Livestock and Literature

Reimagining Postanimal Companion Species

Liza B. Bauer
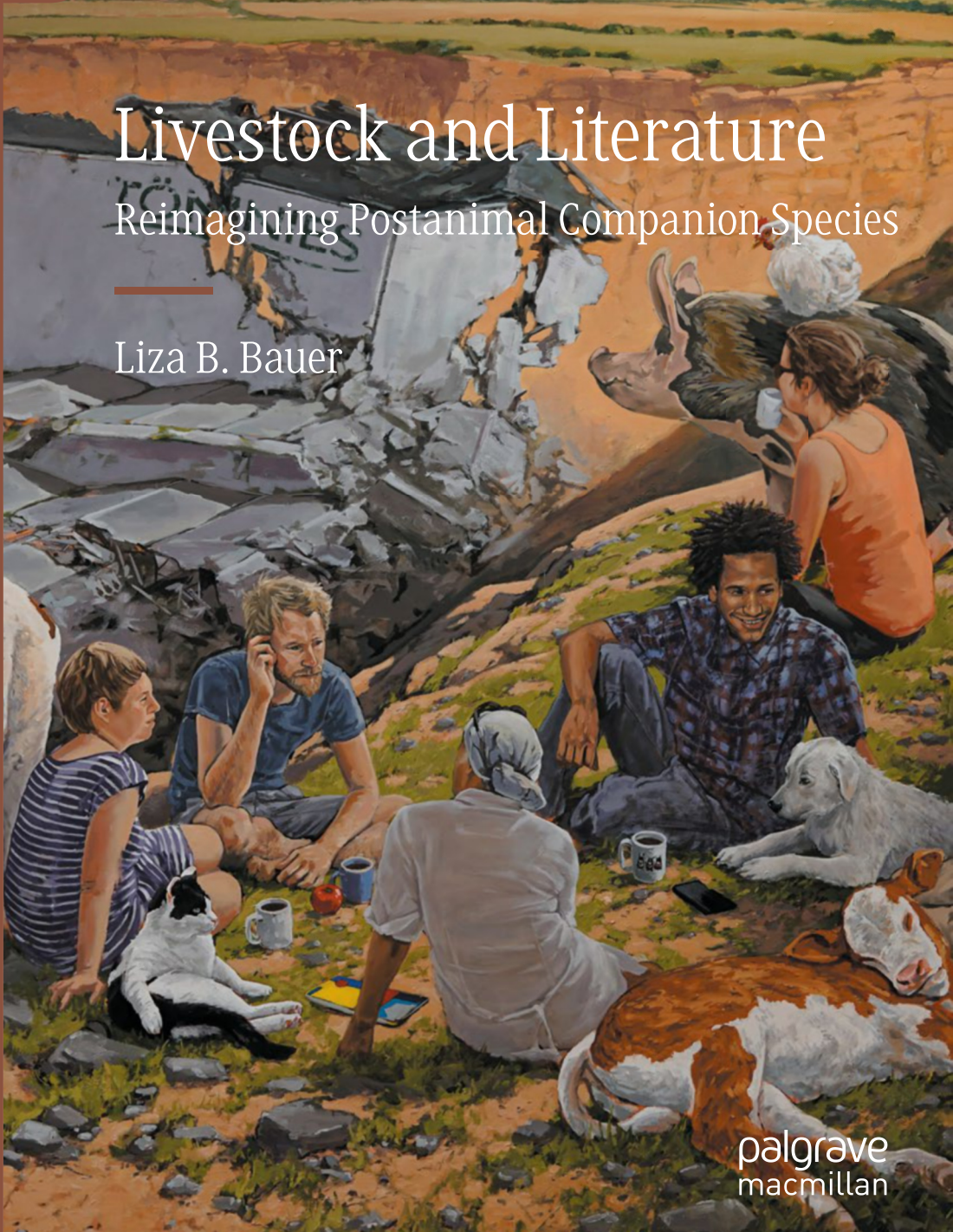
Palgrave Studies in Animals and Literature

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Various academic disciplines can now be found in the process of executing an 'animal turn', questioning the ethical and philosophical grounds of human exceptionalism by taking seriously the nonhuman animal presences that haunt the margins of history, anthropology, philosophy, sociology and literary studies. Such work is characterised by a series of broad, cross-disciplinary questions. How might we rethink and problematise the separation of the human from other animals? What are the ethical and political stakes of our relationships with other species? How might we locate and understand the agency of animals in human cultures?

This series publishes work that looks, specifically, at the implications of the 'animal turn' for the field of English Studies. Language is often thought of as the key marker of humanity's difference from other species; animals may have codes, calls or songs, but humans have a mode of communication of a wholly other order. The primary motivation is to muddy this assumption and to animalise the canons of English Literature by rethinking representations of animals and interspecies encounter. Whereas animals are conventionally read as objects of fable, allegory or metaphor (and as signs of specifically human concerns), this series significantly extends the new insights of interdisciplinary animal studies by tracing the engagement of such figuration with the material lives of animals. It examines textual cultures as variously embodying a debt to or an intimacy with animals and advances understanding of how the aesthetic engagements of literary arts have always done more than simply illustrate natural history. We publish studies of the representation of animals in literary texts from the Middle Ages to the present and with reference to the discipline's key thematic concerns, genres and critical methods. The series focuses on literary prose and poetry, while also accommodating related discussion of the full range of materials and texts and contexts (from theatre and film to fine art, journalism, the law, popular writing and other cultural ephemera) with which English studies now engages.

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Liza B. Bauer
Panel on Planetary Thinking
Justus Liebig University
Giessen, Germany

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*To ever-recalcitrant Claire,
to a dog I once met at a beach in Sardinia,
and to all my other four-legged companions
who have inspired me to write this book.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While it feels like my journey toward writing this book reaches much further back in time, the idea first concretized in 2014 while I was reading Susan McHugh's chapter on "The Fictions and Futures of Farm Animals" in *Animal Stories*. Hers and Erica Fudge's work first acquainted me with animal studies while researching on my BA and MA theses, and ever since I have been fascinated by the wide range, intellectual depth, and animal-sensitive commitment of scholarly work in this thriving discipline. I also owe a great debt to Sune Borkfelt, who shared an early version of *Reading Slaughter* with me after Susan kindly put us in touch. Diving into his work at that stage has been invaluable in the process of bringing this book into the world.

Yet before I could realize my ambitious idea to write a book on so-called livestock animals in literature, I transformed it into a doctoral thesis. First of all, I would like to thank the Justus Liebig University in Giessen (JLU), Germany, for awarding a graduate scholarship to me. It has been an incredible privilege to be funded for three and a half years for doing research on a topic so close to my heart. However, I would locate my first milestone even before that, in an interview for a PhD membership at the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC), also in Giessen. I have Ingo Berensmeyer to thank for his feedback on my first project proposal, Michael Basseler for his critical question on the anthropomorphic bias of narrative during the interview, and Ansgar Nünning and the other committee members for supporting my proposal. As animal

studies had previously not been in the center of Giessen's academic community's attention, I am immensely grateful for the ongoing support by the graduate center, which allowed me to travel to my first animal studies conferences and discuss my ideas. In its earliest written form, this book was significantly shaped by the constructive criticism and encouragement I have received from all my PhD colleagues at the center and beyond, particularly by Jennifer Kappe, Hannah Klaubert, Elizabeth Kovach, Shannon Lambert, and Wibke Schniedermann. Moreover, I have all my other colleagues at the GCSC, particularly Imke Polland, Ann van de Veire, Robert Winkler, and Max Bergmann to thank for many productive coffee breaks and for making my years as a PhD student a time that has shaped who I am today.

I owe my possibly greatest debt to my mentors Ansgar Nünning and Roland Borgards, without whose generous support, challenging feedback, and reliable thesis supervision this book would have never seen the light. My first visit at Roland's research colloquium in Frankfurt am Main constitutes a central milestone for me, as I thus joined the network for cultural and literary animal studies he has co-founded. Discussing my work in depth with animal studies peers has been as frustrating as it has been rewarding, as it unveiled both my project's greatest weaknesses and potentials. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Esther Köhring, Frederike Middelhoff, Alexandra Böhm, Kathrin Lang, Daphne Tokas, Samuel Kramer, and all other colloquium members for their time and efforts in familiarizing me with the intellectual ramifications of the discipline.

While transforming my thesis into this book, my work for and with the Panel on Planetary Thinking, still at JLU Giessen, has vastly expanded my horizon and continues doing so. I am honored for the chance of contributing to that ongoing paradigm shift that stirs scholarly attention toward seriously contemplating the relationships between societies, the planet, and all its more-than-human inhabitants. In particular, I thank the two founders of the Panel, Claus Leggewie and Frederic Hanusch, who have provided me not only with an incredible amount of trust, confidence, and professional expertise, but also with the conditions needed to finalize this book besides coordinating our Panel's numerous activities. Alongside with the rest of the team and our fellow scholars and artists, they have inspired me to dig deeper into my work's connection to the impacts the

animal industry bears on the planet. And last, but certainly not least, I have my colleagues in the human-animal studies research section and the Minding Animals Germany network to thank for their interdisciplinary perspectives, which have given this book some of its many "finishing" touches.

And neither would I have been able to publish this book without the editorial team at Palgrave, whom I thank for reviewing and accepting my proposal, nor without the support by the production team in the formalities of publishing it. I would like to thank the series editors for accepting my book as part of this series, my friend and colleague Aravindi Muthuwahandi for her meticulous editing assistance, and I would like to thank David Herman, who has provided me with essential analytical tools and has given me encouraging feedback on my manuscript in one of its final stages.

To complement these words of gratitude to the many generous human beings from my professional world, I would finally like to express my love and appreciation to the many human and nonhuman animals who fill my personal one with laughter, music, sense of community, inspiration, and encouragement. Thank you, Johannes, for helping me through some of the most challenging times while writing this book; thank you, Stani and all my friends and family members—you are my guideposts and sources of energy without whom I could not stand.

The cover image, "Hügel" (oil on canvas), was kindly made available to me as a courtesy of the artist, Hartmut Kiewert, whose work continues to inspire me and surely many others. Thanks, Hartmut, for dreaming about possible futures, where humans and other animals live together beyond exploitative structures, and for your creative skills in visualizing them.

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

AA   Animal Allegory
ASHT   Animal-Source-Human-Target Projections
CAS   Critical Animal Studies
CLAS   Cultural and Literary Animal Studies
HAS   Human-Animal Studies
HSAT   Human-Source-Animal-Target Projections
LAS   Literary Animal Studies
Sf   Science and Speculative Fiction
UM   *Umwelt* Modeling
ANT   Actor-Network Theory

Introduction: Animal Industry, Literature, and Imagining the Future

> *The whole place smells like milk, fermenting grass, grief and heat. A*
> *wild look of survival in those cow eyes.*
> **Could it tell**
> **My babies I'm**
> **still**
> **here.**
> —(McKay 2020, 182).

In these verses, a fictional cow asks the human first-person narrator—addressed as "it"—to tell her lost calves she is still waiting for their return. The readers of Laura J. McKay's recent speculative fiction (sf) novel, *The Animals in That Country*, know the cow's "babies" are likely dead already; perhaps they even empathize with the narrator's sensations of guilt, feeling *as if* the cow was directing her message at *them* (2020, 182).[1] While they are immersed in the first-person perspective of Jean, a mother who is on a desperate search for her own daughter, Jean's memory points them to "[t]he sound the mothers would make at the fence line when the little ones were driven away" (182). The passage digs into the heart of what interests me here: the capability of sf narratives to confront and connect

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[1] The alternative font in McKay's novel marks the narrator's interpretations of animal communication.

readers with so-called livestock animal characters as *companion species* within and potentially beyond their imagination.[2]

Moreover, it points to the ambivalence inherent in the relationships between humans and the countless other animals with whom they share the planet. In connection to those animal species humans have long been collaborating closely with to produce vital necessities, such as food or clothing, this ambivalence manifests strongly. Albeit evolutionary and culturally intertwined for centuries, the histories of humans and farmed animals are shaped by sociocultural practices that distance them from one another.[3] A central example of these, the "livestock" category ties cows, pigs, chickens, and others to their use value and thus renders them efficiently exploitable and edible resources for humans. Grappling with the complex ethical questions connected to the relationships between humans and farmed animals therefore poses challenges to the human imagination. I am interested in the capacity of literary narratives to work with these challenges by inviting readers to take imaginary leaps within the fictional bounds of their *storyworlds*. Questions on how narrative stages fictional encounters between farmed animals and humans and what readers may learn from them lie at the core of this book. Specifically, I am interested in "livestock" characters who unleash themselves from that category.[4]

My motivation is to shed light on the distinctive contribution of literature to what many consider an urgent change of course. In times of accelerated global warming, an acute pandemic, and breakthroughs in bioengineering practices, discussions about the relationships between

[2] I draw on Donna Haraway's influential anti-category here, which frames all species who share their lifeworlds with each other, so that they eat, play, work, live, and die together as companion species (2007, 14; 2003).

[3] See, e.g., Fudge (2002a, b, 2004).

[4] In this book, I seek to deconstruct the objectifying "livestock" category, which is why the term may be understood as enclosed by quotation marks whenever used, and the term "farmed animals" will be preferred. I focus mostly on pigs, cows, chickens, and sheep, and do not elaborate on fish for reasons of scope. I also do not touch on horses in this book, as they are not as strongly associated with the livestock label by most people (obviously this does not render them less severely subjugated to human control). See, e.g., Sonja Fielitz's (2015), Kristen Guest and Monica Mattfield's (2019), or Kari Weil's (2020) work on horses in cultural histories.

human societies and the more-than-human world have become more heated than ever before. The threats industrial animal agriculture poses to the health of human workers, consumers, and the planet as a whole draw farmed animals into the heart of these discussions. Voices calling for a drastic, worldwide reduction of the *animal industry*[5] have gained a remarkable degree of public attention. In the twenty-first century, there is scientific consensus that a shift away from animal- toward more plant-based agricultural systems bears momentous potential for climate and bio-diversity protection (cf. Hayek et al. 2021). Nevertheless, profound political interventions remain out of sight. Neither is it of help that twenty-first-century slaughter technologies and molecular breeding techniques are transforming living animals into ever more efficient, high-performance machines (cf. Nieradzik 2016, 127; Twine 2010, 16). The structures and practices that compile and support the animal industry effectively hide animal lives and suffering from consumers of animal products. Consequently, many overlook the significant impacts farmed animals have on ecosystems, and any chances for alternative forms of living *with* them seem unimaginable. In this book, I dig into the roots of this detrimental imbalance within human-animal relationships and argue that, as a distinctive form of twenty-first-century cultural expression, sf narratives may have a small but significant role to play within a pivotal moment in their history.

The extent of his role emerges from the capacity of literary narrative to making relationship models with farmed animal *subjects* thinkable. Many have argued that literature can shape and widen our horizons, so much so that philosopher Catherine Z. Elgin has termed it a *laboratory of the mind* where "complacent convictions, […] what we take ourselves to know," can be unsettled (2007, 52; cf. 2019).[6] Following these cues, *Livestock*

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[5] I understand the term *animal industry* as an umbrella concept that subsumes the corporations, profiteers, as well as the extensive range of exploitative and oppressive practices connected to the *animal-industrial complex* (Noske 1989; Twine 2012, 2013). A German initiative between animal rights, climate justice, and climate protection activists has framed the direct translation *Tierindustrie* as a campaigning term. Friederike Schmitz makes a convincing case for an abolition of the German animal industry to enable a profound shift to a plant-based agricultural system in her 2022 work *Anders satt*.

[6] Cf. Nussbaum (1990); Nünning (2014); or Bornmüller et al. (2019).

and Literature highlights how narratives challenge perceptions that frame living farmed animals as passive victims of the animal industry. Texts that imagine these animals' fictional representatives as pushing practices of *farmed animal resistance* to readers' attention do so quite radically. *Sf storyworlds* provide these characters with unsuspected capabilities, as biotechnology and other nova render them modified beings, whom I describe as *postanimal figures.* In early 2022, US scientists celebrated a medical breakthrough in the first successful transplantation of a genetically modified pig heart into a human body—news coverage left the lost life of the pig host untouched (cf. Rabin 2022a, b).[7] In the sf texts I engage with here, fictional versions of pigs, cows, or chickens strike back. Anything but passive resources for what doctors allegedly proclaimed to be an "endless supply of replacement organs" (*Euronews* 2022), the GMO pigs in my readings outwit human characters using intelligence and strategy, or they get involved in political decision-making. In other cases, AI-modified sf cows run their own dairy farms and boss around human workers, and knowledgeable sf chickens outlive a long extinct human race by fifty thousand years. I seek to uncover what these elaborate *literary thought experiments* tell us about the ways humans think about "livestock" in twenty-first-century *meat culture* and inquire into their means of shaping or even changing these ideas.

Instead of propagating any forms of living with farmed animals as the "right" or "wrong" ones, sf texts function as highly imaginative and self-reflective laboratories that experiment with possibilities. Thought experiments that act out versions of human-animal relationships that are different from those in the "real" world invite readers to think critically about existing models (cf. McHale 2010, 23; Elgin 2007, 46; Packard 2019). Their storyworlds extrapolate from *speciesist* or *carnist* belief systems, exemplify animal exploitation or commodification, reconfigure human-animal boundaries according to their own parameters, and thereby sabotage the workings of the *anthropological machine* from many angles (cf. Vint 2010, 16).[8] Moreover, sf thought experiments often negotiate *utopian* and

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[7] Xenotransplantation, the practice of growing replacement organs for humans within animal hosts, constitutes a well-researched and well-developed field within biotechnological research and is engaged with in Margaret Atwood's *The MaddAddam Trilogy*; see Chap. 4.

[8] Giorgio Agamben describes the anthropological machine as a cultural technical apparatus that functions to maintain the human-animal divide in cultural, philosophical, and social systems by means of a range of cultural practices (2004, 37–83).

dystopian visions of multispecies futures side-by-side. While readers are encouraged to *outthink* these extreme poles that are mapped out by "utopian" and "dystopian" imaginaries, they stretch their imaginative continuum for conceivable forms of human-animal relationships. Within their subjective reading experience, they may discover new avenues for thinking about future forms of inter- and intraspecies relationality and thus *retrain* their animal-sensitive imaginations (cf. Haraway 2016, 31).

These functions of narrative contribute to a process that I figuratively describe as *deindustrializing the imagination*. With this, I try to follow up on Alex Blanchette's question on what it means to "radically deindustrialize work, the environment, and the imagination" (2020, 5). I argue that, as one of capitalism's most violent manifestations, the animal industry blocks out our ability to see farmed animals as active partners in world-making processes. It follows that, in its numerous facets and related practices, the animal industry functions as a semiotic *gestalt* that limits Eurowestern cultural repertoires in terms of their capacity to imagine future forms of societal life *with* other animals. While describing the ways in which capitalism structures "knowledge, labour and resources" in industrial countries, cultural theorist Franco Berardi defines the *gestalt* as a "cognitive frame" through which we see the world (2017, 193–94); as a semiotic system, the *gestalt* shapes the mental patterns through which any incoming perceptual stimulus is filtered. Therefore, it can "block our ability to see things in a different frame," so that "anything that does not comply with" it remains unimaginable (194–95). Following Berardi, disentangling cultural imaginations from the "livestock" *gestalten* the animal industry has rooted within our minds lies at the heart of rethinking and practicing future relationship models with farmed animals beyond exploitative structures.

The formal repertoire of sf renders the genre particularly effective in challenging this tangle.[9] "Livestock" characters occurring as protagonists or active partners in reciprocal relationships with human ones in literary texts do not comply with the forms these animals usually take within readers' minds. If these storyworlds play on or suspend the hegemony of meat culture, they reflect on the ideologies that exclude farmed animals from the moral community in the real world as well. Not only does this expose

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[9] See also Séan McCorry's recent contribution on the affordances of sf relevant for animal studies (2021, 459–72).

"the *conceptual* and *invented* roots" of animal exploitation—to borrow the forceful words of Black vegan scholar Syl Ko (2017, 43; original emphasis)—but if these reflections resonate beyond the reading experience, they may alienate readers from the "dairy cows," "battery hens," or "porkers" that the animal industry has inscribed within their minds. Berardi describes this effect as enacting "a poetical potency of estrangement" in line with the function of cultural narratives that Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky describes as *ostranerie* (2017, 195; cf. Palmer 2023, 33–34). Thinking along these lines, narratives may undermine the bedrocks of animal exploitation while disrupting the semiotic forms that are both products and (re)producers of the animal industry. Hence, I am interested in how sf sets itself the task of deindustrializing the imagination—a perhaps utopian prerequisite for a profound reconfiguration of human-animal relationships.

My approach to reading and analyzing these cultural and ethical functions of *farmed animal narratives* operates on textual and conceptual levels. Following cultural narratologists, I understand narratives as active contributors to world- and meaning-making processes (cf. Nünning et al. 2010; Gikandi 2012).[10] It follows that they influence the ways in which human-animal relationships are thought and spoken of, which ultimately shapes how they are lived and practiced as well (Borgards 2015b, 156; Ortiz-Robles 2016, 2). Therefore, I examine how authors represent farmed animals, reflect on the challenges they face while doing so, and explore how they work with or against them. Readers' access and reactions to, as well as their experience of, literary texts are subjective and culturally specific phenomena. In view of the difficulties in describing these, my readings seek a general understanding about the distinctive narrative forms and strategies authors apply to portray "livestock." I close-read selected passages to describe how these forms function within their respective storyworlds and reflect on how they feed into the reading experience and potentially resonate within readers' imaginations. Susan McHugh's theory of a *narrative ethology* suggests that "commitments to loving with and learning from animals ethically […] can proceed from creative engagements with narrative forms" (2011, 217). If this is true, readers'

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[10] See also Alber (2012), Zapf (2016a, b, c), or Garrard (2011) for specific examinations of how narratives may work toward widening readers' sensitivities to, and understanding of, ecology.

imaginary connections to these fictional characters could affect human-animal relationships beyond the reading experience.

With this systematic method for accessing literary representations of a particular group of animals, I seek to contribute to a rapidly expanding body of literary animal studies scholarship.[11] A few decades after Jacques Derrida's crucial insight that humans cannot ever know for sure who or what "animals" are, it is high time to zoom in more closely on who or what "farmed animals" are and can be (2002, 369–418).[12] Within this book series and beyond, literary animal studies scholars are counteracting a long history of treating fictional animal characters as empty containers to be filled with any meaning human authors and readers desired to write and read into them (McHugh et al. 2021a, 2–3; cf. McHugh 2009b, 492). To uncover literature's means of challenging an *explicit anthropocentrism*, animal studies scholars need to reflect critically upon the insurmountable *anthropocentric bias* of literary narrative and work with it.[13] My book feeds into these conversations in that it showcases how the sf narrative's distance from what we perceive as the reality of "livestock" experience renders it particularly effective in challenging our imaginations. Moreover, my readings test and expand upon existing analytical categories in literary animal studies in order to adjust the narratological toolkits applied to the exceptional and yet understudied case in question.

Whereas it may not come as much of a surprise that cows, chickens, and pigs tend to take a back seat in climate activism (cf. Twine 2020) or in discourse on more-than-human rights, the lack of scholarship dedicated to the literary portrayal of "livestock" in particular is striking.[14] Early scholarly

[11] See, e.g., McHugh (2011), Marvin and McHugh (2014, 2018), Herman (2018), Driscoll and Hoffmann (2018), Borgards (2016a, b), Kompatscher-Gufler et al. (2017), Jaeger (2020), McHugh et al. (2021a, b), Borkfelt and Stephan (2022), and others.

[12] Literary animal studies has gained considerable momentum in the past two decades; some scholars consider Derrida's 1997 lecture at the Cerisy conference on which "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)" (2002) is based a crucial moment in the development of the discipline (Köhring 2015, 260–62).

[13] Literary animal studies differentiates between an inevitable epistemological anthropocentrism (the human perspective as formulating knowledge) and an ontological one (the human perspective as the center of the universe) (Borgards 2015a, 71).

[14] In "Eating Kin or Making Kin," I argue that farmed animals remain remarkably absent from climate activism in comparison to "more charismatic animals such as polar bears or large cats" and that "environmental or climate justice NGOs, such as the grass-roots climate organisation *350.org*, for a long time did without animals altogether and narrate environmental crises as mere human ones, as Stacy Alaimo observes (2012: 362)" Bauer (2021a, 297).

works on animal representation (Berger 1977, 1980; Baker 1993, 2000) foreground animals in zoos (especially primates or large cats), pets (especially cats and dogs), or large sea animals (especially sharks and cetaceans). Philosophical and theoretical baselines of animal studies, such as those formulated by Mary Midgley (1979, 1998), Derrida (2002, 2008), or Cary Wolfe (2003, 2009, 2010), rarely draw on farmed animals in their examples. Many introductory texts on the discipline deal with ethical questions surrounding hunting, euthanasia, animal research, and domestication but do not foreground the meat or dairy industries (Weil 2012; Ortiz-Robles 2016; Parry 2017).[15] Remarkably, only a single contribution to the Animal Studies Group's edited collection *Killing Animals* (2006) engages with slaughter practices, and none of the ones in David Herman's collection *Creatural Fictions: Human-Animal Relationships in Twentieth and Twenty-First-Century Literature* (2016b) examine narratives on farmed animals. A similar underrepresentation holds true for more popular science works, such as the German *Naturkunden* collection. The successful series dedicates only five of its ninety-three volumes to animal species associated with the animal industry: donkeys (Person 2013), pigs (Macho 2015), sheep (Fuhr 2017), herrings (Teschke 2014), and, most recently, pikes (Möller 2022).[16] Scholars' heightened attention to tigers, deer, horses, dogs, wolves, birds, cats, and many other non-livestock animals is surely less the result of their lack of concern for the suffering of cows, pigs, and chickens than simply of the rarity of their representation in literature and film. Exploring further reasons for and countering this significant absence of an animal group whose members most actively co-shape human societies alongside humans constitutes another one of my core incentives.

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[15] It should be noted that other introductions, such as those by the Chimaira group (2011), Nik Taylor (2013), Paul Waldau (2013), or Margo DeMello (2012), do foreground the violent aspects of animal domestication.

[16] Interestingly, the volume on pikes delineates the cultural history of a fish that has so far resisted against human attempts at breeding it in captivity. The given number of volumes is correct at the time of writing this introduction (March 2023). For reasons of scope, this book cannot address the representation of fish and other animals whose natural habitats are rivers, lakes, and oceans.

I therefore follow in the steps of animal studies scholars who have drawn these allegedly *killable* individuals into focus.[17] Barbara Noske's *Beyond Boundaries* (1989), Carol J. Adams's *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), Richard Twine's *Animals as Biotechnology* (2010), Anat Pick's *Creaturely Poetics* (2011), Susan McHugh's *Animal Stories* (2011), and Annie Potts's *Meat Culture* (2016b) provide me with key concepts.[18] Seán McCorry and John Miller's *Literature and Meat Since 1900* (2019), Laura Wright's foundational work in vegan studies (2015, 2019, 2021) and the scholars following Wright's approach provide inspirations on how to apply these to reading narrative. My understanding of animal resistance builds upon Dinesh Wadiwel's *The War Against Animals* (2015) and Fahim Amir's *Being and Swine: The End of Nature as We Knew It* (2020).[19] The focus on sf literature borrows Donna Haraway's definition, and her work on *companion species*, *kinship*, and *string figures* provides integral baselines for my arguments (2003, 2007, 2016). Literary scholars working on the formal affordances of science fiction, such as Frederic Jameson (2005), Brian McHale (2010), and, most importantly, Sherryl Vint (2010), provide me with further essential groundwork. My close readings apply the analytical criteria and methodologies established by Susan McHugh (2009a, 2011), Roland Borgards (2015a, b, 2016a, b, 2019), and David Herman (2013, 2016a, 2018). Last, but not least, I draw upon Blanchette's ethnographic study *Porkopolis* (2020) and Berardi's *Futurability* (2017) to frame my understanding of deindustrializing the imagination.

What is at stake may be a deconstruction of what literary animal studies scholar Helen Tiffin has famously termed a "Cartesian dystopia" for cows, pigs, chickens, and so on (cf. 2007, 251). Present-day meat culture, as she argues, catapults them back into the Enlightenment period when René Descartes famously reduced all animal species to non-sentient automata to serve human needs. *Livestock and Literature* foregrounds literary thought experiments that seem to be most effectively in service of expanding

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[17] According to Haraway's *When Species Meet* (2003), where she formulates the notion of "killing well" as building on Derrida's "eating well" (1991). Haraway suggests that, since it is "a misstep to pretend to live outside killing" (79) in a world where eating always entails killing, the goal should be to live and kill responsibly, without rendering any species discardable. Her argument that the commandment "[t]hou shalt not kill" is better reformulated as "[t]hou shalt not make killable" (80) is regarded critically in critical animal studies.

[18] Further texts which should be mentioned here but take a more distant approach were written by Nicole Shukin (2009), Marian Scholtmeijer (1993), Laurence Simmons and Philip Armstrong (2007), Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan (1995), and Philip Armstrong (2008).

[19] The English translation was published in 2020 and the German original in 2018. I draw upon the translation for means of consistency in language use whenever I quote Amir directly and refer to the German original in indirect references.

readers' sensibilities toward these animals as subjective partners. To explore whether literature can be understood as a laboratory, and how this may be relevant for the ways humans think and speak about livestock, a simple question provides an effective opener: *What if humans thought of pigs, cows, chickens, and others as relatable beings*?

1.1   IMAGINING ALTERNATIVE WORLDS FOR POSTANIMAL LIVESTOCK

We live in eternal day. It makes us lay more. [....] Our beaks have been cut off. And we're cancerous. [...]

Twenty-seven thousand of us sit here, our only exercise the laying of an egg, which rolls away from us, down a little chute.

I remember how wonderful it was to peck my way through the shell and step out into the warm bright dawn of life.

I have seen no other sunrise. [...] My birth was a grievous mistake. And yet an egg is developing in me, as always [...] and despite all my bitterness, tiny surges of tenderness fill me. How I wish I could stop the egg from growing so that I wouldn't have to know these tender feelings. But I can't stop. (Kotzwinkle 1976, 25)

As they narrate short periods of their miserable lives, a whole range of nonhuman narrators in William Kotzwinkle's *Doctor Rat* (1976) provide readers with alienating insights into Tiffin's real-world dystopia. Vividly, the first-person narrator describes her and the other laying hens' immediate surroundings, leaving a desolate impression. The notable switch from the plural "we," enunciating the collective experience in the battery cages, to the singular "I," as soon as the hen voices her individual emotions of care and longing, zooms the readers in on the undistinguished mental images of masses of unhealthy-looking hens stuffed in cages—screeching, cackling, and under stress—sharpening their focus onto the individual, the narrating "I." Readers might wonder whether living hens have access to their memories of hatching and whether they are even capable of having "tender feelings" toward their offspring. And either way, can a narrative told by a hen be at all plausible and taken seriously? Yet no matter which conclusions they draw, this juxtaposition of mass-scale commodification and individual suffering invites them to take on the hen's perspective and look through her orange-black, anxiously scowling eyes.

Even though they rely heavily on anthropomorphization, texts like *Doctor Rat* provide somewhat realistic portrayals of animal characters' *Umwelten* that may evoke senses of shared, creaturely vulnerability in readers.[20] In contrast, science or speculative fiction (sf) texts avail themselves of different strategies and pursue different aims. The sf storyworld Margaret Atwood envisions in *The MaddAddam Trilogy* (2003–2013) confronts its readers with so-called ChickieNobs—the "utilitarian's dream creature," as McHugh puts it (2010, 191):

> "This is the latest," said Crake.
> What they were looking at was a large bulblike object that seemed to be covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin. Out of it came twenty thick fleshy tubes, and at the end of each tube another bulb was growing.
> "What the hell is it?" said Jimmy.
> "Those are chickens," said Crake. "Chicken parts. Just the breasts, on this one. They've got ones that specialize in drumsticks too, twelve to a growth unit."
> "But there aren't any heads ..."
> "That's the head in the middle," said the woman. "There's a mouth opening at the top, they dump nutrients in there. No eyes or beak or anything, they don't need those." (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 2003, 237–38)[21]

Tellingly, the term "ChickieNobs" only exists in its plural throughout the three novels; there is no individual left behind these thoroughly commodified bodies. Even if readers overlook that twenty-first-century consumer culture hardly allows "broiler chickens" to be perceived as individuals either, these semi-living gene splices leave a profoundly grotesque image in the readers' minds. Yet instead of a feeling *for* the suffering and sentient "livestock" animal as evoked through Kotzwinkle's text, such sf representations of bioengineered creatures or tissue-cultured meat can trigger a critical engagement with the ethical dimensions of technological innovation in readers. The ChickieNobs are portrayed by a heterodiegetic, presumably *human* narrator as "an utterly abject creature, […] decoupled from any sense of agency," so that mechanisms of *defamiliarization*

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[20] In 1909, Jakob von Uexküll introduced the *Umwelt* concept to describe the specific surroundings in which a nonhuman animal lives and which are determined by individual, phenomenological conditions (cf. Borgards 2016b, 26). A precursor to this concept already appears in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) as a so-called entangled bank, as Borgards mentions.

[21] Henceforth, I abbreviate *Oryx and Crake* as *Oryx*.

feed into the reading experience much stronger than identificatory reader responses (McHugh 2010, 192).[22] It often seems difficult to read such sf characters as "animals" in a conventional sense, especially when biotechnological modifications or other nova enable nonhuman animals to speak or to obtain other unusual capabilities.

Nevertheless, sf narratives perform cultural and/or ethical work of particular value in both animal studies concerned with farmed animals *and* cultural studies concerned with planetary challenges. Haraway has famously argued that, to "stay with the trouble" of the twenty-first century, "it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with" (2016, 12). However, getting the story "right" becomes infinitely complicated when dealing with farmed animals. Perceived as livestock, they are attributed very specific roles, to which their representations in literature adhere for the most part. Were humans to regard them as social or even legal subjects with a right to exist for their own ends, which alternative roles would they take on? Where exactly may liberated farmed animals fit within the biotic community? Within debates on abolitionism and welfarism, animal-sympathetic positions fear that abolishing the human use of "livestock" altogether might result in their extinction, as farmed animals' in-bred dependency would render them unable to inhabit viable ecological niches (cf. Cudworth and Hobden 2018, 94). Even though that argument underestimates the long histories of *co*-dependency between human societies and all domesticated animals, it becomes clear that our imaginative capacities are facing a conundrum that cannot be resolved easily. Given the fact that not even the ecological footprint of the "livestock" sector has kept the numbers of pigs and cattle slaughtered per day from rising, alliances between humans and "meat animals" seem far out of practical as well as imaginary reach. With this in mind, we cannot but wonder which forms of interspecies relationality between humans and cows even remain *thinkable* without the former milking and/or consuming the latter.

Most literary storyworlds fall short in answering these questions. In *Reading Slaughter* (2022), Sune Borkfelt shows that slaughterhouse narratives effectively confront readers with "what average consumers will look away from in order to find pleasure in their meals" (87). However, these texts fail in imagining an alternative to animal suffering; instead, they exemplify that violence dominates existing imaginaries around "livestock"

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[22] See Helen Palmer's entry to the *More Posthuman Glossary* on "Defamiliarization" (2023, 33–34).

in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries most forcefully.[23] Similarly to the passage from *Doctor Rat* quoted earlier, James Agee's short story "A Mother's Tale" (1968) may effectively stir readers' sense of shared, bodily vulnerability by portraying a cow telling a terrifying story of a bull who managed to escape the slaughterhouse to her calves:

> He was upside down and very slowly swinging and turning, for he was hanging by the tendons of his heels from great frightful hooks, and he has told us that the feeling was as if his hide were being torn from him inch by inch, in one piece. (8)

Even if the bull from this passage manages to escape the abattoir to warn his herd, he eventually perishes all the same. The same holds true for the pigs, cattle, and chickens in *Doctor Rat*, the giant hog Earl Buzz in Jane Smiley's campus novel *Moo* (1995), or for the numerous animals who appear as dead body parts or reincarnated humans in Neil Astley's detective novel *The End of My Tether* (2002). For others, such as the steak narrator in Deborah Levy's *Diary of a Steak* (1997), or the countless animals whose demise Upton Sinclair vividly depicts in *The Jungle* (1906), the prospect of survival seems even further out of reach. In 2011, McHugh described how pig characters increasingly manage to change their conventional fates to be turned into meat in literary narrative (171). Yet even particularly recalcitrant characters, such as "Babe, the Sheep-Pig" (King-Smith 1983) or "Napoleon" (Orwell 1945), rarely save their lives for good; even within the world of literary fiction, their escapes from turning into meat remain precarious. Even though these perhaps more "realistic" novels undoubtedly fulfill significant functions, the question of how to imagine relationalities between humans and "livestock" beyond perceptions of exploitation, victimhood, and death persists.

Sf storyworlds give our imagination the necessary push to discover ways out of this dead-end street. Resulting from the aforementioned, limiting *gestalt* the animal industry bears on cultural imaginations, social relationships with farmed animals may seem inconceivable for some consumers. Consequently, Frederic Jameson hits the mark when he describes the radically transformative potential of sf to emerge from its capacity to portray

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[23] In particular, see Borkfelt's chapter on "Dark Spaces: The Horrific Slaughterhouse" (2022, 223–61), where he engages with Matthew Stokoe's *Cows* (1997), Conrad Williams's *The Scalding Rooms* (2007), and similar texts from the horror genre.

"alternate versions of a world that has elsewhere seemed to resist *even imagined* change" (2005, 223; emphasis mine). I understand sf as a literary genre that showcases how literature functions as a *laboratory* where authors and readers conduct thought experiments on multispecies living, a laboratory that simulates insights into the "alien" perspectives of other animals so that potentialities and possibilities for future forms of living with farmed animals gain shape (cf. Elgin 2007, 49, 52). Critical stances on Elgin's position in discourse on the epistemic functions of literature have contested the medium's propositional character and distance from factuality (cf. Schildknecht 2019; Huemer 2019; Gabriel 2019). I contend that this presumed shortcoming of literary texts unleashes some of their biggest potentials to contribute to discourse on human-animal relationships. Unlike scientific or philosophical thought experiments, which relativize facts to deepen an understanding of the "real" world, the laboratory in question experiments with the "relatively, rather than absolutely real" (McHale 2010, 23, cf. Elgin 2007, 46). Literary imaginings neither aspire to yield results that are absolutely true nor make any normative claims.

To work productively *with* the distance between any living and textual animals, literary animal studies scholars increasingly explore what narratologist Brian McHale calls the potential of sf "to imagine alternatives to received reality" by "projecting new *models*, not just individuals," so that readers may be estranged from perceived norms and reflect on them (2010, 23; emphasis mine; cf. McCorry 2021, 467). As I have argued elsewhere with reference to Vint's groundbreaking work on the productivity of sf for human-animal studies, literary storyworlds may "redefine, according to their own rules, who is facing whom in their portrayals" in human-animal relationships (2022, 96):

> In sf, the animal is us and we are the animal, all continually involved in a never-ending process of becoming, of imagining new ways of conceiving humans and animals, new ways of organising our social relations, new futures to inhabit. (Vint 2010, 227)

In support of Vint's argument, my readings show that literary thought experiments provide the imaginary distance from the "real" world that seems necessary to outthink speciesism and "livestock" commodification in that they not only challenge the exclusion of farmed animals from the circle of beings who are of moral concern but negotiate human

perceptions about morals, rights, or political inclusion more profoundly.[24] Sf texts explore what future farmed animals could look like, *if* molecular breeding techniques or tissue culture technologies advanced further, and they wonder how humans would relate these new, biotech life forms (cf. Bauer 2022, 97). Their storyworlds raise questions, such as *what* might happen *if* animals gained human-like awareness, started communicating in human language, or became superior to humans in their intelligence or moral capacities. To form reciprocal relationships with humans, so these storyworlds seem to suggest, farmed animals need to evolve into *postanimal* characters: bestowed with social agency, heightened intelligence, or the capacity to speak, they quit "being livestock."

On the level of the narrative forms and strategies I investigate, a prevalent sf aesthetic emerges that alienates readers from presupposed realities and introduces them to novel ones. Narratologist David Herman defines literary storyworlds as "mentally and emotionally projected environments in which interpreters are called upon to live out complex blends of cognitive and imaginative processes" (2010, 570; cf. James 2015, 34). Cognitive narratologists consider these mental processes to be integral to narrative comprehension, which Erin James describes as an "environmental process" in her work on *econarratology* (2015, xi). As sf authors juxtapose extrapolations from their actual worlds (scientific facts, technological developments, etc.) with futurist projections of fictional ones (postanimal hybrid characters, new technologies, etc.), readers' imaginations are thrown into a state of suspension while immersing themselves into one of these storyworlds. As a result of tensions between alternative possibilities, ruptures with their expectations can have a transformative effect on the spectrum of what they consider imaginable, so Berardi argues (2017, 1). He grounds this argument within the aforementioned *gestalt* theory, according to which the human imagination deciphers "visual stimulation according to gestalten that are inscribed in our mind" (194).[25] Disruptions

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[24] Erika Cudworth and Stephen Hobden discuss the shortcomings to Peter Singer's understanding of challenging speciesism in their exploration of the emancipatory potentials in posthuman thought (2018, 92–96). They particularly highlight Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka's critique of separatist tendencies in *Animal Liberation* (1975) and the need "to find a new basis for transforming human relations with other species by emphasizing the different social relations" between humans and other animals (2018, 94).

[25] *Gestalt* theory was framed primarily by the Czech-born psychologist Max Wertheimer, who formed the "Gestalt school" in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, in 1912 together with the psychologists Wolfgang Köhler and Kurt Koffka (The Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica 2023).

to these mental patterns in the form of what Berardi calls "a poetical potency of estrangement" can therefore transform not only our minds but also our perception (195). Consequently, a disruption to the *gestalten* of the animal industry within readers' minds might cause ripple effects that shift their perceptions of "livestock."

This is where the mechanism of deindustrializing the imagination may operate. The animal industry limits the imaginability of sustainable human-animal relationships; its real-world products—that is, laying hens and broiler chickens, porkers and veal calves, as well as battery cages and disassembly lines in mass slaughter plants—are anchored as semiotic forms within our minds. A deindustrialization of the imagination entails breaking them up and, ideally, transforming them in a way that changes the perception of the living animals and the systems holding them captive. Haraway may describe this effect as *sympoiesis*: as an effect of positioning readers at a critical distance from the preconceived, dominant, or familiar *gestalten* farmed animals take within their minds, they may readjust their mental patterns and perceive farmed animals as subjects and partners in world-making processes (Haraway 2016, 58; cf. Palmer 2023, 34). My readings examine this productive interplay of narrative forms that estrange readers from high-performance "livestock" and empathy-generating forms that familiarize them with farmed animal companions.

These readings also zoom in on the narrative portrayal of biotechnology, as this stylistic device facilitates an ambivalent dynamic to operate within the storyworlds. In connection to this most profound means of capitalizing on farmed animal bodies in current "livestock" industries, posthumanist thinker Rosi Braidotti argues that "ethical forms of belonging" need to be practiced not only for "non-anthropomorphic organic others, but also for those technologically-mediated, newly patented creatures we are sharing our planet with" (2013, 104; cf. Twine 2010, 16). Postanthropocentric thinking therefore needs to "involv[e] a radical estrangement from notions like moral relationality, unitary identity, transcendent consciousness or innate and universal moral values" (Braidotti 2013, 92). Potentially, such de/familiarization processes function when literary thought experiments present readers with biotechnologically modified, narrative figures. Their expectations on who or what does or does *not* count as a subject may be challenged: while Atwood's ChickieNobs epitomize how a living organism may be deformed to the extent that it cannot even be recognized as being alive, sf nova may also provide animal characters with new capabilities for sociality and agency. Following a

manipulation of their brain tissue through human DNA, the postanimal pigs (Pigoons) appearing in Atwood's trilogy or the AI chip-enabled, talking animal rebels in Roberts's *Bête* (2014) can be understood as exemplary of this formal affordance of sf. Yet only some of these former farmed animals escape their commodity status within their storyworlds. Others end up as even more easily exploitable resources, such as the self-butchering cow in Douglas Adams's science fiction classic *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* (1980). What exactly portrayals of *biotechnological enablement* or *disablement* have to offer in light of deindustrializing the imagination is up for discussion.

I describe these emerging new subject forms as *postanimal figures* who productively unsettle human-animal binaries. They do so by pointing to a suspension of a presupposed anthropological difference within the imaginary bounds of their storyworlds and potentially beyond. They explore *what* it might be like *if* human-animal distinctions were no longer possible or necessary. I am indebted here to Vint's notion of postanimal characters in sf, whom she describes as cyborg-like beings "that challeng[e] taxonomic divisions among humans, animals and machines" through the technological manipulation of the original species (2010, 188–89).[26] More recently, sf scholar Melissa Bianchi dehyphenates the term while reading the former house pets in Grant Morrison's graphic novel *We3* (2008) as chimeric "postanimal subjects" (2020, 69). As I have argued elsewhere, postanimal figures prove "good to think with," as they invite readers to imagine ethical relationships with new subject forms and thereby reflect critically upon the capitalization of farmed animal bodies (cf. Bauer 2021b, 54).[27] My readings of postanimal versions of farmed animal characters thus aim to contribute a postanimalist mode of critique which "think[s] beyond the constraints of a preconditioned 'anthropological difference,'" which critical animal studies scholars Vasile Stanescu and Richard Twine have suggested (2012, 55).

Arguably, living pigs, cows, or chickens are always already "postanimals" in the sense of the critical posthumanist understanding of prefix I

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[26] Vint focuses her analyses on animals in sf in connection to technology mainly on how postanimal characters' sociability is being enhanced in such texts (2010, chapter 8). For example, she examines a biotech-enabled dog in Olaf Stapledon's *Sirius* (1944) or horse-like aliens in Carol Emshwiller's *The Mount* (2002) but does not foreground farmed animal characters in particular (200).

[27] Along the lines of Claude Lévi-Strauss's coinage of the phrase (1962).

apply here: one that multiplies perspectives on human-animal binaries.[28] Given the severe physiological changes to which centuries of "livestock" breeding techniques have subjected their physiognomy, farmed animals can be understood as techno-natureculturalural compounds even before cloning or other molecular breeding techniques modify them further (cf. Braidotti 2013, 74). Therefore, their narrative portrayals in sf epitomize that oppositional ontologies and generalizing terms like "animal" or "livestock" are insufficient in describing farmed animals' singular experiences (cf. 66). When sf authors invent biotechnologically modified animal characters as *postanimal figures*, they put dichotomic signifiers, such as organic/mechanic, normal/pathological, animate/inanimate, human/robot, or human/animal, up for debate. If these animal figures come in the shape of cows, pigs, or chickens, the postanimalist perspective I apply not only disconnects from conventional discourse on who or what "animals" are in opposition to "humans"; with the interference of technology—extrapolated by sf authors in their storyworlds—*post-livestock* characters embody what it might mean to deconstruct cultural categories while speaking and thinking about individuals without glossing over their specific and violent histories. Some of these characters embody what may come "after" industrial animal agriculture: either in the sense of an intensification of its violent structures, in the sense of its collapse and replacement, or in a juxtaposition of both.

In imagining these "new" farmed animal figures, sf texts blur the lines between what seems conceivable and impossible, encouraging readers to take imaginative leaps. My understanding of sf is in line with Haraway's *playing string figures*, a literary practice where boundaries between realistic and speculative elements grow indistinct. She uses this metaphor to convey the combination of story- and fact-telling authors apply: "science fact and speculative fabulation" complement one another, Haraway argues, and the narrative forms they create take over distinctive functions within the storyworlds (2016, 3). In highlighting these functions, sf feeds into discussions on literary genre: as twenty-first-century novelists increasingly weave portrayals of real-world developments into their futurist narratives,

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[28] See, e.g., Francesca Ferrando on "The Power of the Hyphen." She explains that the "hyphen is the term of mediation; it communicates the fact that there is another term, or other terms, which shall be acknowledged," and that, even though it may disappear "when the use of a term becomes more common, […] [i]ts relevance should not be dismissed" (2019, 66).

the genre of science fiction is frequently described as *speculative sf*. The texts I examine here contain the three features of this genre, as identified by Michael Svec and Mike Winiski:

1. Deep description of the science content or technologies that were plausible or accurate to the time period.
2. The novum: a plausible innovation as a key element in the speculation.
3. Big Picture: exploration of the impact on society and humanity. (2013, 38)

Moreover, whereas questions on alterity have always been of interest in science fiction, sf in the past few decades has increasingly expanded on these explorations to ask about human-nonhuman relationality.[29] Some storyworlds focus more and others less prominently on the representation of science and technology, the novum, or the big picture (cf. Vint 2008, 179). Sf has thus established itself in literary scholarship as an inclusive term that foregrounds these texts' affordance to envision *what if* scenarios that engage readers in thought experiments.[30]

Postanimal figures perform three main functions within and potentially beyond these sf scenarios. They (1) encourage critical reflections on biotechnological innovation in the "real" world. The biotech sheep from twentieth-century science fiction classics, as they appear in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and John Brunner's *The Sheep Look Up* (1972), or the self-butchering cow in Douglas Adams's *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* (1980), remain mostly compliant with their depicted societies. Their twenty-first-century successors, however, start harnessing biotechnology (and other sf nova) to their benefit, so that (2) *resistant postanimal agents* challenge human-animal binaries and disrupt the *gestalten* of "livestock" within readers' minds. For example, the highly intelligent "sheep of the hearts" in Neil Astley's *The Sheep Who Changed the World* (2005) plots his escape from the laboratory and ridicules human culture and politics writ large.[31] Atwood's trilogy follows

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[29] In this context, see also the concept of *conviviality* as understood in Tom van Dooren and Deborah Bird Rose (2012) or Westerlaken (2020).

[30] For recent discussions on literary thought experiments, see, e.g., Packard (2019), Dalski (2019), Wiltsche (2021). See also Caroline Levine's new formalist approach to study particular constraints and affordances in literary forms (2015).

[31] *The Sheep Who Changed the World* can be read as a twenty-first-century continuation of the sf genre's frequent portrayal of cloning practices but does not foreground questions connected to meat culture and animal agriculture as strongly as do the texts I selected in this book.