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Why feminist-vegan now?*

Carol J Adams

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Abstract

In this essay, I offer a reflection on the publication of *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, introducing several of the main theoretical insights from the book, and examining whether and how they hold true twenty years after the book's first publication. I examine the associations among notions of virility, masculinity, and meat eating, and explain the concept of the absent referent and how it functions in the institution of eating animals. I also explore why images have proliferated that show the animalization of women or the feminization and sexualization of farmed animals, and propose that these are recuperative responses attempting to reinstate 'manhood' and meat eating. I propose that resistance to the decentering of the human being often is expressed through what I call 'retrograde humanism'. To conclude, I meditate on 'little old ladies in tennis shoes' – what it means for women that the animal movement so often wants to disown their work, yet needs them to do that work.

Keywords

absent referent, animalized protein, feminized protein, interlocking oppression, masculinity, meat eating, retrograde humanism, teleological fulfillment, virility

In December 1989, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* was published. The idea that there was a connection between feminism and vegetarianism came to me in October 1974, when I was walking in my tennis shoes down a Cambridge, Massachusetts street. But it took fifteen years from the time I had that insight until I completed my book. And what's sad, to me, is that by the time I finished writing the book, I wondered if I had observed something that, by then, was starting to pass from our culture.

What an optimist I was! I hugely underestimated the antifeminist world – the world vested in women's inequality – and the meat eating world, and the way they would intensify their interactions.

When the book came out, right wing commentators loved hating it. Especially virile, vile, and virulent in his defense of meat eating was Rush Limbaugh, the

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current voice of the Republican Party in the United States – and one of the most recently minted spokespeople for the Humane Society of the United States.¹ Not realizing that I wasn't an academic, that the book had been written by a feminist, anti-racist, grassroots activist, these commentators took it as the latest, and most absurd, example of academic excess and political correctness. They loved hating it.

Over the years, I have observed that the book and the idea of sexual politics of meat are many different things to many different people. But I think I can safely identify core parts of the argument.

Virility, meat eating, and the politics of meat

In the first chapter of *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, I propose that a link exists between meat eating and notions of masculinity and virility in the Western world. Meat eating societies gain male identification by their choice of food creating an experience of male bonding, in steak houses or fraternities or over the barbecue. Meat eating bestows an idea of masculinity on the individual consumer with ideas that men should eat meat and women should serve meat. This is made overt in advertisements in the United States, but is covertly conveyed through recipes in women's magazines in Britain or Australia or Italy. A part of this sexual politics is that vegetables represented passivity, and vegetarianism was okay for women and anyone associated with women.

I describe a functioning of a racial and colonial politics of meat, perhaps most prominent in the notion of the British 'beefeater'. One of the demarcations of the evolutionary status of a culture was whether it was dependent on animal protein: nineteenth century writers believed that it was because the British ate beef that they were so successful in conquering other peoples (see Beard, 1972[1898], discussed in Adams, 1990: 30–31).

In the United States, through the usurpation of Native lands, specifically the violation of treaties with other countries who already inhabited the continental United States, and then the invention of rail transportation and refrigeration, meat eating was 'democratized' so everyone could expect to do it. With the global economy, we have exported these expectations along with McDonalds and Kentucky Fried Chicken and factory farms.

The absent referent

I propose that animals are absent referents in meat eating. As I write in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*,

Through butchering, animals become absent referents. Animals in name and body are made absent *as animals* for meat to exist. Animals' lives precede and enable the existence of meat. If animals are alive they cannot be meat. Thus a dead body replaces the live animal. Without animals there would be no meat eating, yet they are absent from the act of eating meat because they have been transformed into food. (Adams, 2010, p. 66)

Animals are made absent through language that renames dead bodies before consumers participate in eating them. Our culture further mystifies the term 'meat' with gastronomic language, so we do not conjure dead, butchered animals, but cuisine. Language thus contributes even further to animals' absences. While the cultural meanings of meat and meat eating shift historically, one essential part of meat's meaning is static: one does not eat meat without the death of an animal. Live animals are thus the absent referents in the concept of meat. The absent referent permits us to forget about the animal as an independent entity; it also enables us to resist efforts to make animals present (Adams, 1990: 40).

The absent referent functions to cloak the violence inherent to meat eating, to protect the conscience of the meat eater and render the idea of individual animals as immaterial to anyone's selfish desires. The absent referent is that which separates the flesh eater from the animal and the animal from the end product. The function of the absent referent is to allow for the moral abandonment of a being.

I argue that a process of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption enables the oppression of animals so that animals are rendered being-less through technology, language, and cultural representation. Objectification permits an oppressor to view another being as an object. Once objectified, a being can be fragmented. Fragmentation is the hidden aspect in the production of meat – that about which we are not to speak. Through fragmentation the object is severed not only from its body but its ontological meaning.

Once fragmented, consumption happens: the consumption of a being, and the consumption of the meaning of that being's death, so that the referent point of meat changes. I found an overlap of cultural images of sexual violence against women and fragmentation and dismemberment of nature and the body in Western culture. I propose that this cycle of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption linked butchering with both the representation and reality of sexual violence in Western cultures that normalizes sexual consumption.

The interlocking oppression of women and animals can also be found in the use of a dominant and domineering language in which the meaning of the violent transformation of living to dead is consumed and negated as it is 'lifted' into metaphor and applied to women. But, this structure of overlapping absent referents also moves in the other direction as well; in which women's objectification becomes the basis for cultural constructions about meat animals. It was difficult to find a sound bite for this theory, but by the time I wrote *The Pornography of Meat* (2004) I had one: in a patriarchal, meat eating world animals are feminized and sexualized; women are animalized.

In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, I say that the connections between women and animals that I am drawing are contingent and historical. But I argue that theoretically speaking, politically speaking, these contingent historical overlaps (in which the animal substitutes for the woman, and the woman, or part of a woman, substitutes for a dead animal) are relevant conjunctions to make.

Animalized protein and the animal industrial complex

We all get our protein from plants. Some people get it directly, and some chose to let animals process it for them. To help communicate this idea, I bring forward the nineteenth century term *animalized protein*; that is, the protein preexists the animal, who is a processor of plant protein. The hierarchy of humans over animals, which I observe operating in the functioning of the absent referent, is literally enacted as meat eaters move up from the original protein source. By resurrecting that term, I want to make more obvious and thus observable the conflicting world views about the appropriate source for getting one's plant protein.

I coined the term *feminized protein* for eggs and dairy products; that is, plant protein produced through the abuse of the reproductive cycle of female animals. Feminized protein is taken from living female animals, whose reproductive capacity is manipulated for human needs. I felt that the unique situation of domesticated female animals required its own term: a sexual slavery with chickens in battery cages and dairy cows hooked up to milking machines. Even though the animals are alive, dairy products and eggs are not victimless foods.

I also propose that with factory farming or CAFO – concentrated animal feeding operations – we had entered a fourth stage of meat eating, which includes exporting to non-Western countries the Western form of meat production. In China, now, there are 63,000 concentrated animal feeding operations. Some confine 10 million birds on a single farm. Barbara Noske (1997) proposed the term 'animal industrial complex' for this manner of production. She shows how, after World War II, the animal agriculture industry changed, becoming increasingly 'mechanized, automated, and "rationalized"' (1997: 14). She also points out that meat eating is a perfect product for capitalism since it requires an endless supply of raw material (plant protein) which is reduced through the animalizing and feminizing of protein to sixteen percent of its original material.

More than 60 billion farmed animals are alive today on this planet; this is only possible because of industrialized fourth stage factory farming. Thirty-three percent of the world's arable land is devoted to growing crops for animal feed. This form of protein production is introducing new problems: its contribution to global warming is not negligible, nor are its lagoons full of manure. New infectious diseases have also been linked to factory farming. Though during the 1960s leading medical authorities said infectious diseases were eradicated, by the mid 1970s they were back. Every time scientists have been able to trace the evolution of bird flu viruses from low to high pathogenicity, factory farming conditions have been present, whether in Chile, Pakistan, Italy, or Pennsylvania.² In June 2009, 'swine flu', which some medical authorities and animal activists have renamed 'factory farm flu', was declared a pandemic. This is the first time in 41 years that the label of pandemic has been applied to a disease.

The animal industrial complex – the production source for most contemporary meat – is a project of modernity that has transitioned rather seamlessly into post-modernity. Because of the structure of the absent referent, it is thought that

veganism is about consumption practices rather than production practices. Actually, veganism is a boycott.

In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, I offered examples of historical, contemporary, and fictional resistance to meat eating. I suggested that food decisions were coded ways of resistance. I describe feminist-vegetarians who became vegetarians because this made sense as a part of their non-subjugation within the logic of patriarchal culture. I show that for many progressive, feminist, radical activists, vegetarianism was one aspect of their activism. *The Sexual Politics of Meat* establishes that ideas about meat, discussions about meat, are ideas about power, discussions of power . . . and not just power over animals, not just ideas about animals.

Images and imagining oppression

In the 1960s, beach towel makers and poster creators gave us the 'Cattle Queen' showing a woman cut up like meat, with the slogan 'Break the Dull Steak Habit' (see Figure 1). In 1968, feminists protested the Miss America contest arguing that the contestants were reduced to being pieces of meat. They held up the 'Cattle Queen' poster and signs proclaiming, 'Welcome to the Miss America Cattle Auction' (Douglas, 1994: 138–139). The Miss America protest in 1968 suggested that women were being exhibited like animals. In the twenty-first century, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) deployed the problematic image to raise consciousness about animals. PETA began their anti-meat campaign 'All Animals Have the Same Parts' using *Baywatch* actress Traci Bingham, who is shown, naked, from the back, with her body segmented into traditional 'meat' parts (loin, round, rib, chuck, et cetera). PETA expanded this campaign, using a Filipina model, Geneva Cruz, posing in a similar fashion (because she is standing, her thighs are marked 'soupbones'). The models and their poses carry racial implications and not only because PETA labelled the models' body parts (soupbones being 'lower' in classification than ribs, loins, et cetera). PETA's exhibiting of actual women as meat uses many of the conventions of pornography, so that the images, rather than protesting viewing women as meat, seem only to protest making animals into meat. In other words, consuming through *viewing* is okay, but not consuming through *eating*.³ In these depictions of women, the butchered animal is the absent referent. Because of the structure of the absent referent, it is difficult for animals to present their own case for not being consumed. PETA's choice of the misogynistic image from the 1960s sadly confirms how intractable and interconnected oppressions are.

In 1990, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* used four images to illustrate my claims, including on its cover, the 'Cattle Queen'. I also used an image called 'Ursula Hamdress', from *Playboar: The Pig Farmer's Playboy*. I describe the image this way:

A healthy sexual being poses near her drink: she wears bikini panties only and luxuriates on a large chair with her head rested seductively on an elegant lace doily. Her inviting drink with a twist of lemon awaits on the table. Her eyes are closed; her facial expression beams pleasure, relaxation, enticement. She is touching her crotch in

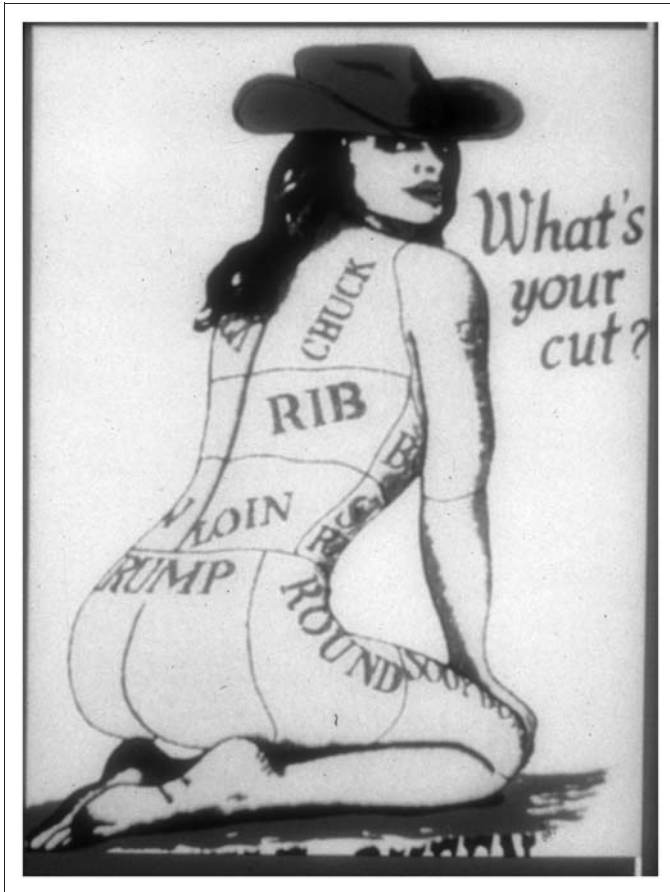


Figure 1. 'Cattle Queen,' cover image for *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, used by permission

an attentive, masturbatory action. Anatomy of seduction: sex object, drink, inviting room, sexual activity. The formula is complete. But a woman does not beckon. A pig does. (Adams, 1990: 39)

Much is going on with this image. To begin with, in the photograph of a pig, the sexualized woman is the absent referent. But, the way in which a pig is substituted for the woman reveals how overlapping absent referents that animalize and sexualize interact. 'Ursula Hamdress', a pig displayed as though she were in a pornographic magazine, comes from a genealogy of Western art inscribing meaning on a woman's body. In *Colored Pictures: Race and Representation*, Michael Harris writes, 'The female nude, long a classical subject in Western art, can be interpreted as evidence of patriarchal structures, an assumption of the universality of white male perspectives, and the appropriation of female bodies for male prerogatives'

(Harris, 2003: 126). In his chapter on 'The Sexualized Woman', Harris looks at Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, 'one of the first reclining nudes in Western art'. *Playboar's* Ursula Hamdress is posed like Titian's famous nude. Titian placed a small sleeping dog near his Venus's feet. Manet's *Olympia* (1863) reworks Titian, making the reclining Venus figure a nude prostitute who directly meets the viewer's gaze. Behind her is a black servant, which intensifies the signification of the image. As Harris explains, 'In the nineteenth century, women of color were associated with nature, uncontrolled passion, and promiscuity . . . Here within the privileged space of the white male gaze is a layered black subject who is at once socially inferior to a naked prostitute, for whom she is a servant, and yet a sexual signifier and a cipher; her mere presence is the equivalence of Olympia's nakedness' (Harris, 2003: 126). (In addition Manet replaces Titian's little dog with a black cat).

Harris isn't the only recent critic to track the evolution of the female nude from Titian to Manet and then into the twentieth century. What concerns critic David Harvey in his *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990) is not only the colonialist viewpoint erected through Manet's painting, nor its genealogy into modernity and postmodernity. (Harris considers Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, Harvey, Rauschenberg's postmodernist work *Persimmon*). What concerns Harvey is how the genealogy can be followed forward to an ad for Citizen Watch.⁴

Ursula Hamdress (in more recent editions of *Playboar* called by the more generic name 'Taffy Lovely') would have fit seamlessly into the genealogy of these female figures with a twist: the animalizing function has moved from margin to center: a dog at the feet of the 'Venus' represented animality in Titian's painting. Manet placed an African servant to represent animal sexuality. With Ursula/Taffy, the animalizing and sexualizing functions that are separate in Titian's and Manet's paintings are united in one being. The image, now forty years old, can still be found in *Playboar*, which is sold in many bookstores. But just as Harvey finds Titian's and Manet's figurations of the nude manifested now in advertisements, so, too, with 'Ursula': advertisements for meat often position animals as sexually free, sexually inviting feminized subjects. I call this *the pornography of meat* – the attitudes towards women found in *Playboy* and other heterosexual pornography can be expressed freely in a disguised way, with animals as the objects. In the functioning of the pornography of meat we find the same phenomenon Harris identifies: the same patriarchal structures, the same white male perspective as universal, the same appropriation of female bodies. This time, it both presumes and maintains the normativeness of meat eating while also sexualizing the killing and consuming of the nonhuman.

The recuperature assertion of the sexual politics of meat in the twenty-first century

The first edition of *The Sexual Politics of Meat* offers only these two images illustrating my idea of overlapping and interconnecting absent referents (Ursula Hamdress, in which 'woman' is the absent referent, and the cover image of the

woman divided into 'meat', in which the dead animal is the absent referent). Yet, immediately, upon publication of the book, my mail changed. People started sending me images that they encountered and saw as confirming the sexual politics of meat. I was shocked by the number of images I received! During this time of animal diseases going viral, it is not merely ironic that the images, too, have gone viral. I find a rigidity and inflexibility in these fetishized images, some of which are reproduced in *The Pornography of Meat* and some of which can be found in the 20th Anniversary Edition of *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (2010). From unsophisticated wall paintings to slick Superbowl commercials, the message that meat's meaning is expressed through sexual politics is constantly recreated.

I've noticed a few themes in the reiteration of certain images: the idea of animals as disposable objects for fun or eating is a given. But equally forceful is the reassertion of heterosexuality as normative and the idea that pleasuring men is women's work.

I find heteronormative practices that obsessively recreate themselves, that try to silence other possibilities, and manifest a need to silence other possibilities in order to recreate themselves. From cartoons to dolls, from ads to television shows, it is as though marketing itself talks a language about women and meat.

Another twenty-first century theme is the resurgence of the raw as 'real'. With the raw, there is always more of it. A photo-shoot from a 2008 reality show called 'America's Top Model' required the contestants to pose in a meat locker wearing bras and underpants made from raw meat. Why raw meat? Raw meat may express a more immediate sense of violation of what once was, what once existed and only recently lost their lives. With the raw, there is always more of it – more raw talent to compete in a reality show, more raw meat to be hung in lockers or worn as undergarments. This sense of the endless production of the raw is recapitulated in the endless reconfiguration of the basic affinity of sexual politics and meat eating, perhaps expressing the affinity of raw flesh and dead flesh in serving sushi off a living woman (used to attract conventions to various West Coast American cities).

Why raw meat? It is as though they are trying to promise that one can experience life again as 'raw, fresh, and tasty', that there remains some untouched, originary zone – connected to eating flesh and naked women – that can be returned to, that dominant lives (assumed as male) that feel so constrained by trying to perform up to standards, those lives that are static can feel 'fresh'.

Another thread in these representations is the idea that meat animals desire being desired, that is, that animals figured as female bodies are sexually available and want to be ravished/consumed. Cartoon pigs are shown stripping on a website that sells dead flesh (see Adams, 2004: 109–112). Or there is the 'the turkey hooker' (a large 'Captain Hook'-type curved hook used to remove a turkey corpse from the oven, promising 'an easy pick up from pan to platter'; see Adams, 2004: 108). After showing some of these images during the sexual politics of meat slide show, I paused and said, 'we need a word for this'. And a friend, Amie Hamlin, proposed the term *anthropornography*. Only cartoons, you might say, which is perhaps a

similar belief as the belief in the raw, that there are only some zones in Western culture touched by the sexual politics of meat. As though cartoons aren't doing heavy loading for cultural constructions. But the models posing in meat lockers, wearing meat clothing, were not cartoons. And neither are the animals being consumed, who are made to appear cartoonish.

There is something hyperbolic and excessive to the images that have proliferated in the past twenty years. A fetishized nature to these representations exists, animalizing and sexualizing, feminizing and animalizing, from high art to doubly derivative 'fun' magazines (like *Playboar*) and suddenly there isn't an absent referent but only a cultural referent (see Adams, 2009).

Why were these images that appeared since the appearance of *The Sexual Politics of Meat* in 1990 more sexist, more misogynist, more exploitative? Because during this time, selling women, through pornography and the sex trade, has moved more into the mainstream (on this see Sheila Jeffrey's [2008] book, *The Industrial Vagina*). The sex industry – the selling of women's bodies – provides an enduring metaphor and image for other consumable bodies, in which women become the absent referents. The advertisements for meat and references in newspapers that conflate the sale of women's bodies and the selling of meat simultaneously normalize and naturalize the sex industry and meat eating.

I've noticed since 9/11 a new insistence on meat eating and masculinity, confirming Susan Faludi's arguments in *The Terror Dream* (2007) regarding anxious virility after the attacks on the World Trade Center. After 9/11 the media hyped John Wayne-like masculinity, Superman-like male powers, and the hypervirility of rescuers and politicians. Thus we learned that, after the World Trade Centers fell, the first meal Mayor Guiliani wolfed down was a sandwich made of 'meats that sweat' (Faludi, 2007: 49). Where there is (anxious) virility, one will find meat eating.

A 2006 Hummer advertisement features a man buying tofu in a supermarket. Next to him a man is buying 'meat that sweats' – gobs of it. The tofu-buying man now alert to and anxious about his virility because of the man with all his meat next to him in the line, hurries from the grocery store and heads straight to a Hummer dealership. He buys a new Hummer and is shown happily driving away, munching on carrot. The original tag line for the ad was 'Restore your manhood'.⁵ An intensified emphasis on male bonding through meat eating – in steak houses, or fraternities, or over barbecues – has appeared in this time. The images are pathetically unfulfilling (unless you're masturbating to them), yet there is a need to compulsively re-present these images. What pornography like *Hustler* fixated on about women as meat in the 1980s bleeds into popular culture in the twenty-first century. (For instance, *Hustler* depicted a woman as the meat of a hamburger, spread eagled on a bun. When, in 2006, Burger King returned to advertising during the Superbowl for the first time in eleven years, its ad featured women jumping onto a hamburger bun, becoming hamburger).

In terms of *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, we see several recuperative responses that in themselves confirm my analysis. First, as with the Hummer ad, we find cultural reactions and images that reinstate manhood, meat eating, and both

interactively. Second, a defensive, yet assertive response that proclaims oneself a meat eater, but a *caring* meat eater. And third, an unregulated, hostile response (such as that found on T-shirts and billboards that proclaim ‘fuck tofu’ or ‘screw vegetarians’). We might conclude that a lot of energy goes to being anti-vegetarian. Because of the absent referent, meat’s presence may announce the disempowering of the vegan message; but veganism isn’t (only) a message.

How is the relationship of the sexual politics of meat happening? It’s an ongoing feedback loop, that loops back into itself. And even when we follow the postmodern associations in representation it still seems to deliver us in one way or another to the confluence of animals and women. Consider that the cell for cloning Dolly was taken from a mammary gland and in the logic of our time the sheep was named after the very buxom Dolly Parton. But something interrupts this fetishization, something offers alternative endings, inserts itself against the associations. It’s actual vegan meals.⁶

Teleological dead ends

Over the past twenty years, several responses have tried to cage in my book. Most prominent is what I call *retrograde humanism*. Retrograde humanists, believing that humans are the teleological fulfillment of evolution, ask me, *Why aren’t I doing something important like feeding the homeless?* (People want to support and fund soup kitchens – we sentimentalize this act of relationship to the homeless – at the expense of truly encountering homeless individuals).

My partner actually does feed the homeless, has been doing so for more than 22 years, and I started a soup kitchen as an activist back in 1985 and oversaw the first rural census of homelessness in the United States. But I don’t usually provide those answers. I see the question as a sign that the sexual politics of meat disturbs the Enlightenment humanist project. This either/or, place-the-human-first is a refusal to see interconnecting oppressions, or rethink human exceptionalism.

Then there is the problem of the animal rights movement. It seems as though some animal right organizations believe animal rights is the teleological fulfillment of a linear progression of liberal activism. They think Peter Singer has made a teleological statement in his preface to *Animal Liberation* (1975). To wit: ‘There’s been Black Liberation, Gay Liberation, Women’s Liberation. Now let’s talk about Animal Liberation’. Reading this, some animal activists conclude: ‘Well Black Liberation, Gay Liberation, Women’s Liberation – that’s been done. I need only to focus on animals’ (as though we have accomplished the goals of those movements, or that their time ‘has passed’). These animal activists believe they are in some untouchable zone because they are the ‘voice of the voiceless’ which problematically, to begin with, accepts a human-centered definition of voice.

When we try to talk with them about sexism in animal advocacy, they may claim they are ‘too busy saving animals’; that is, that the truly dire situation of animals trumps any other concern. This claim that animal advocacy need not be accountable to other liberatory movements suggests that such animal advocacy could be

seen as an example of what Derrida was concerned about when he talked about 'eating well' and 'carnophallogocentrism' (Derrida, 1991).⁷ I cannot assume that I will ever be done with struggling with the question of what it means to eat well. Certainly, veganism is part of the answer to that question, but it is not the only answer. When animal activism asserts otherwise it falls into some of the same presumptions as the humanist project that we're trying to get past. This time, the either/or places the animal first, and is also a refusal to see interconnecting oppressions. The teleological/evangelical animal activist says 'I must sacrifice for the animal'. The sacrifice, if one is a woman, often involves accepting one's sexual consumability, as organizations like PETA flaunt women's bodies to attract attention to the ideas of animal liberation.

Retrograde humanists (and perhaps all meat eaters) offer the explanation 'I thank the animal for its sacrifice to me' (begging a question of whether any animal has a choice). There is the presumption that a hierarchy exists and the meat eater has the right to benefit from the lower, victim status of the animal (the animal who is so often figured as female). Moreover, it exposes the never explicitly stated fact: that meat eaters fear having to sacrifice their enjoyment in eating (his hamburger, her chicken, their fishes) to respond to the scandal that is meat eating.

When challenged, the response is then, 'I understand, but it just isn't my thing', or 'I get it, I just don't want to give up meat eating'. To which I say, 'I'm surprised you think you get it, because the people who do get it, change'.

Many people are like Elizabeth Costello's son and daughter-in-law depicted in J.M. Coetzee's (2003) fiction. They anticipate how we feminist-vegetarians or feminist-vegans will behave. Thinking we are going to lay down the 'law' and assume the role of superego and then, discovering a feeling of guilt or uneasiness in themselves, they assume it is we who have placed it there. In other words, since it is assumed that I am going to make you feel uneasy, and you discover that indeed you do feel uneasy, then I must have done it (see Adams, 2008).

Put another way, the force of the sexual politics of meat is to maintain a closed circle in the constitution of the subject. I am the one with the problem. I use the wrong texts or foods, or I appear puritanical or purity-driven. You, you do not have a problem.

Acknowledging feminized animals/animalized women

Cary Wolfe (2003: 101) proposes that within Western tradition we need to think in terms not of human/animal, but in terms of humanized human, animalized human, humanized animal, animalized animal. Though Wolfe sees the humanized human and the animalized animal as ideological fictions, with the hybrid designations doing much of the heavy lifting in illuminating humanist presumptions, I see his grid – when nudged – functioning to illuminate the sexual politics of meat. The humanized human in western culture has often been white male, the one who had the right to vote and own property. Casting individuals as animalized humans is

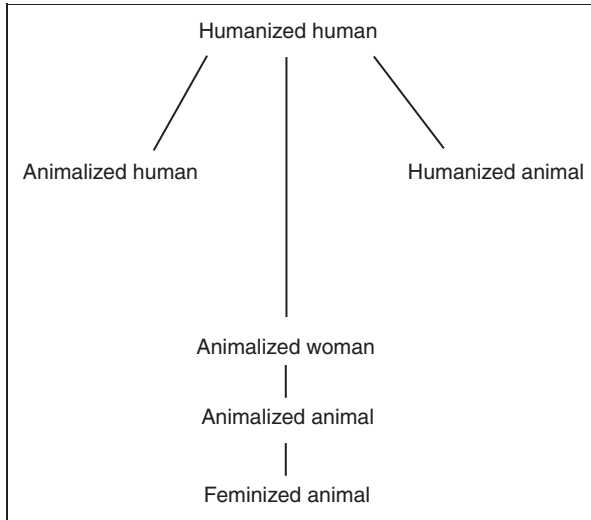


Figure 2. Sex/species devolutionary chart illustrating the sexual politics of meat

usually influenced by race, sex, and class. Animalizing discourse is a powerful tool in oppression (see Adams, 2007). Animalizing discourse also often substitutes for an analysis of why violence against women happens; that is, rapists and batterers or others who commit acts of violence are often animalized (called ‘brutes’, ‘animals’, et cetera), when in fact they are acting like humans, in that their violence is deliberate and often planned.

As for the humanized animal: the humanized animal often occurs as a sort of animal exceptionalism. In Cary Wolfe’s example, the humanized animal is the ‘pet’, the animal who can be saved in *Silence of the Lambs*, since clearly the lambs are not. The great Civil Rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer reported that when she was growing up, the dog who belonged to the farmer for whom Hamer worked had an indoor bathroom, whereas Hamer lived in a small house with no working indoor toilet. Hamer was treated like an animalized human; the dog, a humanized animal. The traditional arguments of animal liberation and animal rights that show how the animals are like us, can feel, suffer, and so on, are also an attempt to humanize the animal. If so, anthropocentrism still determines what it is to count. The animalized animals are the ones who can be discarded or eaten – or perhaps it is the same act. I think it is important to highlight the underlying gender categories that are functioning and tinker with Wolfe’s analysis, by adding the categories of *animalized women* and *feminized animals* (see Figure 2).⁸

With the exception of the Iron Lady of the animal rights movement, PETA’s Ingrid Newkirk, who has staked out a niche of misanthropism, the majority of the leaders of the animal rights movement are men. One reason for the masculinization of animal activism is because in the structure of Western culture the humanized human (fantasized and realized as male) is the one who can be heard about the fate

of the animalized animal (fantasized and realized as female animals). The humanized human is going to protect the animalized animal, or (in the legal community) save the humanized animal.

Have you noticed the issues about aging that Elizabeth Costello's son has? Lord, does he have some hang ups about her.⁹ She's aging, she's old, *she is looking her age*. It's the constant issue for him. Her embodiment is as an old feminist-vegetarian. The son stands in relationship to Costello as the male leaders of the movement do to the majority of grassroots activists – women. There is an ongoing need to disassociate from women and women's voice; there is an apparent discomfort with the aging bodies of women activists.

After the 1990 Washington DC March for Animals, the papers carried quotes from the American organizers announcing that the animal movement was no longer just little old ladies in tennis shoes. Cleveland Amory, one of the long-time public figures for animals in the United States, was the person most famously associated with that refrain. We move from meat ads created to speak to men, and speak a male language, to discover that this is what the animal movement is doing, too.

In 2008, the following quote appeared in a *New York Times Magazine* article on Wayne Pacelle, head of the Humane Society of the United States: "We aren't a bunch of little old ladies in tennis shoes", Pacelle says, paraphrasing his mentor Cleveland Amory, an animal rights activist. "We have cleats on".¹⁰ With that quote and that speaker we have a masculinizing of the animal movement in three ways – the speaker, the negation of women, and the football or sports association of the shoes. It is all structured by representation and a certain kind of voice. It is an act of confining the feminist-vegan message and messengers by focusing or actually not wanting to focus on the aging female body. I take this ongoing denial of women's contributions personally. I am hoping to live long enough to qualify to be a little old lady, and since I was there at the March (wearing my tennis shoes), and it is now twenty years later, it is safe to say, I am getting closer to being a little old lady in sneakers. I am getting (much!) closer to Elizabeth Costello's age.

Let's consider for a moment this back-handed compliment. One thing that is being said is 'before the rest of us discovered the legitimate and important issues about humans' oppression of the other animals, little old ladies had'. Perhaps when they started agitating on behalf of animals they were not little old ladies. But people's refusal to face the facts about what we do to animals made them old in the process.

At the first-ever, official feminist-vegetarian dinner of the Second Wave held at Shandygaffs in the Castro district of San Francisco, in April 1977, we went around and said how long we had been vegetarians. 'Since this morning', one woman announced. And that is fine. That is how it begins. You eat with one fork or two chopsticks; you chew with one mouth; you swallow with one throat. The subject who is constantly expanding theoretically is most contained as a singular individual by eating. That particular practice shapes you and makes you as unified

as you are going to be. Precisely in the way you interiorize the world and exteriorize the world, eating is one of the most serious ways you define yourself and constrain yourself and open yourself.¹¹

Veganism is always a question of now. Knowing what I know, *now* what will I do? It comes with an insistence! ‘Pay attention!’ Pay attention, *now*. The process of objectification/fragmentation/consumption can be interrupted by the process of attention/nowness/compassion. The enlightened humanist subject, the sexual-politics-of-meat subject insists on history. The carnophallogocentric subject is made by history (‘this is how I like it’ or ‘change is hard’), is shaped, more than he or she can admit, by the lies of the parents (‘meat is good for you’).

A refusal, a break, a fissure with that dominant history is needed. I think I have figured this out: it is perhaps the little old ladies in sneakers who ultimately have been challenging interlocking oppressions. With them, I am trying to work out real theories of resistance and real theories of transformation. We aren’t just working toward a new text; we are working for a new world. Join Elizabeth Costello and other little old ladies, and me, on the other side of that oppressive history. Now.

Notes

1. ‘Rush Limbaugh has recorded two statements of support for The Humane Society of the United States and its work to protect animals from cruelty and abuse: The first spot is on our partnerships with law enforcement agencies across the country to crack down on organized dogfighting and other animal cruelty crimes. The second is on our outreach to communities of faith, and the moral obligation that we have to be good stewards of God’s creatures’. See http://www.hsus.org/press_and_publications/press_releases/rush_limbaugh_records_audio_041409.html
2. Information from Michael Greger, MD, Director of Public Health and Animal Agriculture, Humane Society International.
3. One feminist website proposes that at PETA ‘only women are treated like meat’; see <http://www.nostatusquo.com/ACLU/PETA/peta.html>
4. Harvey threaded these images without any commentary throughout his chapter on ‘Postmodernity’. He reports that he received protests from scholars and added this comment in later editions, ‘The illustrations used in this chapter have been criticized by some feminists of postmodern persuasion . . . All the illustrations make use of a woman’s body to inscribe their particular message. The additional point I sought to make is that the subordination of women, one of the “troublesome contradictions” in bourgeois Enlightenment practice, can expect no particular relief by appeal to postmodernism’ (1990: 65).
5. Seth Stevenson, ‘Original SUVs for Hippies? Hummer courts the tofu set’. *Slate*, posted Monday, 14 August 2006. <http://www.slate.com/id/2147657/>
6. This essay was first presented as a keynote address at the ‘Minding Animals’ conference in Newcastle, Australia, July 2009. It was given after a lovely vegan dinner, so the context in which the analysis was given was literally a vegan one.
7. Discussions with Matthew Calarco helped me understand Jacques Derrida’s ideas.

8. I put the feminized animal last in this grid because female animals used for their reproductive labor, cows and chickens, experience the most suffering and are treated as replaceable. They are oppressed both for their reproductivity and their own bodies productivity as meat, once they, too, are killed.
9. This was pointed out to me by Bob McKay, in conversation, May 2009.
10. Maggie Jones, 'The Barnyard Strategist', *The New York Times Magazine*, 24 October 2008.
11. I owe the amplification of this insight to Matthew Calarco. Discussion, June 2009.

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