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Chapter 14

The Sexual Politics of Meatless Meat (in)Edible Others and the Myth of Flesh without Sacrifice

Rebekah Sinclair

When I first declared I would no longer eat animal flesh, my relationship with my family changed. Refusing to eat meat did not simply represent an illogical and unrecognizable choice; rather, it was as though the choice made *me* unrecognizable. I suddenly lacked intelligibility or recognizability. I was actively shifted outside the network of traits that make me recognizable or intelligible as a proper subject.

In her ground-breaking work, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (2010 [1990], hereafter SP) Carol Adams provides a lengthy outline of the material and symbolic ways in which consuming so-called 'animal flesh' has been used to secure masculine identity, and therefore, to secure proper or recognizable subjecthood in the West. Jacques Derrida also notes this in his coining of the neologism 'carnophallogocentrism' (1991, 113). Carnophallogocentrism is the symbolic economy through which male, human, meat-eating, reason-centric, speaking subjecthood is constructed and secured over and against the feminine, the edible, the animal and the irrational. Carnophallogocentrism names the structure of sacrifice through which we regularly and systematically kill and consume non-human animals (legally and without consequence) in order to secure our intelligibility as 'human' and as superior. Certainly in the Midwest of my youth, meat-eating was central to this recognizability. Disavowing meat meant I was compromised, blurred, a creature fallen through the cracks. And it was not only me; my family barely recognized most of the expensive, unsubsidized vegetables I brought home to cook with, and tensions became high as we struggled to negotiate the new conditions of one another's recognition at a primary scene of our togetherness: the table.

This is the deeply personal context where so-called 'meatless meats' continue to play a central role in my communal life. Desiring this recognition, wanting to prove that my ethical choices and my own subjectivity are still

meaningful and intact, I have revelled in faux flesh, and eaten up the declarations, 'You'd never know this wasn't real meat!' With plant-based meats, I have remade old and cherished family recipes with animal-free alternatives, making a plant-based lifestyle seem, at the very least, less exotic and gross, and, at best, potentially tenable and delicious, even to the extremely sceptical. Meatless meats have aided in the transition of partners and friends towards a plant-based diet, securing a familiar subjecthood by settling anxieties about a consumption that balances compassion and culinary satisfaction.

But why is it that serving faux sausage for breakfast does more to secure an intelligible self and a comfortable dining experience than serving a delicious scrambled tofu, even though both are embodied soy matter? I have a hunch that plant-based meats have been helpful in preserving intelligibility, securing subjecthood and appealing to 'meat' eaters precisely because they still refer to the flesh of edible animal bodies in much the same way 'real' meat does, and serve a similar function in the symbolic domain.

In what follows, I argue that plant-based meats are never really free of the animal they intend to substitute, and they therefore reproduce certain frameworks of intelligibility that keep animals *edible* even if they are not eaten. I closely engage the work of Adams and Derrida, to argue that the substitutionary economy of meatless meat uniquely upholds and reproduces human, masculine subjecthood. To make this case, I consider two closely related domains of substitution: inflatable vagina sex toys and faux human meat. In each of these instances, the substitutions (fake vaginas for real ones, and fake human meat for cannibalism) *rely on*, rather than diminish, associations with the bodies they replace. If we are uncomfortable with certain sex toys and with fake human meat *because* of their connection with the bodies they represent and stand in for, why are we *not* uncomfortable with faux animal meat? What does this say about the way meatless meats perpetuate animal *edibility*?

UNDERSTANDING ANIMALS THROUGH EDIBILITY OR ABILITY

To suggest that a body is edible is to claim it has been understood, or materialized, through a constitutive economy that links its ontological position and essence to the socially acceptable practice of killing and eating it without penal or social punishment. If, for Derrida, carnophallogocentrism names the 'sacrificial structure' that opens a space for the 'noncriminal putting to death' of creaturely others, then edibility names the enforced, ongoing ontological condition of those sacrificed to be consumed (1991, 113). It is not only that we kill chickens for food, but that chickens exist *only* to be food – they are always edible, simply 'food producing units', even if we are not eating them

(SP 58). I contend that meatless meats appeal to precisely to this structure of edibility and sacrifice in their naming, advertisements and sexual politics. Why locate my concerns in the context of sexual politics? In part because Adams' original work on the sexual politics of meat plays a significant role in my reading of meatless meats. But also because I believe the discourse of meatless meat is inherently sexualized and carnivorous; it is located within a carnophallogocentric symbolic economy that links the production and exclusion of a number of bodies (women, people of colour, animals, plants, etc.) in order to secure the ethical centrality of 'man'. This sexualized and carnivorous economy facilitates very real structural violence against all feminized, speciesed, racialized bodies that do not conform to its logic of proper subjecthood. To say that bodies are speciesed (or feminized or racialized) is to suggest that species is not a natural category of bodies, but a discursive framework that must be applied to bodies in order to make them legible.

My analysis thus begins with the assumption that man, woman and edible animals are *produced* as coherent ideas within carnophallogocentrism and then reinforced by the sexual, gender and species relations at play in discourses of meat (meatless or otherwise). By bringing Adams' work on sexual politics into greater contact with Derrida's work on carnophallogocentrism, I interrogate the sexual politics of meatless meats. I ask why meatless meats have become such a significant culinary and cultural phenomenon, and problematize the symbolic, sacrificial economy in which they participate.

Now perhaps these opening reflections seem a little harsh. After all, that one can have meat without killing speciesed others seems, perhaps intuitively, like something to be praised. Even *Star Trek*, with their protein resequencers that make food from waste matter and subatomic particles (instead of plants or animals), envisioned the simultaneity of meat consumption and vegetarianism as a sign of progress in liberal and egalitarian societies.¹ But even in the *Trek* universe, the Vulcans – like Spock (rest in peace), Tuvok, T'Pol, etc. – are ethical vegetarians, in accordance with their philosophy of doing no harm, and refuse to eat even this resequenced meat. They were repulsed by the desire for real flesh that haunted the production of the protein resequencers. The Vulcans seemed to understand that consuming plant meats, faux meats or meats made from subatomic particles, does not actually contest the linguistic, material, social economies that makes bodies killable or edible in the first place.

So even as plant meats offer us alternatives to killing animals – or rather, precisely because they are reproductions or analogues of only certain kinds of creaturely flesh – they seem to depend upon the framework of recognition that makes particular speciesed others always already edible, killable even before they are killed. Meatless meats effect or enact this edibility differently than, for example, plant-based milks, cheeses or eggs, whose original (non-plant)

referents do not imply a necessary animal death.² Though plant-based by-products no doubt participate in edibility in some way (through logics of domination, at the very least), plant-based meats directly refer to a symbolic structure that situates edibility *in the very life of the body itself*, and not just their reproductive fluids or forms. One cannot have meat without a death, and it is this death that haunts the discourse of all meat (plant or otherwise).

Plant-based meats therefore participate in a particular *discourse* of meatless meat. There are, of course, differences within meatless meat products themselves: not all plant-based or faux meats are created equal, and they do not all reproduce carnophallogocentrism or sexist pitfalls in the same way or to the same extent. But insofar as these ersatz meats intend to mimic animal flesh, they participate in a specific, material-cultural economy through which their 'flesh' is made legible. Rather than parsing out the different ways each individual plant meat uniquely relies on this structure – a project impossible in scope – it is more important to discuss a representative sample of plant meats and make visible the structure or discourse itself, which is, I contend, the primary problem.

To set up the discussion in this way already relocates our concern from mere abstinence or lack of meat to the much broader and deeper problems of subject construction and meaning-making in which meatless meats participate. We know, for example, that vegetarianism and veganism are but identity categories of the consumer or of a personal lifestyle, and do not inherently point either to the systemic abuse of edible others, nor do they make claims about new possible futures with those bodies (for example, we tend to say 'vegan-friendly food', rather than 'animal-friendly' food). This is why Adams, joined by feminist Josephine Donovan, even names her critical work a 'vegetarian *ethic of care*'; because vegetarianism, or mere abstinence, is simply not enough (2007, 1).

Indeed, meatless meat discourses strategically distance themselves – albeit in different ways and to different degrees – from large-scale ethics and animal care (and their slower pace of social change) in order to provoke rapid market shifts. This is not to say meatless meat companies are not interested in the ethical impact of their products generally. Many analogue meat companies, including Beyond Meat, Impossible Foods, Plenti, March Meats and Garden of Eatin', believe their products *are* ethical alternatives, particularly ethical for environmental and human health.³ But several of these companies also openly claim that their products do not necessitate or presuppose that consumers share their ethical commitments. Founder of Impossible Foods and creator of the plant-based 'burger that bleeds', Patrick Brown, suggests, 'So we don't expect the consumer to want to choose our product because it's better for the world. We have to effectively reinvent a whole system for producing food, the end result being an unbelievably delicious product that can compete successfully

against a product that people have loved for a thousand years' (CNet 2014). Founder of the plant-based meat company Beyond Meat, Ethan Brown, suggests something similar. Even as Brown explicitly affirms animal welfare as one of Beyond Meat's founding commitments – along with improving human health and addressing climate change and resource scarcity – (Our Mission), he also admits that removing the connection to ethical change is a way to shift towards better ethics *for animals* without anyone needing to undergo the arduous process of shifting concerns *about animals*.

It is precisely because of my concern for the agency and co-becoming of edible others – a concern shared by at least some plant-meat producers and advocates, as well as Adams and Derrida – that I believe we must detach so-called animals from their association with *edibility* altogether. We must instead affirm their *ability* to join us in mutually imagining new futures where their lives exist without reference to our tables. So the question is, does strategically using carnophallogocentric symbolic structures to promote quick-paced change actually help speciesed others in the long run, or does it maintain a symbolic relationship to animal flesh that perpetuates our understanding of certain bodies as edible, less than and other than? Do meatless meats maintain carnophallogocentrism and, therefore, also dominant, masculinist, sexist or speciesist subject relations? How can we imagine new speciesed relations while meatless meats either fail to critique, or worse, intentionally espouse the commodification and substitution of bodies within advanced capitalism, as well as other symbolic structures that have kept animal others disenfranchised from the beginning?⁴ Do meatless meats invisibilize the agency and ethical value of plants in order to advance the myth that we can have flesh without sacrifice? Do they keep speciesed others outside of our communities, or at least obscure the means of creaturely entrance, even once their bodies are no longer on our tables? After all, in keeping with our speculative fiction imagery, one can imagine a meatless meat future in which chickens, cows, pigs, geese and others all live and die in ignored squalor and pain outside of communities as humans more cheaply make and consume the analogues of their flesh. Instead of only inquiring whether or not meatless meats will reduce slaughter, we must also ask whether or not they will alter the intellectual, economic and epistemological conditions that make slaughter and exclusion possible to begin with.

THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF MEATLESS MEAT

Carol Adams is a radical feminist semiotician, a literary theorist dedicated to examining and critiquing what she calls 'patriarchal texts of meat', and to dismantling the linguistic and ontological structures that enable violence

against bodies (SP 47). Among her more theoretical legacies is the application of the literary phenomena of the 'absent referent' to the social and political production of meat from certain speciesed others. If a referent is the object to which a sign refers, then an absent referent names the condition in which a sign is disassociated from, emptied of or paradoxically related to that which it supposedly names. Adams famously claims, 'Through butchering, animals become absent referents. Animals in name and body are made absent *as animals* for meat to exist.... A dead body replaces the live animal' (66). She continues, 'Live animals are 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' (66). This last point will become especially significant in our discussion of meatless meats.

But for Adams, in order for speciesed others to be actively absented from their own flesh, they undergo a process of objectification, dismemberment and consumption. In her words, 'Objectification permits an oppressor to view another being as an object. The oppressor then violates this being by object-like treatment' which comes in the form of 'fragmentation or brutal dismemberment, and then consumption' (SP 58). According to Adams, bodies are first objectified and become mere objects through a stripping of their agency and perspective. This then allows the bodies to be dismembered, broken down into their component parts: breasts, thighs, wings, butts, etc. Adams notes, 'Animals are made absent through language that renames the dead bodies before consumers participate in eating them' (66). Dismemberment linguistically and ontologically separates certain non-humans from their own bodies, as though flesh were somehow separate from the *whom* to which the flesh always already belongs, from *who* flesh always already *is*. Creaturely parts are often renamed to obscure the fact that they belonged to or were living, breathing bodies – these bits become sausage, bacon, beef, steak, etc. Once the lives, deaths and wills of particular non-humans are removed, their bodies dismembered, and their parts renamed, 'meat is without a reference point' (59). Meat can then become 'a free-floating image', or even a free-floating materiality – a supposedly self-referential system (74).

For Adams, this structure of the absent referent is a problem, and wrongly invisibilizes the living beings that become meat so that we relate only to meat itself. But, according to meatless meat discourses, the absent referent can be helpful. Meatless meat discourse embraces a cultural imaginary that further detaches sentient creatures from ideas of flesh, using the supposed absence of sentient beings, and meat's self-referential quality, to its advantage, and hopefully removing the animal from the equation entirely. Meatless meats rely on and the structure of the supposedly absent referent and in the dismemberment it presupposes. Meatless meat advocates appear to say, 'You're right, Carol,

there is *not* or *need not* be any other referent behind meat besides itself. It is nothing but a set of proteins, amino acids, etc. and animals don't have to be there. We can provide their desired flesh without them'. What we want, we are told, is not animal flesh per se, but flesh as such, meat as such. 'Chicken' does not refer to a dismembered sentient, maternal, winged creature, but to flesh, and they have reproduced that flesh at supposedly no cost to chickens.

Beyond Meat's CEO Ethan Brown, for example, even dislikes the qualifier 'fake' for his meats, preferring instead that we think of his meats as 'real meat' (just proteins, amino acids, etc.) 'from plants' ('Our 25/20 Vision'). Patrick Brown of Impossible Foods, in a similar argument, claims that on the molecular level, meats (and even blood) are nothing more than proteins, nutrients and heme (found in haemoglobin) and can be exactly duplicated using plants (CNet 2014). The Impossible Foods' website homepage claims, 'For thousands of years we've relied on animals to transform plants into meat, milk, cheese and eggs. Impossible Foods has found a better way to make the foods you love, directly from plants' (online). Here, non-human animal bodies are construed as nothing more than vehicles for turning plants into meat, while animals as entities are, as Adams suggests, invisibilized entirely. By turning plants directly into meat, Impossible Foods intends to completely extract animal lives and fully erase the animal referent. Meatless meats attempt to make meat truly self-referential, and finally, once and for all, detach meat from its creaturely origin.

Now if the structure of the absent referent were total – if meat bore absolutely no symbolic or discursive relationship to animal bodies in any way – then meatless meats might be on the right track. If animals were genuinely fully absented with zero trace, then plant meats would be able to simply radicalize the existing absence in a positive way. But my central claim is that meat is not and cannot ever be a free-floating signifier, freeing chickens and other edibles from ontological bondage. In truth, the absent referent structure *never* fully erases or invisibilizes the referent. In this way, the idea of an *absent* referent is a little misleading. For the absent referent is not strictly absent; there is always a simultaneous absence *and* presence at play in the idea of meat – both faux and real, plant and animal. To this end, it is helpful to buffer Adams' absent referent with Derrida's notion of the trace.

For Derrida, the trace is the 'mark of the absence of a presence, an always-already absent present' (Spivak 1997, xvii). The trace names the play between absence and presence at work in all signs and referents. For a traditional example, we could look at the way ideas of woman and writing are present as an absence in the definitions 'man' and 'speech'. Similarly, animals are both present and absent within flesh. Their absence is what defines the presence of meat, but in this way, they are always still implied, *present* as spectral and implied figures in flesh.

For Adams, it is this simultaneous absence and presence of specied others in meat that allows them to be used to advertise their own flesh, even as we dismember them to make that flesh palatable. And it is the simultaneous presence and absence of specied others that allows their death and consumption to serve as a definitive point in the carnophallogocentric economy. Specieed, edible others are precisely not absent from meat. If they were, our consumption of it would do nothing to signify human superiority over other so-called species, to secure virility or masculinity, or any of the other things Adams and others claim flesh consumption has come to signify.

Like 'real meat', faux flesh and meatless meats also bear the trace of, if not outright association with, edible others and their deaths by their naming, their look and taste, and their advertising and imagery. Products such as Chicken-less tenders or Beefless patties, Beyond Chicken and Tofurkey, Coconut bacon and mock Duck, vegetarian Scallops and vegan Haggis all have their edible, specied counterparts directly referenced as a present absence. They rely on the simultaneity of presence and absence, and on our ontological and culinary comfort with and expectation of this play, to make their products legible and desirable. Beyond Meat's Chicken-Free Strips are advertised as 'the plant protein that looks, tastes, feels, and acts like chicken – without the cluck' ('Beyond Chicken'). Notice that it does not taste like *a* chicken, it tastes like chicken: the flesh we call chicken. The Beyond Meat marketing team attempts to situate their product precisely in this space of absence where 'real meat' does not refer to a sentient body. But chicken-as-living-being and chicken-as-consumable product remain semantically interchangeable, even if the latter becomes plant.

The material itself bears the trace of edible others when it claims it can 'look, taste, feel and act like chicken'. Unlike seitan (a 'meaty' substitute made from wheat gluten), tofu, textured vegetable protein (TVP), eggplant, coconut, mushrooms and any number of other substances that can approximate or take the place of meat in a meal, plant-based and analoge meats are specifically attempting to duplicate flesh exactly; they literally reproduce the flesh of dead animals in every significant material aspect. Beyond Meat even advertises their products as 'Real Meat: 100% Plant Protein' and Impossible Foods suggests they 'use plants to make the best meats and cheeses you'll ever eat'. In a bizarre act of transubstantiation, we are no longer supposed to be able to tell the difference between two 'real meats', one of which is dead animal and the other dead plants. In fact, we are supposed to confuse them, and to remain uncertain about what we are eating. In a Slate.com opinion piece entitled, 'Fake Meat So Good It Will Freak You Out', Farhad Manjoo suggested, 'The first time a vegetarian tastes Beyond Meat's ersatz animal flesh, he'll feel delighted and queasy at the same time. There's something about the way these fake chicken strips break on your teeth, the way they

initially resist and then yield to your chew, the faint fatty residue they leave on your palate and your tongue – something about the whole experience that feels a little too real' (2012). The paranoia of this unnamed masculine subject is precisely the point: without the thought that we might actually be eating real chicken, this product loses its efficacy. The dead chicken has to be present as a trace, as a reference, for this product to sell.

SEX TOYS AND SUBSTITUTION

Now perhaps this critique seems to miss the benefit that meatless meats could bring to our current climate of industrial animal production. After all, plant-based meats do seem intended to take the strain off of animals. So let us turn to a brief critique of another arena of dismemberment and replication, one that might be a little easier to swallow. Let's look at sex toys, and particularly, inflatable and silicone vaginas. Inflatable or silicone vaginas are a genre of sex toys which not only provide a vagina-shaped hole into which interested parties insert a sexual organ or object, but also (and quite often) come attached to entire sections of the female torso, buttocks and breasts. These are different than 'fleshlights' or other male masturbators, which may or may not look like actual vaginas, and which do not reference the female anatomy in name or advertisement (unlike objects such as pocket pussies or other 'artificial vaginas'). We all know that this is not a 'real' vagina, or that they are not 'real' insofar as an inflatable or silicone vagina does not materialize on and act as an assemblage of a living body (male, female or otherwise). However, the pleasure of these toys relies on their association or substitutability with so-called 'real' female bodies. Their ability to give pleasure relies on the confusion, the collapse or at least the deferral of the difference between so-called real and faux vaginas. This is often born out in the process of making such vaginas, many of which advertise themselves as based on the bodies of actual models, and sell themselves through language that claims 'just like the real thing', 'lifelike', and 'feel what it's really like to be inside the world's hottest porn star', etc. ('Silicone'). Rather than merely seeking to provide pleasure through instruments that are a satisfying shape and texture that do not need to reference other objects for their sense – a practice I definitely would not disparage – silicone and inflatable vaginas seek to sell a detached part of the female body that is as close to real as possible.

This might make us wonder what the 'real' of a vagina even is. Or, for that matter, what the 'real' of meat even is. For meatless meat companies invested in separating the animal from its flesh, the real of meat has very little to do with specied others. Beyond Meat's homepage proclaims: 'Meat is actually pretty simple: amino acids, fats, carbohydrates, trace minerals and

water combined to give us that familiar chew, resistance, and variation'. The real of meat might not have anything to do with the bodies whence it comes, the body which ought to define it. Similarly, in a carnophallogocentric, or sexualized, politics of meat in which bodies are understood through their relationship to masculine subjecthood, the 'real' of the vagina has far less to do with its bodily specific microorganisms, its ecosystem of pleasure, blood and bacteria, and attachment to a body, than it does to a certain performance of pleasure it offers others. Silicone vaginas ignore the complex, irreducibly materialized, queerly enjoyed, novel vaginations of the bodies to which they are always already attached – which are never not part of those bodies – in favour of an essentialized, detachable instrument for pleasuring others.

Meatless meats further detach the idea of flesh from the lively, affective, agential, sentient, maternal, invested bodies to which it always already belongs. For Adams, the act of dismemberment is crucial for our ability to consume others. Silicone vaginas, like meatless meats, are premised on the possibility of this taking apart; meat is detachable from animals like vaginas are from women. In a masculinized economy that divides women's bodies into their component parts of pleasure for others (see the classic 'Cattle Queen' image of a woman's body bisected in animal 'cuts' that graces the cover of the Adams' *The Sexual Politics of Meat* for a good example), the consent, relationality and physical presence of feminized bodies are the spectral figures of every vagina, but do not need to be present for their flesh to be enjoyed, just as edible others remain the spectral figures in plant flesh. Here, female and edible bodies and agencies become the implied but spectral figures for their own parts.

Because silicone vaginas participate in a pleasure economy built on confusing the real and the reproduction – even deferring what the 'real' is – it would be difficult to claim that inflatable or silicone vaginas do not perpetuate a certain violence against female bodies (or any body with a vagina). According to feminist materialist Rosi Braidotti, bodily over-representation without embodiment results in a physical reduction to 'pure surface, exteriority without depth' (2011, 51). The same is true for meatless meats, whose attempt to confuse or substitute the real for the production, or to change what 'real' meat is, still imposes a certain violence on other edible bodies. To assert that we would prefer people use inflated or silicone vaginas instead of non-consenting women is, at best, to ignore the ways such products precisely undermine the idea of consent, and, at worse, to concede that women's bodies are substitutable, dismemberable, detachable. It is to concede that our vaginas and our flesh are not our own. Likewise, the linguistic, epistemological and ontological structures that have long made speciated bodies edible, killable and disposable are not contested in faux flesh. They are substituted, but not contested. Faux flesh leaves animals edible – indeed, it relies on their

edibility – and therefore cannot aid in reshaping our thoughts on animals any more than detachable vaginas can better our cultural respect for the bodies of women.

This sex toy argument does not preclude the possibility that certain dildos – or replication of the male penis – also enter into troubling symbolic economies of substitution. Some absolutely might, such as those dildos that possess such proximate anatomical details to penises they would make even Michelangelo blush. These perhaps appeal directly to some processes of dismemberment and substitution. Of course other dildos likely do not, as they might as well be modelled after cucumbers, carrots or other oblong vegetables. Purely functional, these seem to lack all relation (in name, advertisement or design) with male anatomy.

But in general, there is an important difference to be made: unlike inflatable and silicone vaginas, dildos are employable (and enjoyable) by men and women alike, and by both queer and straight bodies. This pivotal difference highlights a crucial element of the substitutionary structure we have been tracking. Namely, we are not only criticizing the process of dismemberment and substitution, though that is obviously a central part of my critique; we are also tracking the way dominant, carnophallogocentric, masculine subjecthood is secured through these substitutions and dismemberments. In other words, we are not only looking at the process of dismemberment as such, but also *who* is dismembered and *who* is substituted and for *whose* sake? In the case of faux meat and faux vaginas, the symbolically dismembered bodies perpetuate a carnophallogocentric economy that secures privilege and intelligibility for the pleased, and unintelligibility, exclusion, vulnerability and edibility for others. Faux vaginas and faux meats refer directly to the bodies of women and edible animals, whose historical disenfranchisement and enforced physical precarity are precisely the fuel for carnophallogocentric intelligibility. These substitutions perpetuate the belief that certain bodies are accessible and consumable, a belief by which masculine subjecthood has defined itself. In short, rather than just suggesting all substitutions are equal or all substitutions are bad – a slightly different argument, but something we might consider in another context – we must instead look at the kinds of subjects and frameworks of legibility different substitutions require and perpetuate. In this sense, meatless meat and faux vaginas are particularly fraught substitutions because they perpetuate a framework of intelligibility that reinforces long-held relations of domination, rendering female and animal populations all the more precarious, while securing the carnophallogocentric legibility of their consumers.

Finally, this analysis of substitutions does not erase the very substantial differences between 'faux' and 'real' flesh, as it were. Instead, this account insists we acknowledge that the intelligibility and desirability of both meats

relies on the same dismemberment, diminishment and edibility of animal lives. For Derrida, the play between presence and absence in the idea of trace is part of a larger critique of the metaphysics of presence. It is a critique of our belief that the value of a word or body comes from its inherent essence rather than a network of perceptions, actions and symbolic relations. But if the trace makes clear the presence of slaughtered animals even in faux meat, even in their material absence, then we cannot simply be concerned about identifying the truth of meat, 'faux or real', and which we consume. We cannot congratulate ourselves just yet. We must turn our attention from the difference between faux and real meats, so to speak, to the troubling, carnophillogocentric *processes of differentiation* by which we understand both.

THE CANNIBAL THAT THEREFORE I AM'

To more clearly understand the connection between meatless meats and the continued edibility of certain specied others, I want to consider a brief thought experiment.

Imagine you are browsing your favourite grocery store and you find a representative trying to sell a hot new product: faux human meat. The energetic spokesperson raves about the product that she assures you is non-gmo, organic and gluten free. This faux human flesh product tastes so much like the real thing you would never know it was fake! You do not even have to be a cannibal to enjoy this food. Vegetarians and meat eaters alike will love it. In front of you on a lovely tray are flesh coloured protein bits, cut up into pieces with fancy toothpicks in each. Would you be curious or repulsed? Would you try it or buy it? Or are you the thrifty shopper who would stock up on it while it was on its debut sale?

Cannibalism, the consumption of humans by one another, has perhaps been around as long as there have been humans, and been popularized in films from *Soylent Green* to *Delicatessen*. But the idea of *faux* human flesh, or flesh made only to look and taste like human bodies, is a relatively recent idea. I have been arguing that plant-based and faux meats do not and cannot fully invisibilize the bodies they substitute, but instead perpetuate a framework of intelligibility that makes these bodies always edible and less than, even when they are not eaten. Here, I suggest that faux human meat has the same problem. In fact, by looking at two examples of faux human flesh in recent pop culture, I argue that society *already* recognizes and acknowledges the un-severable connection between fake meat and real bodies.

The first example of this faux *sapiens* flesh is found in the animated show, *Adventure Time*. In the episode, 'Her Parents', the show's human character, Finn, finds himself in a land of Rainicorns (rainbow unicorns) who have long

consumed human flesh. Now believing humans to have gone extinct, the rainicorns have turned to making faux human meat they call 'soy people'. After a misunderstanding in which they attempt to eat Finn himself, the Rainicorns bring out plates of 'soy people and insist that 'you can't even tell the difference'. The flesh is formed to resemble faces, hands and other bipedal parts that the unicorns have come to recognize as edible through their own process of dismemberment. Naturally Finn tries some and enjoys it. Even his magical companion dog, Jake, loves it and exclaims, 'Finn! You're delicious!' Notice that although the Rainicorns had not actually tasted real human meat in years, their continued consumption of soy people invested actual humans with the quality of edibility long after real human flesh left the menu. The faux flesh only gained its intelligibility and desirability by being attached to certain recognizable edible bodies.

Consider the product, 'Hufu: the healthy human flesh alternative', which made a brief appearance in national media from 2005 to 2006. In 2005, *The Daily Show's* Samantha Bee interviewed the creator of this tofu product 'textured and flavored to resemble human flesh' ('Flesh'). Tellingly, the product's creator, Mark Nuckols, supposedly thought of this idea while eating tofury and reading a book on cannibalism. The original intent was to market the product to anthropology students who would be curious to experience cannibalism. According to Nuckols, Hufu tastes so much like the real thing it could 'satisfy the tastes of even the most demanding cannibal' so much so that it is playfully marketed for 'cannibals who want to quit' ('Flesh'). In the interview with Bee, Nuckols suggested, 'This is an opportunity to experiment the compelling practice of cannibalism' and to 'join the fraternity of cannibals' for one brief moment ('Flesh'). When Bee suggests moving this small-scale cannibalism to a larger audience, she turns to marketing expert, Mark Levit, who, though caught off guard still manages to create the rather brilliant sale line, 'Hufu: the great taste of friends'; Bee also suggests, 'Hufu: it's who's for dinner' ('Flesh').

Now besides being inspired and humorous taglines definitely worth considering if anyone were to have a serious go at marketing faux human flesh, these slogans reveal precisely the play of presence and absence at work in meatless meats. They refer to a 'whom', and to the possibility that the flesh is or was your 'friend', or stands in for the flesh of friends; they refer directly to the significance and ontological value of the bodies they mimic.

Readers of Derrida will recognize the significance of the use of the pronoun 'who' and the paradigm of friendship to express value, especially in the context of cannibalism and eating. In 'Eating Well', Derrida suggests that within Western philosophy, subjectivity (or ethical recognizability) has been phrased in terms of who can answer to the call 'Who?' (1991, 96, 110). Because specied others are believed to possess the absence of speech,

self-reflexivity, knowledge of their own death, etc., speciesed others have never counted as a 'who'; they are not subjects. Playing on the early 1990s slogan by the Beef Industry Council, 'Beef, it's *what's* for dinner', Bee recognizes that something about the who-ness of humans – the proper subjecthood of humans – is maintained even when they are meat. No, even when they are just an analogue of meat. But cows and chickens – even in the form of fake chicken – do not bear the trace of a 'who' in this sense.

In the same text, Derrida notes that for Heidegger and the rest of the Western philosophical canon, the important structure of friendship has been denied to speciesed others. The answer to the questions of whether 'the voice of the friend can be that of the animal', 'or whether friendship is possible "for the animal or between animals"' has always been a resounding no (1991, 278). So when Hufu gets the catchy slogan, 'the great taste of friends', it again points directly to the long held philosophical division between so-called humans – who are always fellows or potential friends – and edible bodies that have no subjecthood.

Faux human flesh is either interesting and intriguing, or gross and creepy (or all of the above), for exactly the same reason: precisely because it refers to the real death, dismemberment and consumption of the *sapiens'* bodies it is intended to represent. The flesh bears the trace of actual bipedal bodies, bodies that we understand to be essentially inedible. Indeed, the consumption of actual humans is the only grounds on which consuming faux flesh makes any sense at all. If the 'high value' of human life, their who-ness and their friendship, is implied in faux human flesh, and if we are uncomfortable with this flesh because of its association with 'real cannibalism' and our insistence in the inedibility of *sapiens'* bodies, then slaughter and the ontological edibility of speciesed others is implied, not contested, in their faux flesh.

THE MYTH OF FLESH WITHOUT SACRIFICE

As we have been suggesting, the consumption of others is not simply a dietary practice. Consumption participates in a symbolic network that invests bodies themselves with qualities of life and liveliness, or edibility and disposability. For Derrida, this construction of bodies as improper subjects, disposable or less than, opens space for their non-criminal putting to death through consumption: they can be sacrificed or killed without consequence in order to secure our desires and control. But this carnivorous structure of sacrifice is not limited to literal slaughter of animal life. On the contrary, this structure can refer to any collective or set of bodies that are symbolically and/or actually sacrificed to and for the intelligibility of a sovereignly collective. It can include, I would argue, the sacrifice of plants.

Here my final criticism of meatless meats comes to the fore. In their attempts to distance themselves from violence, meatless meats perpetuate what I call the myth of flesh without sacrifice. Meatless meats operate under the illusion that we can have flesh without death, without sacrifice, without violence. In this illusion, and in its attempt to give up sacrificing animals while still sacrificing plants or other bodies, we simply redraw a shaky line of intelligibility, and turn plants into the absented, sacrificial bodies of meat analogues. To phrase this in Adams' language, we could say that ersatz meats, like animal meats, continue the structure of the absent referent, but this time, the diminished and invisibilized lives and deaths belong to photosynthetic others.

My final concern with animal-less meats is they perpetuate the myth that we can escape this sacrificial structure by which certain bodies are systematically diminished, obscured or non-criminally put to death, and they therefore cover over the very concrete sacrificial relations still at work and in need of our attention and critique. For we cannot escape the fact that our consumption costs the lives of others. We must recognize that which others we choose to diminish or invisibilize become part of a sacrificial economy that renders certain bodies valuable and others disposable. In this way, carnivorous, cannibalism and even vegetarianism are linked; they share the general structure of sacrifice in that they all slaughter bodies without consequence – bodies they deem to be other, less than or killable. Vegetarians kill plants, carnivores kill animals and cannibals kill humans – but it is all the structure of sacrifice. Derrida famously claims, 'We are all – even vegetarians – carnivores in this symbolic sense' (1991, 282). Even our vegetarian Vulcan friend, Spock, in his wisdom, echoes or perhaps pre-figures Derrida's claim, when he suggests 'In the strict scientific sense, we all feed on death, even vegetarians' ('Wolf').

Here we must not bend to the myth of faux meats, the myth of flesh without sacrifice, or believe we can have our flesh without cost. We cannot pretend to give up sacrifice (to sacrifice sacrifice), or completely forfeit the structure through which we consume others, excluding certain bodies from ethical recognition, rendering them killable without cost. We must acknowledge that if cannibalism is the name for consuming one's fellows, friends and perspective-holding lives, then we are not simply all carnivores, as Derrida claims, we are all cannibals. Vegetarians, carnivores, omnivores – we all consume and sacrifice particular, valuable lives.

It is hard enough to address these vast calculations of sacrifice, to address the different kinds and degrees of sacrifice in which we participate, without the processes of invisibilization which turn vegetables into the absent referent of meats that we must, once again, attempt to recover or make visible. It is difficult enough to parse out these sacrificial relations without myths that certain products escape them entirely. This is, in part, a problem already familiar

to many vegetarians, vegans and other plant-based consumers (of which I am one, so I speak for myself as well), who wrestle with creating compelling cases for drawing boundaries. Especially as participants in industrial agriculture – a size and form of production that cannot help but exclude, harm and diminish for the sake of production – plant-based consumers are directly implicated in a great deal of vegetal violence for which we must answer. Furthermore, a growing body of philosophical and scientific literature on the intelligence, will, affect and agency of our insistent green kin, makes it more difficult to draw clean lines between who can become meat and who cannot. The choice to work on animal liberation without, instead of or before vegetal ethics is a bias that we must admit to, justifiable as it seems. But we must also recognize that even to consume plants is to sacrifice something, someone, bodies with lives, belongings and creative affects, which should not be invisibilized, renamed or obscured in their transformation to ‘meat’ – as though they are casually expendable while their more perceptibly mobile and sentient counterparts (human and non-human) are freed.

Perhaps my desire to keep plant lives recognizable and valuable, and their deaths visible and grievable, is not a totally sufficient counter to our continued sacrifice of their lives for our consumption. Simply demanding that we eat recognizable vegetables (rather than their unrecognizable ersatz meats) does not totally sacrifice *sacrifice* or remove the structures of legibility by which some lives are diminished. But if, as Matthew Calarco notes, following Derrida, the *kinds* of denigration in which vegetarians or plant eaters participate differ from the kind in which omnivores participate. If there are kinds of denigration and variations on sacrificial economies, we need ways of accounting for and making legible the kinds of bodies we engage (and consume) in those economies (2004, 194). Meatless meats make such calculations difficult by intentionally obscuring or invisibilizing certain lives. Perhaps instead, the task in a compassionate consumptive ethic is to increasingly broaden the scope of recognizable bodies, so that rather than, in the spirit of abstinence, bending to the myth of flesh without sacrifice, we can ever more presently, if sometimes grievously, attend to a greater number of bodies and perspectives.

We need not flatten ontology, or renounce all differences between so-called ‘humans’, ‘animals’ and ‘plants’ in order to recognize that these categories are violently insufficient, their boundaries blurry at best.⁵ We do not need to erase differences to recognize that all bodies are affective and agential, valuable and deserving of a care that is unique to their desires and needs. In fact, this requires greater attention to differences, not less. This power to envision and listen for the ethical valuations of differently embodied others is precisely what moves us to seek the end of animal edibility in the first place. Why would we then stop this deconstructive impulse that insists on caring

for and co-imagining with an ever-widening swath of affective lives? Surely we can imagine better ways to live well with plants, and to acknowledge and affirm their agency outside of their ability to fit into masculinist discourses or to transform into flesh and ease our conscience.

CONCLUSION

In as much as plant-based meats participate in a network of intellectual, social, culinary and epistemic efforts to reduce the consumption (literal and symbolic) of certain speciesed bodies, we must ask whether or not they can actually move us towards new ways of viewing those bodies, and towards non-speciesist futures imagined with them.

As I write these final paragraphs, I sit in a diner in the small town of Panguitch, Utah, where I am staying as I spend time in Bryce Canyon. I am surrounded by farmed land and farmed animals. There are cattle transport trucks everywhere – some empty, and some not – and the smells, sounds and material reality of all that are at stake here assault my senses and my heart. I try to imagine these kind country folk, in this very diner, with Beyond Beef on their forks, instead of that sweet mooing mother down the street. I try to imagine what it would take for these townsfolk to transform their livelihoods; would it really just be a bit of tasty faux flesh? Or would they need to foster a totally different reality? Even if they stop eating the cows, what would it take for them, for me and for us to learn to listen to the complex desires of those bodies beyond their hope not to be eaten?

When hiking the long trails of Bryce, my nut-allergic partner and I grab meatless Primal Strips instead of my go-to nut proteins (while there is never a great place for anaplylactic shock, 8,000 feet elevation is definitely the worst). As we talk with leather-decked cowboys, retired marines, adventurous old women, and college travellers, all of us are shredding and ripping our various forms of flesh. I even carry some extra Primal Strips to spread around, like a good plant-based proselytizer. But I still feel uncomfortable, as I wonder how similar our reflections look, and which bodies are present and visible in my consumption, even if not on my tongue.

Meatless, plant-based and faux meats are a particularly difficult thing to criticize. They intuitively seem so much better than doing nothing, or than waiting for the slow tide of large-scale ethical shifts. But as I come face to face with my own community and that of this small town of Panguitch, I am convinced that plant meats cannot be sufficient. Like silicone vaginas, plant or meatless meats offer us a tempting way to continue our lives and habits, our ontological patterns of signification and our economic structures, while the very lives for which such flesh stands in remain systematically excluded

from our communities and our ethical imaginations. They remain edible in our imaginations, if not on our forks, and that is simply not okay with me.

In order to bring these bodies out of edibility and into community, we must do more than stop eating them or replacing their flesh with other invisibilized bodies. We must begin dismantling and reforming the economic, agricultural, epistemological, political, material systems which are founded on their exclusion. We need to think not just beyond meat, but beyond meatless meats, beyond appeals to flesh consumption and beyond masculine subjecthood that will not forsake its right to beef – or vaginas – real or otherwise. We must be committed to ensuring that the invisibilized bodies of our creaturely kin remain at the forefront, so that with whatever freedom or novel possibilities lie on their horizon, their *inedible* bodies and wills can be affirmed without reference to our consumptive habits. For the sake of this mutual co-becoming, may we one day forget the taste of their flesh.

NOTES

1. Protein resequencers are also called replicators and food synthesizers, in the *Star Trek* universe. There is some nerdy debate about the mechanics of these synthesizers, and specifically about whether or not they would have to begin with some kind of animal material in order to be able to synthesize it. However, it is generally agreed that replicators work by rearranging subatomic particles into molecules that can then be recombined according to any molecular structure in the replicator's database. For example, to form a piece of flesh, the replicator would simply make atoms of carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, etc., then arrange them into amino acids, proteins and cells, and assemble the particles into the form of meat. This is more or less exactly what plant-based meat producers such as Beyond Meat claim to be doing as well.

2. I am talking about flesh-bodies themselves, and therefore my analysis does not account for the symbolic economy of other substitutionary products like plant-based milks, cheeses and egg replacers. That would require a slightly different argument. Insofar as there are several meaningful distinctions between the by-products of a living creature (like milk from live cows) and the body of a dead creature (like beef from a dead cow), I have confined my argument here to the kind of symbolic economy that surrounds only animal flesh itself.

3. It is worth noting that these two themes – environmental health and human health – were the only two goals shared by all of these companies, while only Beyond Meat explicitly mentions increasing animal welfare as one of their ethical goals.

4. In the tradition of Frankfurt School critical theory, advanced capitalism (sometimes called Fordism or late capitalism) refers to our particular, historically specific stage of capitalism. It comes after and is distinct from mercantile and industrial forms of capitalism (Shukin 2009, 88). Of potential relevance are the unique relations to 'nature' within advanced capitalism. Prior capitalisms related to nature primarily through lenses of negation and domination, and the human, in the form of

the labourer, was the central figure. But advanced capitalism includes and proliferates many subjects, and humans are no longer the privileged figures. A minor point, to be sure. The modifier 'advanced' simply locates my work in a particular theoretical tradition and therefore in resistance to an equally particular kind of capitalist domination.

5. Expanding care to others outside the human has long provoked a fear of a flat ontology. Because of Derrida's own fear that expanding ethics would flatten ontology or erase differences, he quite famously continued to insist on strict species distinctions and even hierarchies until his death. This is despite his own work's ability to hold irreducible, infinite differences and radical care for each body in ongoing tension. The fear of a flat ontology continues to haunt animal theory both at the contrived borders between humans and animals, and at the border between animals and plants. But I perceive Derrida's vaster work on the singularity and irreducible difference of each individual body to speak louder than his few inconsistent hesitations, and hope this can comfort those who remain on the fence regarding the ethical value of plants and such value's flattening impact.

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