Hollway et al, 2022; Randall, 2005; Weintrobe, 2021). Some writers point to the denial of our inner-world needs. Hoggett (2020) says we have a problematic relationship to our own 'creatureliness', to our physical being, to our frailty, and to our mortality. Rust (2020) writes of the need to take back the 'unwanted parts of the self which are cast onto the other-than-human world' and begin 'the painful process of reintegration' (p. 96).

I have outlined the ways the following concepts are crucial for research into the social politics of meat: the unconscious in individuals (Freud, 1991) and in the collective (Fromm, 1962; Hopper, 2003; Long, 2013; Weinberg, 2007); social defences against uncomfortable emotions such as anxiety and guilt, which may include defences such as denial, splitting, projection, attacking and alienating (Long, 2013; Ringer, 2017; Stein, 2019; Steiner, 1990) that are more likely placed in the paranoid schizoid position than in the depressive position (Klein, 1998); a safe 'holding environment', or containment, being needed for development to occur (Bion, 1989; Winnicott, 1971); and finally the concept that many of our habits are so deeply embedded in socio-cultural norms and narratives it is difficult to even observe those norms, let alone think and analyse them objectively (CPA, 2004).

In addition to the above, the key concepts from the field of systems psychodynamics have been crucial:

- Systems psychodynamic work involves reflexivity, an awareness that the researcher and the research itself are 'part of the social world' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1989). This means that as a researcher, I need to be aware of and examine my own beliefs, judgments and behaviour, and how these may influence the research. Self-awareness and self-scrutiny are a crucial part of the work.
- A systems psychodynamic approach assumes complexity in a system. In Nossal's words 'it attempts to engage with and embrace the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in the human condition. It attends to the perpetual movement between PS <-> D³; between phantasy and reality; between subjectivity and objectivity; between conflict and order; between stability and change; between 'container and contained'. (Nossal, 2007, p 77)
- Also central to working with a systems psychodynamic approach is Bollas's notion of the 'unthought known' (Bollas, 1987), those experiences and ideas in some way known to an individual, but about which the individual is unable to think.
- Finally, within a systems psychodynamic approach, it is common to offer a 'working hypothesis', rather than an interpretation (initially used in psychoanalysis). A working hypothesis is a more active and anticipatory, it invites 'further dialogue and exploration toward learning and development' (Nossal, 2007, p.79).

³ PS <-> D refers to the continual flux from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position throughout one's life, explained more fully on pages 25-26 of this thesis.

Section 2.3: Anthrozoology

Anthrozoology (also known as Human Animal Studies) is the interdisciplinary study of how humans relate to and interact with animals (DeMello, 2012). It is an interdisciplinary field, spanning the humanities (in particular, psychology and sociology) and the biological and bio-medical sciences. My research is into the social politics of meat, which is not specifically about how humans relate to animals, rather it is about how *humans relate to other humans when speaking and thinking about animals* (particularly those bred for food). Nonetheless, a crucial 'way into' this complex and fraught topic is to start with how we relate to animals. Understanding the existing knowledge, literature and research in this fascinating field has therefore been important. I have divided this chapter into four sub-sections. First, in section 2.3.1, I briefly cover existing knowledge on understanding animals, their behaviours and emotions. Second, in section 2.3.2, I explore what is known about human interaction with and treatment of animals. Third, in section 2.3.3, I explore the major figures and theories involved in the ethics of how we treat and use animals. And finally, section 2.3.4 explains existing knowledge on the reasons and beliefs behind cruelty to animals.

2.3.1 Knowledge on animals, their lifestyles, behaviours and emotions

There is a wealth of knowledge in the field of understanding animals, their lifestyles, behaviours and emotions. In the last 20 odd years the field has become increasingly popular as a research area, with authors such as Temple Grandin, Peter Wohlleben and Hal Herzog making significant contributions to our understanding of animal behaviour. I will only touch on a few here, since this is important foundation work for me, although not a core focus of my own research.

Temple Grandin, American professor of Animal Science at Colorado State University, consultant to the livestock industry on animal behaviour, and autism spokesperson, has been a major contributor to current knowledge and understanding of animal behaviour. Grandin has authored more than 60 peer-reviewed scientific papers on animal behaviour and is a prominent proponent for the humane treatment of livestock for slaughter. Her research has developed extensive understanding of animal emotions, behaviours and interactions with humans. In *Animals in Translation* (2005), Grandin draws on her own experience with autism as well as her experience as an animal scientist to deliver insights into how animals think, act, and feel. She argues that all animals (not just pets and farm animals, but zoo animals

and wildlife as well) are more intelligent and sensitive than humans assume them to be, and each deserves a decent life. In *Animals Make Us Human* (2010), she explores what causes animals physical pain and pinpoints what causes emotional distress for animals.

Peter Wohlleben, German forester and author of *The Inner Life of Animals* (2016), also explores the emotions, feelings and intelligence of animals. Wohlleben combines the latest scientific research into how animals interact with the world with his own personal experiences in forests and fields to share stories about free-living and domestic animals, arguing that there is much overlap between how humans and other animals experience emotions, bonding, loss, and life. Stories of devoted pigs, two-timing magpies, scheming roosters, grieving deer, and goats disciplining their kids, to name but a few, give us rich insights into non-human species, and remind us of how much we share with other species. English author Kate Forster expresses this intersection beautifully:

‘I think it's a deep consolation to know that spiders dream, that monkeys tease predators, that dolphins have accents, that lions can be scared silly by a lone mongoose, that otters hold hands, and ants bury their dead. That there isn't their life and our life. Nor your life and my life. That it's just one teetering and endless thread and all of us, all of us, are entangled with it as deep as entanglement goes.’⁴

Indeed, creative writers have always explored human-animal similarities and connections. Think *Lassie*, *Black Beauty*, *Charlotte's Web* and *Babe*. A beautiful book written after the horrendous 2019-2020 Australian bushfires, edited by Leah Kaminsky and Meg Keneally, also entitled *Animals Make us Human* (2020), features famous Australian writers, artists and researchers reflecting on their own connection with animals and nature. Such stories of our entanglements and deep connections with other animals might be seen as a continuation of the idea of the social and associative unconscious (Fromm, 1962; Foulkes, 1971; Hopper, 2003; Long, 2016). Creative writers such as Kate Forster may well be expanding on our ‘shared anxieties, fantasies, defenses, myths and memories’ (Weinberg, 2007, p312). Indeed, Fromm's assertion that the unconscious represents ‘the plant in him, the animal in him....

⁴ Quoted on the Facebook page of Kate Forster (author) 13 October 2013. Available at: [\(20+\) Kate Forster - I think it's a deep consolation to know that... | Facebook](#)

the day when man will become fully human, and when nature will become humanised as men will be “naturalised”,’ (1962, p. 88) seems almost prophetic of current day writers on human/animal relations.

Many of the authors mentioned in the next section also contribute to the field of understanding animal behaviour, although their focus is on understanding how humans interact with animals.

2.3.2 Knowledge on human interaction with and treatment of animals

One of the most significant contributors to the study of human relationships and interactions with animals has been Dr James Serpell, zoologist, professor of Animal Ethics and Welfare, and founder of The International Society for Anthrozoology (ISAZ). Serpell (1996) asserts that animals and our relationships with them have been consistently ignored by mainstream psychology and sociology until the last forty years, and that such a lack comes from the notion that human relationships with animals are somehow counterfeit relationships: non-serious substitutes for the real thing. Serpell himself has gone a long way towards challenging such notions. His book, *In the Company of Animals* (1996) provides a broad overview of human-animal interactions and human attitudes to other species on earth. He contrasts our two opposing sentiments towards animals: a ‘dispassionate, utilitarian attitude to factory-farmed livestock’, on the one hand, and an ‘affectionate and sympathetic relationship with domestic pets’ (p. 235), on the other. He traces the history of human perceptions and attitudes towards animals, exploring the ways in which animal companionship can influence our health, and calling out what he terms ‘the dangerous, egotistical myth’ of ‘human moral superiority’ (p. 235). Serpell asserts that this egocentric notion is not only a danger to earth’s animals, but also a threat to our own existence.

Hal Herzog, one of the world’s leading anthrozoologists and professor of psychology, explores the full spectrum of human–animal relations. His 2010 book *Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat* is based on his research on, and work with, animal rights activists, cockfighters, professional dog-show handlers, veterinary students, and biomedical researchers. Herzog presents scientific research with his own real-world experiences and demonstrates that the relationships we have with animals are riddled with contradictions and complexities. Herzog explores how we can look at the exact same animal very differently given its context—most Americans regard cockfighting as cruel but think nothing of eating

chicken, when in reality gamecocks are treated very well when they are not fighting, while most chickens bred for food lead short, miserable lives and are killed mercilessly. He writes about his own complicated relationship with animals: 'I eat meat—but not as much as I used to, and not veal. I oppose testing the toxicity of oven cleaner and eye shadow on animals, but I would sacrifice a lot of mice to find a cure for cancer. And while I find some of the logic of animal liberation philosophers convincing, I also believe . . . humans [are] on a different moral plane than other animals.' (p. 11). Having identified his own psychological and moral dilemmas, Herzog certainly captures our inability to think straight about, and act consistently with, other species.

Wayne Pacelle, former CEO of Humane Society of the United States, also details mankind's unique, complex and at times disturbing connection with the animal kingdom in *The Bond* (2011). The book is an exploration of the deep links of the human-animal bond, as well as the conflicting impulses that have led to widespread and systemic cruelty to animals. Pacelle devotes early sections of the book to the intellectual and emotional lives of animals, showing their great capacity for love, joy, and grief. He explores our fascination with wild animals, as well as the biochemistry involved in the human-animal bond as seen with pets. He puts the extreme practices in factory farming into human perspective when he quotes from an agricultural expert: 'If you grew as fast as a chicken, you'd weigh 349 pounds at age 2' (p. 128). Pacelle's message is that because of our bond with animals, and because there is an asymmetry in power, we have a responsibility to protect them:

'Today, more than ever, we hold all the cards in our relationship with animals. They have no say in their own fate, it's up to us to speak and act on their behalf.' (p. xiv).

To support the work of authors and researchers studying human-animal interactions, such as Serpell, Herzog, Grandin and Pacelle, the International Society for Anthrozoology (ISAZ) was formed in 1991 as a supportive organization for the scientific and scholarly study of human-animal interactions. ISAZ is a non-profit, non-political organization with a worldwide, multi-disciplinary membership of students, scholars and interested professionals. Their website highlights dramatic changes in people's attitudes towards animals and their treatment in the

last 20-30 years and the growing scientific and scholarly interest in the new field of Anthrozoology: the study of the interactions between human and non-human animals.⁵

ISAZ publishes a monthly journal, *Anthrozoos*, a multidisciplinary journal of the interactions of people and animals.

Numerous documentaries attempting to raise awareness of the way humans treat animals have also been made in the past 20 years. To mention just a few:

Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret, a 2014 documentary film directed by Kip Andersen and Keegan Kuhn, explores the impact of animal agriculture on the environment, and investigates the policies of environmental organizations on this issue. The film looks at various environmental concerns, including global warming, water use, deforestation, and ocean dead zones, and suggests that animal agriculture is the primary source of environmental destruction. *Cowspiracy* won many film awards but also received much criticism: in a review in the SFWeekly it was called 'a pile of self-indulgent, vegan propaganda'.⁶

Earthlings is a much earlier (2005) American documentary film about humanity's use of other animals as pets, food, clothing, entertainment, and for scientific research. The film is narrated by Joaquin Phoenix, features music by Moby and directed by Shaun Monson. Covering pet stores, puppy mills, and animal profession, *Earthlings* includes footage obtained through hidden cameras to chronicle the day-to-day practices of some of the largest animal-use industries in the world. It draws parallels between racism, sexism, and speciesism. *Earthlings* has also won numerous film awards for its evocative portrayal of the correlation between nature, animals and questionable human economic interests.

The Australian equivalent of *Earthlings*, in terms of powerful, informative, and controversial information on the way humans treat animals, is the feature-length documentary *Dominion*. Written, directed and edited by Chris Delforce, who used drones, hidden and handheld cameras to obtain confronting footage from Australian farms, saleyards, and abattoirs, the film also uses narrations by well-known actors: Joaquin Phoenix, Sadie Sink, Rooney Mara and Australian singer Sia. Focusing on legal, industry-standard practices that occur all over

⁵ ISAZ website accessed 21 July 2022. Available at: <https://isaz.net/>.

⁶ *Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret*. In: *CinemaSpin*. March 29, 2015. Available at: [Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret – CinemaSpin](#) (Accessed: 20 August 2022).

the world, the film questions the morality and validity of humankind's dominion over the animal kingdom, advocating for a deep conversation about our exploitation of animals.⁷

Unsurprisingly, this film has been slammed by several industry groups who believe the footage has been covertly obtained and deliberately designed to tarnish the reputation of livestock farming. Labelled as a smear campaign against animal agriculture, Australian Meat Industry Council chief executive Patrick Hutchinson has declared 'What the film shows is not representative of the practices of the wider industry.....the vast majority of businesses and the vast majority of their employees are deeply committed to ensuring the most humane experience possible for animals'.⁸

A researcher who has blended concern for the plight of farmed animals with an understanding of the unconscious aspects of our society is sociologist Melanie Joy. To make sense of the cruelty and secrecy of our treatment of animals Joy has coined the term "carnism" to describe the invisible system and dominant ideology which encourages us to eat certain animals. Her book *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs and Wear Cows* (2010), as well as her numerous TED talks, explain how carnism sustains itself through both conscious and unconscious mechanisms. She maintains that the choice to eat meat is not natural or a given but rather is influenced by social conditioning. She argues that most people care deeply about animals and do not want them to suffer, and hence, to eat animals, people engage in 'psychic numbing', which alters how we perceive certain animals and use defence mechanisms to block empathy. Such mechanisms include invisibility, we don't see the factory farms or the cruelty inflicted on animals; denial and dissociation, through the euphemisms such as 'ham, 'beef' and meat' in our language; splitting, we tell ourselves dogs are cute and smart while pigs are dirty and dumb; and myths, the animal industry uses pictures of animals looking happy on joyful green farms, as well as the myths about meat being essential for our health. She asserts that 'we are passive consumers rather than active citizens. The mechanisms of the system have become ingrained into our consciousness' (p. 116).

⁷ This film is available at: <https://www.dominionmovement.com/>

⁸ Quoted by Mitchell, 2019. Online article. Available at: <https://www.farmonline.com.au/story/5324513/industry-braces-for-documentary-backlash-video/>. Accessed 22 May 2023.

This makes sense to me when I think of the extraordinary response of both horror and compassion with which not only Australia, but the world, had in response to the estimated 480 million animals killed by the bush fires in January 2020. As some animal activists have pointed out, at least the same number of animals are killed every 2 days in the meat and dairy industry. Our compassion for the bush fire affected animals is heartening, but how do we explain the disconnect to all the other animals killed simply for our tastebuds?

The aforementioned researchers and writers focus on exposing the true state of how humans treat animals, although undoubtedly there is an ethical message within their work. I will now cover some of the work done by authors specifically concerned with the ethical issues around our treatment of animals.

2.3.3 Knowledge on the ethics of how we treat and use animals

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Matthieu Ricard's *A Plea for the Animals* (2014), was the first book to profoundly rouse my passion on this issue. An extraordinary and highly academic book, this is a heartfelt plea for us to tap into our compassion and to treat animals with dignity and respect and enable them to live their lives in peace and safety. For Ricard, compassion towards all species is a moral obligation and the direction toward which an enlightened society should aspire. He chronicles the appalling sufferings of the animals we eat, wear, and use for adornment or entertainment, and morally and scientifically scrutinises any justification for animal exploitation. He shares the global figures: every year, sixty billion land animals and a thousand billion marine animals are killed for our consumption: 'We are responsible for an ongoing massacre of animals on a scale unequalled in the history of humankind' (p. 3). Ricard alerts us to the collective denial of our cruel and inhumane treatment of animals, the turning of a blind eye that Steiner, Zerubavel, Long and others have written about with regards to other conspiracies of silence.

Also concerned about the horrors inflicted upon animals, but with a more specific niche, is the work of Carol Adams. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (1990) Adams explores the relationship between patriarchal values and meat eating by interweaving the insights of feminism, vegetarianism, animal cruelty, and literary theory. She argues that male dominance and animals' oppression are linked: 'meat is a symbol for what is not seen but is always there – patriarchal control of animals' (p. xxviii). Her challenging of a violent and violating world view in the two respects, attitudes toward

women and attitudes towards animals, and the links between the two, is steadily progressed through pictures of advertisements and examples of our language and norms, as well as through her robust and detailed arguments. She declares that 'the literal evocation of male power is found in the concept of meat' (p. 11).

An interesting and important concept Adams introduces to the field of animal ethics is that of the 'absent referent'. Behind every meal of meat is an absence: the death of the animal whose place the meat takes. This is the 'absent referent'. The absent referent disguises the violence inherent to meat eating, to protect the conscience of the meat eater and render the idea of individual animals as immaterial. The function of the absent referent is to keep our "meat" separated from any idea that he or she was once an animal, to keep something from being seen as having been someone. It allows us to morally abandon another sentient being.

Adams continues today with her linkage between female and animal abuse by a patriarchal system. With echoes of Menzies Lyth and her observation of nurses calling people by their bed number, illness, or body parts, Adams has commented that both Hillary Clinton and Julia Gillard (high profile female Australian and American politicians) have been described as animal parts. On a 2016 video of one of Donald trump's rallies a political pin appears with the wording "KFC Hillary Special: 2 Fat Thighs, 2 small breasts...left wing", and in Australia in 2013, the opposition party held a dinner that included on its menu "Julia Gillard Kentucky Fried Quail: small breasts, huge thighs and a big red box". Adams (2016) muses:

'Two of the most powerful women in the world, and yet their opponents reduce them to sexualized body parts, participating in the viewpoint that women exist to please someone else, not to act in their own self-interest—it's not about their programs, their platforms, or their merits or demerits. Such characterizations disempower them: body parts don't have a voice or a will' (p1).

I find Adams' connections and insights to be both enlightening and affirming. The link between meat eating and male dominance is an example of an 'unthought known' (Bollas, 1987) in my own life. I remember many a family BBQ where the men cooked the meat, the women made the salads, and when served, the men tended to eat a large steak while the women usually had chicken skewers or sausages. My extended family has traditionally had rather conservative gender roles: the men are typically farmers, while the women raise the

children and perhaps work in town as teachers or nurses. In other words, the men do the 'important work' while the women do the domestic and the 'extra' work. For many of the men in my extended family, their only ever cooking experience is at the BBQ. Masculinity = red meat. Our social and family dinnertime customs are surely further examples of how the social unconscious operates, and of collective denial. If eating red meat is part of the 'co-constructed shared unconscious' (Weinberg, 2007) of men, then the refraining of eating meat may be a real threat to gender identity. This is backed up by statistics. With regards to attitudes to animals and vegetarian or vegan eating, there are significant differences between men and women. Women eat less meat, are more likely to be vegetarian or semi vegetarian, engage in grassroots animal advocacy, oppose animal research and join an animal protection organisation (Cooney, 2014; Herzog, 2010).

Also interested in discrimination, Australian philosopher Peter Singer is widely considered to be the godfather of animal welfare and vegan movements. In *Animal Liberation* (1975), Singer argues against "speciesism": discrimination on the grounds that a being belongs to a certain species. He holds the interests of all beings capable of suffering to be worthy of equal consideration and that giving lesser consideration to beings based on their species is no more justified than discrimination based on race, ability, culture or gender.

Singer has also written two books with author, environmentalist, and attorney who specialises in human-animal concerns, Jim Mason. Their first book as co-authors, *Animal Factories* (1980), is a chilling account of animal life in factory farms. They describe cruel practices such as the killing of male chicks 'as soon as they crawl out of their shells'. (p. 5), the docking (cutting off) of pig's tails because the pigs neurotically bite each other due to overcrowded conditions (p. 22); and the 'debeaking' of chickens to prevent them from pecking each other (p. 39). The impacts on humans of factory farm practices are exposed, for instance, hormones such as BGH (Bovine Growth Hormone) given to dairy cows to increase their production may cause problems such as premature growth in infants, or breast cancer in adults (p. 103). The authors note the unfairness of the system to small farmers and farm workers, commenting on the huge investment of capital and time required by modern factory farms which prevents farmers from running a 'genuinely diversified, resource-balanced, ecologically integrated farming operation'. Consequently, 'those with small numbers of animals in labour-intensive systems find that they are making too little

money for the effort, and they sell off their animals. Thus, the specialized operations proliferate and take over markets from small, diversified producers' (p. 145). Despite this concern for small farmers, the most important issue for Singer and Mason is for animals to be treated as sentient. The authors argue that animals 'are not things. They can feel pain. They can suffer frustration and boredom' p.172), and they pose the question:

Do we have the right to make animals live miserable lives just to satisfy our taste for a diet so rich in animal products that it is bad for our own health?' (p. 172).

In their second co-authored book, *The Ethics of What We Eat (2006)*, Singer and Mason continue this discussion about food production, food choices, and the importance of consciously considering how our food is grown, treated, and delivered. Their opening line: 'We don't usually think of what we eat as a matter of ethics' (p. 3) leads us into an interesting story-telling method to explore the complexities of ethical decision making about food. The stories of three families and their three shopping lists, the Standard American Diet, the Conscientious Omnivores and the Vegans, provides readers with information on the production of food from each of these family's diets. Dilemmas such as the fact that we generally think it is better to buy local, but if local food practices are unethical, perhaps it isn't so good to buy local, are presented to us. The countless complexities of decision making about food, particularly meat, are "put on a plate" for us.

One of the most interesting aspects of this book is the fact that as the authors tried to trace back the production process to see the ethical issues which arose from the three families food choices, of the eighty seven corporations who had farmed or manufactured products the family had bought, only fourteen (most of these 14 were small producers of organic food) were willing to assist them in any way. The rest did not respond to their requests for assistance in identifying where the products came from, or to follow up letters saying they were keen to get the producers' side of the story. The authors state: 'We were disappointed but not surprised. As recently as the 1970s. the food industry was proud to show its farming practices to the public. No more.' (p. 6) They quote from Peter Cheeke, a professor of animal science:

'For modern animal agriculture, the less the consumer knows about what's happening before the meat hits the plate, the better..... One of the best things modern animal agriculture has going for it is that most people in the developed

countries are several generations removed from the farm and haven't a clue how animals are raised and processed.' (p. 8)

Singer and Mason conclude with five ethical principles to help us navigate the ethical choices: transparency, fairness, humanity, social responsibility and needs (pp. 147-248).

Animal advocacy groups also strongly emphasise the ethics of how we treat and use animals. A few of the prominent ones include PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) and Animals Australia. Operating primarily in America, PETA operates under the simple principle that animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, use for entertainment or abuse in any way. This organisation focuses its attention on the four areas in which the largest numbers of animals suffer the most intensely for the longest periods of time: in farms, the clothing trade, laboratories, and the entertainment industry.⁹ Animals Australia has over 2 million individual supporters and has a track record in investigating and exposing animal cruelty and for conducting world-wide strategic public awareness campaigns.¹⁰ Less hard hitting but perhaps more widely known and trusted in Australia, the RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention and Cruelty of Animals) is a non-government, community-based charity that works to prevent cruelty to animals by actively promoting their care and protection.¹¹

2.3.4 Knowledge on the reasons for cruelty to animals

Why do we allow atrocities to be committed on animals? This has been a background question throughout the research. Many authors discussed in the previous sections deal with the question as part of their work. Pacelle, for instance, in *The Bond* (2011), devotes a chapter to 'Cruelty and its Defenders'. He comments on how difficult but important a subject it is: 'we should be wary of arguments that try to smother doubts and advocate a course of action that requires no reflection, no inconvenience, and no sacrifice' (p. 277). He explores the world of industries and interest groups that seek to hide or explain away the abuse of animals: trophy hunters, bear baiters, seal clubbers, factory farmers, commercial breeders and dog fighters. He observes that there has been a shift in public opinion, with more respect for animal welfare groups, and that the industry groups have sensed this shift and adapted their methods of defence. In his view the 'dismissive tone has become more of a

⁹ PETA website: <https://www.animalsaustralia.org/>.

¹⁰ Animals Australia website: <https://www.animalsaustralia.org/>.

¹¹ RSPCA website: <https://www.rspca.org.au/about-us>.

nuanced rebuttal', and 'industries now draw a distinction between "animal welfare" and "animal rights":' (p. 280).

Of the power and political tactics used by the industrial farming industry to justify their treatment of animals, Pacelle asserts that cruelty is sanctioned for the profit motive:

'... they have money, they have connections, they have power, and they know how to use them all. For these industries, their trade groups and their apologists, the suffering of animals is the most incidental of details. They prefer not to think about it, and they try very hard to make sure that you don't either' (p. 311).

Similarly, Jonathan Safran Foer (2009) documents atrocities such as animal farm workers 'using poles like baseball bats to hit baby turkeys, stomping on chickens to watch them "pop", beating lame pigs with metal pipes, and knowingly dismembering fully conscious cattle' (p. 252), but is also sympathetic to those factory farm workers, describing their conditions as 'systematic human rights violations'. Considering their low wages and horrendous work conditions, Foer asserts that this system propagates workers who 'let their frustrations loose on farm animals and simply succumb to the demands of supervisors to keep slaughter lines moving at all costs and without second thoughts' (p. 254). With echoes of systems psychodynamics thinkers who have written about the effect of alienation within other types of workplaces (De Gooijer, 2009; Fromm, 1962; Long, 2008; Menzies Lyth, 1960), Foer writes of the factory farm and the humans who work in them:

'Farmers have lost – have had taken from them – a direct, human relationship with their work. Increasingly, they don't own the animals, can't determine their methods, aren't allowed to apply their wisdom, and have no alternative to high-speed industrial slaughter.....Human beings cannot be human (much less humane) under the conditions of a factory farm or slaughterhouse. It's the most perfect workplace alienation in the world right now. Unless you consider what the animals experience.' (p. 256)

As mentioned earlier, Melanie Joy (2010) also examines the systemic issues involved in our abuse of animals. She details two categories of defence mechanisms which she calls the three Ns of justification and the cognitive trio. The three Ns of justification include the notions that meat eating is normal, natural and necessary. Joy disputes each of these three

rationalisations. She argues that “normal” is socially constructed, not innate, poses the question that if meat eating is “natural”, why do we have to distance ourselves from our own behaviours, and documents much research which strongly suggests that meat eating is detrimental to health, as opposed to being “necessary”. The cognitive trio in her second category includes objectification, deindividualization and dichotomisation. Objectification is ‘the process of viewing a living being as an inanimate object, a thing’ (p. 117). Animals are objectified in a variety of ways, most notably through our language (think of the words “livestock” and “meat”). Deindividualization is ‘the process of viewing individuals only in terms of their group identity and as having the same characteristics as everyone else in the group’ (p. 119). Dogs are beloved pets and are given names, but we do not name our farmed animals, they are not allowed an identity. Dichotomisation is ‘the process of mentally putting others into two, often opposing, categories based on our beliefs about them’ (p. 122). By treating the enormous mass of farmed animals as objects to be bought and sold, not allowing them an identity beyond this, we can easily dichotomise edible and inedible animals. We can ‘eat our steak while we pet our dog and remain oblivious to the implications of our choices’ (p. 123). Joy summarises:

‘The carnistic system is riddled with absurdities, inconsistencies, and paradox. It is fortified by a complex network of defences that make it possible for us to believe without questioning, to know without thinking, and to act without feeling’ (p. 133).

On a similar thread of discourse in examining systemic reasons for animal abuse, there are numerous sociological researchers attempting to understand the links between cruelty to animals and human-to-human violence. Clifton Flynn, in *Understanding Animal Abuse: A Sociological Analysis* (2012) explores and analyses research that has been done on the relationship between animal abuse and interhuman violence. Flynn’s focus throughout the analysis is on understanding the more direct and intentional acts of cruelty that are committed by individuals or small groups. i.e. ‘socially unacceptable behaviour that intentionally causes unnecessary pain, suffering, or distress to and /or death of an animal’ (p. 2). He concludes that animal abuse and interpersonal violence do often go together. Animal abuse can be a risk factor, a marker, and sometimes a precursor of other forms of violence, but he also stresses that we need to be very careful about labelling and stigmatising youth who inflict suffering upon animals: ‘the best evidence to date suggests

that the majority of those who abuse animals, at least in their youth, do so infrequently, outgrow it, and typically go on to lead normal lives' (p. 53).

Flynn also broadens his lens to include the systematic cruelty of factory farms, and institutionalised social practice where animal abuse is 'routine, widespread, and often defined as socially acceptable' (p. 104). He examines research into the impact of slaughterhouse employment, compared to other industries, on a community's crime rate. Findings were clear: slaughterhouse employment was significantly related to higher crime rates as well as report rates (p. 106). This raises the "chicken or egg" question: are violent people more likely to work in places of institutionalised animal abuse, or does the slaughterhouse experience cause more violence in people?

Finally, Flynn points out that research on animal abuse has previously been anthropocentric and speciesist. He explains, 'by "anthropocentric" I mean that the focus has been on humans, with animals only considered at the periphery. By "speciesist" I mean research based on an ideology that views humans as superior to other animals' (p109). He stresses, research on animal abuse 'has been motivated almost exclusively by its association with violence against humans, rather than being seen as worthy of academic investigation in its own right' (p. 109) and that this research has been focussed on violence towards animals that is defined as socially unacceptable, unnecessary, and illegal acts committed by individuals' (p. 110). This of course excludes "socially acceptable" violence, such as hunting, factory farming and animal experimentation. Some criminologists are starting to approach animal abuse from a less anthropocentric and speciesist perspective (Donaldson and Kymlicka, 2011; Nussbaum, 2022) but it is beyond the scope of this research to delve any further into this fascinating field.

In summary, it seems clear that our speciesist attitudes along with capitalism's drive for profit at the expense of all else are primary reasons for animals being treated simply as commodities in a system and therefore neglected as sentient beings. Hence, in the next section (2.4), I examine literature which explores the impact capitalism has had on how we see ourselves as a species, and consequentially how we treat other species.

2.4 Foundation knowledge on the impact of capitalism on how we see ourselves as a species (and therefore how we treat other species)

Capitalism, the prevailing world view which emphasises consumption and growth as its major success factors, has shaped a world view that sees nature and other species as resources to be exploited for profit. Many environmentalists, philosophers, scientists, climate psychologists and animal activists have underlined the damage this world view has done in contributing to the ecological crisis we now face.

Canadian author and social activist Naomi Klein (2014) argues that what is needed to transform our global economy so that it is less resource intensive and equitable across nations is possible, but that it is entirely outside the boundaries of our current dominant ideology. She states:

‘Our economic system and our planetary system are now at war. Or, more accurately, our economy is at war with many forms of life on earth, including human life. What the climate needs to avoid collapse is a contraction in humanity’s use of resources; what our economic model demands to avoid collapse is unfettered expansion. Only one of these sets of rules can be changed, and it’s not the laws of nature.’ (p. 21)

Within the field of systems psychodynamics, Sally Weintrobe (2021) contends that the structures and ideology of neo-liberal capitalism promote the uncaring parts of ourselves at the expense of the caring parts. She argues that this culture infantilises and regresses us all psychologically, breeds carelessness and narcissism, and has perpetuated a bubble of denial that has been largely responsible for the climate crisis and other humanitarian disasters. She describes the rise of the ideology of Exceptionalism, the state of the uncaring part ruling our psyche, explaining that Exceptionalism clings to these core false beliefs:

- I am entitled to see myself as ideal.
- I am entitled to have whatever I want.
- I am entitled to use omnipotent (magical) thinking to rid myself of any moral unease about holding these beliefs. (p. 15)

Susan Long (2008) writes of the state of mind prominent in our current capitalist society where perverse dynamics such as omnipotence, certainty and denial create a situation where corruption breeds corruption:

‘The perverse state of mind is a societal state of mind that turns a blind eye to abuse. The system both knows and does not know.’ (p. 21).

Similarly, Simon Western (2019) comments on what he calls ‘entitled enjoyment’, a cultural phenomenon that embraces individualism and the pursuit of happiness that emerged from the 1960s counter-cultural social movements. He asserts that our entitlement to enjoyment has led to a divided self. Consciously we felt entitled to happiness, and unconsciously we feel constantly lacking. Happiness always seems beyond our reach. This leaves us with a split self, the ‘Wounded Self’ and the ‘Celebrated Self’. What is needed, Western argues, is for us all to integrate rather than split the Celebrated-Self and Wounded-Self. Polarizing these as two parts split off from each other is damaging. We all have both aspects within us, individually and collectively and some integration is needed to own both. In psycho-analytic terms, Melanie Klein might say this is moving to the depressive state.

Indeed, the separatist and human-entitled ideology of capitalism which enables us to see animals as products and profit-making commodities has been prolifically written about in the last decade (Eisenstein, 2018; Gigliotti, 2022; Monbiot, 2022). In his aptly named book *Eating the Earth* (2023) economist Justyn Walsh argues that our modern economy has evolved from a system for *satisfying* needs to one *creating* needs, that ‘capitalism relies on our expectations not being fulfilled’ (p. 42). Animals bred for food are a victim of this system, where ‘most consumers seem to accept, tacitly at least, the assumption popularised by the seventeenth century philosopher René Descartes that animals are nothing more than soulless machines feeling neither joy nor pain, and entirely subservient to our appetites’ (p. 193).

Likewise, Jason Hannon (2020) refers to Marx’s analysis of capitalism when he comments on Marx’s insight that a ‘market-based society forces us, conditions us, into social relationships of market-based exchange... we think like commodities. We relate to one another as commodities’ (p. 7). Referring to the historian Jason Hribal, who argues that in the capitalist system animals are not commodities, but slaves, Hannon explains:

‘They are forced against their will to perform labour: producing hair, leather, milk, eggs and flesh. Like slaves, animals receive no compensation for their labour. The surplus value goes entirely to the capitalist’ (p. 9).

Amber Husain (2023) takes this a step further to argue that even ‘ethical’ and ‘sustainable’ farming has something in common with the comparatively horrific industrial meat farming: ‘beholden to the profit motive, both must culminate in killing for produce’ (p. 11). Commenting on the systemisation of ‘the progressive exploitation of the Other’ (p. 97), Husain ponders how we might be able to become a species that recognises animals as a class:

‘How to become a species prepared to do the work of transforming not just human social relations, but human-animal social relations too?’ (p. 95).

Some advocates use democratic principles and ideals to make the case for broader legal protection of other species. Vandana Shiva, Indian ecofeminist and environmentalist, has been writing about the recovery of the commons and the creation of ‘Earth Democracy’ for over two decades. In her book *Earth Democracy* (2016), Shiva states:

‘Earth Democracy shifts the worldview from one dominated by markets and military, monocultures and mechanistic reductionism, to the peaceful cocreation and coevolution of diverse beings, connected through the common bonds of life’ (pp. 184-185).

The idea of an earth democracy is not just about human democracy. It includes non-human animals, plants and all parts of ecology. Shiva explains that it includes ‘all members of the earth family’, and that it is ‘both an ancient worldview and an emergent political movement for peace, justice and sustainability’ (p.1). Polly Higgins, international environment lawyer, campaigned to make ecocide (destruction of the natural environment by deliberate or negligent human action) a crime subject to trial by jury in 2011 (Kumar, 2012).

In the field of political philosophy, Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, have published *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* (2011), an innovative work on the rights of animals to life and liberty. In explaining the implications of recognising animals as persons or selves with inviolable rights, they state, ‘in the simplest terms, it means recognising that they are not means to our ends’. Philosopher and legal professor Marta Nussbaum is among

those offering new frameworks to animal rights, ethics and law (Nussbaum, 2022). She points out that thus far, law, 'both domestic and international, has quite a lot to say about the lives of companion animals, but very little to say about any other animal' (p. xv).

There is momentum to change this in many spheres. In recent campaigns Greenpeace, one of the world's largest and most powerful environmental groups, has pointed to the many myths within the 'meat industry's propaganda machine' and advocated for 'advertising restrictions and regulations for the meat industry in line with other categories like tobacco, junk food and alcohol' (Bogusky, p. 5). But while this movement to address animal cruelty through the democratic process is clearly happening, the question of whether we should eat animals at all is being actively debated. In the next section I explore some of these arguments.

2.5 Foundation knowledge on the issue of eating animals (or not)

In Western society we eat "meat", not "animals". Certain species of animals are born and raised to become meat. They are seen as products ("stock") from their birth, they are transformed through "production" and upon being slaughtered then butchered they become "meat". Their value is an economic value, the value we place on them is the price of food for humans (or increasingly, the price of petfood). The question of whether we should eat meat, and if we do, how animals should be bred and raised to "provide" that meat is one many writers and researchers in the food industry, the farming industry, animal welfare, and philosophy have been grappling with for some time.

Nick Fiddes, sociologist and author of *Meat: a natural symbol* (1991), explains that food selection is 'imbued with social rules and meaning', and that 'it is clear from the extent of its associations with cultural rituals, both religious and secular, that meat is a medium particularly rich in social meaning' (p. 5). Meat feeds not only our bodies but also our minds; it is 'more than just a meal, it represents a way of life' he argues (p. 45). In Fiddes' view, meat 'tangibly represents human control of the natural world', it is a 'potent statement of our supreme power' (p. 2). He suggests that our attitude to meat reflects our world view, and that 'changing habits in meat consumption may well indicate a changing perception of the world we inhabit'.

The world we inhabit indeed seems conflicted and confused about the function of meat. Global meat consumption continues to thrive and there are loud active voices promoting the

eating of meat (Kanerva, 2019), but at the same time large agri-food companies are being challenged by alternative food networks (Lundstrom, 2018) and some are now arguing that ‘the end of meat is here’ (Safran Foer, 2020). While there is no doubt that a binary “good - bad view of meat” is counterproductive, for the sake of understanding current knowledge and literature, I will now present some of the conflicting messages about meat and its role in society.

There are multitudes of advertorials and direct advertisements by the meat industry promoting the importance of meat to our health and appealing to a sense of patriotism (see Appendix 9). In addition to such prominent advertising, some writers argue that it is our moral duty to eat meat because the existence of domesticated animals depends on the practice of eating them (Zangwill, 2021). Most scholarly proponents of meat eating, however, argue against factory farming, while strongly promoting the eating of *some* meat.

Michael Pollan, author of *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (2006), argues that the modern industrial food system has seriously disrupted the connection between people and the natural world. He advocates organic food farming, local food, and a greater awareness of the consequences of our food choices. Impressed by a local alternative farmer called Joel Salatin who uses symbiotic relationships and ‘strategic disturbance’, Pollan concludes that humans will continue to eat meat, and that sustainable farming is the way to go.

Mathew Evans’ *On Eating Meat* (2019) could perhaps be viewed as the Australian equivalent to *The Omnivores’ Dilemma*. Both are determined meat eaters, and both argue for a more ethical, sustainable and transparent agricultural system. The subtitle to *On Eating Meat* “*The truth about its production and the question of whether we should eat it*”, explains the purpose of this book: to start discussions on what it really means to eat meat, or not to eat meat, and the responsibilities people take on when they decide to farm. Evans himself is a former food critic and chef, now farmer and restaurateur. Just as Singer and Mason do, Evans also comments on the meat industry’s fear of scrutiny and avoidance of transparency. He goes on to argue:

‘... genuinely informed conversation about what constitutes a “moral” carnivore remains elusive. Partly, this is because the debate has been seconded by those who

want us to implicitly trust what happened behind those closed farm gates – as well as by those who want us to eat no meat at all’ (p. 11)

Evans is critical of the ‘abstain from meat eating’ agenda of vegans and animal rights groups (p.11) but is also appalled at the inhumane and cruel practices of the industrial food system. He calls for less radicalisation, greater understanding, and for ethical omnivores to stand up for the welfare of animals and farmers alike.

Just as many of the climate psychologists mentioned in section 2.2.7 argue for a re-integration of the human and other-than-human worlds, Simon Fairlie, English author of *Meat: A Benign Extravagance* (2010), argues that as a society, we need to re-assess our connection with the land and the way we produce meat. Like Pollan and Evans, Fairlie argues against both industrial forms of meat production and the ‘folly’ of veganism as a universal solution to animal cruelty and climate change. An editor of Ecology magazine and a farmer himself, Fairlie argues for regenerative farming and smaller scale production of meat. Fairlie, Evans and Pollan are all proud proponents of an ethical meat industry which treats animals with compassion and care. All are somewhat critical of vegans and vegetarians who advocate getting rid of the industry altogether. Other authors come to a different conclusion.

One of the most influential voices in the vegan movement is Ed Winters, a British animal rights activist, writer and lecturer who has a strong social media presence on platforms such as You Tube and Instagram. He rose to prominence after his lecture, ‘You will never look at your life in the same way again’, was put onto You Tube and viewed over 33 million times online.¹² His two books *This is Vegan Propaganda (and other lies the meat industry tells you)* (2022), and *How to Argue with a Meat Eater (and win every time)* (2023) are popular in vegan circles but have been criticised for being sarcastic and dismissive in tone.

A more academic and theoretical voice (although Ed Winters is a lecturer himself) is Amber Husain’s scrutiny of why ‘the romance of “ethical” meat has gathered such cultural momentum’. *Meat Love: An Ideology of the Flesh* (2023) is an exploration of what she describes as an ideology of ‘meat love’, which ‘teaches us to embody an embrace of exploitation in a spirit of virtuous indulgence’ (p. 13). Highly critical of the type of “sustainable” farming advocated by Fairlie, Evans and Pollan, Husain rejects the argument

¹² Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVRRGAcUc7cblUzOh1KfFg>.

that such farming is kind, humane, and will save the world. She invites us to think of what it really means to love animals:

‘Love has always been capable of meaning many things, among them a propensity to kill. If love is somehow compatible with meat, what kind of lovers have we become?’ (p. 15).

In a similar vein, Jason Hannan (2020), author and professor at the University of Winnipeg, argues that the grass-fed meat movement is a ‘neoprimitivist quest for authenticity’ (p. 309). Like Husain, Hannan sees the popularity of ‘humane and ethical’ farming as romantic and unrealistic. After exploring much of the evidence of whether humane, sustainable farming can solve the ecological crisis and be a solution to world hunger, Hannan concludes that ‘this irrational faith in grass-fed meat’ is a ‘bizarre idea’ (p. 309) and an example of ‘magical thinking’ (p. 305).

Jonathon Safran Foer’s analysis in *Eating Animals* (2009) also argues that putting any meat on our plates in this industrialised world comes with immense ramifications, for the animals, for the environment and for our health. Foer shares his own experience of becoming vegetarian and the difficulty of discussing the issue:

‘Eating animals is one of those topics, like abortion.... that cuts right to one’s deepest discomfits, often provoking defensiveness or aggression. It’s a slippery, frustrating, and resonant subject. Each question prompts another, and it’s easy to find yourself defending a position far more extreme than you actually believe or could live by. Or worse, finding no position worth defending or living by.’ (pp. 13-14).

Foer argues that in continuing to eat meat when it is no longer necessary for our health, we have lost a connection to our own animality. We neglect the parts of us that makes us similar to them, for example, the ability to feel pain, and we deny their importance in the constitution of our humanity. What this leads to, Foer argues, is a sense of shame, hidden and unexpressed shame.

Some writers have commented on the way animal activists have used this sense of shame in campaigning. Frustrated by the lack of impact of information-based campaigns, some activists have utilised “Meatshaming” as a strategy in vegan and animal rights campaigns. Studies have shown that such confrontational strategies which evoke not just shame, but

other negative emotions such as fear and guilt, are proving to be quite effective in producing changes in consumer attitudes and behaviour (Kranzbuhler & Schifferstein, 2023).

Conversely, we are also starting to see research emerge on decreasing conflict between animal activists and meat eaters through the use of dialogue and empathy. Writer and vegan psychologist, Clare Mann, has coined the term 'vystopia', to describe the grief and anguish many vegans feel when they realise the devastating extent of animal abuse in the world today (Mann, 2018). Melanie Joy sets out pathways for improving relationships between vegans, vegetarians and meat eaters in two of her more recent books, *Beyond Beliefs* (2017) and *The Vegan Matrix* (2020). Animal activist Leah Garces also found that working alongside farmers, having frank conversations with them, and encouraging change through dialogue and discussion had more impact than fighting, protesting and shaming (Garces, 2019). Nick Clooney, author of *Veganomics* (2014) blends demographics with social psychology to find the best vegan advocacy methods. He argues that young people, women, urban and politically left-leaning people are all more likely groups to give up meat, and that the best advocacy methods are storytelling, 'social norm' messaging and positive portrayals of healthy, attractive vegan people.

There has undoubtedly been a growing movement towards ethical food consumption. Veganuary, an annual event that encourages non-vegans to adopt a vegan diet for the month of January, has calculated that 25 million people worldwide chose to become vegan for the month of January in 2024.¹³

There certainly appears to be a huge rise in interest in veganism as shown by plant-based food festivals, Showbiz magazines and websites full of lists of vegan celebrities, increases in vegan ranges in supermarkets, increasing numbers of vegan options in restaurants and fast-food chains, documentaries such as *Cowspiracy*, *Earthlings* and *What the Health*, and investor support for alternative protein sources and flexitarian diets.

Singer and Mason (2006) describe the beginnings of this change in public interest:

'Over the last thirty years we've seen the first stirrings of a different kind of concern about what we eat (as opposed to health and obesity concerns). Consumers

¹³ Veganuary website and campaign figures available at: [Veganuary 2024 Results | How Many People Did Veganuary 2024?](#)

increasingly seek out organically produced food, for reasons that range from an ethical concern for the environment to a desire to avoid ingesting pesticides and the conviction that organic food tastes better than food from conventional sources.’ (p. 2)

It has been predicted by A. T. Kearney, a leading global management consultant firm, that by 2040, only 40% of the global population will be consuming meat, with 35% consuming clean (lab) meat and 25% vegan meat replacements.¹⁴ Huge global brands are realising that if they are to survive in this new conscious-consumer age, they must move with the times. Dairy giant Danone invested \$60 million in dairy-free products. Tyson Foods – one of the world’s largest meat producers – recently made a 5% investment into plant-based meat company, Beyond Meat.¹⁵

Nonetheless, there is still evidence of much criticism of vegetarians, and particularly of vegans. As one journalist, Simon Castle, put it in his article in *The Age*, in December 2019, making fun of vegans is still a ‘kind of sport’, and that people who are ‘seemingly progressive in every other way have no qualms in saying vegans are joyless, sanctimonious, preachy, misguided and hypocritical’ (p. 23). In some ways echoing Mark Stein’s views on the whistleblower being a ‘lost good self’ (Stein, 2019), Castle (2019) goes on to examine this attitude:

‘Truth is, when someone, even by their presence, makes you think about something you’d rather not – something disturbing or inconvenient – the reflex is to find ways to discredit them..... The vegan, just by showing up, calls the bluff, and we hate them for it. They make manifest the cognitive dissonance that allows the carnivore to love animals in the abstract even as they eat them with relish (sometimes literally with relish). They touch off a defensiveness that sits just below the meat-eater’s skin.’ (p. 23)

The “meat paradox”

The cognitive dissonance associated with meat-eating is now being studied within the field of psychology. In 2010 psychologists and Steve Loughlan, Nick Haslam and Brock Bastian

¹⁴ Available at: <https://www.atkearney.com/documents/20152/2795757/How+Will+Cultured+Meat+and+Meat+Alternatives+Disrupt+the+Agricultural+and+Food+Industry.pdf/06ec385b-63a1-71d2-c081-51c07ab88ad1?t=1559860712714>. (Accessed: 20 May 2020).

¹⁵ As above.

identified the “meat paradox” in a paper where they identified the cognitive dissonance created by the fact that most people love animals, and yet also enjoy eating meat (Loughnan, Haslam & Bastian, 2010). Indeed, while the world has seen a rise in moral aversion towards animal cruelty and killing, we have also seen a colossal rise in meat eating, as developing countries become wealthier, and meat becomes cheaper for all (Leroy & Praet, 2017). This dissonance between a concern for animal welfare and culinary behaviour in individuals is seen by some as leading to an internal conflict, which is dealt with by dissociation, and that in fact ‘meat eaters go to great lengths to overcome these inconsistencies between their beliefs and behaviours’ (Bastian, Loughnan, Haslam & Radke, 2012, p. 247). Dissociation essentially removes the link between meat and animals, and it takes two forms: defences within personal, individual behaviour, and culturally entrenched practices of dissociation.

Five dimensions of moral disengagement from the thought of our individual behaviour harming animals have been identified: *means-ends justification*, the conscious or unconscious thinking that we need meat, and that need justifies what happens through the production of this meat; *desensitisation*, the blocking of uncomfortable thoughts through language and other means; *denial of negative consequences*, the refusal, conscious or unconscious, to see the consequences of our actions; *diffused responsibility*, our inability to accept our own role in the issue, and finally, reduced perceived choice, we tell ourselves that we don’t have other food choices available to us. (Graca, Calheiros, Oliveira, 2016).

Culturally entrenched practices are of course intricately entwined with individual dissociation, and have been identified as operating at the *linguistic level*: living animals are called cows, pigs and calves, but once dead and prepared as food they become beef, pork and veal (Serpell, 1996; Singer, 1975); at the *visible level*: animals and the whole system that transforms them into meat are rendered invisible by the packaged meat products, presented so that the meat barely resembles an animal at all (Adams, 1990; Kunst & Hohle, 2016); and through powerful *cultural farming myths*: agricultural advertising uses countless pictures of animals looking happy on ‘real’ farms (Joy, 2010). Studies have shown that the way meat is generally presented at restaurants (beheaded, cut up, processed, not looking like an animal at all), the descriptions of that meat (beef/pork, not cow/pig), and the description of the meat production (‘harvesting’ versus ‘killing’) all have a significant effect in reducing

empathy and disgust, feelings that might otherwise make us decide to take the vegetarian option (Kunst & Hohle, 2016).

Once again, we can see a clear connection between the personal and collective defences identified by psychologists and sociologists within the issue of the 'meat paradox', and the personal and collective defences identified around other complex issues explored within the field of systems psychodynamics. We may not yet have explicitly explored the common threads, but when we open our eyes to them, they are there. Common threads of viewing the self as relational, interdependent, and complex. Common threads of understanding how humans create both conscious and unconscious defences against anxiety. Common threads of understanding the way individuals, social groups, and indeed the global economy deny and disavow injustice and cruelty to the extent that it becomes invisible in our everyday lives.

This chapter has given an overview of the foundation knowledge applicable to the research topic 'the social politics of meat' This has included relevant literature in systems psychodynamics, in anthrozoology, in recent academic work which explores and challenges the way capitalism impacts the way humans treat other species on earth, and in the ethics of eating meat. Ethics has been a key issue within this thesis work, hence the importance of the next chapter, where I explain my own philosophical, academic, and ethical positions in the research.

Chapter 3: Research Objectives and Approach

*Living life as inquiry:
'a range of beliefs, strategies and ways of behaving which encourage me to treat little as fixed, finished, clear-cut. Rather, I have an image of living continually in process, adjusting, seeing what emerges, bringing into question...attempting to continually question what I know, feel, do and want, and finding ways to engage actively in this questioning and process...'*

Judi Marshall, *First Person Action Research*, 1999: 156-7

Vignette 3: The joke

We are out for dinner at a prestigious venue for my partner's end of season sports presentation. I never like these functions, but I go to please Gary. We sit beside a friendly couple. A woman joins us who has a guide dog with her she is training. The dog is soon the focus of the table conversation, he gets many pats and cuddles, and everyone talks about how much they love animals. The friendly couple tell me about the delightful interaction between their pet dog and their pet chickens. I tell them about my doctorate work, in the broad area of 'human connections with animals'. I feel connected, I am happy I came. Dinner arrives, mine first because it is a different dish: vegetarian. Someone makes a comment that vegetarians get 'special treatment'. The friendly couple have chicken and lamb dishes, the guide dog owner has chicken. I feel sad, and think about the dissociation, as I usually do when this happens. Someone at the other side of the table says loudly, 'Margo, do you mind if I tell a vegan joke?' I say 'no, go right ahead' (what else could I say?) and he tells his joke: 'How do you know when there's a vegan in the room? Because they'll tell you. Again, and again, and again.' I laugh, along with the others, but ponder this. I didn't tell anyone I was vegetarian, or vegan.

At home I mull over the joke. Why are vegans and vegetarians viewed as acting egotistically? Why have so many people been aggressive towards me, in my decision to become vegetarian, and even to undertake this study? Do they feel I am being 'superior', and hence want to put me back in my box? A thought comes to mind: when someone becomes vegan (which I am not), they make a profound, personal shift. They decide to act according to their values. Those values are that humans are **not** superior. That human appetite does not justify

the pain, suffering and death of other species. It's a position of **justice**. The opposite to superiority. But when they declare this, in overt or covert ways, it is interpreted as an act of superiority. Which goes totally against the grain, or the values, of the vegan. Their position is one of equality and humility. So, they are left with a strange irony: they make a decision not to act with superiority, but they are labelled as acting superior.

3.1 Introduction

As explained in Chapter 1, my aim in this research is to explore the social defences and complex dynamics (conscious and unconscious) surrounding behaviour and conversations about the treatment of animals and meat eating. My core question, 'What are the current social politics of meat?', indicates that I am attempting to uncover not just how people talk about meat (and don't talk about meat), but also what is hidden in these discussions, both consciously and unconsciously. This might include assumptions, stories we tell ourselves, power dynamics, and jokes such as that told in the vignette above. Meat eating is a highly personal issue; whenever each of us eats a meal we make choices (conscious or unconscious) about animals, and by extension, about ourselves and our relationship with animals. The issue is fraught with ethical and moral dilemmas and conundrums. We might ask, for instance:

- Are humans morally superior, and therefore entitled, to eat other species?
- Is there a 'humane' way to eat animals?
- Is there a right and wrong on this issue?
- If you decide not to eat animals because you don't want to harm them, what about the clothes you wear? Do you wear leather? Do you have leather furniture?
- If animals aren't bred for food, what happens to that species?
- What about food from animals not killed, but 'used' for that food, such as dairy and eggs?

Being such a complex, knotty issue has meant I have needed to be very clear about my position in the work. Who am I to be exploring this, and what biases, philosophies, ethics, and values do I bring to the research? In section 3.2, I explain my research approach and

philosophical positions in attempting to answer the core research question. I outline: my beliefs about how the world is, or in other words my ‘theory of existence’ (ontological position); my beliefs about how people come to know things (epistemological position); and my beliefs about what is right and/ or wrong with regard to both the treatment of animals and the conducting of this research (ethical position). Section 3.3 details my particular approach to this research – the disciplines I primarily draw on, an explanation of why I chose the title “The Social Politics of Meat”, the impact of this title, and why I decided to change the title to “The *Changing* Social Politics of Meat”, mid-way through the thesis. Finally, section 3.4 is an exploration of whether an activist can be a credible researcher.

Vignette 4: Ontological and Epistemological Memories

As I reflect on my philosophical approach to research, I recall two distinct childhood memories, both from around the age of 12:

- i. Having the rather existential thought that “I am me, and the world seems to exist around me, but my brother and my sisters must think the same way. They must think the world revolves around them. What does that mean? How can it be my world as well as theirs? And what happens when I die? Does the world keep going?”*
- ii. Seeing a sheep carcass rotting on the ground and being eaten by maggots, and thinking that that could be me one day, and realising that I thought all the Sunday School stuff was nonsense, that we would all just rot in the ground, and that I was fine with that. The ground was an OK place to be.*

3.2.1 Ontological Position: My beliefs about ‘how the world is’

My beliefs and feelings about ‘how the world is’ have not really changed since my twelve-year-old self had those thoughts about life and the world. Just as my child self was sceptical of the Sunday School story of heaven, I am still of the view that realities are socially constructed and there may well be multiple realities in any social realm. This accords with an ontological position of social constructivism (also known as interpretivism). Constructivism rejects objectivism / positivism, which holds the view that a human can come to know external reality definitively, and that we can gather objective evidence to explore the

unknown and make it objectively known. Constructivism holds an alternative view, that our views are often held as if they are fact, but they are not necessarily so, and that knowledge, or meaning, is always a human construction (Moon and Blackman, 2014). I suspect this was the position I was heading towards as I contemplated my view that the world existed 'around me', but that my brother and sisters must have similar views, the world also existed around them. I believe there is more to us than just facts and figures, we all see the world in different ways and construct our own meaning from those interpretations. Constructionist thought is also critical of the belief in a superhuman God. Reality is constructed by us, not some external body (Schofield, 2010), which would have appealed to my twelve-year-old self, gazing at the sheep carcass and rejecting the notion of my body going to heaven after I died.

To explore the 'social politics of meat' it has been important to seek a range of views, to listen deeply to discussions, and to genuinely contemplate my own and other people's thoughts and actions regarding meat eating, so that I can investigate what might be hidden or irrational within those discussions. I am not seeking an answer or uncovering more facts about the way animals are treated, or whether they are sentient or not. Rather, I am trying to explore the social aspect of the meat paradox – how do we explain the simultaneous loving and eating of animals, to ourselves and to each other? Further, why are we eating them at the current excessive rate in Western, developed countries, when there is so much evidence to suggest that this practice is damaging to the environment and our health, and causes immense suffering to billions of animals (Evans, 2019; Monbiot, 2022; Walsh, 2023)? To me, it is a conundrum worth exploring. Constructivist researchers don't claim objectivity, instead they acknowledge their own subjectivity as they co-construct the understanding of a social issue with the participants in their research (Ellis, 2004). This has been the aim of this research, to co-construct an understanding of the social politics of meat.

Certain scientific theories also inform my beliefs about the nature of being. For some time now I have held the view that the connections between us and other living species are little acknowledged but vital to life on earth. James Lovelock's theory that the earth operates as a living organism, where everything is interconnected, and we are merely one of the partner species in the great enterprise of 'Gaia,' was perhaps the first scientific concept that applied the notion of connectedness to the whole earth (Lovelock, 2009). If we assume everything is

connected, we can also think in terms of tangibles and intangibles, which includes human consciousness (feelings, awareness, thoughts, beliefs) and the unconsciousness, both individual and collective (Fromm, 1962, Hopper 2003).

Long (2013), following researchers from the London Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, describes the exploration of unconscious processes in social groups and organisations as ‘the study of human social phenomena from a perspective combining systems theory and psychoanalysis’ (p. xix). She defines systems theory as the examination of ‘the properties and dynamics of entities as complex systems where each part interacts with other parts and the system as a whole to produce behaviour’, and psychoanalysis as the study of the ‘hidden aspects of systems, whether individual or collective’ (p. xx). This entwining of systems thinking and an exploration of the stuff underneath the surface but still connected to the whole system, underpins my ontological position of the earth operating as a living system, and everything being inter-connected. They are the fundamental foundations for my study of the current dominant paradigm and unconscious dynamics at play on the issue of eating animals.

Another core belief I hold about “how the world is”, is my perception that there is no grand design, no final answer, other than the cycle of life. Just as I mused on the dead sheep rotting into the earth as a twelve-year-old, I still believe that we live and we die, and that very fact gives us reason to search for value and purpose in our brief time on earth. In this philosophical view I am guided by Brian Greene (2020), philosopher of physics and mathematics, who so clearly states ‘In the fullness of times all that lives will die.’ (p. 3). Greene reflects that ‘the final fate of any given life is a foregone conclusion’ (p. 3), but what this means is ‘during our brief moment in the sun, we are tasked with the noble charge of finding our own meaning’ (p. 16). My ‘source’, if I were to use the Transforming Experience Framework (Long, 2016),¹⁶ is life itself. Life gives us meaning. And to combine this with the notion of interconnectedness: life, and our interconnectedness with all life, gives us meaning. Well, at the very least, it gives my life meaning.

Appreciation of our interconnectedness (or lack of) with all life on earth is something that has been commented on by climate scientists, thought leaders and climate psychologists for

¹⁶ The Transforming Experience Framework (TEF) is explained in Chapter 4.

some time now (Flannery, 2008; Gilding, 2011; Hamilton, 2017). Some argue that humans as a species have risen to a state (in our minds, and in our actions towards other species) of narcissistic supremacy, where we have little regard for our position as one species of many (Eisenstein, 2018; Hamilton, 2017; Weintrobe, 2021;). Hoggett (2022) writes of this distinction between human and animal: ‘a distinction that erases the fact that humans are animals too while it serves the comfortable idea that humans are superior, an exception to what it means to be animal’ (p. 5). Human exceptionalism is deeply explored in Weintrobe’s book *Psychological Roots of the Climate Crisis* (2021), where she writes of the consequences of our deep intergenerational disconnection from our other-than-human world. She describes human exceptionalism as the belief that we can have whatever we want and use ‘omnipotent (magical) thinking to rid ourselves of any moral unease about holding those beliefs’ (p. 15). Eisenstein (2018), philosopher and ecologist, describes a similar story of narcissism and separation. He sees this ‘derangement’ story as the guiding narrative of human development thus far, and argues that climate change:

‘... calls us to a greater transformation than a mere change in our energy resources. It calls us to transform the fundamental relationship between self and other, including but not limited to the relation between the collective self of humanity and its ‘other’ nature’ (p. 21).

Likewise, Field philosopher Baptiste Morizot (2022), famous for both his beautiful prose and his tracking and cohabitating with wolves, has written that the ecological crisis is a ‘crisis of sensibility’, that is, a ‘crisis in our *relations* with living beings’ (p. 4). Morizot contends that we have grown accustomed to treating other living beings as the backdrop to human life and asserts that ‘they are cohabitants of the Earth, with whom we share an ascent, the enigma of being alive, and the responsibility for living decent lives together’ (p. 10). Theologian and psychoanalyst Ryan LaMothe (2023). asserts that this ‘privileging of human beings emerges from apparatuses that produce and maintain collective narcissism – anthropocentrism -as if human beings are the centre or pinnacle of the cosmos’ and that ‘this privileging is inextricably joined to beliefs or, more accurately, illusions in human superiority and the inferiority of all other species’ (p. 53). LaMothe calls this collective psychological splitting an ‘ontological rift’ (p. 53), which leads to the objectification and instrumental use of other

species and a denial of their individualism. The impact of anthropocentrism is an ongoing theme in this thesis and is explored more fully in Chapter 8.

The social politics of meat is in essence about our attitudes to the eating of other species. Hence, such perspectives on, and interpretations of, our current very human-centric view and the resulting impacts on our own psyche, other living species and the earth itself, all point to this research being of critical importance in understanding the way humans are impacting the earth. In essence, my ontological position is that everything on earth is interconnected: humans and other species, live and dead matter, consciousness and unconsciousness, as well as past, present and future. This position is fundamental to a systems psychodynamic approach, as is my epistemological position.

3.2.2 Epistemological position: my beliefs about how people come to know things

My ontological frame of reality being socially constructed, multiple versions of reality being able to coexist simultaneously, and that everything is connected, leads to an epistemological philosophy that there are many ways of uncovering knowledge, and how that knowledge is constructed and distributed is varied. Some ways of distributing knowledge have more power and authority than others (Foucault, 1981). This is a central tenet of the critical theorists (Frankfort School) who argue that what is determined to be knowable and what knowledge is disseminated depends on who wields power in the relevant social system. Specifically, Michel Foucault, in his 1970 inaugural lecture *The Order of Discourse*, argued that discourse is a system of control that determines the production of knowledge and the legitimacy of speech, rather than being a neutral or transparent medium. Foucault asserts that discourses are mechanisms of control that exert power over what can be said and who says it, even though the rules and boundaries of discourse are fluid and always shifting. Knowledge and power are inextricably linked, such that certain discourses and epistemes (systems of knowledge) become dominant and shape what is permissible and desirable. Importantly, Foucault was of the view that discourses are both restrictive and productive – they may forbid certain things from being said, but they also create a space for expression and ideas (Foucault, 1981).

Who wields power in social discourse is an important aspect of an inquiry into the social politics of meat. It has been scientifically proven that the impacts of the mass production and consumption of animals for human food on the natural world (and therefore also to

humans) are catastrophic, especially in terms of climate change and biodiversity (Humpenöder et al, 2024; Torrella, 2024; Walsh, 2023). Yet, at the same time, most people appear either unaware of the scale and extent of the damage done, or, if aware, unwilling to change or critically assess their own meat consumption. This has puzzled me for some time now, and led me to thinking about the power of the global meat complex, defined by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) as a ‘highly concentrated (horizontally and vertically) web of transnational corporations (TNCs) that controls the inputs, production and processing of mass quantities of food animals’ (Sharma, 2018).

Our eating habits are undoubtedly embedded in larger systems of power and inequality. The thinkers of the Frankfurt School offer useful insights here. Marx and the Frankfurt School thinkers argued that within capitalism, the owners of production seek to exert control over workers to extract as much surplus value as possible from their labour (Gartman, 1999). They demonstrate that we (the workers, but by extension anyone within a capitalist system) can get so caught up in the system we don’t even see the exploitation and the manipulation happening to ourselves (Boothman, 2008). I must admit, when I decided to stop eating animals ten years ago, I realised that the only reason I ate meat was because *I always had*. One could say I was so caught up in the system of carnism (see Chapter 2) I wasn’t even aware of the choice I had made.

Indeed, if one extends the Marxist notion of the exploitation of workers to the exploitation of animals, we see many connections. The status of farm animals is undoubtedly as commodities, they are called ‘livestock’. They are forced to perform labour: producing milk, leather, wool, eggs, even their own flesh. But one difference between farm animals and workers is clear: they cannot organise. They cannot unionise. They have no political voice. Of course, as humans, we have a voice, but undoubtedly within our food system, the dominant voice and narrative is that propelled by the huge global agricultural companies. Just think of some of the common slogans: ‘A cut above the rest’, ‘Meat lover’s paradise’, or ‘From our farm to your table’.¹⁷

Euphemisms are standard practice. Slaughterhouses are now referred to as *meat processing plants*. Mass slaughter, as in the case of the covid pandemic, is *depopulation*. Pig flesh is

¹⁷ For examples of meat industry advertising in Australia, see Appendix 10.

pork or *bacon*, cow flesh is *beef*. The list is endless. I have even struggled at times throughout this thesis on the question of whether I write 'eating animals' or the euphemism 'eating meat'. How will my examiners feel? How do you feel?

In Marxist theory, the owners of the means of production control the narrative in multiple cultural ways, such is the pervasive system of capitalism that we do not even realise what we are persuaded of. Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of cultural hegemony (Boothman, 2008) to explain how the ruling class can control the working class without coercion or force. Cultural hegemony explains that by controlling information, dominant institutions engineer passive public consent to the "reality" that sustains their dominance and so consequentially, working-class individuals come to support the very system that exploits them.

One only needs to look at the size of the major international animal agricultural companies to appreciate the impact and power they have over meat eating in western society. In America just a handful of companies control the entire industry. According to a recent analysis, four companies now control more than half of the market in chicken processing, close to 70 percent in pork, and nearly three quarters in beef (Held, 2021). In Australia, corporatisation and increasing foreign ownership of farming is of growing concern to those who value family farms (Lucas Group, 2022).

Meatsplaining: The Animal Agriculture Industry and the Rhetoric of Denial (2020), edited by Jason Hannan, is a collection of scientific essays which scrutinise the rhetoric and denial tactics used by the animal agriculture industry to shield itself from public scrutiny. The book provides a critical examination of the cultural and institutional factors that enable the animal agriculture industry to perpetuate its denial of the harms caused by its practices, to manipulate public opinion and discredit critics, particularly vegans and animal rights advocates. In his introduction, Hannan defines "meatsplaining" as 'an umbrella concept for the multiple forms of denialism perpetuated by the animal agriculture industry'. That denialism is described as multiple, 'the denial of violence against animals, the denial of environmental pollution and destruction, and the denial of the link between meat consumption and adverse health effects' (p. 19). *Meatsplaining* points to the power of the meat industry, and the all-pervasive industry rhetoric, but Hannan explains that the phenomenon also operates at an interpersonal level:

‘Meatsplaining functions as a silencing mechanism.... (it) delineates discursive boundaries. It establishes who possesses and who lacks credibility to speak about what happens in animal farms and slaughterhouses. It defines what constitutes the normal, the rational and the mainstream, and what constitutes the fringe. Those who are effectively boxed into the latter group by definition lack credibility. If vegans are branded as irrational, violent and extremist, they will perforce lack the moral standing to speak and be taken seriously’ (p. 20).

Certainly, if one thinks about power in society, it is not just those with money and market size who influence our perceptions and our discourse. Sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel examines ‘conspiracies of silence’ in his book *The Elephant in the Room: Silence and Denial in Everyday Life* (2006). Building on the Frankfurt School thinkers and subsequent critical theorists, Zerubavel argues that conspiracies of silence operate at every level of society, ranging from small groups to large corporations, families and friendship groups to politics. Each person’s denial is reinforced by the denial of others. Zerubavel sheds light on the social and political underpinnings of silence and denial, illuminating the social pressures that cause people to deny what is right before their eyes.

The focus of this research is on the possible social pressures around the dinner table- what is allowed to be said and not allowed to be said on the issue of dead animals on our plates. Hence, critical theory, the assessment and critique of society and culture to reveal and challenge power structures, is truly relevant to a study of the social politics of meat. It argues that social problems are influenced and created as much by societal structures and cultural assumptions as by individual and psychological factors. It is a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society, in contrast to traditional theory oriented only to understanding or explaining it. Horkheimer (1982) describes a theory as critical insofar as it seeks ‘to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them’ (p. 244.). Indeed, Fromm linked Marx and Freud with the concept of ‘weapon of truth’ against the illusions we all live with. Fromm (1962) argued:

‘The assumption underlying Marx’s “weapon of truth” is the same as with Freud: that man lives with illusions because these illusions make the misery of real life bearable. If he can recognise the illusions for what they are if he can wake up from the half-dream state, then he can come to his senses, become aware of his proper forces and

powers, and change reality in such a way that illusions are no longer necessary' (p. 10).

Fromm maintained that for Marx, truth was a weapon to induce social change, whereas for Freud it was the weapon to induce individual change. For both, 'truth is the essential medium to transform, respectively, society and the individual; awareness is the key to social and individual therapy' (p. 11). This linking of critical theory with individual and social progress takes us into the realm of change and influence, and the role of research within this realm.

The responsibility of researchers and academics within the field of psychoanalysis to influence and actively change the world was emphasized in the 1980s by Hannah Segal, who argued that psychoanalysts could contribute to an understanding of the dangerous denial of reality that permeated the public attitude to nuclear war (Bell, 1999). Social theorists and psychologists have explored the process and politics of denial in terms of climate change (Hollway, Hoggett, Robertson & Weintrobe, 2022; Marshall, 2014; Oppenlander, 2012). Systems psychodynamics has also played a role in addressing migration issues, organisational and workplace dangers and problems, and many other challenging cultural phenomena. One might say the field of systems psychodynamics is full of 'activist' researchers. Only recently, however, has our field begun to address and analyse human – non-human relations and the impact of these relations on the world (Hoggett, 2020; Lamothe, 2023; Weintrobe, 2021; Western, 2020).

It has been argued that action research (one of the main methodologies used in systems psychodynamics) aims to simultaneously investigate and solve an issue. David Coghlan (2023) argues that action research constitutes a different form of social science than the typical quantitative-qualitative categorisation, with a distinct philosophy, epistemology, methodology and method. He asserts that this social science of change and changing is a 'radical alternative to those that seek to create knowledge only' (p. 42). Coghlan and others (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014; Ellis, 2004; Marshall, 2016) have explained that action research is an emergent process which involves change experiments on real problems in social systems. Coghlan (2023) says that this approach addresses the 'twin tasks of bringing about *change in organisations* and in generating robust *practical knowledge*, in an evolving process

that is undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and co-inquiry'. He adds that action research 'is constructed *with* people, rather than *on* or *for* them (original italics)' (p. 22).

Coghlan explains that a crucial aspect of action research is its 'interiority', the practice of attending to '*how* we know as well as to *what* we know (original italics)' (p. 24). In other words, it has an epistemological stance, and encourages researchers to attend to their own consciousness, or as he explains 'how they experience, question, understand, test their understanding, make judgements, and act.' (p. 25). To encourage researchers to attend to their own consciousness, the approach encourages the 'researcher and researched to co-create understandings' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 21). This feature of social research is also discussed by Hammersley and Atkinson (1989), who emphasise the importance of emergence and reflexivity: 'the most important feature of social research: it's reflexivity, the fact that it is part of the social world that it studies' (p. X). Learning from one's own emotional experience and attempting to find meaning from both conscious and unconscious processes is a fundamental aspect of a systems psycho-dynamic approach.

In summary, my view is that one's "truth" arises from one's own lived experiences (constructionist), and that "truth" is expressed in numerous conscious and unconscious ways (subjectivist). Further, there may be multiple realities or truths in any given situation.

Consequentially, in human social systems, whoever has power can determine the "truth" that is accepted by the dominant culture. And finally, research has a responsibility to actively change and improve the world (critical theory). Systems psychodynamics, and in particular action research, does this by encouraging researchers to work *with* their participants, rather than on or for them. Having declared up front that my aim in embarking on this research is to play a part in changing the way animals are treated on factory farms, it is clear that my epistemological position is that of a critical theorist, one might even say Marxist. My grandmother, a staunch monarchist in her time, would be turning in her grave.

3.2.3 Ethical Stance

As I examine my ethical stance regarding the social politics of meat a paradox emerges. The clearer I become on my own ethical views on the issue of the treatment of animals, the stronger, more legitimate and enthusiastic I feel as a researcher of this topic; but at the same time, the more aware I am of the limitations my views put on my ability to eschew memory, desire and understanding (Bion, 1970) in order to keep an open mind. In systems

psychodynamics, the need to be sufficiently 'unknowing', and managing the frustration and anxiety this creates, is a vital aspect of the work. Since beginning this research journey, I have developed a clearer purpose and a stronger sense of self. And the more background reading I do on the issue, the stronger these views get. But these strong views may well limit my intention to be led by the experience of the research and the analysis of emerging data. Although my supervisor Susan reminds me that the initial impetus to do any research is different to the conduct of that research, in that we can separate the *desire* from the *implementation*, I am nonetheless acutely aware that I began (and continue) the research with strong views and emotions on the use of animals for food, rather than starting from an 'unknowing' stance.

In addition to this paradox, as I really scrutinise my own ethical stance, I see all my own inconsistencies and hypocrisies. In principle, my ethics align with that of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), the largest animal rights organisation in the world, that animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, or use for entertainment.¹⁸ I gave up eating red meat and chicken when I first read *A Plea for the Animals* by Matthieu Ricard (2016) in 2017. I continued to eat fish frequently for about a year until I realised that in terms of environmental impact, eating fish is probably even more harmful than eating land animals. I then reduced my fish consumption, and yet, I still eat fish occasionally, so in theory I am a pescetarian, not vegetarian. I like to say I am 'vegan-ish' because I mostly don't eat meat, and I avoid eating dairy, but we have our own chickens and eat their eggs. And I love honey. As much as possible I do not buy or consume products that I know have caused animal suffering, but how do I really know who suffers, at what level and in what way? I still have leather shoes, and I love high quality woollen garments. My brother-in-law calls me a "hypocritarian" which seems about right when I really hold up the mirror.

Perhaps I am a little more consistent in my ethical views on the issue of "speciesism", which describes and criticises the practice of privileging humans over other animals (Singer, 1975). Singer argues in favour of the equal consideration of interests of all sentient beings. Matthieu Ricard and other well-known writers on animals' rights, such as Tom Regan, Jane Goodall, and Jonathon Safran Foer all question the belief that humanity is at the centre of the world and argue that we cannot pretend to uphold coherent moral values whilst

¹⁸ PETA website: <https://www.peta.org/>.

excluding from our ethical field all other sentient beings with whom we share the earth. This aligns with my ontological position that we are but one of all species which inhabit the earth.

How to hold this view and also to 'eschew memory, desire and understanding' is my challenge. To assist me I have needed several 'containers' to help me define boundaries for my ethical judgements. Obvious such containers are my supervisors and my journal writing. Others have been 'friends prepared to be enemies' (Marshall, 2016), and my fellow PhD student group.

As well as ensuring I have my own containers, I have also needed to ensure others involved in the research feel safely contained. Long and Harding (2013) emphasise that it is a 'great responsibility to create a thought-through and safe environment' within systems psychodynamic research (p. 95), where trust is developed, and researcher and co-researchers can authentically enter the space of exploration. This safe space has also been described as a 'holding environment', so-called to reflect the safe physical and emotional holding of an infant by a caring parent (Winnicott, 1971). To create that safe space, time, task and purpose need to be clear when involving others in the research.

It is also important to take notice of signs of unconscious phenomena that might lie below surface awareness. These might include, for instance, the management of anxiety through splitting and projection, 'one element of the split being imbued with the "good" and the other the "bad"' (Long & Harding, 2013, p. 98). Other unconscious processes to be aware of might involve transference and countertransference. It is easy to become "caught" in the projective material. Long and Harding emphasise that it is important to be open to being "caught", since this very process is a way to get in touch with deep systemic issues. Hence, having a transitional or "third" object to enable this awareness, 'be it through dialogue with an interview partner or research support team, though writing, or through developing internal cognitive and emotional capacity to expect, experience, and think through the projective material' (p. 100) is crucial. Within this research, my supervision, my journaling and my study group all play this "third object" position.

Having others play the third object position is crucial, because if I am completely honest and transparent with myself about the reason for doing this research, I would say I am doing it for the animals. My concern is for them. Nevertheless, I am exploring the *human* system of

the social politics of eating meat, and so my aim has been to be as respectful, as honest, and as open as I can be throughout the research. I have wanted, and tried, to be authentic, deeply reflective, and kind within the work. My kindness needs to extend to those whose views I disagree with, and whose actions I don't particularly like.

I have also been aware of the need to be kind to myself. This work involves long periods of deep examination into intensely disturbing practices, and there has been an emotional cost to this. The research has meant delving into cruelty and legally sanctioned violence into other living species, who I feel a deep connection with and empathy for. In managing my own emotions, I have needed to use the containers of my journal, my friends, and my supervisors. I have needed to reach out for help at times.

3.3 Approach to this research

3.3.1 Multidisciplinary

Critical theory invites a multi-disciplinary approach. As explained in Chapter 2, in this work I am primarily drawing on two distinct disciplines: *anthrozoology*, an interdisciplinary field which explores the spaces that animals occupy in human and social worlds and the interactions humans have with them (DeMello, 2012), and *systems psychodynamics*, which itself draws on three disciplines: systems thinking, group dynamics and psychoanalysis (Nossal, 2007). While I am daunted by the complexity of this endeavour, Margaret Wheatley's words come to mind:

'... reduction into parts and the proliferation of separations has characterised not just organisations, but everything in the Western world during the past three hundred years. We broke knowledge into separate disciplines and subjects, built offices and schools with divided spaces, developed analytic techniques that focus on discrete factors, and even counselled ourselves to act in fragments, to use different 'parts' of ourselves in different settings' (Wheatley, 2006, p. 29).

Wheatley and others (Ikerd, 2007; Stacey, 2003; Western, 2019) have pointed to the limits and ineffectiveness of this approach. My methodological stance aligns with such criticism of a separatist approach, and thus I aim to be as fluid and intuitive as I can be, whilst being disciplined, rigorous and robust in my study. My aim is to primarily use anthrozoology as foundation knowledge on the issue of human-animal relations, and systems psychodynamics

as foundation knowledge on human-human relations and as a methodological stance. I hope that I can range freely across disciplinary boundaries, and not feel constrained by 'institutional' thinking.

This combined approach is proposed because I am curious about individual, societal, and systemic coping mechanisms for dealing with the socially condoned cruelty of factory farming. I am particularly interested in John Steiner's concept of *turning a blind eye* (Steiner, 1999) and Susan Long's examination of *perverse dynamics* (Long, 2008), in relation to what can't be thought about, let alone talked about, regarding what goes on in factory farms. I am curious about the pattern of behaviour we show when we know that something is going on that we don't approve of, yet we ignore it, or even deny that it occurs.

Likewise, from the field of anthrozoology, I am drawn to concepts which also challenge current paradigms and human behaviour, more specifically towards animals. Examples of this are the *meat paradox* (Bastian, et al, 2012) and Joy's portrayal of the power of the dominant and invisible system of *carnism* (Joy, 2010). Such concepts offer valuable insights into how humans perceive animals, and the various justifications and defences used at both an individual and sociological level to defend and maintain our meat-eating habits.

To explore the complexity of human relations with and about animals requires the capacity to look beyond the obvious, to roam from discipline to discipline, from systems psychodynamics to anthrozoology (and other connected fields), and to see the links between them. It requires the capacity to question human behaviour, human thinking, and human paradigms. That is the approach, and the challenge, I have taken up in this work.

3.3.2 Conscious and unconscious aspects

My work diverges from other writers in the field of animal abuse in my focus on the conscious and unconscious dynamics at play in the system. Joy has explained much about the system of eating meat (carnism). I would like to build on this work to explore the social politics of the dinner table. My interest is in the social and associative unconscious, to use Haim Weinberg's definition described in Chapter 2: 'the co-constructed shared unconscious of members of a certain social system such as a community, society, nation or culture' (2007, p. 312). Weinberg states that this includes 'shared anxieties, fantasies, defences, myths, and memories. Its building bricks are made of chosen traumas and chosen glories' (p. 312). Also

explained in Chapter 2, Hopper (2003) explains the social unconscious as the 'existence and constraints of social, cultural and communicational arrangements of which people are unaware' (p. 127).

Long and Harney (2013) describe associative unconscious as distinct from social unconscious. They argue that the 'totality of unconsciousness is a social phenomenon', but that the word "social" is limiting, because examining or accessing the social field implies that 'individuals are in the social field', whereas the premise in socioanalysis is that 'the social field (or parts of it) are *in* (original italics) the individuals' (p. 8). They state: 'the unconscious as a mental network of thoughts, signs, and symbols or signifiers, able to give rise to many feelings, impulses, and images.... is between people', but also 'within each of them' (p. 8). In other words, the collective mind is a system of symbols, signs and thoughts, a field beyond individuals but within all of us, a field that can create thoughts and has its own momentum. Systems psychodynamics attempts to understand this aspect of the mind - the associative unconscious - and how it works between us all.

My aim in this research is to deeply explore the system as a whole, the conscious and unconscious social field we are in, but also the social field that *is in us*, or to return to Weinberg's analogy of building bricks, to investigate the building bricks (both conscious and unconscious ones) of our interactions with each other about the animals we eat for food.

My core questions include:

- How do people interact with each other on the issue of animals bred for food?
- What are the conscious and the unconscious dynamics of the social politics of meat?
- Who are the 'players' in this dialogue/ non-dialogue?
- What is "allowed to be said", and what is disavowed, in Western culture, on the issue of eating animals?
- If certain things are disavowed, what is the impact of this?

Keeping in mind these core questions, it has also been important to use the 'working hypothesis framework' used within systems psycho-dynamic research (Lawrence, 2006; Long & Harding, 2013). This approach emphasises the importance of tentative explanations and ongoing inquiry into the issue. Lawrence (2006) defines the working hypothesis as 'a sketch

of the situation, a guess at what might be happening, a speculation, and recognises that an individual cannot capture truth because it is too evasive' (p. 31). From the outset, it has been clear that there would be no definitive answer to my broad question 'what are the social politics of meat?', nor to the core questions above, but I could potentially formulate one or more working hypotheses on this complex issue.

3.3.3 Why 'The Social Politics of Meat'? (the initial title of the PhD)

'Until a vegan or vegetarian enters the room, people don't see themselves as meat-eaters. They are merely 'eaters', and it is we vegans who have made them aware of what they are doing. Often this is discomfoting.'

Carol. Adams

Once I had made the decision to embark on a PhD about people and how we treat animals, I floundered for a while as to what to focus on. There is so much to be explored in the field of human/animal relations linked with systems and psychodynamics. Did I want to look at how we treat and love our pets? How we think of animals in zoos? Experimentation on animals? How we farm animals? I read a lot about the emerging field of anthrozoology and realised that a systems psychodynamic approach would be slightly different- rather than being about human animal relations, a systems psychodynamic path meant focussing on human- human relations, *on the issue of animals*.

In that first exploratory year, before deciding on my core question, I had many an occasion when I mentioned to someone that I was embarking on a PhD. Conversations often occur over meals, and so when someone would ask me 'So, what is the PhD on?', I'd find myself saying something like, 'I'm exploring how humans relate to animals, including the animals we eat', and in many cases they would look down at their plate of ham sandwiches, sausage rolls or perhaps a roast dinner, and look embarrassed. I'd feel guilty for causing the embarrassment and the conversation would soon end. Mostly, I found these conversations uncomfortable, but occasionally I wondered: did I enjoy the provocation, take some pleasure in the awkwardness?

Nonetheless, these conversations got me thinking deeply about the conversations we have, and don't have, about the animals on our plates. What happens in that dialogue space? What is allowed to be said? What is disallowed? What is palatable and not palatable? Are there informal 'rules' about conversations about meat? Who has the power in these conversations? I had read Carol Adams (1990) ground-breaking book *The Sexual Politics of*

Meat and been captivated by her feminist/ vegetarian critique which linked the system of patriarchy and male dominance with animal oppression. I was very interested in the politics of meat, but rather than taking a gender lens, I was keen to explore the dinner table conversations: the social politics of meat. Undoubtedly the two are linked, our social politics are impacted by gender issues and our gender issues are impacted by social dynamics. But my specific interest is in what happens when we socialise with our friends, family, and colleagues: who has power and influence over our views on meat? Who can express what without sanction? What is the social hierarchy on this issue? What are the informal rules about talking (and not talking) about meat? What is seen as “right” and “wrong” on the issue of eating meat?

As I started to think about the social politics of meat I saw many binaries. Notions of right versus wrong, ideas of what is objective and what is subjective, who is healthy and who is unhealthy, and of course, the binary of human versus animal, all seemed to permeate the work. We know that a binary view is unhelpful for dialogue and learning. Jessica Benjamin (1988) examines the possibility of creating relational connection in the transformational space of “thirdness”, where parties in the relationship are recognised as each having a position of worth with a focus on mutuality, without the usual binary of dominance/ subjugation. The space of thirdness, where opposing parties develop a sense of connectedness to each other’s minds while accepting the other’s separateness and difference, seemed very relevant to the setting up of the research.

Benjamin argues that there is a constant tension between recognising the other and asserting the self. The other must be fully recognised as another subject, for the self to fully experience one’s own subjectivity in another’s presence and allow self and other to ‘meet as sovereign equals’ (p. 12). She asserts that finding this balance is difficult and gives rise to a paradox:

‘Recognition is that response from the other which makes meaningful the feelings, intentions, and actions of the self. It allows the self to realise its agency and authorship in a tangible way. But such recognition can only come from an other whom we, in turn, recognise as a person in his or her own right’ (p. 12).

This struggle, Benjamin argues, forms the core of relationships of domination and submission. She draws on German philosopher Hegel’s dialectic of recognition and the

struggle for independence versus dependence. The key idea here is that the only way to learn and to grow is to escape from fantasy notions of self as prime (subject) and the other as simply an object. In other words, a tool for learning and growth is to see the other as an equal subject. Perhaps, in our rather privileged and exploitative relationship to them, as humans we place ourselves in a binary against animals, we view them as the other. But perhaps we also other each other in our discourses about animals. I have been curious about this. Do vegans, for instance, feel othered, because they are such a minority group within eating behaviours?

Othering can be very political. The set up of “us against them” is in many ways fundamental to how our party system functions. Within this research, I soon realised that my very use of the title “the social politics of meat” was political. I was making a comment that this very issue involves tacit agreements, rules, the use of power, and voices, all with varying impact. I was, somewhat “politically”, pushing people to discuss an issue I see as an injustice. The word “politics” is often defined in terms of government, but my definition of the term, for the purpose of this thesis, is that social politics includes the agreements (formal and informal, conscious and unconscious) a society makes which govern our behaviour, and the power structures (obvious and not so obvious) that influence people to behave in certain ways.

Socially, I am interested in how people are with each other; politically, I am interested in who has a strong voice, who has a weaker, or less heard voice, and who may not have a voice. What comes to mind immediately as I write this is that the animals have no voice at all. A cloak of sadness comes over me.

3.3.4 Changing times (and reason for title change)

One of the main themes that emerged from the focus group sessions, the interviews, and my own experience over the many years of the research, was the notion that times are changing fast, in terms of how we think about, talk about and act with regards to meat eating. There were countless comments from participants about greater food choice, increased awareness of environmental impact, and their own friends and family members who now had vegan or vegetarian diets. It became increasingly obvious that this issue is a fast changing one.

I also became aware of the respect shown to the vegans in the group. One participant (a meat eater), spoke candidly about ‘a moral hierarchy, with vegans at the top, vegetarians in the middle, and meat eaters down the bottom’. This was a very different hierarchy to the one I had read about in my research, where the portrayal of vegans was one of being othered, treated like scapegoats, pariahs, and outcasts (Cooney, 2014; Herzog, 2010; Safran Foer, 2009). This was not the experience in the focus groups; quite the reverse seemed to be the case.

Naturally, I need to bear in mind some unique aspects of the research: my own power within the groups (both my supervisors pointed out the strong influence of my views as the researcher), the fact that the groups were from my own rather narrow network, and the relatively vegan-friendly culture of the city of Melbourne, where the research was conducted.¹⁹ Nevertheless, a change in public attitudes seemed clear. By the end of six focus group discussions, I felt a strong need to reword my title to ‘The *Changing Social Politics of Meat*’.

3.4 Can an activist be a credible researcher?

Vignette 5: Choice and more choice

A family dinner. In a country town, to celebrate both a 50th and 60th birthday together. We eat at the local pub. It is noisy; the atmosphere is jolly. When our meals are served, I look around. Some family members are having steak, some lamb, some chicken, some pork, and some seafood, including a seafood basket. I think to myself ‘there must be ten different types of animals that have been killed for this meal’. The thought appals me. It would be better if we just had a pig on a spit. At least that would be just one animal. What has happened to us? Why do we need so much choice? Can anyone else see the full cemetery in front of us all? For family harmony, I choose to remain silent.

I wouldn’t necessarily call myself an ‘activist’. Although I have been a member of many environmental and animal rights organisations, been involved in quite a few climate change

¹⁹ According to a recent study by PETA, Australia is the third biggest developing vegan nation in the world as of now. For an example of an article on the most vegan friendly countries in the world, see: [Best vegan-friendly countries in the world in 2022](#)

rallies, and handed out how to vote cards at election days, I have rarely been involved in active social disruption for a cause. Nonetheless, I do feel strongly about certain issues, foremost amongst those, the issue of animal welfare. I must admit, there are times when I enjoy agitating, 'rattling the cage' so to speak, but generally, I will abide by social conventions for the sake of keeping the peace, as in the vignette above. As explained in Chapter 1, my deepest ethical-political convictions have driven this research, not my need for agitation. Or perhaps I'm kidding myself. Is this thesis my way of agitating?

Can academic rigour be combined with a commitment to addressing social issues and injustice? Some would argue no, a professional researcher needs to keep their convictions separate from their field of inquiry, else risk being personally attached to an outcome, and have their research accused of being "unobjective", and "unscientific". Others argue yes, there is benefit in a vibrant, active academic community that engages passionately with social and political issues and actively contributes to public debate. The latter view aligns with my ontological frame of reality being socially constructed and my epistemological leaning towards the critical theorist view that research has a responsibility to actively change and improve the world.

Nonetheless, if one is emotionally and morally driven in their research, combining the role of activist and researcher requires careful navigation. Most research comes with its share of ethical dilemmas, tensions, and contradictions, and this is even more so when one is motivated by a personal desire to create change in the area of the research. It is therefore important that those ethical dilemmas, tensions, and contradictions be identified and confronted as directly as possible. Dorothy Broom (2020), an activist on women's health issues and academic, makes the case that activist research and being an academic are entirely compatible provided mixing the two roles does not compromise the integrity of either. In her view, the two can work well together if the researcher builds legitimacy and considers all stakeholders involved in both the research and the cause; acts as a bridge between the research and the cause; seeks to understand those he/she is seeking to influence; avoids ambushing; and takes a long-term view of the issue.

As explained in Chapter 2, Climate Psychology acts as such a bridge. This niche field is a bringing together of psychoanalytic academia, climate scientists and environmental activists. The Climate Psychology Alliance website, for instance, states that Climate Psychology aims to

contribute to the climate crisis by 'building understanding and support for individuals and groups; enabling transformation and adaptation; and helping us to cope with the consequences of the climate and ecological crisis' (CPA website, 2024). In stating this purpose, the Climate Psychology Alliance is playing a part in resolving a complex global problem. It is acting with a sense of responsibility. Their purpose echoes the four components of moral reasoning as articulated by psychologists Narvaez and Rest (1995): moral sensitivity (recognition), moral judgement (reasoning), moral motivation (focus) and moral character (action).

One could even ask, if research doesn't have the aim to improve the world (which may well involve challenging the world) then what is the point of it? I would like to play a role in raising awareness of the cruelty animals experience through our human systems, particularly the human system of industrial agriculture. I hope to initiate many "dinner table conversations", which may highlight how infrequently those dinner conversations actually occur. But my aim is not to be an activist for animal rights in this research; my aim is to explore the current social politics of meat in Western, developed countries. What are the dynamics of our discourses about the animals on our plates?

Having just explained my position in the research throughout this chapter, including my ontological position, my epistemological position, my ethical position, and my approach to this study, in the next chapter I will explain the methodology and methods designed to explore the core research question 'what are the social politics of meat?'

Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods

Human beings are curators. Each polishes his or her own favoured memories, arranging them in order to create a narrative that pleases. Some events are repaired and buffed for display; others are deemed unworthy and cast aside, shelved below ground in the overflowing storeroom of the mind. There, with any luck, they are promptly forgotten. The process is not dishonest: it is the only way that people can live with themselves and the weight of their experiences.

Kate Morton, *The Clockmaker's Daughter*, p. 72

'The best research you can do is talk to people.'

Terry Pratchett

Vignette 6: A Dream about Animal Invisibility 4 March 2023

I am at a 'political dinner'. There are lots of important people there. I feel awkward, muted, uncomfortable, and I am wearing a face mask. Beside me is a sort of half person-half cow. I feel unnoticed, but the person-cow seems even more so, she is practically invisible to others.

People talk and eat; I get interested in the discussion. I say something, a pretty mild, lame comment. The woman opposite me says 'I don't think we've met, I'm Louise', and I recognise her as someone important. The woman next to her says 'I don't know you either, but you seem really interesting and intelligent.' That makes me feel good, but I notice that the person-cow has disappeared. I wake up feeling a sense of loss.

I think about the face mask I am wearing in the dream, and my pleasure at being seen as interesting and important. Am I somehow being deceptive, and egotistical, in this work? It strikes me that maybe this is another example of how we 'use' animals. I complete a doctorate on how humans relate to each other about the animals in their lives, and what has been achieved by the end of it? I have a doctor sign before my name, but for the animals whose lives I was initially so concerned about, things stay pretty much the same.

I discuss my dream with Susan. She speculates that I have a fear of colluding with the other side. The 'other side' being meat eaters, and the dominant paradigm of carnism. I agree with her, but I justify: I must collude to some extent to allow open conversations to happen. Or do I? How do I listen 'without memory or desire' (Bion, 1984) when I have such a strong connection with animals I feel like a person-cow myself?

The sense of loss sits with me for a few days. I realise I haven't felt the despair of dystopia for a while now. The research work is 'helping' me to feel less pain, less anguish, less anger, about the misery our farmed animals experience. In some ways I miss the rawness of that pain. Am I becoming numb?

4.1 Introduction

Methodology is the theoretical framework and systematic approach a researcher takes to solve their research question. My research question, 'What are the social politics of meat?', aims to bring into the light the consciously stated views on meat eating and to untangle the unconscious views that may exist. My exploration therefore involves understanding the differing views on meat eating (those who relish it, and those who cannot abide by it) and how such contrary views co-exist in Western society. I am not so interested in the rightness or wrongness of eating meat, although that polarity has often become the point of focus throughout the research (this is more fully explored in Chapters 5 and 6).

My aim throughout the work has been to explore the systemic issues. Looking at something systemically means to look at the whole system, and I have wanted to explore the subtleties and the complexities of the issue of meat eating. 'Systemic', might include societal beliefs, norms of behaviour, and even laws and policies that are normative or customary throughout our social, political, and economic systems. As the vignette above hints at, the systemic factors I am particularly interested in are the conscious and unconscious societal norms and behaviours. Are there 'sides' within this issue? How might we all be colluding to ignore the practices of our animal agricultural industry? What visible and invisible systemic factors influence humans on the issue of meat eating? And finally, how do I design this research to be fair, ethical and impactful?

I have needed a method, or methods, of research that allow an exploration of how people interact with each other, in both conscious and unconscious ways, on the issue of animals. My methodology and methods needed to enable an exploration of such complexities and nuances. Systems psychodynamics as a field does exactly this- it encourages the use of qualitative research methods to investigate issues and complexities from many angles. I have elaborated on the field of systems psychodynamics in Chapter 2, Literature Review.

In this chapter, I explain methodologically how I approached the research and analysis systemically and psycho-dynamically in section 4.2. In section 4.3, I give an overview of the four methodologies I have utilised within the research: Action research, Psychoanalytic observation, Critical Discourse Analysis, and the Transforming Experience Framework. In the final part of this section (4.3.5), I give an overview of how the four methodologies worked together for the purpose of this research, and how they link with the specific methods used to collect data. I then move on to explain each of the methods used in section 4.4: auto-ethnographic journals, focus group discussions, socio-analytic drawing, socio-analytic interviews, and finally the extra one-on-one conversations I had with participants from the focus groups. Section 4.5 gives a summary of all the data collected, using these methods.

4.2 Using Systems Psychodynamics as a methodology

Systems Psychodynamics, being as interdisciplinary, dynamic and eclectic as it is, generally invites a 'smorgasbord' of methodological approaches. The methodologies used in this field are often a combination of approaches, chosen for their appropriateness to the research, rather than being formulaic. This approach suited an exploration of the 'social politics of meat', the complex dynamics surrounding how humans interact with each other about animals, including the animals on their plates. As explained in Chapter 3, because systems psychodynamics explores the unconscious, it fosters an examination of the rational and the non-rational motivations of individuals, groups and societies. In other words, it takes a systemic approach to research.

To think and analyse systemically I needed to:

- Hold in mind ideas of connectedness, systemic properties and dynamics and persistence of patterns;
- Respect emergence and the unfolding process;
- Understand that 'parts' of a system generally don't change unless there is some kind of shift in the systemic pattern, but that when 'parts' do change, they may influence change in the wider system.

(Marshall, 2016, p. 11)

Thinking and analysing the data systemically was important, but so was thinking and analysing the psychodynamics: the complex social dynamics (conscious and unconscious) surrounding conversations about the treatment of animals and meat eating. The key challenge for any psychoanalytic work, as Stamenova and Hinshelwood (2018) point out, is that 'the unconscious, by definition, cannot be known consciously' (p. 1). It is easy to 'hear' what people say about the animals in their lives, but how to analyse the unconscious aspects of that communication is indeed challenging.

Thinking systemically in terms of the unconscious involves an awareness of the *associative unconscious* (Long & Harvey, 2013), the idea that we are all part of a matrix of relations in any given group or society, where certain ways of perceiving are taken up by individuals without conscious awareness of the influence of the group or society. This notion complements the concept of 'carnism' (see Chapter 2), the invisible belief system, or ideology, that conditions people to eat certain animals. Societal ways of perceiving animals, including animals on our plates, is predominately unconscious, according to Joy's (2010) description of the predominant ideology of carnism.

As well as researching and analysing systemically and psycho-dynamically, I wanted to consider my own story, with regards to animals and meat eating. Within systems psychodynamics, and indeed many of the social sciences 'autoethnography' is a form of research where the researcher connects their personal experience to wider cultural, political and social understandings. Aside from my love of reading about animals, my family and I share our home with 4 chickens and a pet dog, who continually remind me of both their needs and human-animal connections. I donate a sizeable proportion of my annual income to numerous animal welfare and environmental organisations, all devoted to improving the lives of domestic animals and wildlife. Almost every meal with people outside my immediate family involves a declaration of my preference not to eat meat (animals). I am immersed and invested in the work, emotionally, intellectually, financially, and physically. I *live* this work and will continue to live it after the PhD is finished, undoubtedly for the rest of my life.

4.3 Four methodologies

To research and analyse systemically, psycho-dynamically, and personally, I decided on four relevant methodologies. Each methodology on its own had significance to the research,

combining them enabled a rich understanding of the social politics of meat. These methodologies included:

- Action research
- Psychoanalytic observation
- Critical Discourse Analysis
- Transforming Experience Framework

I will give a brief explanation of each methodology and why it is relevant to a study of the social politics of meat.

4.3.1 Action research

Action research is an interactive inquiry process which pursues action and research outcomes at the same time. It is an approach to development based on learning from experience and involves systematic reflection of the experience of the research. Action research is different to traditional research in the social science field in that it moves beyond knowledge created by outside experts studying variables in an organisation; to an active moment-to-moment theorizing, data collecting and inquiry occurring through an emergent process. It addresses those aspects of a social system that are dynamic and changing. It is collaborative in nature and seeks to deepen the understanding and learning of all participants involved in the process. Ideally, action research is carried out 'arm-in-arm' with the client (Cherry, 1999).

Action research tends to be:

- participative - the clients and informants are involved as partners, or at least active participants, in the research process.
- responsive – it responds to the emerging needs of the situation.
- qualitative - it deals more often with language than with numbers.
- reflective - critical reflection upon the process and outcomes are important parts of the process.

This methodology is often described as emergent. The process takes place gradually. Learning from early action and inquiry is used to help decide how to conduct later research,

and the interpretations developed in the early stages can be tested and challenged and refined. It is collaborative, the researcher and the research partner/s think together about the area under examination, explore ideas and hypotheses, and adjust the actions as the research data emerges. Research participants are not acted upon, as they take part in the research, but more importantly, are engaged with the area under examination. As a result, the actual work can take twists and turns that are unexpected, 'somewhere sometime there is going to be uncertainty, fuzziness, risk, ambiguity, conflict, surprise.... our sense of what we are doing, how we will do it, even why we are doing it can and will change in the course of the work' (Cherry, 1999, p.18).

Since action research is a sustained interplay of activity and reflection, various processes have been defined by different authors (Cherry, 1999; Coughlan, 2000; Long, 1999).

Essentially, the following stages occur:

1. Identifying a problem, issue or opportunity, and asking "what else is possible?"
2. Systematically collecting information and data through a variety of methods*
3. Collecting and analysing the information
4. Feeding back the results of the data gathering and analysis to the organisation, group or body
5. Studying the consequences of the research and action taken.

*Typical methods include organisational role analysis (ORA), one on one interviews, group meetings, observation and reflective practice.

Long (1999) describes the methodology of action research as 'learning by doing'. Despite the use of some traditional methods to gather information, the emphasis is on the less empirical and possibly more subjective experience of those within the system under scrutiny and on the themes and connections emerging from those experiences. According to Long, the researcher also needs to be aware that 'in social systems or organisational research, the researcher impinges on the system and herself becomes a source of change... The researcher therefore must aim both to study and understand the organisation as encountered, and to study the effects of the researcher / researched interaction' (p. 3).

Therefore, a crucial aspect of action research is that of critical reflection. The researcher and others involved first reflect and then critique what has already happened. The increased understanding which emerges from the critical reflection is then used in designing the later steps. In this critical reflection, the researcher also works with their own feelings and emotional responses in undertaking the action research. Attention to what is stirred up in the researcher is significant at every point of the study, this is also important data about the system which may assist in understanding and in deciding on appropriate action.

4.3.2 Psychoanalytic observation

The process of observation of both others and self is integral to systems psycho dynamics. Since the field draws upon the practice of psychoanalysis, it is important to know that ‘psychoanalytic observation is rooted in the practice of psychoanalysis itself’ (Skogstad, 2018, p. 107). Observation of both the patient and the analyst him/herself has always been a crucial part of the work. Infant observation research methods have been widely discussed (Hinshelwood, 2002; Rustin, 1989), and Hinshelwood and Skogstad (2002) argued for the use of this method in research and consulting in the dynamics of institutions. The process of observation is now used to explore broad social phenomena such as the threat of nuclear weapons (Segal, 1987), corporate greed (Long, 2008) and climate change (Dodds, 2011; Hoggett, 2019; Weintrobe, 2021) through a psychoanalytic lens.

In his paper on using the mind as a research instrument, Skogstad (2018) argues that particularly important psychoanalytic notions are ‘those of anxiety and defence and of intrapsychic conflict’ (p. 108). Conflicts between our own conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings can be a particular source of anxiety. To avoid pain and anxiety humans use various mechanisms of defence, such as splitting, projection, or denial, to alleviate the anxiety and pain. Defence mechanisms may include splitting, projection and projective identification (Hinshelwood, 1991)²⁰. As Skogstad (2018) explains:

‘Through splitting, opposing aspects of experiences or the different sides of conflicts are completely separated in the mind and may then be projected into different people or groups. In projective identification, aspects are disowned in one’s own mind and are instead, in phantasy, lodged in others, these others are then often

²⁰ See glossary for definitions of these terms.

influenced in such a way that they actually come to feel what has been disowned and they behave accordingly' (p. 109).

To observe these defence mechanisms, Skogstad outlines three separate research stages:

1. The actual observation, where observing includes *what one can see and hear outside* (what people say and do, how they move, interact, gesture, and what their tone of voice and facial expression is like), *what one can perceive empathically* (the quality of the atmosphere, the emotional states of the people, and how these might change throughout the observation), and *what one can observe inside oneself* (one's own feelings, impulses, associations, memories etc).
2. The writing up of the observation. Skogstad emphasises that the researcher needs to do this as soon as possible after the observation, and to refrain from interpretation and instead only write down what has been said, heard and felt as accurately as possible.
3. The processing and interpreting of the observed material. Skogstad insists that to gain different perspectives, greater depth of analysis, and to pick up on things that may have been missed by the observer, this is much better done within a group than by the observer alone. The group 'may be able to pick up clues from the observer's unconscious, in distortions in his write -up, in his use of language or his way of talking, in an ironic slip of the tongue, and thereby find access to feelings, phantasies, and associations that may deepen the picture' (p. 115).

4.3.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

My aim is to understand the 'social politics of meat', which is very much about how language is used in social dialogue, so using discourse analysis to examine how the 'ways of speaking about things' and how these ways of speaking normalise and privilege some frames of thinking is also important.

Discourse Analysis is a social constructivist approach to data analysis. Discourse is any verbal or written communication. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is primarily concerned with the dynamics of power and power relations. For instance, a politician (someone with more power) talking with his/her followers (with less power) might use certain 'discourse' which exhibits and enhances their power. They might speak loudly, use strong persuasive words,

personal pronouns, and generally speak more. Silence can also be part of discourse analysis- how it is used and why. Repeated words and images might also be explored. Discourse analysis can be a suitable tool to study social issues such as power imbalance. It highlights the nuances of the data and can provide insight into how language is used to construct social reality, and how that language reflects social hierarchies, power dynamics and ideologies (beliefs or philosophies, both conscious and unconscious, held by an individual or a group). This approach appealed to me in my study of the social politics of meat. I was keen to explore- how do people talk to each other, and NOT talk to each other, about the animals on their plates? And who has power in these discussions (or non-discussions)?

Principles which underpin CDA

The key principles which underpin CDA include:

- CDA addresses social problems. The approach focuses on language use, but it also attempts to make explicit power relationships. It aims to derive results which are of practical relevance to social, cultural, political and even economic issues. Social action is therefore part of CDA.
- Being 'critical' in CDA means there is an attempt to make the implicit explicit. In other words, CDA attempts to make explicit the implicit relationship between discourse, power and ideology. Being 'critical' also includes being self-reflective and self-critical. 'CDA researchers have to be aware that their own work is driven by social, economic and political motives like any other academic work and that they are not in any superior position' (Wodak, 2014, p. 305).
- Power is a central concept in CDA. CDA researchers are interested in how power is developed and maintained in society by discursive practices. Discourse may produce or reproduce social domination. Wodak (2014) explains that the focus in CDA may be on power *in* discourse (struggle over different interpretations of meaning), power *over* discourse (who has most access to the 'stage'), or even the power *of* discourse (the influence of macro-structures of meaning, or of frames) over societies and social practices (p. 306).

- Discourse constitutes society and culture. In other words, every instance of language use makes its own contribution to reproducing and transforming society and culture. Ideologies are often produced and reproduced through discourse.
- Discourse is part of a wider society and part of history. We must consider culture, society and ideology to understand the discourse.
- CDA is interpretative and explanatory. It is not only interpretative of discourse, but also explanatory in intent. These interpretations and explanations are dynamic, open and may be affected by new readings and new contextual information in an iterative way, much the same as Action Research.
- CDA frequently engages in abductive logic, where unexpected, or atypical cases or events may either expand the theory or necessitate building new hypotheses. In abductive reasoning, the evidence amassed begins to help explain and understand the results. Such hypotheses may initially take the form of conjectures, somewhat uncertain conclusions, which may later be reworked into hypotheses. These hypotheses may provide an explanation of the discourse as an indication or symptom of broader social phenomena (Ruiz, 2009).

Adapted from Fairclough & Wodak (1997), Wodak (2014) and Ruiz (2009)

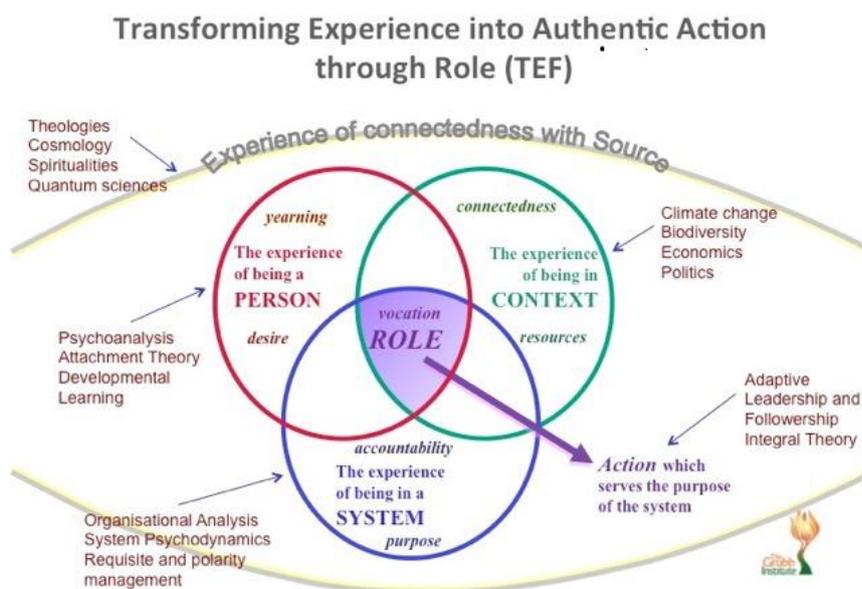
CDA is generally carried out in three steps:(1) description, where the researcher records and categorises the discourse (also called *text analysis* although the discourse is not necessarily only written text), (2) interpretation (also called *frame analysis*), where the researcher attempts to understand the meaning of the discourse and (3) explanation where the researcher presents and explains the discourse as information, ideology or social product or phenomenon (also known as *social analysis*) (Ruiz, 2009). This three-step process somewhat resembles the three stages of the psychoanalytical observational process as described by Skogstad (2018).

4.3.4 Transforming Experience Framework

The framework for transforming experience into authentic action through role, known as the Transforming Experience Framework (TEF) allows people and groups to analyse and understand their lived experience from multiple domains at conscious and unconscious levels. This framework examines four domains of experience – person, system, context and

source – and their interconnections (Long, 2016). It is a very personal framework; it enables individuals to explore the roles they take up throughout their lives, but it also offers a systemic frame for exploring the connections between different aspects of one’s life. The systemic approach considers all experience as interconnected, and as Long explains, ‘the interconnections in actual experience may appear both conscious and immediately discernible but underneath this appearance are implicit and still unconscious connections’ (p. 13). O’Rourke and Bazalgette (2016) explain that the framework gives a ‘holistic understanding’ of what it means for people to take up roles that serves purpose, ‘enabling persons to feel authentic in grappling with the varied forces and factors which they encounter in their daily work’ (p. 159).

Diagram 1: Transforming Experience Framework ²¹



In relation to the research, *person* is the person being researched- perhaps the interviewee, a member of a focus group, or even oneself if the research involves auto-ethnography. The *system* is the social and work systems that person is part of. *Context* is the environment those systems sit in (e.g., the political context at the time). Finally, *source* is the very

²¹ Sourced from: S. Long (ed) (2016) *Transforming Experience in Organisations*. p. 5, Figure 1.1. Permission given by author.

personal sense of purpose and underlying meaning which drive the individual or group thoughts, behaviours and values. To expand on these:

Person includes the person's identity, in other words their skills, intellect, personality, values, and personal strategies for managing emotional and relational life. Long (2016) adds that in the TEF model, person also includes both desire and yearning. She explains that one's behaviour is impacted in powerful ways by conscious and unconscious desires, and that yearning, in psychological terms, is 'where desire becomes linked to a purpose beyond ego' (p. 7). She goes on, 'In spiritual terms, yearning is the link between person and source' (p. 7).

System includes the social and work systems the person is part of. This might include family, local community, sporting groups, a work team and/or organisation, or even one's country. Such systems have their own cultures, languages, rules and expectations, and they impact us in both conscious and unconscious ways.

Context is the environment – physical, economic, social, historical and emotional environment – within the social system. As Long (2016) explains, 'what is currently occurring in the context will have an effect on persons, organisations, and social systems' (p. 9).

Source, in the TEF framework, comes from 'an overall purpose beyond individual egos' (Long, 2016, p. 9). When using this framework, we look at how person, role, system and context are all connected to source. Source may be spiritual (e.g. a God or deity), natural (e.g. Gaia), or other source, and it may be conscious or deeply unconscious.

Role is at the centre of the framework and is essentially the 'public expression of the way the person integrates the inner processes of the four domains' (Long, 2016). When a person takes up a role, they enter the system and its context (the role given to us), and they bring their own person into the role (the role we take up). Long makes clear 'different people will take up the same roles in different ways' (p. 10).

I am drawn to the TEF framework because of the way it highlights the integration of different aspects of a person and the role/s one plays in one's life. The link with stages of adult life development and maturity appeal to me because of my own journey in deciding not to eat meat and even to do this PhD. In many ways, it explains why, even though this research is burdensome, expensive, and exhausting, I am driven to doing it, and it gives me a real sense of purpose.

4.3.5 Combining the four methodologies and choosing methods of research

Each methodology had its own merits, and together, as a smorgasbord, they offered a rich feast to analyse the complexities and nuances of my research question: *what are the social politics of meat?* How to gain access to both individual and associative unconscious (explained in Chapter 3), and as such analyse the system of human-human relations *about animals* guided my chosen method/s of data collection. I needed a method, or some methods, of research that allowed me to explore how people interacted with each other, in both conscious and unconscious ways on the issue of animals. Creating space for conversations, and then analysing those conversations, was crucial to explore and understand such interactions. As such, using the methodologies of Action Research and Critical Discourse Analysis led to the setting up of **focus groups**: I wanted to explore dialogues (discourse) and engage co-researchers, not just the participants in the groups, but also facilitators, which I would hire. Clearly, Psychoanalytic Observation would also be part of this method, as I observed the conscious and unconscious aspects of the focus group discussions (and myself as observer and researcher). Psychoanalytic Observation and CDA also lent towards **interviewing some key 'players'** in the field of animal welfare and animal agriculture, to gain their perspectives and explore some of the dynamics in the broad field of human/animal relations. I hoped that the Transforming Experience Framework would help explain my own journey through this work and my own life choices, so using a form of **auto-ethnography, journal writing**, made sense. The TEF was also pertinent to the interviews, I had in mind a few people who had thought hard about the issue of animal welfare and had made decisions to take up a different lifestyle or work role in this area. And finally, the TEF and the associated Organisational Role Analysis method appealed in leading me to explore in creative ways how people view themselves and their relationship to animals, including animals they may eat. (See Table 1 below for methodology links with the various research methods).

Table 1 below outlines the four different methodologies, the supporting methods, and the chosen techniques of data collection. As the table indicates, the methodologies overlap, entwine and have been adapted to suit the complexities of the thesis core question: what are the social politics of meat? For instance, psychoanalytic observation was used in the focus group discussions, where I employed external facilitators and attempted to simply be

an observer. Traditionally, during psychoanalytic observations, researchers would refrain from direct interaction with research subjects (Skogstad, 2018). However, in this case, the participants all knew me and knew that the research was my creation. Occasionally this led to them speaking to me directly, even though I had explained my role as an observer. I found it awkward and quite impossible at times not to respond to their queries or directed comments. In this way, Action Research entwined with the methodology of Psychoanalytic Observation. The weaving of disciplines and methodologies is also noticeable with the use of vignettes. Although strictly speaking these were part of the auto-ethnographic method, the sensemaking from writing and analysing the life stories described in the vignettes helped me to observe participants in the focus groups with more empathy and understanding, and to conduct the socio-analytic interviews while being aware of my own desires, projections, and biases. In many ways this overlapping and entwining of methodologies is befitting of the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the research, and indeed the interdisciplinary nature of systems psychodynamics.

Table 1: Methodology, methods and data collection

Methodology	Supporting method/s	Chosen techniques of data collection
Action Research	Autoethnography Focus group discussions	Journal writing, then vignettes, using the layered technique (Ellis, 2004) 2 groups of 10 people, 3 sessions per group
Psychoanalytic observation	Focus group discussions Socio-analytic interviews	2 groups of 10 people, 3 sessions per group 10 socio-analytic interviews, done either via zoom or face- to-face
Critical Discourse Analysis	Focus group discussions	Note taking and recordings of focus group sessions.
Transforming Experience Framework	Socio-analytic interviews Autoethnography Socio-analytic drawings	Narratives written from analysing notes and recordings on selected interviews. Journal writing, then vignettes, using the layered technique (Ellis, 2004) Drawings by participants in the focus groups and in other workshops I have run through NIODA and ISPSO.

4.4 Description of each specific method used

4.4.1 Auto-ethnographic journals

Auto-ethnography is a form of qualitative research in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore their personal experience and connect this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political and social meanings and understandings. Described by Judi Marshall (2016), in her book *First Person Action Research, Living Life as Inquiry*, this type of research is thoroughly integrated into everyday life and is a process through which one seeks to 'live with integrity in potentially challenging times' (p. xv). Marshall defines her approach as much more than simply a method, it is a 'range of beliefs, strategies and ways of behaving' (p. xvii), which are emergent and fluid. It involves continually questioning what one knows, feels and wants, as well as how one acts.

This method has been particularly pertinent to my research. My love of animals has been a life-long passion. The parallel process of my journey to vegetarianism and my studies in socio-analysis has enabled deep insights about my own life and our human capacity for denial, deception and cruelty.

After four years of research, I had compiled eight journals full of notes, stories, ramblings, questions, contemplations, descriptions of events, and other ponderings. The analysis of my 'living life as inquiry' method was to look for congruencies and incongruencies between this journal data and my more formal and traditional data collecting (the group sessions and interviews described above). I decided to use vignettes to represent my thinking, pondering, and questioning at various parts of the thesis.

Marshall explains that the method of auto-ethnography is far more than just a 'personal process'. It is not just self-indulgent narcissism. It takes both humility and courage to allow oneself to be questioned and to question oneself continually. She describes her method as inquiring through 'inner and outer arcs', of attention and moving between these. She uses a figure eight on its side to represent this movement. When we are in the inner arc, we notice how the self is perceiving, framing and making meaning. We pay attention to our own assumptions, patterns, repetitions, dilemmas and stuck-ness. When we move to the outer arc we are 'reaching outside the self in some way', actively raising issues, seeking feedback and engaging with others (p. 54).

Hence, the process is relational, not solitary. It is necessary to have ‘friends willing to act as enemies’, as well as ‘friends willing to act as friends’ (p. xx). Conversations are crucial. This means that the process is also political. This methodology involves examining one’s own power and influence, as well as asserting one’s own stance, viewpoints and life philosophy, and seeing how one is influenced by others.

Marshall also asserts that this process is generative. This is a term used by Erikson (1982) in his stages of life theory, where the stage of later adulthood is that of generativity versus stagnation, and our key question is ‘Can I make my life count?’ If only to myself, I am answering this question in the affirmative by researching the social politics of meat.

From the inception of the PhD, I captured and utilised my own stories and meaning making via journal writing and discussions with my supervisor. As a late-to-life vegetarian who grew up on a farm where animals sold for food were a big part of my life and family history, I have many experiences I can draw on as valuable data. Eight personal journals were compiled throughout the PhD journey. Eventually, I selected ‘vignettes’ to intersperse throughout the PhD as relevant and rich, layered (Ellis, 2004) stories which enhanced the data I collected in more traditional qualitative type methods, such as the focus groups and the interviews.

Marshall’s description of ‘continually weaving between inner and outer arcs of attention, as I sought to reflect and act fluidly in context’, whilst maintaining curiosity ‘about what is happening and what part I am playing in creating and sustaining patterns of action, interaction and non-action’ seemed particularly pertinent because this research is so personally important for me. Throughout the research I have continuously examined of my own personal journey towards veganism, and my emotional investment in this research.

4.4.2 Socio-analytic interviews

Long (2018) describes the socio-analytic interview as a ‘space of potentials – what is not known – as much as actuals’ (p. 46). She describes this as a space ‘where both interviewer and interviewee can together discover the various roles, systems, and sub-systems that the interviewee is “holding”, or represents, and the conscious and unconscious dynamics and cultures linked to them’ (p. 46).

The purpose of the socio-analytic interviews as part of this research was to explore the views and experiences of the various ‘actors’ involved in the use of farm animals. I

conducted ten interviews with various 'actors': a vegan psychologist, the owner of a farm sanctuary, an entrepreneur in sustainable and ethical agricultural methods, a pig farmer, a wool grower, an animal welfare project co-ordinator working for a textile company, a nutritional scientist and writer, a long-time vegetarian, a beef farmer, and a group interview of animal activists from a well-known animal activist organisation. Some interviewees were found through my own research, for instance, I contacted the vegan psychologist after reading her book on the difficulties vegans have when they first become vegan. Others were people I knew, or knew of, through the platform of their organisation. Some were recommended by colleagues, and in one case, an interviewee recommended I speak to two others in the field. Six of these interviews were recorded (most of them easily done because they were on zoom), in the other four (all face to face) I took minimal notes during the interview, but extensive reflection notes afterwards. The analysis process is outlined in Chapter 5, Data Analysis Phase 1.

Specifically, I wanted to explore:

- The participants' conscious and unconscious attitudes to, and feelings towards, animals bred for food,
- The participants' experiences and feelings about how other people in their lives view and talk about animals bred for food,
- Ways the participants communicated and related with and about animals in both their work and social life,
- The impact of the work on the participants themselves.²²

In analysing the interview data, my aim was to understand the dynamics (conscious and unconscious) that supported and obstructed the individual's organisational and social relations. A socio-analytic interview explores both the system and the psycho-analytic dimensions of the issue. It was critical that I paid attention to not only what was said, but also the 'emotional texture, sometimes including the body language of the interviewee' (Long & Harding, 2013, p. 98) and to my own responses (emotional and cognitive) to the discussion.

²² See Appendix 7: Interview Plan, Researcher Guide, for detail on the one-to-one interview plan, structure and questions.

It was also important to analyse, through reflection and dialogue with my supervisor and others, 'the dynamics (transferences, counter transferences, projections etc.) in the research system' (Long & Harding, 2013, p. 103). In many ways this seemed to be an impossible task: how does one analyse the dynamics of a whole society? I dwelled on this question through much of my research, and ultimately concluded that one *cannot conclusively analyse*, but one can interpret the data. As Long and Harding explain, 'data analysis within socioanalysis is largely through interpretation and association' which involves 'conceptual sense making' (p. 103). This is theory driven (examining the data through the lens of psychoanalytic theories and concepts such as Kleinian or Jungian theory) and informed through both the experience and through sharing reflections of the experience with others. This reflective sharing is particularly emphasised by Long and Harding. They argue that:

'Although this may all be done in one's own head... it is better done in reality with others.... discovering different perspectives, different experiences and associations to the data, and having different theoretical light thrown on the data' (2013, pp. 103-104).

Hence, sharing my experiences and debriefing with my supervisors and my PhD study group was a crucial part of the analysis.

Originally, I aimed to interview approximately six individuals in the field who have differing views and experience on the issue of farming animals, such as animal activists, farmers, vegans and meat lovers. Through contacting people who fitted these criteria, I found the animal activists and vegans to be most willing to get involved. No doubt they saw my research as sympathetic to their cause and a way to further it. Four very different types of farmers were willing to be involved: a conventional cattle farmer, an ethical wool grower, a sustainable pig farmer and the owner and creator of a farm sanctuary which rescued animals from factory farming or unnecessary slaughter. Quite a few of the interviewees referred me to other people who had significant experience linked with the research question, hence I ended up conducting ten fascinating interviews.

I made many attempts to interview people who owned or worked in factory farms but had no luck, perhaps unsurprisingly they did not want to be involved in this research. Perhaps, unconsciously, I gave away signs of my abhorrence for this practice. I have even wondered if I wanted to interview them at all. Perhaps avoiding these conversations was an unconscious

desire within the work. I made excuses for this: I was interested in the social politics of meat, and surely the interest of anyone involved in factory farming was an economical interest, not social. But I think the fact that no-one from this specific practice wanted to talk about that practice is significant data. Perhaps it is simply too shame inducing to discuss the way animals are treated in that part of the farm industry. Accordingly, factory farming lived experience remains separate from this research. Nonetheless, I ended up holding ten very interesting and varied interviews, which gave me a lot of data to process.

The aim of these socio-analytic interviews was to collect 'data' and also to be a potential space for the interviewee to explore their own thoughts and feelings about relatedness with and about animals. My primary aim was to understand the dynamics (conscious and unconscious) that may have supported and / or obstructed the individual's organisational and social relations regarding their involvement with farmed animals. A socio-analytic interview explores both the system and the psychoanalytic dimensions of the issue. It was therefore important that I paid attention to the setting, content, emotions (my own and those indicated by the interviewee) and the body language of the interviewee. The following skills were all important for me as an interviewer:

- Active listening
- Prompting for extended detail
- Gaining specific examples
- Showing empathy
- Clarifying
- Challenging
- Observation during the interview including of my own reactions
- Taking process notes after the interview

(Long & Harding, 2013, pp. 101-102).²³

²³ See Appendix 5 for evidence of communication with interviewees via email and the Information and Consent Form including aims and process for the interviews.

4.4.3 Focus groups

The aim of the group sessions was to enable a diverse group exploration of the nature of our relatedness with and about animals and the conscious and unconscious psychodynamics involved in these relations. I was particularly interested in exploring what we talk about (and don't talk about) when with people who think similarly to us on the issue of meat, what we talk about (and don't talk about) when faced with people who have quite different views to ourselves, and what happens to the dynamics of groups when they are mixed or separate on this issue. The sessions were designed so that conscious dynamics could be explored through articulated discussion; and unconscious dynamics explored through interpretations of and associations to drawing, and facilitator and observers' observation and reflection of self and others.

The following questions were in my mind as researcher:

- How do people interact with each other on the issue of animals bred for food?
- What emotions are aroused when discussing this issue?
- What are the conscious and the unconscious dynamics of the 'social politics of meat'?
- What is 'allowed to be said', and what is disavowed, in Western culture, on the issue of eating animals?
- If certain things are disavowed, what is the impact of this?

The intent of the sessions was to enable rich socio-analytic dialogue. Socio-analytic dialogue emphasises reflectiveness, shared meaning, and empathic availability. Boccara (2013) has explained that this dialogue relies on 'identifying: the internal mental representations by subgroups; and the intergroups' projections and introjections' (p. 282). Projection, a type of defence mechanism, is when someone unconsciously attributes their thoughts, feelings, or behaviours to another person. Introjection is the unconscious adoption of the ideas or attitudes of others (Jaques, 1955).

To identify the 'internal mental representations' I chose to use drawings to enable individuals to explore their conscious and unconscious mental representations of their own

relatedness with animals (in session 1). To identify the intergroups' projections and introjections the design included a division of the group in session 2 to allow exploration of how each sub-group might view the other group. In session 3 the subgroups came back together to enable a 'reconciliation' and a deeper exploration of their own relatedness to each other with regards to animals.

Summary of focus group details

- Two groups of 10 people in each.
- Two facilitators were hired, one for each group.
- Each group had three sessions; these were spaced about 2 weeks apart.
- Each session was 2 and ½ hours and ran in the evenings from 6pm until 8.30pm.
- Some participants were psychoanalytically informed people (e.g. NIODA alumni), others were simply people from my own network, interested and willing to be participants in the research.
- Participants were mixed in terms of their views on animals and eating animals.
- The intent of the three sessions was that in session one, participants would explore their own *individual relationships* with the animals in their lives; in session two, they would *explore differences between people in the group* in their attitudes to animals, particularly meat eating; and in session three they would explore *system factors* involved in meat eating.
- To serve the above intents, the 'main event' of each session was:
 - Session 1: Drawing activity
 - Session 2: Divided group discussion
 - Session 3: TED talk on Melanie Joy's concept of the system of 'carnism'

Detail on the focus group sessions

Participants were sourced from my own network. Of the twenty, six were colleagues from my own consulting practice., two had been participants in programs I had facilitated, three were previous fellow students from my master degree, five were friends or neighbours who had expressed an interest in the research topic, and four were people who had either

expressed an interest in the topic through my own network or through the networks of other participants. I knew and had good personal relationships with sixteen, the other four I did not know personally, but appreciated their interest and involvement. In Chapter 6, Data analysis, I explore the challenges and limitations of my approach: the fact that most of the participants were from my own personal network, and the rather small demographic they represented.

Prior to the first session, each participant was sent an email outlining the logistics for the sessions (time, venue, facilitator name, food provided, and length of the sessions), with an Information and Consent form outlining the purpose of the sessions and information about possible risks or discomfort they may experience, as well as the method of complaint were they dissatisfied with the process in any way.²⁴ Specifically, they were informed of the aim of the research:

The aim of this PhD is to explore the complex dynamics surrounding behaviour and conversations about the treatment of animals and meat eating. The purpose of the focus group you are part of is to explore the nature of our relatedness with and about animals and the conscious and unconscious psychodynamics involved in these relations.

Specifically, the aims for the two group sessions are to:

- *Explore and share our own attitudes to and thoughts and feelings towards animals- conscious and unconscious.*
- *Explore how we relate with and about animals here with each other, and in our social and work lives.*

Session one, with the 'main event' of drawing, was designed with the intent of enabling the participants to explore their own individual relationship with the animals in their lives. I began the session by explaining the purpose of the sessions, thanking the participants for their involvement, and explaining guidelines around confidentiality and use of the material (which had also been explained in the introductory email). I then introduced and handed over to the facilitator for the sessions. After introductions, the group proceeded with the drawing activity (explained in section 4.4.4 below). Once the pictures were drawn,

²⁴ See Appendix 3 for this email and the attached Information and Consent form.

participants were invited to move into small groups of three to four people, where they explained and explored their drawings in depth. In the final twenty minutes participants came back to the main group to debrief and share insights from their small group explorations.

Session two, with the 'main event' of the divided group discussion, was designed to draw out and explore different attitudes to animals eaten for food. After a debrief of session one, participants were asked to stand on a 'socio-line' from 'I never eat meat', through to 'I eat meat all the time'. The group was then divided according to that line and asked to discuss how they felt about discussions so far, how they perceived 'the other group', and how they thought the other group perceived them. After this divided group discussion, the group came back as a whole and shared their findings.

Session three, with the 'main event' of the TED talk was designed to encourage the group to explore the system factors involved in meat eating. The TED talk is a 2015 talk by sociologist Melanie Joy on the system of 'Carnism' (explained in Chapter 2). The video involves a two-minute section which includes footage of animals suffering in abusive situations on factory farms and in abattoirs. Clearly, preparing the participants for this, and giving them the option of not watching it, was important for their psychological safety and comfort. This was done by the facilitator at the end of session 2, and via an email I sent the participants before the session.²⁵ When playing the video, the facilitator stopped at the point just before this footage was shown and gave people the option of leaving the room if they did not wish to view that two-minute segment. After the TED talk, the group was invited to smaller groups where they were asked to share how they felt after watching the video, and what their thoughts were on the system of carnism. After 20 minutes of small group discussion participants were asked to come back to the whole group and to share insights. In the final half hour, they were asked about the 'rules' of 'this system', what had been allowed and disallowed, and finally to share what they had 'gained or lost' from the sessions, and how they were leaving the sessions.

I am a facilitator and instructional designer by trade, so designing these sessions was in many ways intuitive for me, and talking through the design with my supervisor and the two

²⁵ See Appendix 3.4

facilitators was very enjoyable. It was also challenging. I wanted to enable deep discussion, I wanted the participants to enjoy the sessions, and I wanted to come away with meaningful data for my research. I didn't realise that not all these wants were compatible. Asking participants to split into groups based on meat eating was uncomfortable for some (see Chapter 6) and upon watching the TED talk, at least two participants in each group expressed high levels of discomfort and even anger (see Chapter 6). I designed and re-designed the sessions attempting to get the balance right between stimulating good discussion and ensuring the comfort and safety of the participants. I completed eleven drafts of the sessions, and even then, I did not feel I 'got it right'. I continually asked myself- how much of this design is Margo the researcher, and how much is it Margo the activist? The question pondered in Chapter 3.4, 'Can an activist be a credible researcher?' stays with me. The conundrum of being both a researcher and, if not an activist, at least someone with strong views on the issue, also arose when deciding on the food for the sessions. Because the sessions were in the evening, 6pm to 8.30pm, and some participants were coming directly from their day of work, I felt it important to provide a light dinner for them. I wanted to create a 'social' atmosphere, so I decided to include wine as an option for those who wanted it. But the food was tricky. I am vegetarian. I don't cook or buy meat. Most of the participants were meat eaters. How would they feel if I only served vegetarian food? We would be talking about the 'animals on our plates'. And how would the vegans feel if I served cheese? I wanted to create an atmosphere of openness, of discussion and exploration. What to serve to enable this? After much deliberation and a discussion with my supervisor, Susan, I decided to go with what I was comfortable serving. Vegetarian food with vegan options. I have no doubt this decision impacted the group dynamics, as I discuss in Chapter 5, Data Analysis.²⁶

²⁶ See Appendix 5 for the full session plans for each session, including aims, methodology and facilitator instructions.

4.4.4 Socio-analytic drawing

Art, in itself, is an attempt to bring order out of chaos.
Stephen Sondheim

In the group sessions, I wanted to enable people to give simple expression to the complex thoughts and feelings they have about animals. Drawing is a tool used in socio-analytic exploration, originally used in therapy and developed within the field of systems psychodynamics as Organisational Role Analysis (ORA), a methodology of role consultation where the client draws their role in the system they work in; and explores, with the help of a consultant, how the role is understood and managed by the system but implemented by the client. As Borwick (2006) puts it: 'The individual becomes an observer of herself: she can look at herself from outside the box' (p. 9). The focus is on systems thinking – an examination of the frame in which behaviour is contained, and how the 'container influences what is contained' (p. 12). Lawrence (2006) also emphasises this systemic approach. He reminds us of Bion's hypothesis (Bion, 1961) that one could see a group from two perspectives: from the Oedipus perspective which looks at the individual experience of their relationships in pairs (e.g. son to father, brother to sister, etc) and/or the Sphinx lens which is the social unconscious- both the system and all the unknowns within it. This 'binocular vision' is developed by Hanni Biran in her article *Organisational Role Analysis: using Bion's binocular vision* (2006), where she writes:

'Through the binocular vision Bion tries to show the tragedy of human fate. According to this theory, every human being is simultaneously one hundred percent an individual and one hundred percent a social animal, and therefore fated to oscillate all his life between the narcissistic and the social-istic poles' (p. 85).

The Sphinx is a mythical beast whose body is combined of both human and animal parts, and who asks the enigmatic riddle: 'Who is the one walking on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and on three by evening?' The answer is surprisingly simple: man himself. But as Biran explains:

'The answer enfolds the meaning of being human. Man undergoes several changes and metamorphoses in order to discover the human aspect within himself. Often, we are blind to something basic and simple that is right there in front of our eyes' (p. 87).

The Oedipal story, and Biran's article, underline the idea that to develop, to renew ourselves and to create and live fully, we must continue to ask questions, search and dismantle existing structures so we can build new ones. This is what I was attempting with the drawings: to enable participants to explore, question, and dig beneath their consciousness to understand their relationship with animals.

Drawing allows access to unconscious thought in accessible ways and provides focus and a boundary to discussions about a given issue. As Nossal (2013) reflects 'drawing provides an enormous amount of rich data about both the conscious and unconscious experiences that people have' (p. 67). Nossal also emphasises that the act of drawing, and then sharing drawings, provides participants with a 'means to develop their capacity to think creatively and openly by providing a container and context for socio-analytic discussion'. She adds 'last but not least, drawing can be fun and exciting and provide a novel means of engagement' (pp. 67-68). I was astutely aware that some of the material to be discussed in the sessions could potentially be challenging and confronting, so I was keen to offset this with activities that were likely to be enlivening. Conversely, I also needed to consider that drawing can be intimidating to some. People may feel inadequate as artists or worried about divulging something they may not wish to. Therefore, express permission to use their images was important.²⁷

I wanted participants to think about not just their pets, but also other animals entwined with their own 'system', which of course may have included animals they ate. I also wanted to make sure the drawings came from a personal perspective. After much consultation with my supervisor and the facilitators, we decided on the following instruction: *"Think of your own 'system' of humans and animals and how they interact. This may include animals you eat. Draw this system and include yourself in the drawings."*

This process of drawing was also used within two workshops I ran with my supervisor, Susan Long, throughout the PhD journey. Both were part of an ISPSO conference in 2021, one the Australian regional event in June, the other the international conference in July. Both were held online, and both required participants to draw their own system of humans and

²⁷ See Appendix 3: Email to participants and Information and Consent form.

animals, following the above instructions. In both cases, participants gave permission to use their drawings in my research.²⁸

4.4.5 Post focus group, one-on-one conversations

This amendment to the research methods was suggested by one of the supervisors throughout the data gathering process. The purpose of these one-to-one conversations (about 20 – 30 mins each) was to gather additional data on whether, and if so how, the focus group sessions had impacted the participants. It was important to me to see if the discussions had changed, or impacted, the participants and their eating habits, so I took this opportunity for further discussions. Participants were invited to participate, but it was expressly stated that this was a voluntary extra step if they wished to take it. Fifteen people out of the twenty took up the invitation.

Questions asked included:

- Has anything changed in your thinking about animals (including animals bred for food), since the focus group sessions?
- Has anything changed in your behaviour or eating habits?
- On reflection, how did you find the 3 sessions?

4.5 Summary of data collated:

- Eight personal journals from 4 years of exploring the social politics of meat.
- Records (my own notes and some recordings) of the six focus group sessions.
- Thirty-three visual images drawn by participants in various sessions over the four-year period.
- Personal reflection notes from presentations at NIODA and ISPSO conferences.
- Ten records (notes and recordings) of individual socio-analytic interviews.
- Notes from the fifteen post-focus group one-to-one conversations

²⁸ See Appendix 4: ISPSO Berlin Conference 2021. Workshop Outline.

In this chapter I have explained the four methodologies I utilised within the research design: Action Research, Psychoanalytic Observation, Critical Discourse Analysis and the Transforming Experience Framework. I have shown how these methodologies link with the specific methods used to create data: through the methods of autoethnographic journal writing, focus group discussions, socio-analytic drawing, and one- to one- socio-analytic interviews. How to analyse all of this and make sense of it was challenging. The method of data analysis is described in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis Phase 1. Initial processes

'Sell your cleverness and buy bewilderment.'

Rumi

Vignette 7: A (failed) Vegetarian Family Christmas Dinner.

Christmas is coming up in the next few months and it's our turn to host. We have recently moved back into our newly renovated house and feel much pride and joy about the new space. We want to share this joy with our family, so we look forward to hosting this year. I ask my partner, Gary, if he'd mind if we held a Vegetarian Family Christmas Dinner. He's obliging, as he always is. I run the idea past two family members and ask for their support. They look bewildered, but I assume, perhaps naively, that they will support the idea.

As the time gets closer, I send an email to all family members who would be involved in cooking and decision making. Badly worded, I am sure. A few of them reply within a week or so, willing to try the new way. But I don't hear from most people. After a month, I wonder what is going on. I send out another email and get a few more responses. Then, finally, an angry email accusing me of being a selfish, bad host, not understanding or appreciating tradition, and not considering other people. I feel lectured to, bullied.

I doubt myself and my motives. Was I just making a statement about myself, making others feel bad by being the 'moral one'? Was I being the typical 'difficult middle child'? Was I being selfish? It's a farming family after all, how stupid was the idea?

I decide for the sake of family harmony I will concede. It will be a normal family Christmas. We hold the dinner at our place, and nobody talks about it. Something inside me dies.

Two years later that same person (of the angry email) forgets to bring the ham and turkey to the family Christmas dinner. She is very upset, cries, and everyone consoles her: "We will manage, there are stacks of vegetables, Gary has made the usual nut loaf, Margo has made the stuffed pumpkin." It is a Vegetarian Family Christmas Dinner by default. My psychodynamic friends laugh and laugh and speculate about the playing out of unconscious guilt. I don't know about that. But I feel somewhat avenged.

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explain my data analysis process. As explained in Chapter 4, four methods were used to collect data: focus group sessions, drawings, one-to-one interviews, and my own personal journal writing. The purpose of the focus group sessions was to explore various thoughts, feelings and attitudes to animals, both conscious and unconscious, within society. Drawings were used within these sessions to assist this exploration into both conscious and unconscious feelings towards animals, including animals we eat. The one-to-one socio-analytic interviews were with people directly involved in the issue of farming animals, to get deep insights into the thinking and relationships experienced when one has personal and work/career involvement in this area. Finally, the fourth method, autoethnography, was chosen as a method of data collection to enable me, the researcher, to use 'self as instrument', to explore my own journey and thought processes on this societal issue. In other words, I aimed to explore the issue from my own personal experience (autoethnography), from inside the farming and animal welfare industry (interviews), and from a societal perspective (focus groups including drawings). In section 5.2, I explain the analysis process for each of these four methods. In section 5.3, I explain the major challenges and weaknesses in both the data collecting and data analysing.

With six records of the focus group sessions, thirty-three visual images, ten records of individual socio-analytic interviews., fifteen sets of notes from post focus group conversations, and eight personal journals, I had a lot of data to examine. Making sense of it all was a challenge. I am quite visual in my learning style, so I decided to use what works well for me in terms of categorising and thinking clearly: the use of colour. Using specific combinations of colours to highlight ideas, feelings, surprising events, questions and emerging themes stimulated my senses and helped me gain a clear(er) picture of the data. Throughout the analysis, it became evident that I needed to very clearly distinguish between what was tangible, physical or verbal evidence (such as what a participant might have said or written about their own drawing), and what was my own interpretation.

5.2: Description of the analysis process for each of the four methods

Keeping in mind my chosen methodologies of action research, psycho-analytic observation, critical discourse and the Transforming Experience Framework, I adopted the following stages for analysis of the material:

5.2.1: Description of analysis process for the group sessions

- a) Within and after each session, I wrote up my own notes on what I saw and heard, what I could perceive empathically, and what I observed within myself.
- b) Within a few days of each session, I shared my thoughts and debriefed with both the facilitator and my supervisor (again, taking more notes).
- c) I analysed the group sessions by collating and sorting the data. This involved creating tables where colour coding of text was used to distinguish feelings, surprising events, questions, and emerging themes. (See Table 2 below, for Focus Group 1. I have included the table for Focus Group 2 in the appendix, to avoid repetition in the main body of this PhD. See A8.1.)
- d) I listed and colour coded emerging themes from all the above data.
- e) I wrote up a descriptive list of 'Ponderings, emerging themes and relevant theory'.
- f) I wrote a narrative, of three 'actors' emerging from the data. This was my own creation: the meat eater, the vegan, and the flexitarian. See chapter 6 for this narrative.

Table 2 below is the table from the analysis of all three sessions from the first focus group.

Table 2: First cut analysis, Focus Group 1

Key

P = Participant

F = Facilitator

M = Me, the researcher (Margo)

S = Supervisor (Susan)

Significant words, phrases and events	Feelings (my own and those expressed in the group)	The unexpected / abduction logic	Emerging themes	Questions/ Problems
Session 1: Socio-drawings and small group discussion				
Significant words, phrases and events	Feelings (my own and those expressed in the group)	The unexpected / abduction logic	Emerging themes	Questions/ Problems
<p>Sharing initially involved declaring an 'identity around 'meat'.</p> <p>"I'm a closet vegetarian" (P)</p> <p>"I was vegetarian for 10 years, until I became pregnant..." (P)</p> <p>"Both of our daughters are vegetarian" (P)</p> <p>"I'm struck by how important the social aspect is" (P)</p>	<p>People shared nervously. I had an enormous amount of 'social anxiety', I felt terribly nervous about people liking the food, feeling comfortable, turning up, talking with each other, it being a 'good session' etc.</p>	<p>I was I was taken aback by my own nervousness. I design and run groups all the time! Why was this so anxiety provoking for me? My new identity as a researcher? Something about the topic? Was I holding the anxiety in the group?</p>	<p>The 'social' in the social politics of meat looms very large indeed.</p> <p>People eat, or don't eat meat to satisfy their children, their partners, their broader families....</p>	<p>Do humans mainly eat meat to satisfy other humans and their own social needs? Why do people eat meat?</p>

<p>“One’s cred in the group was about their link to Margo” (S- after the session)</p>				
<p>“It was like meat eaters anonymous” (F – after the session)</p>	<p>Ambivalence: admitting ‘I’m a meat eater’ but doing it anyway.</p>	<p>I’m not sure why I was surprised by this- of course people introduced themselves according to how much meat they ate – they were very aware of at least the title of the thesis!</p>	<p>‘Meat eaters anonymous’ – as though we are addicted to meat and we’re trying to wean ourselves off it?</p>	<p>Is ambivalence a form of denial?</p>
<p>One participant asked me: “Are you prepared to change your mind Margo?” I responded that yes, I was open to what came up in the sessions, but I was caught by surprise.</p>	<p>Surprise Confusion- change my mind about what? Eating meat? Loving animals? Then regret that I didn’t ask him.</p>	<p>This surprised me- the participants wanted to engage with me- I couldn’t be a passive observer.</p>	<p>My impact as a researcher in action research.</p>	<p>Am I prepared to change my mind? That’s a good question. Not about meat, but yes about the social politics.</p>
<p>One participant arrived late and took a plate of cornchips into the room.</p>	<p>Embarrassment</p>	<p>I was terribly conscious of the sound of his munching, more for his sake than anyone else. I could barely ‘hear’ anything else. The eating drowned out everything else.</p>	<p>The act of eating can detract us from noticing, observing other things.</p>	<p>Why was this so distracting? The whole eating thing seems so self-conscious. Have I set this up to be awkward for everyone?</p>
<p>After the session the facilitator said “I don’t know if you should pay me, I’m thinking any money for my work should go to a charity....”</p>	<p>Guilt Desire to please Desire to be ‘moral’</p>	<p>We had agreed on his fee- why did he say this? I wondered if guilt and social</p>	<p>Guilt is present when meat is discussed and explored.</p>	<p>What wasn’t said? No-one said anything about loving the taste of meat.</p>

		conscience was a strong internal feeling in the group.	Ambivalence is also present: I know but I don't want to know.	
Session 2: Socio-line and separate group discussion				
Significant words, phrases and events	Feelings (my own and those expressed in the group)	The unexpected / abduction logic	Emerging themes	Questions/ Problems
<p>A vegan joined the group (he was sick for the first session) and this impacted the group significantly.</p> <p>Enjoyment of the discussion: "This is like a sophisticated dinner conversation." (P)</p> <p>"Really good discussion" (P)</p> <p>"We've pulled so many things in, meat has so many threads..." (P)</p>	<p>Enjoyment Social cohesion</p> <p>Overwhelmed</p>	<p>The group enjoyed the discussions.</p>	<p>The desire to talk about the issue of meat.</p>	<p>Is this because it's just a group of like-minded people? i.e.. my network. I enjoy stimulating, challenging discussions, have I just invited people who are similar in this way?</p>
<p>Many cognitive, rational comments: "We've all drawn ourselves as part of a system. We're not 'apex predators' in the pictures." (P)</p>	<p>I found myself wondering why the discussion was so 'cognitive'. Avoidance of feelings?</p>		<p>All the logical, intellectual talk- a form of defensiveness?</p>	<p>Why haven't people talked much about their feelings? There's a lot of intellectual talk.</p>
<p>In depth discussion about capitalism, consumerism and choice: "I eat meat, I like clothes, I use heating, we're all making choices that are not good." (P)</p>			<p>Again, sophisticated logical talk- a form of defensiveness?</p>	

<p>"It's all about choice. But do I really need 50 types of yoghurt? NO. That's marketing."</p> <p>"It's just too hard to unravel" (P)</p>				
<p>Discussion about cruelty, and how hard it is to discuss: "You've (to the vegan, who was not in session 1) brought in the idea, or the fact, of cruelty and the suffering. It wasn't so strong last time. It's been coming, now it's here."</p> <p>"I hate and reject the cruelty argument. When people present arguments about cruelty my response is 'Are you suggesting I am cruel?' I reject that. Maybe it's just my own defences, it triggers me....." (P)</p> <p>(About last session) "looking at the issue through the lens of suffering was not where we went. We avoided that." (P)</p>	<p>Defensiveness: don't accuse me of being cruel.....</p> <p>But an open admission of not wanting to talk about this.</p> <p>Honesty in the group.</p>	<p>Ambivalence: there was this admission that 'we don't want to talk about the cruelty', but the group seemed to want to go there.....</p>		<p>Can we talk about the cruelty? What is palatable? What is not palatable?</p>
<p>In response to being asked to line up according to how much meat they eat: "Why are we doing this?" (P) Directed at me, the researcher: "Are you studying how we relate to animals, or are you studying the eating of meat?" (P)</p>	<p>Compartmentalising Disconnecting.</p> <p>My thought: "the main way we relate to animals is to eat them!"</p>	<p>This was striking. I wondered why that person didn't see the clear link between how we relate to animals and eating them.</p>	<p>The importance of 'social cohesion' and minimal conflict. Staying safe.</p>	<p>Basic assumption oneness? Or is it about the natural 'splitting' we all do between meat and animals?</p>
<p>In response to the facilitator inviting people to form sub groups- using the phrase "Find your tribe" (F)</p>	<p>Resistance to splitting the group Resistance to labelling</p>		<p>Not many people want to be associated with 'meat-eaters'. (even</p>	<p>Why wouldn't we see meat eaters as our tribe, if we eat meat?</p>

<p>"I object to the term 'tribe'- meat eaters are not my tribe. Even though I am one." (P) But later, another comment "We didn't like that splitting, but we are tribal. Vegans stick together. Think about a BBQ- all the men cooking steak and sausages..." (P)</p>	<p>Social cohesion important</p> <p>I was really amused by this. "They are not my tribe. Even though I am one".</p>	<p>Why did I find that funny? Conscious denial. It was slightly self-deprecating.</p>	<p>though they are meat eaters)</p>	<p>Is this an indication of shame?</p>
<p>The vegan in the group had real status in the group. He was articulate and people listened attentively to him. There was a sense of admiration for him. One participant said to him "You carry a big burden for us." (P)</p>	<p>Respect</p> <p>I described him as an informal leader, Susan described him as a 'central person' in the group.</p>	<p>This was somewhat surprising. Previous research shows vegans are often viewed negatively. The vegan in this group even said: "Just saying 'I'm a vegan' is taken as a slight. We do get picked on. We're often the subject of jokes."</p>	<p>Changed view of vegans.</p>	<p>New moral hierarchy in society?</p>
<p>Many comments on how things have changed and are still changing. "To some degree it's become less of an issue – there are so many different diets now." (P) "We're all on a journey." (P) "I'm hopeful." (P)</p> <p>The vegan made the comment: "I look at the rest of the group and I think: 'It's madness. Like smoking'" (P) Another participant in response: 'That comment on smoking will stay with me. I used to smoke. A lot. Now I think it's ridiculous."</p>	<p>Sense of journey, growth, change.</p> <p>Degree of fascination about it all.</p>	<p>The smoking comment. The learning was happening in real time, in the group session.</p>	<p>Journeys and change</p> <p>I am reminded of the fact that action research is not 'separate' and objective'. They are being impacted by this research.</p>	<p>Should I change the title of my thesis to "The Changing Social Politics of Meat?"</p>

Session 3: Video presentation and discussion				
Significant words, phrases and events	Feelings (my own and those expressed in the group)	The unexpected / abduction logic	Emerging themes	Questions/ Problems
<p>Much contemplation on their raised awareness in the opening reflection time: "I've been thinking 'Why aren't I vegetarian? It's about time.'" (P) "I've been more conscious of what I buy and cook." "I'm becoming more conscious." (P) "Now that I'm talking about this.....people send me things...." (P)</p>	<p>I felt hopeful- 'this is having an impact!'</p>		<p>Impact of the research on the researched</p>	<p>Question- what is my role here? As an influencer? Activist? Researcher?</p>
<p>But at the same time there was still wariness about change and intellectualising: "I can't see the world or our culture going vegan..... I think there will be a shift, because we won't be able to afford it.... Maybe we'll eat cockroaches etc. instead..." (P)</p> <p>In a debrief with the facilitator, he commented: "people had become more aware, and had respect for each other's positions, but their own positions had not changed..... it was like people agreed, BUT...." (F)</p>	<p>Wariness Resistance</p>		<p>Resistance to change</p>	<p>Perhaps discussing things intellectually doesn't actually create change.</p>
<p>There was strong resistance by some to the TED talk on Carnism:</p>	<p>I had very mixed feelings about this response: <i>disappointment as a host</i></p>	<p>My various roles pulled me in many different directions.</p>	<p>Complex role of the researcher</p>	<p>Why did they find the talk about carnism so</p>

<p>"It made me angry. It didn't allow for any nuance." (P)</p> <p>"I was sitting there building defences while watching. I don't like that kind of presentation." (P)</p> <p>"I don't' like the association that if I am a meat-eater, I'm like a Nazi or Holocaust supporter".</p> <p>In our debrief session, my supervisor shared: "You built them up and hit them with something hard, and they defended against it."</p> <p>She contemplated: "When can the conversation start, and go to, and where must it stop?"</p>	<p>that someone was not happy and comfortable in the group, appreciation as a researcher to have such rich data, concern as a designer that this had provoked anger.....</p> <p>Susan shared that she felt disappointed in the last session. In her view the response to the TED talk was an 'othering' of Melanie Joy (the TED presenter). "She was 'carved up' just as animals are."</p>			<p>confronting? Did they feel patronised?</p> <p>Am I wearing too many hats?</p> <p>Did I unconsciously want to sanitise the group and the group discussion, just as we sanitise the production of meat?</p>
<p>Others did like it:</p> <p>"I felt a kind of relief after watching it. She gave us a way out." (P)</p>				
<p>The group enjoyed discussing the 'rules of meat eating':</p> <p>"There are certain topics you don't discuss at dinner... never mention that you are eating an animal." (P)</p> <p>"But there's a rule that there is meat at every dinner." (P)</p> <p>"If you go to the footy you have to have a pie." (P)</p> <p>"You go to a BBQ you have to have a steak." (P)</p> <p>"When I worked as a waiter many, many years ago, the rule was you gave the men the red</p>	<p>I felt delighted that they understood the notion of unspoken rules. The discussion seemed rich with insight and potential.</p>			

meat dish and the women the white meat dish..." (P) "You don't eat things you name. That's a farm rule." (P)				
The economy came up: "Australian meat is highly prized, it's a huge export industry." (P)		I'm surprised the whole money thing hasn't been a bigger part of this discussion.	The looming shadow of capitalism and money.	Is the system of money largely invisible?
The group again expressed appreciation for the discussions: "This has been a safe space." (P) "It is an OK thing to disagree in this group." (P) "This has given me permission to choose my food choices." (P) "It's given me permission to think about this." (P) "It's raised the layers of complexity. I've gained a lot of clarity about this stuff."	The facilitator shared in the debrief that as a result of the group sessions "I feel guiltier." My own gratitude to the group for being here and sticking with the process.	I was struck by the "co-researching" nature of action research.	Nature of action research as a collaborative process.	I wonder how collaborative I've really been here. I set myself up as an observer. How collaborative was that? Not very....

5.2.2 Description of the analysis of the drawings

- a) As described in Chapter 4, focus group participants were invited to: *“Think of your own ‘system’ of humans and animals and how they interact. This may include animals you eat. Draw this system and include yourself in the drawings.”* This resulted in twenty drawings from the focus groups. As well as these drawings, I also had thirteen drawings that had been done in some conference workshops I had facilitated throughout the course of the PhD studies. All participants had agreed on their drawings being part of the research data collection. This resulted in thirty-three drawings to analyse.
- b) I analysed the drawings by first doing a visual sort – laying them all out on a table with my supervisor and categorising them into themes.
- c) I created a table with the headings: Drawing number/s; Significant / repeating images and ideas; Feelings (my own and those expressed in the pictures); Emerging themes / Questions; Drawing samples. (See Table 3 below).
- d) I compared the themes emerging from these drawings to the themes from the discussions in the focus groups (see Table 2 above).
- e) I chose seven drawings as representative of the thirty-three I had collected and the key themes and findings that had emerged.
- f) I analysed each drawing by reviewing what the participant had said about their own drawing, reviewing what others in the small exploration group had said when sharing their associations and feelings to that drawing, and by reflecting on and recording my own associations, feelings and thoughts to the drawing.
- g) I also analysed five of my own drawings, each done as a task in PhD classes throughout the six years of the doctorate study. I did this by reviewing each drawing individually, exploring how I felt at the time, thoughts, feelings and associations in retrospect, and then looking at them together as a whole. Three of these drawings were selected to represent and complement the eight key findings from the data (Chapter 6).

Table 3: First cut analysis, Drawings (33 in total)

Drawing number/s	Significant / repeating images and ideas	Feelings (evoked in myself and/or expressed by participants)	Emerging themes / Questions	Drawing sample to put in thesis (names taken out)
1, 4, 9, 16, 27, 32	The world eating itself up Death	Guilt Despair	Awareness of human destruction of environment and other species	
6, 5	Distended bellies	Revulsion Disgust	Health Greed Spewing out	
2, 7, 10, 14, 15, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 31	Walls and divisions Compartmentalising	Numbing	Splitting	
1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 21, 30, 31, 33	Family, dinner tables and food	Joy, connection	How important the social and cultural aspect of both meat eating and loving animals as pets is.	
4, 5, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, 22, 30	Hearts and tears	Sadness, love	Love of and affection for animals Sense of responsibility	
5, 12, 13	Romanticised notion of animals' lives	Nostalgia Wishful thinking	Denial	
23, 25, 27	Money and corporate interest	Surprised how little this element came up	How insidious this is.	
26, 29	Everything is connected	Serenity Acceptance	The two vegans drew these pictures. How does being vegan link with an integrated human animal view?	
27, 28	The food chain Hierarchy	Quite impersonal	Humans at top of the food chain	

5.2.3 Description of the analysis of the interview data

1. I wrote my own reflection notes immediately after each interview, including those interviews that were recorded
2. Whenever possible, I talked with either my supervisor or my PhD student support group about my reflections, insights and ponderings.
3. I read and re-read the reflection notes as a collection of interview data, highlighting key comments, insights and questions. I listened to the recordings.
4. I created a table, listing and colour coding the following: Key discussion points, significant words, phrases, other gestures or events; Feelings (my own and those expressed by the participant); The unexpected / abduction logic; Emerging themes; and Questions/ problems/ new insights. (See Table 4 below).
5. I wrote a descriptive list of 'Ponderings, emerging themes and relevant theory', similar in format to the descriptive list from the group sessions.
6. I considered the themes in terms of their strengths and consistency with other data, namely, that of the focus groups, the drawings, and my own autoethnographic data.
7. I noted surprising events, or the unexpected (to explore using abductive logic) from the above emerging themes. I kept these for reference after analysing the more consistent themes.
8. I wrote up selected interviews as narratives to link to key themes. (See Sample Narrative 1 below)

Table 4: First cut analysis, Interviews

Key

P = Participant

M = Me, the researcher (Margo)

Key discussion points, significant words, phrases, other gestures or events	Feelings (my own and those expressed by the participant)	The unexpected / abduction logic	Emerging themes	Questions/ Problems/ New insights
Interview 1: Vegan Psychologist				
<p>P(1) talked a lot about collective shame and the projection of that shame onto vegans. Her view was that “most humans are followers”. She talked about “blind adherence to social norms” and the need for animal advocates to stress awareness of choice.</p>	<p>I felt in awe of P(1). She seemed like an amazing modern-day goddess, leading the way, a beautiful and smart woman who had found her cause.</p>	<p>I felt eager to please her and found myself telling a white lie about not eating cheese. Why would I lie about that? At how many people lie about their food choices?</p>	<p>Collective shame Awareness of choice Moral hierarchy</p>	<p>Even I seem impacted by a need to be ‘seen to be doing the right thing’. The moral hierarchy feels strong.</p>
Interview 2: Creator and manager of Farmed Animals Sanctuary				
<p>Lots of conversation about change. P(2) talked about the importance of change agents having a good heart, not judging, being kind, not being critical or judgmental. She said she truly believes that she can help make a connection through kindness. “I don't need to shove it down people's throats.” “Social change comes from compassion and education.” She also said “Vegans can be their own worst enemies. When they're critical and harsh and</p>	<p>If P(1) seemed like a goddess, P(2) felt like a Saint. Everything about her suggested kindness and frugality.</p>	<p>I think one of the most interesting parts of the conversation for me, was when today Pam talked about her sister being “very different” from her. She didn't really want to talk much about it, but it was clear that it was not a happy or close relationship. It got me thinking about my</p>	<p>A decision to be a change agent, or an activist, involves sacrifice. A lot is gained: a sense of self, clarity of purpose, new friends and community, and the satisfaction of feeling driven for a good cause. But a lot is lost: often relationships are</p>	<p>Am I idolising? If so, does it matter? What gives someone like this such clarity about purpose?</p>

<p>use violent language, they just turn people off.”</p>		<p>own siblings and how different I am from them. I wish I'd talked with her more about it.</p>	<p>forsaken and money and career are sacrificed.</p> <p>Vegans can be their own worst enemies.</p>	
<p>Interview 3: Entrepreneur, animal activist, saver of cows</p>				
<p>P(3) is an entrepreneur and marketing expert, who loves cows. Her inspiration is to try and turn the dairy industry around, hence working with farms directly to make them become kinder and more sustainable organisations. We talked about the beautiful romantic narrative that farmers have in their minds. They love animals, but they have these “unwritten codes” such as “Don't give them names”, “Don't be there when the docking truck leaves”, she explained. “They con themselves so they can stick with their beautiful romantic narrative.” Her view is that in many ways farming is like a religion “it's largely unconscious, they've done it their whole lives they don't talk about it as a skill or practise or even a way of life.” But she also said change agents need to be very careful, “Farmers are generally seen as the heroes in Australian culture, the backbone of the country”.</p>	<p>I felt inspired and excited by P(3)'s entrepreneurial venture helping farmers to transition to more sustainable practices.</p>	<p>P (3) talked about vets being speciesist. Many of her vets won't treat her cows in the same way they would care for a dog or a cat.</p>	<p>Farmers, unconscious of their own skill, practice and way of life. They're also seen as 'the backbone of the country', the 'heroes' of Australian culture.</p>	<p>If even our vets are speciesist, how on earth do we change society? The very people who care for and heal animals categorise them according to a worthiness hierarchy. But perhaps doctors once did that too, with people, a worthiness hierarchy based on age, gender, class, race, status.</p>
<p>Interview 4: Animal Welfare and Rights Activist organisation (3 people: P 4)</p>				
<p>The predominant theme here seemed to be “Times are changing”</p>	<p>This was a lively and comfortable interview.</p>	<p>There was some talk of the attitude to</p>	<p>Times are changing.</p>	<p>Working for animals rights and animal</p>

<p>One of the participants was a lot older than the others, she was in her 50s the other two in their 30s. The older one shared that when she became a vegan in her 20s it was very radical, and when she started working for an animal organisation her sister said to her “If you ever tell our brother where you work, he will have a heart attack. (her brother drove trucks carrying livestock). She said that when she ate with others she generally felt she was” missing the main meal”. “Generally,” she said, “people seem to think I was doing it to annoy them”. The younger two said decision to become vegan and work for the animal welfare organisation was readily accepted by their families, and that their friends and communities tended to be aligned with their values. They all spoke about the US versus them mentality being dangerous for the movement and that aggression doesn't work. They did empathise with the impatience many vegans feel, but that “they can get in their own way”.</p>	<p>Being a group, the task of interviewing drew on my skills as a facilitator, making a group feel comfortable and sharing enough of myself to feel that I was one of them. They all seemed very comfortable and we're particularly interested in my question, “How has the work you do in this organisation impacted your relationship with animals?” Invariably, they said that they feel better connected to animals and the world. They commented on their increased gratitude and heightened awareness of all animals. I was reminded of Buddhism.</p>	<p>“green eco-terrorists”, and a book by Will Porter called Green is the New Red. This got me interested and thinking about the power of corporates and their very aggressive attitude to vegans and animal rights activists. It is somewhat ironic that vegans have learned to be LESS aggressive, less judgemental; whereas corporates and even governments critical of vegans have become more aggressive and judgemental, to the extent of calling them (us) “eco-terrorists”.</p>	<p>It is recognised by activists and change agents that the US versus THEM mentality is dangerous for the movement and that criticism, aggression and judgement do not work.</p> <p>Working for animals rights and animal welfare seems to increase empathy and connection to all life on earth. This feels significant. It aligns with the pictures the two vegans in my groups drew, of life and the earth, as connected wholes.</p>	<p>welfare seems to increase empathy and connection to all life on earth. This feels significant. It aligns with the pictures the two vegans in my groups drew, of life and the earth, as connected wholes.</p> <p>I am reminded of the framework for transforming experience into authentic action through role (TEF). (see Transforming Experience in Organisations, 2016, edited by Susan Long)</p>
<p>Interview 5: Journalist, television presenter, author, sustainable farmer</p>				
<p>P(5) did say interestingly that he “gets attacked from both ends”. “I'm considered soft in the farming industry, and I'm considered heartless by animal activists.”</p>	<p>This was an awkward interview. I was feeling fragile, our dog Fizo had just been put down, and I was staying in Tasmania with friends.</p>	<p>The soil is an interesting path (rabbit hole) to go down. P (8) (interview 8) also focusses on soil, as does P(6).</p>	<p>Corporate power. The invisibility of the system and systemic addiction.</p>	<p>Why was this interview so Hard? Was it a gender thing? The fact that I am not a ‘foodie’?</p>

<p>“I’m interested in the middle bit. Unfortunately, the most vocal people are the most annoying and the most noticed.” He is starting to talk, write and present shows about soil.</p> <p>The other interesting thing P (5) talked about was the fact that things take so long because of corporate interests. For instance, battery eggs have now been banned, but that won't take effect for 12 years. It will happen in 2035. Why so long? Because it's the big retailers buying the cheap eggs, the products the consumer doesn't even realise they're buying into. Muffins, pancake mixture etc</p>	<p>We had hired a car, and my friends dropped me at P (5)'s in the car, and after an hour picked me up again.</p> <p>P(5) is also a 'foodie', a famous food journalist and a restaurateur. I've never been a keen cook or a restaurant go-er. So I felt constrained, fragile, and a bit out of place.</p>			<p>Was I a bit awe struck of his fame? Did I feel guilty about taking up his valuable time?</p>
<p>Interview 6: Wool farmer, high end ethical wool</p>				
<p>P(6) spoke a lot about being influenced by a man called Fred Provenza, who writes about animals and nourishment. Her interest is in 3 things: the animals, humans and the landscape; and how these three things interact.</p> <p>When asked about how she gets along with other locals she said I've given up proselyting (attempting to convert) to farmers. Most of them don't want to hear it.</p>	<p>I loved this interview. P(6) and I really connected well through our own stories and values. I found her really interesting and knowledgeable, as well as motivating.</p> <p>Why was it so much better than the others? We weren't rushed, and I shared my own story more thoroughly with her. It was also a sheep farm, so to some extent I felt that I'd come home.</p>	<p>P(6) had an interesting theory about the masculine being interested in genetics, which is all about sex; and femininity being interested in the environment, which is all about nurturing. Sex is easier, she said.</p>	<p>Connection. The most effective interviews are conversations, not interviews. Where we both learn, we both are vulnerable. Action research is collaborative.</p>	<p>Our wonderful connection has stayed with me. And P(6) has introduced me to two other people to interview: P(7) and P(8) I have a new network now.</p>

Interview 7: Animal welfare worker, Muslim vegan				
<p>What was particularly interesting about P(7) was her Muslim background, which she talked about extensively. Growing up she did not have pets or animals in the home and it was only when she became involved in the fashion industry that she became aware of animal based products and the cruelty involved in those.</p> <p>At Four Paws she had “a deep learning curve” and in the beginning had quite a personal internal struggle with her religious background and beliefs. She reconciled this by realising that Islam is concerned with sentience, and that even though animal welfare is not explicitly mentioned in religious writings, it is about adapting to society, which changes over time.</p> <p>When asked about how other people respond to her food choices, P(7) said that her family have been accepting, and that she believes awareness is changing. She has cousins who have switched to a plant-based diet, and even her mum in the month of Ramadan, said to her: “Look, I’ve got these vegan sausages.”</p> <p>When they see things in the media, her friends will send her links saying “Oh, I saw this and I thought of you.”</p>	<p>Another inspiring young woman who has been drawn to working in social (and animal) justice.</p> <p>Once again, I felt privileged to be meeting all of these people.</p>		<p>The importance of family, culture and religion.</p> <p>The influence of those systems and how we reconcile the differences when those systemic factors make our choices difficult.</p>	<p>Why did this particular individual make such a significant change in her life? What made her choose this path?</p> <p>She didn’t grow up with pets or animals. What makes someone take up the cause against animal cruelty?</p>
Interview 8: Author and expert in foraging, nourishment and nutritional wisdom.				
<p>P(8)’s passions are for diversity and health of soil, animals and humans.</p>	<p>What a delightful, jovial interview this was!</p>	<p>P(8) mentioned that on academia his work used to get very few</p>	<p>Again, another person who has really thought through his values,</p>	<p>This is fascinating stuff. In his latest book Nourishment, P(8)</p>

<p>He has authored the books Nourishment and Foraging Behaviour and is co-author of The Art & Science of Shepherding.</p> <p>He “envisions a human community with a collective consciousness that respects, nourishes and embraces our interdependence with life on earth”. He argues that when domestic herbivores learn to forage in landscapes with diverse mixtures of plant species, phytochemically rich diets bolster their health and protect them from diseases.</p>	<p>We started by talking a lot about plants and gardening, and the conversation meandered from soil to vegetables to animals, farming and writing.</p> <p>P(8) seemed to have this gorgeous, lively wisdom....</p>	<p>mentions but in the last 10 years has so many mentions and requests from other authors. He says it's evidence that his way of thinking is spreading.</p>	<p>philosophy and place in the world.</p> <p>Once again, the Transforming Experience Framework (TEF) seems relevant.</p>	<p>debunks the modern attitude that animals are too dumb to know what they eat and shows that when given a choice of natural foods, livestock have an astoundingly refined palate, nibbling through the day on as many as fifty kinds of grasses, forbs, and shrubs to meet their nutritional needs with remarkable precision.</p>
<p>Interview 9: Colleague and long-time vegetarian</p>				
<p>P(9) shared that she knew as a child that she didn't like meat but she ate it reluctantly until she was a teenager. At the age of 17 she decided to stop eating animals, and she was seen as “fussy” and “difficult” by her family for a long time.</p> <p>She talked about the fact that things are so much easier now. There are more options, people are more accepting, she's not seen as difficult or fussy anymore. She said people still tease her occasionally, but that times have changed considerably.</p>	<p>Because P(9) is a long-time friend, this was a very comfortable and interactive ‘interview’.</p> <p>Really, it felt like we were just having a great conversation over lunch.</p> <p>We shared thoughts on being the “difficult middle child”, and on how much closer we both were to our fathers than to our mothers, and the impact this had on us.</p>	<p>Families seem to come up a lot. The attitude of parents and siblings is powerful.</p>	<p>Change theme again.</p> <p>Impact of families.</p> <p>Being seen as ‘different’ and “difficult”.</p>	

Interview 10: Cattle farmer				
<p>P (10) talked about the fact that farmers actually love their animals and are proud to give them good lives. He also talked about the hierarchy of farmers, and commented that he would never be a pig farmer. He said “they’re bottom of the pile, and not farmers at all really”. He said that most farmers despise pig farmers.</p> <p>P(10) also talked about turning a blind eye when the animals go off in the truck to the abattoir, in his words, “you just have to get on with it and not think about it. If you think about it, you’re stuffed. That’s why we don’t name our stock.”</p>	<p>P(10) was, as always, jovial, friendly and open. But the interview somehow felt staged. Perhaps it was me. I felt as though I was acting a bit, playing up my family farming background, playing down my real ethics and feelings about farming nowadays. I was being jovial and light-hearted, just like him</p>	<p>I was struck by the derisive attitude to pig farmers. The “bottom of the pile”. A moral hierarchy exists within the farming system where different types of farmers are on different levels of morality.</p>	<p>Farmers have strategies, some conscious, some unconscious, to deal with the emotions of guilt and attachment that come with the practice of raising and killing animals for food.</p>	<p>New awareness of the hierarchy amongst farmers.</p> <p>Why didn’t I connect with this person so deeply? Was it the humour and joviality? Did I ‘disapprove’ of his lifestyle choice?</p>

Sample Narrative 1: Interview with a cattle farmer

Note: This farmer is a cattle farmer in regional Victoria. He also owns an inner-city property and is in Melbourne most weekends. I met him during an outdoor exercise class we both attend, where he expressed interest in the PhD work and agreed to an interview.

S and I sit down for coffee. He gushes over my dog, Fizo, as usual. We order coffee and I am 'ribbed' for ordering soy ('Could have guessed you'd be a soy drinker, Margo'). I smile and let it go. S likes to stir me (and everyone else) whenever he can. But later I wonder about the humour, it's mildly patronising. A small putdown with affectionate humour to disguise the criticism.

We get into the conversation about farming and animals and S talks about the fact that farmers actually love their animals and are proud to give them good lives. I ask how he feels when sending his cattle to the abattoir. He openly discusses the fact that he has to turn away: 'you just have to get on with it and not think about it. If you think about it, you're stuffed. That's why we don't name our stock. You only name your pets.'

I ask about factory farmers, and he declares that he would never be a pig farmer. 'They're bottom of the pile, and not farmers at all really'. I am struck by the derisive attitude, the 'bottom of the pile' is strong language. I contemplate the moral hierarchy existing within the farming system where different types of farmers are on different levels of morality. Does seeing someone else as cruel, not a real farmer, bottom of the pile, help us to turn a blind eye to our own practices? But I nod and keep the conversation jovial. It's safe that way.

This interview somehow feels staged. Perhaps it's me. I sense I am acting a part, playing up my family farming background, being jovial and light-hearted, playing down my real ethics and feelings about farming nowadays. I feel disappointed in myself afterwards. I think a lot about being 'jovial'. Sure, it's a defence against social anxiety, but is it also a defence against being serious, and confronting the hard stuff? S wears his joviality like a tight mask. It's hard to see what is really underneath.

5.2.4 Description of the analysis of the auto-ethnographical data

My process of data analysis of my own journal included:

- As explained in the above processes, after analysing the data from the six group sessions, the 33 participant drawings, and the 9 interviews, I had colour coded emerging themes and narratives.
- I then went through the eight personal journals I had written over the course of the PhD, looking for consistencies and inconsistencies, colour coding where I found themes or narratives consistent with the themes that had emerged from the focus group data and the interview data, and noting any themes or narratives that were not consistent or questions that emerged throughout the process.
- Using the layered technique (Ellis, 2004) I selected several vignettes to use from my journals to integrate throughout the final thesis. These vignettes are used as an introduction to each chapter, signally key themes and ponderings about the issue and the research journey. My aim in doing this is to add a personal touch to each chapter, to bring in 'self as instrument' in a very real and personal way.
- As I wrote up my key findings, I selected passages from the journals which either supported or contradicted these findings, to add depth and complexity to the analysis.

5.3 Weaknesses and challenges of this method of data collection and analysis

5.3.1 Weaknesses

All methods outlined above can be criticised for their subjectivity. My personal bias in this research is obvious, and my self-awareness about this crucial. I have written about this subjectivity and the ways I have addressed it in Chapters 3 and 4. But added to this subjectivity was the impact my presence, and my biases, had on the focus groups, and perhaps on some of the interviews. I chose not to facilitate the focus group sessions because I wanted some clarity and boundaries around my role as a researcher, and I feared my own biases would get in the way of enabling the group to discuss the issues freely. Hence, apart from thanking everyone at the beginning for being part of the research and introducing the facilitator, I took up the role of observer. Nonetheless, my supervisor Susan commented that

I had a very strong presence in the group sessions she observed. For instance, many people introduced themselves in terms of their relationship to me. People knew I provided the food, which was vegetarian. I wondered what impact that had on the meat eaters. Did the food in itself make them feel wronged or judged? Particularly in the very first session, I had an enormous amount of social anxiety. I felt terribly nervous about people turning up, feeling comfortable, liking the food, talking with each other, and whether it was a 'good session'. I was taken aback by my own nervousness. I design and run groups all the time! Why was this so anxiety-provoking for me? My new identity as a researcher? Something about the topic? Was I holding anxiety on behalf of the group? I became acutely aware that the 'social' in the social politics of meat looms very large indeed.

Considering I am exploring a social phenomenon, the number of participants is very small (twenty people in the two focus groups and ten people interviewed), and they are from my own personal network. So, a limitation of this research is that it explores a rather small demographic: my own. I would describe that demographic as white, cisgendered, socially progressive, middle class, professional and tertiary educated. Added to that rather narrow demographic is the fact that within each focus group I intentionally attempted to represent different attitudes to animals and to meat eating within society. Hence, about half of each focus group included people who identify as vegan or vegetarian or have significant alignment with these groups. This proportionate representation is not typical of wider society, where vegetarians and vegans make up less than ten percent of the population. In other words, I am quite sure my groups do not represent 'broader society', in age and socio-economic demography, proportions of mixed views, and educational level. One might say that while the groups were very limited in terms of typical demographic diversity, there was a boarder diversity of 'attitudes to eating meat' within these groups than is typical in broader western society. In other words, the diversity was in attitudes to meat-eating, not in other ways.

Added to the limitations of demography has been the challenge of interpretation of the drawings done within the focus groups. Within this data analysis I have strongly focussed on the drawings to uncover the unconscious dynamics of the social politics of meat. There were occasions where my supervisors and I disagreed on the meaning behind a picture, so once again, my subjectivity must be owned. Shapiro (2020) distinguishes between 'interpretation'

which is handed from one person to another, and a more collaborative type of interpretation where it is 'framed as a negotiation of understanding between and among people, not one that is handed down from one to another' (p. 19). Certainly, my aim was to listen and to understand the viewpoints of the participants. But in addition to the conscious interpretations, I wished to dig beneath the surface, look for connections, meanings, things that were not said, but may have emerged through the drawings, their explanations, and the group discussions. This type of thinking was done, not just within the focus group session times, but over many months of analysing the data, and my own biases and beliefs may have caused me to see something that the participant did not mean, intended to portray, or even unconsciously considered. Hence, it has been very important for me to distinguish between what was actually said by participants, and what is my own interpretation.

My selection of interviewees was similarly 'biased'. This was less intentional. My aim initially was to try to 'hear the full story' from significant 'players' in the field: farmers, animal activists, vegans and meat eaters. I wanted to speak to people who farmed and advocated meat eating as well as those who opposed such practices or who had taken up alternate practices. Certainly, I began my organising of interviews with the people I was comfortable with and excited to talk to: a vegan psychologist, a group of animal activists, and the owner of a farmed animal sanctuary. I tried on numerous occasions to access people working in factory farms and in abattoirs but was constantly either ignored or told they were not interested in speaking with me. Eventually, I did interview three farmers, but none of them are factory farmers. One is a sustainable pig farmer, another an ethical wool grower, and the third, a traditional cattle farmer. These farmers represented the agricultural industry, but not intensive industrialised agriculture. That part of the industry remains elusive to me and is not represented in the data presented in this thesis.

Despite the above weaknesses in the data collecting, the data can be said to represent something in the associative unconscious of the wider community (Long and Harney, 2013). That is, it brings forward some of the thoughts that exist in that community. Systems psychodynamics looks for what is there in the system, even if not consciously present in large numbers of thinkers.

5.3.2 Challenges

Using abductive logic as a method of data analysis means looking at the surprising, unexpected elements in the data (Long, 2013, p. xxii). This can be very challenging because in many cases a surprise happens when we are somewhat confronted. Something happens that we did not expect, or perhaps did not want. This can lead to a dismissal of this 'surprising fact'. This occurred for me over the issue of bringing my dog, Fizo, into one of the focus group sessions. I had wanted to 'bring the animal in' to the discussion about animals and meat. My 'surprising fact' was that his presence made very little difference to the discussion, in fact he was largely ignored, and so I dismissed the event as insignificant. I almost did not include this data in my 'Key Findings'. It was only at draft 11 of this chapter that I realised I was missing something, and decided I needed to explore this event more fully.²⁹ Often, the surprising fact provides crucial insights, and so a tendency to dismiss these can be challenging and also limiting.

Another challenge arose for me when analysing the ten socio-analytic interviews. As I reviewed the interview data, I realised that the ten interviews varied considerably in style and outcomes. Although the prepared questions and my intent were the same for each interview, some interviews were pretty much a traditional one to one interview, where, after an initial introduction, I asked questions, and the interviewee answered. These interviews are useful, but not nearly as powerful as the few where I was much more personally involved in the discussion, sharing my own stories, feeling emotionally connected and excited by the dynamic in our interaction. In these interviews, there was a sense that we interactively produced meanings and insights. Carloyn Ellis (2004) calls this type of interviewing 'reflexive, dyadic interviewing', where the focus is on 'the story that evolves as researcher/participants interact and develop a relationship, as well as the story each brings to the interaction' (p. 64). Ellis and co-writers Kiesinger and Tillman-Healy (1997), in an article on interactive interviewing, describe the process and its impact as such:

'One person's disclosures and self-probing invite another's disclosures and self-probing; where an increasingly intimate and trusting context makes it possible to reveal more of ourselves and to probe deeper into another's feelings and thoughts;

²⁹ See Key Finding 5 in Chapter 6 for a full explanation of this event and its significance.

where listening to and asking questions about another's plight leads to greater understanding of one's own; and where the examination and comparison of experience offers new insight into both lives.' (p. 122)

Reading the above description (after the interviews), made me realise that when I gave more of myself, openly shared my own story, and allowed myself to be vulnerable rather than a 'professional interviewer', the interviewees were also open, vulnerable and giving of themselves. The interaction itself had more energy, joy, and meaning. I considered what made some interviews more reflexive, dyadic, and therefore more meaningful than others? I think it was a variety of factors, including:

- Whether I felt rushed or not. In two of the interviews, I was very aware of the interviewees being busy (they both had animals to look after), and I felt concerned, and even anxious, not to take up too much of their time. This anxiety led me into 'auto-pilot', where I merely asked questions and recorded or noted down answers, focussing less on the interaction and dynamics between us.
- One of the interviewees is quite a famous Australian author and television journalist. I realised after the interview that I had felt rather in awe of his status and was anxious not to 'waste his time'. In addition to my nervousness, I became increasingly aware that he is a 'foodie', and I am not; I have never been that interested in, or skilled at, cooking and growing food. I suspect this led to a lack of alignment and connection between us. This was difficult, I admired the way he farmed and his ideas about food, so I felt disappointed that I hadn't 'done a better job' of the interview. My own feeling of inadequacy led to me acting more like a traditional interviewer, rather than allowing the dialogue to emerge and deepen.
- As with all interactions and relationships, I just seemed to 'click' with some people, whereas with others it was harder to build rapport. I found this both confusing and perplexing. What did the rapport, or lack of it, tell me about myself as a researcher and about the issue of meat eating? What made me 'click' with some, and not others? Was I looking for certain values, behaviours and even statements? If my values and approach to life did not quite align with the interviewee, did I unconsciously dismiss the data from the interview as less significant? The feeling of

an interview feeling 'staged', such as in Sample Narrative 1 above, gave me powerful unconscious data. Was I the one doing the staging? Was I 'putting on a mask', to protect myself from the beliefs of this beef farmer? Finding meaning from such discomfort was difficult. It also made the experience of a deep and real connection very special and impactful, such as the one depicted below.

Sample Narrative 2: Interview with wool grower

Note: This farmer (N) grows her sheep for wool, so she is not directly in the 'meat' industry. However, it is common practice for wool farmers to sell their sheep to be slaughtered for meat once they are past their prime wool growing age (usually at about six years old). This particular farmer decided she couldn't send her sheep 'off in the truck' after a few years of farming, and so made the decision to let them live out their old age and die of more natural causes on the farm. She has a special paddock set aside for burying the sheep alongside native trees. Perhaps surprisingly, many of these sheep produce very fine wool for well over ten years.

I am determined to make this interview better than the last rather disappointing one, so I get up early, allow myself plenty of time to drive to the farm, and arrive with time up my sleeve. I apologise to N for "being annoyingly early", and she smiles.

I explain that I'd like to tell her a bit about my research, my background story for starting the PhD, and that then we'd move into the questions about her farm and her story. N looks a little surprised, I suspect she's used to more traditional interviews where the interviewer primarily asks questions, but she nods and smiles again.

I tell her it began with an epiphany, a particularly painful one. She chuckles and says, "Epiphanies usually are". Immediately, I feel her interest and a rapport starting to build between us. She listens intently, and I surprise myself with how articulate I am at sharing my story about growing up on a farm, moving to the city, studying systems psychodynamics, becoming aware of the plight of animals in today's world, and my decision to become vegetarian and start this PhD.

N is an engaged listener; she asks deep and probing questions throughout my explanation. "Do you know what triggered you to go back into that? Was it stuff from your childhood that

you were remembering?” I enjoy her interest and for a while there is a reversal of roles- she is the interviewer; I am being interviewed. Normally I would start to panic about something ‘weird’ like this, but instead I feel relaxed and comfortable. We connect so naturally. It is a good 15 minutes before we get on to N's story, but when we do, she tells it intimately, descriptively, generously. It is also a story of pain, change, and deep realisations about the world and her place in it.

She speaks of animals as individuals, her shepherding relationship with her sheep, the cornerstone role her dogs play in the dynamics on the farm, and her belief that farming is all about connection between three things: land, animals, and humans. She states strongly that all animals should have the right to “choice of food, family and social structure”. I am delighted with the communal, village like approach she has to her business, even though she sells to an international market.

N's wool fetches extremely high prices, three times that of the usual wool grower, and so I ask about envy from other farmers. Do many ask her for advice? “In a word, no”, she replies. “There’s a couple of things. Wrong gender. Wrong accent (Canadian). Used to be wrong age, that’s not so true anymore. Upstart. There’s definitely an upstart thing. It’s like ‘What makes her think she knows better than we do’.”

She muses that her science background gave her experience in close observation, persistence and learning from mistakes, but also in holding up the mirror: “the mirror for me was the landscape on the farm. I kept going ‘Shit, this is not what I’m trying to do’. When I finally realised it was my own management and processes that were causing that, I was willing to step back and go, OK, this isn’t working. I need to learn.”

Towards the end of the discussion, N shares that her interest in farming really came from her love of working dogs, particularly border collies, and I share with her that we have just had to put down our beloved dog, Fizo. Tears come to my eyes. I feel her empathy. I know I’ll stay in touch with this wise and compassionate farmer.

Note: Further discussion of this interview and others is included in Chapter 7.

This chapter has described the data analysis process for each of the four methods used to collect data: focus group sessions, drawings, one-to-one interviews, and my own personal

journal writing. I have also presented the weaknesses of using such methods and the challenges presented to me as I went through the process of analysis. In the next two chapters, I present the key findings, arrived at after the data processes described in this chapter, for the focus groups and associated drawings (Chapter 6) and the socio-analytic interviews (Chapter 7).

Chapter 6: Data Analysis Phase 2. Key findings, focus groups and drawings

'If animals are viewed as an outgroup in the same sense that members of other cultures, religions, or nationalities are regarded as outgroups, then psychological research on intergroup relations and "us" versus "them" dynamics are relevant to how people perceive and treat animals.'

Amiot and Bastion, 2015, p. 30

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I explained the data analysis process with each of the four methods: focus group sessions, drawings, one-to-one interviews, and my own personal journal writing. In this chapter, I present thematic findings from the focus group discussions and the drawings, including drawings completed within the focus group sessions, those completed through other forums throughout the research period, and drawings completed by myself as researcher. In section 6.2, I reiterate the purpose and structure of the focus group sessions and the use of drawings throughout the research. In section 6.3, I present eight key findings from the focus group sessions, using selected drawings and anecdotes to support and explore these findings. Section 6.4 is a creative narrative, a short interlude written with the purpose of integrating the various ideas and themes from the focus group discussions and my own experiences throughout the research.

6.2 Purpose and structure of the focus groups and the drawings

As outlined in detail in Chapter 4, the purpose of the focus group sessions was to explore, through discussion between a diverse group of people willing to talk about the topic, the conscious and unconscious dynamics on the issue of animals, particularly animals bred for food. These sessions were crucial in my exploration of the core research question, 'What are the social politics of meat?' I was curious about how the participants would talk about the animals in their lives, including any animals they might eat, and what might be hidden in these discussions, both consciously and unconsciously.

There were two focus groups, each with ten people in them. Each group had three sessions, two and half hours in length, each session about two weeks apart. The first session involved a drawing activity, the second session included a divided group discussion, and the third

session involved viewing a TED talk video and discussion about the concept of carnism. I hired facilitators for these sessions, while I took up the role of observer, as well as host, since I had invited each participant, organised the sessions, and provided finger food for the participants.

As stated above, drawings were used in session 1 of each focus group. They were also used in other forums throughout the research period, such as at workshops where I presented aspects of my research. Throughout the PhD, as part of the NIODA PhD classes, I completed numerous drawings myself, representing my thoughts and feelings about the research and my role in the work. As explained in Chapter 4 (4.4.4), the aim of using socio-analytic drawing in this research was to enable participants to explore, question, and dig beneath their consciousness to understand their relationship with animals. Drawing provides rich data about our conscious and unconscious experiences and provides a container and context for discussion (Nossal, 2013).

6.3 Key findings from the focus groups and socio-analytic drawings

On the question of how humans interact with one another about animals (including animals we eat), eight key findings emerged from the focus group sessions and the socio-analytic drawings completed within those sessions using the data analysis process described in Chapter 5. Here I list those findings briefly. Each finding is explained in depth after the list.

1. There is a recurrent and persistent message that **research such as this**, on how humans interact with one another about animals, including animals they may eat, **is perceived as psychologically stressful and felt as dangerous** for participants and for the researcher.
2. When thinking and talking about animals, the focus group participants, the interviewees, and my own journal entries displayed the **full spectrum of emotions** – from love and connection to grief and despair.
3. **Social pressure** appeared to be so strong within the focus group sessions, and through my own personal experience as evidenced through the journals, that it often **dominated** decisions and actions about meat.
4. In conversations about the eating of meat, focus group participants appeared willing and able to discuss various aspects of eating meat such as health issues, water and land use, population and feeding the world; but when it came to discussing the

cruelty inflicted on farm animals, strong defences emerged. I have dubbed this “everything but the squeal”, an expression used in the pig industry to indicate that none of the animal is wasted. In the focus groups, **everything but the squeal was palatable in conversations about meat.**

5. **Bringing the animal into the discussions** about ‘the social politics of meat’ **proved difficult.** Data from both personal journals and the focus groups indicates that the splitting of ‘meat’ and ‘animals’ is encouraged.
6. Unconscious defences such as **compartmentalising and dissociation** are evident in the participant drawings from both focus groups and conference workshop drawings, as well as in the focus group discussions.
7. **Comparisons and judgements were common throughout the data collecting.** Some participants expressed a feeling of being judged, and as researcher, I often found myself comparing the two focus groups, the facilitators, and my supervisors.
8. The data (admittedly from a rather narrow demographic, as identified in Chapter 5.3) indicates that **the social politics of meat may be changing.** Evidence from the focus groups, the interviews, and my personal journal writing indicate that the way the subjects think and talk about meat and meat eating (or non-meat eating) is undergoing change.

Key to codes:

P = Participant (from the focus groups)

F = Facilitator (from the focus groups)

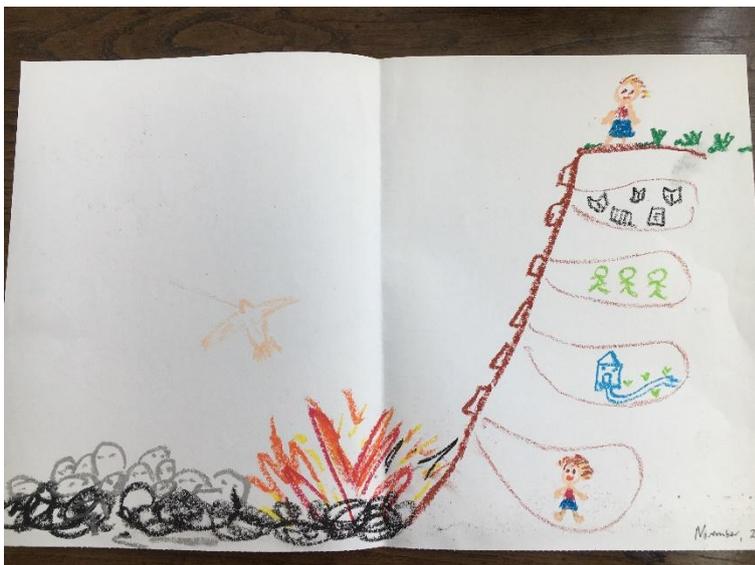
Purple comments = comments from my personal journal writing

Each finding has been arrived at through the analysis processes described in Chapter 5. Evidence for the finding is given from data from my own personal journal writing and PhD researcher role drawings, discussion from focus groups, and the participant drawings, including both their individual explanations of their drawings as well as my own interpretation and comments. To arrive at the interpretations, I have considered both the conscious interpretations and my own interpretations of the unconscious group dynamics. I will now explain each finding, presenting evidence for its emergence.

1. Research such as this is perceived as psychologically stressful and felt as dangerous for the participants and the researcher.

From my own experience of doing research into the social politics of meat over six years, feedback from readers and others involved in the research, and comments by participants in the focus groups, there has been a strong and persistent message that this research is felt as *dangerous*. Dangerous to me, and how people might perceive me (presumably as a biased animal-libber, rather than an objective and professional researcher) but also dangerous to the participants' psychological safety in discussing such an issue and viewing things they might find disturbing. To ask questions about why we eat meat, and whether we should eat animals, was sometimes seen as an attack. At the inception of the research, I created a poster for a symposium, linking systems psych-dynamics with the invisibility and the unconscious dynamics of the system of industrialised farming. I was told not to use any 'traumatising' pictures and my poster (see Appendix 10) needed special approval from the ethics committee. A role drawing I completed in the very first pre-doctoral class in 2018 depicted the danger I felt about the traumatising aspects of the issue, and the trepidation I felt embarking on the daunting task of a PhD.

Figure 1: Researcher drawing. Starting the journey: November 2018



I drew myself at the top of a cliff, contemplating going down the cliff to a ground-level fire alongside burnt, dead figures. For me the fire represented, not so much the task of a PhD, but the horror of the treatment of farmed animals, which I knew I would have to explore in

depth. In my mind the ominous task would be made easier by steps, rather, a step-by-step process. I represented the help I knew would be there along the way through 'support bubbles' adjoining those steps: books, articles and theory; my PhD group (which was two other candidates and my supervisor at the time); my home and family; and finally, my own sense of self and resilience. Out of the fire flies a phoenix bird, faint because I could barely see it at that stage, but there as a symbol of hope that something new and good would emerge from the work.

As I look at this picture years down the track, I see fear, vulnerability and courage in equal measures. The fire, full of skulls, is terrifying, but the little girl is mapping her way down and preparing for the transformation the phoenix bird will go through. When I think back to my decision to become vegetarian, and then a year or so later the resolve to undertake a PhD on the issue of human/animal relations, there is a sense that I went through a kind of 'reckoning'. I simply couldn't live with myself if I didn't do something. Cynically, one might see the ego of a crusader. The alive and powerful fire and the elusive quality of the phoenix both hint at the difficulty of the task: both completing a PhD and the terrible things I knew I would witness about human treatment of animals along the way. Clearly, there were many scary unknowns for me at that stage, but what is also apparent is a sense of determination and even inevitability that I was 'going down'. Perhaps this drawing alerted others to the dangers of the issue I had chosen to explore. In a journal entry years later I contemplated: 'does all this edginess from everyone come from me, somehow? Is it my Vystopia, that I am projecting on to them?'

Perhaps this was the case for my supervisors. Ethical research and the safety of the participants in my focus groups from psychological harm was frequently mentioned by both supervisors. In many ways I felt I had to 'tiptoe' and 'wear kit gloves'. One associate supervisor was very concerned about the ethics of asking people to draw pictures of themselves and the animals in their lives (including animals they may eat). Giving people choice, to draw or not to draw, was emphasised. This felt over the top to me, I had explained from the outset to each participant that the sessions would involve drawing and other creative activities. But I wondered, 'am I too loose in all of this? Do people feel safe in this space?'

The other supervisor insisted on multiple verbal and written warnings that a video which would be shown had a two-minute segment showing animals suffering within the system of industrialised farming, and explicitly given the opportunity to leave the room if they didn't wish to watch the footage. This did seem sensible and caring, and in addition to the above warnings, invitations to debrief were given, both by the facilitators at the end of the workshop and by myself in follow-up emails (Appendix 3). The question arose: was I trying to shock and confront people into agreeing with my point of view? Certainly, I asked myself this question in my journal writing: 'How do I raise awareness about this issue in a respectful way, without being so wishy washy that the whole issue is watered down?'

After some strong reactions to the video in the first focus group, I decided to completely change the third session to have the facilitator explain systems thinking and carnism verbally rather than showing the video which presented the theory. I wrote out a whole new process and run sheet, but after long discussions with the facilitator and my supervisor, we made the decision to use the video again and therefore see if the second group reacted in the same way. In retrospect, part of me did want to challenge the participants. I wanted robust discussion. I probably wanted to confront existing paradigms. Perhaps I even wanted others to taste the despairing Vystopia I had suffered when I became aware of the cruelty of our current farming system. I still don't know if I 'did the right thing' or not. Perhaps if I designed the sessions again, I would simply instruct the facilitator to ask participants to share what they 'know and don't know' about the system of raising animals for food, to see what emerged. Nevertheless, the situation did highlight the sense of danger I experienced throughout the study.

This sense of danger has emerged in other parts of the research besides the focus groups. The vignette at the beginning of Chapter 5 shows how confronting my vegetarianism has been to some family members. As the years of the PhD roll on, I find myself talking less and less to any family members about the issue of eating meat, let alone the PhD itself. Avoidance seems to be easier than talking about something so uncomfortable as the issue of eating animals. In my journal, I ponder why the work is seen as dangerous: 'What are people so fearful of with this research? Is it fear of being traumatised by witnessing violence? Seeing another being hurt can be shocking. Or is it fear of feeling guilty, that they are somehow complicit? Shame might come with the exposure of unwitting collusion. Or is it

fear of judgement, or being judged? Or perhaps a projected fear of death, somehow a denial of death, as in Becker's theory? (Becker, 2020). Or is it something deeper, a fear of losing one's identity? Who am I, if I cannot feed myself and my family in the way I have always done? Who am I, if I am not the good person I see myself as? Mark Stein's work on the lost good self (Stein, 2019) comes to mind.'

Such emphasis on ensuring the safety of the participants became rather annoying to me by the final stages of the PhD. Certainly, any research must be approached carefully and thoughtfully when it involves deep beliefs, customs and behaviours, but I strongly believe the realities of this issue need to be faced. Indeed, one might consider the irony of such strong focus being on the comfort and safety of human participants, while the issue itself is about the systemic suffering and abuse of non-human creatures. When I consider this angle, the "danger" to humans seems trivial.

Nevertheless, facing and discussing the fact that we eat animals, and that those animals suffer in the process, *is* threatening (economically) to the meat industry, and to the whole system of carnism.³⁰ Perhaps an awareness of the threat to such significant aspects of our economic and social systems led to a sense of protectiveness from people involved in the research. However, there is an important distinction to be made here: in my research, the perceived threat was to participants and to myself as researcher. Certainly, the research did draw out strong emotions, as described in the next finding.

2. Experience of the full spectrum of emotions from love and connection to grief and despair.

There was much evidence showing that, bearing in mind individual differences, humans generally feel affection for many different types of animals, and this affection arouses strong feelings, both for animals but also for other people linked with animals in their lives. All participants in each of the two focus groups, all interviewees, and anyone I spoke to throughout the five years of this PhD research, expressed their affection and concern for the animals in their lives. Hearts and tears, generally interpreted as signs of affection and attachment, were common symbols in many of the drawings. The PhD work was seen to be significant. Many focus group participants commented either within a session, or to me

³⁰ Carnism is explained in Chapter 2, section 2.3.2

personally outside the sessions, that they felt it was an important topic, and some spoke of conversations they were having with their families and friends about the research and their involvement. One participant in the first focus group shared that she found she was 'discussing this issue with my family and friends at dinner parties' (P5). Another shared after the three sessions that he had 'many deep discussions with my family after each session' (P15). Both facilitators commented that they felt proud to be part of this work, and that it was something they enjoyed sharing with others. One commented that 'everyone is interested' (F1), the other that 'I've become mesmerised by this topic' (F2).

Many participants expressed their affection for their families and communities when discussing the subject of animals as food. Food creates connection, and animals are often this food. This was clear in the drawings. Sixteen of the thirty-three drawings contain families, friends and dinner tables full of people sharing and connecting over food. The 'social' in the social politics of meat seems to loom very large.

Figure 2: Participant drawing. The all-encompassing heart.



Ten of the thirty-three drawings contained hearts, some quite dominant such as the one almost containing the drawing in Figure 2. In explaining this picture, the participant talked about her love of animals and natural wildlife, hence the birds, fish, snakes and kangaroos in the picture. The large pink heart appears to me to be a symbol of love and responsibility, holding many of the other parts of the picture in place. Inside the heart there is much activity: birds in trees, a cat beside the humans, a fish, spider, insect, and some elements of a kitchen- stove, basin and kitchen table.

The participant explained that she drew the love heart to show 'a loving, contained boundary around my experiences of living with/in as part of "nature" and my farming childhood and current experience of living in a semi-rural suburb'. For her the heart represented 'my personal connection with living systems of which I am a part'. When I commented that the heart doesn't quite hold it all in, some of the animals and trees are outside the heart boundary, the participant explained that she is vegetarian and is aware of the 'tension, between responsibility for my actions and that of society in which I am a part'. She explained that she is the only vegetarian in her family, although they don't eat meat every day, hence the 'meat [is] in square brackets to show this'. The four human figures in the centre, representing the participant's family members, all have their mouths wide open. I am curious about this. With their little arms sticking out like wings, to me they somewhat resemble hungry young birds in a nest. I muse on humans being so vulnerable they are unable to feed themselves and need to be fed by the world around them. Have we become so dependent on others we cannot feed ourselves?

The people in the drawing do not have feet, but a pair of shoes sits outside the heart boundary. The participant was at first unsure why she added the shoes. While thinking about it, she recalled the red shoes of Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, and Dorothy's words 'there's no place like home', which, she surmised, may have represented both her love of her own semi-rural environment, and the family farm she grew up on, sign-posted by the dotted line leading from one of the human figures. The participant also contemplated the leather shoes worn by all family members and the connection of leather with the eating of meat and animal products. I have wondered if this could represent a "walking away" from the reality and misery of what happens to some animals? For me the all-encompassing heart almost overshadows the complexity in this picture. It is as though there is an attempt to 'hold' it all, contain the system in some way, with compassion and love. But things float and leak outside, the heart cannot contain it all.

Paradoxically, alongside the feelings of love and connection which arose when asked to think and talk about animals, the topic also provoked quite intense feelings of despair and thoughts of death. There were numerous comments in the focus group discussions about the state of the world in general being alarming. One participant shared that he felt a sense of doom all the time now: 'the whole world is fucked' (P 12). In both groups, discussion

often drifted into environmental damage, human population numbers, and climate change. Two participants drew particularly ominous pictures, such as the one in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Participant drawing. The world eating itself up



Although this picture was described by the participant in a universal way as ‘the world eating itself up’, the drawing is also intensely personal. The participant depicted herself with eyes closed and a large, open, screaming mouth. A grey cross and grimacing skull are positioned just to the left of the face, covering part of it. On one side of the face is a burning building, spurting out red flames all over the one side of the face; on the other side is a heart spewing forth blood which covers the other side of the face. The participant explained her despair that ‘the world’s crying,’ it is ‘dark’ and ‘in pain’. The small group commented on echoes of the famous agonized face in Edvard Munch’s painting ‘The Scream’, which reportedly represents the anxiety of the human condition, and the participant explained that she didn’t draw any animals in the picture because, ‘why distinguish between us and other animals?’. Certainly, this drawing seems to explode with grief, anxiety and horror. The participant, who hears a lot about the horrors of animal farming through her two adult vegan children, also shared her sense that ‘the world is fucked’ (as did the previously quoted participant), and when she really thinks about it, she has a ‘sense of drowning’. As she explained her picture to her small group, she commented that she hadn’t realised as she drew the picture that the face looks ‘like a pig with a snout’. This felt significant because, for her, pigs, in particular, represent the ‘world [being] a violent place’. She talked about her vegan children and how much they have taught her: ‘I’m proud. It’s huge.’

I was intrigued by the open mouths in both this picture and the drawing in Figure 2. On a superficial level we could say they represented a request for food (Figure 2) and a scream (Figure 3), but an open mouth usually conjures up ideas of surprise and even ignorance ('her jaw dropped open'). Conversely, in this picture the open mouth seems to be more of a howl. The closed eyes seem to imply an inability to act on the pain and horror around and spilling over the face. To me, there is a hopelessness, a despairing sadness, to this representation of the 'system of humans and animals' in this participant's life.

I have contemplated whether the observation of the full spectrum of emotions, from love and connection to grief and despair, is simply a reflection of my own feelings about animals. I feel love and connection when I think about the animals in my life, and I feel grief and despair when I think of what human systems are doing to them. I connect more easily with people who also express a love of animals, as shown in the interview described in Narrative 2, Chapter 5. Sharing our love of dogs, and my grief about Fizo's death, at the end of this interview connected us in a deep and meaningful way. Similarly, I have felt a deep connection with my first supervisor, who also loves animals and is concerned about the way farm animals are currently treated. This tendency to connect well with others who share my values and concern about animals makes me wonder what I projected onto the groups. Did I somehow, in the setup of the focus groups, encourage the expression of these strong feelings towards animals? This wondering about my own projections is also an aspect of the next finding, that *other* humans play a large role in the decisions we make about animals and meat eating.

3. Social pressure dominated decisions and actions about meat.

As I indicated earlier, I was particularly disturbed by how terribly anxious I was during the very first focus group session. The 'social' in the social politics of meat seemed to dominate everything else for me. When I contemplate this extreme social anxiety in my journal, I recall the numerous conversations I've had with people who have said they would be vegetarian except that their husband/ wife/ partner insists on eating meat. Although I am vegetarian, I quite comfortably cook meat for my teenage son because that is what he wishes to eat. The reverse also applies, one participant in a focus group shared that her vegan children have influenced her to become vegan (P16). It seems that some people eat, or don't eat meat, to satisfy their children, partners, broader families, friends, and even their communities. Their

human communities, I should add. Six participants drew dinner tables when asked to draw their 'system of humans and animals and how they interact'. Some of these tables were joyful, others not so much.

Figure 4: Participant drawing. Yin and Yang



At first glance, the drawing in Figure 4 seems like a happy, social, dinner table scene. Looking more closely, there are strong associations of gender splitting and of meat dividing the table. The table is partitioned by a black line down the middle. On right side we see figures in blue, with a stack of brown food piled up on platters. On the left we see female figures in pink with plates of green, yellow and red food in front of them. The participant explained that this represented for her 'the tension between gluttony/ignorance of the carnivores (alpha masculine energy) and the mindfulness / restraint of the vegetarian (feminine energy)'. The masculine side of the table is overflowing with meat, with one figure waving a large chop in the air; while the feminine side contains more measured portions, with the figures sitting more quietly. The participant explained that her drawing was a conscious comment on masculine excess and feminine restraint. I wondered about this participant's family or friendship group and if the gender differences were as clear as in her picture. She did explain that she initially had a strong desire for the tablecloth to be white but found herself colouring it brown. She mused on the soiling of this tablecloth. Was there a sense that 'we are all soiled' by this topic? The brown appears to represent meat in the picture, but, as the participant explained, 'brown is also the colour of faeces, produced by digesting and /or

being consumed'. I have wondered: is it that we just cannot digest this issue? The closer I look, the less happy the scene seems.

Other drawings emphasised the safety of the 'human inner circle', such as in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Participant drawing. The safety of the circle



This drawing was described by the participant as 'my island of sanity'. The drawing shows a smiling couple (the participant and her husband) within a clearly defined circle, which also holds frames of the extended family- their two sons, their partners, and their children. Four animals are also within the circle, a cat, a dog, and two birds. Outside the circle are animals and food derived from animals- chicken, fish, a plate of meat, hamburgers and some pet food. The delineation between the humans and their pets, and the animals on the outer is very sharp, and there was a comment by another small group participant that he 'saw a plate.' The participant explained that the boundary, her own 'dissociation from animals we eat and animals we know as pets,' enabled that 'safe, happy, island of sanity' for her. She shared that she felt there was 'something religious' about her own drawing, 'there's a lot of whiteness which brings to mind purity', and 'the arms are crosses'. She contemplated that the drawing was done on 'butcher's paper', which brought to her mind the notion of an 'unthought known'. I have pondered what that unthought known might have been. Was it the killing and cutting up of animals that butchers do for us? Another participant commented that the boundary created the look of an 'egg', and there was discussion about the protective properties of an egg. Our boundaries (psychological and physical) protect us. When asked what might happen if the boundary disappeared, she said 'a member of the

family might become vegan’, and that would ‘change the dynamics completely’. Comfort and safety exist with the animals (used for food) kept outside the circle. The separation of the human world from the animals-as-food world could be interpreted as a dissociation from our links and interconnections with animals bred for food – they are outside of our consideration. It could also be interpreted as a kind of speciesism; some animals are worthy of belonging to our world and others are kept outside it. Such delineation also occurred within the focus group conversations, there were some topics that could be talked about, and some that could not. This is described in the next finding.

4. ‘Everything but the squeal’ was palatable in the conversations about meat.

In the focus groups, I observed on numerous occasions that people could discuss various negative aspects of eating meat: environmental damage and inefficient resource use, the links between animal agriculture and climate change, and the health risks, but there seemed to be resistance and even denial about the cruelty and suffering farm animals experience. At least one participant in each focus group asserted strongly that there was no suffering in the slaughter process. In the words of one participant, ‘they don’t feel a thing. They don’t know anything while they’re in the lines and they’re stunned first. It’s done quickly and cleanly.’(P15). This surprised me. Having grown up on a farm with a father who prided himself on being a good farmer who cared about his sheep, I was always astutely aware that animals suffer, at least emotionally, if not physically, in the slaughter process. I clearly remember seeing the whites of their widened eyes as they kicked and struggled to get away, and hearing their bleating, even when every care was taken to make it ‘quick and easy’. In the focus group I wondered if this was wishful thinking. I am sure everyone wanted to believe that there is no suffering in the slaughter process.

As described fully in Chapter 4, section 4.4.3, in session three of each focus group, a video explaining the system of carnism was shown to the participants. This video was an eighteen-minute TED talk which had a short (two minute) segment showing footage of animals suffering in abusive situations on factory farms and in abattoirs.³¹ Much effort went into ensuring the psychological safety of participants: at the end of session two they were informed of the potentially distressing two-minute segment and it was stressed that they would have the option to leave the room during that segment if they felt uncomfortable

³¹ Video can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0VrZPBskpg> (Accessed 25 October 2018)

about it, a follow-up email was sent the next week explaining the reason for the video and again emphasising the option of not watching that two-minute segment, and within the actual viewing, the facilitator paused the video to give participants the choice to leave if they wished to. The talk is largely an explanation of the system of carnism³², although, as most TED speakers do, the presenter, Melanie Joy, finishes her presentation with a call, in her case to ‘reduce, and ultimately eliminate meat, eggs and dairy’ and ‘to spread carnism awareness’. Being fascinated with the system of carnism and its links to systems psychodynamics, I was surprised and disappointed that in both groups, there were loud objections and anger expressed about the screening of this TED talk. Some of the comments included:

- ‘It made me angry; it didn’t allow for nuance. Even though I agreed with everything she said.’ (P6)
- ‘I was sitting there building defences. I don’t like that kind of presentation.’ (P8)
- ‘I’m annoyed by the video. It didn’t feel balanced. It felt political.’ (P15)
- ‘I’m upset. It feels imbalanced.’ (P15)
- ‘Shame doesn’t work, it does the opposite.’ (P17)

Conversely, in each group, at least one participant made a positive comment about the talk: ‘I felt a sense of relief. It gave us a way out’. (P 3), and ‘It’s given me pause for thought’ (P12), but both facilitators, my supervisor and I, all felt the dominant response within each group was one of defensiveness. People became more ‘positional’. One facilitator hypothesised the collective group thought process as a suspicion of intent: ‘Is this a veiled attempt to convert us?’(F1). I have pondered this myself. *Was I attempting to convert people? What were all my reasons for showing this talk? To inform? To create discussion? To disturb? Perhaps, in a way, I was passing judgement. Perhaps some people in the group felt this as though I was being a judgemental of them personally.*

Another objection to the TED talk was to the link of carnism to ‘other violent ideologies and atrocities that have been an unfortunate part of the human legacy’. While the presenter, Melanie Joy, makes the point that common threads in different violent ideologies include a mentality of domination and subjugation, a might makes right mentality, and justifications

³² ‘Carnism’, as explained in Section 2.3.2, and also in the Glossary, is the invisible system and dominant ideology which encourages us to eat certain animals.

for reducing 'a life to a unit of production', pictures of animals in trucks and in mass graves are shown alongside images of humans in trucks and mass graves. The covert (or perhaps overt) link with slavery and the holocaust was seen as an assault by some participants in each focus group:

- 'Comparing it (our treatment of animals) to the holocaust and slavery doesn't work. Shame doesn't work.' (P6)
- 'I don't like the association that if I'm a meat eater I'm like a Nazi or Holocaust supporter.' (P15)

I have wondered about the anger over the link between how we treat animals and the Holocaust. Does our human-centric view of the world disallow animals to be compared to humans? Does such a comparison devalue human life? Being compared to an animal is generally negative (just think of the labels "bitch", "pig", or "cow"). Interestingly, the objection didn't seem to be that Jewish people were compared to animals, it was that meat eaters felt they were compared to Nazis. If we consider how Nazis are now generally viewed: as racist, fanatical, aggressive, and evil, it is an insult to be associated with this. Perhaps one could say that being compared to Nazis is like being compared to animals, but the 'mean' animals, not the 'nice' ones ("They're **animals!**"). In my journal I contemplated the irony of this: 'So, here's a twisted logic: our current cruel treatment of animals being compared to Nazi behaviour makes us feel like animals. Not the animals we are cruel to, rather, the 'mean' ones. And which animals are the 'mean' ones? Lions and tigers, being driven out of their natural habitat? Bulls, being castrated and slaughtered at the age of six months? Sharks, being harvested for their fins? The victim and the persecutor are all mixed up. Who is the animal?'

Another frustration for me in session 3 of both focus groups was the seeming inability of the groups to discuss the unconscious and invisible influence of our systems. My aim with the TED talk about carnism was to stimulate discussion about *systems*. The presenter, Melanie Joy explains this system, with its various assumptions and invisible aspects, in quite a bit of detail throughout the talk. She explains that we assume eating meat is normal, natural and necessary. She points out the invisibility, we don't see the factories and abattoirs; they are kept out of our sight. To me, this was both a fascinating and important aspect of the discussion about meat, in fact, it provided the key connection between human/animal

relations and systems psychodynamics within my research. My desire was for the groups to explore the systems they belong to: their family and work systems, the broader societal system, and even the system they were in right then and there, the focus group. The instruction for the facilitator was to firstly invite small groups of three to four people to explore these questions:

- Do we think the system of ‘carnism’ exists in our own world?
- If it does, what are the ‘informal rules’ of this system?
- How are these rules expressed and conveyed in the groups we live and work in?

And then in the large group, to discuss together:

- What have been the informal rules about ‘meat’ and animal discussions, in **this** group?
- How have these rules been expressed and conveyed?
- What purpose have they served?³³

Both facilitators followed these instructions but discussion about systems thinking seemed difficult. There were some comments about the ‘rules’ of various systems:

- ‘You don’t eat things you name. That’s a farm rule.’ (P10)
- “There’s an unspoken rule that you don’t participate in the killing of the animal that you serve at your dinner. And you don’t talk about it being an animal.’ (P14)
- ‘There’s a rule that we don’t eat dogs.’ (P12)
- ‘There’s an unspoken rule that a meal will include meat.’ (P18)

But in both groups the conversation soon reverted to nutrition, the environment and the bias of the TED speaker. The ability to look at the whole, the visible and invisible parts of a dominant system was largely avoided. One facilitator commented, ‘I was holding the system lens, but they couldn’t go there.’ (F2). My supervisor commented that ‘instead of exploring the system, they carved up the TED presenter.’ I brooded in my journal: ‘Why does exploring the social politics of meat keep coming back to “Should we eat meat or not?”’ In a debrief with one facilitator and my supervisor we contemplated the ‘two camps’, and how often in

³³ See Appendix 6 for facilitator session plans.

politics we see the end extremes being more vocal. Once again, I muse over my choice of the word 'politics' in my title. Did I set up division, simply by my title?

In addition to the expressions of anger from group members about the video showing animal cruelty and the associations with Nazis, in each group at least one meat eater showed resistance to the group being divided along meat eating habits. 'We're all on the same side here, why emphasise the differences?' (P15), asked one participant. Another expressed objection to the splitting of the groups based on 'how much meat we eat' in session two: 'I object to this. Meat eaters are not my tribe. Even though I am one.' (P3). I contemplated afterwards: 'Why do meat eaters resist being categorised as a meat eater? It's so different to vegans, who purposefully take up the identity of a vegan. Is it just that meat eaters have never thought of themselves as people who eat meat? They've never thought about it, and so they don't want to be labelled as something they are not even sure they want to belong to? Or does saying "I'm a meat eater" somehow conjure up shame? Does realising there is an 'other' make us realise what we are doing?' This led me to ponder whether, similar to the 'white fragility' DiAngelo (2018) describes with regard to white people's defences against recognising their own systemic racism, there is a 'meat eating fragility': a sensitivity to being seen as cruel or heartless, which can result in defensive behaviours.³⁴

Food, and animals as food, connect us to other humans. As stated above, many of the focus group subjects didn't want the *identity* of meat to connect them. Or rather, they didn't want the *identity of being a meat eater* to connect them. Both groups expressed the desire to be cohesive, both groups initially resisted the splitting into two groups in their second session. One participant commented: 'I really dislike this whole "them versus us" thing' (P4). It appeared that the participants wanted to get along, and most did not want an issue such as food choice to divide or create conflict within the group.

Perhaps concern for being 'sociable' denied the group the ability to really talk and face the hard truths and dilemmas of this issue. Perhaps the fear of an 'all-out-fight' meant potentially confronting and divisive topics were avoided. Perhaps concern to get along with each other over-rode their love for animals, just as my concern about getting along with my

³⁴ The concept of 'meat-eating fragility' is presented as a hypothesis in Chapter 8.

family over-rode my desire to have a meat-free Christmas, as explained in the vignette at the start of Chapter 5.

The tendency to talk about ‘everything but the squeal’ could perhaps be summarised as a catch 22 situation:

Animal suffering is the major reason most vegans refrain from eating meat and dairy products.

YET,

Animal suffering is the one thing meat eaters can’t bear to talk about.

What does this mean for both vegans and meat eaters? For vegans, it means avoiding any mention of the ‘squeal’ if asked why they do not eat meat or animal products by those who do eat them. For determined meat eaters, it means finding conscious and unconscious ways of denying animal suffering, or at least their own connection to it. These unconscious forms of denial form the basis for the next three findings: 5, 6 and 7.

5. Bringing the animal into the discussions about ‘the social politics of meat’ proved difficult.

I have realised throughout this data analysis process that I had a semi-conscious aim within the whole research, which I failed to disclose to myself and others. Looking back, I can see now that I was trying to make clear the link between meat and animals. I never expressly said this to myself, my supervisors, or in my writing, but I can see it plainly now. In the focus group design, the first task required of the participants was to draw the animals in their lives, ‘including any animals you may eat’. On the one hand, this seems a gentle way of introducing the topic, but on the other hand, I am sure it was confronting to many participants, who perhaps had never really thought about their meat being *animals*. I wanted them to see that link. A question posed by a focus group participant (and directed towards me) in the second session seemed to express the disconnect that at least some of the focus group participants felt: ‘*Are you studying our relatedness to animals or are you studying eating meat?*’ (P2). In my mind, the connection was clear. I had read and appreciated the work of sociologists and anthrozoologists who expressly made this link; *Eating Animals* by Safran Foer (2009) was one of my favourite book titles. What I didn’t think consciously about was the fact that many people have not made this link. Indeed, as explained in Chapter 2 (section 2.5), much effort by the agricultural industry is put into

preventing people from making the connection between animals and meat. Who wants to know they are eating an animal when they are having their roast dinner?

Halfway through the sessions for the first group, I had a strong sense that something was missing from the discussions. I wrote in my journal: 'Where are the animals in all this? It's all so intellectual- about the environment, feeding the world, health issues, how things have changed in terms of availability of vegetarian and vegan options... but where is the animal in the discussion?' I reflected on the term 'absent referent' (Adams, 1990). Meat is basically a dead animal, yet animals were missing from any thinking or discussion about meat. It was all about humans, and yet my research was for animals. What was going on? Had all of us been seduced into forgetting about the animals? Talking this through with my supervisor and the facilitator, I decided to ask the participants if they would mind if I brought my small dog into the final session. Fizo was (he has since died) a small, very easy-going companion dog. He was a very cute looking rescue dog. Often people would assume he was female, and/or ask me what type of dog he was, because he was so pretty. I thought that by bringing him into the last session, we would have a quiet, inoffensive, animal presence in the room, and that this might create a different dynamic, while addressing the 'absent referent'. The CEO of NIODA consented to this unusual request, and none of the participants objected, so Fizo came along to the last session.

Afterwards, I felt this was a mistake. While Fizo was harmless (he mostly sat quietly with me, and occasionally wandered around the room and received pats from various people) he did not seem comfortable. His breathing was laboured, and at one stage he walked around the circle and started to bark in seeming confusion. Two participants expressed concern about his wellbeing. Mostly, he was ignored. I was very distracted by him and felt silly for bringing him in. What was I trying to do? Show everyone how much I loved animals? The facilitator afterwards shared 'there was lots of intellectualising. Bringing Fizo in didn't help.' We agreed not to bring Fizo into the second group.

In this data analysis, I find I don't want to think about this part of the group findings. I am puzzled by this. Why don't I want to write about 'bringing the animal in'? Why might bringing an animal into a discussion group about humans, and their relations with and about animals, feel so irrelevant? I self-flagellate in my journal: 'It felt unrelated and wrong. Fizo was even further away than an 'other' in the group. He was seen as inconsequential. It is all

about humans. The social politics of meat denies the animal presence. And I set this up. Through my stupid title.'

Perhaps others also felt this absence. In a very telling conversation after the group sessions, one participant said she thought there was 'politeness masking the rawness, anger and contempt' (P16). She said she felt enormous tension in the group, but that 'everyone had their polite mask on'. She used the quite remarkable analogy of an animal going to slaughter:

'On the way to the group sessions I always felt scared, anxious, like an animal in a truck on the way to the slaughterhouse, what's going to happen? But then once in there, it was like there was a BOLT to my head and I was numb. I turned into a lump of meat in the supermarket. We were all like that. Lumps of meat, sanitised and unable to really have the fight. I wish we had. If I went back again, I'd start a fight.'
(P16)

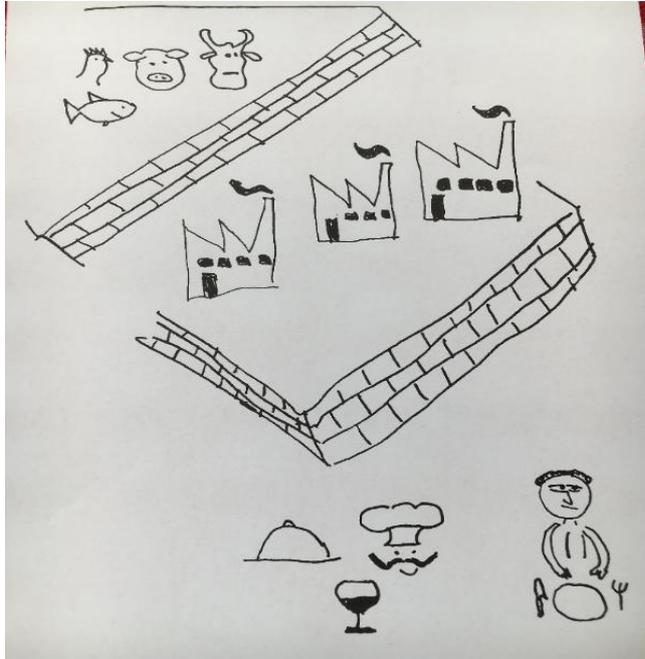
In this participant's mind she became an animal. First, a live animal on its journey to be slaughtered, and then, a dead animal as a piece of meat in the supermarket. Perhaps she also felt the lack of an animal presence and so filled the role herself sub-consciously. Her comment that she became a lump of meat, 'sanitised and unable to really have the fight', suggests a very strong feeling of oppression. I both loved and was saddened by her comment. I loved the expressiveness of it and the deep insights it gave me into what was discussable and what was undiscussable; but I also wondered what I could have done to help this participant express herself more freely in the group. I felt guilty. I suspect I was not alone in this feeling; guilt appeared to be experienced by many subjects of the research, as described in finding 6 below.

6. Unconscious defences such as compartmentalising and dissociation are evident in the participant drawings from both focus groups and conference workshop drawings, as well as in the focus group discussions.

Various defences against facing the suffering of animals appeared throughout the research. In the drawings, compartmentalising was common. One participant drew the animals he and his family associate with – the horses his daughter rides, the pet dog, the birds in the tree, and then a closed refrigerator. In explaining his drawing, this participant said, 'I guess I don't

see the meat in the fridge as animals' (P15). The below picture (by a different participant) also seems to be a classic case of compartmentalising.

Figure 6: Walls hiding the murder



This picture shows the participant sitting in the bottom right-hand corner at his dinner table, plate, knife and fork in front of him. Next to him are symbols of his days working as a chef: a cloche, a glass of wine, and chef's hat. Above these rather human symbols are bricked walls, one enclosing three factory farms, 'the places where the murder takes place', as the participant explained, and another enclosing farm animals: a pig, a cow, a chicken and a fish. The factory farms have sharp jagged roofs, dark windows and doors, and black smoke coming from their chimneys. The participant, a meat eater, spoke about the 'murder' happening in the 'dark places'. He said he is aware of the practices of factory farming, but able to separate this awareness from his daily life. I wonder if there is also an unconscious awareness of the power of the system through the smallness of the participant at the bottom, almost dwarfed by the large walls and what is happening behind him. One could say that the participant looks like he is playing a drum, playing to his own beat, while the circus goes on above and around him. The picture does have a 'circus' feeling to it; the factory farms bring to my mind circus tents, the participant looks like a drummer, and the animals and chef symbols seem to resemble comical caricatures. To me, the bricked walls are particularly significant. They separate the different parts of the 'system of humans and

animals' in this participant's life. In some cases, such as that in Figure 7 below, the drawings showed compartmentalising of oneself.

Figure 7: Who am I?

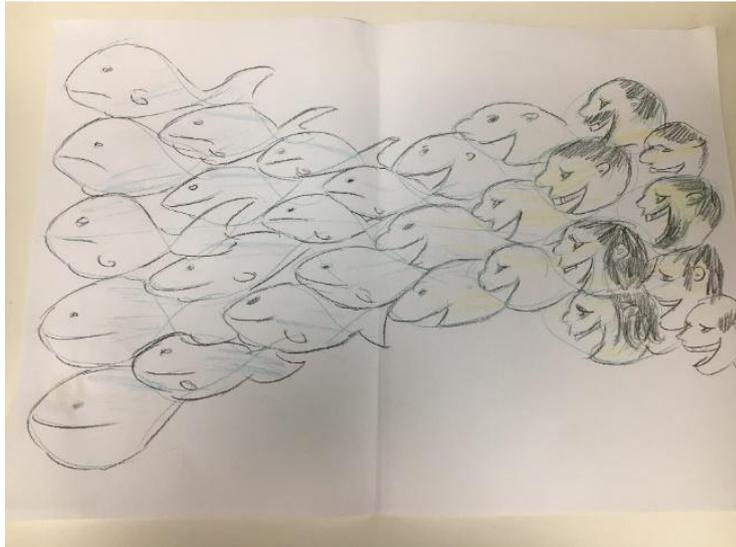


In this colourful and evocative picture, the participant drew herself divided into two different selves. One half is alongside 'free' animals – a horse in a field and bird in the sky. To my mind, there is a gentleness and innocence to this half of the picture: the participant herself is wearing a simple blue dress, she has her eye open, and that side of her mouth is smiling. The other half seems (to me) less gentle and innocent. On this side the participant is wearing a red apron, has her eye shut and her mouth open. Alongside this half is a tray with food on it, above which floats a fish with an arrow pointing to the tray. A pig and some plants are also included in this half, with arrows also pointing to the tray. Perhaps the closed eye represents wilful blindness, or a 'not-wanting-to-know'. Once again, I wonder about the open mouth: is this simply a representation of our eating of animals, or is the participant wanting to say something?

This participant expressed some shock at her own drawing. She reflected that she had previously had 'no idea I split these two sides of myself and my feelings for animals'. The splitting seemed necessary for her need to compartmentalise: some animals are for eating; others are free and able to live their own lives. Further, perhaps this participant needed to split *herself* into two completely different people to cope with the contrasting way she felt and acted towards animals. Perhaps the unconscious process went something like: *'Am I an animal lover or an animal eater? I am both. Or I am half of each'*. Splitting was a common

theme in many of the drawings, but generally that was the splitting of animal groups, the separation of different animals in our lives into categories according to how we 'use' them (such as that in Figure 5). In Figure 7, the self is split, the compartmentalising is internalised, as well as externalised. While compartmentalising appeared to be a defence for some, for others the response was more cognitive, such as that shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Evolution



This picture could also have the title I gave Figure 3, 'the world eating itself up'. Here, we see a mass of heads and fish, all moving in one direction. Starting on the right, we see smiling and laughing human heads, seemingly eating away at the heads in front of them. These heads gradually merge with other heads looking more and more like fish, until they become whole fish on the left-hand side of the picture. The faces start at the left with wide grins, these grins lessen as the faces merge with fish, ending with rather sad looking fish.

This is a powerful image with a strong sense of evolution within it. It echoes but reverses the usual evolution image with monkeys gradually becoming men- in this case the men are gradually becoming fish. The participant talked about evolution, and the way man is eating away at the whole of evolution on earth. He reflected 'perhaps there will be nothing but fish left in the end'. Comments on climate change and the destructiveness of human activity were made by small group members. I have wondered where the participant is in this picture. To me, the drawing is an incredibly cognitive, rational view of the global system, and history, of humans and animals. The lack of the participant as a specific figure in the picture could be seen as a form of defence: does this impersonal and rather objective view sidestep

personal accountability? Or could it be that the participant is not prominent because he feels helpless within the whole system?

Perhaps another unconscious (or semi-conscious) defence against the reality of animal suffering is the use of humour. In sample narrative 1 (Chapter 5), I describe the jovial, light-hearted interview with S. This type of joviality has occurred intermittently for me throughout the research. I have often smiled or laughed when people have teased me for being vegetarian. When a family member called me a 'hypocritarian' I laughed and told him that was clever. I have wondered if I unconsciously encourage such a 'light-hearted' atmosphere when the topic of meat and treatment of animals arises, to defend against the conflict and to allow others and myself an 'out'. It's easier to laugh than to cry or argue.

Compartmentalising, dissociation and humour such as that described through the data analysis above could be interpreted as defences against thinking about the realities of animal suffering. Another phenomenon I observed was the frequent slipping into comparison and judgement. I observed this of myself and my own thinking, as well as of the subjects involved in the study.

7. Comparisons and judgements were common throughout the data collecting.

In the one-to-one debrief conversations after the three sessions some people expressed that they felt real anger in the group, but that this was repressed. One person even said she thought politeness masked the 'rawness, the anger and the contempt' (P16) in the room. She said she thought that if there was a fourth session there may have been an out and out brawl. 'Why didn't we have a full-on fight? If I went back and did it all again I'd start a fight.... But why didn't I, then? I guess, no-one wanted to be hung out to dry' (P16). At times judgement, or fear of judgement, was expressed. As one participant introduced himself as a meat eater, he added 'I feel a bit like the enemy here' (P15). Another said she felt there was 'a moral hierarchy in the group, with vegans at the top, then vegetarians, then meat eaters at the bottom' (P14). One person shared that he felt he was a 'closet vegetarian' (P11), implying that he hid his true self when eating with others. When sharing her drawing, one participant shared that 'When I introduced myself and said my kids are vegans, I heard sniggers... but I'm really proud of them for making that ethical but hard choice' (P16). I was curious about this and pondered in my journal: 'why does the choice in what we eat cause such judgement, and fear of judgement? I guess no-one wants to feel they are 'against'

animals, so I get the meat eaters fear of judgement, but then others seem fearful of being seen as 'soft'. Why do we all worry about declaring what we eat? Is it so personal it's like sex – you don't talk about it? Fucking and eating meat. I guess they both involve the insertion of a bit of someone else.' Even in my ponderings about judgment, I see judgement.

Judgement of oneself was also apparent in some of the drawings.

Figure 9: Disgust, greed, and spewing out



In Figure 9 we see that the participant drew herself with a huge heart, as well as a distended belly complete with cuts of red meat and a circular arm embracing her two cats (now deceased, hence crosses were drawn above each cat). Other animals in the participant's life are present outside the belly: sheep and chickens from a friend's farm, a pig from the volunteer work that another friend does at an animal sanctuary, and horses from a leadership program she had done which included equine therapy. A line was drawn to depict the horizon and separate the land from the sky. The landscape is green – like life in green pastures. Additional crosses were drawn, as the participant explained, 'representing the loss of life and acknowledging the connection of all life'. The sky is coloured black.

The participant shared that she was struck by an overwhelming feeling of shame as she drew the picture. She noticed that the alive animals just 'touch' her skin, perhaps representing her connectedness to all animals. She noted that the line of the horizon cuts her throat, 'as if I'm being slaughtered'. The belly is huge, and I wonder if it is burdened with the weight and

heaviness of human guilt. The participant reflected that 'My left arm was intended to "meet" and hold the right, but it is joined with the line of the belly and looks at that juncture like a piece of sectioned "meat" from a butcher'. She observed of her own picture that 'this is not a "happy" drawing. My gaze is stern. I am large on the page. This feels personal'.

I was particularly struck by the raw honesty and the depth of self-analysis of this participant. She seemed able to stare her own demons in the face, so to speak. I am reminded of the reparative guilt of the depressive position (Klein, 1998). Steiner (1990) says the critical point in the depressive position is 'the realisation of the internal disaster created by his sadism and the awareness that his love and reparative wishes are insufficient to preserve his object which must be allowed to die with the consequent desolation, despair and guilt' (p. 53). Perhaps, for some participants, this *object* was the animals in their lives. Allowing the animals to die (or rather, acknowledging our own role in their death), may have led to desolation, despair and guilt. The ability to hold up the mirror and face our own actions, however hard this is, is part of this movement from paranoid schizoid to depressive. And, as Steiner (1990) adds, 'these processes involve intense conflict which we associate with the work of mourning, and which result in anxiety and mental pain' (p. 53). Certainly, I see anxiety and mental pain in many of the images described above.

The depressive position also involves a shift away from polarising (Klein, 1998). Throughout this work I have been aware of the danger of appearing judgemental and black and white in my view. But I wonder how possible this really was. Did the indirect signs of judgement (through serving vegetarian food and showing a talk by a vegan sociologist) turn people off? Was I, the researcher, my own worst enemy? Have I been stuck in the paranoid schizoid state on this issue?

Judgement and comparison did seem to continually reappear in various ways throughout the work. I found myself quite preoccupied with comparing the two focus groups, with one more 'favourable' (open to new ideas, comfortable with silence, interested in one another, etc) in my mind than the other. I compared participants in my mind: Who was more articulate? Which ones were aligned with me philosophically? Who 'got it' and who 'didn't get it'? I even compared the two facilitators, and my two supervisors. Why did I do this? Does this topic inevitably bring up comparisons? Or was it my phrasing of the topic? Calling

the thesis 'the social *politics* of meat' perhaps encouraged a combative and oppositional approach to the whole research.

Judgement also dominated attitudes to the vegans in the groups. Ambiguously, they were both derided and seen as the top of the moral hierarchy. In the focus groups, some of the meat eaters were openly critical of the vegetarians and vegans. When asked how they perceived vegans, some meat-eaters used phrases such as:

- 'Holier than thou' (P 12),
- 'A bit dogmatic' (P15),
- 'The hypocrisy- there are a lot of vegetarians who preach but have dogs they feed meat to.' (P20)
- 'Many of them have nutritional challenges' (P15),
- 'The judging and lecturing, it's annoying' (P12).

Other meat eaters expressed admiration: 'I admire them' (P14), 'I respect them but then I feel guilty for not feeling guilty' (P18). One person in one of the groups openly talked about the 'moral hierarchy, with vegans at the top, vegetarians in the middle and meat eaters at the bottom' (P14). Another participant said to the vegan in his group: 'You carry a big burden for us' (P6).

I found it fascinating when the vegan in one group made the comment: 'I look at the rest of you and I think it's madness. Like smoking' (P10). I wondered if this would provoke a defensive response from the meat eaters, but it appeared not to. In fact, at the very end of the three sessions one meat eater remarked: 'That comment on smoking will stay with me. I used to smoke. A lot. Now I think it's ridiculous.' (P7). This comment showed both appreciation of the comparison the vegan had made (meat eating with smoking) *and* a sense of changing times. This is discussed in the last finding.

8. The data indicates that the social politics of meat may be *changing*.

One predominant observation that came through the focus groups, particularly from the vegans, was that times are changing. Increased choice, as part of that change, was commented on. Respecting the right for humans to choose their preferred food was seen as very important within the two groups. There were many comments about the vast array of choices at restaurants and in supermarkets nowadays. One vegetarian remarked 'You used

to go to a hotel and if you ordered vegetarian, they just gave you 'meat and three veg' and took the meat off.... Now there's so many good choices' (P6). Many vegans and vegetarians commented on this change in society: 'it is so much easier now' (P10).

Respecting the food choices of others was seen to be a good and important thing by group members. But in my journal, I wondered: *Is the respect for choice respectful? Or is it simply our helplessness in the face of capitalism? A Devo song comes to my mind: 'Freedom of choice is what you've got; freedom from choice is what you want'.... There's just so many choices now, we're all going mad. Or is this respect for choice actually resistance of conflict? ('Let's just respect each other here'). Or is it a form of resistance to change? A kind of 'I will respect your choice, to be vegan, if you respect my choice to eat meat'.*

The attitude to vegans in the focus groups was overall less critical than I expected it to be. I was initially concerned that the two sole vegans would be on the outer of their respective groups. As quoted above in finding 7, there was both criticism and appreciation expressed of vegans, but in one group, the single vegan seemed to have real personal power and influence. One participant in this group shared in session 2 that she appreciated his perspective: 'You've brought in the idea/fact of the cruelty and the suffering. It wasn't so strong last time. It's been coming., but now it's here' (P7). In the last session, another participant (a farmer) said to this vegan: 'You carry a big burden for us' (P4). I was interested in the role this vegan took up. Within his focus group, the other participants seemed to respect and admire him. He had a quiet, unassuming confidence that seemed to draw people to him. For me, the appreciation expressed towards him indicated a change in the 'social politics of meat'. I even contemplated changing the title of my thesis to 'the *changing* social politics of meat'.

In the final session many presented themselves as being on a journey:

- 'Why aren't I vegetarian? It's about time.' (P7)
- 'I'm becoming more conscious.' (P2)

Others spoke of a mindset shift:

- 'I've now got permission to think about these things' (P1)
- 'I've lost some of that 'otherism. I feel less on the outer.' (P10)
- 'I've lost the self-protective insulation of not thinking about this.' (P5)

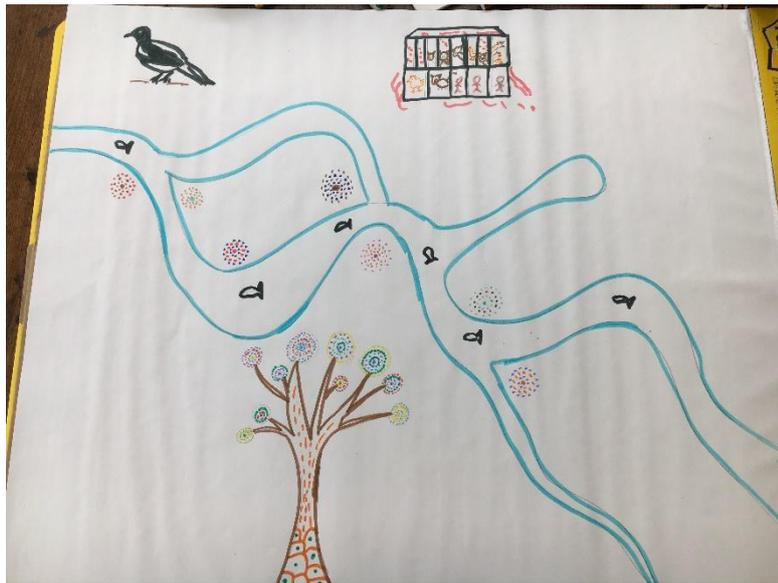
The final question asked by the facilitators at the end of session three in both focus groups was 'What have you gained, and what have you lost, as a result of these sessions?' In both groups there were comments of appreciation:

- Permission to think about this issue (P5)
- Appreciation that this struggle is real for most people (P8)
- It's raised the layers of complexity for me (P3)
- I gained a lot of clarity around this stuff. (P4)
- I tend to be hard on myself. But I'm making steps. That's nice and reassuring. (P14)
- It's given me pause for thought. (p12)
- It's been really interesting and engaging. But has it changed me? I don't think so. (P17)

The last comment above seemed to sum up what had occurred over the three sessions for each group. Both facilitators and I felt after the three sessions that 'People had become more aware, but their positions had not changed.' (F2) I became aware of my own desire that the participants 'wake up' and decide to make a change in their lives, as I did eight years ago. I had gone into the sessions very conscious of my researcher and host roles, but perhaps less conscious of my activist role. It was an unintended role, but a desired role, nonetheless. Both sessions finished for me with a sense of disappointment. In each group, a few people expressed their disdain of the TED talk, and this seemed to dominate the final hour of the session. We were left with the dominance of meat eating. In my journal I wrote that I felt 'lost and incomplete'. My supervisor, Susan, reflected 'You built them up to it, and then hit them with something hard and they defended against it.' We wondered together 'where can the conversation start and when must it stop?'

My own journey throughout the PhD was depicted in two further drawings I completed at different stages of the research:

Figure 10: Researcher drawing. On the journey October 2021



In my second drawing, completed in 2021, almost three years after the first drawing (described in Finding 1, above), I depicted a winding river with various tributaries running off it. For me these represented all the times in the PhD I went off on tangents, encountered a block, or 'took the long way round' various tasks. I wanted to give a sense of flow, but I noticed as I drew, that the fish were swimming upstream rather than downstream. That unintentional symbol felt appropriate for the difficulty of the work. I added to the sense of a long and rather spiritual journey by using Australian traditional owners' motifs for vegetation at bends in the river and for the leaves on the tree. The tree symbolised my own growth, and my need for time in nature to counter my immersion into the cruel system of industrialised farming. That system is represented in the caged box at the top of the picture, which I deliberately wanted to depict as being reasonably 'contained' for me emotionally at that time. Finally, in the top left corner is a magpie, which I see as my token animal. I have had many magpies in my life; I have fed them, loved them, laughed with them, and grieved when they have died. Magpies represent my guilt, my love, my hope, and in many ways my soul. I have noticed now that this magpie faces the same way as the fish. It is an upstream journey, but I am getting there. The animals are guiding me, and are with me all the way. My final drawing, completed two years later, also had notions of a journey, but this time more of an internal journey.

Figure 11: Researcher drawing. Light at the end of the tunnel July 2023



In this final picture, completed in 2023, I am changing from a caterpillar to a butterfly. I was feeling stuck in the ‘cocoon’ of reading, researching, writing, having zoom sessions with my PhD group and my supervisor, as well as trying to make money while doing the PhD. I was also watching a lot of television crime series with my partner, a habit we began during the pandemic and continued afterwards. Much of my work had become online, as opposed to being in-person, hence I was feeling cocooned, but also somewhat trapped, in my own physical space. I can sense the butterfly, I know it and can feel it within me, but it will take a kind of death to become it. It is there but it feels out of reach. How can I contort myself out of this shape and into that strange, different being? Bazalgette and Reed (2016) discuss the oscillation process between ‘intra-dependence’ and ‘extra-dependence’, where the prior state is one of realising our beliefs and meanings, functioning autonomously, and taking action in the world, whereas the latter is where we encounter obstacles and resistances, become despairing and regress to a place of dependence. They explain that this oscillation is ‘a normal process, whereby individuals retreat, as it were for security, from the world, to be replenished, and so to be transformed back to being able to act effectively once again’ (p. 119). I see such a retreat in this picture, I have retreated from the world of action to cocoon myself to finish my PhD.

I look at this picture a year later, as I am nearing the end of my PhD, and see echoes of the phoenix in the first picture. I am becoming something else. The picture lacks the vegetation

of the earlier pictures, and the tree is bare. Industrial farming is not visually present in this picture. I contemplate what I have lost and needed to 'shed'. Amid all the academia, hard work and having to 'go within', perhaps I have not only lost the despair and horror of my dystopia, but also my sense of passion for the cause. I remember just prior to starting this research, telling a colleague about my idea of a PhD, and his response being: 'Margo, you have to do it, the animals need you to.' Those words gave me a strong sense of responsibility and purpose, as well as much sadness. The responsibility, purpose and sadness are all still here, but the rawness of the emotions has gone. My focus on humans, and the 'social politics' of how humans treat one another about animals, has somehow led to a dousing of the fire. Perhaps, as opposed to climbing down the cliff and walking through the fire, I snuffed out the fire through my intellectual pursuit. Perhaps the PhD has freed me, but also required a transformation which has included loss, as well as reconstruction.

One might interpret my own drawings as a representation of a spiritual journey, a finding of one's place in the world. Bazalgette and Reeds' (2016) description of the inward discipline needed whereby a person 'grows' their own role in their mind, first from 'identifying their own desire', and then from 'understanding the system within which he or she will take a role' through 'understanding the system's purpose and what the person's desire can contribute to the system' (p. 124) seems to fit both my own journey and that of the vegans and activists who participated in this research. O'Rourke and Bazalgette (2016) describe a sense of freedom, drive and creative energy found when a person discovers their own purpose in role: 'the hope that is aspired to is fuelled by the desire to further the survival and wellbeing of a community, a society, a nation, humankind or even the planet' (p. 158). My broad desire in this work has been to further the survival and wellbeing of "other-than-human beings".

The evidence from my own increased sense of self, and the focus groups, seems to indicate that this type of spiritual progression, experienced by vegans and animal activists, is starting to be recognised and appreciated by at least some sections of the broader community. At the very least, within my demographically narrow data, the social politics of meat appear to be *changing*. I explore this further in the next chapter where I analyse the key findings from the socio-analytic interviews. Before moving to this chapter, I offer three fictional narratives which have emerged from the research, each giving a different perspective on the question

of meat-eating. This is a creative piece, written after the final focus group session as a way of putting my thoughts into order.

6.4 An interlude. Three narratives emerging from the research

Key

Green	Repeating images and or ideas expressed through drawings or verbally in the groups
Purple	Systems psychodynamic theory
Brown	Author of theory
Pink	Emotions interpreted by researcher and/or others
Blue	Other themes/ theory

The Meat-eater

- We **love** animals. They enrich our lives and we prefer to think of them as happy, healthy and looked after (**romanticised notion of animals lives**). They bring us together as humans (**family, dinner tables and food**). As our pets, or even as our food, they give us strong connections with our loved ones.
- We don't want to think of the actual pain and suffering we cause animals to serve us like this, so we create **walls and divisions** in our minds to enable ourselves not to see what really happens to those creatures we like or love.
- This **splitting (Klein, 1998)** helps to numb us from thinking about **the world eating itself up**, and the **terrible sadness and despair** that arises from this. It reminds us of our own impending **death**, and the state of **environmental trauma** the earth is in.
- We are somewhat aware of the immense **power of corporations that profit monetarily** from animals serving us with their bodies and lives, but we prefer not to think about this, because it **implicates us (Long, 2008)** in the injustice and cruelty.
- We are vaguely aware that some people have confronted this more directly and that they have made some difficult decisions, and that makes us both **admire and resent them**. We would prefer not to hear their reasons and proclamations.
- We have a **different world view** to them; we **see the world as contained (Western, 2013)**, as our emotions are, and as made of separate containers. This helps to maintain **order and stability**.

- What we don't usually see is the **connected, peacefulness** associated with 'them' – we find our peace through **denial**.
- When we do glimpse this, it usually arouses **envy** in us, which is too difficult an emotion to manage, so we defend against this envy through various **defence mechanisms** (Freud, 1991): **anger, criticising, labelling**, etc.
- We do realise that **change** is in the air. We see this in supermarkets, restaurants and our children and grandchildren's diets. But we prefer to think of this change as an expanding of **choices**. This fits with our notion of the world as ordered and stable.
- The change is not due to animal suffering, that is not to be talked about. We are **good selves** (Stein, 2019). We are **entitled** (Weintrobe, 2021) to our views and our dietary preferences.

The Vegan

- We see all animals as sentient and as important individuals. Each has a rightful place in the world (**non-specieism**: Singer, 1975).
- We know there is **terrible suffering** because of human treatment of animals and when we realised this we also suffered terribly with the knowledge (**vystopia**: Mann, 2018)
- We are used to being treated as outcasts and **scapegoats** (Gemmill, 1989) for our knowledge and preparedness to act on this knowledge, but we are prepared to tolerate this for our convictions, and for the ideal of **justice**.
- We have also become used to being accused of being **hypocritical, arrogant, and 'holier than thou'**. We are marginalised, but someone needs to do the work.
- Admittedly, we do see ourselves at the **moral end of the humanity scale**, and we know this comes at a price.
- We try to feel **compassion** for those at various ends of the scale, since our world view is one of compassion. They are the ones yet to go on the **journey of enlightenment**. But sometimes it is hard.
- We see ourselves as outside mainstream society, doing work on behalf of the whole.

The Flexitarian

- We are aware of arguments against eating animals, particularly on a mass scale: the environmental damage, the emissions and the impact on climate change, human health, and of course the cruelty of factory farming.
- We play a sensible role in addressing this issue, by minimising our meat and dairy intake, and choosing wisely.
- There are plenty of choices for us these days, and we are carefully selective to ensure we do the best we can by the environment, our own health, and the animals. We have many new options: plant-based alternatives to meat, meatless meat, lab grown meat, dairy free milks, vegan cheese, the list is now endless.
- We admire the vegans but don't want to play the hard role they play, offending and upsetting everyone. And we generally like to wear leather and eat eggs and honey. We are not extremists.
- We will choose what we think is best; sometimes we eat red meat, we often eat fish, chicken is best if it is free range, and we regularly eat vegetarian or vegan food. We are flexible.
- Like a middle child (Bank & Kahn 1982), we play the middle ground. We sit between the edges of eating meat mindlessly and being a vegan extremist. In some ways we are like the mediators. We don't like to offend.
- This role of middle ground can be hard. Some people see us as confused, lacking in identity, and admittedly, sometimes we do feel unsure of where we sit on issues.
- But the wave of change is on our side. Just walk down a supermarket isle or look in the cookbook section of bookstores and you will see our power.
- We are growing in numbers and our role is one creating transformational change (Kanerva 2019 and Holscher 2018).
- We are the way forward.

Chapter 7: Data Analysis Phase 3. Key findings, interviews

‘Our treatment of animals is important to our own internal state. If we are to expand our horizons, to grow to understand what the relatedness of each and every thing means, then our love and appreciation of all life is essential. Our respect and reverence for all living things will be reflected in our own living’.

Bill Schul

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I looked at thematic findings from the research data, based on the research focus groups. In this chapter, I continue with the thematic findings from the research data, now focusing on the key findings from the socio-analytic interviews. Section 7.2 provides a recap of the purpose, process and structure of the interviews. Section 7.3 is an exploration of my own emotions, thoughts, and attitudes throughout the interviewing process, where I use self as instrument as part of the data analysis. In section 7.4, I present eight key themes which emerged from the interview data. Finally, 7.5 is a summary of these findings.

7.2 Purpose and structure of the interviews

The purpose of the interviews was to explore the experiences and insights of people directly involved in the issue of farming animals, whether that be through actual farming, or through opposing farming via activism. As explained in Chapter 4, I conducted ten interviews with various ‘actors’: a vegan psychologist, the owner of a farm sanctuary, an entrepreneur in sustainable and ethical agricultural methods, a pig farmer, a wool grower, an animal welfare project co-ordinator working for a textile company, a nutritional scientist and writer, a long-time vegetarian, a beef farmer, and a group interview of three animal activists from a well-known animal activist organisation. In total, twelve participants were involved in the interview process (nine as individuals, three as a group interview). Five interviews were conducted over zoom, five were in-person. Three of the in-person interviews were on the work site of the participant, i.e. on their farm. Nine of the twelve were with women, three of the participants were men. All participants identified as White and/or Caucasian.

Participants ranged in age from 25 to 65 years old. Five of the participants lived in farms, two

lived in semi-rural locations, and five (including all activists from the group interview) lived in urban areas.

My specific aim in holding these interviews was to explore:

- The participants' conscious and unconscious attitudes to, and feelings towards, animals bred for food,
- The participants' experiences and feelings about how other people in their lives view and talk about animals bred for food,
- Ways the participants communicated and related with and about animals in both their work and social life,
- The impact of working with or for animals on the participants themselves.

In essence, I examined the lived experience of people closely involved in the farming of animals for food. I explored how these people became interested and involved in either farming or opposing farming, how their involvement affected their broader lives, and the impact their work had on their lives emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

From the outset, I wanted the interviews to be reflexive and dyadic (Ellis, 2004), where together the participant (the interviewee) and I (the researcher) interactively produced insights and meanings. This meant being prepared to share my own stories and vulnerabilities, which naturally was easier with some than others. I did have a list of main interview questions, which were optional, but were mostly used. These included:

- a. Could you tell me a bit about your own personal journey: what led you to where you are now and the relationship you have with animals?
- b. Tell me about your own thoughts and feelings about the animals in your life?
- c. In your own experience, what have you observed about the way people talk and relate to each other about animals?
- d. Have you ever experienced debates or conflict about issues to do with animals?
- e. How do you respond when people share views that are very different to your own?

- f. How has the work you do impacted your relationship with other people?
- g. How has the work you do impacted your relationship to animals?

(See Appendix 6 for full Interview Plan)

7.3 Self as instrument

As explained in Chapter 4, in systems psychodynamics, researchers use their own impressions, intuitions and emotional responses as data about the system being studied (Skogstad, 2018). This involves paying attention to one's own emotions, physical sensations and fantasies throughout the data collection and research. Hence, observing my own reactions during the interviews was an important aspect of the data analysis.

In Chapter 4, I also explain the risks of using self as instrument. Distinguishing what belonged to myself, what belonged to the participants being interviewed, and what was created between us, was an important part of the process. Hence, awareness of unconscious dynamics and defence mechanisms such as projection, transference and projective identification were a key part of the data analysis. Having had a happy childhood on a farm where loving and caring for animals was simply a given part of life gave me an advantage – I could easily connect with the participants' work with animals. But it also posed a risk – that these interviews become aspects of my own fantasies, or even self-fulfilling prophecies. What might my responses have said about the system, and what was just 'my own stuff'? I found it hard to distinguish between the two, but I can make some observations about self as interviewer.

Just as one of the facilitators shared how he felt mesmerised by the research and his role with the focus groups, I felt 'mesmerised' by some of the interviewees in the one-to-one interviews. I felt in awe of many of them for the work they did in trying to create justice for animals. My own phantasies and projections emerged in my reflection notes: one participant seemed like a 'goddess', and another a 'saint'. Many were 'inspiring'. I often felt privileged to be having such intimate conversations with them, not just about their life work but also about their passions and their struggles.

I have wondered whether my sense of admiration and awe was simply my own projection and desire to play a significant role in reducing the suffering of animals. The term 'holier than thou', used by one of the participants in the focus groups echoed through this

contemplation. Used by the focus group participant, this was a criticism of vegans. But to me, the animal activists did seem 'holier than thou'. Is there really a higher moral plane held by those who act on behalf of animals? Did they have a kind of spirituality that those who don't care about animals do not have? It's impossible to say, but what I can say is that to me they possessed a striking clarity about their values, place, and purpose in the world, and they acted on their values in significant ways.

This was daunting for me at times. In one interview, the participant asked me about my own eating habits, and I found myself telling a white lie about not eating cheese. Thinking and writing about this afterwards, I realised my desire to not only connect, but also to impress, led me to feeling I had to present myself as 'better' than I really am about my lifestyle. My inability to be vulnerable and own my own hypocrisies created a barrier to a deeper connection with this participant. In my journal writing I began to wonder about the defences many of us put up to prevent our feelings of guilt about the way farmed animals are treated. Certainly, my lying about my eating habits was one such defence.

I have also wondered about the impact of gender in the interviewing process. With each female participant I felt a comfortable level of connection and appreciation. Of the three men, I felt that way with only one of them. I felt daunted with another by his fame and knowledge on the issue of farming, worried that I was taking up too much of his valuable time, and rather muddled in my approach. It did not feel like a reflexive, dyadic conversation (Ellis, 2004), rather, it felt strained and awkward. I wondered in my journal about the reason for this, perhaps it was because I was grieving my dog who had just died a few days prior, perhaps it was because we had different passions (he is a 'foodie', I am not), or perhaps there was a gendered divide in the practical approach he took and my own more idealistic stance.

My idealistic stance also seemed to get in the way of a genuine and deep connection with the third male participant. A comment he made about ordering a soy latte being typical of me, made me wonder if teasing me about an ideological choice I made gave this man a sense of dominance. Although jovial and much more comfortable than the previous mentioned interview, this conversation felt shallow and somewhat staged, as though we really were 'players' in a game about animals and farming. It strikes me now that it felt like a flirtatious interaction, and I wonder if I slipped into playing the soft-hearted female, while

this man played the tough practical farmer. Did we simply fall into those gender stereotypes so frequently played out in the field of animal welfare and animal rights (Lockhart, 2020)? Two of the female interview participants spoke of the negativity they experienced being a woman in the farming world. One spoke of the negative views of local farmers, 'I get a double whammy. I'm a woman and I'm an animal advocate' (I2). The other also spoke of multiple prejudices including gender bias when she reflected that, despite her success as a farmer, other farmers rarely if ever sought her advice: 'There's a couple of things. Wrong gender. Wrong accent (Canadian), used to be wrong age, but that's not so true anymore. Upstart.....It's like "What makes her think she knows better than us".' (I6).

Their comments evoke memories for me of my own very gendered farming experience, where my brother was always going to inherit the family farm while my two sisters and I were encouraged to find other careers. I felt a sense of sisterhood with these two strong female farmers who defied societal pressure and expectations. Perhaps I was projecting my own secret wishes and lost dreams onto them.

7.4 Emerging themes from the interviews

1) Why participants developed an interest in working with or for animals

The participants all had their own unique, in some cases quite profound, reasons for taking up the work they did with or for animals. Some themes that emerged when looking at the collective reasons included a natural love for animals, significant childhood or family experiences, an emerging or sudden awareness of animal suffering, and a love of the land and rural lifestyle.

Natural love for animals

When reflecting on their personal journeys, each participant expressed affection for animals. For some it came from family experiences, exemplified by the following comments: 'I just loved the farm dogs, especially my grandfather's collie' (I6), 'I always loved the cows and would go out and watch the newborn calves play' (I4). For others it just seemed to be an intuitive part of who they are. One recalled 'When I was growing up, I always appreciated the animals in the paddocks, the frogs in the ponds and the local birds.... It seemed to me they all had a place.' (I1).

Childhood and family experiences

Some spoke of the influence of their families and childhood memories in their decision to work with animals. The life changes required to take up their new role often involved making sense of their childhood memories. 'I was always told I was too soft' (13), 'As a child I ate meat reluctantly... when I turned seventeen, I stopped eating meat and I was seen as "fussy and difficult".' (19). Many of the activist participants also spoke of their gratitude to people who had helped them at pivotal times. Friends were crucial in the process. One activist participant shared her joy that when her friends see things in the media, they send her links saying 'Oh, I saw this and I thought of you' (17). In some cases, families, or family members helped the participant through a major life change: 'in the month of Ramadan, my mum said: "Look, I've got these vegan sausages for you".' (17). Conversely, families were sometimes a barrier to the change. One participant, who worked with an animal rights group, was told, 'If you ever tell your brother where you work, he will have a heart attack' (14). Another activist participant, who became a vegan at a young age, said that as a child and young adult when she ate with others, she generally felt she was 'missing the main meal'. 'Generally,' she said, 'people seemed to think I was doing it to annoy them' (14). Making sense of these experiences, positive or negative, appeared to be important influences on the decision to work with or for animals.

Awareness of animal suffering

Some participants took up their work with or for animals after becoming aware of animal suffering. One activist participant shared that her background was in marketing, but when she became involved in the fashion industry, she became aware of animal-based products and the cruelty involved in those. Another shared that it was when she saw an ABC Four Corners show on live export and the way cattle were treated that she was horrified and realised that she needed to do something.

Love of the land and a rural lifestyle

The two more traditional farmers shared that the appeal of a rural lifestyle, and working on the land, drew them to working on their farms. Another participant spoke of his appreciation of 'diversity of life, interdependence between species, the life cycle, and the importance of healthy soil and healthy plants' (110).

2) The impact the work had on their lives and lifestyle

Working with or for animals had a very significant impact on the participants lives, livelihoods and lifestyles. Eleven of the twelve people involved in the ten interviews shared that they had made major life choices because of their decision to work with or for animals. In some cases, this was a dietary choice, for others a geographical choice, and for some it meant a major career move.

Diet choices

Ten of the twelve people interviewed chose to become vegan because of their involvement and concern for animals. One activist participant spoke of her amusement about the judgement made of her partner being vegan, 'he's a big muscley bloke, so people are surprised. They say: "What, you're vegan?". But his friends have ended up admiring him' (I3). Another shared that at the age of 17 she decided to stop eating animals, and she was seen as 'fussy and difficult' (I9) by her family for a long time.

Home and geographical choice

As mentioned above, some participants spoke of their appreciation of a rural lifestyle. One, an animal activist helping farmers transition from dairy to more sustainable and healthy practices, shared that she had moved from Sydney to rural Tasmania because of her work with dairy farmers. Another activist, running a farm sanctuary, lived in just a small hut on her own property to allow her farm workers a more comfortable lifestyle in the farm homestead.

Career choices

All the participants who defined themselves as 'animal activist' (seven of the twelve participants) spoke of their conscious decision to turn their concern for animals into a professional career. Some had quite consciously given up more 'corporate' careers (I3, I5, and I7). None expressed any regret for this change. For some, it was as though their passion gave them little choice, one participant shared that she 'couldn't not do this work' (I3). Another described her involvement as 'my living apology' (I2).

3) The impact of the work on their relationships with other people

Although some activist participants spoke of people who supported them, such as one who shared that her mother and friends supported her being a vegan, many spoke of the

negative impacts of their dietary and lifestyle choices on their broader relationships. One commented that this was a pattern in her life: 'I was always an outlier in my family. The difficult and the different one, the middle child.' (I9). Another spoke about friends she had lost, and her caution in using 'the V word'. 'It's isolated me' she said, 'the perception is that I'm a bit insane' (I3). Some simply accepted their outlier status as inevitable: 'I've always been a loner. I always knew I was different' (I2).

Another vegan participant reiterated this caution in sharing her veganism with others 'I'm still not that confident telling people. I find myself hesitating to proactively bring it up. There are misconceptions and assumptions' (I7).

One participant, a farmer, spoke of her limited relationship with other farmers, 'I've given up proselytizing to other farmers because they are just not ready to hear it. I'll talk to anybody who wants to listen, but most farmers cannot see past the reduction of stocking that's going to be required' (I6).

Most found other people and networks which supported them and their work. On finding the ethical textile industry, the above farmer shared, 'I found a community of people who came back to me and said "Love what you do. It's transforming my experience of wool". That was fabulous' (I6).

4) The impact of their work on their relationship to animals

Each of the participants had interesting things to say about how their work impacted their relationship with animals. In the group interview with the animal activists, one spoke of her 'heightened awareness of all animals' (I3), another of feeling 'better connected to animals and the world' (I3).

Two participants talked about the fact that farmers love their animals and are proud to give them good lives. One farmer participant commented that he would never be a conventional pig farmer because of their cruel practices, 'they're bottom of the pile, and not farmers at all really' (I10). He spoke about his own need to turn a blind eye when the animals go off in the truck to the abattoir, in his words, 'you just have to get on with it and not think about it'.

One activist participant was not so sure farmers really care for their animals. She declared 'They con themselves so they can stick with their beautiful romantic narrative, but they have these unwritten codes such as "don't give them names", and "don't be there when the

docking truck leaves” (13). Her view was that in many ways farming is like a religion, it’s largely unconscious, they’ve done it their whole lives, they don’t talk about farming as a skill, a practice, or even a way of life. It’s simply what they were born into. But particularly when she sees farmhands, she knows that the cruelty really affects them. She talked about the distance required in farming: ‘the farmer doesn’t hold the bolt gun’ (13). The wool farmer’s decision not to put her sheep on trucks headed for slaughter any more affirmed that perspective: ‘I knew that was a really awful experience for them. Getting on the truck and where they were going..... six years ago I stopped getting the truck to send sheep to slaughter’ (16).

5) Constant struggle with ethical dilemmas

Many of the participants in the interviews were driven by strong personal convictions about the status of animals and their right to be free from exploitation. In some cases, this led to tricky ethical dilemmas, such as balancing their compassion for animals with the need to engage with and persuade those who don’t share their views. One participant had quite a personal internal struggle with her religious background and beliefs. She reconciled this by recognising that even though within her religion animal welfare is not explicitly mentioned, sentience is written about, and the meaning of words such as sentience may change over time.

Others had to balance their compassion for animals with the need to engage with and persuade those who don’t share their views. In the group interview with activist participants (14), there was clear consensus that the ‘us versus them’ mentality doesn’t work. They did empathise with the impatience many vegans feel, but one stated clearly ‘they can get in their own way’ (14). The need to hold up the mirror and be self-critical was seen as a crucial skill for activists. One participant shared: ‘we vegans can be our own worst enemies. When we’re harsh and critical, we just turn people off’ (12).

Along with this emphasis on self-awareness was the need to take a long-term approach. I had a sense that each of them wakes up determined, with the view that every day is valuable and important in the big scheme of things. Certainly, they shared that there were times when they felt discouraged, but overall, there was a persistently positive outlook. One participant had the view that climate change will force change (17). Another declared she was working to change the world ‘one farm at a time’ (13).

6) Views on how people talk and relate to each other about animals bred for food (the social politics of meat)

One predominant observation that came through in the interviews and in the focus groups, particularly from the vegans, was that ‘times are changing’ (I4). Older vegans made comments that in the past they were seen as ‘very radical’ (I4), ‘fussy and difficult’ (I9) and ‘missing the main meal’ (I4). The younger vegans accepted the view that ‘things are easier now’ (I3) and shared that their friends and communities tended to be very supportive of their values and lifestyles.

Many of the activist participants talked about the need to get away from judging and criticising people with different views to themselves. ‘I don’t need to shove it down people’s throats. Social change comes from compassion and education.’ (I2). From one participant’s perspective ‘The biggest threat to the Vegan Community is vegans themselves. They can be seen as rigid and critical’ (I3). She expressed the need for caution, ‘we need to be very careful...farmers are generally seen as the heroes in Australian culture, the “backbone of the country”’. In the group interview, all three activists empathised with the impatience many vegans feel but agreed that ‘they can get in their own way’. One commented that people get defensive because it is ‘like we’re holding up a mirror’ (I4).

Another vegan participant talked a lot about ‘collective shame’ (I1). She argued that people know that eating animals is wrong, allowing a system that abuses animals is wrong, so people project their shame onto vegans. It’s a ‘shoot the messenger case’. She talked about defences such as humour, rage, and conformity, and her view was that ‘most humans are followers’. In her mind most people have a ‘blind adherence to social norms’.

7) Heightened sensitivity to suffering

The activists and vegans displayed a very strong awareness of animal suffering. One participant talked about the commodifying of animals: ‘We commodify them so much that their suffering doesn’t count’ (I3). She mused about the beauty of cows, how emotionally attuned and responsive they are, ‘but farmers treat them like stock, so they get a stock response’. From her perspective, this treatment by farmers is not intentional, but rather a systemic issue in farming. She shared that a neighbouring farmer was very surprised to see a photo of her with a cow laying its head on her lap like a dog, and that this farmer ‘had tears

in his eyes when he saw the picture and said he had no idea they could be so affectionate' (13).

Other participants also commented on the suffering inherent in our systems. One farmer despaired over the whole earth system of consumption. 'Huge shipping containers, huge factory farms.... nobody has 10,000 pigs for their own consumption' (15).

The phrase 'It's my living apology', (12), already mentioned above, highlights the deep empathy and sense of responsibility many of the participants feel for the suffering of farmed animals.

8) Holistic worldview

The above-mentioned sensitivity to suffering seemed to extend beyond farmed animals. Not only were they well informed about scientific research into animal cognition, emotions and genetics, as well as legal knowledge of animal legal rights and protections, many showed detailed knowledge of global environmental and health impacts of animal agriculture. Some even saw their cause as part of a broader ethical framework, connecting animal rights to other social justice issues and a whole earth approach. One participant shared his vision of 'a human community with a collective consciousness that respects, nourishes and embraces our interdependence with life on earth' (19). Another activist participant shared her view that 'social change comes from compassion and education.' (12).

For another, her sustainable approach involved letting go of a previously held paradigm: 'It was a letting go. Letting go of a reductionist approach. Moving away from a reductionist approach to an integrative approach. That's really, really hard for most trained scientists because you're stepping into unknown. You're stepping away from the crutch of statistics and control' (16).

Letting go of old paradigms means taking up new ones. The farmer quoted above has taken on a kind of 'global community' (16) approach. Her farm is in Tasmania, Australia. Her buyers reside in New York. Her wool is sold all around the world. She spoke of the trusting, transparent relationship she has with these stakeholders, which perhaps is a replacement for the lack of a close relationship with her neighbouring farmers. I mused that her style and farming practice had a village approach, at the global level.

7.5 Summary

The ten qualitative interviews with people directly involved in the issue of farming animals were engaging and illuminating. The interviews themselves were all unique, although I can see quite a difference between the eight conversations I had with animal activists, vegans, and people farming in radically different, more compassionate ways, and the two conversations with farmers who raise animals to be sold for meat. In those two interviews I had a strong sense of things being held back, defences being up, and things not being said. I have no doubt that I projected my own discomfort with their practices into the conversation, and perhaps their projective identification elicited even more discomfort in me.

Nonetheless, all the interviews gave me deep insight into the impact of working closely with animals on one's own life, relationships, and world view. Whether as a farmer or as an activist, it seems that having direct exposure to other species and by living closely with them, we become more self-aware and integrative in our approach to life.

In this chapter I have presented thematic findings from the socio-analytic interviews and my own response to them. In the next and final chapter, Chapter 8, I integrate the findings from this chapter and the previous chapter to present three hypotheses on my core question: 'what are the social politics of meat?'

Chapter 8: Conclusions, hypothesis and discussion

When we give others and ourselves permission to be the messy, complicated, fallible people we all are, we give a great gift.

Melanie Joy, (2023), p. 184.

Vignette 8: Communicating with animals

I have just read Laura Mackay's award-winning novel 'The Animals in That Country'. The book describes a pandemic called "zooflu" which sweeps across Australia, giving humans the ability to communicate with animals. How interesting that it was published in 2020, just as the world grappled with an actual zoonotic pandemic. In this fictional pandemic the main symptom is that its victims begin to understand the language of animals:

'The disease is very high in morbidity and very low in mortality. Infected humans appear able to communicate (encode) and translate (decode) previously unrecognisable non-verbal communications via major senses such as sight, smell, taste, touch, and sound with non-human animals. Zooflu is also referred to as "talking animal disease".' (p. 35)

This is not a pleasant experience for the humans in the story. Hearing animals talk is strange and disturbing for them. It's likened to a drug trip, with the experience being intense and often difficult to process, leading to widespread chaos and social breakdown. Becoming aware of what the creatures around them are thinking makes them acutely aware of the way society is dominating and abusing them.

The novel challenges me. Apart from the jolting and weird language of the animals in the story, I realise Mackay requires us to enter the mindset of other species. This is an interesting reversal, most often we project human consciousness onto animals. We expect them to enter and exist in our world, our cultural norms, our language. In this story, humans enter animal consciousness.

I think about the animals I talk to, in my human language, and how they adapt to my mindset and my language. I chatter away to my chickens, even though the only words they

seem to understand are 'chook-chook-chook' when I am feeding them at the end of the day. Our dog, Zara, understands more. She responds clearly to 'Let's go to the park', 'No Zara!', 'Where's the ball?', 'Where's Squeaky?', 'Sit', and many more of our words and phrases. Apparently, dogs can understand up to 1000 words and phrases. How clever of them to be like us. I contemplate, what would happen if instead of expecting the animals in my life to enter my world of language, I entered their world of language? Would I go mad?

The humans in the book go so mad the authorities become desperate to find a cure, and of course, cure they find. A little white pill, a vaccine. I was disappointed in that ending. How typical, I think, that we simply cannot hear the voices of the animals, and if by some rare chance (in this case a fictional pandemic) we can, we must find a vaccine to cure us of this knowledge. I wonder: can we hold the information we need to hear from animals without going mad, or scrambling for a 'cure' so that we cannot hear them anymore? Can we stop and listen to them?

8.1 Introduction

This chapter gathers the various threads arising from the research into the social politics of meat, presents a hypothesis on this 'dinner conversation', and dives deeply into the question of why we eat meat. Throughout the chapter I draw parallels with my findings with theories which present important ideas about social defences and social systems: DiAngelo's theory on white fragility, Stein's theory on responses to whistleblowers, and Long's theory on perverse organisations. I also point to numerous similarities between Joy's theory of carnism and Becker's theory of denial of death. I begin the chapter with a summary of my three working hypotheses on the changing social politics of meat in section 8.2. In section 8.3, I come back to the systems psychodynamic frame, to reiterate the methodology and process used to arrive at these conclusions. In section 8.4, I present and explain my first hypothesis: that within the 'dinner conversation' about meat, there is a strong element of 'meat-eating fragility'. In section 8.5, I look at the larger question of 'why we eat meat', and the typical arguments put forward to explain this behaviour. This leads to my second hypothesis, explained in section 8.6, on the systemic influences which create an 'almost impenetrable barrier' to change on the issue of meat eating. In section 8.7, I present a final hypothesis, suggesting that meat-eating fragility is both a defence against change, and a sign of change,

in the social politics of meat. In section 8.8, I outline areas and ideas for future research. Finally, in section 8.9, I reflect on the impact of this work on myself, both as someone who cares deeply about animals, and as a researcher, as well as the broader societal implications of the findings.

8.2 Three working hypotheses

The three working hypotheses I put forward are based on the qualitative data analysed for this PhD research. I put them forward as hypotheses about Western, developed countries, as evidenced by this Australian-based research.³⁵ As explained in Chapter 3, a working hypothesis is a form of interpretation that offers one possible truth. It is a sketch of the situation, a speculation, and it recognises that the “truth” is often too evasive, too complex, to be captured definitively (Lawrence, 2006). As such, the hypotheses offered below are tentative explanations of the data presented throughout the research, and by the nature of the concept of a working hypothesis, they each are intended to encourage ongoing inquiry into this field. I present the hypotheses here and then examine each one in detail in sections 8.4 (hypothesis one), 8.6 (hypothesis two) and 8.7 (hypothesis three).

My three hypotheses are as follows:

- 1) *Meat-eating fragility is a social dynamic whereby the eating of meat triggers a defensive response to any suggestion that this behaviour contributes to the suffering of animals. The dynamic involves defences such as splitting, reluctance to identify oneself as a meat-eater, anger when the issue of animal suffering is raised, and a tendency to focus on individual discomfort rather than taking a systemic view of the issues around meat-eating.*

- 2) *Most humans eat meat because they are immersed in three entwined systemic influences which all encourage and promote the eating of animals, and which reinforce each other to create an almost impenetrable barrier to change. These systemic influences are custom, carnism and capitalism. Underpinning and surrounding all three is the philosophical belief of anthropocentrism.*

³⁵ Australian culture is generally seen as based on the cultures of Europe and the US.

3) *The almost impenetrable barrier to change in meat consumption in Western developed countries has cracks. Outliers and influencers such as those interviewed for this research, growing market interest in plant-based diets, and the dynamic of meat-eating fragility, are indications of these cracks. The phenomenon of meat-eating fragility is both a defence against change, in that it serves to avoid change; and a sign of change, in that the associated guilt suggests awareness of, and aversion to, the suffering involved in the production of meat.*

8.3 A systems psychodynamic framework

As explained in Chapter 2, systems psychodynamics is the ‘study of human social phenomena from a perspective combining systems theory and psychoanalysis’ (Long, 2013, p. xix). Although similar to sociology, in that the study is of social phenomena, systems psychodynamics draws deeply on psychoanalytic concepts to offer a more specialised lens for examining unconscious processes in groups, organisations and society. The discipline emphasises lived experience, relational understanding and psychoanalytically informed observation of groups and organisations (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020). There is an emphasis on emotional experience, conscious and unconscious behaviours, and interpersonal relationships, and how these impact group and organisational functioning. It often involves an analysis of defence mechanisms and an exploration of how social defences and coping mechanisms operate at the group and organisational level, not just at the individual level. The focus on the group-as-a whole is important; an analysis of group behaviour explores the *collective entity*, rather than the combination of individual behaviours. The aim of such research is to expand knowledge on the conscious and unconscious dynamics of organisational and social systems. The aim of this doctoral research has been to expand knowledge on the conscious and unconscious dynamics on the issue of meat eating. How do we interact with each other on the issue of eating meat (animals)?

The difficulty of studying the unconscious has already been explored in Chapters 2 and 4; the unconscious is not directly observable (Stamenova & Hinshelwood, 2018). As researcher in the field of systems psychodynamics, I have needed to be very aware of my own subjective state, and the interactions I have with the researched and their subjective states. Hollway and Jefferson (2012) discuss ‘defended subjects’, where subjects within the research may

have strong individual and social defences in response to the issue being researched. As explained in Chapter 5, this certainly seemed to be the case within the research focus groups on the issue of cruelty to, and suffering of, animals bred for food. At least two participants in each group of ten expressed anger with the video content when the issue of cruelty was presented. My task has been to explore how and why these defences arose. Was this due to the setup of the research, or could there be broader societal reasons for such defences?

What is important to stress is that systems psychodynamics is about the whole. This discipline emphasises that the group, organisation, or society as-a-whole has unconscious assumptions, beliefs and stories that influence how it acts, thinks and feels through its representatives. Individuals in the group may act consistently with the group norms and beliefs, or a group member acting differently may represent something about the group that is important, or alternatively, may represent 'a defence against that representation' (Long, 2016, p. 65) which is important to the group-as-a-whole. As Long (2016) asserts, 'averaging individual responses to find meaning will lose this understanding. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.' (p. 65). In other words, as researchers, we need to be selective about which responses (data) to draw meaning from. That data may in fact be from something quite surprising, something we initially dismiss, consciously or unconsciously. We also need to be very aware of our own subjectivity, and put into place mechanisms to counter this subjectivity, such as supervision, reflective practice, and continual self-examination. Our own thoughts, feelings and subjectivity are all additional data which help us understand the whole.

In keeping with this notion that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, despite much of the data selected being individual drawings, individual expressions or words, and individual sense-making, I believe the themes and narratives are *representative* of the system-as-a-whole. The system-as-a-whole in this case is Western society (as represented through Australian participants) on the issue of eating meat. My three methods of data analysis: autoethnography, focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews with key players within the issue, as well as my literature review in the fields of both systems psychodynamics and anthrozoology, have led me to the following conclusions about the social politics of meat.

8.4 Hypothesis 1: Meat-eating fragility

My first working hypothesis is as follows:

Meat-eating fragility is a social dynamic whereby the eating of meat triggers a defensive response to any suggestion that this behaviour contributes to the suffering of animals. The dynamic involves defences such as splitting, reluctance to identify oneself as a meat-eater, anger when the issue of animal suffering is raised, and a tendency to focus on individual discomfort rather than taking a systemic view of the issues around meat-eating.

The eight findings from the data analysis in Chapters 6 and 7 all led me to the hypothesis of meat-eating fragility. This expression is an adaption of the term 'white fragility' (referred to in Chapter 2), a phrase coined by Robin DiAngelo to describe the discomfort and defensiveness white people experience and display when questioned about race or made to consider their own race. A simple example might be a white person feeling offended or becoming defensive if a person of colour mentions white privilege. The white person may claim that this is not the case for them, and that they are 'not racist'. The response is a very individualistic one.

DiAngelo (2018) views racism as systemic rather than overt and conscious, and she argues that white progressives (which, she says, include herself) cause 'the most damage to people of colour' (p. 5) because they avoid questioning any issue of racism in themselves, fail to see their own complicity, and take a self-serving approach to anti-racism efforts ('we will put our efforts into making sure others see us as having arrived', p 5). White fragility centres on an individual approach to racism, rather than a systemic view. It focusses on a white person's feelings of discomfort and removes the focus from the lived experiences of people of colour. It often results in people of colour feeling obligated to comfort or coddle white people's emotional reactions, rather than having their own concerns heard and addressed.

Consequently, it gets in the way of productive discussion and prevents real learning and growth. Most of all, it reinforces racism, because it allows white people to avoid confronting their own racial biases and prejudices and shuts down conversations about race and racism.

There are many parallels of white fragility with what I see as 'meat-eating fragility'. Meat-eating fragility also centres on an individualistic approach, rather than a systemic view. As explained in Chapter 6, holding a systems lens seemed almost impossible in the focus group

discussions. A facilitator comment, 'I was holding the system lens, but they couldn't go there' seemed to sum up the inability of the focus groups to explore the whole system. The splitting of the notion of 'meat' from 'animal' could be seen as an example of the difficulty of seeing the big picture, as could the reluctance to be identified within a definable group of 'meat-eaters'.

In the draft stage of this hypothesis, I called the hypothetical phenomenon '*meat-eater fragility*', rather than '*meat-eating fragility*'. However, in conversations with my supervisor, I realised that this was linking the phenomenon with an identity, rather than a behaviour. Just as some participants in the focus group indicated that they do not define themselves as a meat-eater, I do not define myself as a meat eater, although occasionally I eat fish. This reluctance to be defined as a 'meat-eater' could be viewed as hypocrisy, and it could also be viewed as further evidence of '*meat-eating fragility*'. I am defensive about my own meat-eating.

Just as white fragility draws attention to a white person's discomfort (rather than the lived experience of a person of colour), I have found discussions about eating animals to be very focussed on reducing any element of meat-eating discomfort, which in turn removes the focus from the issue of animal suffering. Other issues around meat eating are discussable - health issues and environmental issues in particular - but not animal suffering. My findings indicate that within Western society, 'everything but the squeal' can be talked about. Of course, there are people in all societies who really don't care about how animals feel, and even a minority who are actively cruel to animals. Nonetheless, participants within this research appeared to find discussions about animal suffering uncomfortable and unpalatable.

The fact that this research seems to be perceived as dangerous³⁶ highlights the tendency to focus on *human* individual discomfort, rather than the issue of animal cruelty. The strong sense of judgement and being judged adds to this individual human focus, as does the fact that social influences on whether or not we eat meat, or how much we eat it, appear to dominate behaviour and meat-eating practices.

³⁶ See Chapter 6, Key Finding 1.

Finally, just as ‘white fragility’ reinforces systemic racism, ‘meat-eating fragility’ reinforces the system of carnism because the focus on individual discomfort takes the spotlight off the issue of eating animals. The meat-eating fragility I observed in the focus groups is depicted in the diagram below.

Diagram 2: Meat Eating Fragility



In the diagram above, I have depicted seven indications of meat-eating fragility which emerged from the focus group data. The indications and examples are fully described in Chapter 6, Data Analysis Phase 2, so I will simply give the reference to the relevant data analysis and a brief outline to avoid repetition. These indications include:

- *A sense of judgement on the issue*

See Finding 7 in Chapter 6, Data Analysis Phase 2. Fear of being judged seemed to be present in the focus group discussions, with words and phrases such as ‘enemy’, ‘holier-than-thou’, ‘madness’, ‘hung out to dry’ and ‘hierarchy with vegans at the top’ showing a sense of right / wrong and good / bad on the issue of eating meat. It seemed that the vegetarians and vegans in the group accepted common judgements of them as self-righteous (my overall impression was that they viewed this type of labelling as part and parcel of the course), while the meat-eaters seemed to resent being judged as an ‘enemy’ of animals and animal welfare. Perhaps with increased public concern for animal welfare and awareness of animal suffering, there is a sensitivity to being judged as being on the wrong side.

- *The splitting of ‘meat’ from ‘animal’*

See Finding 5 in Chapter 6, Data Analysis Phase 2. The question asked by one participant ‘Are you studying our relatedness to animals or are you studying eating meat?’ underscored this splitting. To me, the eating of animals is clearly an aspect of our relatedness to them. Indeed, the most direct form of contact many humans have with animals is at the dinner table, when they eat them. But to see eating animals and our relatedness to animals as the same thing seemed difficult, at least for some participants. One only needs to look at other common language (‘pork’, ‘ham’, ‘bacon and ‘beef’) to see how our culture embraces the splitting of meat from animal.

- *Social influences dominate our views and behaviour*

See Finding 3 in Chapter 6, Data Analysis Phase 2. The social, or in other words, the human relationship, aspect of meat appeared consistently in the drawings as a predominant consideration of how we view meat and animals. Relationships with one another at times appeared to matter more than individual views and behaviour on meat-eating. The expression ‘I’m a closet vegetarian’ seemed to indicate both a concern not to upset the status quo, and a sense that keeping others happy is more important than choosing to eat or not to eat meat.

- *Reluctance to being identified as a meat-eater*

See Finding 4 in Chapter 6, Data Analysis Phase 2, and Chapter 7, Data Analysis Phase 3. In both focus groups there were objections to the division of the group along meat-eating lines.

This method of group identification was clearly confronting to some. One person loudly proclaimed ‘they’re not my tribe’ even though he readily announced he is a meat eater. Such reluctance appeared to indicate a sensitivity to meat-eating being attached to one’s identity, and a defence against the perceived characteristics that come with that identity. The telling of my own white lie about not eating cheese to one of the interview participants indicated a similar reluctance to animal cruelty being associated with my identity. Although not specifically meat, the production of cheese and other dairy products is directly linked to the use of cows and the slaughter of their young.

- *Difficulty in holding a systems frame*

See Finding 4 in Chapter 6, Data Analysis Phase 2. Both facilitators commented that in the final focus group session, getting participants to examine the systemic issues involved in meat-eating was very difficult. DiAngelo argues that the tendency to view racism personally, rather than taking a systems lens, is an aspect of white fragility. What we eat is such a personal daily behaviour, that it is perhaps not surprising that it is difficult to hold a systems lens in the case of meat-eating as well. Seeing the big picture is not easy when we are so immersed in something.

- *Everything but the squeal can be talked about*

See Finding 4 in Chapter 5, Data Analysis. The anger expressed by participants in both focus groups about the attention given to animal suffering appeared to be a defence against knowing about this aspect of the meat industry. Not wanting to know is an aspect of white fragility, in that case, not wanting to know that offence has been taken in terms of racism. In this case, the not wanting to know is about animal suffering. The fragility can be seen as a defence against feeling complicit in a system which causes animals to suffer.

- *This research was perceived as dangerous*

See Finding 1 in Chapter 5, Data Analysis. The persistent concern about human safety throughout the research process could be seen as a reluctance to enter this work emotionally, and even as an internalised sense of superiority and speciesism. DiAngelo points to the internalised superiority of white progressives in the case of white fragility. Such internalised superiority creates defensiveness about suggestions that white people may benefit from and are complicit in a racist system. It could be said that internalised

superiority in terms of human-animal relations prioritises human emotional safety over animal physical safety, thereby providing a defence against a deep exploration of the meat industry.

Parallels with ‘white fragility’: reasons for defences

In exploring the systemic reasons for white fragility, DiAngelo gives a summary of the reasons white people are so defensive about the suggestion that we benefit from, and are complicit in, a racist system. These reasons are listed below, with possible parallel meat-eating fragility explanations.

Table 5: Parallels between white fragility and meat-eating fragility

White fragility	Meat-eating fragility
Social taboos against talking openly about race	Social taboos against talking openly about eating animals
The racist = bad / not racist = good binary	The vegan = compassionate / meat-eater = uncaring binary The vegan = radical / meat-eater = sensible binary
Fear and resentment towards people of colour	Fear of being judged and of being seen as uncaring, and resentment towards vegans
Our delusion that we are objective individuals	Our delusion that we are objective individuals
Our guilty knowledge that there is more going on than we can or will admit to	Our guilty knowledge that there is more going on than we can or will admit to
Deep investment in a system that benefits us and that we have been conditioned to see as fair	Deep investment in a system that benefits us and that we have been conditioned to see as fair and humane
Internalised superiority and sense of a right to rule	Internalised superiority and speciesism
A deep cultural legacy of anti-black sentiment	A deep cultural legacy of eating animals

(Adapted from DiAngelo, 2018, p. 100)

Other reasons for defences

An explanation for 'meat-eating fragility' may be also found in Mark Stein's proposition of the 'lost good self' (2019) in his theory on the treatment of whistleblowers. As explained in this thesis, Chapter 2, Stein argues that whistleblowers unconsciously represent the moral values and ethical standards that others may have compromised or abandoned. By exposing wrongdoing, whistleblowers remind colleagues of their own ethical lapses and the gap between their own behaviour and their idealised 'good self'. This reminder of lost moral integrity causes discomfort and resentment leading to a hostile reaction to whistleblowers. In putting forward this argument, Stein proposes a much deeper psychological reason for the stigmatisation of whistleblowers than the common assumption in whistleblower literature that whistleblowers are hated and resented because they threaten the organisation's interests. Instead, he proposes that the hatred stems from a more complex psychological dynamic, especially in organisations, such as hospitals, where staff have a strong moral commitment to their work.

I think this concept can be extended to the sensitivity I have observed in meat eating. Although the two concepts address different domains, parallels can be found. Both involve defensive responses to a perceived threat to one's self-image. In the case of others' response to whistleblowers, the threat is of being seen as dishonest and immoral within an organisational context; in the case of meat-eating, the threat is of being seen as uncaring to animals in a social context.

Both dynamics involve an avoidance of confronting one's own moral compromises. Hatred of whistleblowers is an avoidance of confronting the truth of their allegations; meat-eating fragility is an avoidance of confronting the truth of animal suffering. Both are triggered by the exposure of unethical practices and wrongdoings: in Steins' theory, the whistleblower's revealing of corruption or wrongdoing within an organisation; in meat-eating fragility, the exposure comes from activists and vegans or vegetarians.

Both concepts deal with discomfort around examining and challenging established norms. The 'lost good self' may seemingly act to protect the organisation and its reputation; defensiveness about meat-eating may act to protect animal farmers, and / or one's own family customs. Defensive reactions in both situations serve to maintain existing power

structures: in the case of reactions to whistleblowing, the organisation or industry involved; in the case of meat-eating, the meat industry.

In Stein's theory on the 'lost good self', and in my concept of 'meat-eating fragility', individuals and systems resist challenges to established ways of thinking and behaving. I would argue that in both instances we see a need to develop the capacity for dealing with challenges and change. To develop this skill, we must start from an understanding of the systemic influences acting to prevent new thinking. Within the realm of meat-eating, this is explored in the next section.

8.5 Why do we eat meat?

'Thousands of people who say they 'love' animals sit down once or twice a day to enjoy the flesh of creatures who have been utterly deprived of everything that could make their lives worth living and who endured the awful suffering and the terror of the abattoirs...'

Jane Goodall

Eating meat is both individual and social. We each make choices to put (or not to put) meat into our mouths. We often do this in social settings: family or social meals, work or community gatherings, and countless other settings which involve other people. Although I never intended it to, the original title of this thesis, 'The Social Politics of Meat', invites the rather polarised question: *should we or shouldn't we eat meat?* Most discussions about my research seem to lean towards that binary. If someone asks, 'What is your PhD about?', I generally tell them the title, and after a confused response, I explain that I am 'exploring how people talk (or don't talk) to one another about the animals in their lives, including the animals they may eat'. Generally, then, the person will tell me how much, or how little, meat they eat, and ask if I am vegetarian. The binary choice is the usual focus.

Hence, a deeper discussion with a colleague and friend (who eats meat) in a London restaurant where we contemplated why we eat meat left me pondering this seemingly simple question. While our modern society encourages us to see the individuality and sentience of animals as beings, we continue to put them on our plates as meat. Why do we eat the flesh of other species, particularly in today's Western, developed countries, where it is relatively easy not to do so, and scientific evidence tells us the amount of meat the

average person eats today is unhealthy, environmentally destructive , contributes significantly to climate change and is systemically cruel (Hannan, 2020; Monbiot, 2022; Torrella, 2024; Walsh, 2023)? When one really thinks about it, it is a hugely complicated question. I have done mountains of research on this topic – reading, interviewing, observing, listening, thinking deeply - and all I can definitively say is that we can probably never know the full answer, especially for any individual eater.

Nonetheless, we can speculate about some of the factors which influence us to eat meat. Hence, it is useful to consider arguments put forward by meat proponents, the meat industry, and others, to explain and justify our meat-eating habits. We'll begin with the more commonly known, and probe more deeply as we go through each of the contentions.

Enjoyment: Meat dishes undoubtedly have an enticing, delicious flavour for many palettes. Food writer Barb Stuckey (2013) informs us that as much as 95 percent of what we think of as meat's taste is its aroma. Meat is also apparently loaded with the taste of umami, a Japanese word for delicious savoury taste. Foods that have a strong umami flavour include meats, fish (including fish sauce and preserved fish such as anchovies), tomatoes, mushrooms, meat extract, cheeses, and soy sauce. We can enjoy the taste of umami without meat, mushrooms or tofu cooked in soy sauce or tamari for instance, but we are very used to this taste being associated with meat dishes, in particular, bacon.

Interestingly, no-one in any of my focus groups talked about loving the taste of meat. This may have been due to the title of the work ('The social politics of meat'), and other implicit messages in the sessions which called meat eating into question. For instance, the food I served was vegetarian, people were asked to draw the animals in their lives (including the animals they may eat), and most of them knew that I am researcher concerned about the way animals bred for food are treated today. All these things would have had an impact on what was declared, or not declared, by meat eaters. Nonetheless, I have wondered, is the taste of meat over-rated? Or is loving the taste of meat (or at least, declaring that we love the taste of meat) somewhat out of vogue in Western developed countries nowadays?

Health: While it is beyond the scope of this thesis for me to go into all the arguments for and against including meat in our diet for health reasons, suffice to say meat contains protein, important for growth and development, and other nutrients, such as iodine, iron, zinc and vitamin B12. Many vegans argue that a healthy vegan diet can easily supplement all these

dietary requirements, and many meat eaters argue the opposite. My sense is that all bodies are unique, and each person's body has its own needs, at different stages of that person's life, although I have no direct evidence for this perspective. I can only say that having eaten very little meat (and only fish at that) for the past 10 years, I feel healthier than ever. Leading health organisations all around the world, including the NHS (footnote with NHS blog), the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (footnote with Academy article), Harvard Medical School (footnote with Harvard article) and the World Health Organisation (footnote with WHO article) have all stated that appropriately planned vegetarian diets, including vegan diets, are healthful and nutritionally adequate for all stages of life. Some research even suggests plant-based diets may be associated with lower risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and certain cancers.³⁷

Tradition: Our food does not simply tend to our biological needs. It is also a marker of our identity, a symbol of belonging. Just think of chops and sausages at a typical Australian BBQ, turkey at Thanksgiving in America, or lamb at Eid El Kebir. Meat is seen as a crucial part of these cultures and traditions. A failed attempt at a Vegetarian Family Christmas lunch (see vignette at the start of Chapter 5) made me realise how important these traditions are to some people. My aim was to try something new and to have a cruelty free gathering, but instead I was seen (by some) as a poor host and an inconsiderate family member.

Gender: I have written and spoken previously about the consumption of meat being linked with masculinity and virility (Lockhart, 2022). With regards to attitudes to animals and vegetarian or vegan eating, there are significant differences between men and women. Women eat less meat, are more likely to be vegetarian or semi vegetarian, engage in grassroots animal advocacy, oppose animal research and join an animal protection organisation (Cooney, 2014, and Herzog, 2010). Various reasons have been put forward for this difference, including the societal perception that meat eating is a masculine activity, and that men need meat more than women do (Ruby & Heine, 2011), as well as the 'nurture' theory that our culture instils more indifference to animal suffering in boys than girls (Luke, 2007). My argument in the paper (Lockhart, 2022) applies a psychoanalytic lens to this gender difference. The early stages of 'differentiation' may give us clues as to why women

³⁷ See: Harvard Health Medical School: website: [What's the beef with red meat? - Harvard Health](#) and also World Cancer Research Fund: [Limit red and processed meat - WCRF International](#)

are more inclined to empathise with animals and become active about animal welfare. The 'separation-individuation' process a child goes through as it moves from a 'narcissistic relation to reality' (Chodorow, 1997) to a perceived demarcation between self and the object world could potentially shed light on the gender difference to identifying with, empathising with, and eating or choosing not to eat animals.

Manners: Pollan, Safran Foer and others write about 'table fellowship' (Foer, 2010, p 55), our time with friends, our connections around the table, the bonds we make eating together. Eating is social; the kinship fostered by sharing food generates good feeling and creates social bonds. For many, meat at the dinner table represents memories, traditions and the comfort of family and community eating. Pollan (2006) writes in *The Omnivore's Dilemma* that the thing that troubled him the most about being a vegetarian was 'the subtle way it alienated me from other people' (p. 314). On his attempt at being a vegetarian, Pollan writes: 'Other people now have to accommodate me, and I find this uncomfortable: My new dietary restrictions throw a big wrench into the basic host-guest relationship' (p. 314). Pollan's argument regarding table-fellowship has been criticized by Safran Foer, who in his own book *Eating Animals* (2009), claims that nowadays it is easier for hosts to accommodate vegetarians than locavores (people whose diet consists only or mainly of locally grown food), as in the latter case hosts would need to do extensive research to find local, free range and organically grown meat. Foer asks a simple but challenging question of himself: 'How much do I value creating a socially comfortable situation, and how much do I value acting socially responsible?' (p. 55).

Beliefs: As explained in Chapter 2, Melanie Joy (2010), coined the term '*carnism*' to describe the invisible belief system that conditions people to love certain animals while eating others, despite the fact that animals used for food have personalities and emotions as complex and unique as those of our beloved cats and dogs. Joy, a social psychologist, argues that because eating animals is not a necessity for survival, it is a choice, and choices always stem from beliefs. She posits that eating animals has always been presented as normal, natural, and necessary, and that these beliefs underlie the dominant ideology that conditions us to disconnect from our most deeply-held values—empathy, compassion, and justice—to make food choices that cause unnecessary violence and suffering.

Necessary dominance: Speciesism, the deeply held collective belief that our interests are always more important than that of other species, in many ways justifies the eating of other species. In a fascinating article comparing animal ‘welfare’ law to humanitarian ‘warfare’ law, legal academic and author, Saskia Stucki (2023), draws parallels between animal protection laws and international humanitarian laws. She argues that for all the clear differences between the two legal frameworks, comparison reveals structural and functional similarities. Both regimes serve to regulate and humanise the exercise of violence; both regimes seek to organise the widespread, collective use of force, rather than to abolish it; both strive for a paradoxical humanisation of inhumanity; and the goal of both is to prevent ‘unnecessary suffering’, implying the existence of ‘necessary suffering’. This might include injuries and death caused by cluster munitions in war, or the distress of suffocation and electric shock before slaughter.

The linking of sanctioned war violence with the treatment of animals in factory farms is compelling. Both do seem to be a perversion of sorts. However, as mentioned in Chapter 6, when cruelty towards humans was compared to that towards animals in the focus group sessions, anger and shock was expressed by some members of each focus group. The view was expressed that the two should not be compared. This may be seen as part of meat-eating fragility (hypothesis one, above) and it could also be seen as evidence of the dominant ideology of anthropocentrism (hypothesis two, below).

Tribalism: The philosopher Francios Jaquet (2022) argues that speciesism, the collective belief that humans are always more important than animals, is largely shaped by tribalism, our innate tendency to prefer members of our own group over outsiders. He states:

‘Human beings are tribalistic. We have a robust tendency to divide our social environment into various, more or less salient ingroups and outgroups..... As it happens, a very salient ingroup is the human species, which leads us to treat our conspecifics better, to empathize with them more, and to grant them a higher moral status than nonhuman animals. In sum, speciesism is largely a manifestation of our tribalism.’ (p. 9-10)

This ‘othering’, the notion that ‘we’ are humans, and ‘they’ are animals, links with the story of separation written about by Eisenstein (2018) and others described in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Environmentalists argue that this othering allows us to take a consumptive approach

to other species. In David Suzuki's words, this approach enables us to 'act on nature, abstract from it, use it, take it apart, we can wreck it, because it is *another* (original italics), it is alien' (Suzuki, 1997, p 191).

A sense of entitlement, if not for meat itself, for the freedom to eat it: The attitude that the world is ours to consume is explored by award winning writer and poet John Berger, best known for his book and BBC series *Ways of Seeing*, in an essay 'The Eaters and the Eaten' (Berger, 1976). In this essay Berger distinguishes between peasant and bourgeois ways of eating. For the peasant, all food represents work accomplished and provides an opportunity for rest. The point of eating is the act of eating itself. What and how the peasant eats are continuous with the rest of life. Like the repetition of seasons, the rhythm of this lifestyle is cyclic. The diet is local and seasonal. Conversely, to the bourgeois, 'food is not directly exchangeable with his (sic) own work or activities'; it is a 'commodity he (sic) buys' (p. 29) and has 'more of a social than temporal significance'. The bourgeois way of eating, centred as it is on 'fantasy, ritual, and spectacle.... gives rise to an appetite which is, in essence, insatiable' (p. 32).

The idea that wealth and materialism have created an insatiable appetite, which disconnects us from our food is one which echoes Sally Weintrobe's (2021) notion of neoliberal exceptionalism and the culture of uncare it creates (see below, and Chapter 2).

Human narcissism: The belief that the world exists for our uses and pleasures has been written about and challenged by thought leaders for the past few decades. In *Psychological Roots of the Climate Crisis* (2021), Weintrobe explains how states of narcissistic entitlement and exceptionalism have led to a ruthless exploitation of the planet and its more vulnerable inhabitants. She calls this the culture of uncare, which she contrasts with other states of mind that express care. The culture and state of mind of uncare is promoted by the economic framework of neoliberalism. It is also supported by the predominant ideology of anthropocentrism: the tendency of human beings to regard themselves as separate from nature, and nature existing for human use and exploitation.

Love: As explained in Chapter 2, in a small but thought-provoking book called *Meat Love: An Ideology of the Flesh*, Amber Husain (2023) scrutinises why the romance of "ethical" meat has gathered such cultural momentum. In this interrogation of the current populism of free-range meat, Husain describes an 'embrace of exploitation in a spirit of virtuous indulgence'

(p. 13) and argues that while industrial meat farming is 'horrific' in comparison to sustainable or "ethical" farming, both are ' beholden to the profit motive, both must culminate in killing for produce' (p. 11). Examining social influences such as art, film and social media, Husain argues that Western capitalistic culture institutionalises our love of and desire for meat. Her examination of influences such as the film *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* point to a 'powerful aesthetic campaign of carnivorous interests' (p. 14) in modern society. She argues: 'Love has always been capable of meaning many things, among them a propensity to kill', and raises the question 'If love is somehow newly compatible with meat, what kind of lovers have we become?' (p. 15).

Co-dependency: The argument that farmed animals would not live if we did not breed and farm them is a line of reasoning I have sometimes heard from meat-eaters. It seems a ridiculous argument: animals only live to be killed for food, we want them to live, so we eat them. It's a warped argument of co-dependency; we eat meat because we have established a systemic cycle of abuse. But perhaps we have created such powerful myths about happy farm animals that there is a collective dependency on this fantasy. Husain (2023) also deliberates over both the dependency on humans that we have created in farmed animals and our dependency on that dependency. She wryly comments:

'If our own dependency on animal life forms the anxious undercurrent of our insistence that they depend on us, it makes sense that we would swallow it all down. We swallow to insist that we will not be swallowed- neither by helplessness nor guilt' (p. 59).

As I look over all the reasons we might eat meat: health, convenience, custom, politeness, systemic invisibility, dominance, co-dependency they all seem to be rationalisations for an ultimately indefensible behaviour. We are creatures of habit, and we build defences to defend these habits. Obviously, the consumption of meat plays a significant role in the food and nutritional needs of modern society. However, meat is also linked to cultural traditions and norms, collective and individual identities, and to economic and political frameworks (Nungesser & Martin, 2021). Eating meat is not just about nourishing the body. It is also about identity, social connection, economic power, and an acceptance of a paradigm where certain animals are seen as products to be sold and purchased. But the massive scale of global production and consumption of meat is also connected to numerous ecological

problems and dangers to public health (Evans, 2019; Melina, Craig & Levin, 2016, Monbiot, 2020; Salter, 2018; Walsh, 2023). Continuing to eat meat at the rate that it is currently eaten seems, not just irrational, but suicidal.

Considering why we continue to eat meat on such a scale as to endanger ourselves and the planet, while not just sacrificing but causing immense suffering to tens of billions of sentient beings every year, has led me to the following hypothesis.

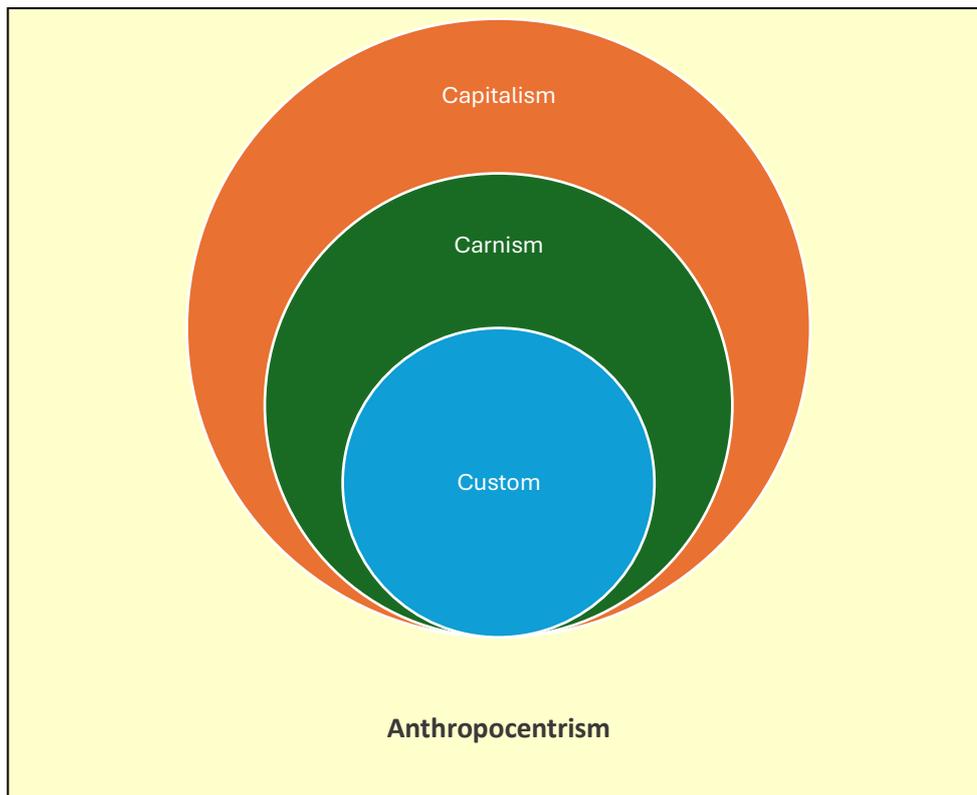
8.6 Hypothesis 2: why we continue to eat meat in Western, developed countries

My second working hypothesis is as follows:

Most humans eat meat because they are immersed in three entwined systemic influences which all encourage and promote the eating of animals, and which reinforce each other to create an almost impenetrable barrier to change. These systemic influences are custom, carnism and capitalism. Underpinning and surrounding all three is the philosophical belief of anthropocentrism.

I have displayed these systemic influences below as concentric circles to show how each one reinforces and embeds (or is embedded by) the others. All rely on the denial of the reality of the cruelty, environmental damage and health risks involved in raising and eating animals. Each systemic influence has its own defences, which intersect with the defences of the other two. All are sustained by the anthropocentric belief that human beings are separate to nature and that other species exist for human use and exploitation.

Diagram 3: Entwined Systemic Influences on Meat Eating



8.6.1 Inner Circle: Custom

The inner-most circle of influence is **custom**. By this I mean an individual's customs or habit and patterns of behaviour, acquired throughout their life, particularly during childhood, through family, peer, social and situational influences. This inner circle is linked with the 'person' circle within the Transforming Experience Framework, described as a key methodology of this thesis in Chapter 4. Long (2016) describes the experience of being a person as including 'developing and transforming an identity through the different ages and contexts of life' (p. 6). She explains that it involves the construction of a personality, the adoption of values and purposes and the creation of personal strategies for managing emotional and relational life. These occur through family and environmental influences. In my family, for instance, I became *accustomed* to Sunday night roast lamb for dinner. A ham sandwich was *customary* in my school lunchbox. I've realised that the reason I ate meat for the first fifty years of my life (bar a period of about 6 months at university after I first read Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*), was simply because *I always had*. I ask a friend on a walk

why she eats meat, and her answer is much the same: 'It's always just been there.' We are creatures of habit.

Defence mechanisms particularly linked with individual customs include avoidance, apathy, de-individualising of certain animals, rationalisation and dissociation. I have often found myself *avoiding* conversations about meat throughout this thesis because it is simply too uncomfortable, for me and the person I am conversing with. My *apathy* encourages me to talk about the weather instead. Or my dog. She (my new dog) has a name, Zara, and I talk of her as a family member. I individualise her, whereas, while growing up on our sheep farm, I could easily *de-individualise* the sheep who went off in the trucks from our family farm. I could *rationalise* their slaughter- the farm had to make money, and we needed food for the dinner table. And I could *dissociate* easily because the lamb roast we ate each Sunday night was covered in gravy, mint sauce and surrounded by vegetables. It didn't look like a sheep.

Such individual defence mechanisms may also be supported by the culture of human exceptionalism and ideology of individualism described by Weintrobe (2021). Such a focus on what I want and think I need allows me to dismiss other concerns, particularly the concerns of an 'outer' group such as farm animals. It allows me to unconsciously support the beliefs of carnism, described in the next section.

8.6.2 Middle Circle: Carnism

The middle circle of systemic influence is **carnism**. Explained in Chapter 2, carnism is the invisible belief system, or ideology, that conditions people to eat certain animals (and not others). Whereas the inner circle represents individual customs, this middle circle represents societal pressures. According to Joy (2010), who coined the phrase 'carnism', this invisible and largely unconscious system posits that eating meat is 'normal', 'natural' and 'necessary'. It is the dominant paradigm that enables us to love some animals and not others, to eat some animals and not others, to treat some animals well but not others. Joy argues that the defence mechanisms of the system all operate to create passive consumers of meat. These defence mechanisms include objectification (we perceive certain animals as objects rather than subjects with their own sentience), de-individualisation (dogs are seen as having personalities, pigs are not), and dichotomisation (we split animals into categories of edible and not-edible). Consider the public outcry at Donald Trump's recent exclamation in a presidential debate that migrants in America are eating dogs and cats. The outcry was about

the *racism* that this comment illustrated, not the *carnism* inherent in both his comment, and in the public response. In some cultures, eating dogs is perfectly acceptable, and even considered to be a staple food.³⁸

Joy argues that carnism, as an invisible ideology, provides defences to allow us to deny the reality of a system of animal suffering. Denial is a key theme in her theory of carnism, as it is in the realm of systems psychodynamics. If, for instance, we compare Joy's theory of carnism to Ernest Becker's theory of denial of death we can see many psychological parallels, particularly in how both authors explore human defences against uncomfortable truths. It is worth further exploring these parallels.

Both theories focus on psychological defence mechanisms that humans employ to avoid confronting disturbing realities. Joy argues that carnism relies heavily on denial as its primary defence mechanism. People avoid acknowledging the suffering of animals they consume through objectification, deindividualization, and dichotomization. Similarly, Becker's 'denial of death' theory posits that humans use various psychological defences to deny the reality of their own mortality. Both death denial and carnism involve avoiding deeper existential questions, about the meaning of life and death in Becker's theory, and about the ethical implications of our food choices in carnism.

Both theories highlight how dominant ideologies can remain invisible. Joy emphasises that carnism is an invisible belief system that conditions people to eat certain animals. Its invisibility allows it to persist unquestioned. Becker argues that cultural worldviews serve as an unconscious defence against death anxiety. These cultural worldviews generally operate below the level of conscious awareness.

Both theories deal with how humans manage contradictory beliefs or behaviours. Joy describes carnistic justifications as the three 'Ns', normal, natural and necessary, to rationalise eating animals even though it seems that most humans care about animals. Becker suggests that humans engage in 'heroic projects' to feel significant and transcend death, even if these projects sometimes contradict other values.

³⁸ World Population Review: [What Countries Eat Dogs in 2024? \(worldpopulationreview.com\)](https://worldpopulationreview.com) Accessed 21 Sep 2024

Both theories point to universal tendencies while acknowledging specific cultural differences. Joy notes that while perceiving certain animals as edible varies across cultures, the psychological process of categorising only certain animals as food is consistent. Becker argues that while specific cultural worldviews differ, all cultures provide ways for individuals to feel heroic and achieve symbolic immortality.

Finally, both theories offer similar insights on how societal change might occur. Joy suggests that naming and understanding carnism is crucial for individuals to make more conscious food choices. Becker asserts that a more open acknowledgement of death might lead to more authentic and compassionate ways of living.

These theories both offer insights to help us understand psychological defence mechanisms and encourage us to question our beliefs and behaviours. One might even ponder whether the denial of death, and the associated need to feel heroic and achieve symbolic mortality, might *play a role* in the denial of animal cruelty? Do humans unconsciously view the farming and slaughter of animals as heroic, and a way to be symbolically immortal? Perhaps carnism, the invisible ideology that encourages us to eat some animals and not others, is part of the denial of death.

With respect to the question of why we eat so much meat in Western society, Joy's theory provides the ideological framework. Carnism is an invisible, sociological ideology that supports the habitual customs of meat-eating. Together, custom and carnism create a strong barrier to changing meat habits. If we look even further than these first two circles, individual and social customs and the ideology of carnism, we can see that it is not just social and cultural influences that encourage and promote the eating of animals, it is also the pervasive system of capitalism, the outer circle of systemic influences, described in the next section.

8.6.3 Outer Circle: Capitalism

The party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command.

George Orwell, 1984 (p. 84)

In the hypothesis of three entwined systemic influences, the outer circle is **capitalism**. In an economic system which asserts that 'self-interested behaviour can produce benefits for

society as a whole' (Walsh, 2023, p. xvi), killing animals to produce meat is profitable. The exploitation and oppression of animals occurs so that the meat industry can make money. The profit motive encourages animals and meat to be viewed as commodities to be bought and sold in the market. George Orwell's comment on propaganda and thought control in his novel *1984* could well be applied to the insidious influence of capitalism on how animals are treated within industrialised farming. The evidence of our eyes and ears is there in every supermarket we might care to walk through, just glance at the meat section full of packaged meat and we can see how commodified our farm animals are. And yet, the most essential command of capitalism seems to be that we do not see or hear the truth about these packaged goods.

The rise in meat consumption has been closely tied to the development of industrial capitalism. Over the last one hundred years, industrialisation has shifted small farming to large scale industrial operations with hundreds of thousands of animals, selectively bred for 'efficient' body growth (DeMello, 2012; Evans, 2019; Walsh, 2023; Weis & Ellis, 2022). Livestock breeding and meat production has been transformed. Massive factory farms, huge slaughterhouse complexes, and scientific and technical developments have made it possible to increase the rate and density of livestock production (FAO, 2021) based on economic principles such as 'economies of scale' (Nungesser & Martin, 2021). It has also been made possible by hiding the killing and processing of animals from the public. Timothy Pachirat (2011) argues that because industrialised slaughterhouses are usually situated in industrial areas and do not differ significantly from other industrial buildings, they are practically hidden in plain sight. Add to this the 'happy cow/happy chicken' advertising of the livestock and meat industries and we have an all-powerful system which very successfully promotes, markets and publicises the selling of animal flesh to consumers.

As societies industrialise and become more capitalist, meat consumption increases. In other words, as a country gets wealthier, meat consumption in that country tends to rise.

According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO, 2022), the global number of livestock kept and slaughtered each year increased from 8.4 billion in 1961 to 92.2 billion in 2022.³⁹ This is a phenomenal increase of 997%. At the same time, our world population

³⁹ FOA: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2023) *Global Meat Production. 1961 to 2022*. URL: [Meat and Dairy Production - Our World in Data](#)

increased from 3.1 billion to 8 billion, an increase of 158%. These almost unfathomable numbers are undoubtedly linked to capitalism, since the trend seems to be that in Western industrialised countries the numbers of meat production and consumption have plateaued, while in developing countries like China and India the numbers are drastically lower but rising quickly due to economic growth as well as cultural and social transformations (Nungesser & Martin, 2021). Fast food and convenience stores selling meat have become prevalent around the world. In many societies, meat consumption is associated with economic progress and prosperity. Eating meat regularly is seen as a sign of having 'made it' economically (Fiddes, 1991).

Awareness of the profit motive and the power of corporate capitalism seemed minimal in my research focus groups. Supermarkets and/or shopping were depicted in five of the drawings, and dollar signs included in just two drawings. There was the occasional comment on the profit motive in the group sessions: 'Australian meat is highly prized. It's a huge export industry' (P8), but a deep exploration of the impact of capitalism on meat eating did not occur in either group.

My own neglect of this vital aspect of the meat question became apparent when an interesting and rather bizarre IT anomaly occurred within NIODA in the first year of my thesis. For some strange reason, my name started appearing in email messages as "Capcash". I have no idea why; I have never used that expression as a password. It conjured up images of a superhero (Captain Cash) who was immersed in the money system and was a constant subtle reminder to me of the economic drivers influencing the treatment of farmed animals and the consumption of meat.

Perhaps it was a reminder to focus on the *system*, rather than the individual. Many climate change scholars (Klein, 2014; Mann, 2021; Walsh, 2023) are now highlighting that on the climate change issue, the fossil fuel industry has not only allowed, but encouraged, (and still allows and encourages) personal guilt and individual sacrifice to be emphasised. Many of us have felt (and still feel) guilty about not recycling properly, using our car when we could ride a bike, and using the heater instead of putting on another jumper. This focus on individual behaviour essentially takes the blame away from the industry itself and serves as a decoy from making the major change of shifting to a low or zero-emissions economy. One might say the same about the meat industry. The story the meat industry encourages is that

individual consumers like and want meat, and this drives the industry. But perhaps it is the other way around. Demand doesn't drive supply, rather, supply drives demand. The industry drives what individual consumers like and want. The *system* perpetuates itself (Long, 2008).

Environmental professors Tony Weis and Rebecca Ellis (2022) explain the term '*meatification*' as a phrase which encapsulates the surging per capita consumption of animal products on a global scale. They argue that 'de-meatification' is essential to counter the multitudinous issues associated with the extraordinary rising scale of livestock production: climate change, biodiversity loss, amplified risks of zoonotic disease, mounting antibiotic resistance, poor health and safety conditions for workers in industrial animal complexes, and world full of animal suffering. Weis, Ellis and others (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011; Hannon, 2020; Stache, 2020) argue that a 'meat hegemony' now prevails, arguing that ideologies such as 'carnism' need to be seen as embedded within capitalism.

French economist, Thomas Piketty (2020), has asserted that 'every human society must justify its inequalities: unless reasons for them are found, the whole political and social edifice stands in danger of collapse' (p. 1). Many justifications for treating animals as commodities are found within the framework of capitalism. Animals and animal products have long been viewed as economic resources to be bought, sold and traded. In most legal systems, animals are regarded as property which can be purchased and sold. The use of animals as food has been justified as essential for human wellbeing and progress.

Defence mechanisms particular to capitalism support these justifications. These include faith in the profit motive, confidence that private ownership and control of property ultimately serve the needs of society, reliance upon 'growth', and the belief that demand and supply dynamics will serve the best interests of all. Indeed, we could consider the perverse state of mind described by Long (2008), which includes turning a blind eye, the assertion of individual pleasure at the expense of the general good, and the engaging of accomplices, as ways in which capitalism denies reality and perpetuates its own cycle.

Long (2008) says it is important to distinguish denial from repression. If we repress something, it is there but we unconsciously repress it. Until exposed, we do not know that thought or emotion was there. In the case of systemic denial, both states are there: we both know and don't know at the same time. It is both conscious and unconscious, one might say it is a state of the unconscious dominating the conscious. Long describes this as a perverse

state of mind: it 'acknowledges reality, but at the same time, denies it' (p. 15). She also comments that the perverse state of mind 'may flourish where instrumental relations have dominance in society', a relationship in which those in power ignore 'the rights of others to have an independent existence' (p. 15). Certainly, our treatment of animals in industrial complexes is characteristic of such an instrumental relationship. Farmed animals, particularly those in industrial complexes, have no independent existence outside of their role as commodities for profit making purposes.

Long's examination of perversity is as a cultural and organisational phenomenon. She proposes that perversity in organisations and in culture should not be viewed as an illness to be healed, but as corruption involving issues of power and abusive social relations. If we examine her five key aspects of perverse dynamics we can see clear parallels between her exploration of corporate sins within the finance industry, and animal exploitation within the animal agriculture industry. I have presented these parallels below, in Table 6.

Table 6: Parallels between perverse organisations and animal exploitation

Perversity within the corporate world	Animal exploitation within the animal agriculture industry
1. The narcissistic position where individual pleasure comes at the expense of the more general good.	1. The anthropocentric view that human beings are the central and most important entity on the planet. All other beings hold value only in their ability to serve humans, or in their instrumental value.
2. The use of denial as a major defence, where the perverse state of mind both acknowledges the reality concerned, but also denies it (involving ‘turning a blind eye’ to wrongdoings and corruption).	2. The use of denial as a major defence, where the mind both acknowledges the reality of the exploitation of animals, and also denies it (hence ‘turning a blind eye’ to issues of cruelty and suffering).
3. The engagement of accomplices in the perversion.	3. The engagement of the advertising industry (meat is healthy), close political and industry relationships (Sievert et al., 2022), and other meat supply chains in the turning of a blind eye to animal suffering.
4. The use of instrumental power and ideology.	4. The use of instrumental power (over animals as products) and anthropocentric ideology.
5. The pervasive cycle of unconscious perversion and its links to corruption. Perversion begets perversion. Abusive cycles are hard to break.	5. The pervasive cycle of animal exploitation. Exploitation makes money. Money drives more exploitation. The cycle is almost impossible to break.

(Adapted from Long, 2008, p. 34)

Long warns us of the power of perverse dynamics in contemporary organisational life. It is a group and organisation dynamic that is more deeply embedded in organisations, and our psyche, than conscious corruption. The corporate narrative, as well as key role-holders’ narcissism and greed, sustain the lies and deceit of corrupt and even criminal behaviour.

One might say such pervasive dynamics create a hegemony within, not just an organisation, but whole industry. As explained in Chapter 3, the concept of hegemony in capitalism refers to the dominance of certain ideas, values and practices that serve to maintain the power of the dominant ruling class and legitimise the existing social order. Applying the lens of hegemony to the animal agriculture industry can also help explain how industrial animal farming has become normalised and accepted despite its many negative impacts. Hegemony involves cultural dominance, economic power (money) and ideological control. By controlling property and information, dominant institutions engineer public opinion and even a perception of 'reality'.

It could be said that the animal agriculture industry has established a cultural 'reality' of meat-eating by shaping beliefs and norms around meat consumption. Meat is promoted as being healthy, natural and normal food. Economic power is wielded by large agrobusiness corporations with significant economic and political influence, allowing them to shape policies and regulations in their favour. The banning of battery cages for hens in Australia is an example to point. Battery cages involve chickens, normally sociable birds who love foraging, exploring and dust bathing, being bred and kept in stacked wire cages, often crammed in with up to five other hens. Caged hens never experience sunlight and cannot flap or stretch their wings. Animal welfare organisations and a public outcry has pressured the Australian government to put an end to the battery cage. But the phase out period will last 10 to 15 years; the official end date is 2036 for battery hen farming.⁴⁰ Why so long? Major retailers Coles and Woolworths have committed to removing cage eggs from their shelves completely by 2025. So, the delay is not for public consumers. One of my interviewed participants speculated that the delay is for 'other' consumers of cheap eggs; he reminded me of the endless list of products in supermarkets which contain egg: pies, custards, muffins, batter-fried foods, and so on. The broad supply chains of these products want cheap eggs for as long as possible, and their demand has real political power. Marketing, lobbying and control of information maintains the status quo, and millions of birds continue to suffer because of this power.

⁴⁰ Animals Australia website: <https://animalsaustralia.org/our-work/factory-farming/battery-cages-phase-out/> (Accessed 20 Sep 2024).

Ideological control of all aspects of animal agriculture is maintained through media and advertising, we see positive images of happy, healthy animals on the packaging of countless animal products. Other media representations rarely challenge the ethics of animal agriculture, just think of Master Chef and various other popular cooking shows. Meat and Livestock campaigning hires influential public figures to promote their products, consider the beef advertisement in 2019 where Dame Edna Everidge (Barry Humphries) cheekily endorses beef as the best natural source of iron for 'busy Australian women'.⁴¹

Our educational system adds to the hegemony, school curricula and nutrition guidelines generally promote animal products as essential. In Australia, for instance, Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) provides educational resources for schools about meat production. Their Australian Good Meat Education Program offers free, curriculum aligned materials for primary and secondary school students.⁴² Meat industry funded scientific research also shapes public opinion on nutrition and has been viewed by some climate scientists as propaganda (Carrington, 2023).

The concept of capitalist hegemony shows how economic, political and cultural forces intercept to maintain the eating of meat in Western societies. Although the industry practices are ethically questionable and environmentally unsustainable, dominant cultural norms, economic practices and political policies all work to reinforce the dominant carnist view that eating meat is natural, necessary and normal.

8.6.4 Anthropocentrism

Underpinning and surrounding the three concentric circles in this theory of almost impenetrable denial is the anthropocentric belief that human beings are the most important entity in the universe (Burdon, 2011). I have presented this belief as a square background to the three circles of systemic influences, because I see it as such a predominant paradigm, it is almost like the air we breathe. This world view regards humans as separate from and superior to nature and nature as existing for human use. Anthropocentrism assigns a greater amount of value to human beings than nonhuman entities. Many environmentalists and

⁴¹ Advertisement available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9OqMVA89Xk> (Accessed 12 December 2023).

⁴² MLA website: <https://www.mla.com.au/news-and-events/beef-australia-2024/good-meat-schools-program/> (Accessed 26 Sep 2024).

climate change scientists have attributed this belief to the current environmental crisis (Berry, 1999; Bosselmann, 1995; White, 1967;). Indeed, Thomas Berry, theologian and cultural historian, whose observation that law is central to the present environmental crisis led to a movement called Earth Jurisprudence, writes ‘The deepest cause of the present devastation is found in a mode of consciousness that has established a radical discontinuity between the human and other modes of being’ (Berry, 1999, p. 4).

The cultural roots of anthropocentrism have been traced back to Greek Stoic philosophy and the writings of Plato and Aristotle (Bosselmann, 1995). Aristotle, for instance, argued that all of nature was organised in a hierarchy with the physical environment and non-human animals representing instruments for human use and happiness (Singer, 1975). This argument was influential with Roman Stoic jurists who constructed the first real definition of property under the concept of human dominion (Burdon, 2011). The Roman concept of dominion was strengthened by Christian belief that God made man in his own image and gave man dominion over every living thing (Bosselmann, 1995; Singer, 1975).

The concept of anthropocentrism is clearly linked to the naming of the current geological age as the Anthropocene, the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment. Interestingly, the naming of this era as the “Anthropocene” has been criticised by some scientists who argue that this title paints humanity as an undifferentiated whole, and does not consider strategic relations, power, inequality and commodification. They feel it more apt to call our era “Capitalocene”, drawing attention to the influence of capitalism and the motive of private wealth accumulation (Malm, 2016; Moore, 2017). It is an interesting argument, emphasising that it is not so much the relations *between humans and nature* that has caused the current ecological crisis, as the relations *between humans*. In particular, it is the ruling socioeconomic class (fossil fuel companies and their beneficiaries) and the relations it establishes to continually accumulate capital that has caused climate change.

The argument could equally be applied to animal exploitation. It is the ruling socioeconomic class (the industrial animal farming industry and their beneficiaries) and the relations it establishes to profit from animal products that has caused so much suffering to animals, risks to human health, and global ecological damage. Nonetheless, the anthropocentric view, that humans are separate from and superior to other species, underpins the capitalist

system, where animal exploitation is simply a part of the chain of production and consumption. Hence, it is the line beneath all the circles, and the square that boxes them all in, in this theory of almost impenetrable denial. Humans exploit and eat animals in the Western world not just because they are human, but because of the predominant anthropocentric view of the world, the system of capitalism, the ideology of carnism, and because of longstanding individual customs.

Combined with carnism, the meat industry hegemony embedded within our system of capitalism reinforces the customs we each practice individually and in our family and social groups. When one considers the power and the interconnectedness of these three systems, all underpinned by a world view that sees humans as superior to all other species, there is no wonder vegetarians generally make up less than ten percent, and vegans about two percent, of the population in developed countries.⁴³ The entrenched systemic influences create an almost impenetrable barrier to change on the issue of meat eating. Such an *almost* impenetrable barrier, however, obviously has some fissures. In the next section, I explore these cracks in the dominant paradigm of meat-eating.

8.7 Hypothesis 3: Cracks in the armour

My third hypothesis integrates the first two hypotheses and attempts to explain the complex social dynamics involved in this multi-faceted issue:

The almost impenetrable barrier to change in meat consumption in Western developed countries has cracks. Outliers and influencers such as those interviewed for this research, growing market interest in plant-based diets, and the dynamic of meat-eating fragility, are indications of these cracks. The phenomenon of meat-eating fragility is both a defence against change, in that it serves to avoid change; and a sign of change, in that the associated guilt suggests awareness of, and aversion to, the suffering involved in the production of meat.

As explained in Chapter 7, the interview data from this research strongly indicated that people involved in working with animals, with the intent of improving the way they are treated by humans, appeared to have strong attributes of resilience and moral courage. They

⁴³ World Population Review: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/veganism-by-country>. (Accessed 22 Sep 2024).

are outliers who are playing the long game. Their long-term approach, their holistic world view, and their sensitivity to suffering indicated strong moral resolution. If we follow the four components of moral action, outlined by philosophers Narvaez and Rest (1995), we might conclude that these outliers display:

1. Moral sensitivity: the participants were acutely aware of human actions leading to animal suffering.
2. Moral judgement: The individuals weighed the choices involved and determined what was the most appropriate course of action based on this judgement.
3. Moral motivation: They gave full priority to the moral value of kindness to animals.
4. Implementation: They had the strength and skills to carry out their chosen action.

In Chapter 5, section 5.4, finding 8, I presented an analysis of my own drawings throughout the PhD journey as a representation of a spiritual journey, a finding of my place in the world. I likened this to the idea of connectedness to source in the Transforming Experience Framework (Long, 2016). Bazalgette and Reeds' (2016) description of the inward discipline needed to first identify one's 'own desire', to then understand 'the system within which he or she will take a role' and finally to understand the system's purpose and what one's 'desire can contribute to the system' (p. 124) seems to echo the four components of moral courage discussed by Narvaez and Rest (1995). The resilient sense of purpose and creative energy displayed by the animal activists and vegans I interviewed reminded me of the poet and songwriter Leonard Cohen's much quoted line, '*There's a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in*'.⁴⁴

Can the moral actions of a few indicate broader societal inclination to change? One only needs to look at anti-corruption campaigns that started with whistleblowers, the environment movement, or the gay rights movement, to see evidence that the moral actions of small groups can create snowball effects which lead to significant societal change. Clearly, power, visibility, and societal trends all either work for or against such influence. Nonetheless, the moral actions of a few can indeed be both a sign and a catalyst of change. Perhaps they could be viewed as seeds of change. Or cracks in the wall.

⁴⁴ Leonard Cohen, Selected Poems, 1956-1968.

Their optimism also indicated cracks in the barriers to change. Each of the interview participants indicated that they see change happening, in the way their views and eating practices are becoming more 'acceptable' by the public, and by the rising market demand for cruelty free products. Certainly, overall global meat consumption is increasing, but in Western, developed countries there are increasing concerns about the sustainability and environmental impacts of meat production. There is growing interest in plant-based diets, vegetarianism and veganism, especially among younger generations (Nungesser and Winter, 2021). Plant based meat substitutes and lab-grown meat are increasing as a market force (Walter & Krupke, 2023). Gradual meat reduction (a flexitarian approach) seems to appeal to many consumers as a comfortable, workable way of dealing with the environmental, health and ethical questions about meat-eating (Kanerva, 2019). While meat-eating remains culturally entrenched for much of the developed world, there are clearly shifting attitudes in some segments, as evidenced in the data from the forum groups, the drawings, the interviews, and the autoethnographic writing in this research.

Meat-eating fragility, like white fragility, could be seen as a defence against change. It serves to maintain the status quo of prolific meat-eating in Western, developed countries. However, if, as I argue, meat-eating fragility is a part of the social politics of meat, one might conclude that there is a sense in the associative unconscious (Long & Harney, 2013) that something is wrong with our current meat-eating practices. If people are defensive (consciously and / or unconsciously) about meat eating, as hypothesised in section 8.4 above, one might conclude that there is an associative unconscious sense of culpability. Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous quote about complicity may be entering our psyche:

*'You have just dined, and however scrupulously the slaughterhouse is concealed in the graceful distance of miles, there is complicity.'*⁴⁵

If there is such an associative unconscious sense of collusion to animal suffering, as well as being a defence *against* change, meat-eating fragility may also be a sign *of* change in attitudes to eating meat in Western countries.

⁴⁵ Available at: <https://quotefancy.com/quote/759801/Ralph-Waldo-Emerson-You-have-just-dined-and-however-scrupulously-the-slaughterhouse-is> (Accessed: 18 January, 2020)

In section 8.4 of this chapter I argued that all eight findings from the data analysis in Chapter 6 connected with the idea of meat-eating fragility. The last of these eight findings was that the social politics of meat appear to be changing. My research focus has been on the social dynamics surrounding how Western society views animals, in particular, animals which end up on our dinner plates. As I suggested in Chapter 6, these social dynamics appear to be changing. I see this as part of the phenomenon of meat-eating fragility. Eating meat (especially if there are choices and conscious or unconscious questions around the choice to eat meat) may trigger a sense that there is a shift in public consciousness about the ethics of eating animals. Sensing that one is at the unethical end of a moral dispute is not a comfortable place to be. Hence, fragility may well be a sign of broad social change, in both public awareness and attitude.

Admittedly, the signs of change identified in this research - the influence of outliers who are working with and for animals, the dynamic of meat-eating fragility, and growing market interest in plant-based diets – are small indications of change in a massive and powerful global market which promotes and upholds the production and consumption of meat. Those signs are only small cracks in the almost impenetrable barriers to change. But they are cracks. They do let in rays of light, however faint those rays may be.

Although initially defensive, awareness of the discomfort of meat-eating fragility may lead to more meaningful discussions about the treatment of animals. It might serve as a starting point for reflection and an examination of the way we treat farmed animals. Activating consciousness about our individual and shared beliefs and paradigms, and our social defences regarding those beliefs and paradigms, is a powerful way to shift norms and change behaviour. Identifying and recognising this social defence could lead to increased awareness of the highly complex systemic influences which lead us to eat more and more meat in Western developed countries, and perhaps even lead us to significantly reduce our meat consumption.

8.8 Areas and ideas for future research

Within the field of systems psychodynamics, I believe there is huge scope for future work on human-animal relations. Future research might explore the conscious and unconscious connections between humans and animals, regarding pets, farmed animals, or animals in the wild.

The animal rights movement, and how it intersects with other social justice causes might be a focus of study. Qualitative research might involve the impact of witnessing violence to animals on activists, or the social defences used by both slaughterhouse workers and farmers as they experience, witness or play a part in animal suffering. Further research might well involve a deep exploration into gender differences in animal activism.

Future exploration might be more centred around ethics, for instance, the role ethical concerns play in the choice to eat or not to eat meat. Likewise, the role ethical concern about animals, as opposed to concern about the environment or human health, plays in decisions about how to raise and farm animals could also be examined.

Another focus of related research may be within the realm of diet. For example, a deep examination into 'flexitarianism' and attitudes to this diet would be useful and interesting. Further study could be done into the meat industry and the defences it employs both consciously and unconsciously to counter growing criticism of meat as a primary staple food. Behaviour change may be the focus in an exploration on the barriers people may face when attempting to reduce their meat consumption, potential strategies to overcome such barriers, or how to encourage or motivate behaviour change in terms of eating less meat.

Building specifically on this doctoral research, the concept of "meat-eating fragility" might offer insights and 'food for thought' for educators, animal rights advocates, or policymakers working in areas of food ethics, sustainability, or public discourse. For instance, animal rights advocates clearly need to work carefully with the defensiveness and collective denial inherent in meat eating fragility; but may also take hope from the early signs of change represented by this phenomenon. Likewise, the systemic model presented in Diagram 3 (p. 215) might inform the practices and policies of social change movements. Understanding the interlinking systems of custom, carnism and capitalism, all underpinned by the concept and dominant belief of anthropocentrism, may enhance awareness of the vast and complex influences on all of us, and perhaps even enable social change through deeper consciousness regarding our thinking and behaviour.

8.9 Impact of the work and broader social implications

As I write the final sections of this thesis, I realise I have had two predominant emotions throughout the research: anger and a heightened sense of caution. I can see now that I have

constantly been swinging from disliking people, to tiptoeing to keep them happy and comfortable. My anger is about the horrendous way humans treat animals, and the multitudinous ways we avoid thinking about and talking about this treatment. The tiptoeing is to preserve the relationships I have, and my sense of myself. I like people, I enjoy interacting with people (almost as much as I enjoy interacting with animals), and my work as a facilitator and coach depends on my faith in people and their capacity to engage, reflect and change. A state of anger with humanity doesn't sit well with me. Hence, my relief to come to this concluding chapter and realise through writing my conclusions and hypothesis that it is not so much *people* I dislike, as the anthropocentric system of capitalism which entrenches the idea of human dominion, and therefore allows and encourages animals to be viewed and treated as commodities.

It has often been observed that after a long journey we arrive back at the place we began, but with new insights.⁴⁶ The early part of a PhD involves establishing one's own philosophies, ethics and positions. Thinking about my ontological, epistemological and ethical positions as part of writing Chapter 3 helped me realise that not only did I have a social constructivist view of knowledge and learning, my position on the role of research aligns closely with that of the critical theorists. As outlined in that chapter, critical theory works across multiple disciplines, combining insights from fields such as sociology, philosophy, psychology and economics. Mostly, it involves analysis and critique of social structures and cultural practices to uncover hidden forms of domination and oppression. Its roots are in Marxism, the theory that economic production shapes institutions and social relations. Hence, concluding that the forces of hegemonic capitalism play a large part in the way we treat and view animals as commodities has taken me to a place of realising, at a deep level, my own doubts about an economic system based on private ownership, in which the physical environment and non-human animals merely represent instruments for human use and profit making. One might say I have embraced my Marxism.

This is not to say that I see or advocate an alternative economic model. That is way beyond the scope of both this thesis and my own thinking. But I do feel we are on the cusp of a

⁴⁶ This is largely attributed to TS Elliot's line from his poem "Little Gidding", part of the *Four Quartets* collection published in 1943: 'We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time.'

paradigm shift, and as various philosophers and scientists assert, a paradigm shift usually involves a paradigm crisis when the dominant paradigm becomes dysfunctional, impacts negatively or loses its meaning for society (Diamond, 2005; Kuhn, 1996; Kumar, 2012; Nyberg, Wright & Bowden, 2023). It seems clear that the horrendous treatment of tens of billions of animals every year is dysfunctional and impacts negatively on us all. And, if it ever had meaning, it is losing that meaning as awareness grows of the injustice and the negative impacts on not only animals, but on us, as their fellow species. Perhaps naively, I do feel hopeful that one day we will look back and see our current treatment of farm animals as a massive, past, wrongdoing.

Postscript

Because there is nothing that I detest more than the stench of lies.

Marlon Brando as Colonel Kurtz in the film *Apocalypse Now*, 1979.

Vignette 9: Words.

Words. I think about them all the time. Words direct how we think about things. Words enable us to deny things we can't face, or don't want others to know. Words can be intentional manipulation, or an unconscious sign of how we think and feel. Words can be so beautiful. And so terrible.

I pass a billboard today which calls us to 'Get some pork on your fork'. Nice rhyme, I think, but no thanks. A few months ago, I saw a traffic STOP sign, graffitied (I will come to the eco-terrorists soon) so it read 'STOP eating meat'. That one made me smile. Bias confirmation you might say.

I think about the tiny word, 'it', used invariably for farm animals ('It's a cow!') but not for our beloved pets. We are promptly corrected if we mistakenly call Charlie the border collie a 'she' rather than a 'he'. But a sheep in a paddock is an 'it'. What does it mean, to use 'it' rather than the personal pronoun? Distance, of course. Depersonalisation. The word 'it' strips away all identity, all sense of a sentient being. It's demeaning. Yes, I know, the animals probably don't know they are being demeaned (although there is some evidence now that many animal species do have a sense of justice⁴⁷). But I know. You know. Words direct our thinking, and our consciousness, or unconsciousness.

Speaking of demeaning, think of the insults of calling a human being by any number of animals names. 'Bitch', 'pig', 'snake', 'ape', 'turkey', 'donkey'. Who is this really demeaning to? The human or the animal? Both?

We hide behind our words. Our food made more palatable by not using the animal's name. The sandwich isn't 'pig', it is 'ham', and let's think of that crowning glory of the roast pork, 'crackle'. Of course we don't call it pig's skin. That would be insensitive. Unpalatable. Not

⁴⁷ See, for instance, the 2013 primate study by Sarah Brosnan, cited at [Justice- and fairness-related behaviors in nonhuman primates - PMC](#)

only is food made more palatable through ‘euphemisms’, the violence inflicted on ‘farmed’ animals is euphemised (I am suddenly struck by how similar to ‘euthanised’ that word is). ‘Mutilation’ is far too emotive, so instead we ‘debeak’, ‘tail dock’, ‘declaw’, ‘crutch’ and ‘de-spur’. All without anaesthetic.

Animals are ‘livestock’ (sounds like an oxymoron, when you think about it), which denies their individuality and presents them as a product or commodity. They are taken to a ‘processing plant’ (slaughterhouse). If something goes wrong, such as an outbreak of disease, requiring mass slaughter, the word is ‘depopulation’. This is how othering works. We view the animals we breed and kill as so different to us, and the animals we love, so as to make what we do to them more palatable. To avoid exposing the cognitive dissonance of the meat paradox.

And oh, how this suits the agriculture industry. What doesn’t suit them is the ‘theft’ of words such as ‘milk’ by the alternative milk industry. Or the use of the word ‘meat’ in ‘meat alternative’. Or the word ‘cheese’ in a vegan alternative. This ‘confuses’ consumers, argued a national party senator in a food packaging Senate Inquiry in 2022.⁴⁸

We wouldn’t want to confuse consumers. Unless, of course, it is to make our product more palatable, more desirable, less horror stricken. Which is why the industry speaks of the ‘*humane* killing’ of animals. Another oxymoron.

Finally, let us not forget what animal liberationists are called: ‘extremists’, ‘underground activists’ and ‘eco terrorists’, (Potter, 2011). What, exactly, is a ‘terrorist’? The UN definition reads: ‘criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act...’.⁴⁹

Causing death or serious bodily injury? To provoke a state of terror? Let’s consider another form of being ‘terrorised’: to be bred for a miserable life of imprisonment, mutilation, denial

⁴⁸ Available at: <https://susanmcdonald.com.au/vegan-food-packaging-focus-of-inquiry-recommendations/>. (Accessed 25 August 2024).

⁴⁹ UNODC website. Available at: <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-4/key-issues/defining-terrorism.html#:~:text=criminal%20acts%2C%20including%20against%20civilians,a%20government%20or%20an%20international.> (Accessed 20 July 2024).

of all basic instinctual urges, and a terrifying and inescapable death. Being gassed in large groups for cost efficiency, if you are a pig. Being hung upside down by your ankles on a compressor belt until you pass through a bath of electrified water intended to stun you, before a blade cuts your throat, if you are a chicken.

Perhaps the truth does provoke a state of terror in us. The truth of a mother pig living in a farrow crate, constantly being artificially impregnated, never seeing daylight or feeling real earth beneath her (it's) feet, unable to scratch herself let alone turn around, unable to nurture her babies, grown so big and without exercise that her legs can barely hold her up. A life worse than death I would say. And yet the word from the factory farm industry is 'biosecurity'.

Seventy-two billion per year (FAO, 2023). Those numbers are just words on a page, but the mind boggles. And that mind boggling number doesn't mean they all lose their own needs, their own pain, their own uniqueness. They don't become zombies because there are so many of them, or because of their appalling treatment. Ask anyone who has had a rescue dog if that dog, despite previous ill-treatment, still has its own emotions, its own distinct personality. Am I being a terrorist (or even an extremist) by writing about this? I don't like writing about it, I hate reading about it, I cry whenever I see footage of it. It is mentally exhausting and emotionally harrowing to think about. I am terrorised by this treatment of our fellow earth creatures. But.... WE NEED TO OWN THIS. They are my most important words.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Recruitment Material: Focus Groups.

In early 2023 the opportunity to participate in focus groups for the PhD was advertised. This was done initially through my own network of colleagues, associates and friends who had expressed some interest in the research. The first group was easily filled with 10 people. Sourcing enough participants for the second group was a little harder, hence the research Opportunity Notice put onto NIODA and GRA (Group Relations Australia) websites and newsletters.

A1.1 Email sent to interested parties in early 2023

Email title: *Focus group sessions for PhD research*

Dear.....,

In my conversations with you, you have expressed interest in my PhD research and in being a part of a group process which explores the social politics of meat. I am happy to say that I am progressing with this PhD, and am currently organising group sessions with the aim of exploring the nature of our relatedness with and about animals and the conscious and unconscious psychodynamics involved in these relations.

There will be 3 sessions for each group, spaced about 2 weeks apart. Sessions will be 2 and ½ hours each, and will be in-person sessions (most likely in the city, but venue yet to be decided).

Conscious dynamics will be explored through articulated discussion, unconscious dynamics through interpretations of and associations to drawing, and facilitator and observers' observation and reflection of self and others.

I am hoping you are still happy to be a part of one of the groups this year. The first group will be run on these dates:

- Session 1: Wed 3rd May: 6 - 8.30pm
- Session 2: Thurs 18th May: 6 - 8.30pm
- Session 3: Thurs 1st June: 6 - 8.30pm

You would need to be committed to all three dates.

Please let me know if you are still interested, and if these dates work for you. The attached voting process lets me know if you are interested in these May sessions, or alternatively the August sessions, or if you are not interested in the workshops at all.

Thank you.

Warm regards,

Margo

Margo Lockhart (PhD Candidate, NIODA)

Mobile: 0409 214 489

Email: margo@margolockhart.com.au

Website: www.margolockhart.com.au

A1.2 PhD Research Opportunity Notice: advertised through NIODA and GRA in June 2023

Notice title: *PhD Research Opportunity*

Margo Lockhart is a NIODA PhD candidate studying the “Changing Social Politics of Meat”. She is currently conducting interactive group sessions with the aim of exploring the nature of our relatedness with and about animals and the conscious and unconscious psychodynamics involved in these relations.

One group (the May group) has just completed the process. Another group will be beginning in late July. If you are interested in being part of this group, please contact Margo at margo@margolockhart.com.au

There are 3 sessions for the group, spaced about 2 weeks apart. Each session is 2 and ½ hours in length (6pm – 8.30pm) and held in-person at the NIODA office: Level 4, 601 Bourke Street in the city.

The dates for the three sessions are:

- Session 1: **Thursday 27th July**: 6pm - 8.30pm
- Session 2: **Thursday 10th August**: 6pm - 8.30pm
- Session 3: **Tuesday 22nd August**: 6pm - 8.30pm

Appendix 2: Recruitment of interviewees

Throughout 2023 I contacted people directly involved in the field of animal farming or animal welfare. This was done via email, sometimes after sourcing their details through other contacts or through their own websites.

A2: Email to potential interviewees:

Email title: *PhD Student Request*

Dear,

I am a PhD researcher at NIODA (National Institute of Organisation Dynamics, Australia), studying the nature of our relatedness with and about animals (particularly animals bred for food) and the conscious and unconscious psychodynamics involved in these relations.

I am seeking to do some qualitative socio-analytic interviews with key people involved in the issue, and I am hoping you might be willing to be one of them. The interview would be up to 90 minutes, and would preferably be face-to-face. I live in Melbourne, but will be in Tasmania in mid July and would love to visit your farm and talk with you then if possible.

The aim of a socio-analytic interview is to collect 'data' and also to be a potential space for the interviewee to explore their own thoughts and feelings about relatedness with and about animals. In conducting socio-analytic questioning, my aim is to understand the dynamics (conscious and unconscious) that support and obstruct the individual's organisational and social relations.

Would you be willing to have this conversation with me?

Yours sincerely,

Margo Lockhart (PhD Candidate, NIODA)

Mobile: 0409 214 489

Email: margo@margolockhart.com.au

Website: www.margolockhart.com.au

Appendix 3: Communication to focus group participants throughout group sessions

The following information was sent to participants throughout the six weeks of the three-session process for the focus groups.

A3.1: Email sent to participants before session 1: May and July 2023

Email Title: *PhD Focus Group sessions on 'The Social Politics of Meat'*

Hi all,

I am very much looking forward to our first group session for my PhD on the 'social politics of meat' next Thursday night. I have attached an Information and Consent Form; you will need to read and sign this before the group starts. I will bring spare copies on the night, but if you'd like to print this out, read and sign it and bring it on the night that would be helpful.

A reminder about logistics:

- Sessions are held at Level 4, 601 Bourke Street.
- Please arrive by 5.45pm so we can start promptly at 6pm.
- It is quite easy to get to the venue. Go to the building at 601 Bourke Street. You should be able to go straight up the lift, but if you have any problems please call me on 0409 214 489.
- We will finish by 8.30pm.
- Your facilitator is James Yorsten. I know many of you know James, but I will introduce him at the beginning, and then I will take an observer role for the rest of the sessions. Kate Dempsey, one of my research supervisors, will also be there as both an observer, and as co-facilitator if needed.
- For the purposes of data collecting, I will seek your permission to both record the session (sound only), and take photos of drawings. We will discuss both of these in the first session. Please let me know if you are not comfortable with either of these.
- Food and drink will be provided.
- Neat casual dress- sessions will be creative and conversational.

I look forward to seeing you next Thursday.

Warm regards,

Margo

A3.2: Information and Consent Form: Focus Groups

Participant Information and Consent Form

Margo Lockhart

Project Title:

PHD RESEARCH: THE SOCIAL POLITICS OF MEAT

Researcher:

Margo Lockhart

Phone: 0409 214 489

Email: margo.lockhart@nioda.org.au

Why the research project is being conducted:

Margo Lockhart is a PhD candidate at the National Institute of Organisation Dynamics Australia (NIODA), researching our relatedness with and about animals and the conscious and unconscious psychodynamics involved in these relations.

Further information about NIODA and the PhD program can be found at www.nioda.org.au.

PhD Supervisor:

Professor Susan Long, Director of Research and Scholarship, NIODA

Phone: 0448 007 453

Email: susan.long@nioda.org.au

Chief Executive Officer

Sally Mussared, CEO and Administration Lead

Phone: +61 414 529 867

Email: sally.mussared@nioda.org.au

Aims of the Project:

The aim of this PhD is to explore the complex dynamics surrounding behaviour and conversations about the treatment of animals and meat eating. The purpose of the focus group you are part of is to explore the nature of our relatedness with and about animals and the conscious and unconscious psychodynamics involved in these relations.

Specifically, the aims for the three group sessions are to:

- Explore and share our own attitudes to and thoughts and feelings towards animals-conscious and unconscious.
- Explore how we relate with and about animals here with each other, and in our social and work lives.

Research activities:

The research will involve:

- Three focus group meetings of 2 & 1/2 hours each,
- Between 8 and 16 people in the group,
- Creative role drawing within one session,
- Watching a TED talk within one session,
- Reflection and discussion in small groups and the whole group.

Anticipated Time Commitment:

It is anticipated that the focus group meetings will take place over the period March to August 2023. This will involve 3 sessions with an established group for the research. Each session will be 2 and ½ hours in length.

Possible Risks / Discomforts or Harm:

The research involves some risk to participants. You may experience some discomfort in exploring feelings and thoughts about animals and the ways humans interact with and about animals.

To make sure you are able to participate safely, an experienced and well qualified facilitator who has a reputation for handling difficult emotions in a group will be running the focus groups. This facilitator will explain all activities and their purpose before they begin. Participants will be able to choose their level of participation and withdraw at any time. At the start of each session, participants will be reminded of the importance of respecting others' contributions, feelings and rights to participate at their own level of comfort.

If at any stage you feel uncomfortable or unable to participate, please indicate this to the facilitator and you will be able to discontinue or take time out from the session.

Details on complaint procedures and available counselling services will be provided within each session.

Conditions of participation:

There are no disadvantages, penalties or adverse consequences for not participating, for withdrawing prematurely from any activity, for withdrawing from the project, or for changing a request you have already made for confidentiality/or not.

You have the right to withdraw from active participation in this project at any time and, further, to require that data arising from your participation are not used in the research project provided that this right is exercised within four weeks of completing your participation in the project. You are asked to complete the “Withdrawal of Consent Form” or to notify Margo by email or telephone that you wish to withdraw your consent for your data to be used in this research project.

If you have any questions regarding this Information and Consent Form or the project, please direct them to Margo Lockhart, or Susan Long (details above).

Method of Complaint or Query:

If you have any complaints or queries that the researcher has not been able to answer to your satisfaction, you may contact Dr Janelle Morgan, the Chairperson of the NIODA Human Research Ethics Committee at HREC@nioda.org.au

Use of data collected during the project:

All data will be regarded as confidential, and only discussed between Margo and her supervisor and PhD study group. Data will be used for the writing of Margo’s PhD. Names and/or identifying information will not be used in Margo’s thesis, or in any publication regarding the work.

If the group agrees, focus group sessions will be recorded (auditory only). As observer, Margo will also make notes each session. Written transcribes may include short quotes, where these do not reveal any participant’s identity. With permission, pictures drawn in the sessions will be photographed and may be used in the final thesis write-up, in de-identified form. Art works will be used as de-identified data.

Participants will be provided with a copy of the research document when completed upon request.

Participants may request a copy of any personal data collected in the course of the research. All research data will be retained for a period of five years as required under NIODA’s ethics guidelines and will then be deleted from all NIODA files.

Data from focus groups may be preserved for possible future work only by the researcher, Margo Lockhart. Other than this possibility, data will not be accessible for any other use than the current PhD or to any other person.

Consent:

I _____ have read and understood the information above, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the project, realising that I may physically withdraw from the study at any time and may request that no data arising from my participation are used, up to four weeks following the completion of my participation in the research. My response to any experiential tasks undertaken as a result of this research is original and am the sole author of my contributions to the project. I agree that research data provided by me or with my permission during the project may be included in a thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals on the condition that neither my name nor any other identifying information is used.

I agree to my de-identified responses (including drawings and artwork) being published by NIODA in any format. (Please tick)

Yes

No

Name of Participant (block letters):

Signature _____ Date _____

Name of Researcher (block letters):

Signature: _____ Date _____

Name of Supervisor (block letters):

Signature: _____ Date _____

A3.3: Email sent to focus group participants after session 1

Email title: *Thank you for your participation in session 1*

Hi all,

Thank you once again for your participation in session 1 of our focus group sessions, for taking part in the drawing activity and sharing your thoughts and feelings through the process. We will debrief and reflect on the drawings as a whole in the next session, before moving into a new activity.

Talking about the animals in our lives and in our own 'systems' (which in some cases were family or friendship systems and in other cases were whole world systems – all were valid), can be very confronting and bring up feelings of sadness, distress and discomfort, as well as feelings of love, joy and connection. If you felt any discomfort or distress and would like to talk, please feel free to call or email either myself or James your facilitator, and we will make time to talk with you. My number is below and James is cc-ed in this email.

Otherwise, we look really forward to seeing you in session 2 on Thursday the 10th of August.

I hope you have a lovely weekend.

Warm regards,

Margo

Margo Lockhart (PhD Candidate, NIODA)

Mobile: 0409 214 489

Email: margo@margolockhart.com.au

Website: www.margolockhart.com.au

A3.4 Email to focus group participants prior to session 3

Email title: *PhD focus group: Important note about session 3*

Hi all,

Thank you for another engaging session last week. We are on an interesting journey together and I am looking forward to our third and last session next **Tuesday** (August 22).

An important note about this 3rd session:

James will play a TED talk by Melanie Joy during the session. She is a sociologist and vegan who coined the term 'carnism' to describe the invisible belief system, or ideology, that conditions people to eat certain animals (and not other animals). The talk is very interesting from a systems perspective, but it does contain a 2-minute segment of quite graphic and violent footage of animals being mistreated. Melanie Joy warns us when it is coming up, so we will pause the talk then, and if anyone wishes to leave the room to avoid watching this footage, they will be able to. No judgement for either watching or deciding not to watch, it will be your decision.

Thank you again for your participation in this research, and for the very rich, curious and engaged discussions you are each contributing to.

See you on the 22nd of August, and once again, please aim to arrive around 5.45pm so you can have a bite to eat, and we can start promptly at 6pm.

Warm regards,

Margo

A3.5: Email sent to focus group participants after session 3 (final session)

Email title: *Thank you for your participation*

Hi all,

Thank you for your participation in the focus research group for my PhD, 'The Social Politics of Meat'. It was illuminating to hear you all talk openly about your views, experiences, thoughts and feelings on animals and eating meat, and I really appreciate the time you all took to be there and to contribute to this important work. I am sure the discussions have kept us all thinking and reflecting, and I do hope that whatever your food choices are you have found the process to be useful.

As I said in the last session, I would appreciate a ½ hour conversation with each of you at some stage over the next few months to hear your thoughts on how the sessions impacted you and your reflections and understanding of the process. This is not obligatory, but it would be appreciated. I do have some time on the 4th and the 5th of September, so if you are keen for a zoom meeting sooner rather than later let me know if either of those days works for you and we will set up a time. Otherwise, I am away for the rest of September so let me know which days in October work for you.

Thank you all again for the generosity of your time, conversations, and focus on this issue.

Warm regards,

Margo

Appendix 4: ISPSO Conference 2021. Workshop Plan.

ISPSO 2020 Berlin Conference: Professional Development Workshop Outline
PDW 6 on July 6, 12.30pm Berlin time/ 8.30pm Melbourne time

Margo Lockhart and Susan Long
with Pearl Tran as online facilitator

Workshop Title: “The unpalatable dinner conversation: the walls within and between us on the issue of eating animals.”

Outline

This professional development workshop will explore social defences and complex dynamics (conscious and unconscious) surrounding conversations about the treatment of animals and meat eating. There are many walls on the issue: between meat eaters and vegetarians; farmers and urban dwellers; and humans and animals. Food is a contentious issue that divides us: what’s ethical or unethical; healthy or unhealthy; eco-friendly or unsustainable. This topic can give insight also into the dynamics surrounding difficult conversations in many “wicked problem’ areas.

The Issue: A System with Walls

The practice that dominates our food system is industrialised animal agriculture or factory farming. Global research conducted by the Sentience Institute suggests over 90 percent of farmed animals worldwide live on factory farms (Gilliver, 2019). Billions of animals around the world live in industrial complexes with no sunlight, fresh air, or room to move. The walls around them are virtually prison walls.

Widespread polarising occurs between people about the practice of eating animals.

Veganism is one of the fastest growing movements in the world today, however there is much backlash against ‘extremists’. Our instinct towards binary thinking creates labelling at both ends of the dinner conversation with farmers perceived as heartless and money-hungry and animal activists labelled “green collared criminals” (Stubley, 2019, p13).

Getting Beyond Individual and Social Defences

Sociologist Melanie Joy (2010) coined the term “Carnism” to describe the invisible system and dominant ideology which encourages us to eat certain animals. Carnism sustains itself through invisibility (we don’t see the factory farms), denial and dissociation (we eat ‘meat’, not animals), and myths (agricultural advertising uses countless pictures of animals looking happy on ‘real’ farms).

Steiner (1999) also examines invisibility and denial in his exploration of the phenomenon “turning a blind eye” (p86), where we have access to adequate knowledge but because it is so unpleasant and disconcerting we choose unconsciously, and sometimes consciously, to ignore it. Long (2015) explores the collective blind eye regarding climate change: *‘Denial becomes a systemic process that can shape a whole culture, and therein lies its most insidious harm’* (p 248). Long argues that socio-analysis offers the possibility of facing such “wicked problems”, through the multiple perspectives available in this field of work.

Rather than sustaining defences and associated unconscious guilt (cf. the unconscious guilt involved in racism (Davids 2011)), how might we work through the issues?

This workshop aims to use the multiple perspectives offered through ISPSO to stimulate new ways of thinking about the walls around the dinner conversation. The workshop will

include small and large group discussions, creative drawing and individual reflection time to enable expression of and insights into thoughts and feelings on the issue of eating animals.

Minimum participants: 6 (maximum 20)

Intended learning outcomes:

- Increased awareness of the dynamics of “collective blindness”. While this is a general issue in systems psychodynamics the specific focus is on the issue of cruelty towards animals
- Increased awareness of the ways psychological walls are created between people and how they might be examined and reduced
- Examination of the difficulties in awareness and conversation about the global treatment of animals
- Individual reflection on one’s own attitude, thoughts, defences, and behaviour towards the eating of animals
- Exploration of potential ways forward on this complex issue while avoiding intergroup blame and unconscious guilt.

Workshop delivery mode: online via zoom

Workshop structure:

90 minutes of preparation activities for participants- sent 2 weeks before the workshop
3-hour workshop via zoom

Workshop Design:

90 minutes of preparation activities for participants

Participants will be asked to do the following:

Watch the 30 minute You-tube video of Margo’s presentation to the NIODA 2020 Symposium entitled Dissonance, the ‘Meat Paradox’ and Leadership. (30 minutes) This talk is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnCPAsqvdIU&feature=youtu.be>

OR

Read the written version of this talk published in the journal Socioanalysis Volume 22, January 2021.

Complete a personal creative drawing exercise where you: Think of your own ‘system’ of humans and animals and how they interact. This may include animals you eat. Draw this system and include yourself in the drawings. (30 minutes) Please take a photo of your drawing and send it to Pearl Tran at pearltran022@gmail.com by COB on Monday the 5th July.

Keep a record of the food you eat for a 3-day period before the workshop. Record each meal, and why you chose that food for that meal. You will be required to bring this record to the PDW.

NOTE: Ask participants to arrive a few minutes before the workshop starts.

Time	Activity	Method
– 0.15 (15 mins)	<p>Susan: Welcome, explain purpose and style of the session.</p> <p>Purpose: to explore social defences and complex dynamics (conscious and unconscious) surrounding conversations about the treatment of animals and meat eating.</p> <p>Style: interactive, conversational, informal.</p> <p>Margo: Outline of agenda</p> <p>Introductions</p> <p>Name and your connection with/ interest in this issue</p>	Zoom whole group
0.15-0.30 (15 mins)	<p>Margo presents the key concepts and ideas in her pre-doctorate work:</p> <p>The global issue of industrialised farming, responses to the issue, the concept of ‘carnism’, the ‘meat paradox’, polarities and walls within and between people on animals bred for food.</p>	Power point presentation
0.30-0.40 (10 mins)	<p>Susan leads</p> <p>Invite responses from participants to the information presented.</p>	Discussion
0.40-1.45 (65 mins) (with 5 min stretch break in the middle)	<p>Margo leads</p> <p>Exploration of drawings:</p> <p>Each person to share their drawings (depending on the size- we could go into two groups):</p> <p>Three roles:</p> <p>Sharer: shares their drawing and the meanings within it.</p> <p>Partner (Susan or Margo): encourages conversation through prompts, questions, hypotheses.</p> <p>Observers (others in the group): Observes the dynamics between the two, and also their own emotions and thoughts whilst observing. Notice body language, facial expressions, tone, etc.</p> <p>Rough time guide:</p> <p>5 minutes conversation between sharer and partner.</p> <p>5 minutes: observers to share observations.</p> <p>10 minutes X 6 = 60 minutes.</p>	Small group exploration of drawings.

	Note: Very short stretch break in the middle of this activity- 5 minutes stretch	
1.45-1.55 (10 mins)	Susan convenes Large group discussion (20 mins) Broad sharing of observations of self and others. Exploration of the walls that existed or 'rose up' through the discussions.	Large group discussion
1.55-2.15 (20 mins)	Break	
2.15 – 2.30 (15 mins)	Margo introduces: Small group discussion (different groups from first activity) Discussion topic: Share your notes and thoughts on the meals you ate over the 3-day period specified as pre-work (you may even share what you ate in the break and why you may those choices). Discuss the reasons for your choices of food, and note your reaction to other people's choice of food. Discuss for 5 minutes. Then- Share experiences of that discussion. What was noticed of self (feelings and thoughts)? Of others? Did any walls exist or 'rise up' through the discussions? (another 10 minutes)	Breakout groups of 3 each
2.30-2.50 (20 mins)	Susan leads: Large group discussion What is emerging? Discuss these questions. If it is a large group, perhaps break into three groups and deal with the questions. If there are walls within and between us on the issue of eating animals, what purpose do they serve? How might these walls affect the organisations we work in and the work we do? What might be some potential ways forward on this complex issue without evoking intergroup blame and unconscious guilt?	Large group discussion OR 3 separate groups.
2.50-3.00	Susan and Margo: Wrap Up Sharing of any final thoughts.	Large group.

	<p>Summary of learnings and insights.</p> <p>Key question to leave participants with:</p> <p>How can we, as practitioners informed by systems psychodynamics, approach the walls and barriers between and within ourselves on this issue?</p> <p>Give “Takeaways” – list of 4 follow up pieces: articles, books, films, TED talks...see below.</p> <p>Thank participants.</p>	<p>Closure.</p>
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Takeaways

Melanie Joy’s TED talk on ‘Carnism’: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0VrZPBskpg>

Susan’s article on climate change denial:

Long, S. (2015) Turning a Blind Eye to Climate Change, in Organisational & Social Dynamics 15(2) pp. 248–262

Clare Mann’s ‘Vystopia’ website: <https://vystopia.com>

Online articles about the ‘meat paradox’:

a) <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190206-what-the-meat-paradox-reveals-about-moral-decision-making>

b) <https://theconversation.com/the-meat-paradox-how-we-can-love-some-animals-and-eat-others-149>

References

Dauids, M.F. (2011) Internal Racism: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Race and Difference Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Joy, M. (2010). Why we Love Dogs, Eat Pigs and Wear Cows. San Francisco: Conari Press

Long, S. (2015) Turning a Blind Eye to Climate Change, in Organisational & Social Dynamics 15(2) pp. 248–262

Steiner, J. (1999) Turning a Blind Eye. The Cover Up for Oedipus, in Bell, D. (editor) Psychoanalysis and Culture. A Kleinian Perspective. Gerard Duckworth & Co. Ltd. London., pp 86 – 102

Website Articles

Gilliver, L “99% Of US Farmed Animals Live on Factory Farms, Study Says”, Plant Based News. April 22, 2019:

<https://www.plantbasednews.org/culture/factory-farms-study>

Stubley, P, “Vegan activists protesting meat industry described as ‘un-Australian’ by PM Scott Morrison” The Independent, Monday 8 April 2019 20:13:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/australasia/animal-rights-protest-australia-pm-morrison-a8860321.html>

Appendix 5: Communication to Interviewees

The following information was sent to interview participants prior to the interviews.

A5.1: Email to interviewees prior to interview

Email title: *PhD interview*

Thank you for agreeing to a socio-analytic interview for my PhD research into the 'social politics of meat'.

The aim of this PhD is to explore the social defences and complex dynamics surrounding behaviour and conversations about the treatment of animals and meat eating. The purpose of the interview you are invited to be part of is to explore the views and experiences of the various 'actors' involved in the use of farm animals.

Specifically, we will be exploring:

- Your observations of the way people you know and work with view and talk about animals bred for food.
- Your own conscious and unconscious attitudes to and thoughts and feelings towards animals bred for food.
- How you relate with and about animals in both your work and social life.

The interview will involve:

- One, 90-minute interview at a venue of your choice (I am happy to come to you).
- Reflection and discussion of the above.

I have attached the Participant Consent Form so you can read more about the process, but no need to sign it now, we can do that when the interview is held.

I will fit in with your schedule. Is there a day or time that suits you better? I am happy to do week or weekend days, whichever works best for you.

If you can give me some possible options, I'll hopefully be able to do one of those times.

Thank you for your support and time.

Warm regards,

Margo

Margo Lockhart (PhD Candidate, NIODA)

Mobile: 0409 214 489

A5.2: Information and Consent Form: Interviews

Project Title:

PHD RESEARCH: THE SOCIAL POLITICS OF MEAT

Researcher:

Margo Lockhart

Phone: 0409 214 489

Email: margo.lockhart@nioda.org.au

Why the research project is being conducted:

Margo Lockhart is a PhD candidate at the National Institute of Organisation Dynamics Australia (NIODA), researching our relatedness with and about animals and the conscious and unconscious psychodynamics involved in these relations.

Further information about NIODA and the PhD program can be found at www.nioda.org.au.

PhD Supervisor:

Professor Susan Long (PhD), Co-Lead, NIODA PhD group, NIODA

Phone: 0448 007 453

Email: susan.long@nioda.org.au

Chief Executive Officer

Sally Mussared, CEO and Administration Lead

Phone: +61 414 529 867

Email: sally.mussared@nioda.org.au

Aims of the Project:

The aim of this PhD is to explore the complex social dynamics surrounding behaviour and conversations about the treatment of animals and meat eating. The purpose of the interviews you are invited to be part of is to explore the views and experiences of the various 'actors' involved in the use of farm animals.

Specifically, we would be exploring:

- Your observations of the way people you know and work with view and talk about animals bred for food.
- Your own conscious and unconscious attitudes to and thoughts and feelings towards animals bred for food.
- How you relate with and about animals in both your work and social life.

The interview process:

- One, 90-minute interview at a venue of your choice, or online via zoom.
- The interview will include:
 - Introduction and questions re the purpose, format and process of the interview
 - Basic demographic information
 - Discussion of the topic
 - Reflections on the process

Possible Risks / Discomforts or Harm:

You may experience some discomfort in exploring feelings and thoughts about animals and the ways humans interact with and about animals.

To make sure you are able to participate safely, the researcher will explain all questions and their purpose before we begin. You will be able to withdraw at any time. At the start of the interview, you will be reminded of the de-identification of your words and statements.

If at any stage you feel uncomfortable or unable to participate, please indicate this to the researcher and you will be able to discontinue or take time out from the interview.

Details on complaint procedures and available counselling services will be provided within the interview process.

Conditions of participation:

There are no disadvantages, penalties or adverse consequences for not participating, for withdrawing prematurely from any activity, for withdrawing from the project, or for changing a request you have already made for confidentiality/or not.

You have the right to withdraw from active participation in this project at any time and, further, to require that data arising from your participation are not used in the research project provided that this right is exercised within four weeks of completing your

participation in the project. You are asked to complete the “Withdrawal of Consent Form” or to notify Margo by email or telephone that you wish to withdraw your consent for your data to be used in this research project.

If you have any questions regarding this Information and Consent Form or the project, please direct them to Margo Lockhart, or Susan Long (details above).

Method of Complaint or Query:

If you have any complaints or queries that the researcher has not been able to answer to your satisfaction, you may contact Dr Janelle Morgan, the Chairperson of the NIODA Human Research Ethics Committee at HREC@nioda.org.au

Use of data collected during the project:

Permission to tape the interview is requested. This tape would only be available to Margo and her supervisors. If not taped, detailed notes would be taken.

All data will be regarded as confidential, and only discussed between Margo and her supervisors and PhD study group where de-identification of participants will occur. Data will be used for the writing of Margo’s PhD. Names and/or identifying information will not be used in Margo’s thesis, or in any publication regarding the work.

Written transcriptions may include short quotes, where these do not reveal any participant’s identity.

Participants will be provided with a copy of the research document when completed upon request.

Participants may request a copy of any personal data collected in the course of the research. All research data will be retained for a period of five years as required under NIODA’s ethics guidelines and will then be deleted from all NIODA files.

Deidentified data from focus groups may be preserved for possible future work only by the researcher, Margo Lockhart. Other than this possibility, data will not be accessible for any other use than the current PhD or to any other person.

Consent:

I _____ have read and understood the information above, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the project, realising that I may physically withdraw from the study at any time and may request that no data arising from my participation are used, up to four weeks following the completion of my participation in the research. My response to any experiential tasks undertaken as a result of this research is original and am the sole author of my contributions to the project. I agree that research data provided by me or with my permission during the project may be included in a thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals on the condition that neither my name nor any other identifying information is used.

I agree to my de-identified responses being published by NIODA in any format. (Please tick)

Yes

No

Name of Participant (block letters):

Signature _____ Date _____

Name of Researcher (block letters):

Signature: _____ Date _____

Name of Supervisor (block letters):

Signature: _____ Date _____

Appendix 6: Focus Group Session Plan: Facilitator Guide

The following session plan was developed and provided for the facilitators of each focus group. The plan was constantly updated and re-worked as the sessions were held and I reflected on the group and the process with my supervisors and each facilitator.

PhD: The Social Politic of Meat

Researcher: Margo Lockhart

Group sessions: Facilitator run sheet

AIMS

The aim of the group sessions is to:

- Enable an exploration of the nature of our relatedness with and about animals and the conscious and unconscious psychodynamics involved in these relations. Conscious dynamics will be explored through articulated discussion, unconscious dynamics through interpretations of and associations to drawing, and facilitator and observers' observation and reflection of self and others.

Subsidiary aims involve an exploration of the following questions:

- How do people interact with each other on the issue of animals bred for food?
- What emotions are aroused when discussing this issue?
- What are the conscious and the unconscious dynamics of the 'social politics of meat'?
- What is 'allowed to be said', and what is disavowed, in Western culture, on the issue of eating animals?
- If certain things are disavowed, what is the impact of this?

METHODOLOGY

Socio-analytic dialogue is the methodology used in the design of these sessions. Socio-Analytic Dialogue emphasises reflectiveness, shared meaning, and empathic availability (Boccaro, 2013). Bruno Boccaro has explained that socioanalytic dialogue relies on two tasks. “That of identifying:

- the internal mental representations by subgroups; and
- the intergroups’ projections and introjections”

(Bocarro, p 282).

In order to identify the ‘internal mental representations’ I have chosen to use drawings to enable individuals to explore their conscious and unconscious mental representations of their own relatedness with animals (they do this in session 1). In order to identify the intergroups’ projections and introjections the design includes a dividing of the group in session 2 to allow exploration of how each sub-group might view the other group. In session 3 the subgroups come back together to enable a ‘reconciliation’, if needed, and allow a deeper exploration of their own relatedness to each other with regards to animals.

FORMAT

- 2 groups of about 8 people in each
- Both groups are mixed in terms of psycho-analytic interest and study
- Participants are mixed in terms of their views on animals and eating animals
- Each group will have 3 sessions of 2 and ½ hours
- The ‘main event’ of each session is:
 - Session 1: Drawing activity
 - Session 2: Divided group discussion (Susan Long will join this session so we have an observer of each group)
 - Session 3: TED talk on Melanie Joy’s concept of the system of ‘carnism’

- The three sessions will each be spaced approximately 1 week apart.

NOTES TO FACILITATOR AND OBSERVER

Boundaries of time, task and territory need to be strictly adhered to.

Skills needed by the facilitator include (but are not limited to):

- Expressed appreciation of all views on the issue
- Active listening
- Prompting for more detail
- Gaining specific examples
- Showing empathy
- Clarifying and or challenging
- Encouraging free association
- Encouraging the articulation of shared meaning

PRIOR TO SESSIONS

Conversation between facilitator and researcher, to cover the following:

- Roles of facilitator and observer / researcher,
- Potential discomfort and stress experienced by participants,
- Clarity about facilitator (and observer) views and feeling on the issue of animal treatment and the eating of meat.

SESSION 1:

Timing: 6pm-8.30pm

Food: Drinks / nibbles provided

Set up: sitting in circle with break out space available

Materials:

- Information and Confidentiality agreements for each participant
- Drawing materials ready- large blank paper, textas and crayons etc
- Recording device ready (ask permission of participants first)

Time	Process	Facilitator/ Speaker	Rationale/ detail	Tools, Materials
6pm – 6.15	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Margo to begin:</p> <p>Acknowledgement of traditional owners of the land</p> <p>Welcome, thank you for coming/ being part of the research.</p> <p>Reason we are here: be a part of this research into the nature of our relatedness with and about animals and the conscious and unconscious psychodynamics involved in these relations.</p>	Margo	Ensure everyone feels psychologically safe by explaining purpose, roles, time boundaries and confidentiality agreement.	Information and Confidentiality Agreements

	<p>Explain roles: facilitator, observer, participant roles.</p> <p>Broad aims for the three group sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore and share our own attitudes to and thoughts and feelings towards animals- conscious and unconscious. • Explore how we relate with and about animals here with each other, and in our social and work lives. <p>Guidelines: confidentiality, data use, acceptance of difference in the group.</p> <p>Check that everyone has Information and Confidentiality Agreements and has signed.</p> <p>Mention the drawings, and photos of drawings being anonymous if taken.</p> <p>Check that everyone is OK with the session being audio-recorded.</p>			
6.15-6.30	<p>Process for the sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 and ½ hours • Short break at about 7.15pm – finger food provided • Creative processes will be used (this session drawing) 	James	Allow people time and space to start to get to know each other.	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chatham House rules: feel free to share the process, but not anyone’s individual story • Please be open and honest. <p>Introductions:</p> <p>Please briefly share something about yourself to the group, and how you feel being part of this research. (No storytelling, just a short intro)</p>			
6.30-6.50	<p>Drawing activity</p> <p>Explain rationale of drawing (see column 4)</p> <p>Instructions (on flipchart or whiteboard)</p> <p><i>Think of your own ‘system’ of humans and animals and how they interact. This includes any animals you may eat. Draw this system and include yourself in the drawings. Try not to use words.</i></p> <p><i>You have 15 minutes.</i></p>	James	<p>Rationale for drawing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing provides rich data about both conscious and unconscious experiences • Through drawing and sharing our drawings we can think more creatively and openly about the issue • The process helps provide a ‘container’ for a discussion • Drawing can be playful and exciting, and a novel means of engagement between people. 	<p>Art paper</p> <p>Textas, crayons, etc</p> <p>Space to draw</p>

			(Nossal, in Long, 2013, pp 67-68)	
6.50 – 7.15	<p>Sharing of drawings.</p> <p>First 1 or 2 drawings will be shared with the whole group, then after the break we will split into smaller groups to share.</p> <p>Ask for a volunteer to share first.</p> <p>Instructions for sharing drawings:</p> <p>Facilitator asks:</p> <p>Please tell us about your picture and what emerged for you as you drew it?’ This is a three step process:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Drawer shares their drawing and talks about it – share what you drew and why, and what emerged for you through the process of drawing. (5 mins) 2. Others share their associations, emotions, curiosity, questions. Important: no judgement, of drawing or drawer. (5 mins) 3. Drawer shares any final reflections and responses. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10-15 minutes per person (up to 5 mins for the drawer to share and discuss, a minute or two for clarifying questions, then 5 mins for others to ask clarifying questions and share responses) 	James	<p><i>NOTE: group may be divided to share if there are more than 7 people.</i></p> <p>Please ensure that everyone understands the importance of being respectful, curious, and not judging.</p>	

7.15 – 7.30	Short break.			Snack food, tea/ coffee
7.30- 8.20pm	Sharing of drawing continues in small groups. Ideally, 3-4 people in each group. All remaining drawings to be shared. Timing will depend on group numbers.	James, Kate and, depending on numbers perhaps also Margo, to observe and assist each group.		
8.20- 8.30	Whole group discussion / debrief. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you have to say about this experience? • What emerged from the process? • What might have been missed? • How are you leaving the session? NOTE: Check permission to take anonymous photos of the drawings.	James	Allow people some time to reflect and share how they found the whole experience.	Camera/ phone to take photos

SESSION 2:

Timing: 6pm-8.30pm

Food: Drinks / nibbles provided

Set up: sitting in circle with break out space available

Space for 2 separate groups to have discussions

Materials:

- Information and Confidentiality agreements for any participants who didn't sign last session
- Recording device ready (ask permission of participants first)
- Pictures from session 1 all put on wall together

Time	Process	Rationale/ detail	Tools, Materials
6pm – 6.05	Welcome back, Go over reason we are here: be a part of Margo's research into the nature of our relatedness with and about animals and the conscious and unconscious psychodynamics involved in these relations.	Ensure everyone feels psychologically safe by explaining purpose, roles, time boundaries and confidentiality agreement.	Have some spare confidentiality agreements in case any of these were

	<p>Reiterate roles: facilitator, observer, participant roles.</p> <p>Broad aims for the three group sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore and share our own attitudes to and thoughts and feelings towards animals- conscious and unconscious. • Explore how we relate with and about animals here with each other, and in our social and work lives. <p>Reiterate guidelines: confidentiality, data use, acceptance of difference in the group.</p>		missed in the last session.
6.05-6.50pm	<p>Reflection:</p> <p>Observing the pictures drawn in the last session, and also thinking back to what was said and not said:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you remember? • Thoughts / insights/ questions from that last session? • What was expressed? • What wasn't expressed? 		
6.50-7.15	<p>Divide group into 2:</p> <p>This could be done with a socio-line: "How much meat do you eat? None at one end, lots at another end"</p>	Group will be divided into two: those who eat meat and those who don't. If someone is 'mostly vegetarian' they go into the vegetarian group.	Flipcharts and textas in case the groups

	<p><i>(Alternatively, could ask “How much do you identify with either end of this scale: Vegan at one end, carnivore at the other”.)</i></p> <p>Divided group discussions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have I felt about discussions in the broader whole group about the animals in people’s lives? (last session and this session so far) • What do I understand of the perspectives of people in the other group? What don’t I understand? • How do I treat people in the other group in the light of these perspectives? 	<p>If groups are too large, perhaps have 3 groups, one in the middle.</p>	<p>want to use them</p>
7.15 – 7.30	<p>Short break.</p>		<p>Snack food, tea/ coffee</p>
7.30- 8.10pm	<p>Large group discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each group shares a summary of their discussion, including how they view, treat and feel about perspectives in the ‘other’ group. • The ‘other’ group then has a chance to respond to what has been shared. 	<p>This could be done with an inner and outer circle arrangement of chairs.</p> <p>The inner group is the one sharing their group discussion, the outer group listens and then responds.</p>	<p>Chairs in 2 circles – one inner, one outer circle</p>
8.10- 8.30	<p>Whole group discussion / debrief.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you find that experience? (of the differentiated groups). 	<p>Pull chairs back to be one circle again.</p>	<p>Chairs in one circle again.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How are you leaving the session?• Thank you for your time – check on use of data and confidentiality agreements.• Mention that next week we will be watching a video which has a short section with some graphic, violent footage. It only goes for about 2 minutes and the speaker warns us about it, so we will stop the video and if anyone wants to leave the room for that part they can.		
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SESSION 3:

Timing: 6pm-8.30pm

Email sent early in the week: Emphasize that anyone uncomfortable with graphic footage can step out for that part of the TED talk

Food: Drinks / nibbles provided

Set up: sitting in circle with break out space available

Materials: Video ready to play TED talk

Time	Process	Rationale/ detail	Tools, Materials
6pm – 6.05	<p>Welcome back,</p> <p>Go over reason we are here: be a part of Margo’s research into the nature of our relatedness with and about animals and the conscious and unconscious psychodynamics involved in these relations.</p> <p>Reiterate roles: facilitator, observer, participant roles.</p> <p>Broad aims for the three group sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore and share our own attitudes to and thoughts and feelings towards animals- conscious and unconscious.• Explore how we relate with and about animals here with each other, and in our social and work lives.	Ensure everyone feels psychologically safe by explaining purpose, roles, time boundaries and confidentiality agreement.	

	<p>Reiterate guidelines: confidentiality, data use, acceptance of difference in the group.</p>		
6.05-6.30	<p>Reflection:</p> <p>James welcomes, acknowledges traditional owners, explains process for today.</p> <p>Margo shares a bit about her methodology and challenges as a researcher: choices about food, video, focus and the challenges of the emotional aspects of the research.</p> <p>Invite thoughts / insights/ questions from the last session.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any reflections on the experience of the split groups in the last session? • What insights do we have about how our relatedness with and about animals that are bred for eating? 		
6.30-6.55pm	<p>Group watches TED talk by Melanie Joy on ‘carnism’.</p> <p>Brief overview of who Melanie Joy is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sociologist, vegan and animal advocate • In her PhD, coined the phrase ‘carnism’, to describe the invisible system that encourages humans to eat certain animals (and not others). (Put this definition on whiteboard) 	<p>I wanted to give some ‘input’ here- something for the group to focus on and discuss. The concept of carnism with its system lens seems appropriate.</p>	<p>TED talk video: Melanie Joy. ‘Carnism’</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has now set up an organisation based in Berlin that promotes veganism and advocates for animals, called “Beyond Carnism”. <p>There is also here an article on “reasons humans should eat meat” which gives another perspective on this topic.</p>		
6.55-7.15pm	<p>Mixed small groups (about 3 in each):</p> <p>Please discuss your responses to the video / talk.</p> <p>Talk through your emotional response as well as any thoughts / ideas that emerge.</p> <p>In the same small groups, please discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we think the system of ‘carnism’ exists in our own world? If it does, what are the ‘informal rules’ of this system? How are these rules expressed and conveyed in the groups we live and work in? 	About 3 people in each group- no particular configurations.	Flipcharts and textas in case the groups want to use them
7.15–7.30pm	Short break.		Snack food, tea/ coffee
7.30 - 8pm	<p>Large group discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each group shares the ‘informal rules’ discussed in their small groups Pivot: What have been the informal rules about ‘meat’ and animal discussions, in this group? 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have these rules been expressed and conveyed? • What purpose have they served? 		
8pm – 8.30pm	<p>Whole group discussion / debrief.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have gained or lost as a result of the sessions? • How are you leaving the sessions? • Thank people and point out that in this research, research hasn't been 'done on them' they have been co-researchers. That is the nature of the work done at NIODA. Thank you for being co-researchers. • Thank you for your time – check on use of data and confidentiality agreements. • If anyone wants to raise any concerns or issues, outline process. 	Process of complaint explained.	

References

Boccaro, B. (2013) Socioanalytic dialogue. In Long, S, (Editor) *Socioanalytic Methods: Discovering the Hidden in Organisations and Social Systems*. London. Karnac Books Ltd.

Appendix 7: Interview Plan, Researcher Guide

The following document was used as a basis for the interview process. Since I wanted the interviews to be free flowing and emergent, after the set up and basic demographic details, the conversations all transpired differently.

Title: *PhD Interview Process and Questions*

Margo Lockhart, PhD Candidate

Topic: The Social Politics of Meat

2. Check set up:

- a. Signed Informed Consent form.
- b. Permission to tape or take notes.
- c. Explain purpose of the PhD: to explore the complex social dynamics about animals, including animals humans eat.
- d. Explain how the data will be used. De-identified, quotes may be used, themes explored.
- e. Check timing (90 mins maximum).
- f. Explain this process.

3. Check basic demographic detail:

- a. Full name
- b. Occupation
- c. Age group:

20 – 29, 30 – 39, 40 – 49, 50 – 59, 60 – 69, 70 – 79, 80 - 89

- d. Gender:
 - i. Male
 - ii. Female
 - iii. Neutral
- e. Primary place of residence (broad details)

4. Main interview questions (all questions are optional, go with what feels right) :

- a. Could you tell me a bit about your own personal journey: what led you to where you are now and the relationship you have with animals?
- b. Tell me about your own thoughts and feelings about the animals in your life?
- c. In your own experience, what have you observed about the way people talk and relate to each other about animals?
- d. Have you ever experienced debates or conflict about issues to do with animals?
- e. How do you respond when people share views that are very different to your own?
- f. How has the work you do impacted your relationship with other people?
- g. How has the work you do impacted your relationship to animals?

5. Final process reflection

- a. How did you find the experience of being interviewed on this topic?
- b. Any thoughts or final observations you would like to make?
- c. Do you have any concerns or questions before we finish?
- d. Thank you for your time and support of my PhD.

Appendix 8: Data analysis table (Focus Group 2)

The data analysis table for Focus Group 1 is included in the main text of the PhD (Chapter 6). As with Focus Group 1, I wanted to record significant words or phrases, feelings (my own and those expressed by the group), anything unexpected or surprising, emerging themes, and any questions or problems I felt were arising or had arisen.

A7: First cut analysis. Focus Group 2

Key

P = Participant

F = Facilitator

M = Me, the researcher (Margo)

S = Supervisor (Susan or Kate)

Significant words, phrases and events	Feelings (my own and those expressed in the group)	The unexpected / abduction logic	Emerging themes	Questions/ Problems
Session 1: Socio-drawings and small group discussion				
Significant words, phrases and events	Feelings (my own and those expressed in the group)	The unexpected / abduction logic	Emerging themes	Questions/ Problems
Like group 1, in the introduction people shared somewhat tentatively whether they ate meat or not. One participant explained that he is a meat eater, and added, "I feel a bit like the enemy here." (P)	Participant felt judged, 'on the wrong side'. Sense of 'sides' I felt concern and surprise at this comment.	Why did he start with feeling like the enemy? Was it the food I provided, and the fact that he knows that I, the researcher, am vegetarian?	When we start to talk about the eating of meat, in the context of our relationship with animals, we immediately feel a sense of morality and judgement.	Did this comment about being the enemy (because he's a meat eater) set up an atmosphere for this group right from the beginning?

Another participant shared that he felt a sense of doom all the time now, like “the whole world is fucked” (P)	Doom, pessimism, despair		Talking about our relationship with animals brings up feelings of despair on a broader scale – links with climate change and general environmental decline	This group seemed much ‘darker’ than the previous group. Why?
When one participant shared her drawing, she shared this about the introductions: “There were a couple of sniggers in the group when I shared that my kids were vegan. But it’s huge. And I’m really proud of them.” (P)	Feelings of division, criticism, judgement			Why didn’t this feeling of division happen in the first group?
Another participant shared that she felt comfortable with her current family dynamic, and commented “What if one of us became vegan? It would completely change the dynamic.” (P)	Fear of change	Why would it so upset the family dynamics for one person to change their diet?	Diet choice is so much more than just about food, particularly when one chooses vegan for ethical reasons. For meat eaters, it implies a judgement on them.	
In the drawing activity, one participant drew the horses his daughters ride, the birds in the trees, and then a closed refrigerator. Later he shared: “I’ve realised I don’t think of the animals I eat as animals.” (P)			Compartmentalizing. The animals we eat are not even seen as animals by some.	
After the session, my supervisor gave some strong feedback. She said: “I felt pulled out of role. I should be just a critical friend, I was pulled out of that.” (S)	Unsafe Pulled out of role ‘not meant to be here’	That feeling of ‘not meant to be here’, or ‘don’t want to be here’.		Was this supervisor the container for the anxiety in the group, as I seemed to be in

<p>“It didn’t feel safe. There was discomfort in the room.” (S) She said the purpose of the drawing activity wasn’t explained and the word ‘system’ confused people.</p>	<p>I felt disappointed, I had anticipated that she would enjoy the process as much as my first supervisor and I did. I had looked forward to her being involved in the process, so I was really surprised she was so critical.</p>	<p>Is that how we all feel when challenged (even implicitly) about the morality of our behaviour?</p>		<p>the first group? I remember my terrible anxiety in the first group, which I didn’t feel at all in this group. Has all the anxiety been projected into one person each time? Is this a safe enough space?</p>
<p>My first supervisor and I talked about how human centred we are. We contemplated how people might become more ‘species centred’. (She commented: “It’s similar to being more ‘global centred’ rather than ‘national centred’.” (S) We talked about this being linked with having a systems perspective. Being aware that society constructs a social system. She linked it with Australians attitude to our past treatment of indigenous people: “People say ‘That wasn’t me. I didn’t do that. It wasn’t even my grandmother’.”</p>	<p>I am daunted by the magnitude of the change needed. How do you get people to see the invisible and unconscious parts of a system?</p>			
<p>Similar to many people in the previous group, the facilitator shared that he had shared with many friends the work he was doing in the research. “Everyone is interested.” (F) “I’ve become mesmerized by this topic.” (F)</p>	<p>Deep interest Fascination Appreciation</p>	<p>Very different responses by the people involved. The topic brings up paradoxical emotions: for some despair, for others fascination, for some fear, for others delight.</p>		

Session 2: Socio-line and separate group discussion				
Significant words, phrases and events	Feelings (my own and those expressed in the group)	The unexpected / abduction logic	Emerging themes	Questions/ Problems
<p>Similar to Group 1, this group did a lot of intellectualising in this session.</p> <p>In the opening reflection there was a lot of talk about animals eating other animals in the wild, the vested interests in meat (farmers etc), different cultures where various animals are eaten (e.g., dogs), the environment, population numbers, war, life expectancy of humans, and human poverty.</p> <p>Some in the group commented on this further into the session:</p> <p>“If the task is to talk about our relationship with animals, what is getting in the way?” (P)</p> <p>“We were fleeing from the task.” (P)</p> <p>“What is the topic?” (P)</p> <p>“This is just really difficult to talk about.” (P)</p> <p>One participant said he had been bored.</p>	<p>I felt frustrated that it was so ‘high level’, ‘cerebral’, ‘academic’ and ‘intellectualising’.</p> <p>Avoidance of the task?</p> <p>Where are the animals in this discussion?</p> <p>Frustration</p> <p>Confusion</p> <p>Difficult to concentrate</p> <p>Bored</p>		<p>Talking about the animals we eat is so difficult we avoid it, so much that we risk boredom.</p>	<p>What is boredom?</p> <p>Unmet expectations?</p> <p>Repressed anger?</p> <p>Detaching oneself from engagement?</p>
<p>In the divided groups, some of the meat eaters were openly critical of the vegetarians and vegans:</p> <p>“Holier than thou” (P)</p> <p>“A bit dogmatic” (P)</p> <p>“The hypocrisy- there are a lot of vegetarians who preach but have dogs they feed meat to.” (P)</p> <p>“Many of them have nutritional challenges.” (P)</p> <p>Others were praising:</p> <p>“I admire them” (P)</p>	<p>Mixed emotions towards “the other side”</p> <p>Admiration versus annoyance.</p>	<p>So much more division in this group – but why am I constantly comparing them?</p>		<p>My own comparison, critique of people seeping in</p>

<p>"I respect them but then I feel guilty for not feeling guilty" (P)</p> <p>"The judging and lecturing, is annoying" (P)</p>				
<p>When speculating about how vegans and vegetarians see them: "They probably think we're dinosaurs." (P)</p> <p>"uninformed" (P)</p> <p>"backward" (P)</p>	<p>Fear of how we might be seen by 'others'</p>		<p>The notion of journeys and change, but there is an element of resentment here, of having to (or even being pushed to) change.</p>	
<p>Two people felt they might have been "in the wrong group"</p> <p>"Maybe I should have been in the other group. I eat fish. But I wanted to be here." (P)</p> <p>"I think I was in the wrong group. I couldn't share in my group. I just love animals. My photo on my phone is of my dog, not my grandchildren." (P)</p>	<p>Confusion</p> <p>Feeling voiceless</p> <p>Lost</p> <p>Powerless</p> <p>Mistaken identity</p>	<p>This was interesting. Exploring, and declaring, our 'meat identity' is hard. 'Who do I identify with?' is fraught, when we consider our own eating behaviour and habits.</p>	<p>Identity is NOT usually discussed in terms of meat eating. (unless one is vegan). Grappling with this is so very hard.</p>	<p>When we are asked to hold up the mirror, there's a sense of judgment- our judgement of ourselves and the judgement of others. Am I right or wrong? Good or bad?</p>
<p>Similar to Group 1, there was a dislike of the splitting of the group:</p> <p>"I really dislike this whole 'them versus us' thing" (P)</p> <p>"It's 'othering'" (P)</p>	<p>Group did not like being split.</p> <p>Anger</p> <p>Resistance</p>		<p>There is a desire to see our society as cohesive, harmonious. This activity threatened that.</p>	
<p>There were discussions about the 'moral hierarchy':</p> <p>"I think there's a hierarchy: vegans are at the top, then vegetarians, then meat eaters at the bottom." (P)</p>	<p>Judgement, sense of being judged.</p>	<p>This is new to me. Descriptions of a moral hierarchy with vegans at the top.</p>		
<p>The vegan shared:</p> <p>"People like to catch me out: 'What about your shoes?' 'What about your cat?'"</p>	<p>Desire to punish, to 'prove wrong'.</p>			

<p>My Balint Group was keen to hear about and discuss this session. They commented that the serving of vegan and vegetarian food showed a judgement, and immediately set up a moral hierarchy within the group.</p> <p>They compared the serving of the food to two things:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The current mushroom poisoning case in Australia, where three people died as a result of eating a dish with poisonous mushrooms in it (the group contemplated- is it in the participants' unconscious that I might be deceiving them, tricking them, beguiling them, poisoning them?) 2. The Hansel and Gretel story where the witch beguiles them into her cottage and then tries to shove them into the oven- was I beguiling them with food and wine, and then shoving their faces into the knowledge of the horrors? 	<p>Delight at the passion and interest here</p>		<p>Cultural influences on behaviour and unconscious thinking</p> <p>I was very influential in the group. I hadn't realised the significant power of my own actions as a host until now.</p> <p>Deception</p>	<p>By not serving meat, was I withholding something else from them?</p> <p>Satisfaction?</p> <p>Was there a hunger in the room because they felt deprived?</p>
<p>Session 3: Video presentation and discussion</p>				
<p>Significant words, phrases and events</p>	<p>Feelings (my own and those expressed in the group)</p>	<p>The unexpected / abduction logic</p>	<p>Emerging themes</p>	<p>Questions/ Problems</p>
<p>I joined the group circle for the first 15 minutes and spoke with them about my core question, my ontological position (non-speciesist) and my systems psycho-dynamics approach (3 sessions- one self – use of</p>	<p>Interest Relief Included Feeling special</p>		<p>Action research needs to be responsive, and integrated.</p>	<p>The group wanted to hear more from me. Why had I set myself up as an observer? Self protection?</p>

<p>pictures, one others - use of socio-line and sperate groups, and one system – talk on the concept of ‘carnism’)</p> <p>This seemed to be appreciated: “Thank you, that’s very helpful” (P) After the session the facilitator said “I felt relieved when you spoke about the research. It clarified things, and it brought you into the room.” (F)</p>				
<p>People talked about unspoken rules: “There’s a general expectation that people eat meat. An unspoken rule that a dinner will include meat.” “You don’t participate in the killing of an animal you serve for dinner. And you don’t talk about it.” “For her last birthday party my 16 year old wanted all vegan food. The other parents were horrified. ‘What? Vegan? I can’t believe you’re allowing it!’ “ (P) “Vegan food is seen as poo” (P) “We were having people over for dinner, I said I’d cook vegetarian. My wife said ‘You’ll have to tell them.’ “ (F)</p>	<p>Do what’s expected Social pressure to conform</p> <p>Social expectations and anxiety</p>			
<p>There were comments on vegans being seen as provocateurs: “it’s the minority that are seen to be provocateurs. Vegans and vegetarians are seen to be provoking. “ (P)</p>				

<p>Commenting on how the group sessions had impacted them, similar to group one there were themes of a journey: “I think I’m more vegan now.” “I’m making steps”</p>			Journey	
<p>For others, things didn’t change at all: “Has it changed me? I don’t think so.” “Yes, I eat meat. Yes, animals are harmed in the process. I kind if feel OK about that. But it has given me pause for thought.”</p>	Resistance to change?		People change at different times and for different reasons.	
<p>Similar to group 1, there was real antagonism towards the TED talk, and towards me for choosing it to be part of the group process: “I’m annoyed by the video. It didn’t feel balanced. It felt political. I’m upset. It feels imbalanced..... I feel the need to defend myself. Shame doesn’t work. It does the opposite.” (P) These comments were directed at me, the researcher, the person turned and look at me as he said this. “Comparing it (our treatment of animals) to the Holocaust doesn’t work. Shame doesn’t work.” (P)</p>	Felt attacked, criticised Sides Polarising		<p>‘Everything but the squeal’</p> <p>People can hear most arguments on not eating meat, but they cannot hear the cruelty arguments. It’s too confronting.</p>	
<p>But again, some put forward a different view: “Hearing the truth is hard. And I’m thinking – ‘What’s the difference between activism and telling the truth?’ “ (P)</p>				Am I an activist?
<p>In the debrief afterwards, the facilitator commented on the last session being confronting:</p>	Suspicion of motive: is someone trying to change me?		Hypothesis: was this a seduction?	<p>What is my aim in this research?</p> <p>What am I trying to do?</p>

<p>“Up until then it was like we were walking through sunshine on a nice day. Then we hit them with it. Perhaps they had the unconscious thought: ‘Is this a veiled attempt to convert us?’ “ (F)</p>			<p>Hatred of learning (Bion- see Brigid’s thesis)</p>	
<p>There was interest by one participant in the word ‘political’. He asked why I called my research the ‘social politics of meat’. My supervisor commented “You can’t ask your core question without the splitting into the two sides of ‘should we eat meat or not?’” (S)</p>		<p>Again, I am drawn to comparing the groups. The first group seemed to get beyond the splitting, to explore the notions of flexitarian and choice much more.</p>	<p>Politics is divisive, threatening. It is about sides. Power. Influence.</p> <p>No-one wants to think they are not ‘on the side of animals’.</p>	<p>Why didn’t I call this the social dynamics of meat?</p> <p>Why does the exploring of the social politics of meat turn into ‘Should I eat meat or not?’ Why the constant reverting to the binary? Yes or No. Good or bad.</p>
<p>Once again, a discussion about the ‘system’ of carnism seemed impossible. The facilitator (in the debrief) commented “I was holding that systems lens, but they couldn’t go there...” (F) We discussed the fact that two things created tension in session 3 (in both groups): an attempt at systems thinking, and an attempt to discuss curtly.</p>			<p>Systems thinking is so difficult we will avoid it; just as we avoid discussions of cruelty to animals. These are both vital aspects of the animal rights movement.</p>	<p>An impossible situation? The vital aspects are undiscussable.</p> <p>So where do activists go instead? Nice vegan recipes, ‘Veganuary month, impact on climate change, health arguments....</p>

Appendix 9: Notes from selected interview

Interview with wool grower

I am determined to make this interview better than the disappointing last one, so I get up early, allow myself plenty of time to drive to the farm, and arrive with time up my sleeve. I apologise to N for “being annoyingly early”, and she smiles.

I explain that I'd like to tell her a bit about my research, my background story for starting the PhD, and that then we'd move into the questions about her farm and her story. N looks a little surprised, I suspect she's used to more traditional interviews where the interviewer primarily asks questions, but she nods and smiles again.

I tell her it began with an epiphany, a particularly painful one. She chuckles and says, “Epiphanies usually are”. Immediately, I feel her interest and a rapport starting to build between us. She listens intently, and I surprise myself with how articulate I am at sharing my story about growing up on a farm, moving to the city, studying systems psychodynamics, becoming aware of the plight of animals in today's world, and my decision to become vegetarian and start this PhD.

N is an engaged listener; she asks deep and probing questions throughout my explanation. “Do you know what triggered you to go back into that? Was it stuff from your childhood that you were remembering?” I enjoy her interest and for a while there is a reversal of roles- she is the interviewer and I am being interviewed. Normally I would start to panic about something ‘weird’ like this, but instead I feel relaxed and comfortable. We connect so naturally. It is a good 15 minutes before we get on to N's story, but when we do she tells it intimately, descriptively, and generously. It is also a story of pain, change, and deep realisations about the world and her place in it.

As I listen back to the recording, months later, I am struck by many things:

- The way N talks about the sheep as individuals. Early in the conversation she mentions “before that point I'd had an experience with an individual animal, which I'll come back and tell you about”. Later, she tells the full story of Alice, the crippled sheep who ate certain grasses in a particular order, showing her how animals intuitively understand their own digestive needs. She talked about her learning from the American author Fred Provenza, who teaches farmers about animals' nutritional wisdom, which they “mainly learn from their mothers”.
- To N, what is crucial in farming (and living) is the connection between three things: land, animals and humans. This addition of land is new for me. I think I have been missing something. Something vital.
- N's attitude to learning. She talks about learning from the land, from individual animals, from the herd, from a retired stockman, from students who visit her, from

her own yearning for a farm which has wild places....'she is a wise student of life', I think to myself.

- N's conclusion, after her 'epiphany', that:
 1. Diversity is crucial to healthy sheep,
 2. The only way you have diversity is to have abundance,
 3. To have abundance, you need to limit the number of sheep on the land.
 4. I need to reduce my stock by about a third. (easier said than done).
- N's shepherding-style relationship with her sheep. She talked about two to three times a week going off shepherding, camping out with the sheep, just to observe them and understand their needs and behaviour. "I'd have a nap while they were napping....the scientist in me really wanted to know what each plant was doing for those animals, but it's actually quite expensive to do those analyses, and I didn't have that sort of money.... I finally had to come to terms with the fact that I didn't need to know, *the animals* needed to know. My job was the macro job. We're here for the day, eat anything you like, but we're staying for the day."
- This new approach and epiphany N talked about was about "It was a letting go. Letting go of a reductionist approach. This is what Fred talks about. Moving away from a reductionist approach to an integrative approach. That's really, really hard for most trained scientists because you're stepping into unknown. You're stepping away from the crutch of statistics and control."
- On finding the ethical textile industry, N shares "I found a community of people who came back to me and said 'Love what you do. It's transforming my experience of wool'. That was fabulous."
- I really believe that choice of food is an animal right, and socialisation and social structure is an animal right. (She keeps lambs with their mothers, not in separate flocks).
- On other farmers and her relationship with them: "I've given up proselytizing to other farmers because they are just not ready to hear it. I'll talk to anybody who wants to listen, but most farmers cannot see past the reduction of stocking that's going to be required. They just can't..... even if they were otherwise inclined....they're struggling to make money as it is."
- N's relationship with the individual sheep. Her story of Alice, the story of Leonardo (always interested in the car engine), Difficult Girl (always at the back fighting the dogs), and others. "They are all engaging and engaged, different animals. Every animal, every sheep I've been up close enough to, to be involved with, has been an

individual. They've all got a personality, it's just that I can't get to know all of them, for obvious reasons."

- This led to N's decision not to put them on trucks any more, to be sold for meat. I knew that was a really awful experience for them. Getting on the truck and where they were going..... six years ago I stopped getting the truck to send sheep to slaughter.
- We talk about the community approach- her buyers (in New York) trusting what she does, the transparency. I commented that "it's almost like a village approach, just at the global level".
- I asked about envy by other farmers, and whether many ask her for advice. "In a word, no", she said. There's a couple of things. Wrong gender. Wrong accent (Canadian), used to be wrong age, that's not so true anymore, upstart. There's an upstart thing. It's like 'What makes her think she knows better than we do'."
- "I think what allowed me to do it was my science background. But also, there's an analogy with what you were going through during your masters degree, you were learning a bunch of stuff, but you kept holding the mirror up to yourself, and the mirror for me was the landscape on the farm. I kept going 'Shit, this is not what I'm trying to do'. When I finally realised it was my own management and processes that were causing that, I was willing to step back and go, OK, this isn't working. I need to learn."
- After a story about her dogs and a kangaroo, N reflects: "it's that whole thing of allowing animals to be who they are, and not dominate. It's that domination, it's the way that we do conventional farming".
- Towards the end of the discussion, N shares that her interest in farming really came from her love of working dogs, particularly border collies, and I share the sad news that we have just had to put down our beloved dog, Fizo. Tears come to my eyes and I feel her empathy.

Appendix 10: Meat Industry Advertising Examples

The following are just a few examples of meat industry advertising in Australia.

Picture 1



Meat & Livestock Australia's 2021 winter beef campaign: Australian Beef. Feed Your Greatness. Accessed 10th May 2024 at URL:

<https://www.beefcentral.com/trade/olympics-focus-for-mlas-winter-beef-marketing-campaign-video/>

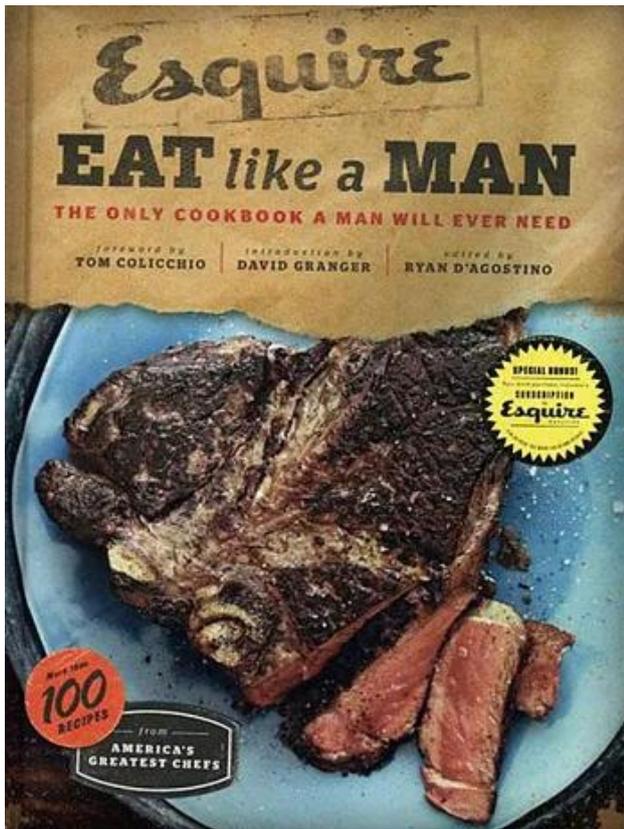
Picture 2



Meat and Livestock Australia Day advertisement, 2016.

Accessed 10th May 2024 at URL: <https://overland.org.au/2016/09/a-chop-to-multiculturalism/>

Picture 3



'Real men eat meat' Esquire ad.

<https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/RealMenEatMeat>

Accessed 12 Oct 2024

Appendix 11: Poster created for NIODA symposium, 2018.

QUESTIONS IN MY MIND

- How to start these conversations without being too confronting that people turn away because they can't bear to see the truth.
- How to be 'creatively disruptive' on an issue of this magnitude.
- What strategies the stakeholders use to keep this issue 'invisible'.
- Where are the levers for change?
- What strategies are leaders of the animal rights movement employing?
- How to manage my own distress and shame on this issue.
- Is progress being made? Is there any hope?

FACTS & FIGURES ABOUT FACTORY FARMING

AUSTRALIA 95% FACTORY FARMING
95% of Australia's 95% of the chicken and 95% of the beef come from factory farms.

18% GREENHOUSE GAS
According to the UN the global livestock sector is responsible for 18% of global greenhouse gas emissions - a higher share than transport.

6 CHICKENS BROOD OUT MEAT LIVE WEEKS **12 CHICKENS NATURALLY LIVE UP TO YEARS**

"ANIMALS ARE SENTIENT beings. THEY FEEL PAIN AND FEAR as we do."

RESEARCH POSSIBLE FOCUS

- **CARNISM** The system of 'carnism' as defined by Melanie Joy: the dominant belief system that conditions people to eat certain animals.
- **PSYCHO-DYNAMICS** The psycho-dynamics involved in this system: unconscious behaviours such as denial, shame and fear.
- **INVISIBILITY** The invisibility of the violence within this system.
- **EMPATHY** What happens to our natural empathy within this issue?
- **DENIAL** Eating our denial...
- **VEGETERIAN & VEGAN** How are vegetarians and vegans seen by the majority of the population? Emotional? Rigid? Radical? Moralistic?
- **LEADERSHIP** How leadership in this area is evolving.
- **LEADERS IN THE FIELD** How leaders in the field cope with their own emotions of distress, horror, dismay and futility.

How do we confront the denial of our treatment of animals in ways that are palatable?

How to bring up the dinner table conversation.

Glossary

Animal Politics: the study of human-animal relations within the discipline of Political Theory. It is concerned primarily with the political and legal subjugation of animals and explores political inclusion of animals in human politics.

Animal Rights: the argument that all species should have rights just as humans do. This generally includes the belief that “animals are not ours to use for food, clothing, entertainment, or experimentation” (PETA website).

Animal Welfare: concern about the quality of animals' lives and attempts to minimize their suffering by advocating improvements their living conditions. Animal welfare allows human use of animals if “humane” guidelines are followed.

Anthropocentrism: the tendency of human beings to regard themselves the most important entity on the planet, as being separate to nature, and holding the view that nature exists for human use and exploitation.

Anthropomorphism: the attribution of human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities.

Anthrozoology: the study of the interactions and relationships between human and nonhuman animals.

Carnism: the invisible belief system, or ideology, that conditions people to eat certain animals. “Carn” means “flesh” or “of the flesh” and “ism” refers to a belief system.

Factory farms: a system of rearing livestock using highly intensive methods, by which poultry, pigs, or cattle are confined indoors in very large sheds under strictly controlled conditions. Also known as industrialised agriculture.

Flexitarian: a person who has a largely plant-based diet without ruling out ever eating meat or dairy products.

Free range: a method of farming where animals, for at least part of the day, can roam freely outdoors, rather than being confined in an enclosure for 24 hours each day.

Locavore: a person whose diet consists only or principally of locally grown or produced food.

Live export: exporting animals (by ship) for slaughter and consumption overseas.

Meat paradox: a term coined by psychologists Loughnan, Bastian and Haslam (2014), which describes the phenomenon of both loving and eating animals, and the cognitive dissonance that this entails.

Meatless meat: This is becoming an alternative meat industry, and many see this as a way to escape the many problems of factory farming. *Impossible Foods* and *Beyond Meat* are two

large companies creating meatless “meats,” each using different blends of plant proteins. Meatless meat be one of the following:

Lab grown meat: or cultured meat. Meats grown from cell cultures, which may or may not be “vegetarian” depending on how an individual views the use of animal cells.

Plant-based meat: Plant-based meat is produced directly from plants and is composed of protein, fat, vitamins, minerals, and water.

Meatshaming: emotion-based campaigns used by vegan and animal activists to evoke feelings of shame and therefore reduce meat consumption.

Projection: a defence mechanism used when a person externalises their own feelings (which may be positive or negative) onto another person or an object.

Projective identification: occurs when the above occurs, and the second person introjects the projected qualities and believes him or herself to be characterised by those qualities, appropriately and justifiably.

Speciesism: prejudice or discrimination based on species; especially discrimination against animals. In applied ethics and the philosophy of animal rights it means the practice of treating members of one species as morally more important than members of other species.

Splitting: a psychological process which allows one to tolerate difficult or uncomfortable emotions by seeing someone or something as good or bad, right or wrong, black or white.

Vegan: a person who does not eat any food derived from animals (including dairy and eggs) and who typically does not use other animal products (such as leather).

Vegetarian: someone who avoids eating meat and other byproducts of animal slaughter. They may still consume other animal products, like eggs, milk, etc.

Vystopia: A word coined by Psychologist Clare Mann which she defines as “an existential crisis experienced by vegans, arising out of an awareness of the trance-like collusion with a dystopian world.” It involves intense grief at the enormity of ubiquitous animal abuse.

Veganuary: a UK nonprofit campaign that encourages people to give up animal products for 31 days (in January) to show that veganism is an attainable lifestyle.

Acronyms

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis

CPA: Climate Psychology Alliance

GRA: Group relations, Australia

HAS: Human Animal Studies (also known as anthrozoology)

IATP: Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

ISAZ: International Society of Anthrozoology

ISPSO: International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organisations

NIODA: National Institute of Organisation Dynamics, Australia

TEF: Transforming Experience Framework

TNC: Transnational Corporation