

CHAPTER 1

THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF MEAT

In the early times men and women lived apart, the former hunting animals exclusively, the latter pursuing a gathering existence. Five of the men, who were out hunting, being careless creatures, let their fire go out. The women, who were careful and orderly, always kept their fire going. The men, having killed a springbok, became desperate for means to cook it, so one of their number set out to get fire, crossed the river and met one of the women gathering seeds. When he asked her for some fire, she invited him to the feminine camp. While he was there she said, "You are very hungry. Just wait until I pound up these seeds and I will boil them and give you some." She made him some porridge. After he had eaten it, he said, "Well, it's nice food so I shall just stay with you." The men who were left waited and wondered. They still had the springbok and they still had no fire. The second man set out, only to be tempted by female cooking, and to take up residence in the camp of the women. The same thing happened to the third man. The two men left were very frightened. They suspected something terrible had happened to their comrades. They cast the divining bones but the omens were favorable. The fourth man set out timidly, only to end by joining his comrades. The last man became very frightened indeed and besides by now the springbok had rotted. He took his bow and arrows, and ran away.

—Myth from the Bushman

I left the British Library and my research on some women of the 1890s whose feminist, working-class newspaper advocated meatless diets, and went through the cafeteria line in a restaurant nearby. Vegetarian food in hand, I descended to the basement. A painting of Henry VIII eating a steak and kidney pie greeted my gaze. On either side of the consuming Henry were portraits of his six wives and other women. However, they were not

The Sexual Politics of Meat

eating steak and kidney pie, nor anything else made of meat. Catherine of Aragon held an apple in her hands. The Countess of Mar had a turnip, Anne Boleyn—red grapes, Anne of Cleaves—a pear, Jane Seymour—blue grapes, Catherine Howard—a carrot, Catherine Parr—a cabbage.

People with power have always eaten meat. The aristocracy of Europe consumed large courses filled with every kind of meat while the laborer consumed the complex carbohydrates. Dietary habits proclaim class distinctions, but they proclaim patriarchal distinctions as well. Women, second-class citizens, are more likely to eat what are considered to be second-class foods in a patriarchal culture: vegetables, fruits, and grains rather than meat. The sexism in meat eating recapitulates the class distinctions with an added twist: a mythology permeates all classes that meat is a masculine food and meat eating a male activity.

Male identification and meat eating

Meat-eating societies gain male identification by their choice of food, and meat textbooks heartily endorse this association. *The Meat We Eat* proclaims meat to be “A Virile and Protective Food,” thus “a liberal meat supply has always been associated with a happy and virile people.”¹ *Meat Technology* informs us that “the virile Australian race is a typical example of heavy meat-eaters.”² Leading gourmards refer “to the virile ordeal of spooning the brains directly out of a barbecued calf’s head.”³ *Virile: of or having the characteristics of an adult male*, from *vir* meaning *man*. Meat eating measures individual and societal virility.

Meat is a constant for men, intermittent for women, a pattern painfully observed in famine situations today. Women are starving at a rate disproportionate to men. Lisa Leghorn and Mary Roodkowsky surveyed this phenomenon in their book *Who Really Starves? Women and World Hunger*. Women, they conclude, engage in deliberate self-deprivation, offering men the “best” foods at the expense of their own nutritional needs. For instance, they tell us that “Ethiopian women and girls of all classes are obliged to prepare two meals, one for the males and a second, often containing no meat or other substantial protein, for the females.”⁴

In fact, men’s protein needs are less than those of pregnant and nursing women and the disproportionate distribution of the main protein source occurs when women’s need for protein is the greatest. Curiously, we are

The Sexual Politics of Meat

now being told that one should eat meat (or fish, vegetables, chocolate, and salt) at least six weeks before becoming pregnant if one wants a boy. But if a girl is desired, no meat please, rather milk, cheese, nuts, beans, and cereals.⁵

Fairy tales initiate us at an early age into the dynamics of eating and sex roles. The king in his countinghouse ate four-and-twenty blackbirds in a pie (originally four-and-twenty naughty boys) while the Queen ate bread and honey. Cannibalism in fairy tales is generally a male activity, as Jack, after climbing his beanstalk, quickly learned. Folktales of all nations depict giants as male and “fond of eating human flesh.”⁶ Witches—warped or monstrous women in the eyes of a patriarchal world—become the token female cannibals.

A Biblical example of the male prerogative for meat rankled Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a leading nineteenth-century feminist, as can be seen by her terse comment on Leviticus 6 in *The Woman's Bible*: “The meat so delicately cooked by the priests, with wood and coals in the altar, in clean linen, no woman was permitted to taste, only the males among the children of Aaron.”⁷

Most food taboos address meat consumption and they place more restrictions on women than on men. The common foods forbidden to women are chicken, duck, and pork. Forbidding meat to women in non-technological cultures increases its prestige. Even if the women raise the pigs, as they do in the Solomon Islands, they are rarely allowed to eat the pork. When they do receive some, it is at the dispensation of their husbands. In Indonesia “flesh food is viewed as the property of the men. At feasts, the principal times when meat is available, it is distributed to households according to the men in them. . . . The system of distribution thus reinforces the prestige of the men in society.”⁸

Worldwide this patriarchal custom is found. In Asia, some cultures forbid women from consuming fish, seafood, chicken, duck, and eggs. In equatorial Africa, the prohibition of chicken to women is common. For example, the Mbum Kpau women do not eat chicken, goat, partridge, or other game birds. The Kufa of Ethiopia punished women who ate chicken by making them slaves, while the Walamo “put to death anyone who violated the restriction of eating fowl.”

Correspondingly, vegetables and other nonmeat foods are viewed as women's food. This makes them undesirable to men. The Nuer men think that eating eggs is effeminate. In other groups men require sauces to disguise

The Sexual Politics of Meat

the fact that they are eating women's foods. "Men expect to have meat sauces to go with their porridge and will sometimes refuse to eat sauces made of greens or other vegetables, which are said to be women's food."⁹

Meat: For the man only

There is no department in the store where good selling can do so much good or where poor selling can do so much harm as in the meat department. This is because most women do not consider themselves competent judges of meat quality and often buy where they have confidence in the meat salesman.

—Hinman and Harris, *The Story of Meat*¹⁰

In technological societies, cookbooks reflect the presumption that men eat meat. A random survey of cookbooks reveals that the barbecue sections of most cookbooks are addressed to men and feature meat. The foods recommended for a "Mother's Day Tea" do not include meat, but readers are advised that on Father's Day, dinner should include London Broil because "a steak dinner has unfailing popularity with fathers."¹¹ In a chapter on "Feminine Hospitality" we are directed to serve vegetables, salads, and soups. The New *McCall's* Cookbook suggests that a man's favorite dinner is London Broil. A "Ladies' Luncheon" would consist of cheese dishes and vegetables, but no meat. A section of one cookbook entitled "For Men Only" reinforces the omnipresence of meat in men's lives. What is for men only? London Broil, cubed steak, and beef dinner.¹²

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century cookbooks only serve to confirm the historical pattern found in the nineteenth century, when British working-class families could not afford sufficient meat to feed the entire family. "For the man only" appears continually in many of the menus of these families when referring to meat. In adhering to the mythologies of a culture (men need meat; meat gives bull-like strength) the male "breadwinner" actually received the meat. Social historians report that the "lion's share" of meat went to the husband.

What then was for women during the nineteenth century? On Sundays they might have a modest but good dinner. On the other days their food was bread with butter or drippings, weak tea, pudding, and vegetables. "The wife, in very poor families, is probably the worst-fed of the house hold," observed Dr. Edward Smith in the first national food survey of British dietary

The Sexual Politics of Meat

habits in 1863, which revealed that the major difference in the diet of men and women in the same family was the amount of meat consumed.¹³ Later investigators were told that the women and children in one rural county of England, “eat the potatoes and look at the meat.”¹⁴

Where poverty forced a conscious distribution of meat, men received it. Many women emphasized that they had saved the meat for their husbands. They were articulating the prevailing connections between meat eating and the male role: “I keep it for him; he *has* to have it.” Sample menus for South London laborers “showed extra meat, extra fish, extra cakes, or a different quality of meat for the man.” Women ate meat once a week with their children, while the husband consumed meat and bacon, “almost daily.”

Early in the twentieth century, the Fabian Women’s group in London launched a four-year study in which they recorded the daily budget of thirty families in a working-class community. These budgets were collected and explained in a compassionate book, *Round about a Pound a Week*. Here is perceived clearly the sexual politics of meat: “In the household which spends 10s or even less on food, only one kind of diet is possible, and that is the man’s diet. The children have what is left over. There must be a Sunday joint, or, if that be not possible, at least a Sunday dish of meat, in order to satisfy the father’s desire for the kind of food he relishes, and most naturally therefore intends to have.” More succinctly, we are told: “Meat is bought for the men” and the leftover meat from the Sunday dinner, “is eaten cold by him the next day.”¹⁵ Poverty also determines who carves the meat. As Cicely Hamilton discovered during this same period, women carve when they know there is not enough meat to go around.¹⁶

In situations of abundance, sex role assumptions about meat are not so blatantly expressed. For this reason, the diets of English upper-class women and men are much more similar than the diets of upper-class women and working-class women. Moreover, with the abundance of meat available in the United States as opposed to the restricted amount available in England, there has been enough for all, except when meat supplies were controlled. For instance, enslaved black men received half a pound of meat per day, while enslaved black women often found that they received little more than a quarter pound a day.¹⁷ Additionally, during the wars of the twentieth century, the pattern of meat consumption recalled that of English nineteenth-century working-class families with one variation: the “worker” of the country’s household, the soldier, got the meat; civilians were urged to learn how to cook without meat.

The Sexual Politics of Meat

The racial politics of meat

The hearty meat eating that characterizes the diet of Americans and of the Western world is not only a symbol of male power, it is an index of racism. I do not mean racism in the sense that we are treating one class of animals, those that are not human beings, differently than we treat another, those that are, as Isaac Bashevis Singer uses the term in *Enemies: A Love Story*: “As often as Herman had witnessed the slaughter of animals and fish, he always had the same thought: in their behavior toward creatures, all men were Nazis. The smugness with which man could do with other species as he pleased exemplified the most extreme racist theories, the principle that might is right.”¹⁸ I mean racism as the requirement that power arrangements and customs that favor white people prevail, and that the acculturation of people of color to this standard includes the imposition of white habits of meat eating.

Two parallel beliefs can be traced in the white Western world’s enactment of racism when the issue is meat eating. The first is that if the meat supply is limited, white people should get it; but if meat is plentiful all should eat it. This is a variation on the standard theme of the sexual politics of meat. The hierarchy of meat protein reinforces a hierarchy of race, class, and sex.

Nineteenth-century advocates of white superiority endorsed meat as superior food. “Brain-workers” required lean meat as their main meal, but the “savage” and “lower” classes of society could live exclusively on coarser foods, according to George Beard, a nineteenth-century medical doctor who specialized in the diseases of middle-class people. He recommended that when white, civilized, middle-class men became susceptible to nervous exhaustion, they should eat more meat. To him, and for many others, cereals and fruits were lower than meat on the scale of evolution, and thus appropriate foods for the other races and white women, who appeared to be lower on the scale of evolution as well. Racism and sexism together upheld meat as white man’s food.

Influenced by Darwin’s theory of evolution, Beard proposed a corollary for foods; animal protein did to vegetable food what our evolution from the lower animals did for humans. Consequently:

In proportion as man grows sensitive through civilization or through disease, he should diminish the quantity of cereals and fruits, which

The Sexual Politics of Meat

are far below him on the scale of evolution, and increase the quantity of animal food, which is nearly related to him in the scale of evolution, and therefore more easily assimilated.¹⁹

In his racist analysis, Beard reconciled the apparent contradiction of this tenet: “Why is it that savages and semi-savages are able to live on forms of food which, according to the theory of evolution, must be far below them in the scale of development?” In other words, how is it that people can survive very well without a great deal of animal protein? Because “savages” are

little removed from the common animal stock from which they are derived. They are much nearer to the forms of life from which they feed than are the highly civilized brainworkers, and can therefore subsist on forms of life which would be most poisonous to us. Secondly, savages who feed on poor food are poor savages, and intellectually far inferior to the beef-eaters of any race.

This explanation—which divided the world into intellectually superior meat eaters and inferior plant eaters—accounted for the conquering of other cultures by the English:

The rice-eating Hindoo and Chinese and the potato-eating Irish peasant are kept in subjection by the well-fed English. Of the various causes that contributed to the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, one of the chief was that for the first time he was brought face to face with the nation of beef-eaters, who stood still until they were killed.

Into the twentieth century the notion was that meat eating contributed to the Western world’s preeminence. Publicists for a meat company in the 1940s wrote: “We know meat-eating races have been and are leaders in the progress made by mankind in its upward struggle through the ages.”²⁰ They are referring to the “upward struggle” of the white race. One revealing aspect of this “upward struggle” is the charge of cannibalism that appeared during the years of colonization.

The word “cannibalism” entered our vocabulary after the “discovery” of the “New World.” Derived from the Spaniards’ mispronunciation of the name of the people of the Caribbean, it linked these people of color with the act. As Europeans explored the continents of North and South

The Sexual Politics of Meat

America and Africa, the indigenous peoples of those lands became accused of cannibalism—the ultimate savage act. Once labeled as cannibals, their defeat and enslavement at the hands of civilized, Christian whites became justifiable. W. Arens argues that the charge of cannibalism was part and parcel of the European expansion into other continents.²¹

Of the charges of cannibalism against the indigenous peoples, Arens found little independent verification. One well-known source of dubious testimony on cannibalism was then plagiarized by others claiming to be eyewitnesses. The eyewitnesses fail to describe just how they were able to escape the fate of consumption they report witnessing. Nor do they explain how the language barrier was overcome, enabling them to report verbatim conversations with “savages.” In addition, their reports fail to maintain internal consistency.

One cause of cannibalism was thought to be lack of animal protein. Yet most Europeans themselves during the centuries of European expansion were not subsisting on animal protein every day. The majority of cultures in the world satisfied their protein needs through vegetables and grains. By charging indigenous peoples with cannibalism (and thus demonstrating their utterly savage ways, for they supposedly did to humans what Europeans only did to animals) one justification for colonization was provided.

Racism is perpetuated each time meat is thought to be the best protein source. The emphasis on the nutritional strengths of animal protein distorts the dietary history of most cultures in which complete protein dishes were made of vegetables and grains. Information about these dishes is overwhelmed by an ongoing cultural and political commitment to meat eating.

Meat is king

During wartime, government rationing policies reserve the right to meat for the epitome of the masculine man: the soldier. With meat rationing in effect for civilians during World War II, the per capita consumption of meat in the Army and Navy was about two-and-a-half times that of the average civilian. Russell Baker observed that World War II began a “beef madness . . . when richly fatted beef was force-fed into every putative American warrior.”²² In contrast to the recipe books for civilians that praised complex carbohydrates, cookbooks for soldiers contained variation upon

The Sexual Politics of Meat

variation of meat dishes. One survey conducted of four military training camps reported that the soldier consumed daily 131 grams of protein, 201 grams of fat, and 484 grams of carbohydrates.²³ Hidden costs of warring masculinity are to be found in the provision of male-defined foods to the warriors.

Women are the food preparers; meat has to be cooked to be palatable for people. Thus, in a patriarchal culture, just as our culture accedes to the “needs” of its soldiers, women accede to the dietary demands of their husbands, especially when it comes to meat. The feminist surveyors of women’s budgets in the early twentieth century observed:

It is quite likely that someone who had strength, wisdom, and vitality, who did not live that life in those tiny, crowded rooms, in that lack of light and air, who was not bowed down with worry, but was herself economically independent of the man who earned the money, could lay out his few shillings with a better eye to a scientific food value. It is quite as likely, however, that the man who earned the money would entirely refuse the scientific food, and demand his old tasty kippers and meat.²⁴

A discussion of nutrition during wartime contained this aside: it was one thing, they acknowledged, to demonstrate that there were many viable alternatives to meat, “but it is another to convince a man who enjoys his beefsteak.”²⁵ The male prerogative to eat meat is an external, observable activity implicitly reflecting a recurring fact: meat is a symbol of male dominance.

It has traditionally been felt that the working man needs meat for strength. A superstition operates in this belief: in eating the muscle of strong animals, we will become strong. According to the mythology of patriarchal culture, meat promotes strength; the attributes of masculinity are achieved through eating these masculine foods. Visions of meat-eating football players, wrestlers, and boxers lumber in our brains in this equation. Though vegan weight lifters and athletes in other fields have demonstrated the equation to be fallacious, the myth remains: men are strong, men need to be strong, thus men need meat. The literal evocation of male power is found in the concept of meat.

Irving Fisher took the notion of “strength” from the definition of meat eating as long ago as 1906. Fisher suggested that strength be measured

The Sexual Politics of Meat

by its lasting power rather than by its association with quick results, and compared meat-eating athletes with vegetarian athletes and sedentary vegetarians. Endurance was measured by having the participants perform in three areas: holding their arms horizontally for as long as possible, doing deep knee bends, and performing leg raises while lying down. He concluded that the vegetarians, whether athletes or not, had greater endurance than meat eaters. "Even the *maximum* record of the flesheaters was barely more than half the *average* for the flesh-abstainers."²⁶

Meat is king; this noun describing meat is a noun denoting male power. Vegetables, a generic term meat eaters use for all foods that are not meat, have become as associated with women as meat is with men, recalling on a subconscious level the days of Woman the Gatherer. Since women have been made subsidiary in a male-dominated, meat-eating world, so has our food. The foods associated with second-class citizens are considered to be second-class protein. Just as it is thought a woman cannot make it on her own, so we think that vegetables cannot make a meal on their own, despite the fact that meat is only secondhand vegetables and vegetables provide, on the average, more than twice the vitamins and minerals of meat. Meat is upheld as a powerful, irreplaceable item of food. The message is clear: the vassal vegetable should content itself with its assigned place and not attempt to dethrone king meat. After all, how can one enthrone women's foods when women cannot be kings?

The male language of meat eating

Men who decide to eschew meat eating are deemed effeminate; failure of men to eat meat announces that they are not masculine. Nutritionist Jean Mayer suggested that "the more men sit at their desks all day, the more they want to be reassured about their maleness in eating those large slabs of bleeding meat which are the last symbol of machismo."²⁷ The late Marty Feldman observed, "It has to do with the function of the male within our society. Football players drink beer because it's a man's drink, and eat steak because it's a man's meal. The emphasis is on 'man-sized portions,' 'hero' sandwiches; the whole terminology of meat-eating reflects this masculine bias."²⁸ Meat-and-potatoes men are our stereotypical strong and hearty, rough and ready, able males. Hearty beef stews are named "Manhandlers" Head football coach and celebrity Mike Ditka operated a restaurant that featured "he-man food" such as steaks and chops.

The Sexual Politics of Meat

One's maleness is reassured by the food one eats. During the 1973 meat boycott, men were reported to observe the boycott when dining out with their wives or eating at home, but when they dined without their wives, they ate London Broil and other meats.²⁹ When in 1955 Carolyn Steedman's mother "made a salad of grated vegetables for Christmas dinner," her husband walked out.³⁰

Gender inequality/species inequality

The men . . . were better hunters than the women, but only because the women had found they could live quite well on foods other than meat.

—Alice Walker, *The Temple of My Familiar*³¹

What is it about meat that makes it a symbol and celebration of male dominance? In many ways, gender inequality is built into the species inequality that meat eating proclaims, because for most cultures obtaining meat was performed by men. Meat was a valuable economic commodity; those who controlled this commodity achieved power. If men were the hunters, then the control of this economic resource was in their hands. Women's status is inversely related to the importance of meat in non-technological societies:

The equation is simple: the more important meat is in their life, the greater relative dominance will the men command. . . . When meat becomes an important element within a more closely organized economic system so that there exist rules for its distribution, then men already begin to swing the levers of power. . . . Women's social standing is roughly equal to men's only when society itself is not formalized around roles for distributing meat.³²

Peggy Sanday surveyed information on over a hundred nontechnological cultures and found a correlation between plant-based economies and women's power and animal-based economies and male power. "In societies dependent on animals, women are rarely depicted as the ultimate source of creative power." In addition, "When large animals are hunted, fathers are more distant, that is, they are not in frequent or regular proximity to infants."³³

The Sexual Politics of Meat

Characteristics of economies dependent mainly on the processing of animals for food include:

- sexual segregation in work activities, with women doing more work than men, but work that is less valued
- women responsible for child care
- the worship of male gods
- patrilineality

On the other hand, plant-based economies are more likely to be egalitarian. This is because women are and have been the gatherers of vegetable foods, and these are invaluable resources for a culture that is plant-based. In these cultures, men as well as women were dependent on women's activities. From this, women achieved autonomy and a degree of self-sufficiency. Yet, where women gather vegetable food and the diet is vegetarian, women do not discriminate as a consequence of distributing the staple. By providing a large proportion of the protein food of a society, women gain an essential economic and social role without abusing it.

Sanday summarizes one myth that links male power to control of meat:

The Mundurucu believe that there was a time when women ruled and the sex roles were reversed, with the exception that women could not hunt. During that time women were the sexual aggressors and men were sexually submissive and did women's work. Women controlled the "sacred trumpets" (the symbols of power) and the men's houses. The trumpets contained the spirits of the ancestors who demanded ritual offerings of meat. Since women did not hunt and could not make these offerings, men were able to take the trumpets from them, thereby establishing male dominance.³⁴

We might observe that the male role of hunter and distributor of meat has been transposed to the male role of eater of meat and conclude that this accounts for meat's role as symbol of male dominance. But there is much more than this to meat's role as symbol.

"Vegetable": Symbol of feminine passivity?

Both the words "men" and "meat" have undergone lexicographical narrowing. Originally generic terms, they are now closely associated with

The Sexual Politics of Meat

their specific referents. Meat no longer means all foods; the word *man*, we realize, no longer includes *women*. Meat represents *the essence or principal part of something*, according to the *American Heritage Dictionary*. Thus we have the “meat of the matter,” “a meaty question.” To “beef up” something is to improve it. Vegetable, on the other hand, represents the least desirable characteristics: *suggesting or like a vegetable, as in passivity or dullness of existence, monotonous, inactive*. Meat is *something one enjoys or excels in*, vegetable becomes representative of someone who does not enjoy anything: *a person who leads a monotonous, passive, or merely physical existence*.

A complete reversal has occurred in the definition of the word vegetable. Whereas its original sense was to *be lively, active*, it is now viewed as dull, monotonous, passive. To vegetate is to lead a passive existence; just as to be feminine is to lead a passive existence. Once vegetables are viewed as women’s food, then by association they become viewed as “feminine,” passive.

Men’s need to disassociate themselves from women’s food (as in the myth in which the last Bushman flees in the direction opposite from women and their vegetable food) has been institutionalized in sexist attitudes toward vegetables and the use of the word *vegetable* to express criticism or disdain. Colloquially it is a synonym for a person severely brain-damaged or in a coma. In addition, vegetables are thought to have a tranquilizing, dulling, numbing effect on people who consume them, and so we can not possibly get strength from them. According to this perverse incarnation of Brillat-Savarin’s theory that you are what you eat, to eat a vegetable is to become a vegetable, and by extension, to become womanlike.

Examples from the 1988 Presidential Campaign in which each candidate was belittled through equation with being a vegetable illustrates this patriarchal disdain for vegetables. Michael Dukakis was called “the Vegetable Plate Candidate.”³⁵ Northern Sun Merchandising offered T-shirts that asked: “George Bush: Vegetable or Noxious Weed?” One could opt for a shirt that featured a bottle of ketchup and a picture of Ronald Reagan with this slogan: “Nutrition Quiz: Which one is the vegetable?”³⁶ (The 1984 Presidential Campaign concern over “Where’s the Beef?” is considered in the following chapter.)

The word vegetable acts as a synonym for women’s passivity because women are supposedly like plants. Hegel makes this clear: “The difference between men and women is like that between animals and plants. Men correspond to animals, while women correspond to plants because their development is more placid.”³⁷ From this viewpoint, both women and plants are seen as less developed and less evolved than men and animals.

The Sexual Politics of Meat

Consequently, women may eat plants, since each is placid; but active men need animal meat.

Meat is a symbol of patriarchy

In her essay, "Deciphering a Meal," the noted anthropologist Mary Douglas suggests that the order in which we serve foods, and the foods we insist on being present at a meal, reflect a taxonomy of classification that mirrors and reinforces our larger culture. A meal is an amalgam of food dishes, each a constituent part of the whole, each with an assigned value. In addition, each dish is introduced in precise order. A meal does not begin with a dessert, nor end with soup. All is seen as leading up to and then coming down from the entrée that is meat. The pattern is evidence of stability. As Douglas explains, "The ordered system which is a meal represents all the ordered systems associated with it. Hence the strong arousal power of a threat to weaken or confuse that category."³⁸ To remove meat is to threaten the structure of the larger patriarchal culture.

Marabel Morgan, one expert on how women should accede to every male desire, reported in her *Total Woman Cookbook* that one must be careful about introducing foods that are seen as a threat: "I discovered that Charlie seemed threatened by certain foods. He was suspicious of my casseroles, thinking I had sneaked in some wheat germ or 'good-for-you' vegetables that he wouldn't like."³⁹

Mary McCarthy's *Birds of America* provides a fictional illustration of the intimidating aspect to a man of a woman's refusal of meat. Miss Scott, a vegetarian, is invited to a NATO general's house for Thanksgiving. Her refusal of turkey angers the general. Not able to take this rejection seriously, as male dominance requires a continual recollection of itself on everyone's plate, the general loads her plate up with turkey and then ladles gravy over the potatoes as well as the meat, "thus contaminating her vegetable foods." McCarthy's description of his actions with the food mirrors the warlike customs associated with military battles. "He had seized the gravy boat like a weapon in hand-to-hand combat. No wonder they had made him a brigadier general—at least that mystery was solved." The general continues to behave in a bellicose fashion and after dinner proposes a toast in honor of an eighteen-year-old who has enlisted to fight in Vietnam. During the ensuing argument about war the general defends the bombing of Vietnam with the rhetorical question: "What's so sacred about a civilian?" This upsets

The Sexual Politics of Meat

the hero, necessitating that the general's wife apologize for her husband's behavior: "Between you and me," she confides to him, "it kind of got under his skin to see that girl refusing to touch her food. I saw that right away."⁴⁰

Male belligerence in this area is not limited to fictional military men. Men who batter women have often used the absence of meat as a pretext for violence against women. Women's failure to serve meat is not the cause of the violence against them. Controlling men use it, like anything else, as an excuse for their violence. Yet because "real" men eat meat, batterers have a cultural icon to draw upon as they deflect attention from their need to control. As one woman battered by her husband reported, "It would start off with him being angry over trivial little things, a trivial little thing like cheese instead of meat on a sandwich."⁴¹ Another woman stated, "A month ago he threw scalding water over me, leaving a scar on my right arm, all because I gave him a pie with potatoes and vegetables for his dinner, instead of fresh meat."⁴²

Men who become vegetarians and vegans challenge an essential part of the masculine role. They are opting for women's food. How dare they? Refusing meat means a man is effeminate, a "sissy," a "fruit." Indeed, in 1836, the response to the vegetarian regimen of that day, known as Grahamism, charged that "Emasculation is the first fruit of Grahamism."⁴³

Men who choose not to eat meat repudiate one of their masculine privileges. The *New York Times* explored this idea in an editorial on the masculine nature of meat eating. Instead of "the John Wayne type," epitome of the masculine meat eater, the new male hero is "Vulnerable" like Alan Alda, Mikhail Baryshnikov, and Phil Donahue. They might eat dead fishes and dead chickens, but not red meat. Alda and Donahue, among other men, have not only repudiated the macho role, but also macho food. According to the *Times*, "Believe me. The end of macho marks the end of the meat-and-potatoes man."⁴⁴ We won't miss either.

14

After MacKinnon

Sexual Inequality in the Animal Movement

By Carol J. Adams

“You become what you do not resist.”

—Catharine MacKinnon

For the past thirty years, animal activists have challenged the interdependent nature of dominance and subordination vis-à-vis our relations with other species.¹ At the same time, they have largely avoided the question of how the system of *human* dominance and *animal* subordination tracks, intersects with, and diverges from *men's* dominance and *women's* subordination. Despite the work of radical feminists to identify the linkages between the oppressions of women and animals, establishing the common patriarchal roots of both groups' subjugation, a feminist perspective has yet to be incorporated into the theory and practice of the mainstream animal movement. This is unfortunate, because sexual inequality is one of the defining elements of the animal movement, defining both the status of animals whose liberation is sought, and the status of the women within the movement who seek the liberation of animals.²

As my title indicates, this chapter was prompted by my reading and reflecting upon Catharine MacKinnon's essay, “Of Mice and Men: A Feminist Fragment on Animal Rights” and as a result by my sense that, because of the way the animal movement is structured, it could fail to hear MacKinnon's radical feminist insights in any substantive way that would induce it to change its tactics and approaches.³ Metaphorically, then, this chapter might be considered a musical counterpoint, an exercise in contrapuntal themes, in which I focus on the interaction of MacKinnon's insights in that essay and her other writings with my own theories. My concern throughout is with both theory

and activism. To understand why MacKinnon matters, or should matter, for movements to end the human oppression of other animals, we must first have an appreciation of her radical feminist critique both of male domination, and of *liberal* understandings of gender and sex.

The basic survival issues facing women arise because of sexual inequality: women experience the social reality of domination made into sex through rape, incest, pornography, sexual harassment, forced pregnancy, and captivity in the home. Patriarchy is a global system of systemic economic inequality; of sexual violence, intimidation, and killing by men;⁴ and of the racializing of that sexual violence.⁵ As such, sexual inequality affects *every* woman's life. As MacKinnon sums up the predicament of women in the United States and elsewhere, "women's situation is made up of unequal pay combined with allocation to disrespected work, sexual targeting for rape, domestic battering, sexual abuse as children, and systematic sexual harassment together with de-personalization, demeaned physical characteristics, use in denigrating entertainment, deprivation of reproductive control, and forced prostitution."⁶

For MacKinnon, sexual inequality therefore means that we can't take the "sex" out of sexism, because *gender reflects a systematic inequality of power, and sexuality is a form of its practice*. Sexuality is "a social construct of male power: defined by men, forced on women, and constitutive of the meaning of gender."⁷ Thus, sexuality is predicated on the domination of women by men, and "this domination is sexual."

The liberal feminist critique, by contrast, holds that gender oppression can be decoupled from sex: that the hierarchy of inequality has nothing to do with sexuality per se. This, however, only mystifies the material basis of inequality, which derives from men's sex right and the constitution of heterosexuality as such. MacKinnon writes: "[t]o notice that these practices are done by men to women is to see these abuses as forming a system, a hierarchy of inequality."⁸ In other words, the liberal conception of gender neutrality ignores what is distinctively *done to* women, as well as *who is doing it* to them.⁹

In mainstream discourses about animal rights, we find a similar (and similarly unexamined) assumption operating among activists and theorists: namely, that gender and sexuality have no bearing on the problem of speciesism as such. While taking radical positions against human domination of other species, many animal activists and theorists adopt an oddly *liberal* view when it comes to questions of gender. The domination of women by men, and the domination of animals by human beings, are not only kept in separate accounts—they are seen as having nothing to do with one another. This lack of insight into the interconnections between speciesism and sexism, I want to suggest, seriously compromises the animal movement. So long as the movement fails to address the problem sex inequality poses, it remains in

thrall to the dominant patriarchal culture, colluding in a regime of sexual hierarchy and domination that both hurts women and damages its own radically transformative potential. The animal movement—like other social movements and institutions in patriarchal society—both mirrors the inequalities of the larger culture, and constitutes itself through those same inequalities.

In what follows, I want to do two things. First, I want to examine some of the ways that ideologies of masculinity, male-centered definitions of reason and “the human,” and female sexual subordination play themselves out in speciesist ideology and practice, in order to show why patriarchy and sexual inequality *matter* for the domination of animals by human beings.¹⁰ Second, I want to show how the animal movement itself, by ignoring or remaining insufficiently attentive to the connections between patriarchy and speciesism, ends up reproducing women’s inequality in its structure, its focus, its arguments, its use of women’s labor, and in the accessibility it provides to sexual exploiters.

SEXUAL INEQUALITY ELEVATES “RATIONAL MAN” TO REPRESENT THE DEFINITION OF “THE HUMAN”

Sexual inequality elevates men to represent the definition of “human;” women represent the not-man, and thus, the not-human. As MacKinnon puts it, women are “the animals of the human kingdom, the mice of men’s world.”¹¹ This definition of human as not woman, not animals can be traced back to Aristotle. As Wendy Brown details in her study of *Manhood and Politics*,

It was precisely the sharpness of the Athenian conception of manhood that bore with it a necessary degradation of women, a denial of the status of “human” to women. To the extent that women were viewed as part of the human species, they would recall to men the species’ animal or “natural” aspect. Alternatively, women could be denied fully human status and remain the somewhat less threatening repository of the “lower elements” of existence.¹²

In other words, manhood = humanhood: those who wish to be seen as worthy must try to show how they fit into this equation. As MacKinnon writes in “Of Mice and Men”:

Men’s debates among themselves over what makes them distinctively human have long revolved around distinctions from women and animals. Can they think? Are they individuals? Are they capable of autonomous action? Are they inviolable? Do they have dignity? Are they made in the image of God? Men know they are men, meaning human, it would seem, to the degree their answer to these questions is yes for them and no for animals and women.¹³

The question MacKinnon poses in her essay is why animals must first be shown to be similar to us (fit into our definition of the *human*) before they can be deemed worthy of our attention and our respect. Why do animals have to be like us (the common tack taken by analytical moral philosophers defending animal rights) to be free of human mistreatment of them? Just as women should not need to be “like” men to be accepted as fully human, so animals should not have to be seen as similar to humans to have their lives matter to us. In fact, the whole theoretical discussion of similarity is not really a discussion about animals at all, as MacKinnon points out, but about human power *over* animals.

The Western definition of the “man of reason” coincides with gendered notions about male behavior and masculinity. The idea of a rational person draws upon “men’s gender-specific criteria”¹⁴ and more highly valued activities identified as male or “masculine.” To be a person is to be *rational* and to esteem autonomy over relationship—in other words, to be the antithesis of what is thought to be female. “[T]he feminine has been associated with what rational knowledge transcends, dominates or simply leaves behind.”¹⁵ Men’s experience has been mistaken as representing human experience, while rationality has been mistaken as representing the highest attribute of humans. The central categories and habits of Western political thought—concern about rights, interests, the status of the individual over and against others, what constitutes being human, and so on—have all arisen on the basis of these two errors. Has not men’s experience structured and delimited the threshold issues regarding the social contract and inclusion within the moral order, by fostering the presumption that we must prove how animals are like us? Why must we prove that animals suffer (and suffer in ways like humans) in order to have them recognized as beings worthy of better treatment? Men never had to prove they suffered to “have their existence validated and harm to them seen as real.”¹⁶ “Why is just existing alive not enough? Why do you have to hurt?”

As MacKinnon notes, the term *male* “has nothing whatever to do with inherency, preexistence, nature, inevitability, or body as such. Because it is in the interest of men to be male in the system we live under (male being powerful as well as human), they seldom question its rewards or even see it as a status at all.”¹⁷ Being a powerful male is culturally constructed. It is demonstrated in part by one’s use of animals—specifically, by severing one’s connection to one’s feelings and by “being a man” who hunts, kills, and in other ways violates the other animals (as with scientific experimentation). Emotions are denigrated as untrustworthy and unreliable, as invalid sources of knowledge. Crucially, the emphasis on rationality precludes appealing to the one aspect of ourselves as human beings that might enable us to recognize the situation of animals and hence to respond to it: our capacity to care.¹⁸ We experience this capacity

through our bodies. The devaluation of the body and its emotions, and how both have been treated in philosophy, in history, in science, and in everyday life, thus has everything to do with its equation with women, nature, and animals; and the treatment of women, nature, the body, and animals has everything to do with the elevation of men.

The elevation of “rational man” in Western thought, and its corresponding devaluation of the (female/animal) body has two immediate consequences for the animal movement. First, as feminist critics have pointed out, animal rights theorists themselves often appeal to humans to stop harming animals in a way that bifurcates the human into “rational thinker” or “emotional reactor.” In addressing the “rational thinker,” rights theorists tacitly accept the prior ontological divisions and categories created by a world of sexual inequality. In positing its two primary texts as Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* and Tom Regan’s *The Case for Animal Rights*—texts that insist on their reasonableness—the animal movement reiterates a patriarchal disavowal of emotions as having a legitimate role in theory making. Paradoxically, theorists articulate positions against animal suffering, while at the same time they maintain that our emotional responses to this suffering can never be appropriate sources of moral knowledge. The working assumption appears to be that emotional responses to suffering are not trustworthy as the foundation of theory.

Second, the fetish of a disembodied and abstract reason in our society effectively obscures real structures of inequality and violence, by keeping the actual experiences of women and animals at arm’s length. Just as women experience the social reality of domination made into sex through rape, incest, pornography, sexual harassment, forced pregnancy, and captivity in the home, animals experience the *material reality* of human oppression through a patriarchal matrix that renders them into objects of manipulation, scientific torture, mass annihilation, and consumption. What MacKinnon calls a neo-Cartesian mind game reduces the experiences of women, and of animals, to abstractions, rendering them *immaterial*. This mind game treats everything as ideas. To take one example: the common argument that corpse-eaters offer to vegetarians and vegans that “plants have life too and so we can eat animals,” is implicitly patriarchal. To draw lines where lines should not exist (i.e., by claiming that eating an animal is essentially different from eating a human being) does not mean that we cannot draw lines at all (i.e., distinguishing between eating a cow and eating a carrot). Questioning the appropriateness of drawing such lines is ironically an example of Cartesian doubt, which denies the validity of ideas rooted in lived reality. As MacKinnon points out, Cartesian doubt is a function of human male privilege. This privilege enables a standpoint that views everything as made out of ideas. One might pose the “theoretical” question of whether carrots are being exploited. But once we

situate ourselves within the lived, embodied reality we know as this world, we surely know that the eating of a cow, pig, or chicken is different from the eating of a carrot.

MacKinnon also sees this neo-Cartesian mind game functioning in the argument that pornography is an idea, a speech, rather than an act, a documentation of torture. Human male privilege can view everything as being made out of abstractions. But women lack such luxury when someone else's privilege is hitting them in the face, calling them "cunt" as they walk in the street, sexually abusing them as children, sexually coercing them as adults, and sexually coming on to them as they volunteer as animal activists. MacKinnon writes:

When something happens to women, it happens in social reality. . . . In other words, the harm of second-class human status does not pose an abstract reality question. In social life, there is little that is subtle about most rapes; there is nothing complex about a fist in your face; there is nothing nuanced about genocide—although many nuanced questions no doubt can be raised about them. . . . It is the *denial* of their social reality that is complicated and raises difficult philosophical questions. Understand that the denial of the reality of such events has been a philosophical position about reality itself. Unless and until it is effectively challenged, only what power wants to see as real is granted reality status.¹⁹

Power, a function of human male privilege, enables a standpoint that controls what is designated "real" and considers everything as being made out of ideas, out of abstractions. For instance, when Linda Marchiano (Linda Lovelace) testified that she was forced into the making of the pornographic film *Deep Throat*, her statements about her experience of brutal sexual slavery while making that film (in *Ordeal*, her autobiography) became the subject of a libel suit. In other words, the film was seen as an "idea," hence as protected speech, rather than as a document of actual, physical torture and degradation. Her reality disappeared. Similarly, when corpse-eaters invoke the baseless image of screaming, suffering carrots, lettuce, and tomatoes in order to justify eating animals, the animals' reality disappears. Because of the perspective arising from male privilege, the reality of *suffering* gets reduced to a debate about ideas, and whatever is an idea is protected as speech.

As MacKinnon points out, through pornography, women *become* men's speech. Thus does the mind triumph over the body, men over women, ideas over reality. And privilege remains undisturbed because abstractions ignore the context of power. When the working definition of "human" is what *manhood* is, and rationality is valued as one of the qualities of manhood, then women represent what is not valued—femaleness and what femaleness is associated with: the body, emotions, and animals.

SEX INEQUALITY INSCRIBES THE USE OF ANIMALS AS PART OF ITS DEFINITION OF MANHOOD

A popular Burger King advertisement in 2006 satirically appropriated and subverted Helen Reddy's feminist song, "I Am Woman, Hear Me Roar," turning it into a paean to masculinity and meat-eating. In the ad, a man declares his right to eat meat because he is a man: "I am man hear me roar. . . . I'm way too hungry to settle for chick food. Yes I'm a guy. . . . I will eat this meat. . . . I am man." Then the voice-over proclaims, "The Texas Double Whooper. Eat like a man, man."²⁰ The life-and-death power over animals that men have traditionally had in the West establishes a part of the meaning of manhood. Species inequality is inscribed within the definition of manhood, a definition that grants men the right to act violently toward animals and women with impunity. Meat eating continues to be associated with male privilege, establishing meat eating as a virile, manly thing to do. Just as philosophers elevated the "man of reason" for whom mind conquers matter, and historians elevated a male idea of the professional historian who rejected the trivial, the domestic, the feminine, so too the everyday corpse-eater recapitulates these gendered rejections of the body by consuming the bloody bodies of feminized animals.

The sexual politics of the hunt in contemporary hunting culture meanwhile celebrates man as hunter and life-taker. Both associations (virility in meat-eating, virility in hunting/killing) drip with power as well as blood.²¹ Many of the recent school shootings in the United States involved gunmen targeting girls and women; and even when women and girls weren't the target, the shootings have all been done by men and boys. As Daniel Moshenberg observes, "Men and boys with guns are stalking and hunting women and girls in schools repeatedly. Until we see 'the gun problem' as equally a problem of violence against women, nothing will change."²² Men and boys thus stalk female human animals as well as nonhuman male and female ones. Gender identity as a system leads directly to male violence and domination directed against both sets of subjects.

The question of "manhood," then, clearly enters into the politics of the animal movement at all sorts of levels. One more that bears mentioning is the increasing vogue among men in the direct action wing of the movement to portray the struggle for animal liberation as a *war*. Learning about animal oppression provokes a variety of feelings—sadness, distress, anger, powerlessness, indignation, outrage, and horror among them. Men, however, are traditionally taught to perceive all negative emotions as anger. Those who feel only anger in response to animal suffering, rather than the complex of emotions that accompany anger, may experience animal activism as a battle rather than as a process. Naturally, if animal activism is seen as a war, men's feelings about the other animals can in this way be rendered comprehensible and even honorable. To be at war avoids

being “unmanned” by caring about animals. But the referent is no longer the animals, it is the battle. This maintains a disengagement from feelings such as tenderness, empathy, and sympathy. And it provides a heroic, male-identified metaphorical framework for one’s work to “save the animals.”

Bonnie G. Smith, a feminist historian (describing Hayden White’s critique of traditional tropes of history) writes that since “the past serves up accounts of violent events that are over . . . readers (including scholars) can let their violent fantasies roam freely when doing history.”²³ This raises a disturbing question: Does learning about animal oppression provide a similar function in terms of allowing the roaming of violent (male) fantasies? Sometimes the focus on describing violence against the animals becomes a justification for violent actions, and frequently for the use of violent metaphors. We are told that we are engaged in a “new civil war,” that violence against animal oppressors is acceptable, that our activism should be “by any means necessary.” Women and men are encouraged to join this new civil war. The problem is that to be at war upholds gender dominance within the movement while it protects male activists’ “manhood.” It links the animal movement with extreme Right and terrorist male groups who also use the discourse of the “warrior.” Further, women are already experiencing a war, a war against them. Why should we join another? And why is it necessarily a war?

Bellicose language that celebrates armies fighting, warriors redeeming, soldiers marching (under orders) for the greater good ignore one of the basic feminist insights into animal oppression, which is that the ability to care and respond to animals exists within each of us. Though our empathic imagination is actively repressed through socialization, it can also be actively accessed. Moments of interaction between a human being and an animal being often open up the ability to respond to the situation of animals. But with warrior talk, not only is the warrior talk of other (right-wing) movements legitimated, not only are the emotions of sympathy and empathy (for both animals and for one’s own opponents) denied, but the traditional male response to threats against one’s possessions and one’s identity are reinforced: making war.

As this analysis suggests, one of the challenges for the animal movement is getting men to give up male-identified power over other beings. To be in the animal movement, the individual man must “refuse to be a man”—to use John Stoltenberg’s term for the process of disowning the privilege that comes through sexual inequality. This undoubtedly goes some way toward explaining why there aren’t more men in the animal movement. Logically, if the animal movement leaves the definition of “manhood” undisturbed it cannot accomplish its goals of liberating animals since, by definition, manhood involves use of and killing of animals, as well as the promotion of a “warrior” ethos that reproduces the values of aggression and masculine heroism of a patriarchal order.

**SEXUAL INEQUALITY INSCRIBES
A PORNOGRAPHIC "FEMININITY"
ON DOMESTICATED AND DEFEATED ANIMALS**

MacKinnon's understanding of how "gender is a substantive process of inequality," "a material division of power,"²⁴ is helpful in understanding how femaleness becomes symbolically associated with defeated animals:

[T]o be victimized in certain ways may mean to be feminized, to partake of the low social status of the female, to be made into the girl regardless of biological sex. This does not mean that men experience or share the meaning of being a woman, because part of that meaning is that inferiority is indelible and total until it is changed for all women. It does mean that gender is an outcome of the social process of subordination that is only ascriptively tied to body and doesn't lose its particularity of meaning when it shifts embodied form. Femininity is a lowering that is imposed; it can be done to anybody and still be what feminine means. It is just women to whom it is considered natural.²⁵

Sexual inequality makes the dominated animal "female" in reality or metaphorically. Cast as female, the animal becomes either immaterial or symbolic of the defeat (thus the mounting of dead animals' heads as trophies). Thus, species inequality is gendered.

Sexual inequality creates a hierarchy about animals: domesticated animals are seen as female, wild animals are seen as male—until, that is, the hunter kills the animal, at which point, as defeated prey, he or she is treated linguistically as female.²⁶ The victim of the hunt is a dominated power within a sexual system that is structured along lines of dominance and subordination; ergo, the dominated animal becomes symbolically female. Karen Davis argues that the reason farmed animals have been neglected by the environmental movement is because they are "creatures whose lives appear too slavishly, too boringly, too stupidly female, too 'cowlike.'" Davis shows how both wild and domestic turkeys are subject to human sexual violence.²⁷ Similarly, Susan Davis and Margo Demello challenge the social/sexual construction of rabbits:

Words about women and rabbits—like "dumb bunny" and "cunt"—belittle and degrade women and rabbits simultaneously. And the very success of the Playboy Bunny—a creature that is half rabbit and half woman, after all—reveals a male penchant for a very chilling notion of female sexuality: one that is bound in notions of prey, childishness and submissiveness, on the one hand, and unbridled lust, fertility and even witchery on the other.²⁸

Animal oppressive activities, including almost all forms of corpse-eating, "work" ideologically and materially by equating the individual animal with

femaleness. Industrialized farming depends on domesticated female animals' reproductive labor. Consumption of domesticated animals cannot exist without the enslavement of female animals to reproductive labor. To control fertility one must have absolute access to the female of the species. Cows, sows, chickens, and female sheep are exploited in ways that merge their reproductive and productive labor. Their bodies must be reproduced so that there will be "meat" for humans, so that there will be cow's milk for humans, so that there will be eggs for humans. Female animals are not worthy of respect. Their importance is *what* they do—*reproduce*—rather than *who* they are—individual animals. They become a *what*. There is no *who*.

The status of the female of the species meanwhile establishes the status of the male domesticated animals. The slang use of species names such as *cow*, *sow*, and *chick* demonstrates the unworthiness of that species and anyone to whom the name is appended. All domesticated animals carry the taint of this exploitation of female reproductivity; it is one reason that animals are seen as always already replaceable (there will always be more animals because of the slavery of female animals). Farmed animals' unworthiness becomes associated with their species as such, which in turn is associated with or defined through the demeaned status of its females. Deprived of any recognizably "human" (read male) characteristic, like reason, which might redeem them as subjects and lift them out of their lowly status, male domesticated animals become merged with femaleness.

HOW THE MOVEMENT TRADES IN SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN—AND THEREFORE OF ANIMALS

How do animal oppressors change? How does someone become awakened to consciousness of his or her individual responsibility for the death of animals? How does a culture learn to care about domesticated animals? As we have seen, one powerful structural barrier to caring about animals is the ideology by which domesticated species have been "lowered" through their equation with femaleness. So effective and total is this ideology that campaigns on behalf of animals believe that they cannot win over animal oppressors simply by showing the actual lives of domesticated animals. Farmed animals are inevitably seen as a nothingness, associated as they are with femaleness. To get around this problem, some campaigns on behalf of animals have ironically chosen to substitute a different subject for their campaigns, one who has *also* been desubjectified: the woman who lives in a state of perpetual undress. In doing so, however, they are only reinforcing the very

system of sexual objectification that consigns *both* women and animals to perpetual domination.

While several organizations have promoted their causes using sexual images of women, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) is most notable for its choices to use women models, naked women, and to associate itself with pornographers like Hugh Hefner and *Playboy*. In a world in which sex is what women have to sell, PETA provides a way to “sell” their sex for a *cause*. A January 2007 example was PETA’s “State of the Union Undress” (available at YouTube for anyone who verifies they are 18 or older), a video in which a young woman is depicted (through the magic of video intercutting) addressing the U.S. Congress on the subject of animal exploitation—as she slowly strips off all her clothing. One of the implicit, if not explicit, messages of such advertisements is, *Yes, we’re asking you to give up animals as objects, but you can still have women as objects! You can become aware of animals’ lives, but you don’t have to give up your pornography*. Thus, rather than challenge the inherent inequality of a culture structured around dominance and subordination, the ad instead tries to leverage sexual inequality on behalf of the other animals. In fact, every time PETA uses a naked or nearly-naked woman to advertise animals’ concerns it not only benefits from sexual inequality, it also unwittingly demonstrates the intransigence of species inequality.

In its defense, PETA asserts that there is nothing wrong with nakedness; that feminists who object are puritanical and denying the beauty of the body; that these campaigns bring people to their website or prompt them to make phone calls to PETA where they do learn about issues relating to animals’ lives. This of course is the liberal position on women’s sexuality—that it can be freed from carrying the meaning of inequality. PETA’s spokespeople further defend the choice of campaigns featuring women’s naked or near-naked bodies by arguing that the women in their campaigns have consented to their participation. Such arguments are inherently problematic. In a world in which sex is what women have to sell, isn’t the concept of consent emptied of much of its meaning? What does women’s “no” to being used as a sex object actually look like in our culture? As MacKinnon has pointed out, of the debate about consent in rape cases: “when force is a normalized part of sex, when no is taken to mean yes, when fear and despair produce acquiescence and acquiescence is taken to mean consent, consent is not a meaningful concept.”²⁹ The problem of consent surfaces at other levels of animal movement organization as well. PETA, for instance, narrows its employment pool when it asks young women applying to certain positions at the organization if they would pose in a cage, for instance, or in other ways display themselves. If their employment at PETA is predicated on their willingness to perform certain acts of selling the message through their bodies, then *de facto*, those women unwilling to do

so are not going to be hired (some remove themselves from consideration after being asked this question). If only those who say, "Yes I will participate," are being hired, it is again hard to know what a "no" really looks like.

In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, I proposed that animals are "absent referents" in an animal-oppressive world. They are made absent through interventions such as corpse-eating, in which the animal disappears as animal to become food, through vivisection, in which the animal becomes the "object" of study, and is reduced to his or her body, and then reduced further to the symptoms that that body exhibits. In this context, while some argue that PETA's ads using naked or nearly-naked women are liberating, not only for animals but, in transgressive ways, for women too, such practices in fact only substitute *one absent referent* for another. The challenge for the animal movement is how to restore the absent referent to a dominant culture that refuses to acknowledge it. What must be borne in mind, however, is that the absent referent is a crucial point of intersection *both* for sexual inequality and species inequality. Logically, there can be no politically liberatory *substitution* of woman for animal, because what is being replaced carries its own marker of inequality. What appears superficially as substitution is actually the layering of one oppressive system on top of another. (In another recent PETA campaign, a woman was posed as though cut up like a piece of meat, demonstrating both sexual and species inequality—the dead animal's fate was effectively layered upon the woman's fate as an object.)

Ironically, one common way that sexual inequality is imposed on farmed animals is through advertisements that sexualize meat. Conventions include fragmentation ("are you a breast man or a leg man?"), consumable females (barbecued pigs as sexy females with thrusting hips and pendulous breasts), and strip teases (animals in various stages of disrobing), rendering all domesticated animals being consumed as female. Replacing animals with women is therefore not *substitution* or potentially liberating, because the original victim's fate is still there, present through reference. A turkey posed as a prostitute, a turkey "hooker," refers not only to the turkey's fate but uncritically invokes, and thus reinforces, the debased status of the prostitute. The word *substitution* implies that the object is changed, and that substituting women for animals is somehow transgressive (e.g., as when women are substituted for cows in "Milk Gone Wild," a pornographic parody of the well-known dairy industry slogan). But it isn't a parody of a dairy industry slogan. It is a parody of the spring break beach parties (girls gone wild). What we in fact see is merely one debased subject being substituted for the other: the lowered status of the first (animal) is applied to the other (woman), who however already carries her own low status—marked as "female" in a world of sexual inequality. If animals are burdened by gender, by gendered associations, by the oppression that is gender,

then clearly they can't be liberated through representations that demean women. It isn't helping animals, and it certainly isn't helping men—to continue to believe that privilege is something to hold on to, to masturbate to. We live in the world pornography has made, and so do other animals.

Contemporary capitalist agriculture has developed into a multi-billion dollar industry that, like the porn industry, makes money off of the bodies of others, that controls female sexuality, is obsessed with nipples and pregnancy and uses vibrators (yes, these are all aspects of industrialized farmings' treatment of female animals) in ways that blur the line between the pornographer's world and the world of industrialized farming. This is one meaning of the term "the pornography of meat." Another meaning to the term is found in the imposition of common conventions in pornography (rear-entry shots; sexualized poses; and language about sex) on animals, so that the message becomes that animals, too, *want* to be desired. Through such references, meat advertisements presume they are talking to users of pornography. In *The Pornography of Meat*, I showed that animals in bondage, particularly farmed animals, are shown "free" in the way that women are seen to be "free"—posed as sexually available as though their only desire is for the viewer to want their bodies. It makes animals' degradation and suffering fun by making animals' degradation sexy. Simultaneously, it makes women's degradation fun because to be effective the advertisement requires the implicit reference to women's sexualized status as subordinate. For women, through pornography, their degradation is always already sexy. The *sexualization* of animals and the *sexual objectification of women* thus overlap and reinforce one another. The body parts of females, at times dead females, are subjects pornography has already sexualized. In a fluid move, these conventions are used to sell dead bodies.

As MacKinnon and other radical feminists have argued, pornography is a central factor in women's subordination. "Pornography makes sex into a violation and makes rape and torture and intrusion into sex."³⁰ Pornography is a multi-billion dollar industry—larger than all regular media combined.

Because the profit from these mass violations counts and women do not, because these materials are valued and women are not, because the pornographers have credibility and rights and powerful friends to front for their interests and women do not, the products of these acts are protected and women are not. So these things are done so that pornography can be made of them. Everyone who has been looking high and low for a "direct casual link" between pornography and harm might consider this one: it takes harming women to make it.³¹

Meat advertisements show us how pornographers do this: take a defeated being, in this case a dead animal, and pose him or her according to a pornographic convention, say, a restaurant that sells dead lobsters claiming "Nice

tail;" barbecued pigs posed as young women (all pink, signifying whiteness), hanging on the arms of men; anorexic cows; chickens in high heels. In each case: she is dead and yet she wants it.³² Wants what? Wants sex; wants to be sexually used; wants to be consumed. And so violence has been made into sex. Meat advertisements do this to animals because pornographers do it to women. Pornographers do it to women because it works for them sexually. It works for them, because *sexual inequality* is sexy. As MacKinnon explains, "[t]o be a means to the end of the sexual pleasure of one more powerful is, empirically, a degraded status and the female position."³³ Which not only explains what pornography is doing and why, but why meat advertisements would gravitate to pornographic conventions to sell their dead products. They mix death with degradation. That equation has one answer: the dead animal equals the female position. "Pornography creates an accessible sexual object, the possession and consumption of which is male sexuality, to be possessed and consumed as which is female sexuality. This is not because pornography depicts objectified sex, but because it creates the experience of a sexuality which is itself objectified."³⁴

Meat advertisements that sexualize and feminize animals have been around for more than 30 years, and during this time, they have become more widespread and more explicit. Pornographic conventions bleed into the bloodied animals that are shown wanting to be consumed, that is, wanting their own death. Similarly, pornography makes of actual women's experience an absent referent. As MacKinnon explains, "abused women become a pornographer's 'thought' or 'emotion' . . . Once the women abused in it and through it are elided this way . . . pornography is . . . conceived in terms of what it says . . . rather than in terms of what it does."³⁵ Not only is species gendered through the feminizing of animals, as gender subordination, but gender is in turn animalized. This animalization is one aspect of sexual inequality. The animalizing of women and the sexualizing of animals is the point at which the structure of the absent referent overlaps, interlocks, intersects. The creation of the woman as absent referent through the sexualizing of her body and then the use of it in pornography, prostitution, rape, and battering melds with the creation of animals as absent referents by negating their individuality as living beings and by using/abusing their bodies through slaughtering, milking, experimenting upon, and hunting. There is one road, not two: a road of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption that requires and enacts the structure of the absent referent in relationship to nondominant others, whom it posits not just as objects but similar, metaphorically overlapping objects providing sexual pleasure. I have called this the *sex-species system*.

The *sex-species system* ensures that men have access to feminized animal bodies and animalized women's bodies. Another Burger King ad demonstrates this.

The “Whopperettes” shows women dancers, who suddenly, upon command from the “Burger King”—“Ladies, build your whopper!”—begin to throw themselves down upon each other in a pattern that creates a huge hamburger. While “have it your way” sounds in the background, one can also hear the “oofs” as women supposedly land on top of one another.³⁶ That *Hustler’s* “Last All-Meat Issue” featured a woman on a hamburger bun back in 1978 shows how completely even hard-core pornographic conventions have now bled into popular culture (the Burger King ad was shown during Super Bowl 2006).

It may be that the more vegetarians make meat eaters uneasy, the more meat is sexualized. People don’t know what to do with uneasiness. But they do know what to do with sexualized messages: ignore what has actually happened to the being who has been reduced into a consumable object of representation, *her* experiences, and just get it on. Sexualizing domesticated animals through advertisements for cultural consumption restabilizes assumptions about their literal consumability. When the animal movement engages in the same representational strategy, it merely recycles the terms of an order that oppresses both animals and women.

SEXUAL INEQUALITY CREATES AN ATMOSPHERE FOR STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY IN THE ANIMAL MOVEMENT

In making veganism a political decision, animal activists rightly draw attention to the relationship between the personal and the political. However, the movement has remained extraordinarily indifferent to the ways in which the seemingly impersonal structures of patriarchy introduce patterns of sexual dominance and submission within the movement itself, patterns which inevitably play out in workplace conditions and interpersonal relations. The aforementioned PETA campaign depicting women as meat, for example, could be cited as an example of the creation of a hostile work environment for women working at PETA. A judge in one recent court case (unrelated to PETA) ruled that an image displayed at a plaintiff’s workplace depicting women as meat helped create a hostile work environment, forming a context in which acts of sexual harassment occurred. But sexual politics plays out in more subtle ways within the movement as well.

In the animal movement, men still predominate as leaders and speakers, women as the grassroots workers doing the day-to-day work. Just as the Gross National Product does not measure housework, it does not measure volunteer hours. Unpaid labor is more likely to be provided by women than men, whether in the animal movement or at home. Without it, the movement could not survive. In addition, the glass ceiling for employees exists in animal orga-

nizations just as it does anywhere else in our society. Meanwhile, because of sexual inequality, women are doing work for animals instead of feminist work, or feminist-animal work. While some women come to the work for animals from the feminist movement, and see animal oppression as a part of women's oppression,³⁷ many women may become activists for animals in order to protect themselves from recognizing their own oppression. In other words, it may be easier to work on behalf of others who are suffering rather than to confront one's own situation.³⁸

Why do women make this choice? MacKinnon suggests a reason: "[p]eople feel more dignity in being part of any group that includes men than in being part of a group that includes that ultimate reduction of the notion of oppression."³⁹ Though it has more women than men, the animal movement has more men than the feminist movement. Meanwhile, if women want to challenge women's oppression, we hear, let them join the feminist movement. If the animal movement challenged women's oppression, the fact that women outnumber men so greatly in the movement would be more apparent and the animal movement would more explicitly experience the lowering that comes from being associated with women. The animal movement cannot afford to do this, or so it seems to believe. Among other reasons, this may be why there is such an emphasis on the fact that no one else is doing *this* work—the work for animals—whereas someone else is doing the work for women (i.e., feminists). The claim that *we must do this work because no one else is!* helps to keep everyone distracted from just *who it is* that is doing most of that work. And so, a dualism about those who experience inequality evolves: those who can speak for themselves and those who cannot. Thus, animal activists are told we are the "voice for animals" or the "voice for the voiceless." The decision that couches advocacy as *speaking for those who cannot speak* contributes to the difficulty of seeing sexual inequality and perhaps, as well, species inequality. This decision communicates that it is equally or more important to speak for those who can't speak than to speak for oneself. This often leads to the conclusion that if you can speak for yourself you are not as oppressed as those who can't. For instance, after the Michael Vick arrest for being a major part of a dog-fighting ring, a discussion occurred on the nationally-syndicated Diane Rehm talk show that went something like this: *Why all this attention to dog fighting when there are women being beaten? At least women being beaten can speak for themselves.*⁴⁰

In fact, there are times when women being beaten cannot speak up for themselves, for in doing so they may risk their lives or the lives of their children or companion animals.⁴¹ By emphasizing *speaking for another*, however, we send the message that as long as we are speaking for those who cannot we therefore do not have to attend to other issues regarding those who can speak

for themselves. For example, we might come to believe that battered women, because they can speak for themselves, already have sufficient power to change their lives.

Moreover, when the ability to speak on behalf of animals is lifted up as the more important act, how then do we see that animals are already communicating with us in a variety of ways? Or that it shouldn't take speech (and our ability to "hear" it) to provide the proof that animals should not be oppressed? Animals protest their treatment in many ways—they escape, they turn away, they growl, snarl, hiss, bray, or bark, they resist, they flail, they flatten their ears or bite, they kick, they swish their tails, they paw the ground or the doors, they scratch, and in other ways documented by animal behaviorists exhibit displeasure, dislike, and rejection. If we bring attention to our interactions with animals, no human voice is needed to articulate what they need. As Josephine Donovan has said, "if we listen, we can hear them."⁴² By setting itself up as "the voice of the voiceless," the animal movement vaunts human language while trying to create some grounds for equality of treatment for those who don't use it (the voiceless) and ignoring the social reality of those with human voices who cannot speak about their oppression. Thus it fosters a double mis-impression: about who is the "speaker" and who are the speechless. Women who speak on behalf of animals are identifying themselves as self-sacrificing, perhaps because of the tacit recognition that women continue to hold a position of subordination both within and without the animal movement.⁴³ Meanwhile, and ironically, because of sexual inequality and the gendered nature of speech in Western culture, men who speak are constituting themselves as men (the status quo) often through a male-identified logocentric, rational narrative.⁴⁴

There is a further way, though, that the personal and the political merge in the animal movement: sexual inequality creates an atmosphere for the outright sexual exploitation of women in the movement by men. The animal movement is thought of as a movement of compassion for animals. Because of this, women activists may believe that the men they meet in the movement will be compassionate and that they won't be insensitive. Thinking they will find gentle men in the movement, women lower their defenses and—guess what? They find themselves as sexualized in the animal movement as they are out of it. Indeed, they are victimized by sexual exploitation in the movement. I have received numerous personal reports from victimized animal activist women. Sexual exploitation can take place many arenas, but one popular, and confusing one, is the conference circuit. Feminists in the animal movement have discussed the inappropriateness of calling serial sexual exploiters *predators*. However, to use the term *predator* for such male behavior also applies a negative meaning to actual predatory animals. Serial sexual exploiters (the

term I prefer) are not acting as “nature” would have it but in a socially constructed way, and they could change. Basically they are refusing to act justly toward women. Child sexual abusers choose professions that give them access to children (the church, the educational system, scouting activities); perhaps some men choose the animal movement because it gives them access to so many women.

Serial sexual exploiters in the movement adhere to certain forms of “grooming behavior” to lower their target’s defenses. “Grooming behavior” was first identified as the deliberate ways child molesters choose to acclimate children to their sexual advances (having them sit on their laps, talking sexually, showing them pornography, touching first in a “safe” place, then moving their hands). Child sexual abusers benefit from an age difference; serial sexual exploiters benefit from the lowered defenses of women in the animal movement who anticipate *humane* men.

Serial sexual exploiters in the animal movement may begin with being flirtatious in public. The grassroots woman activist may feel flattered; someone is actually noticing the work that is often unnoticed. The next step is for the serial sexual exploiter to find an environment that is private (*Can you give me a ride?*—perhaps because he’s from out of town and doesn’t have a car, or perhaps because they are going to a protest together). Within the private environment, he sexualizes the talk in a general way (say, discussing topics such as PETA’s “State of Undress” or other ways of directly discussing something having to do with sex to see if the language and the topic are tolerated). In this private environment, he tests out the boundaries further by sexualizing the conversation in a more personal manner. He might seize on some personal information that is revealed and up the ante: discussing how she looks, for example, or the energy he feels being near her. The grooming behavior continues by the selection of an environment that is supportive of the continual erosion of the target’s boundaries. For instance, he might suggest going to a bar. Then, he talks about how there is *an attraction between them*. Unlike routine dating behavior, the time frame for these interactions is often accelerated (indeed this may all occur in one night). And unlike routine dating behavior, the sexual exploiter is not looking for an ongoing relationship; indeed, the behavior he exhibits is specifically to disarm the woman quickly so that he can use her and move on. He is persistent; he won’t take no for an answer. She worries about being rude. There may be some threatening, *I won’t work with you. You led me on*. And when the night is over, the sexual conquest achieved, suddenly the *attraction* was only a *flirtation*. When the victim protests, verbally threatening behavior occurs: “Who will believe you?” “I will accuse you.” “You will hurt the movement.” Traumatized by what has happened the victim may not be able to think clearly or linearly.

Meanwhile, once again assured of his dominance through this sexual conquest, the serial sexual exploiter benefits from her traumatized state. His life is not shattered by the experience; it is enhanced. He can continue to behave as always while the victim is putting the pieces back together and trying to maintain her work on behalf of animals. Not wanting to put the movement at risk by attempting to hold him accountable, she remains silent and he moves on to his next target. Since individual women aren't seen as "the movement" per se, this sexually abusive behavior is not perceived as putting the movement at risk. It would be her speaking up that would be seen as hurting the movement. If the serial sexual exploiter is a visitor, a well-known activist, or scholar, he benefits from moving on and choosing a new target far removed from the most recent victim so that the opportunity to exchange experiences will not occur. Some women may uphold men who are abusers or sexual harassers within the movement because they are thankful that someone is articulating animals issues so strongly on behalf of animals. They recognize that women will not be heard in the way that the men or some men are. They accept, even at an unconscious level, that women are not going to be as successful, so they side with someone, even if that person has harmed them, who they think will succeed. In these ways, women are silenced so that animals can be helped. Who is the voiceless now?

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have taken up the question of what it would mean for the movement on behalf of other animals to acknowledge women's inequality, and I have suggested that MacKinnon offers a necessary corrective to the limits of contemporary animal rights activism and critical theories of animal domination. What I have called the sex-species system keeps oppressions interlocking and interactive; indeed the sex-species system gains its strengths through its interlocking nature. Yet, problematically, many *radical* animal activists and theorists continue to adopt a *liberal* perspective regarding sexuality, seeing it as essentially gender neutral. In doing so, they obscure one of the most important bases of animal domination, which is the sex hierarchy system.

If taken seriously, however, the problem of sexual inequality raises a host of quite vital and relevant questions for those who would liberate other species: are the animal movement's theories of *why* animals are abused ignoring one of the primary reasons for that exploitation—patriarchy? Can nonhuman animals really be saved without also eradicating sexual inequality among human ones? Will animal activists also free the animals in pornography, or in situations where they are killed by batterers, killed by hunters, killed because they are female or equated with the female?

Does anyone really believe that the animal movement, because of its “pure” focus—on others who are unable to fight for themselves—is inoculated from problems of dominance within its ranks? Gender reflects a hierarchy, a division of power that is expressed and acted out, primarily sexually. There are therefore in fact two realities in current animal activism: men’s and women’s. These realities are determined by the dominant culture in which animal activism is trying to intervene. Failure to acknowledge these conflicting realities and the sexual inequality that creates them does harm to women and sets the animal movement back. The problem for animal activism is that it not only faces and must change a speciesist world, but also it faces and must change a sexist world that expresses its sexism through speciesism and expresses its speciesism through sexism. For the feminist, animal activism’s failure to confront the problems of sexual inequality is sad; but for animal activism, such a failure may be fatal. The animal movement is trying to eradicate the oppression of animals without addressing how sexual inequality structures species inequality. But it can’t be done.

What would it mean, then, for the movement on behalf of other animals to acknowledge women’s inequality? As I have argued, the animal movement benefits from women’s inequality in its structure, its focus, its arguments, its use of women’s efforts, and in the accessibility it provides to sexual exploiters. So long as the movement refuses to acknowledge that it is a part of a dominant culture in which women’s inequality still prevails, so long as it resists addressing the problem of this inequality, it will unconsciously undermine its own vision for a new kind of society, one based on genuinely universal equality, justice, and caring.

2

Road Kill

Commodity Fetishism and Structural Violence

By Dennis Soron

In early 2005, the New Jersey Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals began a campaign to pressure Kraft Foods to remove its Trolli Road Kill Gummi Candy from the market. Activists argued that the candy, designed in the shape of cartoonishly mortified chickens, squirrels, and snakes imprinted with tire-treads on their backs, sent a disturbing message to children, encouraging them to be cruel towards animals. Responding to a public relations crisis, yet denying any intention to be callous about actual animal suffering, Kraft announced in late February that it would immediately cease production of the candy. Circulating as a quirky filler story through the Internet and the mainstream media in North America, this news was welcomed as a small victory among animal rights advocates and bemoaned among many others as further proof of the tyrannical power of political correctness. As minor as this case may have been, it reveals how opportunities for critically re-examining our collective relationship to animals are often bypassed, resolving into a simple contest between localized expressions of ethical concern and braying accusations of pleasure-killing moralism. Indeed, this incident provides an entry point into a more suggestive discussion than whether a specific product predisposes children to be unkind to animals, or simply represents a harmless form of gross-out humor.

Road kill candy and other similar products certainly demonstrate commercial culture's ability to wring opportunities for profit from the most abject circumstances. They also underline the extent to which, in the advanced capitalist world, the commodity form has come to overwrite habitual ways of seeing and relating to animals, draining their embodied experiences of moral

or emotional significance. Although the controversy it generated was unique, Kraft's product is merely part of a broader market trend now transmuting the spectacle of dead animals on the road into saleable commodities. The California company *Stuffe & Nonsense*, for instance, produces *Rikki-Tikki Roadkill*, a tire-flattened version of Kipling's fabled mongoose, and also takes special orders for other species of road kill toys. Alongside its cloyingly cute stuffed bears, another American company, *HankieBears*, sells *RoadKill Kitties*, featuring bendable wire tails, missing eyes, and carefully stitched-in "road damage," and has recently expanded this line to include puppies. In a strange expression of global compassion, *Cuddly Collectibles* donates part of the profits from online sale of *Meany Splat the Road Kill Kat* to disaster relief efforts of the Red Cross and Habitat for Humanity. Other plush products of this kind abound on the market, including splayed animals that can be fastened to car or truck grilles, hats and slippers in the shape of squashed skunks and alligators, and even battery-operated dog toys that activate when squeezed, triggering the sound of tires squealing followed by a loud, comical splat. Although animal exploitation is a precondition of many consumer items today, road kill novelties like these represent a second-order form of exploitation in which the animal's expired body is offered up for consumption not simply as food or clothing, but as an image of its own ritualized abasement.

By transforming the animal's desecrated body into a spectacle and offering it up as a consumable thing abstracted from the violent encounter that caused its death, such commodities both bear witness to and dissolve responsibility for one of the most apparent consequences of our collective attachment to another commodity: the automobile. For most people in automobile-dependent regions of the world, the sight of animals laying dead on roadways—sometimes calm and intact, as if sleeping, sometimes gruesomely stretched out and pulverized into an unrecognizable mass by ongoing traffic—has become so routine as to seem like an inescapable fact of life. Notwithstanding the alluring imagery of advertisements portraying the car as a magical means of escaping from workaday drudgery and communing with wild animals in natural settings, automobile-oriented land use has become a primary threat to the integrity of ecosystems and animal habitat, with the car itself emerging as an apex predator in the landscapes reconfigured for its purposes. Although vast in its scale and implications, road kill is still a largely overlooked problem that has not been seriously taken up by major animal rights, environmental, or anti-car organizations. In the absence of any coherent moral or political discourse addressing the problem, commodity culture itself has effectively been delegated the task of reckoning with the meaning of the carnage on the streets, unmourned collateral damage of the automobile and the type of economic and technological progress it powerfully symbolizes.

Addressing this gap in the argument that follows, I will employ a flexible version of the notion of commodity fetishism to examine road kill both as the flashpoint for cultural anxieties lurking under the shiny surfaces of consumer capitalism, and as a structural problem arising from the spread of automobile-oriented transportation systems over the past century. While this concept has undergone many complex reformulations since Marx outlined it in the third volume of *Capital*,¹ my use of it will remain quite ecumenical, focusing on its ability to illuminate how road kill becomes visible in commodity culture and is constructed as an accident delinked from the system that produces it. In the broadest sense, commodity fetishism pertains to the processes through which capitalist commodity exchange detaches the value and meaning of objects from their social and material origins. Far from reflecting an a priori distinction between appearance and essence, Rosemary Hennessy argues, the concept underscores the commodity form's unique ability to effect a distinction "between what is visible and what is seeable"² at the level of everyday social life. As self-encapsulated objects imbued with economic and cultural values that seem to spring from their own being, commodities are the visible markers of historically organized social relations and productive processes that are ultimately seeable but not immediately apparent. In the classic Marxist formulation, a commodity is fetishized when it appears to us as an autonomous entity divorced from its origins in exploitative relations of production between capital and labor. In an expanded sense, fetishism also encompasses the colonial domination, environmental destruction, gender oppression, animal suffering, and other forms of exploitation that commodified social reality simultaneously incorporates and disavows.

The effects of commodity fetishism do not simply bear on the production of material goods, but on the production and reproduction of collective life more generally. As the expansionary logic of capitalism saturates social life with commodities, things—cars being a prime example—increasingly mediate our relationship to other people, the nonhuman world, and even our own bodies, identities, and capacities. Rationalized and abstracted from the complex network of relationships that make them possible, social structures and processes acquire a thing-like objectivity. Thus, Terry Eagleton writes, "the fact that social life is dominated by inanimate entities lends it a spurious air of naturalness and inevitability: society is no longer perceptible as a human construct, and therefore as humanly alterable."³ This form of fetishism, however, is not simply a mystified understanding of the power of commodities, but an expression of the coercive power of capitalist market regulation. In a competitive, profit-driven economic system in which production and consumption are coordinated through the mechanisms of commodity exchange, the impersonal push and pull of market forces can have real and often tragic

effects—either in the form of sudden crises or of cumulative social and ecological problems that the market's commodity logic cannot resolve. In the latter case, automobile transportation offers an excellent example of how the accelerated production and consumption of a single commodity, and the creation of a huge social and material infrastructure to support its use, gives rise to a "second nature" that acts back on humans and other animals alike with increasing hostility and violence.

VISIBLE, BUT NOT SEEN: MAKING SENSE OF "ROAD FAUNA"

As Hennessy suggests, the idea of commodity fetishism draws our attention to the socially constructed boundary between the visible and the seeable, calling upon us to theoretically and historically excavate the network of relationships and processes that has produced a particular object, but that is not immediately perceptible in its self-contained thinghood. Attempting to enhance the seeability of animal suffering amidst an ocean of decontextualized consumer goods, activists have often circulated disturbing images of abattoirs, vivisection facilities, fur farms, and so on, in order to conscientize people about ugly realities that are often obscured or denied in today's society. Contradicting the assumptions underlying this strategy, the stark visibility of broken animal bodies on roadways has generated mostly fatalism and disengagement, becoming as naturalized a part of contemporary landscapes as roads and automobile traffic themselves.

Since James R. Simmons published his pioneering book *Feathers and Fur on the Turnpike* (1938), the extent of the problem of "road fauna" has gradually become clearer, thanks largely to the independent efforts of various scientists, educators, and wildlife and humane societies.⁴ As road ecologists Richard T. Forman and Lauren E. Alexander argue, the proliferation of roads and vehicles in North America over the past several decades has made this problem so acute that, setting aside the meat industry, automobile collisions now surpass hunting as the leading human cause of vertebrate mortality, accounting for over a million deaths per day in the United States alone.⁵ Roger M. Knutson, founder of the International Simmons Society, estimates that the average density of "flattened fauna" on American highways now ranges between .429 and 4.10 bodies per mile, meaning that, depending on local conditions, a single trip of 1,000 miles could be the occasion for seeing 400 to 4,000 dead animals.⁶ As shocking as these numbers are, they probably significantly undershoot the mark, since they do not account for the many wounded animals that stumble off the road to die out of sight.

This problem is significant not only for its physical impact upon the animals involved in accidents and its role in driving vulnerable species to the

brink of extinction, but also for its growing influence over how people in automobile-oriented environments apprehend animals in their everyday lives. As cars and other forms of technology have increasingly come to shape contemporary experiences of the nonhuman world, road kill has become, alongside media images and branded consumer products, one of the dominant ways people encounter many species of animals. For every live creature a motorist in the United States today views along the roadside, as Knutson estimates in *Flattened Fauna: A Field Guide to Common Animals of the Roads, Streets, and Highways*, he or she is “likely to see anywhere from five to twenty-five animals plastered to the pavement.”⁷ Recognizing that many people today are likely to come across wildlife only after it has been rendered unrecognizable on the highway, Knutson’s “field guide” provides a taxonomic scheme for identifying pulverized animals, even offering ironic tips for differentiating between mufflers and armadillos, and between hubcaps and turtles. In a literal sense, road collisions transform living creatures into inert objects of public display. The very banality of this everyday violence reinforces the tendency in commodity culture to regard animal bodies as things whose routine destruction inspires morbid curiosity, but never empathy or concern.

In spite of the palpable visibility of road kill, mainstream animal advocacy groups have failed to accord it any significant degree of critical attention. This failure is illustrated clearly in the case of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). Although PETA activists were involved in the Trolli Road Kill Gummi Candy protest, the organization itself has in recent years led a campaign that demonstrates no more sensitivity to the issue than that shown by Kraft. “Roadkill: Meat without the Murder” pitches PETA’s message in an ingratiating manner to “die-hard meat lovers” who are tired of “guilt trips” from moralistic activists, urging them “to help save animals by scouring the streets and turning vehicular victims into vittles.” Millions of animals are killed on highways every year, the campaign website argues, and this “natural, organic, and pesticide free” meat goes to waste while many other animals are raised for human consumption on brutal factory farms. To this extent, eating animals killed in accidents is a way to indulge in one’s taste for flesh without supporting the atrocities of contemporary animal agriculture. Although laden with irony and calculated to tease meat eaters in some ways, this campaign falls in line with arguments made elsewhere by PETA president Ingrid Newkirk and with her embrace of other “victimless meats” such as laboratory-grown flesh.⁸

Leaving aside for now the environmental and utilitarian arguments for eating road kill, one of the interesting features of this campaign is the way it excludes certain forms of human-caused animal suffering from the ambit of compassion and ethical consideration:

At PETA, we realize that squirrels are squished by Subarus and 'possums get plowed over by Pathfinders. We don't like it, but it happens. At least, with these animals, there's a good chance that Thumper was scampering about, happy and free, until that final moment when the Rabbit came around the corner. Odds are, he never knew what hit him.

Such is not the case for all the cows, pigs, chickens, fish, and other commonly farmed animals who are unlucky enough to be born wearing the label "USDA meat." They have personalities and are quite capable of forming communities and relationships if given the chance. Instead, factory farms deny animals everything that is natural or enjoyable to them, condemning them to frustrating lives in filthy, cramped cages, stalls, and sheds, where only a steady diet of pharmaceuticals keeps them alive through the miserable and unnatural conditions.⁹

PETA's concern for factory-farmed animals contrasts sharply with its breezy dismissal of the fate of hundreds of millions of other creatures maimed and killed in collisions. The tone here is one of snickering bemusement, echoed in the playful alliteration, the reference to cartoon figures, and the jocular pairing and conflation of animals and automobile brand names. This calculated sense of ironic detachment is reinforced by the website's graphics, which feature an artfully blood-spattered car hood, photos of wounded animals over provocative captions ("It looks just like hamburger!"), and a masthead photo of a disfigured creature painted over by a yellow roadway line. PETA's critique of factory farms in this case hinges upon turning road kill itself into a fetishized object—one that can be pleasurable consumed, both physically and symbolically, without regard for animal suffering or the social processes that produced it.

Although extreme, PETA's campaign highlights the inability of contemporary animal advocacy groups to develop a coherent response to the problem of road kill. As Barbara Noske has argued, the largely urban-based animal movement's failure to address automobile hegemony is symptomatic of its tendency to frame animal oppression as a discrete moral issue disconnected from the wider social and ecological context in which it occurs.¹⁰ With its outlook and practice heavily influenced historically by the moral philosophy of figures such as Peter Singer, David Nibert asserts, this movement has tended to eschew structural and institutional critique, typically regarding "individual attitudes and moral deficiencies as underlying the problem of animal oppression."¹¹ However institutionally embedded they may be, acts such as debeaking caged chickens or torturing lab animals are easily regarded as deliberate behaviors amenable to moral judgment. In contrast, animal deaths related to car use are more readily seen as random, unintentional, and hence beyond moral scrutiny. Indeed, apart from the occasional sadist, the majority of drivers seek to avoid animal collisions—whether to avoid harming another creature, or to simply protect themselves and their vehicles. Locating respon-

sibility for road kill requires us to look beyond the plane of individual values and intentions, to consider how it, like automobility itself, is enmeshed with broader imperatives driving production, consumption, and government policy under late capitalism.

Ironically, the issue of road kill is most likely to be marginalized in critiques of animal oppression that explicitly target capitalist institutions and practices. As PETA's campaign shows, free-roaming animals killed in accidents are often seen as mercifully outside the capitalist commodity economy, in contrast to animals directly confined and exploited for profit by various industries. The animal movement has advanced powerful arguments against the treatment of other creatures as commodities, but it has tended to regard commodification less as a basic drive of capitalist production than as a matter of morally inappropriate attitudes and behaviors. Acceptance of the commodity status of animals, Gary Francione argues, underpins our "moral schizophrenia" toward them, leading us to hypocritically "love some animals, treat them as members of our family, and never once doubt their sentience, emotional capacity, self-awareness, or personhood, while at the same time we stick dinner forks into other animals."¹² Along similar lines, Craig Brestrup, in *Disposable Animals*, analyses how companion animals are treated as commodities by feckless "owners" who abandon them to premature death in shelters, often for the most trivial reasons. As he believes, the commodification of animals is a "moral failure" based on nonrelational, egocentric values that individuals can choose to either "affirm or reject."¹³ While Brestrup offers a cogent psychological analysis of the devaluation of animals in commodity culture, he fails to consider that, as Noske notes, a large proportion of animals in shelters have not been willfully abandoned, but are displaced victims of automobile collisions.¹⁴ The fate of these animals, and countless others killed on roads far from shelters, is not the consequence of individual moral failure, but the impersonal outcome of social and material structures that shape our collective patterns of habitation and mobility, as well as our relationships to the nonhuman world.

The concept of commodity fetishism enables us to retain a sense of moral opposition to the commodification of animals, while considering how this process is impersonally mediated through market exchange and tied in directly with capitalism's amoral imperatives of profit, accumulation, and expansion. Alongside the automobile industry, industries involved in the exploitation of animals are a central component of advanced capitalist economies today. Emergent segments of these economies, such as those associated with genetic engineering, involve an unprecedented manipulation and even patenting of animal life. As strict vegans well know, the bodies of animals are directly and indirectly incorporated into a vast array of consumer products, ranging from foodstuffs to clothing, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, housewares,

and even car products such as antifreeze, brake fluid, and tires. As Carol J. Adams asserts, the animal's living body is an "absent referent" in consumer society, continually fragmented and consumed as an object without history.¹⁵ The meat at the supermarket, for instance, has been both physically transformed into a commodity dissociated from the living animal, and conceptually transformed into de-animalized categories such as "beef" or "pork." By this means, Bettina Heinz and Ronald Lee argue, "commodity fetishism in marketplace exchange removes the production process from the meaning of meat and, thereby, silences the slaughter of animals."¹⁶ This severing of production and consumption, they suggest, has been amplified by global trade and the influence of marketing, enabling industry to continually intensify animal exploitation with little public opposition. In this regard, fetishism both constricts the meaning of meat by bracketing off the context of its production, and dramatically expands it by enabling marketing and other cultural practices to infuse the commodity with new values and connotations.

In one sense, the very visibility of road kill is a transgression of the fetishism that effaces animal suffering from commodity culture, signaling a return of the absent referent to the surface of public life. Unlike the unspeakable things that happen to animals behind laboratory doors and in factory farms, which leave little trace on the commodities on store shelves, road kill offers a highly conspicuous display of death and dismemberment. As I've suggested, the banality of road kill seems to undermine the hopes that some have placed upon the act of making animal victimization publicly visible. Jonathan Burt, for instance, drawing a strong link between visibility and the growth of moral awareness, has established a connection between the expansion of animal representation in photography, film, and other media, from the late nineteenth century onward, and the concomitant rise of animal welfare movements.¹⁷ One reason road kill breaks this link is that it comes into view as the impersonal outcome of uncoordinated flows of traffic, rather than as an injustice perpetrated willfully by an identifiable agent. That said, Burt and others have perhaps underestimated the extent to which commodity culture and advanced technology have demoralized the visible, presenting us with an endless flow of depthless images that often produce sated detachment or disorientation rather than empathy and commitment to social change.

As Rosemary Hennessy has argued in relation to contemporary queer politics, "visibility" within commodity culture is by no means uniformly empowering, often leading to the commercial and symbolic exploitation of the subjects on display and to a denial of the materiality of their oppression.¹⁸ In this context, coming to terms with the visibility of road kill requires us to consider how our prior understanding of animals as commodifiable, as subjects who are always latent or potential objects, enables us to emotionally and

ethically dissociate from the fragmented form their bodies take through the mediation of human activity. As a human creation, "road kill" is just as de-animalized as "beef" and just as open to cultural meanings that are bracketed off from the embodied experience of the suffering animal. This is one reason that road kill imagery has been so readily adopted as a grittily authentic visual logo for everything from guitar pedals to lottery tickets, sports teams, and record labels. This process of dissociation is exacerbated in a social environment where animals are largely visible as commodified images and spectacles detached from their material bodies. As John Berger has argued, the physical marginalization of animals within urban-industrial life has been accompanied by a countervailing explosion of commodified images of them.¹⁹ These stuffed toys, mascots, cartoons, picture books, nature shows, blockbusters, and so on provide us with consoling images of anthropomorphized creatures that express our yearning for connection with animals while turning them into projection screens for our own hopes and fears. Such images are themselves fetishes, abstract and simulated animal bodies invested with socially produced meanings and divorced from the material context of human domination.

Much like popular films such as *Babe*, *Chicken Run*, and *Charlotte's Web*, products like Trolli Road Kill Gummi Candy and Rikki-Tikki Roadkill explicitly acknowledge the fact of animal victimization while offering symbolic strategies for recontaining the anxieties that arise from this acknowledgement. Unlike the films, which show us exemplary creatures whose spirit and ingenuity enable them to escape being commodified like the rest of their kind, such goods simply collapse the boundary between animals and their commodified representations, rendering their plight as magically inconsequential as Wile E. Coyote's falls from cliffs. In the tradition of *Bambi Meets Godzilla*, their transgressive quality doesn't come from a realistic rendering of violent death, but from a gleeful trampling of conventional animal representations. The looming presence of physical violence is indirectly acknowledged in the disparity between road kill animals and their guileless cartoon counterparts, but only by rendering these animals so abject that they seem to invite and enjoy their own victimization. As Mike Michael argues, representations of road-killed animals today are often "cartoonified"—featuring comically protruding tongues, crossed and bulging eyes, buck teeth, expressions of dazed shock, and other stereotypical signs of imbecility. "By virtue of being cartoonified," he writes, "the corporeally traumatized animal can be portrayed as continuing to express surprise and display stupidity. That is to say, cartoonification at once warrants these deaths and serves in their partial denial."²⁰

Other less representational road kill commodities also offer ways of expressing, enjoying, and symbolically recontaining anxieties arising from experiences of roadway carnage. Distilling death into a small bottle of clear fluid,

for instance, *Liquid Road Kill* is—as its label announces—designed to smell “like the rotting carcass of a small animal that you might pass on the highway. You know the smell . . . it’s so bad that you can’t get your windows rolled up fast enough and it lingers inside your car for what seems like hours.” Referencing a form of death that is abstract rather than particular, this product enables its owner to cap and selectively experience the smell of decaying flesh in an aestheticized manner, and to use it socially in pranks that confuse people with repulsive odors lacking any clear origin. Goods like these recuperate the unasimilated remains of road-killed animals within the commodity form, offering them up for consumption in ways that reaffirm human mastery. Clothing, jewelry, and other road kill accessories made directly from animal bodies illustrate this fusion of utility and symbolic mastery. Down Under Enterprises, for instance, is an Australian company that sells customized leather hats made from the skins of several road-killed animals and trimmed up with rattlesnake rib bones, mink jawbones, and “coon penis bone.” This hat is utilitarian yet contemptuous, emphasizing absolute dominance over the dead animals—much like the wine goblets Viking warriors were fabled to have made out of the skulls of their vanquished foes.

This tension between the animal body’s pure utility and symbolic value is particularly evident with respect to the status of road kill as food—or “road pizza” as it is colloquially termed. PETA notwithstanding, actual consumption of road flesh has remained marginal in contemporary culture, confined to circles of survivalists, utterly impoverished country dwellers, cryptic celebrities like Viggo Mortensen, and periodic “road kill cook-offs” in the rural United States. In purely symbolic terms, road kill cuisine is a diversified market sector—comprising an array of road kill cookbooks, spices and sauces, gag products such as Roadkill Helper and Campbell’s Cream of Roadkill soup labels, and firms such as the Road Kill Cafe, a 1990s New England restaurant that served mock dishes such as “Smear of Deer,” “Center Line Bovine,” and “Outta Luck Duck.” Following the lead of other steak-iron businesses, one California company sells The Original Road Kill Griddle, an embossed griddle that burns the words *road kill* into ordinary burgers and steaks, packaged along with road pylons that transform the cooking area into an accident scene. In this case, road kill literally becomes an abstract “brand” that makes conventional acts of consumption seem subversive. Eating simulated road kill is a source of perverse pleasure not simply because of the lingering threat of physical contamination, but because the public nature of the animal’s death has symbolically polluted the meat. By breaking with taboo and enjoying the familiar taste of this “branded” meat, the consumer dissolves any lingering anxieties about messy roadway violence and, indeed, the whole status of animals as food.

**“THE COMMODITY THAT IS EATING THE WORLD”:
AUTOMOBILES, CAPITALISM, AND STRUCTURAL
VIOLENCE**

The notion of commodity fetishism nicely captures the ambivalent and contradictory nature of capitalist “progress,” whose blind drive for accumulation and expansion becomes an end in itself, unhinged from any non-economic measure of value, need, or rationality. The apogee of commodification, as Fredric Jameson has compellingly argued, is quantitative abundance alongside qualitative loss: the unique and distinct “ends and values” of various forms of life and activity are extinguished under the rein of abstract exchange value, which reduces everything “to a means for its own consumption.”²¹ Thus, in today’s world, animal commodities and road kill novelties of every conceivable variety proliferate as biodiversity declines and species extinction rates reach record levels. At the same time, paved-over, placeless landscapes become populated with enchanted, animalized objects—Thunderbirds, Impalas, Vipers, Mustangs, Rams, Eagles, Rabbits—that mimic and memorialize the vital, organic life they destroy.

A recent Canadian television advertisement for the 2008 Ford Escape Hybrid²² captures the unique combination of nostalgia and denial that the contradictions of automobility often inspire. In it, a family with a young daughter is driving slowly along an unpaved road through a pristine forest echoing with the sounds of birds and crickets, when they come upon a parallel “family” of deer. Because of the quiet hybrid engine, the otherwise skittish deer remain unperturbed as the humans roll to a stop, lowering their automatic windows to gaze in awe at the magnificent animals. After a poignant moment of eye contact between the human daughter and a young deer calf, the light green SUV pulls away, fading slowly into the verdant hues of the surrounding forest. Suddenly, a pine cone dislodges from a branch and falls to the forest floor, causing the deer to scatter in fright. At one level, this commercial is a clear plug for the eco-friendliness of hybrid technology, highlighting not only the quietness of the vehicles, but their ability to exist peacefully within primeval nature. At another level, it simply recapitulates one long-familiar motif in auto ads, whereby vehicles become a native part of the environment, affording us controlled experiences of natural wonderment, and allowing us to commune with wild animals that reflect suppressed parts of ourselves. Effaced from this idyllic picture are all identifiable features of the spaces in which cars most frequently move—the gridlocked traffic, expressways, intersections, overpasses, strip malls, parking lots, ex-urban business parks, fast-food signs, tract housing, roadside garbage, and—more to the point—dead animals. Ironically enough for Ford drivers, not only are deer the large mammal most often killed

by auto collisions, but all animals vulnerable to road traffic are likely to be put in greater danger by quiet vehicles that are harder to hear in advance.

In spite of its cultural associations with freedom, progress, and technological mastery, Peter Freund and George Martin assert, the automobile has today become “the commodity that is eating the world”²³: swelling rapidly in number, continually annexing more social and biophysical space for its purposes, demanding huge supplies of material and economic resources, generating levels of pollution and waste beyond the earth’s sink capacity, and leaving a trail of other seemingly intractable social and ecological problems in its wake. The dramatic growth in the global automobile fleet over the past century is one powerful confirmation of Marx’s famous dictum that capitalist economic growth presents itself in the first instance as “an immense accumulation of commodities.” In the past sixty years, the number of motorized vehicles in the world has expanded almost twelve-fold, growing from roughly 70 million in 1950 to over 826 million in 2006—more than two-thirds of which are in North America, Western Europe, and Japan.²⁴ One researcher, drawing upon U.S. government statistics, predicts that the number of passenger cars in the world will surpass one billion by the year 2014, and will rise to an astounding four billion if motor vehicle density across the globe were to ever converge with that of the industrial world today.²⁵

Although the environmental and health implications of such scenarios are dire, even current rates of automobile use are dangerously unsustainable. Aside from its insatiable demand for fossil fuels—which bespeaks its disproportionate responsibility for problems like smog, global warming, and geopolitical conflict in the Middle East—automobile transportation in the industrial world is also a key cause of toxic air and water pollution; health problems such as cancer, asthma, and lung disease; and the wanton destruction of wetlands, agricultural land, wilderness areas, animal habitat, and urban green space. Most notably, as I’ve discussed above, the automobile has been a leading agent of violence against diverse forms of animal life—including human life. In the century since Marinetti’s famous *Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism* (1909),²⁶ whose tribute to the cleansing, technologically enhanced violence of modernity begins with a car crash narrative, automobile accidents have claimed over 30 million human deaths globally, escalating to approximately 1.2 million per year in 2005, and are poised to become one of the top three causes of human death in the near future.²⁷ Beyond fatal collisions, humans—and, presumably, the nonhuman animals who share the earth’s air and water with us—are sickened and killed in even greater numbers by automobile-related pollution and toxic releases.²⁸ While the structural violence of automobile-oriented transportation systems has become increasingly pronounced, Freund and Martin argue, public discussion of its manifestations continues to address

the exceptional rather than the normal, focusing largely on accidents, technological shortcomings, faulty regulations, and the irresponsibility of individual drivers.²⁹

The overall lack of critical public discourse around the structural effects of automobile transportation suggests that this system has become so deeply integrated into the life of advanced capitalism as to seem like an innate fact of life. Although ubiquitous and ordinary, the car is—to borrow Marx's well-known term—a “social hieroglyph” that quietly encodes within itself key features of an entire mode of production and consumption. Indeed, Mark Dery provocatively asserts, the automobile is a symbolically potent “totem” of postwar capitalism, an “ever-present reminder of the assembly line that made industrial modernity possible, Ur-commodity at the heart of postwar consumer culture, essential ingredient in the rise of suburbia and the dereliction of . . . inner cities.”³⁰ As John Urry argues, the automobile is not simply a material good, but the key node in a system of linkages between dominant economic, political, and cultural process in contemporary capitalism.³¹ The production and consumption of automobiles has become an important economic indicator in its own right, and is directly correlated with aggregate consumption of fossil fuels, metals, plastics, rubber, and other materials and with ongoing growth in other sectors, including land development, construction, road maintenance, retailing, fast food, mining, and many other industries. Although the car offers drivers a sense of self-motivated freedom, this freedom is collectively enabled, heavily dependent upon political decisions that shape land-use and transportation options, and upon the vast collective resources devoted to the automobile's social and material infrastructure. Indeed, John Bellamy Foster argues, the coordinated efforts of economic and political elites have made the “auto-industrial complex” the key axis around which accumulation has turned for much of the past century.³²

To this extent, sustaining high levels of economic growth and profitability has historically hinged largely upon fostering individualized forms of consumption and making the car culturally and physically indispensable for the majority of people in the over-developed world. In the first instance, the multi-billion dollar automobile marketing industry has become a significant agent of commodity fetishism, investing the car with complex connotations of freedom, power, status, and unrepressed animality, and helping to make it “the one commodity of the industrial age that holds out the greatest promise of liberation through the possession of things.”³³ That said, intensive automobile use in the contemporary world is not simply a culturally induced habit, but a structurally induced need deriving from the pragmatic pressures of coordinating one's work, domestic, and leisure routines within a social and material environment where alternatives to the car are often impractical or nonexistent. By spurring a progressive frag-

mentation and dispersal of human settlements and unbundling key sites of everyday activity, Freund and Martin argue, "the very social organization of space that auto-centered transport fosters helps to further auto dependence and to mask any sense of realistic alternatives to automobility."³⁴ Routinely immersed in the "second nature" of car-dependent environments, the diffuse and incremental effects of automobile transportation, such as road kill, are difficult to immediately grasp as a structured whole, and seem far beyond the power of any individual to personally influence.

One of the most dramatic of the cumulative effects of automobilization has been upon animal habitat. Over the past few generations, automobile-oriented land use within and beyond urban areas has radically transformed the natural landscape, exposing many species of animals to new types of risk and danger to which it has been very difficult to adapt. As Richard T. T. Forman has argued, the modern road system is the "largest human object on earth" and one of the leading weapons in human society's large-scale assault upon biodiversity.³⁵ According to some conservation biologists, road building and sprawl, along with off-road driving, is now the single biggest threat to habitat loss in the industrial world.³⁶

This process has led to an ongoing degradation and fragmentation of animal habitat, confining wild populations into enclosures too small for their needs and forcing animals to attempt road crossings for access to food, water, cover, migration routes, nesting sites, and potential mates. Of course, roads are not simply dead zones that animals are forced to reluctantly cross, but places that often carry a positive attraction for animals seeking to bask in the radiant heat of the pavement, dig into roadside food scraps, or simply to avail themselves of the most efficient and unobstructed route through fragmented terrain. Unsurprisingly, habitat fragmentation and road kill are currently among the main drivers of extinction for threatened species such as woodland caribou of the Pacific Northwest, Florida panthers, cougars, grizzly bears, and various types of lizards, tortoises, and birds. Overriding the mobility needs of other species, automobile-oriented transportation has extended human incursions into previously wild and unsettled areas, intensifying forms of residential and commercial "splatter sprawl" that create aggressively rationalized landscapes in which animals become, at best, nuisances or intruders.

In this light, as Mike Michael has emphasized, road kill is largely a structural byproduct of the continual mapping of automobility onto "animobility."³⁷ Michael's theoretical outlook, unfortunately, leads him first to unduly idealize and reify these discrete systems of mobility, and then to celebrate their interpenetration—in the form of road kill—as if this were a welcome, subversive example of postmodern hybridity and boundary-crossing. A better formulation is put forth by Barbara Noske, who argues that road kill and other struc-

tural effects of automobile transportation are the consequence of human mobility “becoming more and more unanimal-like”³⁸—that is, more mechanized, disembodied, sensually attenuated, and abstracted from the complexity of places through which we travel. Encased within a “metal cocoon” that becomes their technologically enhanced prosthetic body,³⁹ drivers—like television viewers—gain access to a wider range of experiences, but such experiences are transformed by their “screens” into a rapid succession of visual impressions without context or independent value. The inability to respond morally and politically to the problem of road kill is, in this regard, partly related to the phenomenological experience of driving, in which speed and mastery go along with a flattening of experience to its visual dimension and a loss of affective involvement with the sensuous life around us.

In this cultural context, the radical “othering” of road kill—as a commodified spectacle of debased and dominated bodily difference—not only is morally problematic, but prevents us from seeing the fate of animals as a reflection of our own enduring vulnerability and mortality, as a reminder of how the social world we have collectively constructed also violates, objectifies, constrains, and oppresses members of our own species. Breaking through this type of fetishism will require more than isolated wildlife corridors and overpasses and other small gestures toward the development of a more animal-friendly auto infrastructure. Indeed, it will require a wholesale political challenge to automobile dependency, the auto-industrial complex, and—more broadly—the socially, psychically, and environmentally corrosive logic of commodification itself. Asserting this form of collective human agency is, ironically, one important step in developing a more ethical relationship to other animals and a richer appreciation of the pleasures and possibilities our own animal being.