

Meat Culture

Edited by

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BRILL

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Contents

Acknowledgements	VII
List of Contributors	VIII

- 1 **What is Meat Culture?** 1
Annie Potts
- 2 **Derrida and *The Sexual Politics of Meat*** 31
Carol J. Adams and Matthew Calarco
- 3 **Rotten to the Bone: Discourses of Contamination and Purity in the European Horsemeat Scandal** 54
Nik Taylor and Jordan McKenzie
- 4 **Live Exports, Animal Advocacy, Race and ‘Animal Nationalism’** 73
Jacqueline Dalziell and Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel
- 5 ***The Whopper Virgins*: Hamburgers, Gender, and Xenophobia in Burger King’s Hamburger Advertising** 90
Vasile Stănescu
- 6 **With Care for Cows and a Love for Milk: Affect and Performance in Swedish Dairy Industry Marketing Strategies** 109
Tobias Linné and Helena Pedersen
- 7 **“Peace and Quiet and Open Air”: *The Old Cow Project*** 129
Melissa Boyde
- 8 **“Do You Know Where the Light Is?” Factory Farming and Industrial Slaughter in Michel Faber’s *Under the Skin*** 149
Kirsty Dunn
- 9 **Down on the Farm: Why do Artists Avoid ‘Farm’ Animals as Subject Matter?** 163
Yvette Watt

- 10 **The Provocative Elitism of ‘Personhood’ for Nonhuman Creatures in Animal Advocacy Parlance and Polemics** 184
Karen Davis
- 11 **“I Need Fish Fingers and Custard”: The Irruption and Suppression of Vegan Ethics in *Doctor Who*** 198
Matthew Cole and Kate Stewart
- 12 **On Ambivalence and Resistance: Carnism and Diet in Multi-species Households** 222
Erika Cudworth
- 13 **Negotiating Social Relationships in the Transition to Vegan Eating Practices** 243
Richard Twine
- 14 **Critical Ecofeminism: Interrogating ‘Meat,’ ‘Species,’ and ‘Plant’** 264
Greta Gaard
- Index** 289

Derrida and *The Sexual Politics of Meat*

Carol J. Adams and Matthew Calarco

What sorts of intersections, associations, or refusals might be found between Jacques Derrida's work and *The Sexual Politics of Meat*? Carol and Matt decided that a discussion format might enable them to explore answers to this question. What follows represents a part of that larger conversation. While Carol's work in decoding the sexual politics of meat stretches over more than thirty years, expanding into close consideration of the functioning of representations, Derrida's elaboration on his neologism *carnophallogocentrism* remained largely suggestive and deferred. Carol and Matt recognize that this difference, among many other reasons, means that their goal never was to compare and contrast but to create a dialogue and exploration. They wish to thank Vasile Stănescu for suggesting that they explore this topic together.

Matt:

One of the more evident points of contact between your work and Derrida's writings on animals can be found in (1) your overarching project of critically examining and contesting the sexual politics of meat, and (2) Derrida's occasional attempts to think through the connections between subjectivity, sexism, and eating meat by way of his concept of *carnophallogocentrism*. In order to explore this overlap between the sexual politics of meat and *carnophallogocentrism*, it might be useful for me to lay out a few of Derrida's ideas in a bit more detail and suggest some points at which your and his project overlap and diverge.

It is important to note that Derrida's work on *carnophallogocentrism* (and animals more generally) was, despite his occasional protestations to the contrary, never in the foreground in the same manner that the sexual politics of meat is in your work. That Derrida nearly always deferred attention from questions concerning *carnophallogocentrism* and animals is indicative of both a certain caution and also (I would suggest) a lack of a sense of urgency in his writings. He always found time to write on other pressing socio-political issues and develop his positions in great detail on many of those issues; but when issues concerning animals and other nonhuman beings arose, he most often held any careful analysis of such matters in abeyance. There can be little doubt that Derrida was cautious when approaching issues surrounding animals

and non-human life primarily because of the sheer difficulty and magnitude required for a full treatment of the topic. But his tendency to hold questions about animals in abeyance was perhaps not just a symptom of this caution and hyper-prudence. It is also clear—or at least, nearly everything in his writings and political activity would suggest—that the transformation of the living conditions of many animals as well as the transformation of human relationships with animals simply was not one of his over-arching priorities in the same way it is for your work or mine.

So, allow me to start off with a basic discussion of the concept of carnophallogocentrism and how it fits into Derrida's work. He mentions this concept in several of his writings, but his most sustained examination of it occurs in a 1988 interview with Jean-Luc Nancy entitled "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject" (1991, 113–14). The interview is Derrida's contribution to Jean-Luc Nancy's attempt to take stock of recent work in so-called post-humanist thought (that is, thinking that proceeds from the critical interrogation of 'humanism,' or what it means to be a human 'self' or 'subject' in the Western philosophical tradition). Throughout the interview, Derrida repeatedly makes the point that, despite the seemingly radical and thoroughgoing critique of selfhood and subjectivity in recent Continental philosophy (and in Heideggerian and Levinasian thought in particular), insufficient attention has been paid both to the anthropocentric nature of dominant Western philosophical conceptions of subjectivity and also to the lingering anthropocentrism in the more cutting-edge, post-humanist critiques of subjectivity. In other words, he detects a certain dogmatic adherence to anthropocentrism even among his more sophisticated fellow post-humanist critics. It is in this context that Derrida tries to distance himself from dogmatic anthropocentrism by calling attention to the carnophallogocentric constitution of human subjectivity in the Western philosophical and cultural traditions.

Derrida's earliest writings aimed to expose the *logo*-centric assumptions of these traditions (logocentrism here denoting the privileges and priorities granted by Western philosophy to the rational, self-aware, self-present, speaking subject).¹ And, when his attention turned to issues dealing more directly with sexuality and gender, he tried to demonstrate the inextricable linkages between logo-centrism and *phallo*-centrism (phallogocentrism here denoting the quintessentially virile and masculine aspects of Western social institutions and conceptions of subjectivity), leading him to use the neologism

1 See especially Part I of Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

phallogocentrism to denote these joint phenomena.² In “‘Eating Well,’” Derrida suggests that *carno* should be added to *phallogocentrism* in order to emphasize that the notion of the subject that is being critiqued in post-humanist thought should be understood not simply as a fully self-present, speaking, masculine subject but also as a quintessentially *human, animal-flesh-eating* subject.

By the late 1980s, then, Derrida is arguing that the critical deconstruction of subjectivity should be seen as a critical deconstruction of carnophallogocentrism. This project calls for an intersectional analysis of at least three coordinates or registers in the constitution of subjectivity:

- self-presence (the *logos* of self-mastery, reason, speech, and transparent, unmediated access to one’s inner mental life);
- masculinity (the manner in which virile and masculine ideals are infused throughout and dominate the socio-cultural order); and
- carnivorousness (the requirement of the literal and symbolic consumption of flesh, a commitment to anthropocentrism, the hierarchical ranking of human subjects over non-human animals)

While there are significant differences between the sexual politics of meat and the deconstructive analysis of carnophallogocentrism as I have initially explained it here, I wonder if we might first turn to a discussion of how your project has certain *positive* affinities with Derrida’s work.

Carol:

I have a sense that in its analysis, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* intersects with ‘carnophallogocentrism’ in several ways. Derrida was attempting to name the primary social, linguistic, and material practices that go into becoming a subject within the West and how explicit carnivorousness lies at the heart of classical notions of subjectivity, especially male subjectivity. Similarly, I have been trying to show how a feminist analysis that decenters male subjectivity and challenges a violence long associated with human male behavior is impelled to include a critique of carnivorousness, too. I argue that a challenge to the male-defined Western subject needs to include challenging the foods that are assumed to be ‘his’ foods. In this, I make clear that I am not talking just about ‘men’ but how everyone in the West is implicated by the sexual politics of meat.

2 The “indissociability” of logocentrism and phallogocentrism are discussed most lucidly by Derrida in “‘This Strange Institution Called Literature’: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” in Derek Attridge, ed., *Acts of Literature* (London: Routledge, 1992), 57–60.

I want to suggest that the carnophallogocentric subject is the subject created by a culture with the foundational premise of the sexual politics of meat. In other words, the sexual politics of meat is constituting this carnophallogocentric subject at many levels. I am not claiming this is the only force at work; I am asserting its influence is not negligible and needs to be recognized.

Matt, you identify three coordinates or registers in the construction of subjectivity that constitute, in a sense, the carnophallogocentric subject. Similarly, I propose several aspects to *The Sexual Politics of Meat*. It is not one 'thing,' one quality, one 'fact,' it is, rather, kaleidoscopic and shifting in how we experience it, but at the minimum contains these parts:

- The association of virility and meat eating
- The functioning of the structure of the absent referent
- Women and animals positioned as overlapping absent referents in a patriarchal culture

Virility and Meat Eating

In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, I argue that a link exists between meat eating and notions of masculinity and virility in the Western world. Meat eating societies gain human male identification by their choice of food, creating and recreating an experience of male bonding in various male-identified locations, such as steak houses, fraternities, strip clubs, or (domesticated) at a barbecue.

Meat eating bestows an idea of masculinity on the individual consumer. Popular culture manifestations of the sexual politics of meat can be found imbricated throughout various media and in personal behavior. Generally, they imply that a man needs meat and that a woman should feed him meat. From French commercials to newspaper advertisements for Father's Day, the theme is reiterated.

Meat eating is an act of self-definition as a privileged (male-identified) human.

A belief exists that strength (male-identified) comes from eating 'strong animals' (for instance, 'beef'), and that vegetables represent passivity. Thus, conventionally, vegetarianism was considered appropriate for women and anyone associated with women. These ideas, which appear in the first chapter of *The Sexual Politics of Meat* seem to resonate with Derrida's idea of "carnivorous virility." A bumper sticker like "Eat Beef. The West Wasn't Won on Salad" exemplifies this attitude. In one statement, it is putting down foods associated

with women, elevating animal foods, and at its heart, celebrating the genocide of Native Americans.

The issue is not only human exceptionalism in the myriad ways it is recuperated to justify eating animals; it is how the human is conceived, as male-identified, with a male-identified diet. A 2006 Hummer advertisement features a man buying tofu in a supermarket. Next to him a man is buying gobs of raw meat. The tofu-buying man notices this and becomes alert to and anxious about his virility, apparently compromised by his tofu-buying. He hurries from the grocery store and heads straight to a Hummer dealership. He buys a new Hummer and is shown happily driving away, munching on carrot. The original tag line for the ad was “Restore your manhood” (Stevenson 2006). (It was changed to “restore the balance”). The implication that the Hummer acts as compensation for the vegetarian man’s failure to eat manly protein suggests that one aspect of culture committed to carnophallogocentric subjectivity is the belief in the logic of the sexual politics of meat.

Since *The Sexual Politics of Meat* was published, I have noticed that many popular culture appeals to men (especially white, heterosexual men as in the Hummer ad) seem to be rebuilding what feminism and veganism have threatened. In terms of *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, we see several recuperative responses that seek to reinstate manhood, meat eating, and both interactively. From unsophisticated wall paintings on restaurants to slick Superbowl commercials, the message that meat’s meaning is expressed through sexual politics is constantly recreated. The ads that I examine in *The Sexual Politics of Meat Slide Show* appeal to, reassure, flatter, massage, reinforce the carnophallogocentric subject Derrida espied.

The Absent Referent I

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

The absent referent is that which separates the flesh eater from the animal and the animal from the end product. The function of the absent referent is to allow for the moral abandonment of a being. In many quotidian ways, the

absent referent functions to cloak the violence inherent to meat eating, to protect the conscience of the meat eater, and to render the idea of individual animals as immaterial in the face of someone's specific and selfish desires to consume them.

Implicit in Derrida's use of *carno* is sacrifice; but *explicit* in his use is 'carnivorism,' in other words, flesh eating. What the concept of the absent referent uncovers is both the fact that animals die individually, and that we wish to keep hidden what we are doing to animals. We cannot lose track of the fact that flesh eating occurs through an act of violence that the 'carnist,' in Melanie Joy's (2010) terms, accomplishes through an activity of consumption.

The act of killing animals (like the act of eating meat) is part of the project of constructing carnophallogocentric subjectivity. Isn't the violence underlying the act an important aspect of both 'sacrifice' in Derrida's term and in associating the act with phallogocentrism? Recently, scholars have begun studying the 'New Carnivore' or 'neocarn' movement, in which popular food shows (Gordon Ramsay's *The F Word* and Jamie Oliver's *Fowl Dinners*) display the killing and consumption of domesticated animals the celebrity chefs have raised (Parry 2010, 381–96). The need to reassure masculinity is an unstated project of these television shows—a sort of desperate performative rebuilding of the carnophallogocentric subject through violence. They want one sort of honesty (killing) and hide behind a greater dishonesty. The need to make the kill present is a hypermasculine reinscription of the sexual politics of meat.

Let us say "the structure of the absent referent is xyz" (the literal death of the animal, the hiding of the facts of that death, the lifting of the animals' death to a higher meaning through metaphor and consumption). With these television shows, we see x and z still functioning (the objectifying, the eating of a dead object) but y is not absent; it has been made demonstrably present (the death is not hidden). Why 'y'? And the answer turns on the issue of the instantiation of the human male subject who, in these instances, requires not just consumers of goods, but consumers of their actions, in a sense, voyeurs.

The reiterative nature of the sexual politics of meat (finding new ways of reinforcing 'carnivorous virility') suggests how fundamental it is to the operation of Western culture.

Women and Animals as Overlapping Absent Referents

In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, I argue that women and animals are overlapping absent referents. This is tied to another aspect of the absent referent, when a dominant and domineering language consumes and negates the violent

transformation of living to dead and ‘lifts’ that experience into metaphor. Then it is applied to vulnerable or otherwise disenfranchised beings.

This structure of overlapping absent referents also moves in the other direction as well, in which women’s objectification becomes the basis for cultural constructions about meat animals. It was difficult to find a sound bite for this theory, but by the time I wrote *The Pornography of Meat* I had one: in a patriarchal, meat eating world animals are feminized and sexualized; women are animalized.

In terms of overlapping cultural images involving animals and women, things have gotten worse. Meat advertisements that sexualize and feminize animals have been around for more than thirty years, and during this time, they have become more widespread and more explicit. What *Hustler* pornographically imagined women as thirty-five years ago, Burger King, Carls’ Jr, and many other dead animal purveyors recreate and suggest now. You can find *Hustler’s* image of a woman going through a meat grinder image prettified in an ad for the HBO series *The Comeback* featuring Lisa Kudrow. Burger King takes the *Hustler* mentality—women as meat, as hamburger, and stylizes it for Super Bowl commercials. The 2009 *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue (“Bikinis or Nothing”) includes an ad for Arby’s with hands removing two hamburger buns as though they are taking off a bikini top.

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

I propose that in general women are visually consumed; animals literally consumed. Then, I push on just *who* we are consuming. This may be one place where I make explicit something that may be only implicit in Derrida. If the carnophallogocentric subject knows ‘himself’ to be a subject through the inflection of meat eating and male-centeredness, then implicitly there are objects in ‘his’ life that contribute to the creation of ‘his’ subjectivity.

I am interested in those *objects*, and who our culture allows to become those objects, and how the process of objectification is working. In my work, I found an overlap of cultural images of sexual violence against women and fragmentation and dismemberment of nature and the body in Western culture. I propose that a cycle of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption linked butchering with both the representation and reality of sexual violence in Western cultures, that normalizes sexual consumption. I believe this aspect of my work ties in with Derrida’s concern about “commonly accredited oppositional limits” (2009, 36). If I can appropriate Derrida’s term to explicate my

ideas, carnophallogocentric subjectivity is invested in the oppositional framework of Western culture, and benefits from the lowering/debasing of some beings that accompanies this oppositional framework. But what I try to show is how the oppositional points (human/animal, man/woman for instance) are intensified by linking two parts of the negated side—female and animal. I do not believe these points are fixed, nor do I necessarily simply valorize the side that has been lowered. I am concerned with the dynamics of linking that occur on both sides.

This linking is important, because the carnophallogocentric subject is constituted, in part, through the power to objectify living beings, to make other subjects into objects. This subject whose qualities of self-mastery, reason, speech, etc., feel inherent—is not one way that this subject *knows* his (or her) self-mastery, reason, speech etc. precisely through the objectification of other beings?

I remember when O. J. Simpson was first suspected of murdering his wife. Often, the comments that I heard were that he was such a ‘charismatic’ person. No one seemed to stop and think perhaps there was a link between his *charisma* and his battering behavior. He could behave the way he did in public because of what he was doing, controlling another person, in private. Similarly, is not one aspect of the construction of the carnophallogocentric subject the ‘consumption’ or ‘sacrifice’ (forced, imposed, not selected) of other beings to his (or her) needs or wants?

One of the things *The Sexual Politics of Meat* was trying to do was to capture the dynamics of this.

Matt:

Your remarks here on the contingent and historical aspects of the sexual politics of meat serve as an excellent starting point to carry our discussion forward. I would like to use those remarks to press on the question of whether this kind of attention to the sexual politics of meat in your work and carnophallogocentrism in Derrida’s work is itself in need of a supplement.

Carnophallogocentrism as *the* Dominant Schema of Subjectivity

When Derrida turns in the late 1980s to a discussion of carnophallogocentrism, this turn is the direct result of his earlier efforts to pinpoint both the dominant tendency of metaphysics and its unthought ground. The dominant tendency of metaphysics for Derrida is to elaborate and privilege a certain thought of

presence and identity understood most often as a self-present, self-conscious subject. In this gesture, he is quite close to Heidegger. But where Derrida critically and importantly departs from Heidegger is in his characterization of subjectivity as specifically involving *human*, *masculine*, and *carnivorous* dimensions. These dimensions were not a point of focus for Heidegger, nor are they for most neo-Heideggerians. That Derrida takes these specific dimensions seriously is very much to his credit, as he is one of the very few Continental philosophers who have noticed not just the phallogocentric aspects of metaphysical notions of subjectivity but also the anthropocentric and carnivorous tendencies of that tradition.

But I think Derrida also overplays his hand a bit on this point. Although his remarks on carnophallogocentrism are in no way programmatic, they are nevertheless intended to capture the deep structure, the “dominant schema” of subjectivity of Western metaphysics. And it is precisely here, in the attempt to name definitively the dominant and quintessential form of subjectivity that I think he overreaches. Although I would readily and enthusiastically agree that the concept of carnophallogocentrism brings together important and significant trends in so-called Western metaphysics, I doubt that it captures *the* dominant schema of metaphysical subjectivity. Are there not other important trends and tendencies to add to this hyphenated list? Why limit our analysis to logocentrism, phallogocentrism, and carnivorousism? Why do these three registers have priority?

The point here is not that this list should be extended to 4+n registers in order to be made accurate and complete. The list of forces and relations that constitute us as subjects can obviously never be made complete. Instead, I am wondering whether we should subscribe to this neo-Heideggerian logic of dominant schemas in the first place. Is there really something called ‘Western metaphysics’ whose dominant schema can be uncovered? And even if we were to arrive at such knowledge about the inner workings of Western metaphysics, what is the ultimate wager or hope behind this approach? What are the critical and transformative implications for uncovering carnophallogocentrism as the dominant schema of Western metaphysics? We might also ask: How would this kind of neo-Heideggerian approach relate to other critical analyses of Western culture that differ substantially in their focus and strategies (I am thinking, for example, of indigenist or Marxist critical approaches that often have very different premises and critical aims from those of deconstruction).

By setting up things in this neo-Heideggerian way (the search for dominant schemas, definitive limits of metaphysics, and so on), Derrida ends up (whether intentionally or not) framing the philosophical and critical task in

such a way as to foreclose other analyses and to cut off linkages with other approaches. By contrast with Derrida, I would much prefer to understand the discussion of carnophallogocentrism and the sexual politics of meat as but one way to uncover a force that is (to use your words) “not negligible and needs to be recognized.” If we begin from this space and in this kind of modest theoretical spirit, it creates the possibility for additional linkages between critical analyses and for allowing such analyses to mutually inform one another in a critical and progressive manner.

Ultimately, the problem I have with Derrida’s analysis of carnophallogocentrism is that it remains at bottom almost entirely intra-philosophical and intra-theoretical. To explain this point further: What I find important about the concept of carnophallogocentrism is that it is, among other things, useful for (1) capturing important tendencies in our culture surrounding the constitution of ‘properly’ human subjects, and (2) suggesting possible linkages among various critical perspectives and movements for social transformation (in this case, feminism and movements on behalf of animals). But the latter considerations are, at best, secondary for Derrida and always deferred in favor of his primary interest. His primary interest seems to lie in a careful philosophical analysis of the deep structures of metaphysics (we find hundreds upon hundreds of pages dedicated to careful readings of Heidegger, Levinas, Lacan, Descartes, Kant, and so on)—and not in creating alliances across radical and critical practices.

This point should not be taken to suggest that Derrida is entirely uninterested in radical politics and social transformation; but it is hard to resist the conclusion that such interests remain in the background. Any bridge that might be built between his preferred method of patient philosophical analysis and radical political transformation is almost always deferred in his work, much like ‘the question of the animal’ is often deferred. And when he is pressed on the connections between deconstruction and social transformation, he most often dodges the question by implying that such questions are driven by those who expect a political ‘program’ from him. But it is not the case that I or others expect or desire a program from him (I doubt anyone who is involved in this discussion or reads this material finds political programs desirable); instead, the question that is at issue here is how this kind of critical work informs or is informed by alternative modes of practice and movements for social transformation. For me thought and philosophy *begin* there, in the context of the disruption of the status quo, in the desire for radical and transformative practices; and the schemas, ontologies, and frameworks that are produced by philosophy in that context serve as responses to limits in practice or serve to create the space for unheard-of and presently unimagined practices.

Of course, a very generous reading of Derrida might seek to have us understand his work as suggesting much the same point, but it is clear that his political engagements (especially concerning animals) have a very different status in his work than such engagements might have for you and me. After reading through Derrida's remarks on carnophallogocentrism and animals more generally, one can only be left wondering how such concepts and discourse relate to existing practices aimed at transforming our thought and practices concerning animals. If we are seeking to critique ideologies and prejudices while building connections across movements for social transformation, then carnophallogocentrism might be a very helpful concept for such projects—or it might not; we would have to construct and develop the concept and then put it to work within specific contexts. We would have to ask: Does this concept create linkages where none previously existed? Does it allow us to see connections among oppressions that would have gone otherwise overlooked? Does it open up new perspectives and practices? Does it transform and enrich life and thought? Such matters are far more important to me than whether a given concept accurately captures the dominant schema of metaphysics. To that end, I would suggest that the critique of *anthropocentrism* (understood very broadly) might actually do more philosophical, critical, and political work than carnophallogocentrism, as it has the potential (if understood in a very specific and refined manner) to tie together and mutually inform multiple critical analyses, frameworks, and movements for social change. But the main point I would make here is that the creation of concepts has everything to do with creating the space for resistance, transformation, and new ways of living and very little to do with an intra-philosophical, intra-theoretical analysis that hedges every time it is confronted with questions concerning practice and the invention of new forms of life.

Returning to your remarks above, these points about the critical limitations of carnophallogocentrism take on a very direct relevance when they are placed in the context of your comments on the bumper sticker: "Eat Beef. The West Wasn't Won on Salad." You suggest, rightly, that such a statement exemplifies the attitude of carnivorous virility and is simultaneously engaged in "putting down foods associated with women, elevating animal foods, and at its heart, celebrating the genocide of Native Americans." While the concept of carnophallogocentrism would do much to help us make sense of what is going on here, I wonder if it (or any of the other of the myriad discourses on animal ethics) can do full justice to questions concerning, for example, Native Americans and other indigenous peoples and how they figure not just in the constitution of the carnophallogocentric subject but how they figure in and alongside struggles for animal defense. The respective political strategies,

epistemologies, and worldviews of the many indigenous struggles for justice and similar movements for animals do not always align, and it seems essential to me for animal theorists and activists to discuss these differences more carefully.

These questions take on a different but still very direct relevance when we think about Derrida's larger strategy in focusing on carnophallogocentrism and anthropocentrism. If these ideologies and practices constitute the dominant schema of metaphysics, then we can be prepared for Derrida to demonstrate how *différance* and other forms of non-presence (ex-proprietation and so forth) figure at the very center of the carnophallogocentric subject (and this is what he is doing throughout much of his work on animals). For Derrida, it is in the exploration and thought of how *différance* is at work throughout life that we might begin to challenge the hegemony of presence and its quintessential figure: the carnophallogocentric subject. But the details, implications, and stakes of such a strategy are very rarely discussed by Derrida or his followers. Instead, there is a kind of unspoken faith among Derrideans that there is some direct line between: (1) uncovering and contesting the basic workings of metaphysics, (2) a thought and practice of *différance*, and (3) radical social transformation. To my mind, much more would need to be said here; and I am not all convinced that this kind of approach constitutes a good strategy or a viable ontology.

The Absent Referent II

Now, I would like to turn to some of the more positive and fecund connections between your work and Derrida's work, starting with the issue of the absent referent. Your invention of this concept in the context of issues concerning animals has always struck me as a singularly important achievement. Standard philosophical discussions of animals, especially those deriving from analytic animal ethics, pay lip service (at best) to the ways in which the unique lives of animals and the violence that many animals undergo at our hands is kept from out of sight for certain populations. And yet, there can be little doubt that it is by way of a profound relationship to singular, irreplaceable animals and the violence done to them that many people are moved to transform their lives with regard to animals. Far too little attention is paid to such connections in analytic animal ethics, where a premium is placed on the supposed transformative force of establishing formal, abstract similarities among 'moral patients' and a concern for impersonal justice.

In paying attention to (1) the singularity of the animal beings we encounter and with whom we relate, and (2) to the hidden violence that characterizes the lives of many of those animals, you present an ethical approach that is extraordinarily close in spirit to the logic (if not the letter) of Emmanuel Levinas's ethical thinking and Derrida's appropriation and reworking of Levinas's ethics concerning animals in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Levinas argues (contra analytic approaches to ethics) that ethics has its origins in a unsettling, traumatic encounter with the 'face' of the Other ('face' can be understood here, roughly, as any site wherein one encounters the Other's fundamental vulnerability). When I encounter the face of the Other, that Other presents her- or himself outside of the general category of 'others' as a concrete, singular, irreplaceable Other. In such an encounter, I encounter *this* finite Other (as opposed to some abstract 'other' with whom I have formal similarities), and I begin to catch sight of the hidden violence that my egoistic, unthinking existence often entails.

Although Levinas presents his general account of the ethical encounter within the context of inter-human ethics, it has been argued by many of Levinas's best readers that there is no legitimate reason for limiting the 'logic' of this account to human beings alone. One could, in fact, read Derrida's work on animals as a subtle reworking of this Levinasian logic, as an attempt to stretch it and extend it beyond the particular anthro- and androcentric dogmas that plague Levinas's work. If one reads Derrida in this way, then what his work offers us is an attempt to attend to the singularity of animals in their lives and deaths, and joys and sufferings. That all of these things go missing in standard philosophical and metaphysical notions of animals and animality is evidence of the ways in which individual animals are reduced to absent referents in philosophical discourse.

The Iterability of the Carnophallogocentric Subject

Another point of contact between your thought and Derrida's (as well as Judith Butler's) has to do with what you describe as the "reiterative nature of the sexual politics of meat." The carnophallogocentric subject, both in its form as an ideal subject position and as it becomes actualized in individual subjects, is never achieved once and for all. It must be repeatedly enacted, called into being in line with the conceptual-discursive-institutional ideal it invokes (this is what Judith Butler, in her reworking of certain aspects of speech theory, refers to as the performative nature of subjectivity). Thus, as you note, in order

to achieve subjective stability it is necessary to find ever new methods and means for reinforcing this identity and shoring it up against that which would unravel it or challenge its dominance.

This notion of the reiterative nature of carnophallogocentric subjectivity has two important implications. On the one hand, it implies that there are the ever new ways of reinforcing carnivorous virility that we need to attend to. On the other hand, the very fact *that* carnophallogocentrism *has to be reiterated* means that it is unstable, structurally open to being challenged and contested, and that it has not fully determined or suffused the various systems of meaning and institutions that constitute individuals as subjects.

Carol:

The need to establish manliness through meat eating has always suggested an instability to masculinity. The difference between 1990 when my book first came out and now is this notion of re-upping or renewing one's "man card." This recent development shows just how unstable masculine identity is perceived to be. (An ad for beer that gives 'man points' for putting together a barbecue but takes away more 'man points' for cooking tofu on it.) Unlike my library card which does not have to be renewed, this 'man card' apparently is constantly being depleted, exhausted, needing re-iteration. So, a strong and very powerful reality—masculine subjectivity—is continually being reinstated through both traditional and new means, while its instability is acknowledged.

Does the space open within its fissures to reconfigure it? In 2013, *Vanity Fair* carried an article ("Steak Shows Its Muscle") celebrating steak as "the butch foodie communion" not just for "flinty-eyed, Armani-suited leaner-than-thou businessmen, but for metrosexuals who wish to beef up their cultural testosterone." A. A. Gill continues: "What does steak say to us and about us? Well, it's manly. If food came with gender appellations, steak would definitely be at the top of the bloke column. Women can eat it, they can appreciate it, but it's like girls chugging pints of beer and then burping. It's a cross-gender impersonation" (2013). The space burps opens; the space closes.

The issue of agency in and against such re-iterative moves also comes up in the way that some vegans who are men appear to accept the givenness of a culture invested in the sexual politics of meat. Trying to show that men are not 'wimps,' and instead can be 'plant-strong,' a few well-known 'manly' vegans coined the term 'hegans.' Rather than pushing into the fissure and suggesting veganism liberates the gender binary, these vegan advocates appear to want veganism to fit into the humanist project, offering the assurance *you are not really changing as radically as you think you are if you become a vegan*. I see it as a conservative response to the threat to the carnophallogocentric

subject posed by veganism. To me this seems like they are reassuring what Derrida called the phallogocentrism inherent in Western subjectivity.

It becomes necessary to track the various ways that the subject continues old kinds of exclusions, but has to create new alliances to do this. One of the aspects of these recent meat re-iterations is that they sweat with misogyny. Making connections between my first point ('men need meat') and my second (the function of the absent referent is to hide and promulgate violence), I have started calling some of the representations that have appeared *hate speech* as they celebrate the consuming of the full-bodied female body and position the female body in ways that announce she desires to be consumed. This hate speech normalizes violence.

The Logic of Logocentrism

Matt:

In order to explore further some of the limits characteristic of analytic ethical approaches to animal issues, I thought we might return for a moment to the theme of logocentrism. Above, I glossed Derrida's definition of logocentrism as "denoting the privileges and priorities granted by Western philosophy to the rational, self-aware, self-present, speaking subject." With that gloss in mind, we can note by implication that what gets subordinated by logocentrism are all of those 'things' that fall outside of the *logos*, starting with 'writing' (understood narrowly as written texts and broadly as those things that escape the full control of the sovereign, speaking subject), and extending to all of the other traits (for example, the emotions, passions) and beings (for example, animals, children, nature) that/whom fall short of exemplifying full presence and full *logos*. In his early writings on logocentrism, Derrida sought primarily to make the point that all attempts at achieving logocentric closure and full presence are haunted by *différance*, writing, non-presence, and so on; and in his later writings on animals, he extends this analysis by showing the ways in which logocentrism subtly persists in certain forms of animal rights discourse and politics and produces a contradiction in the reinforcement of the very concept of rights and of the human it seeks to overthrow. I know that you have made related points in your critiques of analytic animal ethics.

Carol:

I like to think that understanding logocentrism helps illuminate why reactions to vegans and vegetarians are often so irate. They have threatened something thought to be *essential* to the subject. It also explains why the defensive

flesh eater's response is to *argue*, to try to defeat through words/arguments the vegan/vegetarian (who is demurring from a culture wordlessly through a dietary change). The non-speaking vegan's dissent must be lifted into the speaking world and there defeated. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, I propose "At a dinner where meat is eaten, the vegetarian must lose control of the conversation. The function of the absent referent must be kept absent especially when incarnated on the platter at the table. The flesh and words about it must be kept separate" (2010, 127).

I devote two chapters of *Living Among Meat Eaters* to the problem of talking with meat eaters. I argue that vegans/vegetarians must learn how to stop the conversation, that is, they must refuse to be a speaking subject, refuse to engage at that level. In this, I disagree with the belief among activists (and the almost good-natured assumptions of the average vegan) that we should always answer questions being posed to us. The presumption is that if we are 'the best speaking subject,' that is, if we can proffer forth the best arguments, we will win. I state that conversations "are functioning differently for meat eaters than for vegetarians." And that this logocentric interaction through words, through the speaking self, is "the most stubborn way that meat eaters hold on to their lifestyle" (2009, 91).

In believing they should respond with arguments and explanations of a vegan diet, individual vegans recapitulate the premise and activities of many of the major animal activist organizations. These presumptions include:

1. It is by argument that people change.
2. A debate has a hierarchy, and your goal is to be on the top.
3. If we have the right 'speech' we will prevail. The best arguments will win.
4. The other animals have no voice in human discussions. We must be 'the voice of the animals.'
5. So, the speaking subjects speaking on behalf of the 'voiceless' have to prove themselves to be the best speaking persons or else we have betrayed the non-speaking animals.

Analytic philosophers like Tom Regan, Peter Singer, Steve Best, and Gary Francione accept the logocentric world view, too. They presume the same kind of space, the same kind of subject, the one who has control, the one who is more 'reasonable.' This worldview presumes that change happens this way. As I suggest in "Post Meat Eating," the animal rights movement is a modernist movement in a postmodern time. As you have said, it is all *part of the legalistic and moralist approach to animals*.

Matt:

The issues you raise here concerning the defense of vegetarianism/veganism are important ones to consider; and, like you, I would suggest that standard philosophical arguments have (at best) a derivative and secondary role to play in this area. After speaking with countless meat eaters about vegetarianism/veganism over the past two decades, and after teaching standard philosophical material on vegetarianism/veganism to thousands of students over the past several years, I am more convinced than ever that philosophical arguments nearly always arrive on the scene too late to have the force that most animal ethicists wish them to have. And even when the arguments are considered rationally persuasive by readers, they rarely seem to have the transformative force with non-vegetarians/non-vegans that philosophers claim. I would suggest that for philosophical arguments to carry any persuasive force on these matters there must *already* be in place a certain set of dispositions, relations, and experiences that attune one to animals and their lives. So, even if one wished to retain a space for philosophical argumentation concerning vegetarianism (and I am not entirely opposed to maintaining such a space), it would seem that the space needs to be reinscribed elsewhere than at the foundations of vegetarianism (which is where philosophers would like to place it).

Likewise, when vegetarians/vegans play the role of the rationally persuasive subject in discussions over eating meat, not only does such a gesture place the speaker back into the very logocentric space of mastery that needs to be called into question; it also problematically reinforces the idea that what is at issue here lies in the domain of reason and argumentation (rather than, say, in the domain of what Levinas calls “the face,” or emotions, relations, ethical interruptions, and so on). Arguments with meat eaters about vegetarianism/veganism are fairly easy to have, and perhaps even fairly easy to ‘win’ for the masterful subject, but they rarely bring the discussion into the space where it needs to be in order to get at the heart of the matter—which is, namely, to rethink in a fundamental manner the way one relates and is related to other animals (oneself included).

Another pernicious, but often overlooked, consequence of this subtle reinforcement of logocentrism can be seen in the way that analytic ethics and argumentation map onto larger legal and political strategies for transformation. Given the premium placed on the rational, speaking subject within our logocentric culture, it comes as little surprise that the nonhuman beings animal rightists/welfarists seek to bring into the legal and political sphere most often resemble that same logocentric subject. Animals who can communicate in ways ‘we’ can understand are more valued than those who cannot; animals

who demonstrate ‘superior’ (which is to say, anthropomorphic) intelligence are considered paradigm examples of animals with moral standing; animals who lack reflexive consciousness, language, familial relations, who are aesthetically disgusting to ‘us,’ or are culturally unpopular are consistently given less attention in political and legal struggles for animal justice.

In a related vein, and following the same logocentric logic, many legally—and philosophically-inclined animal rightists seek to distance themselves from environmental struggles for justice for nonanimal beings, systems, and regions. It is assumed by nearly every mainstream philosophical and legal theorist for animal rights/welfare that the nonanimal natural world is owed no direct consideration and always and everywhere counts less than humans and animals. And the reasons given for the priority granted to animals are almost always logocentric in nature. Steven Wise’s *Drawing the Line* is a prime example of this kind of tendency to exalt logocentric-type animals at the expense of less logocentric-type animals and the rest of the natural world. One of the primary motivations I have for entering standard philosophical and legal debates over animal ethics is to contest these kinds of logocentric consequences; and when I refer to the need for a deconstruction of vegetarianism/veganism³ and its associated mainstream practitioners, it is precisely these kinds of logocentric limits and blindspots that I believe are in urgent need of deconstruction.

The Power of Phallogocentrism

Carol:

Animal activism not only incorporates the dominant presumptions about the speaking subject, it also operates largely from a *phallogocentric* position.⁴ Both analytic philosophy that argues on behalf of animals and activism prefer the rational, reasonable male speaking voice.

The disowning of the female speaking subject has a long history in the West. But it is one thing to encounter Mrs. Slipslop in Fielding, Mrs. Malaprop in Sheridan, or Tabitha Bramble in Smollett. (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 30–31). It is another to recognize that animal activism not only privileges the male speaking voice but actively disowns the female speaking subject. I gesture toward the issue of the speaking subject in the second section of *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (“From the Belly of Zeus”) which is framed by the story of Zeus’s

3 “Deconstruction Is not Vegetarianism: Humanism, Subjectivity, and Animal Ethics,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 37 (2004): 175–201.

4 See my “Sexual Inequality and the Animal Movement,” in Sonbanmastu.

swallowing of Metis, and Zeus's claim that she "gave him counsel from inside his belly" (Adams 2010, 133).

What does animal activism do with women's speaking voice? Their moves are not literally as anthropophagic as Zeus's, but symbolically, they are equally devastating, they announce the animal movement is no longer "just little old ladies in tennis shoes."⁵ This comment has been around for decades, but most recently could be found in a profile of Wayne Pacelle head of the Humane Society of the United States, in the *New York Times Magazine*. "'We aren't a bunch of little old ladies in tennis shoes,' Pacelle says, paraphrasing his mentor Cleveland Amory, an animal rights activist. 'We have cleats on'" (Jones 2008). "Don't look at the aging bodies of women activists," they seem to be telling us. This posturing of the animal activist movement tries to fill the cultural space once occupied by the little old ladies (though it still needs them to do the work but hide the fact that they are doing it and that they are 'old' and female).⁶

Several assumptions operate here:

- They assume they are speaking to the dominant subjectivity in the West, the carnophallogocentric subject.
- They assume this subjectivity has trouble/resistance to hearing little old ladies.
- They think they have to accept the limitations in perspective imposed by this subject.
- They have to 'save' animal activism from the threat of empowered little old ladies.

5 It might be interesting to think for a moment about why 'little old ladies' have been wearing tennis shoes for so many years. Tennis shoes are certainly better for one's spine than heels; the additional weight that comes with pregnancy results in the widening of the feet; tennis shoes are very comfortable.

6 Animal Studies has been challenged for making this same sort of move resulting in the disappearance of feminist writers who pioneered intersectional theory that included animals and offered early analyses of animal oppression. Susan Fraiman analyzes the disappearance of women in the story of the birth of Animal Studies in "Pussy Panic versus Liking Animals: Tracking Gender in Animal Studies." *Critical Inquiry* 39.1 (Autumn 2012): 89–115. I appreciate her role in asserting the historical and theoretical importance of books like *The Sexual Politics of Meat* and those of my feminist colleagues. The important move is not to accept the either/or assumption presented by some of the gatekeepers of Animals Studies: either English-speaking feminist writers or Continental philosophy. This accepts the gatekeepers' formulations by reversal. I believe our conversation shows another way, as does *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics*, in which Josephine Donovan and I placed Derrida within the feminist care tradition (2007, 14–15).

- They have to reiterate their rationality over against the stereotype of the emotionally-laden, female-identified body.
- They believe that the *carn* can be excised from the carnophallogocentric subject, plucked out, removed, ruptured, while leaving the phallogocentric subject intact.

Perhaps they believe all this, because this has worked for them.

Certainly the animal activist organizations that display nude and nearly nude photographs of women in their outreach on behalf of animals enact these assumptions. Derrida's concept provides a tool for explaining just why women's naked bodies are so important to some animal campaigns. They think by assuaging phallogocentric subjectivity they can convince him (they clearly are appealing to heterosexual men in much of this) to stop eating meat. They want to remove the *carn* but leave the phallogocentric subject undisturbed. Derrida says in an interview included in *Acts of Literature*, "although phallogocentrism and logocentrism are indissociable, the stresses can lie more here or there according to the case; the force and the trajectory of the mediations can be different . . . [a] radical dissociation between the two motifs cannot be made in all rigor. Phallogocentrism is one single thing, even if it is an articulated thing which calls for different strategies" (2009, 59–60). Once he appended *carno* to his idea of the subject, did he not also recognize its indissociability from the other parts?

Strategies that assume a culture invested in the carnophallogocentric subject requires the strengthening of the phallogocentric subject as we eliminate the 'carno' aspect (meat eating) like some feminist discourse in Derrida's perspective, "risks reproducing very crudely the very thing which it purports to be criticizing" (Ibid, 60).

Matt:

The quotation from Pacelle is a particularly illustrative example of the standard logic of phallogocentrism that dominates leading forms of animal rights/welfare today. The privileged, 'proper' forms of activism are those carried out by cool, level-headed, rational subjects who believe in the power of arguments and legislation. Women can certainly accede to this privileged space on occasion, but they do so only inasmuch as they renounce all non-logocentric traits, strategies, and considerations. My own experiences with fellow animal activists have suggested to me that precisely the opposite is often the case, that 'little old ladies' are among some of the most important, inventive, and remarkable activists in animal defense circles. And the same holds true for the role of both older and younger women in several kinds of related struggles for social justice,

ranging from environmental justice to queer politics to indigenous politics. Women, young and old, employing tactics that fall well outside the logics of logo- and phallogocentrism, have advanced these struggles in unprecedented and vitally important ways.

Returning to the specific context of animal defense politics, I want to underscore that this kind of phallogocentrism also functions to exclude a wide range of additional strategies and activists beyond those just mentioned. We should note, for instance, how a large number of mainstream philosophical and legal animal rightists routinely denigrate direct-action groups like the A.L.F. (and it is significant that younger and older women play a leading role in many of these actions). Such direct-action strategies and tactics that seek to short-circuit the long-term, incremental process of legislating our way to animal rights are often dismissed by mainstream animal rights activists for being not just ineffective (which is a questionable criticism, given the general ineffectiveness of nearly all proposed strategies to date) but also for being driven by many of logocentrism's 'others' (blind emotions, irrational spontaneism, misguided fanaticism, and so on). This kind of dismissal occurs despite the fact that direct-action activists and theorists have developed an extraordinarily insightful series of strategies, practices, analyses, and alternative ways of living in view of animal justice, even as mainstream organizations and theorists leave largely unchallenged the hegemony of phallogocentrism, capitalism, and consumerism in our culture (as your remarks above make clear).

One of the helpful aspects of Derrida's concept of carnophallogocentrism and your notion of the sexual politics of meat are that they help us to attend to these often invisible constraints that guide and limit thought and practice. Did Derrida notice the indissociability of carnivorousness with phallogocentrism? Based on his scattered remarks on the issue, one can only conclude in the affirmative. He seems to want to make this series of centrismisms not only indissociable but also central to understanding the dominant modes of constituting subjectivity.

This returns us, though, to the question of whether this series (carno-, phallo-, and logo-centrism) is meant to be descriptively exhaustive or only partial, contingent, and strategic. And even if we decide that carnophallogocentrism only functions in the latter sense and does not seek closure over and against other critical analyses of subjectivity, this does not put an end to a whole series of very difficult questions that might arise here. To tease out a bit more one of the issues I raised above: What are we to make of decolonial struggles for social justice that make heavy use of the rhetoric and political strategies of humanism, human rights, and human dignity? How do we link our struggles with theirs when the respective strategies, rhetoric, and histories

might conflict? I do not think there are any easy answers to such questions, but I should note here that it is at least clear to me that the resources for working through these matters are *not* to be found in animal defense circles that rely on traditional phallogocentric concepts and practices.

Carol:

Yes, I agree with you completely. It is as though there is a tendency to an anthropomorphic notion of political change.

I like the term *carnophallogocentrism* precisely for what it accomplishes: the linking of carnivorous virility with the speaking subject, and the linking of the Western subject with meat eating.

The carnophallogocentric subject is granted privilege, and this privilege is experienced as pleasure. When this happens the privilege disappears as a social construction and is seen as something private, something personal: "This is your choice, not to eat meat, and my choice is to eat meat." At the minimum, the carnophallogocentric subject is the subject for whom this privilege is working.

So, I find the concept important as it helps to get at the problem of the person who admits to 'carnivorous virility' but who does not want to believe 'he' needs to change. And often the 'virility' part is hidden, it is the naked 'carnivorousness' that is claimed, but it is claimed in an implicitly virile way. The medium becomes a part of the message.

People often respond to *The Sexual Politics of Meat* by suggesting that the phenomenon I am examining is something that is out 'there,' just advertisements, as though they are not implicated in and by it. (*The Sexual Politics of Meat Slide Show* in a sense defeats a part of my purpose because it causes people to think my analysis is about images not attitudes.) Or the response is that *The Sexual Politics of Meat* is critiquing something that has passed (recent advertisements and attitudes notwithstanding). Or that my analysis of images is wrong because how images work has changed. And here is Derrida, in coining the term *carnophallogocentrism*, saying it is about the kind of subject we are, and my point is that this subject is constructed and inflected by a culture heavily committed to the sexual politics of meat.

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