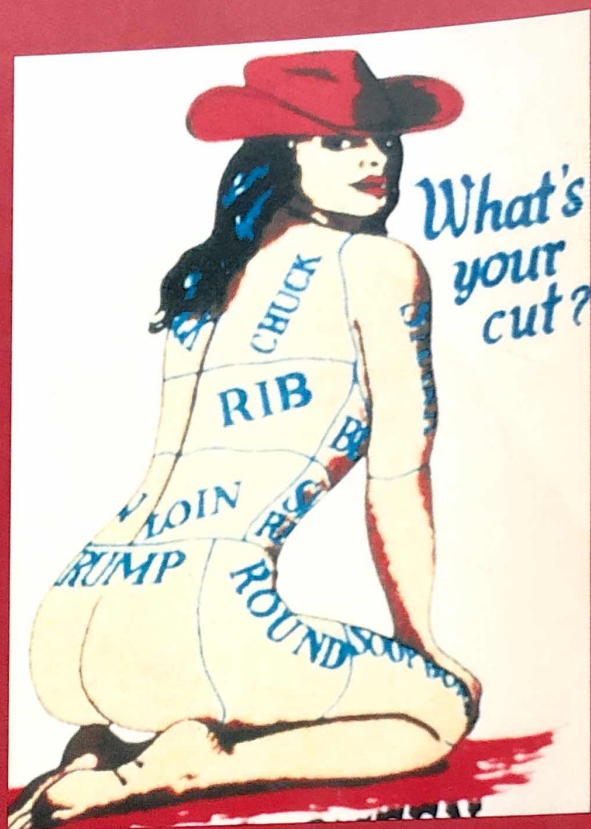


Tenth Anniversary Edition

The Sexual Politics of Meat



*A Feminist-Vegetarian
Critical Theory*

Carol J. Adams

2000

The Continuum Publishing Company
370 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10017

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Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Adams, Carol J.

The sexual politics of meat : a feminist-vegetarian critical theory / Carol J. Adams. — 10th-anniversary ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8264-1184-3 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Animal welfare. 2. Vegetarianism—Social aspects.

3. Patriarchy. 4. Feminist theory. I. Title.

HV4708.A25 2000

179'.3—dc21

99-31195
CIP

Copyright Acknowledgments will be found on page 261, which constitutes an extension of this page.

chapter 1

The Sexual Politics of Meat

Myth from the Bushman:

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.

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 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 Cleves—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 gourmands 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 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

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think that eating eggs is effeminate. In other groups men require sauces to disguise the fact that they are eating women's foods. "Men expect to go to 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."

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 untiring 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-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-

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hold," observed Dr. Edward Smith in the first national food survey of British dietary 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 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 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

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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 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 brain-workers, 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 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

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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 onstrating 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 dishes torts 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 fattened 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 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 surveys of women's budgets in the early twentieth century observed:

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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 analogous to homeopathic principles 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 vegetarian 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 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 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 flesh-eaters 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

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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.

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

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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

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 soci-

ety, 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 to meat's role as symbol than this.

"Vegetable": Symbol of Feminine Passivity?

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

tudes 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. 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 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 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.

chapter 2

The Rape of Animals, the Butchering of Women

The first metaphor was animal.

—John Berger, “Why Look at Animals?”

He handled my breast as if he were making a meatball.

—Mary Gordon, *Final Payments*

One could not stand and watch [the slaughtering] very long without becoming philosophical, without beginning to deal in symbols and similes, and to hear the hog-squeal of the universe.

—Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*

A healthy sexual being poses near her drink: she wears bikini panties only and luxuriates on a large chair with her head rested seductively on an elegant lace doily. Her inviting drink with a twist of lemon awaits on the table. Her eyes are closed; her facial expression beams pleasure, relaxation, enticement. She is touching her crotch in an attentive, masturbatory action. Anatomy of seduction: sex object, drink, inviting room, sexual activity. The formula is complete. But a woman does not beckon. A pig does. “Ursula Hamdress” appeared in *Playboy*, a magazine that calls itself “the pig farmer’s *Playboy*.”¹ How does one explain the substitution of a nonhuman animal for a woman in this pornographic representation? Is she inviting someone to rape her or to eat her? (See Figure 2.)

In 1987, I described Ursula Hamdress on a panel titled “Sexual Violence: Representation and Reality” at Princeton’s Graduate Women’s

Studies Conference, “Feminism and Its Translations.” In the same month, less than sixty miles away, three women were found chained in the basement of Gary Heidnik’s house in Philadelphia. In the kitchen body parts of a woman were discovered in the oven, in a stewpot on the stove, and in the refrigerator. Her arms and legs had been fed to the other women held captive there. One of the survivors reported that during the time that she was chained, Heidnick repeatedly raped her.²

I hold that Ursula Hamdress and the women raped, butchered, and eaten under Heidnik’s directions are linked by an overlap of cultural images of sexual violence against women and the fragmentation and dismemberment of nature and the body in Western culture.³ Of special concern will be the cultural representations of the butchering of animals because meat eating is the most frequent way in which we interact with animals. Butchering is the quintessential enabling act for meat eating. It enacts a literal dismemberment upon animals while proclaiming our intellectual and emotional separation from animals’ desire to live. Butchering as a paradigm provides, as well, an entry for understanding exactly why a profusion of overlapping cultural images exists.

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.

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

There are actually three ways by which animals become absent referents. One is literally, as I have just argued, through meat eating they are literally absent because they are dead. Another is definitional: when we eat animals we change the way we talk about them, for instance, we no

Figure 2



“Ursula Hamdress” from *Playboar*. This copy appeared in *The Beast: The Magazine That Bites Back*, 10 (Summer 1981), pp. 18–19. It was photographed by animal advocate Jim Mason at the Iowa State Fair where it appeared as a “pinup.” (More recent issues of *Playboar* have renamed “Ursula” “Taffy Lovely.”)

longer talk about baby animals but about veal or lamb. As we will see even more clearly in the next chapter, which examines language about eating animals, the word *meat* has an absent referent, the dead animals. The third way is metaphorical. Animals become metaphors for describing people’s experiences. In this metaphorical sense, the meaning of the absent referent derives from its application or reference to something else.

As the absent referent becomes *metaphor*, its meaning is lifted to a “higher” or more imaginative function than its own existence might merit or reveal. An example of this is when rape victims or battered women say, “I felt like a piece of meat.” In this example, meat’s meaning does not refer to itself but to how a woman victimized by male violence felt. That meat is functioning as an absent referent is evident when we push the meaning of the metaphor: one cannot truly *feel* like a piece of meat. Teresa de Lauretis comments: “No one can really *see* oneself as an inert object or a sightless body,”⁴ and no one can really feel like a piece of meat because meat by definition is something violently deprived of all feeling. The use of the phrase “feeling like a piece of meat” occurs within a metaphoric system of language.

The animals have become absent referents, whose fate is transmuted into a metaphor for someone else’s existence or fate. Metaphorically, the absent referent can be anything whose original meaning is undercut as it is absorbed into a different hierarchy of meaning; in this case the original meaning of animals’ fates is absorbed into a human-centered hierarchy. Specifically in regard to rape victims and battered women, the death experience of animals acts to illustrate the lived experience of women.

The absent referent is both there and not there. It is there through inference, but its meaningfulness reflects only upon what it refers to because the originating, literal, experience that contributes the meaning is not there.⁵ We fail to accord this absent referent its own existence.

METAPHOR

→ death of animals = lives it & in violence

Women and Animals: Overlapping but Absent Referents

This chapter posits that a structure of overlapping but absent referents links violence against women and animals. Through the structure of the absent referent, patriarchal values become institutionalized. Just as dead bodies are absent from our language about meat, in descriptions of cultural violence women are also often the absent referent. Rape, in particular, carries such potent imagery that the term is transferred from the literal experience of women and applied metaphorically to other instances of violent devastation, such as the “rape” of the earth in ecological writings of the early 1970s. The experience of women thus becomes

a vehicle for describing other oppressions. Women, upon whose bodies actual rape is most often committed, become the absent referent when the language of sexual violence is used metaphorically. These terms recall women's experiences but not women.

When I use the term "the rape of animals," the experience of women becomes a vehicle for explicating another being's oppression. Is this appropriate? Some terms are so powerfully specific to one group's oppression that their appropriation to others is potentially exploitative: for instance, using the "Holocaust" for anything but the genocide of European Jews and others by the Nazis. Rape has a different social context for women than for the other animals. So, too, does butchering for animals. Yet, feminists among others, appropriate the metaphor of butchering without acknowledging the originating oppression of animals that generates the power of the metaphor. Through the function of the absent referent, Western culture constantly renders the material reality of violence into controlled and controllable metaphors.

Sexual violence and meat eating, which appear to be discrete forms of violence, find a point of intersection in the absent referent. Cultural images of sexual violence, and actual sexual violence, often rely on our knowledge of how animals are butchered and eaten. For example, Kathy Barry tells us of "*maisons d'abattage* (literal translation: houses of slaughter)" where six or seven girls each serve 80 to 120 customers a night.⁶ In addition, the bondage equipment of pornography—chains, cat-tle prods, nooses, dog collars, and ropes—suggests the control of animals. Thus, when women are victims of violence, the treatment of animals is recalled.

Similarly, in images of animal slaughter, erotic overtones suggest that women are the absent referent. If animals are the absent referent in the phrase "the butchering of women," women are the absent referent in the phrase "the rape of animals." The impact of a seductive pig relies on an absent but imaginable, seductive, fleshy woman. Ursula Hamdress is both metaphor and joke; her jarring (or jocular) effect is based on the fact that we are all accustomed to seeing women depicted in such a way. Ursula's image refers to something that is absent: the human female body. The structure of the absent referent in patriarchal culture strengthens individual oppressions by always recalling other oppressed groups.

Because the structure of overlapping absent referents is so deeply rooted in Western culture, it inevitably implicates individuals. Our participation evolves as part of our general socialization to cultural patterns and viewpoints, thus we fail to see anything disturbing in the violence and domination that are an inextricable part of this structure. Consequently, women eat meat, work in slaughterhouses, at times treat other

Bidirectional use of metaphor 'butchering' for women = R.A.P.E., of animals = MEAT

WHY DOES 'Butchering' or 'Rape' like meat work to describe violence.

women as "meat," and men at times are victims of sexual violence. Moreover, because women as well as men participate in and benefit from the structure of the absent referent by eating meat, neither achieve the personal distance to perceive their implication in the structure, nor the originating oppression of animals that establishes the potency of the metaphor of butchering.

The interaction between physical oppression and the dependence on metaphors that rely on the absent referent indicates that we distance ourselves from whatever is different by equating it with something we have already objectified. For instance, the demarcation between animals and people was invoked during the early modern period to emphasize social distancing. According to Keith Thomas, infants, youth, the poor, blacks, Irish, insane people, and women were considered beastlike: "Once perceived as beasts, people were liable to be treated accordingly. The ethic of human domination removed animals from the sphere of human concern. But it also legitimized the ill-treatment of those humans who were in a supposedly animal condition."⁷

Racism and the Absent Referent

Through the structure of the absent referent, a dialectic of absence and presence of oppressed groups occurs. What is absent refers back to one oppressed group while defining another. This has theoretical implications for class and race as well as violence against women and animals. Whereas I want to focus on the overlapping oppressions of women and animals, further exploration of the function of the absent referent is needed, such as found in Marjorie Spiegel's *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*. Spiegel discusses the connection between racial oppression and animal oppression and in doing so demonstrates their overlapping relationship.⁸

The structure of the absent referent requires assistants who achieve the elimination of the animal, a form of alienated labor. Living, whole animals are the absent referents not only in meat eating but also in the fur trade. Of interest then is the connection between the oppression of animals through the fur trade and the oppression of blacks as slaves. Black historians suggest that one of the reasons black people rather than Native Americans were oppressed through the white Americans' institution of slavery is because of the slaughter of fur-bearing animals. As Vincent Harding describes it in *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*: "One important early source of income for the Europeans in North America was the fur trade with the Indians, which enslavement of

the latter would endanger."⁹ While the factors that caused the oppression of Native Americans and blacks is not reducible to this example, we do see in it the undergirding of interactive oppressions by the absent referent. We also see that in analyzing the oppression of human beings, the oppression of animals ought not to be ignored. However, the absent referent, because of its absence, prevents our experiencing connections between oppressed groups.

When one becomes alert to the function of the absent referent and refuses to eat animals, the use of metaphors relying on animals' oppression can simultaneously criticize both that which the metaphor points to and that from which it is derived. For instance, when vegetarian and Civil Rights activist Dick Gregory compares the ghetto to the slaughterhouse he does so condemning both and suggesting the functioning of the absent referent in erasing responsibility for the horrors of each:

Animals and humans suffer and die alike. If you had to kill your own hog before you ate it, most likely you would not be able to do it. To hear the hog scream, to see the blood spill, to see the baby being taken away from its momma, and to see the look of death in the animal's eye would turn your stomach. So you get the man at the packing house to do the killing for you. In like manner, if the wealthy aristocrats who are perpetrating conditions in the ghetto actually heard the screams of ghetto suffering, or saw the slow death of hungry little kids, or witnessed the strangulation of manhood and dignity, they could not continue the killing. But the wealthy are protected from such horror. . . . If you can justify killing to eat meat, you can justify the conditions of the ghetto. I cannot justify either one.¹⁰

Sexual Violence and Meat Eating

To rejoin the issue of the intertwined oppressions with which this chapter is primarily concerned, sexual violence and meat eating, and their point of intersection in the absent referent, it is instructive to consider incidents of male violence. Batterers, rapists, serial killers, and child sexual abusers have victimized animals.¹¹ They do so for a variety of reasons: marital rapists may use a companion animal to intimidate, coerce, control, or violate a woman. Serial killers often initiate violence first against animals. The male students who killed their classmates in various communities in the 1990s often were hunters or known to have killed animals. Child sexual abusers often use threats and/or violence against companion animals to achieve compliance from their victims. Batterers

harm or kill a companion animal as a warning to their partners that she could be next; as a way of further separating her from meaningful relationships; to demonstrate his power and her powerlessness. The threatened woman or child is the absent referent in pet murders. Within the symbolic order the fragmented referent no longer recalls itself but something else.¹² Though this pattern of killing pets as a warning to an abused woman or child is derived from recent case studies of domestic violence, the story of a man's killing his wife's pet instead of his wife can be found in an early twentieth-century short story. Susan Glaspell's "A Jury of Her Peers" exposes this function of the absent referent and the fact that a woman's peers, i.e., other women, recognize this function.¹³

Generally, however, the absent referent, because of its absence, prevents our experiencing connections between oppressed groups. Cultural images of butchering and sexual violence are so interpenetrated that animals act as the absent referent in radical feminist discourse. In this sense, radical feminist theory participates in the same set of representational structures it seeks to expose. We uphold the patriarchal structure of absent referents, appropriating the experience of animals to interpret our own violation. For instance, we learn of a woman who went to her doctor after being battered. The doctor told her her leg "was like a raw piece of meat hanging up in a butcher's window."¹⁴ Feminists translate this literal description into a metaphor for women's oppression. Andrea Dworkin states that pornography depicts woman as a "female piece of meat" and Gena Corea observes that "women in brothels can be used like animals in cages."¹⁵ Linda Lovelace claims that when presented to Xaviera Hollander for inspection, "Xaviera looked me over like a butcher inspecting a side of beef."¹⁶ When one film actress committed suicide, another described the dilemma she and other actresses encounter: "They treat us like meat." Of this statement Susan Griffin writes: "She means that men who hire them treat them as less than human, as matter without spirit."¹⁷ In each of these examples, feminists have used violence against animals as metaphor, literalizing *and* feminizing the metaphor. When one is matter without spirit, one is the raw material for exploitation and for metaphoric borrowing.¹⁸

Despite this dependence on the *imagery* of butchering, radical feminist discourse has failed to integrate the *literal* oppression of animals into our analysis of patriarchal culture or to acknowledge the strong historical alliance between feminism and vegetarianism. Whereas women may feel like pieces of meat, and be treated like pieces of meat—emotionally butchered and physically battered—animals actually are made into pieces of meat. In radical feminist theory, the use of these metaphors alternates between a positive figurative activity and a negative activity of occlusion,

Meat has long been used in Western culture as a metaphor for women's oppression. The model for consuming a woman after raping her, as noted in the preface (page 25), is the story of Zeus and Metis: "Zeus lusted after Metis the Titaness, who turned into many shapes to escape him until she was caught at last and got with child." When warned by a sibyl that if Metis conceived a second time Zeus would be deposed by the resulting offspring, Zeus swallowed Metis, who, he claimed, continued to give him counsel from inside his belly. Consumption appears to be the final stage of male sexual desire. Zeus verbally seduces Metis in order to devour her: "Having coaxed Metis to a couch with honeyed words, Zeus suddenly opened his mouth and swallowed her, and that was the end of Metis."²² An essential component of androcentric culture has been built upon these activities of Zeus: viewing the sexually desired object as consumable. But, we do not hear anything about dismemberment in the myth of Zeus's consumption of Metis. How exactly did Zeus fit her pregnant body, arms, shoulders, chest, womb, thighs, legs, and feet into his mouth in one gulp? The myth does not acknowledge how the absent referent becomes absent.

Eliding Fragmentation

Paralleling the elided relationship between metaphor and referent is the unacknowledged role of fragmentation in eating flesh. Our minds move from objectified being to consumable food. The action of fragmentation, the killing, and the dividing is elided. Indeed, patriarchal culture surrounds actual butchering with silence. Geographically, slaughterhouses are cloistered. We do not see or hear what transpires there.²³ Consequently, consumption appears to follow immediately upon objectification, for consumption itself has been objectified. Discussing the alliance of women and workers during a lively 1907 challenge to vivisection, Coral Lansbury offers this reminder, "It has been said that a visit to an abattoir would make a vegetarian of the most convinced carnivore among us."²⁴ In "How to Build a Slaughterhouse," Richard Selzer observes that the knowledge that the slaughterhouse offers is knowledge we do not want to know: "Before it is done this field trip to a slaughterhouse will have become for me a descent into Hades, a vision of life that perhaps it would have been better never to know."²⁵ We don't want to know about fragmentation because that is the process through which the live referent disappears.

Fragment #1: Implemental Violence

Abandon self, all ye who enter here. Become component part, geared, meshed, timed, controlled.

Hell. . . Hogs dangling, dancing along the convey, 300, 350 an hour; Mary running running along the rickety platform to keep up, stamping, stamping the hides. To the shuddering drum of the skull crush machine, in the spectral vapor clouds, everyone the same motion all the hours through: Kryckszi lifting his cleaver, the one powerful stroke; long continuous arm swirl of the rippers, gut pullers. . . .

Geared, meshed: the kill room: knockers, shacklers, pritcher-uppers, stickers, headers, rippers, leg breakers, breast and aitch sawyers, caul pullers, fell cutters, rumpers, splitters, vat dippers, skinners, gutters, pluckers.

—All through the jumble of buildings . . . of death, dismemberment and vanishing entire for harmless creatures meek and mild, frisky, wild—Hell.

—Tillie Olsen, *Yonmondio*²⁶

The institution of butchering is unique to human beings. All carnivorous animals kill and consume their prey themselves. They see and hear their victims before they eat them. There is no absent referent, only a dead one. Plutarch taunts his readers with this fact in his "Essay on Flesh Eating": If you believe yourselves to be meat eaters, "then, to begin with, kill *yourself* what you wish to eat—but do it yourself with your own *natural* weapons, without the use of butcher's knife, or axe, or club." Plutarch points out that people do not have bodies equipped for eating flesh from a carcass, "no curved beak, no sharp talons and claws, no pointed teeth."²⁷ We have no bodily agency for killing and dismembering the animals we eat; we require implements.

The essence of butchering is to fragment the animal into pieces small enough for consumption. Implements are the simulated teeth that rip and claws that tear. Implements at the same time remove the referent; they bring about "the vanishing entire for harmless creatures."

Hannah Arendt claims that violence always needs implements.²⁸ Without implemental violence human beings could not eat meat. Violence is central to the act of slaughtering. Sharp knives are essential for rapidly rendering the anesthetized living animal into edible dead flesh. Knives are not so much distancing mechanisms in this case as enabling mechanisms. For farm slaughter some of the implements required include: hog scraper, iron hog and calf gambrel, stunning instrument, large cleaver, small cleaver, skinning knives, boning knives, hog hook, meat saw, steak knife,

pickle pump, sticking knife, and meat grinder. Large slaughterhouses use over thirty-five different types of knives. Selzer notes that the men at a slaughterhouse "are synchronous as dancers and for the most part as silent. It is their knives that converse, gossip, press each other along."²⁹ Implements used against animals are one of the first things destroyed after the overthrow of people in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

Fragment #2: The Slaughterhouse

[The slaughterhouse] carries out its business in secret and decides what you will see, hides from you what it chooses.

—Richard Selzer³⁰

Generally, if we enter a slaughterhouse we do so through the writings of someone else who entered for us. Early in the century, Upton Sinclair entered the slaughterhouse for his readers. He seized the operations of the slaughterhouse as a metaphor for the fate of the worker in capitalism. Jurgis, the worker whose rising consciousness evolves in *The Jungle*, visits a slaughterhouse in the opening pages. A guide ushers him through the place and he experiences what "was like some horrible crime committed in a dungeon, all unseen and unheeded, buried out of sight and of memory."³¹ Hogs with their legs chained to a line that moves them forward hang upside down, squealing, grunting, wailing. The line moves them forward, their throats are slit, and then they vanish "with a splash into a huge vat of boiling water." Despite the businesslike aspect of the place, one "could not help thinking of the hogs; they were so innocent, they came so very trustingly; and they were so very human in their protests—and so perfectly within their rights!"

Then came the dismemberment: the scraping of the skin, beheading, cutting of the breastbone, removal of the entrails. Jurgis marvels at the speed, the automation, the machinelike way in which each man dispatched his job, and he congratulates himself that he is not a hog. The next three hundred pages trace the rising of his consciousness so that he realizes that a hog is exactly what he is—"one of the packer's hogs. What they wanted from a hog was all the profits that could be got out of him; and that was what they wanted from the working man, and also that was what they wanted from the public. What the hog thought of it and what he suffered, were not considered; and no more was it with labor and no more with the purchaser of meat."³²

In response to Sinclair's novel people could not help thinking of the hogs. The referent—those few initial pages describing butchering in a

book of more than three hundred pages—overpowered the metaphor. Horrified by what they learned about meat production, people clamored for new laws, and for a short time, became, as humorist Finley Peter Dunne's "Mr. Dooley" described it, "viggytaryans."³³ As Upton Sinclair bemoaned, "I aimed at the public's heart and by accident hit it in the stomach."³⁴ Butchering failed as a metaphor for the fate of the worker in *The Jungle* because the novel carried too much information on how the animal was violently killed. To make the absent referent present—that is, describing exactly how an animal dies, kicking, screaming, and is fragmented—disables consumption and disables the power of metaphor.

Fragment #3: The Disassembly Line as Model

Those who are against Fascism without being against capitalism, who lament over the barbarism that comes out of barbarism, are like people who wish to eat their veal without slaughtering the calf.

—Bertolt Brecht, "Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties"³⁵

Using the slaughterhouse as trope for treatment of the worker in a modern capitalist society did not end with Upton Sinclair. Bertolt Brecht's *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* employs butchering imagery throughout the play to depict the inhumanity of large-scale capitalists like the "meat king" Pierpont Mauler. This capitalist does to his employees what he does to the steers; he is a "butcher of men." With the activities of the slaughterhouse as the backdrop, phrases such as "cut-throat prices" and "it's no skin off my back" act as resonant puns invoking the fate of animals to bemoan the fate of the worker.³⁶ Appropriately, the choice of the trope of the slaughterhouse for the dehumanization of the worker by capitalism rings with historical verity.

The division of labor on the assembly lines owes its inception to Henry Ford's visit to the disassembly line of the Chicago slaughterhouses. Ford credited the idea of the assembly line to the fragmented activities of animal slaughtering: "The idea came in a general way from the overhead trolley that the Chicago packers use in dressing beef."³⁷ One book on meat production (financed by a meat-packing company) describes the process: "The slaughtered animals, suspended head downward from a moving chain, or conveyor, pass from workman to workman, each of whom performs some particular step in the process." The authors proudly add: "So efficient has this procedure proved to be that it has been adopted by many other industries, as for example in the assembling

of automobiles."³⁸ Although Ford reversed the outcome of the process of slaughtering in that a product is created rather than fragmented on the assembly line, he contributed at the same time to the larger fragmentation of the individual's work and productivity. The dismemberment of the human body is not so much a construct of modern capitalism as modern capitalism is a construct built on dismemberment and fragmentation.³⁹

One of the basic things that must happen on the disassembly line of a slaughterhouse is that the animal must be treated as an inert object, not as a living, breathing, being. Similarly the worker on the assembly line becomes treated as an inert, unthinking object, whose creative, bodily, emotional needs are ignored. For those people who work in the disassembly line of slaughterhouses, they, more than anyone, must accept on a grand scale the double annihilation of self: they are not only going to have to deny themselves, but they are going to have to accept the cultural absent referencing of animals as well. They must view the living animal as the meat that everyone outside the slaughterhouse accepts it as, while the animal is still alive. Thus they must be alienated from their own bodies and animals' bodies as well.⁴⁰ Which may account for the fact that the "turnover rate among slaughterhouse workers is the highest of any occupation in the country."⁴¹

The introduction of the assembly line in the auto industry had a quick and unsettling effect on the workers. Standardization of work and separation from the final product became fundamental to the laborers' experience.⁴² The result was to increase worker's alienation from the product they produced. Automation severed workers from a sense of accomplishment through the fragmentation of their jobs. In *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, Harry Braverman explains the initial results of the introduction of the assembly line, "Craftsmanship gave way to a repeated detail operation, and wage rates were standardized at uniform levels." Working men left Ford in large numbers after the introduction of the assembly line. Braverman observes: "In this initial reaction to the assembly line we see the natural revulsion of the worker against the new kind of work."⁴³ Ford dismembered the meaning of work, introducing productivity without the sense of being productive. Fragmentation of the human body in late capitalism allows the dismembered part to represent the whole. Because the slaughterhouse model is not evident to assembly line workers, they do not realize that as whole beings they too have experienced the impact of the structure of the absent referent in a patriarchal culture.

Fragment #4: The Rape of Animals

"Chickens fly in on the table with knife and fork in their thighs," begging to be eaten.

—Nineteenth-century Swedish ballad writer on the plenitude of meat in the United States⁴⁴

"He would tie me up and force me to have intercourse with our family dog. . . . He would get on top of me, holding the dog, and he would like hump the dog, while the dog had its penis inside me."⁴⁵ In this description of rape, the dog as well as the woman is being raped. Most rapes do not include animals, yet the phrases used by rape victims when describing their feelings suggest that animals' fate in meat eating is the immediate touchstone for their own experience. When women say that they feel like a piece of meat after being raped, are they saying there is a connection between being entered against one's will and being eaten? One woman reported: "He really made me feel like a piece of meat, like a receptacle. My husband had told me that all a girl was was a servant who could not think, a receptacle, a piece of meat."

In *Portnoy's Complaint*, Philip Roth conveys how meat becomes a receptacle for male sexuality when Portnoy masturbates in it: "'Come, Big Boy, Come' screamed the maddened piece of liver that, in my own insanity, I bought one afternoon at a butcher shop and, believe it or not, violated behind a billboard."⁴⁶ Unless the receptacle is Portnoy's piece of meat, a sexual object is not literally consumed. Why then this doubleness? What connects being a receptacle and being a piece of meat, being entered and being eaten? After all, being raped/violated/entered does not approximate being eaten. So why then does it feel that way? Or rather, why is it so easily described as feeling that way?⁴⁷ Because, if you are a piece of meat, you are subject to a knife, to implemental violence.

Rape, too, is implemental violence in which the penis is the implement of violation. You are held down by a male body as the fork holds a piece of meat so that the knife may cut into it. In addition, just as the slaughterhouse treats animals and its workers as inert, unthinking, unfeeling objects, so too in rape are women treated as inert objects, with no attention paid to their feelings or needs. Consequently they feel like pieces of meat. Correspondingly, we learn of "rape racks" that enable the insemination of animals against their will.⁴⁸ To feel like a piece of meat is to be treated like an inert object when one is (or was) in fact a living, feeling being.

The meat metaphors rape victims choose to describe their experience and the use of the "rape rack" suggest that rape is parallel and related to consumption, consumption both of images of women and of literal, ani-

mal flesh. Rape victims' repeated use of the word "hamburger" to describe the result of penetration, violation, being prepared for market, implies not only how unpleasurable being a piece of meat is, but also that animals can be victims of rape. They have been penetrated, violated, prepared for market against their will. Yet, overlapping cultural metaphors structure these experiences as though they were willed by women and animals.

To justify meat eating, we refer to animals' wanting to die, desiring to become meat. In Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, meat is forbidden unless it comes from animals who died "a natural death." Resultingly, "it was found that animals were continually dying natural deaths under more or less suspicious circumstances. . . . It was astonishing how some of these unfortunate animals would scent out a butcher's knife if there was one within a mile of them, and run right up against it if the butcher did not get it out of their way in time."⁴⁹ One of the mythologies of a rapist culture is that women not only ask for rape, they also enjoy it; that they are continually seeking out the butcher's knife. Similarly, advertisements and popular culture tell us that animals like Charlie the Tuna and Al Capp's Shmoo wish to be eaten. The implication is that women and animals willingly participate in the process that renders them absent.

In *Total Joy*, Marabel Morgan unites women and animals through the use of the metaphor of hamburger. Morgan fosters her own Shmoo syndrome in advising women to consider themselves like hamburger in serving their husbands' needs: "but like hamburger you may have to prepare yourself in a variety of different ways now and then."⁵⁰ Her sentence structure—"like hamburger you may"—implies that hamburger prepares itself in a variety of ways, and so must you. But hamburger, long before arriving in the kitchen of the total woman, has been denied all agency and can do no preparing. "You," woman/wife, refers to and stands in for hamburger. Women stand in relationship to the "total woman" as they do to "hamburger," as something that is objectified, without agency, that must be prepared, reshaped, acculturated to be made consumable in a patriarchal world. Though the referent is absent, women cannot escape recognizing themselves in it. And just as animals do not desire to be eaten, Morgan's sentence structure subverts her attempt to convince women that they do.

How does one turn a resistant, kicking, fearful subject into pieces of meat? To be converted from subject into object requires anesthetizing. G. J. Barker-Benfield tells us of a nineteenth-century medical man who came to the assistance of a man who wished to have sex with his wife. The physician arrived at the residence of the couple two or three times a week, "to etherize the poor wife."⁵¹ The anesthetizing of animals as a prelude to butchering reminds us of this doctor's complicity in marital rape.

What cannot easily be done to a fully awake and struggling body *can* be accomplished with an anesthetized one. What is the exceptional case in rape is again typical in butchering: anesthetization is an essential part of mass-producing meat.⁵²

A seduced animal results in a more economical operation, safer and better working conditions for the butcher, and, quite simply, produces higher quality meat. Animals' muscular tissue contains sufficient glycogen to produce a preservative, lactic acid, after death. But this glycogen can be used up by physical and nervous tension before death. Thus, a seduction routine to calm the victim, and medical intervention to anesthetize the victim, act as the prelude to butchering. Excited, frightened, and overheated animals will not bleed fully, and their dead flesh will be pink or fiery, making them "unattractive carcasses."⁵³

The seduction of "meat-producing animals" begins with tranquilizers, which are either injected into the bodies or inserted into the animals' feed. With a minimum of excitement and discomfort, the animals must then be immobilized. Immobilization may occur by mechanical, chemical, or electrical methods. The goal is not to kill the animals outright—as Arabella informs Jude in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*—but to stun them and initiate bleeding while the heart continues to beat, helping to push the blood out.

Curiously, as the animals move closer to the actual act of slaughter, the descriptions of the meat industry use language that implies the animals are willing their own actions. The more immobilized the animals become the more likely the words describing the slaughtering process will refer to them as though they were mobile, so their movements appear entirely their own: "emerging," facing in the same direction, and "sliding."⁵⁴ The concept of seduction has prevailed; animals appear to be active and willing agents in the "rape" of their lives.

Fragment #5: Jack the Ripper

I had always been fond of her in the most innocent, asexual way. It was as if her body was always entirely hidden behind her radiant mind, the modesty of her behavior, and her taste in dress. She had never offered me the slightest chink through which to view the glow of her nakedness. And now suddenly the butcher knife of fear had slit her open. She was as open to me as the carcass of a heifer slit down the middle and hanging on a hook. There were . . . and suddenly I felt a violent desire to make love to her. Or to be more exact, a violent desire to rape her.

—Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*⁵⁵

The overlap of categories of violated women and butchered animals is illustrated by the response to Jack the Ripper, who killed eight women in 1888. At the heart of his male violence was not murder alone, but sexual mutilation and possession by the removal of the uterus. He displayed skill in handling his implement of butchering; as the police surgeon concluded, he was "someone very handy with the knife."⁵⁶ In addition, he displayed knowledge of women's bodies by his precise butchering of specific body parts. "Indeed the principal objective of the murderer seems to have been evisceration of the body after the victim had been strangled and had her throat cut. When the murderer had enough time, the uterus and other internal organs were removed, and the women's insides were often strewn about."⁵⁷ For instance, after Katharine Eddowes was murdered, her left kidney and her uterus were missing.

The image of butchered animals haunted those who investigated the crimes. Women's fate became that traditionally reserved for animals. First, women were disemboweled by Jack the Ripper in such a fashion that it allowed for but one comparison, as the police surgeon reported: "She was ripped open just as you see a dead calf at a butcher's shop."⁵⁸ After viewing one victim whose small intestine and parts of the stomach were lying above her right shoulder and part of the stomach over her left shoulder, a young policeman could not eat meat. "My food sickened me. The sight of a butcher shop nauseated me."⁵⁹ The absent referent of meat suddenly became present when the objects were butchered women.

Secondly, Jack the Ripper's demonstrated skill with the implement of butchering, the knife, led the authorities to suspect the killer was either a butcher, hunter, slaughterman, or properly qualified surgeon. According to the police report, "seventy-six butchers and slaughterers have been visited and the characters of the men employed enquired into."⁶⁰

Thirdly, one of the motives proposed for Jack the Ripper's interest in the uterus demonstrates that women felt they were being treated like animals in terms of medical experimentation: it was rumored that an American was paying twenty pounds a womb for medical research. Jack the Ripper was thought to be supplying him.⁶¹ Lastly, one London minister, the Reverend S. Barnett, proposed that public slaughterhouses be removed because seeing them tends "to brutalise a thickly crowded population, and to debase the children."⁶²

Fragment #6: *The Butchering of Women*

Now I get coarse when the abstract nouns start flashing.
I go out to the kitchen to talk cabbages and habits.
I try hard to remember to watch what people do.
Yes, keep your eyes on the hands, let the voice go buzzing.

Economy is the bone, politics is the flesh,
watch who they beat and who they eat

—Marge Piercy, "In the men's room(s)"⁶³

Animals' fate in butchering is exploited in the oppression of women, and it is invoked by feminists concerned with stopping women's oppression. While animals are the absent objects, their fate is continually summoned through the metaphor of butchering. Butchering is that which creates or causes one's existence as meat; metaphorical "butchering" silently invokes the violent act of animal slaughter while reinforcing raped women's sense of themselves as "pieces of meat." Andrea Dworkin observes that "the favorite conceit of male culture is that experience can be fractured, literally its bones split, and that one can examine the splinters as if they were not part of the bone, or the bone as if it were not part of the body." (We dwell on the T-bone steak or the drumstick as if it were not part of a body.) Dworkin's dissection of the body of culture resounds with meaning when we consider the concept of animals' status as absent referent: "Everything is split apart: intellect from feeling and/or imagination; act from consequence; symbol from reality; mind from body. Some part substitutes for the whole and the whole is sacrificed to the part."⁶⁴ Dworkin's metaphorical description of patriarchal culture depends on the reader's knowledge that animals are butchered in this way.

Images of butchering suffuse patriarchal culture. A steakhouse in New Jersey was called "Adam's Rib." Who do they think they were eating? *The Hustler*, prior to its incarnation as a pornographic magazine, was a Cleveland restaurant whose menu presented a woman's buttocks on the cover and proclaimed, "We serve the best meat in town!" Who? A woman is shown being ground up in a meat grinder as *Hustler* magazine proclaims: "Last All Meat Issue." Women's buttocks are stamped as "Choice Cuts" on an album cover entitled "Choice Cuts (Pure Food and Drug Act)." When asked about their sexual fantasies, many men describe "pornographic scenes of disembodied, faceless, impersonal body parts: breasts, legs, vaginas, buttocks."⁶⁵ Meat for the average consumer has been reduced to exactly that: faceless body parts, breasts, legs, udders, buttocks. Frank Perdue plays with images of sexual butchering in a poster encouraging chicken consumption: "Are you a breast man or a leg man?"

A popular poster in the butcher shops of the Haymarket section of Boston depicted a woman's body sectioned off as though she were a slaughtered animal, with her separate body parts identified. In response to such an image, dramatists Dario Fo and Franca Rame scripted this narrative:

There was a drawing of a naked lady all divided up into different sections. You know . . . like those posters in the butcher's shop of a cow? And all the erogenous zones were painted these incredible colours. For instance, the rump was painted shocking pink. (Does a bump and grind and laughs.) Then this part here (Putting her hands on her back just below her neck) . . . butchers call it chuck. It was purple. And the fillet . . . (Briefly diverted) What about the price of fillet nowadays eh? Terrible! Well anyway, it was orange.⁶⁶

Norma Benney in "All of One Flesh: The Rights of Animals" describes the centerfold of a music magazine that "showed a naked woman, spread-eagled and chained on an operating table in a butcher's shop surrounded by hanging animal carcasses and butchers' knives and cleavers while a man in a red, rubber, butcher's apron prepared to divide her with an electric saw."⁶⁷ In this context, colloquial expressions such as "piece of ass," "I'm a breast man," and "I'm a thigh man" reveal their assaultive origins. (Although men may be called "stud" and "hunk," these terms only reconfirm the fluidity of the absent referent, and reinforce the extremely specific, assaultive ways in which "meat" is used to refer to women. Men possess themselves as "meat," women are possessed.)

These examples suggest a paradigm of metaphorical sexual butchering of which the essential components are:

- the knife, real or metaphorical, as the chosen implement (in pornography the camera lens takes the place of the knife, committing implemental violence)
- the aggressor seeking to control/consume/defile the body of the victim
- the fetishism of body parts
- meat eating provides the image of butchered animals

Metaphoric sexual butchering recurs in literature and movies extolling images of butchered women. We find the rape and subsequent butchering of a woman in the Hebrew Bible book of Judges. A Levite allows his concubine to be savagely raped by strangers: "They raped her and tortured her all night until the morning."⁶⁸ She falls down at the doorway of the house where the Levite is staying. He puts her on his donkey—we do not know if she is dead or alive—and takes her to his house. "He took the knife and he seized his concubine. He cut her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel."⁶⁹ Similarly, in D. H. Lawrence's "The Woman Who Rode Away" a New Woman rides into a situation where she is to be sacrificed to the sun by

a group of men in a cave. Lawrence's language evokes both literal and sexual consumption. Kate Millet offers an acute analysis of this tale: "This is a formula for sexual cannibalism: substitute the knife for the penis and penetration, the cave for a womb, and for a bed, a place of execution—and you provide a murder whereby one acquires one's victim's power."⁷⁰

Sexual butchering is a basic component of male pornographic sexuality. The infamous "snuff movies," so-named for the snuffing out of a woman's life in the last few minutes of the movie, celebrate women's butchering as a sexual act:

A pretty young blond woman who appears to be a production assistant tells the director how sexually aroused she was by the stabbing [of a pregnant woman] finale. The attractive director asks her if she would like to go to bed with him and act out her fantasies. They start fumbling around in bed until she realizes that the crew is still filming. She protests and tries to get up. The director picks up a dagger that is lying on the bed and says, "Bitch, now you're going to get what you want." What happens next goes beyond the realm of language. He butchers her slowly, deeply, and thoroughly. The observer's gut revulsion is overwhelming at the amount of blood, chopped-up fingers, flying arms, sawed-off legs, and yet more blood oozing like a river out of her mouth before she dies. But the climax is still at hand. In a moment of undiluted evil, he cuts open her abdomen and brandishes her very insides high above his head in a scream of orgasmic conquest.⁷¹

"Snuff" movies are the apotheosis of metaphoric sexual butchering, embodying all the necessary components: the dagger as implement, the female victim, the defiling of the body and the fetishism of female parts. In the absence of an actual victim, snuff exists as a reminder of what happens to animals all the time.

In constructing stories about violence against women, feminists have drawn on the same set of cultural images as their oppressors. Feminist critics perceive the violence inherent in representations that collapse sexuality and consumption and have titled this nexus "carnivorous arrogance" (Simone de Beauvoir), "gynocidal gluttony" (Mary Daly), "sexual cannibalism" (Kate Millet), "psychic cannibalism" (Andrea Dworkin), "metaphysical cannibalism" (Ti-Grace Atkinson); racism as it intersects with sexism has been defined by bell hooks in distinctions based on meat eating: "The truth is—in sexist America, where women are objectified extensions of male ego, black women have been labeled hamburger and white women prime rib."⁷² These feminist theorists take

us to the intersection of the oppression of women and the oppression of animals and then do an immediate about-face, seizing the function of the absent referent only to forward women's issues, not animals', and so reflecting a patriarchal structure. Dealing in symbols and similes that express humiliation, objectification, and violation is an understandable attempt to impose order on a violently fragmented female sexual reality. When we use meat and butchering as metaphors for women's oppression, we express our own hog-squeal of the universe while silencing the primal hog-squeal of Ursula Hamdress herself.

When radical feminists talk as if cultural exchanges with animals are literally true in relationship to women, they invoke and borrow what is actually done to animals. It could be argued that the use of these metaphors is as exploitative as the posing of Ursula Hamdress: an anonymous pig somewhere was dressed, posed, and photographed. Was she sedated to keep that pose or was she, perhaps, dead? Radical feminist theory participates linguistically in exploiting and denying the absent referent by not including in their vision Ursula Hamdress's fate. They butcher the animal/woman cultural exchanges represented in the operation of the absent referent and then address themselves solely to women, thus capitulating to the absent referent, part of the same construct they wish to change.⁷³

What is absent from much feminist theory that relies on metaphors of animals' oppression for illuminating women's experience is the reality behind the metaphor. Feminist theorists' use of language should describe and challenge oppression by recognizing the extent to which these oppressions are culturally analogous and interdependent.

So, too, should animal advocates be wary of language that uses rape metaphorically to describe what happens to animals, without basing their analysis on a recognition of the social context of rape for women in our culture. Metaphoric borrowing that depends on violation yet fails to protest the originating violence does not acknowledge interlocking oppressions. Our goal is to resist the violence that separates matter from spirit, to eliminate the structure that creates absent referents.

It is tempting to think that all that has been discussed in this chapter are words, ideas, "abstract nouns," how images work: that there is no flesh and no kitchen. But there is fragmented flesh and there are kitchens in which it is found. Animals may be an absent referent point in discourse but this need not continue. What if we heeded Marge Piercy's response to abstract nouns; let's go into the kitchen and consider not only "who they beat" but "who [we] eat"? In incorporating the fate of animals we would encounter these issues: the relationship between imperialism and

meat eating in imposing a "white" diet of meat eating on the dietary folkways of people of color; the ecological implications of what I consider to be the fourth stage of meat eating—the eating of institutionalized, factory-farmed animals (after stages of (1) practically no meat eating, (2) eating meat of free animals, and (3) eating meat of domesticated animals); the meaning of our dependence on female animals for "feminized protein" such as milk and eggs; issues of racism and classism that arise as we consider the role of the industrialized countries in determining what "first class" protein is—all of which are a part of the sexual politics of meat.

There is a model for us of living, breathing connections awaiting incorporation in our theory; a logical next step in the progression of feminist thought is politicizing the ambiguity and slippage inherent in the metaphors of sexual violence, as well as their social, historical, and animal origins. The next chapter begins this politicizing process by analyzing the role of language in masking violence and defining the conflict between a dominant worldview that accepts meat eating and the muted minority viewpoint of vegetarianism.