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'All Fishing Is Wildlife Poaching:' Nonhuman Animal Imagery and Mutual Avowal in Racing Extinction and Seaspiracy

David Rooney

Moody College of Communication Studies, The University of Texas-Austin, Austin, TX 78712, USA;
David_Rooney@utexas.edu

Abstract: Images of nonhuman animals may be effective tools in producing climate concern and empathy for animals, particularly if animals are shown in natural habitats. Visual and narrative analysis of the documentary *Racing Extinction* identifies a practice of selectively recognizing the individuality of certain animals. Despite emphasizing the intrinsic worth of often-marginalized animals, *Racing Extinction* reproduces the marginalization of domesticated animals raised for consumption and less charismatic marine life. A close reading of the film's animal imagery also reveals a spatialized bias—visualizing violence against marine life overwhelmingly in China and Indonesia and by comparison associating the U.S. with indirect climate harm rather than the direct killing of animals. Intertwining a decolonial ethic with a critical animal studies perspective, this paper reveals how disjointed imagery of nonhuman animal suffering facilitates racial scapegoating, masks the exploitation of marine life by the U.S. and partitions uneven ethical responsibilities towards nonhuman animals. This is contrasted to the documentary *Seaspiracy*, which advances a universal, non-speciesist ethic of “mutual avowal”, contextualizing images of violence against marine life in a global frame.

Keywords: *Racing Extinction*; *Seaspiracy*; manta rays; animal imagery; colonialism; fishing; shark fin trade



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1. Introduction

Racing Extinction (Psihoyos 2015) is a 2015 Oscar-winning animal advocacy documentary, named “Best Green Film of the Decade” by the Green Film Network, which examines mass species die-off from climate change, overfishing and the illegal wildlife trade—particularly in manta gills and shark fins. *Seaspiracy* (Tabrizi 2021) is a 2021 documentary that also heavily focuses on nonhuman animal protection (hereafter, “animal” will be used to refer to nonhuman animals, not human animals or animals generally) and environmentalism, rocketing to the top ten list of the most watched on Netflix only a week after release (Korban 2021). Controversially, *Seaspiracy* parted from celebrated animal advocacy documentaries in the last decade that focused on particularly notorious marine industries: the Taiji dolphin hunt (*The Cove*), marine park captivity (*A Fall from Freedom*, *Blackfish*), shark-finning (*Sharkwater*, *Sharkwater Extinction*, *Fin*) or plastic dumping (*A Plastic Ocean*). *Seaspiracy's* criticism that places routine fish consumption alongside the Taiji dolphin hunt and plastic pollution has “bitterly divided the environmental community” between those who think that some form of fishing is ethical or sustainable, and those who do not (Steadman 2021). *Seaspiracy* and *Racing Extinction* are both somewhat distinct from the traditional wildlife/nature documentary, emphasizing both environmental protection and the moral worth of animals—a perspective still somewhat rare in environmental documentaries (Freeman 2012). Indeed, for those who long for films centered on animal justice alongside environmental harm without *Seaspiracy's* radical rejection of all animal consumption, some have recommended *Racing Extinction* in its place (Narula 2021).

Racing Extinction and *Seaspiracy* thus serve as useful comparisons to outline the intersections and tensions between an anti-speciesist approach opposing both use and consumption

of animals as inherently unethical and an ecological approach that values animals primarily for their role in an ecosystem. Communication and media scholars have already noted that images of animals in visual climate communication are powerful motivators that can have vastly different results: an extension of anthropocentric principles applied to the environment or an environmental perspective unconcerned with animal suffering (Almiron 2019; Cole 2015; Freeman 2014). This paper contributes to these emerging conversations by turning a critical eye not only to which animals are featured more favorably in climate communication (as others have criticized the dominance of megafauna, see: Born 2019), but who is predominantly depicted as doing violence to animals. As graphic images of violence against animals may be uniquely powerful in shaping empathic response (Freeman and Tulloch 2013), I argue that it is particularly important for environmental communication scholarship to examine how animal imagery may highlight a selective concern for certain wildlife, mask other forms of environmental exploitation and reproduce colonial hierarchies of cruelty to animals.

This perspective is rooted in Critical Animal and Media Studies (CAMS), which advances an intersectional framework of “total liberation” (Nocella et al. 2015) that highlights the need for interspecies justice for both humans and nonhuman animals. CAMS argues that the human–animal binary informs and empowers colonialism, racism, sexism, ableism and more by discursively slotting certain populations closer to an “animal” nature that may freely face violence without regulation and others closer to a valorized “human” subject held in higher esteem. A CAMS perspective argues that environmental exploitation and animal suffering are inherently co-constitutive, noting that human/animal dualism empowers a larger human/nature dualism, producing a sense that humanity is “outside” and “above” the environment—facilitating environmental damage (Plumwood 1993). As the globe is careening towards disastrous climate change without sufficient response, there is an urgent need to foundationally rethink our relationship to nonhuman animals, the environment and ecological sustainability (IPCC 2021).

First outlining the relevant literature on animal imagery, this paper briefly summarizes *Racing Extinction* before examining its visual and narrative elements, identifying a spatialized hierarchy of responsibility for species extinction—primarily locating graphic images of animal killing in China or Indonesia and associating the West with indirect climate violence in the form of localized pollution or fossil fuel emissions. This distinction in emphasis locates violence against animals as inherently far off or distant (Born 2019; Whitley and Kalof 2014), replicating racial or national bias and mystifying the role the West plays in species extinction. I propose instead that visual climate communication should incorporate an “ethic of mutual avowal” (Kim 2015) that situates ecological harm within a universalist, non-speciesist framework that challenges the easy conflation of animal exploitation with particular locales and peoples. This is read through the example of *Seaspiracy*, which reveals a number of practical and theoretical insights for how to depict threats to animals in a more ethical manner.

2. Literature Review

Animal imagery may be a uniquely powerful tool to generate empathy for nonhuman animals and motivation for environmental action. As fear-inducing representations of climate change can encourage the impression that climate change is a distant temporal and spatial problem, there is a need to partner non-threatening imagery “with those that enable a person to establish a sense of connection with the causes and consequences of climate change in a positive manner” (O’Neill and Nicholson-Cole 2009, p. 376). Animal images may offer this sense of connection to personalize the abstract issue of climate change (Manzo 2010), connecting its effects to the fate of individuals in specific places (Born 2019, 2021; O’Neill 2020). In films, animal imagery functions as “a key component in the structure of human responses towards animals generally, particularly emotional responses” (Burt 2002, p. 11). Animal portraiture has been found to heighten feelings of empathy and kinship through selective anthropomorphism (Amiot and Bastian 2017; Kalof et al. 2011,

2016) while images of wildlife¹ in their natural habitat heighten a sense of sadness or concern (Whitley et al. 2021). For some respondents, images of human or animal suffering in wildfires were comparatively more motivating of climate concern than the destruction of property or smokescreens were (Duan et al. 2021), although other studies have found animal imagery without an empathic perspective failed to produce significant climate concern (Swim and Bloodhart 2015). Measurements of neural responses indicate that images of suffering animals (in this study: dogs) activated parts of the brain connected to empathic responses to human suffering (Franklin et al. 2013).

However, this empathic response may be limited in animal images that are disconnected from specific instances of human harm or in a remote location (Whitley and Kalof 2014). Environmental films risk portraying animals as “surrogate humans” in isolated and human-free environments (Huggan 2016, p. 16). Born (2019) noted that *National Geographic* portrayed polar bears as “anthropomorphized subjects of identification” and a “stand-in for humanity’s problems”, facilitating an abstract conception of a universal humanity reflected in the polar bear (p. 659). A focus on charismatic animals may reduce empathy for less charismatic species, obscure broader societal relationships that produce environmental catastrophe (Hansen and Machin 2008) and hide marginalized humans from the representations of climate change, such as Indigenous peoples in the Arctic (Tam et al. 2021). Although films may open up the ability for the viewer to empathize with nonhuman animals, empathic responses may also be limited by focusing on minor aspects of animal welfare, overlooking broader systems of violence (Aaltola 2014; Henry 2014).

Animals featured in climate visuals tend to be charismatic megafauna—penguins, polar bears, elephants, etc. (Lousley 2016), perhaps due to greater available information (Tisdell et al. 2004), similarity to humans (Gunnthorsdottir 2001), a sense of mammalian familiarity (Born 2019), facial signals and eye gazing reminiscent of human infants (Borgi and Cirulli 2016) or overall body mass (Gunnthorsdottir 2001). In particular, marine life such as hawksbill turtles and sharks tend not to be framed as charismatic animals (Tisdell and Wilson 2006, p. 154), although this may be changing due to the rise of ecotourism centered around particularly large elasmobranch species (Mazzoldi et al. 2019). For example, media coverage of species being considered for CITES (Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species) listing tends to describe terrestrial species in more anthropomorphic or emotive terms (e.g., “cute”, “intelligent”) than were marine species (e.g., “critical ecologically”) (Shiffman et al. 2021, p. 5). As pre-existing beliefs or values shape audience reactions to visual imagery (Domke et al. 2002), differing contexts or motivational cues might shape attitudes towards imagery of certain animals, although more research is needed (Thomas-Walters et al. 2020). For example, the shift away from ritualistic culls and extractive industries targeting dolphins and whales for oil and meat in some Western societies coincided with a greater value placed on dolphin and whale preservation (Mazzoldi et al. 2019).

This tie between extractive industries and changes in the ability of an animal to capture the public imagination may be explained by Berger’s (1980) account of animal disappearance. Industrialized areas, disproportionately centralized in the West, encounter wildlife and domesticated animals less frequently as hunting and urbanization forcibly remove wildlife from previous habitats and animals killed for consumption are hidden from sight (Broad 2016). Adams (2015a) refers to nonhuman animals raised for consumption as “absent referents”, an absence that disconnects the “thing” of a hamburger from the “someone” that was killed to create meat (pp. 59–61). The absent referent prevents the visibility of violence, shrouding animal killing behind “Ag-gag” laws and a discursive regime of objectification that divorces “meat” from the violence necessary to produce it (Adams 2015b). As contemporary Western culture most commonly encounters animals as images, the “discursive regime of wildlife photography” instead marks wildlife as a spectacle that is “more real (more animal) than the animals encountered in daily life” (Brower 2011, pp. xvii–xix, 196). Mitman (2012) reaches a similar conclusion, arguing that nature films make animals into “spectacle, rather than beings we engage with in work and

play” (p. 206), revealing a voyeuristic desire to be close yet removed from nature (Bousé 2011).

Eco-film analysis has argued that ecologically minded cinema has an important role in advancing environmental justice, as a “tremendous amount of moral thinking and development of ethical feeling” happens while watching films (Brereton 2015, p. 2). As von Mossner (2012) notes, films concerning environmental catastrophe transform “abstract scientific scenarios” into relatable ethical stories about particular beings (p. 98). However, there is a risk that eco-films might result in fatalism on the part of the viewer, if they understand environmental destruction to be “outside human agency or responsibility” (Kakoudaki 2002, p. 121). Campbell (2014) offers a clear differentiation between passive experience films such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (which Mossner takes up) and the “call to action” of environmental advocacy or justice films, such as *An Inconvenient Truth* (p. 64). *Racing Extinction* and *Seaspiracy* might be more accurately grouped in the latter camp: both films call upon the audience to make significant changes they can enact—a new diet, sustainable consumption patterns, a call for political and local activism, etc. rather than passively awaiting environmental devastation.

As a result, documentaries featuring wildlife not only shape our understanding of animals or the environment, they also “frame the conception of the human”, by forcing the viewer to consider life, death and ecological interconnectedness (Brower 2011, p. 197). As Chris (2006) argues, the wildlife film “is a prism through which we can examine investments in dominant ideologies of humanity and animality, nature and culture, sex, and race” (p. xiv). For example, the “empathic distress” from viewing animals suffer in wildlife documentaries (von Mossner 2018) might lead to empathic bias against ethnic groups seen as a common enemy (Hoffman 2001, p. 215). Likewise, the ability for an animal to capture the public imagination in media may be dependent on cultural and social particularities. Meta-analysis of the existing literature indicates that attitudes towards animal imagery may vary across cultural and demographic factors, particularly between Western countries and the rest of the world (Thomas-Walters et al. 2020). Sharks (particularly great whites) tend not to be considered charismatic animals but are often subsumed under a pseudoscientific “*Jaws*” narrative as aggressive killers (Cermak 2021; Le Busque and Litchfield 2021; Lerberg 2016). Despite the overwhelming dominance of this frame, sharks are increasingly becoming objects of concern, especially for Western subjects unaware of the connections between shark fishing and fishing for flounder, tuna or swordfish (Mazzoldi et al. 2019). Bloody images of sharks without their fins inspire a “visceral response” in Western countries that rarely encounter shark-based goods, heightening a focus on the fin-trade and displacing less visible forms of shark mortality, such as incidental catch (often referred to as bycatch) from other fishing industries and habitat destruction (Wilcox 2015).

Campaigns such as the WildAid shark-fin soup commercial have been criticized for generating concern for sharks by advancing an Asian Super Consumer stereotype (Margulies et al. 2019), which has been amplified by anti-Chinese backlash during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bergin et al. 2020). The Asian Super Consumer stereotype describes ecological campaigns that disproportionately focus on the wildlife trade in Asian countries (and China in particular), downplaying or ignoring the substantial role played by North America and Europe. Collard (2020) argues that the conflation of the wildlife trade with Chinese and Indonesian production displaces analysis of “colonial trade flows” from biodiverse countries towards wealthier nations—focusing on particular industries rather than the “top spots” of overall wildlife importations held by the U.S., followed by the European Union (pp. 12–13). Although it is true that there are many ways that regions can be destructive beyond wildlife imports (for example, local hunting, overfishing, or wildlife exports), the U.S.’ outsized role in wildlife imports (as the biggest consumer of wildlife internationally) often means that wildlife products from Taiwan, Thailand or China are exported for US consumption (Olsen et al. 2021). It is also estimated that the U.S. is the largest importer of *illegal* wildlife products, although exact details of that industry are difficult to discern (Smart et al. 2021). In any case, my intention is not to argue that there

are not intensively destructive fishing practices to be found outside of North America or Europe—but that the role of the West in marine destruction has been relatively sidelined in comparison to “notorious industries” in Asia. Instead, I believe that it is necessary to widen the scope of what marine practices are understood as destructive or “sustainable” as the poaching of wildlife from the ocean in the form of commercial fishing is always an act of tremendous violence and inherently ecologically unsustainable, even assuming an ideal state of best practices and regulations (McClanahan et al. 2021).

The recent focus on animal suffering in wet markets has made salient the interlocking and reinforcing nature of white supremacy and speciesism; selectively concerned with certain animals, China was depicted by some Western media outlets as both “the sole culprit” of the COVID-19 pandemic and uniquely brutal in the treatment of animals (Alonso-Recarte 2022, pp. 108–9; Chang and Corman 2021). Kim (2015) has documented a similar response to live animal markets in San Francisco, highlighting the disparate response to Chinese markets compared to Fisherman’s Wharf, an upscale animal market that avoided controversy. Inspiring “a media firestorm in which the tropes of Chinese cruelty, transgressiveness, backwardness, and recklessness were given full play” (Kim 2015, p. 104), the interlocking nature of speciesism and racism reveals itself in depictions of the Chinese as “cruel and transgressive *like* animals and *with* animals” (p. 102). As Western violence against animals is hidden by transforming animals killed for food into absent referents and masking the effects of climate change on free-roaming animals (Almiron and Faria 2019; Whitley and Kalof 2014), a disproportionate focus on outside transgressors may have the effect of locating animal exploitation as primarily belonging elsewhere. In this vein, Muller (2021) has argued that colonial speciesism disparages non-Western populations as inhumanly cruel or unclean for actions that are routine but hidden in the West. As a result of this spectacle, non-Western populations may be placed generally lower on the “sliding scale” of humanity for their transgressive relations with certain animals (Muller 2020, p. xvii; Deckha 2008; Ko and Ko 2017; Ko 2019).

3. *Racing Extinction* and *Seaspiracy*—Context and Synopsis

Racing Extinction is a 2015 documentary that weaves together themes of animal protection and climate change, connecting the inherent cruelty in wildlife hunting to the ecological harms of biodiversity loss. Director Louie Psihoyos’ previous film, *The Cove*, has been criticized for demonizing Japanese fisherman in contrast to an ecologically mindful West (Freeman 2012; Haynes 2013, p. 28). Freeman (2012) argues that *The Cove*’s limited focus on cetaceans ignores the exploitation of fish generally, discussing fish only as food or for their role in ecological stability (Freeman and Tulloch 2013). Although *Racing Extinction* has not received as much scholarly attention as *The Cove*, it has similarly been criticized for generating a Manichean dualism between unfeeling Chinese traders and Western environmentalists (von Mossner 2020), leading Truscello (2018) to conclude that the film produces a “orientalist visual grammar” (p. 264).

Racing Extinction follows Psihoyos and ocean conservationists Paul Hilton and Shawn Heinrichs around the world, drawing connections between local pollution, the wildlife trade and species extinction. The film begins at The Hump, an LA-based restaurant where the film crew successfully orders whale meat, resulting in protests against Japanese whale fishing. The crew then travels to the Cornell Bioacoustic Laboratory where they encounter audio recordings of blue whales and extinct species, such as the mating call of the last male Kaua’i ‘ō‘ō. Heinrichs and Hilton lead the viewer through several Chinese wildlife markets where shark fins and manta gills are traded, before infiltrating a shark slaughterhouse in Pu Qi. Briefly touring an oyster hatchery and cows grazing in the U.S., *Racing Extinction* proceeds to Lamakera, Indonesia, filming Lamakerans killing mantas. After heading to the U.S. to observe various environmental efforts—a prairie reserve, a greened Empire State Building, a low emission racing car and Elon Musk’s plea for citizens to use electric vehicles—the grand conclusion of the film takes place in New York City, where Psihoyos projects images of endangered species onto major buildings from a

retrofitted Tesla. Interspersed throughout the film are interviews with scientists describing the threats facing ocean wildlife and the need to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Seaspiracy is a 2021 animal advocacy documentary by Ali Tabrizi centered on the harms of fishing. Beginning with the effects of plastic on marine life, the film follows Tabrizi through major fishing areas: Japan, Hong Kong, West Africa, Norway and more. Interviewing a mix of marine biologists, nutritionists and ocean activists, *Seaspiracy* challenges the impetus behind sustainable fishing, favoring “a hands-off” approach that eliminates fishing wherever possible. Critical of the Western focus on notorious fishing practices in Asia (e.g., shark-fin soup, the Taiji dolphin hunt), *Seaspiracy* aims to show that there is *no* ethical or sustainable fishing, but that the attention on Asian industries displaces focus away from Western marine exploitation masked by rubber-stamped regulations and greenwashing (such as “dolphin-free tuna” certifications, which are heavily criticized in the film). For example, Tabrizi is shocked to realize that bycatch (the killing of non-target marine species by fisheries) near the coast of France kills ten times as many dolphins a year as the infamous Taiji dolphin hunt, which is the subject of several eco-films, including Psihoyos’ *The Cove*. As a result, *Seaspiracy* outlines a universalist ethic towards marine exploitation, declaring that all fishing, even “sustainable” practices, must be rejected on ethical and environmental grounds.

4. Methodology

As there is no universal method for film analysis (Mikos 2014, p. 420), the author followed Mikos’ (2014) recommendation of developing a general cognitive purpose (a guiding set of questions) before observing the object of interest, reflecting on the levels of analysis potentially relevant for investigation. As analysis may be guided by any single or several different levels depending on the cognitive purpose (Mikos 2014, p. 413), analysis centered on the interplay of narration, characters and aesthetic choices that direct the viewer towards certain impressions of species extinction. Guided by an interest in intersectional approaches to nonhuman animal imagery in climate communication, the author transcribed the film’s core plot structure, recording every instance of animal imagery and noting the duration and species of animal depicted (as far as possible). Salt (1974) recommends that a quantitative approach to film be carried out through comparison of one primary film to another within the same genre. Although this paper focuses more on the meaning generated within two specific films (rather than of the style of the director, as Salt does), I do take note of both the total number of shots or sequences and the length of each shot. The intent of such a “statistical method” of film analysis is to ground analysis in a repeatable, close reading of a film-maker’s choices rather than a purely interpretative approach (Salt 1974, 2009, 2001). However, this approach goes beyond mere analysis of shots and shot length—making use of such quantitative metrics as the basis to chart the influence of a particular film-maker’s beliefs or aesthetic desires (Salt 2001, p. 99).

Each sequence that shows one or more nonhuman animals was recorded as a distinct data point (although overall time onscreen was also recorded). Sequences were distinguished by “cuts” that resulted in a temporal shift, change of location, transition in subject of analysis, or otherwise interrupted running footage. Although this runs the risk of potentially repeating nonhuman animals across scenes, it is virtually impossible to identify if a given shark or dolphin reappears in wide shots that feature hundreds of animals. In any case, the montage itself is a necessary unit of analysis as decisions concerning perspective, backdrop or transition to new angles generates meaning through the editing process (Mikos 2017). As eco-films construct a particular reading of a topic through conscious decisions of what to include or leave out, it is particularly important to examine what is *not* shown (Loy 2016). Indeed, the invisibility of nonhuman animals in major films may be a dominant way of propagating anthropocentric ideology (Loy 2016; Nibert 2002, p. 208; Taylor 2015). The analysis thus also critically interrogates what forms of animal imagery were not shown and what such silences reveal about the film.

Sequences that featured nonhuman animals were coded as *unharmful wildlife* (non-human animals not under immediate danger—either in natural habitat or forced into sanctuaries or other forms of captivity), *extinct* (preserved remains of extinct species), *threatened* (nonhuman animals depicted as injured, dying or dead and their body parts—flesh, gills, fins, etc.) or *other* (domesticated animals on farms, cartoons, etc.). Information and location of the actor that posed a threat (for threatened subjects) were also recorded. Although violence is levied against animals in a variety of direct (e.g., fishing, dismembering, trapping) and indirect ways (e.g., plastic pollution, greenhouse gas emissions), the *threatened* code emphasized the visual presence of direct imminent harm to animals rather than a general state of being threatened—which risked categorizing *every* animal featured as under threat of harm from captivity, climate change or habitat destruction. For example, although removing fish from their natural habitat and containing them within aquariums is an act of violence, sequences with aquariums were not coded as “threatened”. However, visual indications of animal disappearance were coded as threatened—as in projections of animals with a population counter plummeting to zero or images of animals dissolving into pixels with associated priming words such as “extinction”.

A similar difficulty arose in classifying nonhuman animals as *Racing Extinction* is filled with images of animal corpses and dried remnants. Informed by a Critical Animal and Media Studies (CAMS) perspective that seeks to make the hidden processes of violence against animals recognizable (Almiron et al. 2016), I coded images of animal body parts (e.g., gills, fins, flesh of fish, cows or whales sold for consumption) as *threatened* even though such threats may have occurred prior to filming. A CAMS perspective rejects the anthropocentric privileging of human interests over other animals, acknowledging the ethical demand to bear witness to the violence inflicted against other animals (Freeman 2009, p. 104). A central aspect of CAMS is an intersectional framework (Crenshaw 1989) that examines the discursive interconnections between animal and human oppression—unpacking how anthropocentric discourse acts in tandem with colonialism, racism, gender normativity, sexism, ableism and more—to constitute a collective matrix of oppression built around a distance from an idealized male, White European human subject (Almiron 2019). This is particularly important for animal advocacy that makes use of environmental frames, as such strategies may advance a genuinely universal approach to animal oppression (Almiron 2019; Freeman 2014) or further solidify such violent systems by enhancing racist tropes (Kim 2015) or advancing eco-friendly oppression of animals (Cole 2015). The former has been termed the “total liberation” or “abolitionist approach” to animal liberation (Nocella et al. 2015; Francione and Charlton 2017). Other scholars have argued that scholarship examining media aimed at a largely Western audience ought to challenge anthropocentric framings within a “decolonial telos” that centralizes the role Western actors play in reproducing colonial violence, animal oppression and masking their own complicity (Muller 2021). This is not to abdicate critique of non-Western animal oppression or advance a moral relativism that denies global violence against animals. As Kim (2015) argues, the aim is not to say that “there is no *there there*” when facing animal suffering, but to critique how non-universal frames selectively choose certain animals as a “vehicle for ethnocentrism and even imperialism”, re-creating speciesist hierarchies of value along national and racial lines (pp. 82, 83, emphasis mine).

5. Results

The results first describe the number and location of animal images in *Racing Extinction* (Figure 1) and in *Seaspiracy* (Figure 2). Total time of footage and more specific analysis is discussed in Sections 5.1 and 5.2, but the absolute number of sequences was used to generate the graphed comparison.

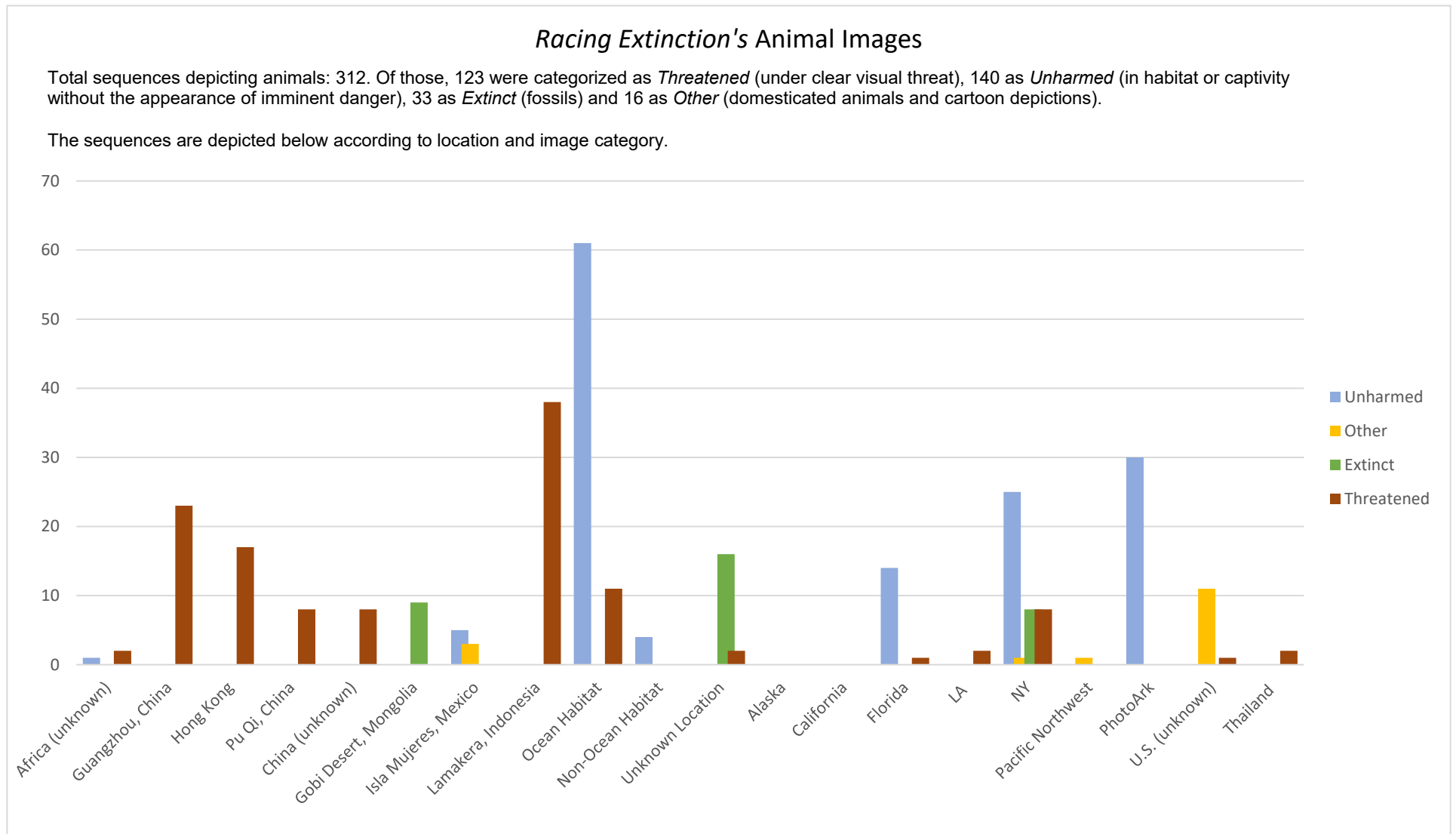


Figure 1. Racing Extinction's Animal Imagery.

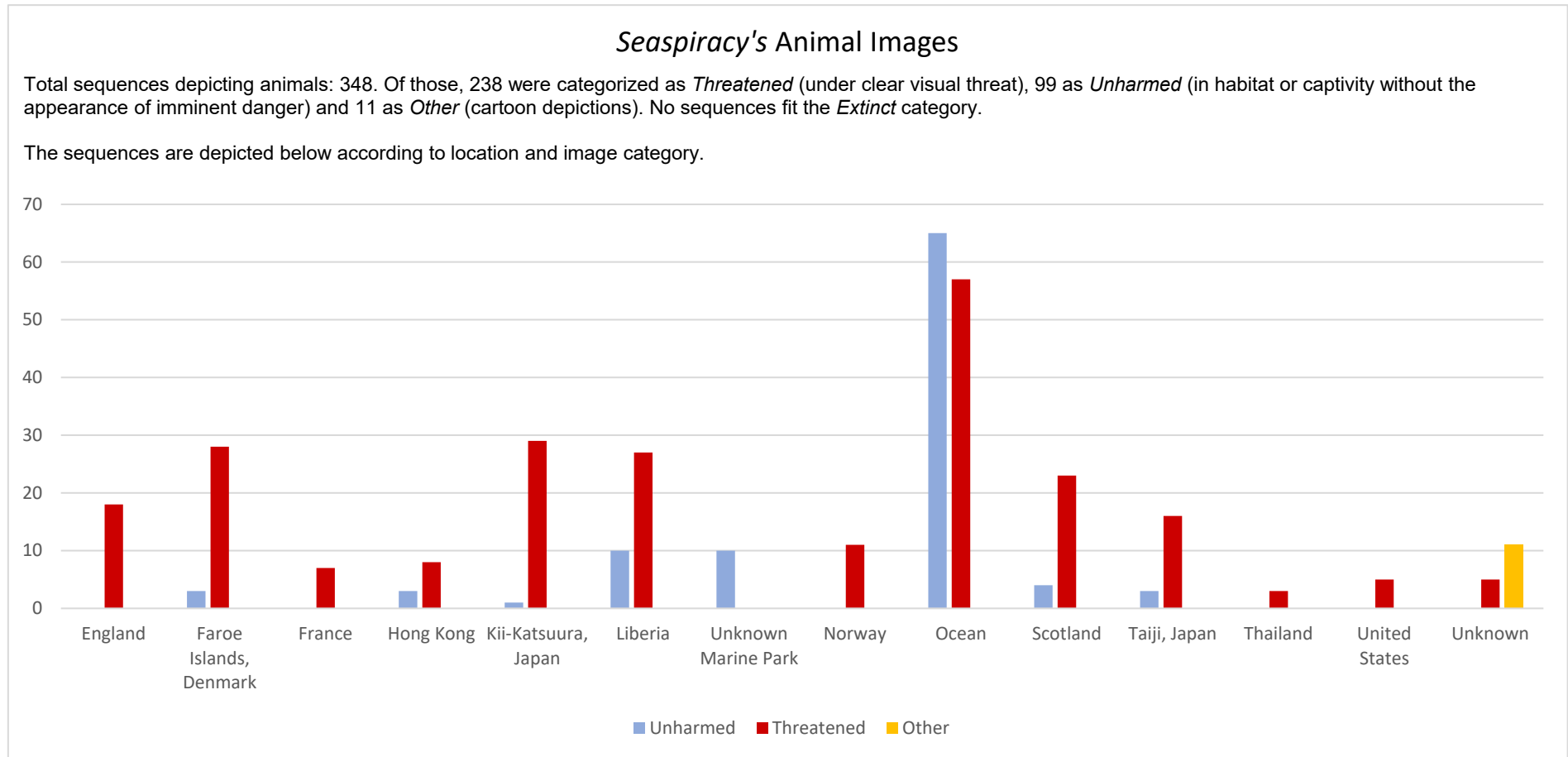


Figure 2. Seaspiracy's Animal Imagery.

5.1. Racing Extinction's Visuals

5.1.1. Unharmed Wildlife

The U.S. was predominantly associated with unharmed wildlife, totaling 69 sequences (176 s and 49.28% of total sequences), surpassing the number of sequences (65, 431 s) associated with Natural Habitats (46.4% of total), the next highest location. The only other unharmed wildlife imagery was five sequences (20 s) of whale sharks in Isla Mujeres (3.57% of total) and a single sequence (2 s) from news footage of an unknown country in Africa (0.71% of total).

Representations of wildlife in their natural habitats are paired with upbeat, happy music and a narration that affirms the importance of leaving these animals be. Imagery of unharmed wildlife in natural habitats was one of the most significant categories, encompassing 65 sequences and 431 s of footage—exceeded only by unharmed animals in the U.S. However, 69 sequences of unharmed wildlife in the U.S. only covered 176 s of footage, mostly within reserves or captivity—suggesting that footage of animals in their natural habitat featured long, extended shots of a broader environment.

5.1.2. Extinct Animals

Extinct animals were most commonly associated with an unknown location (16 sequences, 27 s, 48.48% of all extinct sequences), followed by Mongolia's Gobi Desert (9 sequences, 24 s, 27.2%) and then the U.S. (8 sequences, 59 s, 24.2%).

5.1.3. Threatened Animals

Threatened animals were mostly commonly shown within China with 56 distinct sequences (216 s), encompassing 45.5% of all threatened sequences. Lamakera was the second most frequent, with 38 sequences (169 s) or 30.9% of the total. Lamakera was followed by the U.S., with 12 sequences (33 s) or 9.75% of the total. The fourth most frequent location for threatened sequences was Natural Habitats, with 11 sequences (22 s) or 8.9% of the total. Finally, an unknown country in Africa featured on a news broadcast, the 2013 CITES meeting in Thailand and an Unknown Location each had two sequences (3 s) of threatened animals, or 1.6%, respectively. Notably, Lamakera and China were unique in *only* being associated with threatened animals. The 2013 CITES meeting in Thailand was also only associated with threatened animals, but this consisted of manta gills from Lamakera and footage of manta hunting by fishermen from Lamakera.

5.1.4. Threatening Actors

The actors that threatened animals differed greatly by location. In China, the threatening actors only consisted of Chinese fishermen, workers and consumers who killed sharks or traded their body parts. In Lamakera, the only threatening actor shown was Lamakera villagers, who were shown hunting and carving up mantas. In the CITES meeting in Thailand, the threatening actor was also Lamakera villagers, as gills and footage from the manta hunt were shown during deliberations. In the news broadcast discussing the future of the Ivory Trade in Africa, an unknown person with a gun was the threatening actor to elephants. The most common threatening actor for the Natural Habitats location was Japanese fishing boats (7/11 sequences), followed by unknown actors (4/11 sequences).

Animals under threat in the U.S. were threatened by markedly distinct actors. For one, only a single sequence showed an immediate threat to animals clearly connected to human activity—a 6 s recording of fish swimming in polluted waters near a sewer pipe in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Two sequences (5 s total) were of whale flesh purchased at The Hump, which the film connects with the Japanese whale-fishing industry. Eight sequences (totaling 20 s) consisted of projections of endangered animals onto buildings in New York City. These projections featured animal images (often of a single animal in the style of a portrait), with a general indication that these species were under threat. For example, several projections paired an endangered species (a Gray Wolf or Ocelot) with a population

counter that rapidly fell to zero, before fading the animal image to black. For other species, such as the Florida Panther or the Francois' Langurs, as the population counter hit zero, the animal images disintegrated into pixels. The most explicit depiction of the threat facing endangered wildlife was a projection that transitioned images of lions, eagles and apes into skulls, while the caption reads "In the next 100 years, we could lose 50% of all species on earth".

Animals under threat in countries other than the U.S. were often showed being killed. Footage from Pu Qi featured extended footage of dozens of whale sharks being carved into pieces. Sequences affiliated with Natural Habitats primarily showed images of Japanese commercial whale fishing, spearing whales before hauling corpses onto ships or piling bloody sharks to be processed. Footage from Lamakera overwhelmingly showed villagers stabbing manta rays with machetes, dragging corpses to shore and removing organs.

5.1.5. Other

Animals in the *Other* category included domesticated animals such as cows, oysters and images of animals (cartoons, etc.). *Other* animals were most commonly shown in the U.S., with 13 sequences (55 s), or 81.25% of the total. U.S. other animals included 11 sequences (50 s) of cows grazing under aerial shots and lighthearted music, 1 sequence (4 s) of oysters in a hatchery and 1 sequence (1 s) of a projection of a cow outside a McDonalds. Shark cartoons and statues in Isla Mujeres were three sequences (12 s) or 18.75% of the total.

5.2. *Seaspiracy's* Visuals

5.2.1. Unharmed Wildlife

Unharmed wildlife was predominantly associated with unspecific locations in the Ocean, encompassing 65 sequences (279 s and 65.6% of unharmed wildlife sequences), surpassing that of an unspecified Marine Park (10 sequences, 47 s and 10.1% of total sequences), Liberia (10 sequences, 40 s and 10.1% of the total), Scotland (4 sequences, 11 s and 4% of the total), Faroe Islands (3 sequences, 25 s, 3%), Taiji, Japan (3 sequences, 14 s, 3%), Hong Kong (3 sequences, 13 s, 3%) and Kii-Katsuura, Japan (1 sequence, 3 s). In contrast to *Racing Extinction*, which associated unharmed wildlife primarily with the United States, unharmed wildlife could be found in most major regions in *Seaspiracy*.

5.2.2. Threatened Animals

Threatened animals were shown in a roughly equal manner across many major locations. The most predominant location was the Ocean, with 57 sequences (221 s, 11.3% of total *Threatened* sequences), followed by Kii-Katsuura, Japan with 29 sequences (96 s, 12.2%), the Faroe Islands (Denmark) with 28 sequences (133 s, 11.8%), Liberia (27 sequences, 118 s, 11.3%), Scotland (23 sequences, 56 s, 9.6%), England (18 sequences, 53 s, 7.6%), Taiji, Japan (16 sequences, 34 s, 6.7%), Norway (11 sequences, 48 s, 4.6%), Hong Kong (8 sequences, 20 s, 3.4%), France (7 sequences, 27 s, 2.9%), The United States (5 sequences, 16 s, 2.1%), Unknown locations (5 sequences, 16 s, 2.1%) and finally Thailand (3 sequences, 13 s, 1.3%).

5.2.3. Threatening Actors

The actors that threatened animals generally aligned with the location. In Taiji or Kii-Katsuura Japan, the threatening actor was usually Japanese workers and fishermen who killed dolphins, finned sharks or transported tuna. In the Faroe Islands, the Faroese were the only threatening actor to whales, which is mirrored in England, Hong Kong, France, The United States and Thailand, etc. The two exceptions to this were Liberia and the Ocean. In Liberia, the threatening actors were predominantly European and Chinese fishing vessels that had come to illegally fish in more abundant waters. In the Ocean, a variety of actors were shown threatening animals. For example, *Seaspiracy* highlighted the

Japanese whaling industry, French bycatch of dolphins, turtles trapped in U.S. fishing gear, seals caught in English plastic waste and the general practice of bycatch by commercial fishing vessels internationally.

Unlike in *Racing Extinction*, animals in every location were shown being brutally killed by a variety of actors. Sequences from the Faroe Islands featured a prolonged and bloody hunt of pilot whales. In France, dead dolphins caught in nets accompanied revelations about abhorrent bycatch practices. In Scotland and England, beached whales, dead seal pups and sick salmon were connected to fishing gear and other waste. In Hong Kong and Japan, shark and tuna were shown first as dying individuals and then as products for sale. Indeed, one of the notable aspects of *Seaspiracy*'s animal imagery is its equal attention to the global harms of commercial fishing— as the number of threatening sequences in Scotland, Taiji, Kii-Katsuura, England, the Faroe Islands, Hong Kong and Norway are roughly similar.

6. Discussion

The use of nonhuman animal imagery in climate communication may be a valuable tool to facilitate greater concern and awareness for environmental harms *and* animal exploitation. Departing from a purely ecological focus, *Racing Extinction* portrays several commonly denigrated wildlife species as individuals worthy of concern and protection. In this way, the film is a significant rupture of hegemonic portrayals of species such as sharks within a “Jaws narrative” (Cermak 2021) and aligns with recommendations by Freeman and Merskin (2015) to represent animals in their natural habits and as individuals with their own interests and desires.

The film's narrative also supports a view that mantas, sharks and whales have value intrinsically, not just instrumentally. Narrating footage of a tawny nurse shark dying after her fins were amputated, Heinrichs calls the scene “horrific” as this “beautiful” shark was “trying to swim, but it couldn't swim. And it was heartbreaking”. Recalling the killing of a manta in Lamakera, Heinrich tears up, saying “I watched its soul just disappear in front of me”. In Hong Kong, a member of the film crew, Dr. Heather Rally, is overcome with emotion looking at the racks of shark fins, saying “Jesus” and looking away. As the camera pans over thousands of shark fins drying in racks, Psihoyos declares “I feel like this world is absolutely insane”. Before traveling to Lamakera, Heinrich is shown removing a fishing hook from a manta and looking at the manta in the eyes, before remarking in the voiceover, “you're gonna be okay” as he realized that “she knew I was trying to help her”. Discussing species extinction, Psihoyos is so overcome with emotion over the Baiji Dolphin that he has to temporarily stop speaking. As footage rolls of Lamakera villagers carving gills out of the bodies of dead mantas, Hilton remarks “It's just losing a bit of magic, you know? The world, without that species, to me, it's empty, you know?” Going beyond questions of the ecological sustainability of manta ray fishing, Heinrichs declares a mission of making it “socially unacceptable to consume these animals”.

However, *Racing Extinction* does not extend this consideration to other marine life. When the film exposes The Hump for serving whale, the crew discuss their other dishes; having ordered whale and horse and already eaten the flesh of cows (high-grade Kobe beef), codfish and shrimp. Of these various animals, only one (whale) serves as a spectacle for shock, inspiring protests and the film's condemnation of Japanese whale fishing. Indeed, only the whale flesh is visible to the viewer—the rest are discussed but not shown. This message is repeated in the film's positive regard of anti-whale environmental protestors outside The Hump, particularly the projector work of Adi Gil. The camera lingers over signs with messages such as “Japan stop slaughtering whales”, “whales don't belong on plates”, “stop the murder, stop the death”, “No Whale Sushi”, an image of a whale with the caption “Not 4 Sushi” and a sign reading “No Whale!” accompanied by an image of a person holding chopsticks. Of course, the irony of such a protest is that the business model of The Hump necessitated the murder of fish and other animals, far before whale flesh found its way to the film crew's table. As a result of this selective focus, *Racing Extinction* reproduces

the disappearance of less charismatic animals—rendering them “absent referents” to the film’s outcry against whaling. The distinction between acceptable consumption of shrimp, cows or other marine life (with their own environmental consequences, some discussed in the film) and those that cross this threshold (whales, mantas, sharks) seems to reflect a Western intuition over which animals are consumable more than the avoidance of disparate environmental effects or genuine care for the well-being of nonhuman animals.

Similarly, when *Racing Extinction* tours several oyster hatcheries, the film does not explore the fate of oysters but limits this sequence to interviews with hatchery production managers, who describe how ocean acidification threatens food chains by killing oyster larvae. Oysters are only shown for a single sequence as a generalized mass, rather than as individuals. There is some controversy over the extent of a moral responsibility to oysters—popular vegans such as Peter Singer have deemed it acceptable (Cox 2010), claiming that oysters lack a complex central nervous system and thus process pain differently than other animals or not at all, but others have strongly criticized this perspective, arguing that oysters may feel pain (Feliz 2017), that moral responsibility to animals is not limited to pain (Bekoff 2010), and that there is a need to be precautious in the face of uncertainty (Francione 2020, p. 147). In any case, *Racing Extinction* does not explore the possibility of oysters as beings rather than things for food, either narratively or visually.

Along with oysters, cows are only discussed in light of ecological harms. In sharp contrast to the marine life killed elsewhere, *Racing Extinction* does not show the killing of a cow, only a quick shot of flesh cooking on a grill—the violence inherent to the process of converting living cows into flesh for consumption occurs out of sight (Adams 2015a, 2015b). This contrasts the actions in Pu Qi, where the film crew releases photographs of dead sharks in what they label a “shark slaughterhouse”. The association stuck, and dozens of headlines by major news outlets featuring the term “shark slaughterhouse” flash by the viewer. Despite the willingness to use the term slaughterhouse, at no point is “slaughterhouse” associated with the meat or dairy industry. In this way, *Racing Extinction*’s heightened visibility of sharks killed in the Pu Qi slaughterhouse is juxtaposed to the invisibility of the slaughter of domesticated animals in the U.S.

Narratively, Psihoyos frames the killing of cows as a problem of inefficiency, not ethics—arguing “One cow is not a problem, but now we have 1.5 billion of them. And it’s an incredibly inefficient way of producing food”. Lester Brown, the founder of the Earth Policy Institute, also stresses ecological harms as “the more dependent we are on meat, milk, and eggs, the greater the CO₂ and methane emissions”. In the conclusion, a projection states “Eat more plants!” while the film quantifies the impact of meat and dairy reduction with the statement “if every American skipped meat and cheese just one day a week for a year, it would be like taking 7,600,000 cars off the road”. The conclusion features a projection of a cow wearing a methane-gathering bag next to a McDonalds, captioned “Got Methane?” The narration by Dr. J.E.N. Veron of the Australian Institute of Marine Science features a lighthearted plea for a new diet on ecological grounds: “It sounds a bit silly. Change your diet and save the planet, but if humans could become vegetarians now, you would make a massive difference”. Juxtaposed to Heinrichs’ campaign to absolutely ban manta consumption, *Racing Extinction* favors requests to simply moderate consumption of other animals. The difference in tone (one as suggestion, the other as punitive) reveals a differential relationship to animal individuality. As it is “easier to sell Americans on dolphin and whale protection because Americans don’t eat them”, the concern for manta rays, sharks or whales may be premised on the distinction between the intrinsic value of unfamiliar wildlife in distant places and more routine violence overlooked domestically (Freeman 2012, p. 112).

However, *Racing Extinction's* selective recognition of animal individuality goes beyond species hierarchy. Contra Whitley and Kalof's (2014) critique of animal imagery, *Racing Extinction* does not divorce humans from images of animal suffering. Showing nonhuman animals being killed and having fins and gills forcibly removed, *Racing Extinction* does not shy away from depicting graphic footage to garner sympathy for animals. Such moral shock footage may be a necessary disruption of hidden violence against animals (Fernández 2019, 2021; Taylor 2015), what Freeman and Tulloch (2013) have termed "a reverse panopticon" where an animal may look back at the human viewer (Derrida 2008). However, the film problematically limits the causes of species extinction to a select group of people. Threatened animals were overwhelmingly shown in China and Lamakera, together encompassing more than 75% of all sequences of violence. For the vast majority of threatened animals, the threatening actors were Chinese fishermen, traders, consumers and Lamakeran villagers. In other locations threatening actors were either Japanese whaling (natural habitats) unknown (Africa, natural habitats, unknown location), Lamakera fishermen (Thailand) or the unknown Chef at the Hump (U.S.). These threatening actors were featured in graphic footage, such as mantas being killed in front of the camera (Lamakera), bloody shark bodies being piled on boats (Japan) and the carving up of sharks and mantas for fins and gills (China, Lamakera). Although the U.S. was associated with some threats, the threatening actors were diverse and not graphic: a sewer pipe, an unknown actor grilling cow flesh and projections of endangered animals.

In contrast to China and Lamakera, the U.S. was primarily connected to indirect forms of climate violence—visuals of past extinction events, fossil fuel emissions and barren wastelands. Projections in NYC show endangered species disintegrating into pixels, melting away or fading to black. However, at no point is the specific threat to these animals clear nor are they shown in a state of harm, which facilitates the impression that the effects of climate change are far off (Born 2019; Whitley and Kalof 2014). Images of industrial smokestacks adorned with the U.S. flag were overlaid with narration by Dr. Veron that focused on carbon dioxide spikes. This transitioned into footage of volcanoes erupting, but no animals or humans were shown. When discussing the environmental impacts of the Gulf Oil spill, footage of burning oil was shown, but no animals were depicted. Although the narration by Veron discussed mass marine death as the result of ocean acidification, the sequence showed only an empty ocean, with no marine life present. Visual representations of the Sixth Mass Extinction event—narratively associated with both wildlife fishing and GHGs—were abstract; raging fires and globes struck by asteroids. The absence of any animal images from these renditions of climate change suggests both that the harm to nonhuman animals is selectively erased in *Racing Extinction's* framing of species loss (Almiron and Faria 2019) and that images of animal suffering may generate a response distinct from that of general environmental catastrophe or narrative and sonic priming (Aaltola 2014).

Somewhat similar, a minor theme in *Racing Extinction* is the metaphorization of past extinction events to the present. In the introduction, the excited squeaks and clicks of dolphins overlay images of dinosaur skeletons, while the concluding scene shows endangered species melt into skulls. Footage of fossils being uncovered in the Gobi Desert is paired with sad or thrilling music, highlighting the threat posed to current endangered species. As Smaill (2016) suggests, animals in documentary films resemble "that of animals already extinct" (p. 74), capturing a mythologized form of an endangered species disconnected from her embodied reality. As the cause of past extinction events is disconnected narratively from on-going species extinction, this metaphor also does not outline a clear sense of responsibility or actionable solution.

In total, there was *no* sequence in the film that showed an agent (a person, fishing vessel or environmental catastrophe such as oil spills) from the U.S. (or any other Western country) directly killing an animal. Although the film's narration describes the threat climate change poses to life on the planet, there were no sequences that showed animals suffering direct harm clearly brought about by climate change. As images of suffering prime intense

empathic responses, including potential ethnic bias (Hoffman 2001), this omission risks positing that endangered species, and marine biodiversity generally, are primarily under attack by Asian subjects—expanding the scope of the “Asian Super Consumer stereotype” from the wildlife trade to global ecosystem stability. Visually and narratively divorcing the West from its role in wildlife eradication, *Racing Extinction* reproduces a selective ignorance to the causes of species extinction by constraining the causal mechanisms to a limited set of actions and actors. In so doing, it reproduces a hierarchy of species and a racial hierarchy of responsibility that primarily locates violence against animals outside of the Western world. This risks the scapegoating of non-White rulebreakers (Muller 2020), whitewashing the complicity of the U.S. in speciesist violence against marine life by juxtaposition.

Kim (2015) describes the problems of animal cruelty, racism, and ecological harm as single optic issues, leading to “mutual disavowal”, where each group centralizes its own focus and invalidates the justice claims of others (p. 181). Instead, she gestures towards an ethics of “mutual avowal”, which takes seriously the intersecting dimensions of domination, requiring a universal commitment to attend to the uncomfortable reality of animal oppression. An ethic of mutual avowal does not neglect criticism of how marginalized subjects can reproduce oppression against animals but seeks to critically situate concern for animals within a truly universal, non-ethnocentric lens. I offer *Seaspiracy* as an example of this ethic of mutual avowal, highlighting practical lessons on representing harm against nonhuman animals.

Although *Seaspiracy* has received criticism by fisheries scientists for potential distortion of evidence (McVeigh 2021) and advancing an anti-fishing perspective deemed Western (Belhabib 2021), *Seaspiracy*'s narrative and visual imagery are generally consistent with a CAMS perspective that challenges normalized violence against marine life. First, *Seaspiracy* situates the violence of the fishing industry as a global war against marine life, challenging the killing of charismatic marine animals and less charismatic fish consumed on a massive scale. *Seaspiracy*'s central message is that sustainable fishing is a myth—greenwashing environmental harm and inherently producing unacceptable violence to marine life. Interviews of activists, such as Sea Shepherd Conservation Society's Paul Watson, defend a “leave it alone” approach to the ocean, outlining a total rejection of fish consumption where possible. Referring to commercial fishing as “wildlife poaching on a mass scale”, the film collapses an easy distinction between controversial wildlife products featured in *Racing Extinction* and fishing generally. *Seaspiracy*'s ending concludes that even potentially sustainable fishing is a profound violation of the interests of individual fish. Importantly, the film does not displace issues of food access, critiquing the European Union's fishing practices that have left Liberian fishermen hungry and destitute, advancing a perspective similar to Freeman's (2014) that “hunting of wildlife may be necessary in limited survival circumstances” (p. 258).

Second, *Seaspiracy* situates the violence against marine life in relative terms, quantifying the causal relationships behind animal exploitation and species extinction, ascribing responsibility on a global scale. This avoids placing a myopic lens on shark, whale or dolphin fishing by Japan or China as *Racing Extinction* does but situates those industries within a broader continuum of violence against animals, rather than as aberrations from the norm. When Tabrizi heads to Taiji, Japan to observe its infamous dolphin hunt, the film connects the hunt to the demand for live dolphin performers in other countries and the eradication of competition for tuna sold globally. Lamya Essemlali, a member of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, quantifies the global exploitation of dolphins further: “One of the recent discoveries that Sea Shepherd has made is that on Atlantic French coast, up to 10,000 dolphins are being killed every year by bycatch. So, this is ten times more than dolphins killed in Taiji and no one knew about it. This has been going on for at least 30 years, because the French government has been very effective in hiding the problem. People love dolphins, and most of them have no idea that when they eat fish, they're actually putting a death sentence on the dolphin population in France”. Similarly, when Tabrizi and his crew travel to Hong Kong to get a closer look at the epicenter of the shark-fin

trade, they record graphic images—the removal of fins from recently killed sharks and a tremendous number of dead sharks and dried fins in major markets. Although the film exposes the brutal violence inherent to the shark-fin trade (calling it “Mafia-esque”), it is clear to contextualize the harms to sharks beyond this limited context—what it calls “following the shark story”. Paul de Gelder, a shark activist, remarks that “stopping shark fin soup is only half the picture. The problem is that eating fish is just as bad if not worse than the shark finning industry because the shark finning industry is strictly held in Asia whereas everyone around the world is eating fish”. Highlighting that half of all sharks killed (50 million) are killed as bycatch by commercial fishing vessels, *Seaspiracy* transitions to a series of images of sharks dying painfully on commercial fishing vessels before being dumped overboard. Shining a light on the “invisible victims” of bycatch, marine conservation biologist Calum Roberts gives the example of an Iceland fishery that killed 269 porpoises, 900 seals and 5000 seabirds in a single month—asking the audience to consider those effects scaled up to global commercial fishing.

Third, *Seaspiracy* highlights a diversity of actors posing a threat to marine life. In contrast to *Racing Extinction*, *Seaspiracy* shows a broad range of actors harming animals, equally distributed around the world (as is seen in Figure 2). Captain Peter Hammarstedt of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society even situates European commercial fishing near West Africa as a “continuation of a history of plundering the African continent” that drives food scarcity, piracy, riskier fishing and bushmeat foraging practices. One of the longer scenes of violence against animals is the grindadráp—the herding of whales and dolphins into shallow water to be killed—in the Faroe Islands, an autonomous nation within the Kingdom of Denmark. The grindadráp sequence features footage of White, Western subjects brutally stabbing and killing defenseless whales and dolphins to the shock of Tabrizi, a marked contrast from the violence shown in *Racing Extinction*.

As environmental issues may be both self-interested and altruistic (as climate change affects both humans and nonhuman animals) (Freeman 2014, pp. 172–74), a pertinent question for environmental messaging is whether self-interest or altruism is privileged above the other. The former might appeal to a wider audience but is unable to meet the “transformational” aim of raising the level of respect for nonhuman animals generally (Freeman 2014, p. 176). The analysis of *Racing Extinction* suggests that a form of partial altruism may emerge when the call to action does not challenge self-interest: emphasizing the intrinsic value of animals culturally and spatially distant from a likely viewer (e.g., a total moratorium on shark-fin soup and dolphin hunts for their profound violence), but returning to a predominantly self-interested perspective for more familiar animal exploitation (e.g., a partial reduction in meat consumption for environmental, not ethical, reasons).

7. Conclusions

As over one-third of chondrichthyans (sharks, rays and chimeras) are threatened with extinction (Dulvy et al. 2021) it is increasingly important for visual climate communication to find effective strategies to represent the harms they face. The primary driver of chondrichthyan mortality is bycatch (in one study, 99.6% of species), particularly as depleted species may be too rare to be the desired target of fishing operations, although habitat loss, coral bleaching and shifting water temperatures are also having a significant effect (Dulvy et al. 2021). As manta mortality in Lamakera has declined significantly (86%) from their addition to CITES Appendix II in 2013 to 2018, there is strong evidence that strict conservation efforts targeted at particular species can be effective (Booth et al. 2021). However, manta mortality in Lamakera has risen significantly since 2018—the result of bycatch and a parallel increase in devil ray catch used as a substitute for manta (Booth et al. 2021). This suggests that the threat to chondrichthyans may be diverse and interconnected with other forms of fishing, complicating a species-specific conservationist approach. Indeed, there is no form of fishing that is ecologically sustainable (McClanahan et al. 2021) or avoids brutal violence against marine life. As animal imagery can be a powerful means of inspir-

ing climate concern and empathy for nonhuman animals, media makers concerned with particular species should also recognize that they have “the opportunity to help humans view all other animals, and the animal in themselves, more respectfully” (Freeman 2012, p. 105).

Animal imagery in visual climate communication has been criticized for disconnecting animal habitats from human harm, which displaces anthropogenic causes of ecological harm (Born 2019; Whitley and Kalof 2014). *Racing Extinction* follows this pattern for environmental harm associated with the U.S.—favoring images of globes, asteroid collisions and desecrated environments lacking human or animal figures. However, *Racing Extinction* offers a challenge by showing graphic images of animal suffering almost exclusively in non-Western locations by non-Western subjects—primarily Chinese, Japanese and Indonesian actors. This focus reproduces a spatial hierarchy that invisibilizes the killing of marine life by Western commercial fishing and transforms domesticated animals into absent referents (Adams 2015a). Simultaneously, *Racing Extinction*'s recognition of the individuality of large marine life such as manta rays and sharks does not extend to less charismatic marine life (fish, shrimp, etc.) or animals killed and consumed in the United States (oysters, cows, etc.), replicating a hierarchy of animal life that undercuts the film's central ethical challenge to shark-finning and manta hunting. I suggest that media representations of animal suffering could better address these problems with a universalistic ethic of mutual avowal (Kim 2015), exemplified by the 2021 film *Seaspiracy*. First, communicators should contextualize the scale of harm inflicted on endangered species and the connection to biodiversity loss and mass extinction. Using trusted sources and scientific expertise, media should situate specific practices within a larger practice of human exploitation of nature, which can avoid confusion over the relative impact of a given practice. Second, communicators should keep in mind the coverage of notorious industries (e.g., the Baiji hunt, the shark-fin trade) as they intersect with cultural unfamiliarity. It may be more productive to represent less visible forms of ecological harm that may be closer or more relevant to the targeted audience. Third, communicators should diversify depictions of actors that pose a visible threat to animals. Images of animal suffering are shocking and generate empathic distress that can inspire intense anger towards the perpetrator, including ethnic bias. It is particularly important to avoid primarily associating graphic imagery with non-White peoples from non-Western countries, which may inspire racial or nationalist bias and hide the ecological harm and animal exploitation carried out by the West.

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Note

- ¹ The use of the term “wildlife” is intended to represent nonhuman animals who are free-living (non-domesticated) and not meaning “wild” in a derogatory sense.

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