

## **The Animal Activism of Henry Spira (1927-1998)**

### ABSTRACT

This paper profiles the animal activism of the late American animal activist Henry Spira, whose campaign strategies and tactics suggest a number of links with the nineteenth century pioneers of animal protection as well as with approaches favored by contemporary animal activists. However, the article argues that Spira's style of animal advocacy differed from conventional approaches in the mainstream animal movement in that he preferred to work with, rather than against, animal user industries. To this end, he pioneered the use of "reintegrative shaming" (J. Braithwaite, 1989) in animal protection, an accommodation strategy that relied on moralizing with opponents as opposed to the more common approach in animal advocacy of adversarial vilification, and hence, disintegrative shaming. The article describes the framing of some of Spira's best-known anti-cruelty campaigns and his use of reintegrative shaming to induce animal users to change their ways.

**Henry Spira is a classic example of an issue entrepreneur who used a variety of legal tactics, both conventional and unconventional, to achieve his nonhuman animal welfare goals. His strategy was unusual for an animal protectionist in that he sought**

to make instances of animal cruelty public only as a last resort. Ever the pragmatist, his primary goal was to reduce the level of suffering and cruelty to animals, preferably by persuasive communication and only when that failed, by coercion. Sometimes Spira worked alone, and sometimes he formed social movement organizations from existing animal rights groups to achieve his ends. His tactics always were designed to achieve maximum benefits in terms of saving animals' lives and ranged across the spectrum of tactical mechanisms identified by Turner and Killian (1987).

Activists and advocates, at one time or another, have used all four mechanisms—persuasion, facilitation, bargaining, and coercion—in their campaigns on behalf of animals. These tactical mechanisms can best be thought of as a continuum with persuasion as the most moderate tactic at one end and the more direct confrontational tactic of coercion at the other end. Not surprisingly, persuasion, facilitation, and bargaining tend to be the preferred tactics of organizational advocates in the suites while coercive tactics are usually more commonly observed in grassroots activist campaigns.

Persuasion, involving the use of strictly symbolic manipulation and the raising of issue consciousness, is one of the most important ways in which ideology is produced and continuously modified (Turner & Killian, 1987, pp. 297-298). For organizational advocates, persuasion usually takes the form of education campaigns, typically via their own print media (brochures, glossy magazines, and the like). Although consciousness-raising in the environmental movement has been derided as "social change through banner hanging" (Wapner, 1995), it is an important tactic in the animal movement for changing the way people think about animals. As described below, the use of persuasive communication as a tactic for changing people's sensibilities is exemplified in the various campaigns organized by Henry Spira.

In many instances, grassroots activists, in particular, have deployed coercive tactics of various kinds to achieve improvements in animal welfare. These range from the use of "nuisance" tactics to more disruptive tactics including the violent actions of extreme animal rights activists. Coercion, then, can be thought of as a continuum ranging from the mild forms of persuasive communication used by Spira to the threats of violence made by extremist groups such as the Animal Liberation Front. Spira used coercive shaming only as a last resort and only when his targets failed to respond to his animal welfare

proposals. Put differently, he preferred liberal governance strategies to critical governance strategies (Newell, 2000). Newell describes liberal governance strategies as those that seek reforms within the system while those engaged in critical governance “tend not to compromise and are less inclined to discuss ways in which (environmental) activists and company executives may be able to help one another” (p. 127).

Grassroots activists are more inclined to embrace the symbolic and expressive with little concern for the more pragmatic evaluation of long-term strategic planning favored by animal advocates and lobbyists. Turner and Killian (1987, p. 301) note that an undisciplined grassroots movement employs many tactics more expressively than strategically. These distinctions are never cut and dried. For example, in forming coalitions with other groups or in facilitating common cause alliances, grassroots activists sometimes employ the tactical mechanisms of persuasion, bargaining, and facilitation that, in theory, belong in the suites and offices of the professional lobbyist. As I will show, Spira’s style of activism used all these conventional tactics, including coercion, albeit with a different twist.

## **Spira’s Animal Activism in Theory and Practice**

In common with other social change advocates and activists in social movement organizations, Spira’s campaigns consisted of three essential frames: diagnosis, prognosis, and a call to action (Wilson, 1973; Snow & Benford, 1988). I describe Spira’s diagnostic and prognostic frames as belonging to the conventional animal protectionist’s techniques of seeing and exposing cruel practices. His “call to action”—the frame that constitutes the third prong of a social movement’s framing repertoire—was more unconventional. It was used (a) as a weapon of last resort to shame recalcitrant animal abusers and (b), in a reformatory, reintegrative sense along the lines advocated by the criminologist Braithwaite (1989), for controlling crime. Spira was unusual as an activist in that he hoped to avoid the disintegrative or dysfunctional shaming that characterized the rhetoric of vilification used by antivivisectionists in the nineteenth century and the “them versus us” stance of many contemporary animal rights fundamentalists. Thus, in stark contrast to Spira’s approach, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has used consumer boycotts to attack directly the interests of alleged animal abusers.

Friedman (1999) found that in recent years 11 of 12 PETA boycott campaigns focused on using the media to dramatize the actions. In half these boycotts, PETA made no effort to communicate with its targets either before or after the actions took place (p. 190).

In contrast to the hard-line tactics of PETA and similar groups, Spira's strategy in all of his most widely publicized campaigns that are discussed below—the American Museum of Natural History's cat campaign, the targeting of Revlon, Procter & Gamble, Perdue Farms Inc., and the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)—included the novel strategy of attempting to identify common interests between the targeted organization and the animal lobby rather than the “them and us” stalemate that characterizes most animal rights campaigns (Munro, 1999). Working with, rather than against, animal industries made Spira a target for criticism from some sections of the animal rights movement. When Spira exposed institutional cruelty toward animals, he used the threat of coercive shaming only as a last resort. His primary objective was instrumental, not expressive. His strategy was unusual in social movement activism in that he would prefer to avoid the call to action—the last of the three framing processes used by social movements—because his preferred outcome was to resolve the movement's grievance during the second stage of the process, that is, during the prognosis.

His strategy was to work through the processes identified by Turner and Killian (1987) as persuasion, facilitation, bargaining, and identifying the interests of the movement's opponents that were compatible with the ethical treatment of animals. Spira sought to engage in reformatory or reintegrative work with his adversaries to find more humane ways of using animals to reduce their suffering and still preserve the legitimate interests of his targets. As we will see, this typically meant initially applying mild coercion to corporations and individuals in the form of an offer they were reluctant to refuse. Although Spira politely suggested that it was in the interests of an organization not to be subjected to negative publicity, which could threaten the reputation of the enterprise, not all his targets were prepared to cooperate with what they saw as blatant extortion. Spira's style of animal advocacy / activism, while unique in many ways, had much in common with some of the tactics of the nineteenth century animal protection pioneers. The characteristics of Spira's work are described in the remainder of the paper.

## Diagnosing Oppression: Ways of Seeing Animal Suffering

According to Shapiro (1996), there are different styles of seeing or different levels of perception (one woman's elegant fur coat is another woman's dead animal) that involve taking in or fully grasping the meaning of the object of perception—in this case the animal reduced to a commodity. The feminist philosopher Rosemary Tong has noted that Aristotle claimed the basis for making ethical decisions was “in the act of perceiving, in *seeing through one's experience* [italics added], to the moral truth beneath appearances” (Donovan, 1996, p. 165). She argues, however, that philosophers in the Western tradition have not lived up to the Aristotelian model. “Not seeing the oppression that surrounded them, they shaped an abstract ethics that may have served to protect the interests of those in power” (Donovan, p. 165). Thus, while moral philosophers Peter Singer and Tom Regan have served as midwives to the animal movement, ordinary citizens have been responsible for translating “ethics into action” as the title of Singer's (1998) book on Spira acknowledges.

Kean's (1998) recent history of the animal rights movement in England from 1800 to the present highlights the act of “seeing” animal suffering in the streets of London as the most important factor in the development of the movement in that country. Lansbury (1985), also notes that in the city at least, cruelty towards horses “was under the *supervision of a watchful* [italics added] populace, but in the country the old barbarities persisted” (p. 35). Kean criticizes fellow historian Thomas for not recognizing the importance of the sheer number and visibility of England's working animals in the development of what Thomas (1984) called “the new sensibilities” in our treatment of animals in the early modern period (p. 303). Then as now, she argues, it was the sight of suffering animals—for example, animals in transit under the control of drovers in the nineteenth century or lorry drivers as recently as 1995—that inspired public protests against the injustice of animal cruelty in England. For Kean, animal rights sensibilities during the past two centuries were affected primarily by the visibility and the visualization of animals. “Paradoxically,” writes Shapiro (1996) about cruelty toward animals in the late twentieth century, “what is everywhere hidden, forgotten, denied, erased, transmuted, manufactured is yet everywhere present. The shopping mall, the restaurant, the city, but not less the woods and the sea—each has its own network of bloody trails” (p. 140).

Both animal visibility and the way animals are visualized or represented are important in Spira's diagnosis of cruelty. By focusing on the "invisibility" of animal suffering behind the closed doors of the research laboratory and the factory farm, he has attempted to make these hidden worlds more visible so that as in the case of the working animals of the nineteenth century, a watchful populace can condemn cruel practices. In the visualization of animal suffering, parallels can be drawn with some of Spira's campaigns and those of the early animal protectionists described by Kean (1998). There are differences, however, in the way the antivivisectionists and Spira's supporters dealt with their opponents. In Munro (1999), I describe this as a difference between the rhetoric of vilification and a policy of accommodation.

Spira focused on institutionalized cruelty, on systems of oppression as represented by corporations involved in animal exploitation rather than individual abusers of animals although they too have been targeted, as we will see. Shapiro (1996) suggests that terms like systems of oppression, injustice, and speciesism are examples of abstract seeing that protagonists on both sides of the movement use to deflect or soften the reality of individual animal suffering (p. 136). In Spira's case, the abstraction served as a tactical mechanism for encouraging oppressed workers, migrants, women, and other downtrodden groups to see animal suffering as an extension of their own oppression. More than most animal rights leaders, Spira was conscious of the interconnectedness of speciesism, racism, and sexism as social injustices. For him, the treatment of nonhuman animals was bound up with our treatment of downtrodden workers, blacks, and women. Nonetheless, Spira was first and foremost an animal rights activist. These other causes were important only in so far as they contributed to an understanding of the plight of animals. Strategically, he reflected: "We knew that we must focus sharply on a single significant injustice, on one clearly limited goal. Moreover, that goal must be achievable" (Spira, 1985, p. 197).

### **Spira's Prognostic Frame: Visualizing and Exposing Cruelty**

That goal was a ban on the use of cats at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) for sex experiments, a practice that would not be exposed by recourse to "abstract seeing" but rather by visualizing vivisection at its

worst. Spira first came across the “cat torture experiments” in a report published by the antivivisectionist organization, United Action for Animals. The first step in his prognosis—that is, what to do about the grievance—was to seek more details about the nature and funding sources of the experiments by using the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act (Singer, 1998, p. 54). The evidence in the documents obtained via FOI indicated to Spira that the experiments were both cruel and useless. These bizarre sex procedures on cats made the AMNH in New York City a vulnerable target for his first public campaign in 1976 on behalf of nonhuman animals (Singer, p. 55). Seeking an opportunity to discuss the future of the cat sex experiments with the researchers, Spira sent requests to the museum, but the letters and calls were ignored. A radio station and a Manhattan weekly newspaper sympathetic to the cause gave the campaigners some publicity, which then was followed by public demonstrations outside the museum (Singer, pp. 56, 57). These continued every weekend for more than a year but there was still no dialogue with the museum (Singer, pp. 57-59).

In May 1977, “Stop the cat-torture at the Museum of Natural History”—a full-page advertisement—appeared in *The New York Times*. It featured a graphic picture and headline—along with an explanatory text that detailed the cruelty to cats performed at public expense in the name of science. The picture and the accompanying text are reminiscent of “Shedding light on professional cruelty” (1909-1910) featured in Kean (1998), which depicts a guilt-ridden vivisector caught in the act of experimenting on a small dog. At about the same time, in 1907, moral reformers in the National Council of Women of Canada called for “the searchlight of knowledge and truth” to be turned on the “social evil” of female prostitution (Valverde, 1990, p. 68). Valverde gives a number of examples where light was used as a metaphor in various social purity campaigns; in contrast to Kean’s example, in this campaign the authority figure holding the searchlight of surveillance is a doctor responsible for “cleansing and healing” the impure. The “Stop the Cat Torture” (1977) text in small print claims that “Behind locked doors, in sound-proof labs, hidden from an unknowing public” doctors and scientists are perpetrating unspeakable cruelties. These are then graphically described and the chief scientist named, along with advice on how readers can assist the campaign to ban the cat-torture.

Independent of this publicity, the chief scientist was harassed when activists distributed fliers—asking, “Do you know this man?”—along with details of his experiments to his residential neighbors. Although Spira was not involved directly in the intimidation of the individual, he managed to encourage thousands of scientists to believe that they too could be exposed and shamed if they were involved in cruel animal experiments (Singer, 1998, p. 71).

When the museum eventually discontinued the cat experiments, Spira had succeeded where the antivivisectionists a century earlier repeatedly had failed. How can this be explained, given that similar tactics of exposing and vilifying vivisectionists for inflicting unnecessary cruelty on animals had failed in the campaigns of the nineteenth century? The most plausible explanation is that in the mid 1970s a much larger public was receptive to the influence of a much more extensive network of print and electronic media than was available to animal protectionists in the mid 1870s. In addition, with the publication of Singer’s *Animal Liberation*, the various liberation movements of the twentieth century involving blacks, women, and—in 1975—animals all contributed to the mood of social change that Spira and others were promoting in their advocacy of social justice. As Spira (1985) explained: “We wanted to adapt to the animal movement the traditions of struggle which had proven effective in the civil rights movement, the union movement and the women’s movement” (p. 197).

Yet, the systems of oppression that Spira (1985) identified were not unlike those that Lansbury (1985) described. Lansbury recounts a turn-of-the-century controversy in Battersea, when suffragettes, antivivisectionists, and working-class men defended the statue of an old, brown dog as a symbol of oppression by the “New Priesthood” of doctors and medical students. Citing Patrick White’s (1973, p. 135) *The Vivisector*, Lansbury (p. 24) explains how—according to a Battersea resident who remembered the riots—the dog became “an advertising story”—in the Anti-Vivisection Council’s shop-front display in Oxford Street. Shop-front displays, exhibits in shopping malls, and weekend markets are still popular with animal protectionists in welfare groups like the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals as well as with more radical activists in animal liberation branches—at least in Australia.

The difference in the visualizing of cruelty in the two eras lay in the media available to the activists. Thus, whereas the early antivivisectionists relied on

popular fiction, in-house journals, and shop window displays to press their claims, contemporary animal protectionists like Spira have a potentially more effective medium for propagating their issues to a much larger audience in the form of the electronic and print mass media. The 1977 campaign advertisement in the *New York Times* was read by thousands of readers, many who responded to the call to action. The early antivivisectionists' propaganda against animal experimentation was published in animal protection tracts, fliers, and posters read mainly by the converted. Reaching a wider audience was achieved through the medium of fiction in popular novels like *Black Beauty* (1877), which became a school text and a regular prize at Sunday schools (Lansbury, 1985, p. 5). According to Lansbury, what people said and did at the turn of the century "was shaped as much by literature as by history." Hogarth's (1750) *Four Stages of Cruelty* provided a recurring theme used by novelists more than a century after the work first appeared and suggested to the working class that the natural order of things was that cruelty to animals led to the murder of women and the offender's own dissection by experimentalists.

It is not possible to say whether the more sophisticated electronic media of the late twentieth century are a more effective mobilizing force than the print-based propaganda used in the nineteenth century. Yet, in reading Lansbury (1985), one is struck by the number of "advertising stories" about animals—in addition to the posters, pamphlets, and essays on the subject—in which novelists used "the truths of fiction" to move the hearts of their readers (130-131). Vivisectors became "a recurring figure in pornography and in women's fiction" and were portrayed as the ultimate in evil. Consequently, both sides used the rhetoric of vilification to mobilize support for their respective causes. Using a tactic that would be repeated 75 years later by the defenders of animal experimentation in a *Newsweek* cover story (The battle over, 1988), the Research Defence Society in 1912 challenged Hogarth's prints with a morality tale of its own—a picture of a smiling woman and her child with the caption: "which will you save—your child or a guinea-pig?" (Lansbury, 1985, p. 169).<sup>2</sup>

### **Prodding Action Through Motivational Shaming**

As noted at the beginning of this paper, when Spira exposed institutional cruelty in the treatment of animals, he employed the threat of coercive shaming,

but only as a last resort. His primary objective was to achieve animal welfare goals through persuasion, bargaining, and facilitation, and without the mobilizing frame or call to action that social movements use to coerce their opponents. Just as the early pioneers in the animal movement used fictional literature as advertising stories to inspire compassion, Spira's coalition of activist groups in Animal Rights International (ARI), reminded its adversaries of the animal lobby's version of successful advertising stories, namely those featured in the *New York Times*. Although some animal exploiters have seen this as a not so subtle threat, most have accepted the tactic as legitimate. By offering to work with his adversaries to find a mutually beneficial outcome, Spira was seen to be acting in good faith.

Spira's animal rights campaigns were unique in that they sought to replace vilification with accommodation by identifying the common interests of animal protectionists and animal exploiters (Munro, 1999). Unlike the nineteenth century antivivisectionists who demanded the abolition of animal experimentation and whose arguments were used to deviantize the vivisectors, Spira was prepared to work with animal users to achieve improvements in animal welfare. Just as the campaigners of the nineteenth century used access to fresh water as an incentive for people to be kind to animals, contemporary animal protectionists like Spira appeal to the self-interest of people who work with animals (Kean, 1998). Business and scientific fraternities that use animals for commercial and research purposes cannot afford to have their reputations damaged by charges of animal cruelty or indifference to animal suffering. Spira and his supporters have effectively employed the motivational power of shame and its converse pride in their campaigns against major companies and institutions in the United States.

One of Spira's most successful campaigns, the Revlon campaign which began in September 1978, illustrates this point, and demonstrates his use of persuasive communication and coercion. A letter was sent to Revlon suggesting an alternative to the Draize test, which involves the application of toxic or irritant substances to the eyes of rabbits to test levels of safety. According to ARI, replacing Draize, in cosmetics testing alone, with a more humane alternative might spare 10,000 rabbits needless suffering and death. As in other campaigns, Spira sought to identify the overlapping interests of the company and the animals. In the letter to Revlon, Spira's scientific adviser Leonard

Rack suggested that alternative methods to the Draize test would “be faster, more economic, and more efficiently protective of the cosmetics user than current methods” (Singer, 1998, p. 92). In June 1979, a meeting between Spira and Revlon’s vice president for public affairs ended without any meaningful dialogue between the two and no indication of any willingness by Revlon to use a more humane alternative to Draize.

Spira then set up a new group of alliances, the Coalition to Stop Draize Rabbit Blinding Tests, consisting of more than 400 organizations with a membership in the millions (Singer, 1998, p. 93). News of the Coalition’s Revlon campaign and the cruelty of the Draize test began to appear in the popular press, but Revlon was unmoved. When a further meeting in January 1980 with Coalition members and Revlon’s vice president proved fruitless, Spira arranged for a full-page advertisement to be run in the *New York Times* on April 15, 1980 (Singer, p. 96). As the words in large print—and the accompanying mobilizing information made clear—this was a call to action that could be disastrous to Revlon’s reputation as “the General Motors of beauty”. Revlon denied the claims, but a new, more conciliatory vice president was convinced the company was in trouble when “an enormous demonstration on Fifth Avenue” took place with dozens of reporters and science writers in attendance (Singer, 1997). The Coalition continued the pressure on Revlon with representations to different levels of government and a new full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* (October 7, 1980), which observed that, “There must be a less ugly way for Revlon to test beauty products.”

More public demonstrations against Revlon induced the company to agree to fund research for an alternative to Draize, and—in the spirit of reintegrative shaming—Spira praised the industry leader for “linking imaginative, elegant science with effective and efficient safety testing” and for providing \$750,000 over three years for the research. The Revlon chairman and chief executive described the grant as “proof of Revlon’s social conscience” (Singer, 1998, pp. 103-104), a phrase Spira used to encourage other cosmetic companies to support Revlon’s initiative. Revlon’s vice president was gratified by the company’s new image as a good corporate citizen and noted, “a great pride in what we were doing. Everybody in our company felt good when they went home that night because their kids would no longer look at them cockeyed as being someone who does untoward things to rabbits” (Singer,

p. 105). The Coalition to Stop Draize Rabbit Blinding Tests described the outcome as an historic breakthrough in “imaginative, humane science” rather than a victory *per se*. Accommodation had replaced vilification in the repertoire of animal activist strategies.

Spira’s next major campaign focused on the notorious LD50 in which animals are used to test the “Lethal Dose” of household products like shoe polish and shampoo. A newspaper advertisement explained that the Lethal Dose 50% was the amount of any substance, from cosmetics to cleaning products, sufficient to kill exactly half a group of laboratory animals. The advertisement targeted regulatory agencies in the United States and led to admissions by the authorities that LD50 was of limited use (Would you pay, 1983).

Spira’s stance on LD50 was, however, not for its abolition but for reduction and refinement; he argued that six animals, rather than 600, could provide sufficient data for the safety tests to be valid. Although this was heresy to the fundamentalists in the movement, Spira knew that years of campaigning by abolitionists had not reduced the numbers of animals used in such experiments. His strategy was to approach a large company that used the LD50, Procter & Gamble, and suggest a plan that would serve the interests of the company. He made it clear to Procter & Gamble that they were not being asked for money to fund research for alternatives but rather to save money by reducing the number of animals used for product safety tests. After some persistence on Spira’s part—including attendance at an annual meeting made possible by the purchase of a single share in the company—Procter & Gamble agreed that they had an interest in avoiding unwanted publicity and could benefit financially and ethically by “Taking Animals Out of the Laboratory,” (Singer, 1998, p. 145) as one of its in-house journals proclaimed. It was in this journal that Spira took the opportunity to congratulate the company for its “‘serious initiatives and commitment to replace and reduce the use and suffering of lab animals [which was] both visionary and practical’” (Singer, 1998, p. 126). Here then was an example of how the tactical mechanisms identified by Turner and Killian (1987) actually worked.

More radical animal rights groups like PETA were appalled by Spira’s support of companies that had a history of exploiting animals. Spira’s response is that his strategy of accommodation is more effective than the vilification and stigmatization of opponents:

I do not support PETA's campaign which attempts to portray Procter & Gamble as villain when, in fact, P&G has the best record to date in developing [alternatives]. It seems to me that when a corporation is responsive to our concerns, it makes no sense to clobber them over the head. Rather, we want to encourage them to continue to be responsive and use their responsiveness as an example to others. (Singer, 1998, p. 131)

According to Singer (year) who clearly prefers Spira's style of activism to PETA's more aggressive campaigns, the complete abolition of Draize and LD50 remain elusive. Even so, PETA's worldwide campaign against Avon, in which millions of door-hangers labeled "Avon killing" were distributed, caused the company to discontinue animal tests within a month of the boycott on its products. PETA's campaign had all the ingredients of successful social movement campaigns that Rochon (1990) has identified as "size, militancy and novelty." The question, therefore, is raised as to the effectiveness of Spira's campaign tactics, which, though novel, rely less on size and not at all on militancy. Is the strategy of accommodating opponents less effective than their outright defeat?

According to Braithwaite's (1989) theory of reintegrative shaming, stigmatizing white-collar offenders as "criminals" is less effective than moralizing with them and encouraging them to mend their ways. Reintegrative shaming focuses on the offence rather than the offender. Spira appears to have used this strategy long before Braithwaite coined the term "reintegrative shaming" as a theory of crime control. Braithwaite argues that white-collar offenders are more susceptible to shaming than their blue-collar counterparts. This is confirmed by Spira's targeting of corporations that likewise are interested in protecting their reputations and profits from the negative consequences of bad publicity alleging cruelty to innocent animals.

Not everyone, however, is responsive to the moralizing efforts of social movement entrepreneurs. One such individual who seemed impervious to Spira's moralizing efforts on behalf of farm animals is the chicken mogul Frank Perdue, who was unsuccessfully targeted in at least two major campaigns (Singer, p. 145). In the *New York Times* advertisement (Frank, are you telling, 1989), Spira's ARI targeted Perdue after efforts to liaise with Perdue Farms Inc., failed. Unlike the Revlon campaign, this did not have the desired effect, and a new slant was put on the anti-Perdue publicity. In one campaign, the

ARI used the novel and eye-catching image of a chicken in a condom to highlight the message that “there’s no such thing as a safe chicken.” Like other groups such as the Farm Animal Reform Movement that in recent years have expanded their rationale against factory farming (Kunkel, 1995), Spira had dropped the cruelty frame in the advertisement in favor of a health frame in the hope of mobilizing more supporters by appealing to their self interest. This also had no effect on Perdue, although Spira claims the campaign worked well despite getting “absolutely nothing from him” (Singer, 1998, p. 149). Some individuals, as Braithwaite (1989) readily acknowledges, are beyond shaming.

### **The Effectiveness of Spira-Style Animal Activism**

In an age of visual overload, pictures that startle, shock, or otherwise attract people’s attention are widely believed to be more useful to the movement in changing people’s attitudes about animals than the cute clichés of the coffee table variety. On the other hand, a number of animal movement leaders told me that some of their members refuse to read in-house magazines if they picture injured, suffering, or dead animals. Most of the animal images used in Spira’s campaigns have been neither obnoxious nor nice. Rather, his way of “picturing the beast” is to use representations of animals that are realistic rather than sensationalist, which in the case of the campaigns described thus far—and with the notable exception of the “condom chicken”—have been fairly innocuous. An advertisement published in the *New York Times* (This is what USDA, 1994), however, which depicts the cruelty involved in face branding cattle, is one of the most disturbing and dramatic images used by ARI.

Here, the target was the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that cancelled a meeting Spira had requested to discuss finding an alternative to the painful and unnecessary procedure of face branding. Berger (1990) describes violent war pictures as arresting—we are seized by them. It is no exaggeration to say that Berger’s comments apply equally well to the images of face branding in the ARI advertisement:

As we look at them, the moment of the other’s suffering engulfs us. We are filled with either despair or indignation. Despair takes on some of the other’s suffering to no purpose. Indignation demands action (Berger, 1990, p. 42).

For the “caring sleuth” (Shapiro, 1996) for whom animal rights activism is a way of life, there is both sorrow and anger in these images of agony. But the purpose of the face-branding image was not to engender despair among the movement’s membership but to mobilize the indignation of those outside the movement and to demand action. The call to action was explicit in the caption: “This is what USDA policy looks like. Can you imagine what it feels like?” This is a classic instance of the use of “moral shocks” to prod people into action (Jasper, 1997; Jasper & Poulsen, 1995). According to Singer (1998, p. 162), 1,000 readers had called the USDA in the two days following the appearance of the advertisement. By December of that year, the USDA was forced to discontinue the practice as a result of public pressure. Typically, Spira did not gloat or claim a victory for ARI. Instead, a follow-up full-page advertisement featuring a more contented steer asked—“Who is listening? The USDA is listening!” In the spirit of reintegrative shaming, the advertisement—later hung in the department’s offices—went on to thank the USDA for its change of heart.

Many animal activists are offended by Spira’s willingness “to work with the devil himself,” to use the phrase of Adele Douglass of the American Humane Association (personal communication, 1996) who would wholeheartedly agree with Spira’s strategy. On the other hand, Spira’s policy of accommodating opponents to achieve animal welfare reforms has been denounced by some rights proponents, including the president of the International Society for Animal Rights, Helen Jones, who has sought to dismiss Spira’s activism as belonging to “the old humane movement” (Feder, 1989, p. 60). According to her, Spira’s methods are ineffectual because they promote animal welfarist incrementalism (lengthening the chains on the animal slaves) as opposed to animal rights abolitionism (banning animal slavery outright). Yet this criticism misses what was unique about Spira’s animal activism. Unlike the abolitionists and his critics in the contemporary animal rights movement, Spira relied on what has proved to be a very effective form of “reintegrative shaming” (Braithwaite, 1989) as a strategy to achieve improvements in institutional practices involving nonhuman animals.

A different view is taken by New York writer and activist Fano (1997) who believes there are two strategies available to activists. The first is to work within the current system to achieve incremental change, which critics deride

as animal welfare conservatism. The second, which she advocates, is to work outside the system for radical change (p. 209). These strategies correspond to Newell's (2000) liberal and critical strategies noted in the early part of this paper. Spira's approach was to work, at least initially with, rather than against, companies like Procter & Gamble, Revlon, and Gillette as well as with the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the organizational center of U. S. biological research. Fano suggests that although this approach might be expected to work in banning cosmetics testing, more radical, "grassroots" activism will be needed if systems of oppression are to be effectively challenged.

Although it is true that fundamental change will be achieved only by reforming the structures underpinning the institutionalized exploitation of animals, both the strategies of grassroots activism and organizational advocacy are needed to achieve this goal. Fano (1997) acknowledges as much when she cites approvingly the repertoire of tactics used by an American animal advocacy group that pressures companies in much the same way that Spira did. The repertoire of tactics cited by Fano—which could have been borrowed from "An Animal Activist's Handbook," devised by Spira himself—include the key ideas of pressure group politics; the promotion of alternatives; and the use of international coalitions, advertising, public information, and education as well as the accommodation of the interests of compassionate companies (pp. 217-218).

I have suggested that Spira's style of animal activism incorporated many of the tactics used by the pioneering animal protectionists in the nineteenth century but not the "them versus us", anti-science stance of the early antivivisectionists. Spira's diagnosis of the institutionalized oppression of animals as a social problem is in accord with Singer's (1975) critique that sees sexism, racism, and speciesism as interconnected systems of oppression. In attempting to do something about cruelty to animals, Spira's prognostic frame was unique in that he sought to work with corporations and individuals who harm animals in the hope of reducing the total amount of animal suffering. His reformatory and reintegrative work with animal industries has led the leaders of some animal rights groups to condemn his style of activism as ineffectual. Although Spira preferred to accommodate the legitimate interests of his opponents, he was, nonetheless, not averse to exposing their cruel practices if they refused to consider using more humane, non-animal alternatives.

Although he was not the only moral entrepreneur to have used the threat of coercion to achieve movement goals, he was unique in that the tactic was used only as a last resort and then in the spirit of reintegrative shaming. As an activist of long standing, working with his adversaries, rather than against them, may not have been his natural inclination but it was the strategy that he believed achieved most for the animals.

\* Lyle Munro, Monash University

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Correspondence should be sent to Lyle Munro, School of Humanities, Communications, and Social Science, Monash University, Gippsland, Churchill, Victoria, 3842, Australia. E-mail: [lyle.munro@arts.monash.edu.au](mailto:lyle.munro@arts.monash.edu.au). I would like to thank Ken Shapiro and three anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.
- <sup>2</sup> Similarly, contemporary animal experimenters have framed the issue in the language of stark choice between saving a child's or an animal's life or as the title of a *Newsweek* cover story (December, 1988) proclaimed, a choice over "suffering versus science." Thus the different ways of representing cruelty by these generations of animal protectionists has been one of degree rather than of kind.

## References

- Berger, J. (1990). "Photographs of agony" in *About looking*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Braithwaite, J. (1989). *Crime, shame and reintegration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Donovan, J. (1996). Attention to suffering: Sympathy as a basis for ethical treatment of animals. In J. Donovan & C. J. Adams (Eds.). *Beyond animal rights: A feminist caring ethic for the treatment of animals*. New York: Continuum.
- Feder, B. J. (November 26, 1989). Pressuring Perdue. *New York Times Magazine*, pp. 32, 33, 60, 72.
- Fano, A. (1997). *Lethal laws: Animal testing, human health and environmental policy*. New York: Zed Books Ltd.
- Frank, are you telling the truth about your chickens? (1989, October 20), *New York Times*.
- Friedman, M. (1999). *Consumer boycotts: Effecting change through the marketplace and the media*. New York: Routledge.

- Jasper, J. (1997). *The art of moral protest: Culture, biography & creativity in social movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jasper, J. & Poulsen, J. (1995). Recruiting strangers and friends: Moral shocks and social networks in animal rights and anti-nuclear protests. *Social Problems*, 42 (4), 493-512.
- Kean, H. (1998). *Animal rights: Political and social change in Britain since 1800*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Kunkel, K. (1995). Down on the farm: Rationale expansion in the construction of factory farming as a social problem. In J. Best (Ed.). *Images of issues: Typifying contemporary social problems* (pp. 239-256). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Lansbury, C. (1985). *The old brown dog: Women, workers, and vivisection in Edwardian England*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Munro, L. (1999, Winter). From vilification to accommodation: Making a common cause movement. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*, 4 (1), pp. 46-57.
- Newell, P. (2000) "Environmental NGOs and globalisation: The governance of TNCs." In R. Cohen & S. Rai (Eds.). *Global social movements*. London: The Athlone Press.
- Rochon, T. (1990). The West European peace movement and the theory of new social movements. In R. Dalton & M. Kuechler (Eds.). *Challenging the political order: New social and political movements in western democracies* (pp. 105-121). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Shapiro, K. (1996). The caring sleuth: Portrait of an animal rights activist. In J. Donovan & C. J. Adams (Eds.). *Beyond animal rights: A feminist caring ethic for the treatment of animals*. New York: Continuum.
- Singer, P. (1975). *Animal liberation: A new ethics for our treatment of animals*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Singer, P. (1997). *Henry: One man's way*, a film written and co-produced by Peter Singer.
- Singer, P. (1998). *Ethics into action: Henry Spira and the animal rights movement*. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers Inc.
- Snow, D. A. & Benford, R. D. (1988). Ideology, frame resonance and participant mobilisation. In B. Klandermans, H. Kriesi & S. Tarrow (Eds.). *From structure to action: Comparing social movement research across cultures* (pp. 197-217). Greenwich, CN: JAI Press Inc.

- Spira, H. (1985). Fighting to win. In P. Singer (Ed.). *In defense of animals*. New York: Harper & Row Publisher.
- Stop the Cat Torture at the Museum of Natural History (1997, May 3). Advertisement. *The New York Times*.
- The battle over animal rights: A question of suffering versus science. (1988, December 26). *Newsweek*, pp. 50-59.
- This is what USDA policy looks like: Can you imagine what it feels like? (1994, March 15). *New York Times*.
- Thomas, K. (1984). *Man and the natural world: Changing attitudes in England 1500-1800*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Turner, R. & Killian, L. (1987). *Collective behavior* (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Valverde, M. (1990). The rhetoric of reform: Tropes and the moral subject. *International Journal of the Sociology of the Law*, 18, 61-73.
- Wapner, P. (1995). In defense of banner hangers: The dark green politics of Greenpeace, in B. Taylor (Ed.). *Ecological resistance movements: The global emergence of radical and popular environmentalism*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Would you pay someone to kill this animal? (1983, May 3). *New York Times*.