

Synthesis: The Post-war Landscape of Welfare Science and Activism (1945–1964)

Understanding the enormous impact of *Animal Machines* requires a detailed analysis of the scientific, social, and personal context in which it was written. Doing so shows that *Animal Machines* was about more than animal welfare and strongly shaped by Ruth Harrison's wider concerns about the ecological, moral, and health effects of contemporary food production. Beginning research for her book in 1961,¹ Harrison was writing during an auspicious time. On both sides of the Atlantic, ethologists were questioning supposed divides between animal and human cognition and anthropomorphic taboos associated with studying animal feelings (affective states). In Britain, the Universities Federation of Animal Welfare (UFAW) and ethologist William Homan Thorpe began translating research on evolutionary behaviour and stress into welfare guidelines. Their fusion of scientific and moral concerns fell on fertile political ground. With the first wave of Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) protests peaking, public concerns focused on environmental degradation, invisible health hazards, and wider moral threats to society. For Harrison and many others, the small but growing number of intensive farming operations seemed particularly problematic. As a Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA)-trained dramatist, Harrison used the dystopia of the “factory farm” as a narrative centre piece to weave together

¹FACT Files. Donald Broom [in the following DB], Box: Material for ‘Animal Machines’.

popular concerns about intensive farming. Her ability to mobilise this dystopian “sociotechnical imaginary”² and stage a compelling romanticised alternative of animal welfare in a bucolic countryside would turn *Animal Machines* into an international bestseller and a defining document of post-war literary activism.

²Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun, “Sociotechnical Imaginaries,” 189–196.