

Thinking Forward Through the Past- Requiem for the Farm Animal

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We often associate a sense of loss or mourning in animal and environmental history with extinction, and, in that, we see the very powerful cultural association between the sense of loss and emotional pain at the risk of loss for exotic species such as the panda (as in WWF campaigns) harnessed to their care and rescue. But, while 'the 'traditional' methods of extensive livestock agriculture are defended in spaces such as the UK's Lake District National Park and elsewhere by farmers who practice conservation, and others seek to treat farm animals humanely (Compassion in World Farming, 5 Freedoms), the idea that the masses of livestock currently used for agricultural production may be removed altogether to reduce the drivers of human-caused climate change fits neither model. While the landscapes shaped by them will alter as they are removed, the beasts animals will become 'at risk'. All livestock breeds will become "rare", if they are no longer needed for food production, just like those now curated by the Rare Breeds Society. This paper will explore the rhetorics associated with recent discussions about animal husbandry, and the historical roots of those rhetorics within longer-standing histories of human-animal relations.



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