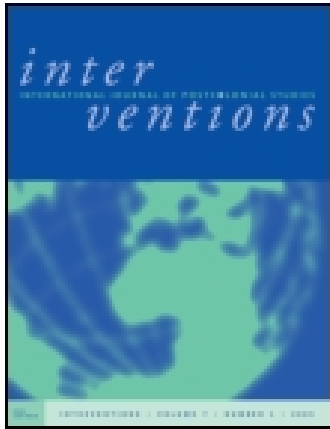


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The Animal You See

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THE ANIMAL YOU SEE

Why Look at Animals in Gaza?

Sara Salih

University of Toronto, Canada

.....
animals

death

Gaza

species

suffering

zoos
.....

Taking my cue from John Berger's question why look at animals, I discuss media coverage of Gaza's zoos between 2005 and 2009. I probe what is at stake when we look at animals in war zones, and I ask what purpose the spectacle of suffering and murdered animals served for non-Gazans outside the Strip who followed these news cycles. There is a pleasure in this kind of looking, which also necessitates a looking away from other suffering animals – those closer to home in factory farms and slaughterhouses. Engaging the ideas and arguments of W. G. Sebald, Susan Sontag, Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Derrida, I draw attention to the ways in which our gaze is guided and distracted by photographs of suffering animal bodies in war zones. As a counterpoint I turn to the eight-page sequence in Joe Sacco's Footnotes in Gaza in which a bull is slaughtered for Eid Al-Adha, the feast commemorating Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his only son to Allah. Following Derrida, I argue that there's a sacrifice involved in our very acts of looking, and that photographs and film footage consolidate entrenched and unquestioned hierarchies regarding the moral significance of some animals (e.g. lions, tigers) and the moral insignificance of others (e.g. pigs, cows – the animals humans eat).

I

Perhaps it's strange to write about a zoo (several zoos in fact) I haven't seen. Zoos are all about looking, but as far as I'm aware, the zoos in question are no longer there to be looked at. Even if they were, I'm not sure I'd make the journey. It might be dangerous for one thing, impossible even, the situation being what it is. To see or not to see? What difference does it make? How will you respond to what I write if I tell you I never set my naked eyes on the zoos or the animals in them, but sat at home reading newspaper reports, poring over photos of dead camels and children riding around on donkeys disguised as zebras?

This essay is an attempt to understand the kinds of images and narratives that move us; in particular, media images and narratives focusing on zoos in the Gaza Strip. I'm wondering why we want to look at or read about animals in occupied territories, war zones and disaster areas, and the ways we're drawn to stories of animals who suffer in the midst of human suffering, by human agency. Of course, these questions connect to the bigger question, perhaps most famously posed by John Berger: why look at animals? To which we might add: how do we look at these particular animals in this particular place, as opposed, say, to other animals in other places whom we might in fact overlook in the very act of looking elsewhere? Obviously, when we train our gaze in one direction we're ignoring what lies in another – perhaps necessarily so, since we can't look in two directions at once – but I want to argue that we may train our gaze or allow it to be trained *in order* to overlook what we don't want to see. Stories about zoos in distant war zones perform this function for us, and zoos closer to home do the same. This is a kind of culturally sanctioned long-sightedness, a tacit injunction that we should look over *there* rather than over *here*, because of course, our eyes are not entirely free to roam where they will, our gaze is directed in ways in which we may be largely unaware, and we're being encouraged to focus on the far (e.g. 'exotic animals' in war zones) rather than the near (e.g. the slaughterhouse down the road). As one of the damned tells Dante when he descends to the sixth circle of hell:

*Noi veggiam, come quei c'ha mala luce,
le cose' disse 'che ne son lontano'*

We see, like those with faulty vision,
things at a distance from us.

You could plead that long-sightedness isn't exactly faulty vision since it's impossible to see everything; we're not, like Argus, endowed with a hundred eyes. Surely we have to be selective about the objects of our compassionate gazing? You might also ask why more and more of us in the Academy are

1 For example, a recent *Guardian* (2011) front-page article announced that ‘Chimpanzees seem to know what’s on other chimps’ minds . . . Humans may not be alone in having insight into the minds of others, a chimpanzee study suggests.’ See also a discussion in the *New York Times* about why ‘animal studies’ has moved from the lab to the lecture hall: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/03/science/animal-studies-move-from-the-lab-to-the-lecture-hall.html?_r=1&ref=science.

II

directing our compassionate gazes towards non-human animals, giving rise to what has been characterized as a recent ‘boom’ in animal studies and critical animal studies. One answer to this last question may be that people in the industrialized West are increasingly conscious of their consumer choices and wish to consume ‘ethically’, whether it be bananas or bacon. Additionally, it would make sense that a concern for animal rights would accompany or be part of human rights discourse, which has enjoyed its own ‘boom’ in recent years, especially if you connect this to our increasing understanding of animal sentience, empathy and suffering, our knowledge that humans are ‘not alone’ in possessing such capacities.¹ Now that we know other species suffer as we do, we may feel it’s incumbent upon us to do what we can to prevent that suffering, and yet if our vision is limited in the ways I’ve already suggested, then it may also be the case that we don’t see suffering clearly. Indeed, it can be difficult to know what kind of suffering deserves our attention, and there’s surely something amiss when so many of us resolutely overlook certain kinds of suffering in order to continue with our current ways of consuming. This is why it’s worth trying to understand how we choose to look, or are conditioned to look – perhaps even forced to look sometimes – and the corollary efforts we might expend in *not* looking.

In January 2006 Hamas won a major victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections, sparking a conflict with the rival Fatah group led by Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas. The international community stopped sending aid to the Strip, while the United States initiated sanctions and a boycott of the Palestinian Authority. In June of that year, Hamas suspended its ceasefire, and a total blockade of the Strip followed. A year later, Hamas attacked Fatah and took control in Gaza, prompting Israel to seal off Gaza’s borders. Following an Israel Defence Force (IDF) ground offensive in November 2008, Israel launched Operation Cast Lead in December, putatively in response to Hamas rocket attacks on Israel from the Strip. The Israelis bombarded Gaza, targeting Hamas police stations, headquarters and offices, and they launched a ground invasion after eight days of air strikes. It’s thought that a total of 1,300 Palestinians and 13 Israelis were killed during the 22-day offensive, with the civilian death toll among Palestinians drawing widespread condemnation from the international community. A truce was eventually brokered, with Israel announcing a unilateral ceasefire on 19 January 2009 and eventually withdrawing its troops from the Strip – a ‘great victory’ according to Hamas. A UN fact-finding mission was subsequently launched – the contentious Goldstone Inquiry on the Gaza Conflict and Human Rights Violations – which found

2 For the full report, see <http://www.unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/5ba47a5c6cef541-b802563e000493b8-c/25184e52d3e5cd-ba8525763200532-e73?OpenDocument>. Other sources consulted for this account of Operation Cast Lead include *Journal of Palestine Studies* (2009a, 2009b) and *Contemporary Arab Affairs* (2009).

3 Malamud (1998: 1–56) also uses the term ‘zoo stories.’

strong evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity during the Israeli offensive.²

Media reports about Gaza’s zoos began before Operation Cast Lead, beginning in 2005 and steadily increasing until 2009, after which they petered out. These zoo stories, which appeared in newspapers and other online news sources, can be divided into two distinct segments: the almost identical reports published in July 2007 after Hamas rescued Gaza Zoo’s female lion from her kidnappers, and a steady trickle of stories which appeared in 2009 during and after Israel’s three-week military attack on the Strip.³ The written accounts and audio reports were often accompanied by images of the zoos and their non-human inmates, so I want to think about the functions this kind of spectacle fulfilled for non-Gazans living outside the war zone who found themselves looking at animals in such a highly mediated, distantiated way at this time.

It’s a tiny piece of land – just 360 square kilometres, with a population of 1.6 million – but as far as I can gather, there were at least four zoos in this, the sixth most crowded place on earth. That seems remarkable enough, given the size of the Strip, the difficulties obtaining and transporting ‘exotic’ animals through the network of underground tunnels linking Gaza to Egypt, and the even harder task of feeding and caring for the zoo animals. A *Slate* article mentions ‘several ramshackle zoos in Gaza’, singling out Marah Land Zoo near Bureij refugee camp as ‘by far the cheeriest’. The *Slate* journalist also notes that in Rafah Zoo dead animals were left to rot in their cages, while another zoo in Bureij was so poor that a shopping trolley with a board over the top served as a cage for a fox. A fourth zoo in Zeitoun was the ‘Gaza Zoo’ which attracted extensive media attention because of its lions.

Theirs was a pretty awful story by all accounts. Smuggled into Gaza from Egypt as cubs, the brother and sister were separated in 2005 when Sabrina was stolen at gunpoint. A BBC story filed in November 2005 by journalist Alan Johnstone reported that a local mafia-type gang had also stolen two parrots, and that Sabrina’s mate, Sakher, was ‘devastated’. We see footage of the lions in upsettingly small cages and enclosures, even though Johnstone remarks that ‘[Sakher’s] cage is too big without Sabrina’. Johnstone himself was kidnapped two years later in March 2007, also by a notorious crime family which was at loggerheads with both Hamas and Fatah at the time. Held for sixteen weeks in the Sabra neighbourhood of Gaza city, Johnstone’s release was eventually secured by Hamas in July 2007 shortly after the party took control in Gaza. Only five days later, Hamas – whose mandate was to restore law and order in Gaza – also managed to free Sabrina during a raid on her captors, who were charging people five shekels to be photographed with her. The kidnappers had cut off the end of her tail, declawed her, and apparently removed some of her teeth. She was also undernourished, and a *New York Times* reporter cites the zoo’s vet as remarking: ‘I am very sad for

her . . . she must have felt very humiliated.’ Britain’s *Daily Mail* also quoted the vet’s comment, thus tacitly appearing to accept – indeed emphasizing – that lions can feel humiliated. The report included a portrait of Sabrina with the caption, ‘Back at the zoo but shows signs of malnourishment’ (this is a Reuters image). In the same report, we see a photograph of her with a large chain around her neck in the arms of one of the kidnappers, while a second image shows her sparring with Sakher shortly after her return to the zoo.

However, zoo stories rarely have happy endings. Israel began its attack on Gaza in December 2008, and Sakher and Sabrina somehow managed to survive the bombing which reportedly killed 759 Palestinians ‘not taking part in hostilities’, as well as most of the animals in the zoo. Sabrina, now pregnant, fled with Sakher through a hole in a missile-torn fence. They ate some of the other escaped animals before seeking shelter in the zoo’s administrative building where the owner eventually found them. Sabrina and Sakher were among around ten out of four hundred animals who survived the Israeli attacks: some were reportedly killed in air strikes, many starved, and some were shot dead. Footage accompanying a BBC report filed after the attacks shows Sakher in his cage; in another enclosure a small fox lurks behind a broken pot; ragged tarp gusts eerily in the breeze. In the same report, there’s a photo of an indistinguishable pile of rotting flesh and bones with the caption, ‘The remains of the camel have yet to be removed’ (Maqboul 2009). It’s not clear what happened to the two lions after that; I don’t know whether Sabrina gave birth to her cub, whether she and Sakher are alive, or even whether the zoo in Zeitoun is still up and running. I doubt it: a *Slate* article published in July 2009 reported that female lions at Marah Zoo and Gaza’s Middle Zoo were killed by shrapnel (‘An odd coincidence’, notes the sceptical reporter, ‘or perhaps life is hard for female lions?’), and a photo shows a sad-looking male lion, now ‘up for sale’ at the Middle Zoo.

Life is indeed hard for female lions, particularly in Gaza, but media interest in them waned quickly – proof, if we needed any, that the reports were motivated by something other than compassion or a concern for the animals’ welfare. Clearly, Gaza’s zoo animals provided a relatively apolitical spectacle for viewers in the West who might not want to weigh in on one side of the conflict or the other. Indeed, such stories of animal suffering and survival during times of war are fairly generic (compare, for example, Gaza media reports with the graphic novel *Pride of Baghdad*), thus also obviating the need for a contextualized, politically engaged response to the Israeli bombardment.

Attention turned to another pair of newsworthy animals at the Marah Land Zoo where two zebras had died of starvation during the Israeli attacks. The zoo’s owner, Mohammed Barghouti, discovered that it would cost \$40,000 (the figure varies from report to report) to smuggle real zebras through the tunnels connecting Gaza with Egypt. Not having such a large

sum to hand, he used masking tape, black hair dye and a paintbrush to create a pair of zebras out of two white donkeys. The BBC's headline reads 'Dye-job donkeys wow Gaza children', and the 'zonkeys' also caught the attention of *Slate*, the *Independent* and ITN. The BBC report includes film footage of the two zonkeys surrounded and ridden by crowds of laughing children. 'It shows how people are coping', remarked *New York Times* reporter Taghreed al Khadaj in a radio interview with the BBC: 'they are coming up with ideas to do business.' There was even a rumour that an Israeli mayor had been so moved by the story of the zonkeys that he was offering to donate two real zebras to the zoo. It seems unlikely that this altruistic impulse was fulfilled since, in spite of its spectacular 'made in Gaza' zebras, a year later Marah Zoo was up for sale. One donkey-zebra had perished (of hair dye poisoning, it was rumoured, even though the owner insisted that he used a Wella product), and other animals were starving because of the Israeli economic blockade. 'It is too expensive to feed the animals', Barghouti commented to the *Independent* in February 2010, leading the reporter to conclude: 'In an economic siege that is taking its toll on both the morale and the pockets of Gazans, exotic animals, or even just souped-up donkeys were always going to be a difficult business model' (Butler 2010). Berger's insight that the animal has been reduced to a unit of production would seem to be borne out by this comment, which also draws attention to the reification of animals who are being triply exploited – by the zoo owners, by the reporters and by us, the readers/viewers. Again, media reports bear striking similarities to zoos themselves: we gaze at the animals through the metaphorical 'cage' of print, we're briefly amused, and we move on to the next spectacle very little the wiser for what we've seen.

The media trail ends here. There don't seem to be any further reports, although I've learned from the contact of a contact in Rafah that the zoo there suffered a similar fate to those in Zeitoun and Marah. This zoo had no wild animals, only cats, birds, dogs and snakes that had been smuggled through tunnels from Egypt. Times are hard in Gaza, where it seems that any animal can be spectacularized in order to provide a source of entertainment, a distraction from the dire situation, or simply something else to look at. The Rafah zoo owner said that three rockets hit the zoo during the bombardment, killing many of the animals and causing others to flee to the border. The zoo owner (who had taken out a large loan to open the place) was understandably bitter, and he asked whether his zoo was a place for terrorists to blow up (presumably he meant Israeli terrorists).⁴ It's true, a zoo doesn't seem like an obvious military target, yet it's also true that zoos are often destroyed during times of war, sometimes galvanizing people into humanitarian action since, as Malamud observes, 'zoo animals suffer at least as appallingly as people [*sic*] during wartime' (Malamud 1995: 200).⁵ Sometimes humans on opposing sides of a conflict are brought together in

4 My thanks to Joe Sacco for providing this information.

5 For example, South African conservationist Lawrence Anthony travelled to Baghdad on a mission to 'rescue' the animals trapped during the war against Iraq in

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2003. His account (Anthony 2007) is blurbbed as ‘the astonishing story of one of the world’s great animal rescues’ (it seems human heroics are what’s at stake here). For a discussion of zoos in wartime, see Malamud (1998: 199–207).

common cause: in February 2009 an article in an online resource called *ISRAEL21c* reported that Let the Animals Live, an Israeli animal welfare organization, was working to bring relief to animals in both Israel and Palestine, and an offer had been made to move Sabrina and Sakher to a foster home in Israel. Apparently, Hamas repeatedly refused the offer, since, as a Let the Animals Live spokesperson put it, ‘officially, they [the Palestinians] don’t want our help.’ Still, the spokesperson concluded, ‘I am hoping that through the animals we can draw the two sides closer together.’ As far as I know, Let the Animals Live is still working with zoos in the occupied territories, even though recently there has been no media interest in the animals trapped there. It seems we’ve stopped looking at Gaza’s animals, at least until the next round of disasters strikes the Strip.

III

We could be cynical about this break in our attention or, on the other hand, we could use it as an opportunity to think about why we were drawn to look at and read about zoo animals, zoo-goers and decimated zoos in the first place. Perhaps at least part of the attraction of such zoo stories for western readers is their anomalousness, their grotesquerie. Historically, the zoological garden has signalled the conquest of ‘foreign’ and ‘exotic’ places, which is clearly not the case in Palestine, although the spectacle of the bombed-out zoo may well resonate with cultural imperial representations of tamed ‘savages’ let loose in times of war. In the West, the emergence of public zoos coincided with industrialization, imperialism and new technologies of leisure. More recently, zoos have fed a consumer taste for domesticated versions of ‘the wild’, nature, the environment. The zoo, as Randy Malamud points out, is a contact zone in which an imperialist hegemony is sustained: zoo-goers are constructed as paramount masters of all they survey, while zoo animals are the controlled, oppressed, subalterns (Malamud 1998: 58, 59, 60). If zoos signal a delusive human belief that the natural world can be organized, mastered and controlled, and if historically they have allowed imperial nations to grandstand their ‘animal capital’, then what is the meaning of a zoo in an occupied territory like Gaza?⁶ It would be easy enough to give a crudely psychoanalytic reading of the situation in which dispossessed, powerless Palestinians exert their control over those more dispossessed and powerless than they are. After all, zoo animals are like prisoners of war and/or refugees in wartime, and zoos are routinely compared to prisons; in which case, we could indeed say that in some ways, the predicament of the animals in Gaza’s zoos is not so dissimilar from that of Gaza’s humans (Coetzee 1999: 59; Malamud 1998: 48).

6 Malamud (1998: 32, 33). For an extended discussion of ‘animal capital’, see Shukin (2009).

However, if zoos resemble penal institutions such as occupied countries and refugee camps, they're also a sign of nationhood and normality and they indicate the existence of a class of people with sufficient wealth and leisure to spend looking at animals. As the vet at Qalqilya Zoo in the West Bank told British journalist Amelia Thomas when she asked him why he bothered with animals given the difficulties he faced: 'Every country has a zoo . . . Tell me. Why shouldn't we?' (Thomas 2008: 11). A mean-spirited interlocutor might reply, because you're living under occupation and many people don't recognize you as a country, yet the vet's reply suggests that Palestine's zoos at least in some measure constitute a raised fist to Israel and the world. 'They won't break our spirit', Emad Qasim the zookeeper at Gaza Zoo told a *Gulf Times* reporter as he stood amid the animal corpses and the rubble after the bombing: 'And we will build again.'

Furthermore, at least one reporter notes the irony of 'caged' and trapped Gazans preferring to spend their time looking at caged and trapped animals, while the *Toronto Star* lays out the carceral continuum even more starkly: 'A zoo is a prison, however you look at it, and Gaza City seems in many ways to be a particularly penal place.' Indeed, says the reporter, it's hard not to draw a depressing parallel between the zoo and Gaza itself: 'enclosed by impassable security walls on three sides and by an Israeli-patrolled sea on the fourth – the world's largest open-air prison, as it is sometimes called' (Ross 2008). In that case, when we look at Gazans looking at animals, in a sense we're watching them watch themselves. Surely part of the power of zoo stories lies in the sentimental responses they elicit from us, perhaps even subtly inviting us to regard zoos as signs of 'civilization' (as opposed to the 'barbarity' of bombing them). 'Zoos in war zones produce an unending cascade of heart-string-tugging stories', as the *Slate* reporter puts it, although she also cautions that 'the zoo stories are sometimes apocryphal.' Actually, it seems more accurate to say that *we* produce zoo stories from war zones, and that something other than truth or apocrypha might be at stake here. For if the zoo is a longstanding narrative of nation, the zoo's destruction by external or internal forces is no less a part of that story. Think of the Jardin des Plantes during the Prussian siege of Paris in 1870; or the bombing of the Zoologischer Garten in Berlin during the Second World War (I'll come back to Berlin); or the tales of zoos in Baghdad, Kuwait, Kabul and Libya with which we've been regaled more recently.⁷ If not exactly 'unending' as the *Slate* reporter asserts, the stream of zoo stories has been relatively constant in recent years, so that again, we must ask why we read these tales and what kind of entertainment do we derive from them. Why are we tacitly enjoined to read about and look at suffering or dead animals? What's the function of these zoo stories, and why is it that we're drawn to them?

7 For an account of the Siege of Paris, see Spang (1992: 756). Intriguingly, reports about these last three decimated zoos focused on the fate of their lions, while the graphic novel *Pride of Baghdad* purports

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to give a lion's-eye view of the bombing of Baghdad. Perhaps reporters and writers focus on lions because humans can readily empathize with them – they're sociable, after all, unlike other big cats, and the lions in at least two of these war-zoo sagas are represented as a monogamous couple. Lions are also associated with an exoticized 'African' martial ethos, as for example in *The Lion King*. See *BBC News* (2002) for a report on the death of Marjan, the lion in Kabul Zoo who, as the report puts it, 'became something of a symbol of survival against the odds'.

Quite simply, we read about and look at animals who suffer or die in times of war because we want to. These stories are appealing, not altogether mournful; we may derive a certain pleasure from them. The tone of a number of the articles about Gaza's zoos is jaunty, sometimes more than faintly comical. For example, *The Times* report starts off with the narrative conceit that Sabrina the lion is a human who's reluctant to be interviewed about the hardships of war she's endured, while most accounts of the zonkeys emphasize the humorous rather than the pathetic aspects of the story. It's clear enough that at least a few of these animal tales offer non-Palestinians a form of light-ish relief from reading about a bleak political situation. Even those reports which aren't quite so jolly don't seem to be inviting us to take sides, and they appeal to sentiments that aren't strictly political. For example, a *Gulf News* video report about the zoo in Zeitoun includes footage of a pregnant camel who was shot in the back by the Israelis, her dead face contorted in pain. We're shown a pair of dead monkeys, mother and child, trapped in a pot where they sought shelter (they were afraid, remarks the zoo keeper), while Sakher and Sabrina lie listless, mutilated and probably hungry in their miserable cage, having narrowly escaped Israeli gunfire. Other reports also detail the carnage, the destruction and deprivation, the awful lives these animals lead in their 'narrow cell[s]' (*Independent*). If Gazans enjoy looking at caged animals, those of us who live outside the Gaza Strip seem to have no less avid a taste for such spectacles, along with an even more unflinching gaze. We're amused, horrified and bewildered all at once, and yet as long as the reports keep coming, we don't look away.

We look, as I've said, because we *can* look and want to look; and as I'm also suggesting, stories of animals in war zones always carry with them the sense that we're looking away from another, contiguous catastrophe – the human lives destroyed by human violence. Perhaps this is because 'the human cost' seems harder to quantify and/or more difficult to come to terms with. To think about it implicitly requires something of us, demands a response in a way that stories of animal death apparently do not. Animal stories come and go, just as animal lives do, or so we assume. As I write this in 2011, I shouldn't think many people are sparing a thought for Gaza's animal war dead, but two years later 'Palestinians wait for answers on Israeli war in Gaza' as one headline puts it (Macintyre 2011). Richard Goldstone, the South African jurist who led the UN Human Rights Council investigation into the Gaza war, has just retracted his most contentious finding, that Israeli forces intentionally targeted civilians. Now the terrible stories of civilian deaths which took place in Gaza in 2008/2009 must be told all over again, raising questions to which answers are urgently required. Did Israel violate international law? Did it commit war crimes and crimes against humanity? Did Hamas? What's the legal redress for such

8 For example, Higgins (1909). Animals are listed under ‘contraband of war’ alongside arms, projectiles, powder and clothing (546).

crimes? Hague Convention statutes don’t include animals, which are not counted as either ‘civilians’ or ‘combatants’.⁸ Zoo animals are nationless, neither Israeli nor Palestinian; they’re simply ‘animals’ and so our outrage at their deaths might seem on the surface to be an uncomplicated, unpolitical, ‘humanitarian’ response to the spectacle and narrative of their suffering.

W. G. Sebald offers a different explanation for the appalled fascination with which we confront animal death during times of war: ‘These images of horror fill us with particular revulsion because they go beyond those routine accounts of human suffering that are to some extent precensored’, he writes in *On the Natural History of Destruction*: ‘And it may be that the horror which comes over us in reading such passages is also aroused by the recollection that zoos, which all over Europe owe their existence to a desire to demonstrate princely or imperial power, are at the same time supposed to be a kind of imitation of the Garden of Eden’ (Sebald 2004: 92). Sebald is talking about accounts of the bombing of Berlin Zoo 1943, a very different context of course, but his observations help us to understand how we receive the ‘images of horror’ coming out of Gaza’s zoos. In fact, the content of the first-hand accounts Sebald cites is quite similar to the kind of material we’re likely to encounter in the present day: zoo buildings set alight by incendiary bombs; antelope houses destroyed; a third of the animals dead; deer and monkeys escaping, birds escaping through broken glass roofs; lions charred and suffocated in their cages; crocodiles writhing in pain beneath lumps of concrete; dead elephants cut up; humans crawling around their rib cages and burrowing through mountains of entrails (Sebald 2004: 92).⁹ Sebald writes:

9 For an eyewitness account of the destruction of the Zoologischer Garten, see Schäfer (1985): 159–66).

Most of all, it must be said that the account of the destruction of Berlin Zoo, which ought to be too much for the sensibilities of the average reader, probably caused no offense only because it was written by professionals who evidently did not lose their minds even in extremity – or their appetite either, for [an eyewitness] writes that ‘the crocodile tails, cooked in large pans, tasted like fat chicken’, and later [the eyewitness] continues, ‘we regarded bear hams and bear sausage as delicacies.’ (Sebald 2004: 92–3)

We don’t look away, aren’t overwhelmed, Sebald implies, because the spectacle of destruction and death is mediated for us by professionals whose eyes and stomachs apparently remain undisturbed. ‘They ate the zoo’, as it was said of the fate of the animals in the Jardin des Plantes during the Siege of Paris in 1870, a tidy metonym and euphemism which might also apply to what contemporary readers are doing when they ‘consume’ the zoo stories pictured and narrated by photographers and journalists. According to Sebald, we’re revolted by stories of bombed-out zoos because such images of horror go beyond routine accounts of human suffering; *animal* suffering is

10 Sontag (1977: 19–20) describes her first encounter with photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau at the age of 12. ‘Nothing I have seen – in photographs or in real life – ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously’, she writes, but she also asks, ‘What good was served by seeing them?’

not invoked by Sebald, nor is it apparently routinized in the accounts he cites. We’re revolted at the same time that we’re able to look at the uncensored horror of animal death. It seems that in life as in death, the zoo animal is no more than a spectacle (although tellingly perhaps, Sebald doesn’t include one of his trademark photographic images at this point in his book). Further, Sebald’s narrative of the narratives of Berlin Zoo and its destruction also suggests that we look at ravaged animal corpses because we can’t bear to look at the spectacles of suffering which lie at an oblique angle to our line of vision. In Sebald’s account, this contiguous suffering is ‘human’, it’s ‘routine’ and it’s precensored; it’s the death camps, images of which, as Susan Sontag (1977: 21) observes, were quickly to become ordinary.¹⁰ But the unusual evocation of human survivors eating crocodile tails and bear sausages in Sebald’s account brings another mass of suffering into my mind – the suffering of the animals we eat, the animals we don’t, can’t, *won’t* see even though they’re not all that distant from us.

IV

I’m suggesting that reports about the terrible fate of animals in war zones provide readers and viewers with a double distraction: from the depredation and death visited upon humans in those areas (Gazans, in this case), and from the depredation and death visited upon the unimaginable numbers of animals we kill and eat in the industrialized West. I’ll return to the unimaginable shortly, but first I want to think a bit more about distraction. Susan Sontag warns against it: ‘the pity and disgust that [images of war] inspire should not distract you from asking what pictures, whose cruelties, whose deaths are *not* being shown’, she admonishes in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003: 12). Further, she warns, we shouldn’t be fooled by our sympathetic responses to such images, since sympathy may mystify our relations to power as well as proclaiming our innocence.

To that extent, [sympathy] can be (for all our good intentions) an impertinent – if not an inappropriate – response. To set aside the sympathy we extend to others beset by war and murderous politics for a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering, and may – in ways we prefer not to imagine – be linked to their suffering... is a task for which the painful, stirring images supply only an initial spark. (Sontag 2003: 91–2)

For Sontag, then, sympathy *itself* is a distraction, and the ‘spark’ of recognition may be altogether extinguished by the strong, self-preoccupying breeze of our sentiment. Sontag is well aware that sentimentality is compatible with a taste for brutality as she calls it, and it’s possible that

reports about animals in times of war feed that taste – whether by design or not is another question (Sontag 2003: 91). We are in a sense protected by the horror and outrage we might feel when we see (for example) images of pregnant camels shot by Israeli soldiers; and I would even hazard that our sentimental, sympathetic reactions probably don't prompt us to place our privileges on the same 'map' as the suffering we're being invited to witness at second-hand. Perhaps it's because in this case the suffering on display is animal suffering. We might decry it but we probably won't identify with it, so that the focus on animal suffering serves only to distance the reader/viewer from the suffering of Gazans, even as our sympathetic response to the dead camels could well be construed as pointless.

Given that the context I'm discussing is contested occupied territory, Sontag's 'map of suffering' is a resonant metaphor for the ways we orient ourselves ethically, and the connections – 'routes', if you like – we perceive or overlook between one zone of suffering and another. We should also ask who's drawing the map, why are these particular waypoints marked on it, and what has been left off. Again, I'm directing attention to the ways our attention is directed, usually without our realizing it, and I'm trying to shed some light on what's left in shadow or omitted altogether. What is the function of these catalogues of violence (the phrase is James Baldwin's), and is there anything we can learn about our sentimental attraction to them? Baldwin's own view is uncompromising: sentimentality is the mark of dishonesty, an inability to feel, a fear of life, an arid heart, 'the signal of secret and violent inhumanity' (Baldwin 1995: 20). 'Catalogue of violence' is his resonant characterization of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a novel which in Baldwin's view 'flinch[es] from nothing in presenting the complete picture'. And yet, says Baldwin, Stowe's picture is *not* complete, so he believes we must ask 'what constriction or failure of perception forced her so to depend on the description of brutality – unmotivated, senseless – and to leave unanswered and unnoticed the only important question: what it was, after all, that moved her people to such deeds' (Baldwin 1995: 20).

It would seem that the cataloguer, compiler, map-drawer – I don't think it really matters which metaphor you choose – *depends* on the representation of brutality in order to avoid tackling the more difficult moral question: why do people do such terrible things? It's interesting that Baldwin regards Beecher Stowe's constriction or failure of perception as forcing her to fall back on descriptions of brutality, as though her catalogues of violence are themselves the result of a violence of vision – or we might say, the violence of a culture which 'does such deeds' even as it pushes our attention in another direction. To return to the topographical metaphor: it seems the map is already drawn, the sentimental route marked out for us in ways that allow us to trundle along in blithe – or perhaps willed? – ignorance of other avenues. When we respond sympathetically and sentimentally to images of pain and

death, we're allowing ourselves to be propelled along certain well-trodden pathways, and we're permitting our gaze to be guided, perhaps even manipulated, as we do so. There's too much suffering to see, we may have no time to ask ourselves Sontag's question about what cruelties and deaths are *not* being shown.

We are voyeurs if we look at images of extreme suffering and do nothing to alleviate it, writes Sontag; it may even be that we find such images alluring, pornographic (Sontag 2003: 37–8, 85). Again, I would argue that the same is true of photos depicting animal bodies. We consume such images. 'We eat the zoo.' Like Berger, but with obvious differences, I've been suggesting that we're distracted by the images of animal suffering and death which circulate during times of war. Looking at the particularized animals depicted in photographs and films of zoos in war zones not only turns our attention away from global politics, but also these images allow us to remain ignorant of another war as recently characterized by Jonathan Safran Foer and J. M. Coetzee – the war we've been waging on animals for the last several decades in the industrial West (Safran Foer 2009: 33; Coetzee 1999: 59).

V

Where then, should we look, and what should we do once we've finished looking? How can we look in ways that don't *overlook*? In his book about witnessing, Giorgio Agamben describes some of the difficulties of looking and the directions in which we're likely to shift our gaze when the subject becomes too uncomfortable or unbearable. He describes British film footage of Bergen-Belsen taken shortly after the camp was liberated in 1945. 'It is difficult to bear the sight of the thousands of naked corpses piled in common graves or carried on the shoulders of former camp guards, of those tortured bodies that even the SS could not name', Agamben writes, yet because the Allies intended to use this footage as proof of Nazi atrocities, the details had to be filmed. At one point, says Agamben,

the camera lingers almost by accident on what seem to be living people, a group of prisoners crouched on the ground or wandering on foot like ghosts. It lasts only a few seconds, but it is still long enough for the spectator to realize that they are either *Muselmänner* who have survived by some miracle, or, at least, prisoners very close to the state of *Muselmänner*. (Agamben 2002: 51)

The same cameraman who trained his lens on nameless corpses stacked one on top of another apparently cannot bear the sight of these *Muselmänner* or 'half-living beings', so he immediately returns to the corpses. Agamben

concludes: ‘As Elias Canetti has noted, a heap of dead bodies is an ancient spectacle, one which has often satisfied the powerful. But the sight of *Muselmänner* is an absolutely new phenomenon, unbearable to human eyes’ (Agamben 2002: 51).

The *Muselman* – not literally a Muslim here, but as Agamben characterizes him, ‘the moving threshold in which man passed into non-man’ in the Nazi camps (47) – is an unbearable sight because he is neither living nor dead, neither human nor non-human (nor animal?). The camera has to swing back round to piles of corpses as a preferable, less Gorgon-like spectacle. An aesthetic choice has been made even in this dire context, something is left out of the frame. Step through the looking-glass into the bizarre (but sadly, not fantastic) world of intensive ‘farming’ and you’ll find an inversion of the situation Agamben describes. Now we don’t want to look at heaps of dead bodies since this is the flesh we’ll be eating, so we permit our gaze to be drawn away by images of particular, suffering animals in war zones. This kind of particularizing objectifies, entertains even. Where numbers and piles tend to generalize, overwhelming and overloading us, such photographs or films isolate a single animal or group of animals with the effect that, as Berger suggests, we’re distracted from the bigger, systemic issues, which in any case, we may feel we’re powerless to change.

Perhaps the question is not (or not just) where can we look, but how can we look. Can we watch the footage of Sakher and Sabrina in their cages in ways that don’t obscure their immediate context (Israel’s war on Gaza) or, more broadly, the treatment of non-humans by humans in Palestine as well as the industrialized West? It may well be that photograph and film, at least in their current form, do not readily prompt this kind of reflection. ‘The limit of photographic knowledge of the world is that, while it can goad conscience, it can, finally, never be ethical or political knowledge’, Sontag observes in her forthright way (although she later came to interrogate this view, expressed in *On Photography*): ‘The knowledge gained through still photographs will always be some kind of sentimentalism, whether cynical or humanist. It will be a knowledge at bargain prices – a semblance of knowledge, a semblance of wisdom’ (Sontag 1977: 23–4). Taken instantly, ‘consumed’ perhaps as rapidly, photographs of suffering might give rise to a kind of cut-price ethics whereby we think we’ve done something simply by looking at a picture. After all, what good *does* it do to look? As Sontag also asserts, photographed images of suffering don’t necessarily strengthen conscience and compassion. They may even corrupt them (Sontag 1977: 20).

Part of this corruption may lie in our eventual habituation to such images, our ability, like the Bergen-Belsen photographer, to contemplate them and turn away, turn the page, or as Berger suggests, reach for our wallets in a commodificatory, expiatory, self-exculpatory gesture: ‘The picture becomes evidence of the general human condition. It accuses nobody and everybody’

11 Benjamin (1999: 526) quotes Brecht's observation that 'less than ever does the mere reflection of reality reveal anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG tells us nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional.'

(Berger 1991a: 44). Sontag (1977: 20) similarly claims that after repeated exposure to such images, an event begins to seem less real.¹¹ This certainly seems true of images of animal suffering, whether they depict thousands of unnamed, anonymous animals tightly packed together in factory installations or a pair of emaciated lions in a war-damaged zoo on the Gaza Strip. I doubt even film footage of a factory farm (and the Internet yields plenty of this) can convey the horrors of such places. You would have to go there if you really wanted to know what it's like, to linger in the facility, to observe individual animals and the conditions in which they live and die. Perhaps neither photographic nor televisual images can ever particularize in ways that actually alter our moral sensibilities (even lingering in a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation might not do this), and I wonder how likely it is that we'll change our minds and our practice after looking at a photograph or watching a film.

Arguably, other kinds of image don't let us off so lightly. They demand more of us, encouraging or even implicitly forcing a kind of turning of our attention to that which has been at the periphery of our vision. What I have in mind is the way drawings and comic books are able to represent and narrativize an event/events rather than producing an instant trace of reality as the photograph does. Speed or slowness is important, since the labour of arranging lines, shadows and words on a page invites a different kind of attention from the reader. Certainly, when we're looking at an image or reading a comic book we can turn the page if we don't wish to be drawn in by what's been drawn, but we probably know we're missing something. At the very least, the laborious detail of a drawing or comic invites us to slow down and concentrate, or to recognize our own haste and inattentiveness as well as the reasons behind our hurrying along.

Let's return to Gaza where it's Eid Al-Adha, the feast commemorating Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his only son to Allah. The cartoonist Joe Sacco is in Khan Younis refugee camp working on a historical project about a massacre of humans which occurred fifty years previously. As so often in *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009), the cartoon-journalist's historical research is interrupted by current events, but on this occasion it's bulls who are being slaughtered, not Palestinians. The connection is made explicit by Abu Hamed, one of Sacco's interlocutors, who's hanging around for the butcher to come and slaughter a bull: 'We make a sacrifice of the bulls, and [Ariel] Sharon makes a sacrifice of us' (Sacco 2009: 139). The point is not belaboured. Here, animal death is animal death but it could also be allegory. What's more, the bulls' deaths (there are two in this sequence, which is entitled 'Feast') are uncomfortably drawn out, in both senses of the phrase, so that the reader's gaze is in a sense forced into the bloodbath. I don't think either photograph or film could do so much in quite this way. As André Bazin says in his brief, influential essay 'Death every afternoon' (which also

centres on the death of a bull), the photograph arrives at its limit in the presence of death. ‘We do not die twice’, writes Bazin:

In this respect, a photograph does not have the power of film; it can only represent someone dying or a corpse, not the elusive passage of time from one state to the other...Before cinema there was only the profanation of corpses and the desecration of tombs. Thanks to film, nowadays we can desecrate and show at will the only one of our possessions that is temporally inalienable: dead without a requiem, the eternal dead-again of the cinema. (Bazin 2003: 30–1)

True enough, we can play and replay dying and death on our TV screens every afternoon as Bazin says, and yet the flickering light and the movement of the images could hardly be taken as an invitation to linger (see also Sontag 2003: 94). Surely it would indeed seem like violation and obscenity as Bazin also suggests, were we to sit with the controls in our hands watching a human or an animal dying in slow-motion, whereas the comic-book sequence works (and was produced) in something resembling stop-motion as a matter of course, so that the images seem to invite us to pore over them (Bazin 2003: 30–1).¹²

In fact, Sacco makes us witness two bulls’ deaths. No sooner have we endured one visual bloodbath, than the comic book presses replay and the sequence starts all over again with a different bull, in much more detail and at closer quarters (Figure 1). Whereas Bazin’s bull is anonymous, a mere pretext for toreador heroism and the reader’s supposedly sublime response, Sacco manages to individualize his bull without sentimentalizing. ‘This is nothing personal, but the bull knows something is up’, reads the caption above a portrait of the bull’s terrified, open-mouthed, rather ‘human’-looking face (Sacco 2009: 140; the rope that’s coiled about the bull’s forehead looks like both a noose and a headdress). And yet in that single panel, we’re convinced that it *is* personal because an individual – not thousands in a factory installation, or an unnamed bull in the ring – is about to die: ‘For every creature, death is the unique moment *par excellence*’, acknowledges Bazin, and Sacco’s reader is likely to recognize the truth of this observation as it applies to a non-human ‘creature’ (Bazin 2003: 30). Unlike Bazin’s filmed bullfights, there’s nothing uplifting about the depiction of the Gazan bull’s death. In the next dozen or so panels, we’re taken blow by blow (literally) through the bull’s slaughter, his decapitation, flaying, slicing, evisceration and the disposal of his internal organs. We’re shown how the flesh is divided into smaller and smaller pieces, into more and more bags to be distributed among various families; and at last, perhaps with a sense of unease, we see Sacco and his friend Abed eating the dead bull that’s been rendered into meat. Again, the comparison is made between the sacrificed (eaten) bull and the Gazans, when Abed jokes that Sacco should interview

12 In his introduction to *Palestine*, Edward Said remarks that ‘Sacco’s art has the power to detain us’ (Sacco 2001: v).

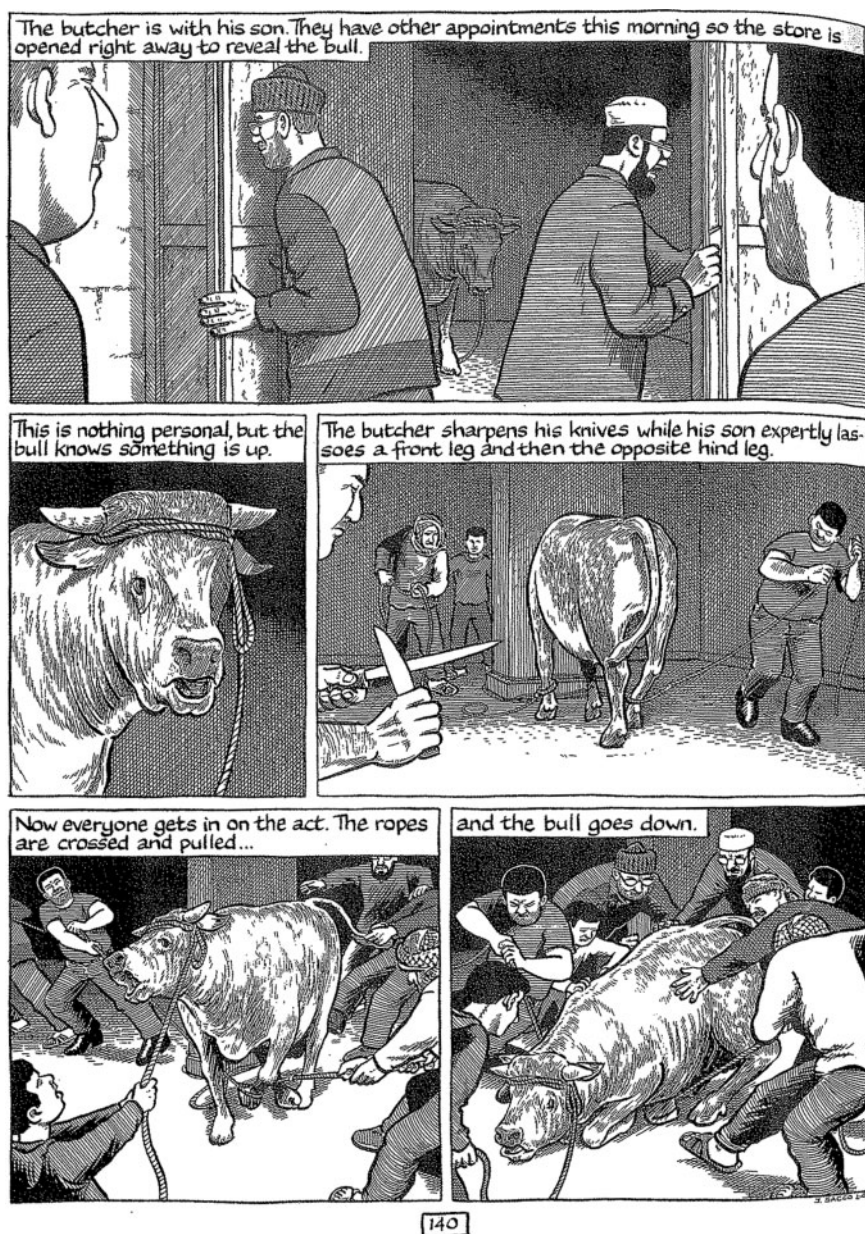


Figure 1 From *Footnotes in Gaza* (Sacco 2009: 140, 141, 142, 145).



Figure 1 Continued



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Figure 1 Continued



Figure 1 Continued

bulls about their massacre: ‘You could go around and they’ll tell you, “This is where they kept me.” And since you don’t speak bull, you’ll have a bull to accompany you as a translator’ (Sacco 2009: 145). In the final panel of this sequence, Israeli bombers roar overhead and a heavy rain washes the bulls’ blood from the streets. Nothing has changed: the bulls are dead and sacrifice is still the stuff of life in Gaza, whether it’s the Eid or not.

The Gift of Death’s discussion of sacrifice resonates with this sequence – for one thing, Derrida gives a long exegesis of Abraham and Isaac – so we might revisit the question I posed earlier regarding who or what is seen and/or sacrificed, or as here, seen in the moment of sacrifice. In *Footnotes*, the sacrifice we’re called to witness is that of a single animal, contrasted with the hundreds of Palestinians massacred in 1956 (and the billions of farm animals killed every year in the United States).¹³ Sacco’s images don’t offer us the aesthetic and moral relief of those media representations in which, as I’ve suggested, the zoo animal is doubly spectacularized – because it’s a zoo animal and because it’s a victim of war. Nor is the reader permitted the luxury of distance in the killing sequence. It’s as though your face is pushed right up against the bull’s flanks so that you almost feel as though you’ve been spattered by the blood that’s shed when the butcher’s son plunges in his knife ‘so deep that his fists disappear into the bull’s throat’ (Sacco 2009: 141). The author has witnessed the butchering and he seems to enjoy his plate of meat at the end of it. He has neither turned away nor refused, and he watches and consumes with equal passivity. The toneless captions only accentuate the moral blankness of the whole sequence. There’s no clear ‘animal rights’ message here, and yet in a book which so meticulously and extensively documents the massacre of Palestinians by Israeli soldiers, it’s hard not to discern the subtle assertion of an animal–human continuum in this detailed depiction of an animal’s slaughter.¹⁴ What’s the connection, we might be moved to ask ourselves, between *this* dead meat and *that* dead meat, between how an animal is killed in Gaza and how an animal is killed in the industrialized West? And is there a connection between the killing of an animal and the killing of a human? After all, isn’t it one of the clichés of genocide that humans are made to die ‘like cattle’?¹⁵

In part we’re moved to ask these questions because of our vicarious presence at the slaughter. Photographs and films don’t usually show us the person behind the lens, whereas in *Footnotes* the author is our visible witness and his impassive face provides a space into which the reader can easily slot herself. Such proximity and identification tacitly invite us to consider or reconsider our orientation as regards animals and our own attitudes towards ‘meat’. How can he? we might ask when we see Sacco tucking into his Eid dinner. That bull was alive, it had a face – he saw it. And so, how can *we*? Once again the contrast with zoo stories is stark. There’s sympathy in the portrayal of the terror-stricken bull at the moment of his realization, but as

13 In an interview, Sacco refers to the ‘beauty’ of the slaughter, and he also says that such traditions are what make people ‘feel like a human being, despite everything’ (El-Haddad 2010).

14 There’s a more direct engagement with the meat industry, as well as another depiction of bull slaughter, in a sequence that’s included in Sacco’s collection of early works, *Notes from a Defeatist* (2003: 52–5).

15 In her first ‘lecture’ Coetzee’s Elizabeth Costello remarks that ‘denunciation of the camps reverberates so fully with the language of the stockyard and the

slaughterhouse, that it is barely necessary for me to prepare the ground for the comparison I am about to make. The crime of the Third Reich, says the voice of accusation, was to treat people like animals... Let me say it openly', she continues: 'we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them.' Coetzee has the fictional poet, Abraham Stern, object to the analogy: 'if Jews were treated like cattle, it does not follow that cattle are treated like Jews' (Coetzee 1999: 21, 50). A footnote is not the place to deal adequately with this complex issue, but as I see it, the problem is that *cows* are treated 'like cattle' – in other words, there's an underlying analogizing or metaphoricizing impulse in the way humans talk about and/or represent animals.

I've said, the sequence is resolutely unsentimental. Nothing is hidden. The author saw this and so must we.

Of course, I'm not suggesting that *Footnotes* shows us everything, since this would be impossible, but that a 'realistic' cartoon image may have more range and imaginative license than film or photography. If, as I've been arguing, reports about zoos in war zones provide a distraction from suffering animals closer to home, then the cartoonist's images – not 'real' obviously, but realistic enough to prompt a shock of recognition in the reader – fulfil precisely the opposite function. In *Footnotes* the reader's gaze is forced in a sense, but here such violence of vision as Sontag characterizes it, has a purpose. When we find ourselves face-to-face with a bull moments before his slaughter, we're able to recognize him as a sentient, suffering individual who anticipates his own death. That eerily comic, pleading, panicked look brings the cartoon animal into our sphere of concern, albeit briefly. 'Have you ever been anyone's last sight?' asks Safran Foer (2009). He's describing how discomfited he was when he locked eyes with a pig who was about to be slaughtered, a moment which made the pig – *all* pigs – a member of Safran Foer's invisible family, so that it was impossible for him to continue ignoring who meat comes from. Obviously, there's a difference between meeting the eyes of an animal in the pages of a comic book and encountering his or her gaze on the floor of a slaughterhouse; and yet it seems to me that images like Sacco's encourage us to particularize and to pay attention to the details, the forgotten 'footnotes'. The bull in *Footnotes in Gaza* is eaten – dismembered rather than remembered – but even though the narrative is focused on other victims, the inclusion of the eight-page slaughter sequence nonetheless places the animal before us as a subject of concern, not just an object for consumption. The comic can do this in a way written text on its own cannot. Safran Foer's description of his face-to-face encounter with a pig is certainly moving, but Sacco's bull sequence is direct, idiosyncratic, unaccompanied by any moral gloss with which we might console ourselves. Once again, proximity is key, whereas in contrast and to return to my earlier point, media reports train our gaze on what lies afar and apart from us. Even our sentimental responses to them may only further increase the separation between ourselves and our objects of compassion. As Berger suggests in his essay 'Photographs of Agony', we're distracted by our own distraction, so that photographic images of animal suffering may be said to move without changing us (Berger 1991a: 44). We're not close enough, we're not in the frame or anywhere near it. The cartoon, on the other hand, is doubly porous: it effectively melts the 'human'/'animal' boundary (e.g. by depicting animal terror as in *Footnotes*) while also inviting – or assuming – readerly identification. The carefully constructed labour-intensive images enjoin us to look carefully, and to look again.

Postscript

I've been thinking about looking, about the kinds of narratives and images and image-narratives which are likely to move and reorient us in relation to animals, and I've been suggesting that sympathy and sentiment – the emotions aroused by those 'heart-string tugging stories' about zoos in war zones – aren't going to effect such a reorientation or shift in perspective. If anything, stories and images of suffering captive animals have become all-too familiar. Even if they weren't, the shock we might experience on seeing a picture of an animal dead or suffering in a war zone permits us to keep training our gaze away from our own domestic 'war'. To adapt Derrida's formulation: when we're moved by footage of the lions in Gaza's zoos, we continue to sacrifice all the cats (all the animals) in the world, in our own world.¹⁶ This isn't to suggest that 'animal charity' begins at home and that we should correct our own abuses before turning to those in other regions. Rather, it's an opportunity for us to rethink the kinds of hierarchies we perhaps unthinkingly assume about the moral significance of *this* animal rather than *that* one. For example, social psychologist Melanie Joy asks why we aren't averse to consuming the very small selection of animals we've deemed edible, as opposed to those we've deemed inedible such as golden retrievers (Joy 2010: 17). 'Most of us rank cats and dogs and horses above cattle and swine', Harlan B. Miller similarly observes in his contribution to *The Death of the Animal*: 'but there is no property of intelligence or sentience that justifies such an ordering' (Miller 2009: 66).

Most of us would also rank lions (and golden retrievers) above bulls, but we might be hard-put to say why. Because there are more bulls than lions? Because lions are 'prettier'? Because we went to see *The Lion King*? Certainly you could say that humans identify with predators, but these and other explanations aren't exactly rational and it would be easy enough to line up strong philosophical arguments against them. And yet I haven't been talking about reason, I've been talking about the power of certain images and stories to sway us emotionally, as well as the cultural – you might say ideological – function those images and stories and emotions fulfil. My sense is that images of animals in war zones cause us to look away even as we look. If we were looking at images of bombed-out slaughterhouses rather than bombed-out zoos, we would undoubtedly respond differently. Indeed, we might begin to wonder about our own slaughterhouses and the animals inside them, but no one wants to look at domestic slaughterhouses, let alone those in war-stricken areas of the world.¹⁷ The industry, as J. M. Coetzee notes, has arranged the lives of factory animals in such a way that we're reminded of industrial installations and abattoirs as little as possible (Coetzee 2007: n.p.). I would add that we've also arranged our minds (or allowed them to be arranged) in order to preclude this kind of 'reminder'. So deeply entrenched is the hierarchical ranking of

16 Derrida (1996: 7) asks, 'How would you ever justify the fact that you sacrifice all the cats in the world to the cat that you feed at home every morning for years, whereas other cats die of hunger at every instant? Not to mention other people?'

17 Pollan (2002: 110, 111) comments that if the walls of factory farms and slaughterhouses were transparent,

industrial agriculture would rapidly change its practices. He also suggests that looking at what we eat might determine our food choices.

animals that I think most of us would be nonplussed if we were challenged to explain why we subject certain species to death, cruelty, ‘war’ (to use Foer’s formulation) while labouring to preserve others – from death, cruelty, war.

I’ve suggested that this kind of taken-for-granted hierarchical ordering is connected to our consumption of certain kinds of cultural spectacle such as media reports of war zones. It’s terrible when lions suffer during times of war, just as it’s terrible when humans suffer during times of war. It’s also terrible that we wage war against animals by turning them into units of production. We don’t need to read *Footnotes* to appreciate that the ‘processing’ of animals and the ‘processing’ of human beings are not very far apart in either their ideology or their methodology, so the comparison needn’t be laboured. Since J. M. Coetzee puts the point with typical starkness, I’ll leave the last words to him:

In the twentieth century, a group of powerful and bloody-minded men in Germany hit on the idea of adapting the methods of the industrial stockyard, as pioneered and perfected in Chicago, to the slaughter – or what they preferred to call the processing – of human beings. Of course we cried out in horror when we found out what they had been up to. What a terrible crime to treat human beings like cattle – if only we had known beforehand. But our cry should more accurately have been: what a terrible crime to treat human beings like units in an industrial process. And that cry should have had a postscript: what a terrible crime – come to think of it, a crime against nature – to treat any living being like a unit in an industrial process. (Coetzee 2007: n.p.)

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