

**The New Visibility of Slaughter in Popular
Gastronomy**

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ABSTRACT

Animal slaughter has recently become highly visible in popular food media. This thesis interrogates the myths, assumptions and ideologies underlying this so-called New Carnivore movement, through critical analysis of a range of popular gastronomic texts. Socially-constructed ideas about ‘reality’, ‘sentimentality’, ‘sacrifice’, and ‘redemption’ are intimately implicated in the process of animal slaughter, as are the notions of ‘good taste’ and social distinction. The domination of animals, demonstrated through the slaughter, butchery, and consumption of nonhuman bodies, is held to be an integral component in the performance of gender, as well as a means of reconnecting, via a kind of secular epiphany, with ‘Nature’ at its most authentic. As a hostile backlash against the social progress made by the animal advocacy and vegetarian movements, New Carnivorism denigrates vegetarianism and veganism as outdated, unfashionable, unnatural, puritanical and rude. Although these texts’ potential to inspire farmed animal welfare reform should not be ignored, New Carnivorism ultimately serves to naturalize, justify and promote the continued consumption of meat, and the continued exploitation of nonhuman animals, in Western societies.

INTRODUCTION

I met my meat, looked it in the eye, patted it on the head, even kissed it on the nose now and then.

- Catherine Friend, *The compassionate carnivore* (2008, p. 9)

In the first decade of the new millennium, animal slaughter no longer seems a taboo topic for meat eating urbanites; indeed, in contemporary food media, killing animals is positively *en vogue*. Celebrity chefs slit chickens' throats in front of live studio audiences (Lazenby & Van Someren, 2008), journalists pen eloquent treatises on how to embrace slaughter as a loving and respectful act (Pollan, 2006a), and gastronomes wax lyrical about the superior flavour of meat with a back-story (Bourette, 2008). According to the editors of the recently launched "journal of meat culture" *Meatpaper*, we are now in the midst of "a full-blown fleischgeist" – an era characterized by "a growing cultural trend of meat consciousness", of which the new visibility of slaughter is central (Wizansky & Standen, 2007: no pagination). Dubbed the "New Carnivore" movement by media commentators (Hanes, 2008; Soller, 2009), these loosely connected "gastro-philosophical treatises" (Bourette, 2008, p. 36) strive to present animals' becoming meat as a humane, benevolent, and wholly 'natural' process. In doing so, they soothe the anxiety that came to characterise the discourse surrounding meat production in the nineteen-eighties and -nineties, when spiralling food scares, well-publicized health risks and increasing popular awareness of the environmental and ethical problems associated with industrial animal agriculture all combined to undermine the traditional prestige of animal flesh in Western societies (Fiddes, 1991).

The New Carnivore movement also responds to the popular criticism that urban meat eaters are fundamentally disconnected from the realities of meat production, and wilfully ignorant of the death necessary to produce the meat on their plates. This idea – that modern industrial agriculture has created a fundamental disconnection between humans and the ‘natural’ world – is a recurring trope in recent gastronomy (Strong, 2006, p. 38). In New Zealand back-to-the-land reality TV show *Off the radar* (Andrews, 2007, 2008), for example, the protagonist raises and slaughters several animals in order to remedy what he diagnoses as a societal-wide “essential disconnect” between the production and consumption of meat (Radar & Andrews, 2007b). In the magazine article “Killing a lamb called dinner” (1999), Kimberly French similarly laments that modern Western consumers are “cut off from the process of where are food comes from” (p. 6), particularly meat. In popular book *The shameless carnivore*, Scott Gold (2008) argues that Western consumers “have all become children of the supermarket”, with pieces of animal flesh “presented to us in beautiful packaging that has been cleverly and calculatedly designed by experts in marketing and food packaging to be as appealing as possible”, thus “sever[ing] all connections with [meat’s] animal history” (p. 267). Similarly, in her gastro-memoir *Meat: A love story* Susan Bourette (2008) contends that modern methods of meat production and presentation have erased all traces of the animal from the final product: “I doubt there are many among us who have ever laid eyes on meat that hasn’t already been cleaved into individual portions and shrink-wrapped,” she declares. “For some it may even come as a shock: Meat comes from animals!” (p. 4). This was certainly the case for Catherine Friend, author of the award-winning *The compassionate carnivore* (2008): “Meat came from Styrofoam trays covered in cellophane, all traces of skin and blood and guts removed, so I could easily forget that the meat used to be an animal” (2008, p. 6), she writes. Similarly, in popular

book *Portrait of a burger as a young calf* (2002), Peter Lovenheim declares that “most of us know little about where our food comes from, and we are invested in keeping it that way because some aspects of animal agriculture make us uncomfortable” (p. ii).

The wilful ignorance that has (supposedly) come to surround modern urban meat eating is harshly criticised by journalist Michael Pollan in his bestselling book *The omnivore’s dilemma* (2006a): “forgetting, or not knowing, is what the industrial food chain is all about”, he laments (p. 10).

There is more than a grain of truth to the New Carnivore assertion that urban consumers have by-and-large become ‘disconnected’ from the meat they eat: according to anthropologist Nick Fiddes (1991) “a deliberate process of disguising the source of animal foods has gathered pace in the twentieth century, reacting to our evident unease with the idea of eating dead animals” (p. 95). Throughout the nineteenth century, readily recognisable animal body parts in butcher’s shops were transformed into anonymous plastic-wrapped bundles on supermarket shelves (Adams, 1990; Cronon, 1991, p. 256; Fiddes, 1991, p. 95; Vialles, 1994). Modernity has indeed severed meat from its origins; even whilst alive, most of the animals who die so that their flesh may grace the Western world’s dinner plates are simply the “raw material” for industry, mechanistically conceptualized as protein-producing units, de-animalized as merely “what meat was before it was meat” (Berger, 1971, p.1042; Cole, 2009). So pervasive has this process been, argues feminist theorist Carol J. Adams (1990), that the living animal has been rendered an “absent referent” to the act of meat eating - wilfully forgotten and systematically erased, so that no trace of the living, breathing animal remains to taint the commodified, euphemistically renamed dead flesh on the dinner plate (Adams, 1990, pp. 40-42).

The recent spate of slaughter images and narratives in popular food media – so graphic that the term ‘gastro-snuff’ is an accurate descriptor – is a conscious engagement with the theories outlined above, most specifically Adams’ (1990, pp. 40-42) theory about animals being ‘absent referents’ in the practice of meat eating. Like Adams, the New Carnivore authors examined here posit that an essential disconnection between animals and meat exists in the minds of many consumers, a detachment that has been exacerbated by modernity’s commodification of meat. However, these New Carnivore texts attempt to re-incorporate the animal into the meat not as a deterrent to flesh-eating, *but as an incentive*. By selectively reintegrating the animal into the discourse surrounding meat, acolytes of New Carnivorism are able to “reconnect the dots” between animal and flesh (Lovenheim, 2002, p. xix) whilst still upholding the anthropocentric status quo and ensuring meat eating’s continued popularity.

This thesis is a critical examination of the resurgent popularity of meat, and the new visibility of slaughter, in contemporary gastronomy. In interrogating the myths, assumptions and ideologies underlying the so-called New Carnivore movement, I make no claim to objectivity. Like Best et al. (2007), I take a critical animal studies perspective, one that “explicitly clarif[ies] its normative values and political commitments, such that there are no positivist illusions whatsoever that theory is disinterested or writing and research is nonpolitical” (Best, et al., 2007, p. 4). Following post-structuralist social theorists such as Donna Haraway (2008), Giorgio Agamben (2004), and Jacques Derrida (2002), I recognize that the categories ‘human’ and ‘animal’ are historically and culturally nuanced, blurry and co-constructed rather than essential and fixed; following moral philosophers such as Peter Singer (1990 [1975]), Tom Regan (1983), and David Sztybel (2006), I reject the anthropocentrism and speciesism that has erected a gaping moral chasm between humans and

nonhumans. Keeping a critical awareness of the intersectionality of various forms of oppression firmly in mind (Adams, 1990; Donovan and Adams, 2007; Twine, in press), my aim in this thesis is to interrogate and challenge some of the many “historically-constructed ideologies and systems of power and domination in which humans have oppressed and exploited animals” (Best, 2007, p. 1) through close readings of a range of contemporary popular gastronomy texts.

Using Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* (1973) as a theoretical reference point, chapter one (“Myth”) explores the myths underlying the transformation of farmed animals into meat, examining how socially-constructed ideas about ‘reality’, ‘sentimentality’, ‘sacrifice’, and ‘redemption’ are implicated in the process of animal slaughter. The New Carnivore tactic of rendering animal slaughter highly visible, I argue, epitomizes Barthes’ understanding of myth as an ideological mechanism that “hides nothing”, but instead (selectively) illuminates potentially problematic social practices in order to “purify” them as “innocent and eternal”, and hence beyond the scope of social criticism (Barthes, 1973, p. 140). Chapter two (“Taste”) explores how consumer knowledge regarding the ‘origins’ of a given food product has lately become incorporated into the fetishization of the commodity (Cook & Crang, 1996): in the case of meat products, this has resulted in the collapse of the disconnection between animals and meat, as ‘discerning carnivores’ and ‘fearless eaters’ sing the praises of offal and bear witness to the act of slaughter. I will demonstrate how the performance of ‘good taste’ and the accumulation of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) have become intimately implicated in contemporary gastronomy’s love affair with slaughter. Chapter three (“Gender”) examines the gendered ideologies underlying this new visibility of slaughter in popular food culture, surveying a range of cooking shows in which slaughter and meat consumption are held to be potent methods of performing masculinity. A

prominent New Carnivore gastro-memoir (Powell, 2009), in which the dismemberment of animal bodies and the consumption of animal flesh are held to be pathways to female empowerment, is also critically examined. Chapter four (“Nature”) looks at how these gastronomic texts present animal slaughter as a means of reconnecting, via a kind of secular epiphany, with ‘Nature’ at its most authentic. Drawing upon both a nostalgically-constructed notion of a pre-industrial rural idyll and an atavistic revalorization of the role played by meat consumption in the evolution of ‘human nature’, these texts depict vegetarianism and animal liberation as fundamentally ‘unnatural’ perversions of the authentically ‘natural’ truth of human dominance over nonhuman animals. Chapter five (“Backlash”) analyses New Carnivorism as a hostile reaction against the social progress made by the animal advocacy movement. In employing the soft repressions of ridicule, stigma and silencing (Ferree, 2004, p. 85) to denigrate vegetarians and vegetarianism, these popular gastronomic texts betray a deep-seated anxiety that the entrenched hierarchy of human over nonhuman might be threatened by the growing cultural authority of vegetarian counter-discourses. Finally, in my conclusion, I evaluate the potential positive and negative impacts of the recent explosion of New Carnivore gastronomic texts on the animal advocacy movement.¹

¹ In organizing my analysis under the broad themes of myth, taste, gender, nature and backlash, rather than concentrating on one text at a time, my intention is not to erase or negate differences between the individual texts comprising the so-called New Carnivore movement. These differences do exist, and they are important, as the respective titles of *The compassionate carnivore* (Friend, 2008) and *The shameless carnivore* (Gold, 2008) demonstrate. Despite their different areas of focus (in the former, the aim of promoting better welfare standards through ‘happy meat’ purchasing; in the latter, the aim of accruing cultural capital by fearlessly consuming exotic animals), these and other examples of New Carnivore discourse are remarkably consistent in their key motifs. It is these overriding commonalities that concern me, and that a thematic analysis can bring into focus.

CHAPTER ONE: MYTH

At one point on the drive home [from the slaughterhouse] Melissa reached over and took my hand. “You know, because we’ve done this tonight, our friends and family will have safe, good-tasting chicken to put in their freezers.”

I squeezed her hand. “I know. I just didn’t think it would be so hard.”

“Me neither,” she replied.

- Catherine Friend, *The compassionate carnivore* (2008, p. 31)

In the recent explosion of New Carnivore literature, the animal is no longer an absent referent (Adams, 1990): instead of being hidden, the slaughter of animals is positively celebrated. These recent popular texts enact Roland Barthes' (1973, p. 129) theory of the naturalising power of myth, whereby nothing problematic is completely hidden, but is instead acknowledged and thus naturalized and justified. Barthes understood myths as the ideas underpinning the workings of everyday culture (Barthes 1973, p. 156). They are a society's way of acknowledging and naturalising certain troublesome practices to which opposition might otherwise build, thus averting potential threats to the existing social order. As Barthes writes, “[m]yth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion” (Barthes 1973, p. 140). Art historian Steve Baker identifies a key idea in Barthes' concept of myth as being that nothing is hidden (Baker 1994, p. 8), nothing is kept in the dark and allowed to fester.

Myth, according to Barthes, “does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, makes them innocent, gives them a natural and eternal justification” (1973, p. 156). For Barthes, myth serves to mediate the tensions between the real and the ideal; it naturalises exploitation or oppression, rendering it innocent and eternal, an inevitable (if regrettable) fact of life.

The power of myth simultaneously to acknowledge and excuse exploitation can be seen with crystal clarity in the popular gastronomy and ‘lifestyle’ texts comprising the so-called New Carnivore movement. Since myth does not deny things, the suffering of farmed animals is not invisible in these texts; rather, this ‘myth of meat’ naturalises and justifies the slaughter of nonhuman animals by rendering it an article of common sense, pure and unquestionable. However, these texts embody something of a contradiction: they insist that they are only being ‘realistic’ when they assert that killing animals for food is ‘natural’, but they simultaneously construct an elaborate series of rites, processes, and categories to support this premise. These categories and processes have to be constantly policed against potential transgressions that could call the ‘naturalness’ of animal slaughter into question. The division between ‘pets’ and ‘livestock’, for example, must remain impermeable. Feelings of guilt or reluctance at killing an animal must be ‘worked through’, a cathartic process from which one can then emerge purified and unflinching, cleansed of childish ‘sentimentality’. Refusal to be party to the slaughter of animals for food at all is condemned as sentimentalism of the worst kind, an urban perversion of an inalienable natural truth. Killing animals and eating their remains, these texts would have us believe, are acts sacred and unsentimental; perfectly legitimate, admirably honest and wholly and irreducibly natural. However, as Burt (2006) notes, any culture’s attitudes towards meat need to be understood as the product of a particular configuration of technologies and discourses,

rather than “simply an abstract version of the human relation to the animal kingdom” (124). As the various threads of narrative which comprise this contemporary Western ‘myth of meat’ are untangled and examined, it soon becomes obvious that the slaughter of these animals is anything but ‘natural’; to the contrary, the ways in which these animals become food are demonstrably *cultural*.

In naturalizing potentially problematic practices by rendering them purely and simply ‘the way things are’, Barthesian myth not only upholds particular ideological investments, but also serves particular kinds of social, cultural and economic interests (Barthes, 1973). The material interests served by the ‘myth of meat’ are not inconsiderable: alongside agribusiness, consumer capitalism, and the kinds of conspicuous consumption and cultural capital served by cooking shows and cuisine subculture (see chapter two), the New Carnivore myth also serves the economic, cultural, and conceptual investment in the production and consumption of animal meat products, or what Adams (1990, p. 80) calls “animalized protein”. In asserting that animal slaughter and meat consumption are simply ‘reality’, these culinary narratives of slaughter do a great deal of ideological work in naturalizing the centrality of meat to Western consumer capitalism, bolstering the commodity’s high status and “smoothing over the conflict between this centrality of animal production and the increasingly high environmental costs it entails” (Armstrong, in press). This mythic process of purification and naturalization, inextricably invested in the material interests sketched above, functions in New Carnivore texts in part by insisting that any resistance to the agreed-upon workings of ‘reality’ – in this case, the ‘reality’ of animal edibility – relies on a deplorably ‘sentimental’ worldview quite at odds with the way things really are. This recurrent denunciation of sentimentalism requires close examination.

“WE MUSTN’T BE SENTIMENTAL”

Once considered an important virtue, the concept of sentimentality became thoroughly devalued with the increasing authority of industrial capitalism and scientific positivism in the late nineteenth century (Armstrong, 2008, p. 165), at which time the word accrued its current pejorative connotations of mawkishness and melodrama. With a new modernist aesthetic in literature that valued “barbarous but authentic treatment of animals” (Armstrong, 2008, p. 166) as a reaction against the perceived artifice and alienation of modern life, the charge of sentimentality came to be levelled typically against “[p]eople who display emotional concern for animal suffering” (Serpell qtd. in Armstrong, 2008, p. 223). The mandate against showing empathy for animals becomes even more strict when there is profit to be made from the abuse of the animal in question: as feminist writer and literary critic Brigid Brophy remarks in an early manifesto against factory farming: “Whenever people say, ‘We mustn’t be sentimental’, you can take it they are about to do something cruel. And if they add ‘We must be realistic’, they mean they are going to make money out of it” (Brophy, 1966, p. 21).

Brophy’s insight – that empathy towards animals is transformed into ‘sentimentality’ and cruelty into ‘realism’ when there is money to be made – is an important one, demonstrating once again that the influence of myth is not just ideological, invariably being pressed into the service of material, economic interests. The division between ‘sentimentality’ and ‘realism’ is continually reiterated in the New Carnivore discourse: in classic Barthesian fashion, the myth here engages in the constant construction and maintenance of certain agreed upon ideas about what ‘reality’ is, rendering innocent and eternal socially constructed ideas about what is ‘serious’ and what is ‘trivial’.

This oppositional binary of ‘sentimentality’ and ‘realism’ is frequently mobilized in New Carnivore discourse to police the boundary between ‘pets’ (animals who are usually allowed into the house, are given individual personal names, and are never eaten [Franklin, 1999, p. 87; Melson, 2001, p. 25; Thomas, 1984, pp. 112-115]) and ‘livestock’ (animals who are simultaneously perceived as living creatures and as “rightfully consumable” products of human invention [Franklin, 1999, p. 41]).² As Serpell and Paul (1994) note, ‘pets’ can highlight a potentially disruptive contradiction in the way humans treat other animals; if some animals deserve love, care and affection, why do others of similar cognitive abilities deserve death and dismemberment? This potential disruption is managed in the New Carnivore discourse by insisting that the categories ‘livestock’ and ‘pets’ are fundamentally distinct, and that attitudes towards animals in the former category that are not based primarily on their utility to humans are deplorably sentimental and completely at odds with any realistic, mature perception of the world.

Still, the ‘pet’-‘livestock’ divide can apparently be dangerously porous: the human protagonists of “Killing a Lamb Called Dinner” (French, 1999), *Portrait of a burger as a young calf* (Lovenheim, 2002) and *The omnivore’s dilemma* (Pollan, 2006a) seem constantly aware of the risk of slipping into a ‘sentimental’ mindset that would relegate animals ‘meant for the table’ to the privileged category of ‘pets’. Several of these would-be farmers take steps to avoid this possible slippage. Frequently, they carefully and consciously avoid giving the animal a name; to do so would endow the animal with a key marker of ‘pet’-hood, potentially opening the doors for a ‘sentimental’ relationship of emotional attachment to develop between human and animal. Pollan, for

² In practice, animal welfare protection agencies are often critically understaffed and underfunded. For example, New Zealand’s Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) has a paltry five officers to supervise and police the welfare of 140 million farmed animals. See Fox (2008).

example, is careful not to allow an emotional connection to develop between himself and the calf whose ‘progress’ he follows through America’s industrial beef complex, because such a relationship would be at odds with the realism he is striving to attain in his meet-your-meat exposé: “No. 534 is not a pet and I certainly don’t want to end up with an ox in my backyard because I suddenly got sentimental”, he writes (2002, p. 5). Pollan carefully regulates how he interacts with and thinks about the calf, all too aware that if he becomes ‘sentimental’ and allows the animal to slip into the ‘pet’ category, his slaughter will become unthinkable and the author’s ‘know your meat’ quest will be thwarted. In *The compassionate carnivore* (2008), Friend is similarly reluctant to name animals intended for slaughter, and cites a strict conceptual ‘livestock’/‘pet’ divide as central to ensuring the edibility of potentially problematic “cute” animals: “I can eat the animals because the lambs are wild, not pets, and the lambs aren’t specifically named individuals,” she writes (p. 40). Lovenheim (2002) and French (1999) are also reluctant to give ‘their’ animals personal names, for fear that a ‘sentimental’ attachment might then take root. Lovenheim confesses to being “a little concerned that if I name [the calf] I might start getting attached to him” (2002, p. 72), and French writes:

My other sheep had names from novels (Celie, Lucy, Codi) and from public-radio newscasts (Nina, Cokie, Boutros), but I'd named this one Dinner and his twin brother Lunch. I treated the others like pets. I fed them dropped apples. I scratched Boutros' back until his eyes rolled in an ecstatic swoon. But I had barely handled Lunch and Dinner. (French, 1999, p. 2)

French relegates these animals into the category of ‘livestock’ by intentionally limiting her interactions with them, and by calling them merely the name of meal she intends to prepare from their corpses. Similarly, the host of New Zealand back-to-the-land reality

TV show *Off the radar* remarks, in relation to the unnamed sheep he is intending to slaughter for Christmas dinner: “I’ve deliberately kept my distance from these sheep, physically and emotionally” (Radar & Andrews, 2007c).

In their emphasis on ‘not getting attached’ these gastronomic texts echo the language used by children involved in agricultural apprenticeships (Ellis and Irvine, 2010). In a series of interviews with the young ‘4-H club’ members,³ Ellis and Irvine found that the young people had to engage in active emotional work by deliberately trying not to get attached to animals ‘destined’ for slaughter – they achieved this in large part by refraining from giving the animals individual names (2010, pp. 28-9). Keeping a certain emotional distance from animals intended for slaughter is apparently imperative; as these gastronomic texts demonstrate, bestowing personal names upon ‘livestock’ is risky, because it potentially encourages relationships between people and animals on a personal, affective level deemed inappropriate for ‘food’ animals.

When the would-be farmers break with tradition and do in fact name the animals they intend to slaughter, ‘experts’ consulted within the texts are quick to point out the risks. In *The f word*, for example, celebrity chef and home-slaughter ‘expert’ Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall chastises host Gordon Ramsay for giving names to the turkeys he is raising for Christmas dinner, telling him that “it’s that much easier to form a sentimental attachment to a creature if you give it a name” (Ramsay & Smith, 2005). A farmer in *Portrait of a burger* relates a similar tale, confessing that she developed her own ‘sentimental attachment’ to a cow named “Wart”, and was subsequently unable to send her to slaughter: “that’s why it’s not a good idea to get attached to cows”, she concludes (2002, p. 159). These anecdotes about the perils of naming reveal how

³ ‘4-H’ is the youth program of the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service of the United States Department of Agriculture. A prominent focus of ‘4-H club’ is teaching young people (of both urban and rural backgrounds) about animal farming (Ellis and Irvine, 2010: 22).

dangerously permeable the boundary between ‘livestock’ and ‘pet’ can be, and how carefully this dichotomy must be maintained. Although (as we shall see) named animals are certainly not guaranteed an exemption from slaughter and dismemberment, the palpable anxiety that pervades the naming of farmed animals, and the disapproval towards this practice shown by several ‘experts’ consulted within the texts, attests to a distinct sense of cultural unease. By creating and reinforcing various interchangeable constructions of reality (‘realism’ vs. ‘sentimentality’, for example), the myth not only underpins, but also actively polices the workings of everyday culture (Barthes, 1973).

POLICING THE DIVIDE

The mythic distinction between ‘pets’ and ‘livestock’ is considered especially porous for children, and many of these narratives of slaughter take great care to police this boundary when young people are involved. In *The f word*, guest star Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall recounts how his son Oscar, normally “very calm and understanding about the whole ‘grow it, eat it’ thing”, made the cardinal mistake of naming a calf ‘Lovely’: “then, for the first time, we had problems” (Ramsay & Smith, 2005). Gordon Ramsay’s own son shows signs of this potentially problematic boundary transgression, brightly referring to the two pigs his father is intending to slaughter as ‘pets’ (Ramsay & Smith, 2006b). Ramsay solicits some “expert advice” from Fearnley-Whittingstall in an attempt to rectify this potentially disruptive slippage from ‘livestock’ to ‘pet’: the expert’s response emphasises the importance of policing the ‘pet’-‘livestock’ boundary, in order to avoid ‘sentimentalism’ and promote ‘realistic’ instrumentalism in children’s attitudes towards animals. “Do [the children] think they’ve got two new pets, or do they think they’ve got some very interesting dinner coming in a few months’ time?” he asks,

adding that “it’s important that they don’t lose this connection between pigs and meat, and [realise that] the reason they’re here is for food” (ibid.). By referring to this connection as one that could be *lost*, Fearnley-Whittingstall implies that the children have a pre-existing (perhaps primordial) tendency to connect animals with meat. Once again, cultural construction masquerades as ‘Nature’; in fact, he and Ramsay have to intentionally strive to *create* this connection. As Ramsay explains to his son, “we’re trying to think of *cuts*. They’re not called legs anymore, they’re called *hams*.” “Hams...” the boy repeats. “Do you mean the ham you eat?” “That’s right!”, enthuses Ramsay, “the ham you eat, of course!” (ibid.). Ramsay’s father-son discussion provides an insight into the inner workings of myth: understandings of ‘reality’ that contradict the speciesist status quo are brought under control not by attempting to render them invisible, but by carefully airing them before decisively dismissing them. Children are particularly prone to making the ‘mistake’ of thinking about and interacting with ‘livestock’ animals as if they were beloved ‘pets’ (Ellis & Irvine, 2010); the myth thus emphasises that the ways in which children think about non-human animals must be carefully guided, in order that the ‘reality’ of animals as edible commodities is not undermined.

Indeed, the tendency to look at a living animal and literally see a walking collection of meat cuts recurs throughout New Carnivore texts, and is usually presented as a sign of a burgeoning carnivore consciousness. Lovenheim (2002), for example, marvels whilst looking at a calf, “I see a rump roast on his hind leg. This must be how Peter Vongliss and other farmers see cattle” (p. 248). Te Radar likewise muses that the experience of raising them for slaughter “does make you look at animals differently. Quite often you see them, and you just see all the different cuts of them walking around, all together” (Radar & Andrews, 2008). Cultural theorists have long noted that

renaming butchered animal parts as ‘cuts’ helps maintain a certain conceptual distance between animal and meat (Adams, 1990, pp. 40-62; Cronon, 1991; Fiddes, 1991, pp. 148-57). In many New Carnivore texts, however, the conceptual distance between animal and meat is intentionally collapsed, and the renaming of body parts as ‘cuts’ of meat can take place not once the animal has been dismembered, but while he or she is still alive. By means of the distorting function of myth, contradictions are willed away: the living animal becomes simultaneously an experiential subject *and* ‘meat on the hoof’, unequivocally and implacably destined for slaughter and consumption.

“YOU HAVE TO FACE REALITY AFTER A WHILE”

In learning to accept animal slaughter as ‘natural’ and animal beings as ‘meat on the hoof,’ children and adults alike are able to undergo an important rite of passage, shedding their naïve ‘sentimentalism’ and becoming proudly and staunchly ‘realistic’ in the way they interact with animals. In the well-received Canadian documentary *Animals: Friend or food?* (Martin & Young, 2003), filmmaker and rookie farmer Jason Young turns to his sister-in-law Gail for guidance regarding his growing attachment to ‘his’ animals. Described as an “expert” who has “been dealing with issues of farming her whole life”, and has “got things all worked out”, Gail sympathises with Young’s predicament. “I had rabbits when I was a little girl and I wouldn’t even sell them to anybody who was going to eat them, I’d have nothing to do with killing my bunnies”, she tells Young, reassuring him that his feelings of empathy towards animals are not abnormal. “But”, she tells him as she shoots and butchers one of her “bunnies” right in front of Young’s (and the audience’s) eyes, “you have to face reality after a while”

(*ibid.*). In this case, ‘reality’ entails accepting the economic logic of animal slaughter and dispensing with any compassion that might jeopardise this conclusion.

However, the passage from ‘sentimentality’ to ‘realism’, purportedly achieved by ‘letting go’ of an animal and becoming complicit in his or her slaughter, is not presented as something easy. As Jonathan Burt (2002) writes of the film *Old Yeller* (Anderson & Stevenson, 1957) (in which a young boy must shoot his rabid pet dog), “the renewal consequent on animal death is not one that entails a simple moving on. The sacrifice necessary for the rite of passage requires its scar” (p. 181). The narratives examined here likewise emphasise that slaughter leaves an emotional scar. “Taking something [sic] to slaughter is an emotional occasion, you can’t sort of totally put that out of the way, you’ve just got to work through it”, home-slaughter ‘expert’ Fearnley-Whittingstall advises (Ramsay & Smith, 2006b). Filmmaker Jason Young readily admits that ‘letting go’ of Red the pig was a struggle: “I was attached to Red, and I knew if I was going to go through with the killing, I was going to need help letting go,” he narrates (Martin & Young, 2003). Food writer Scott Gold (2008) agrees, calling sending an animal to slaughter “sad and difficult” (p. 262):

I was anxious, even a little scared, when it came time for “the deed.” None of us wanted to do it, least of all Paul, who’d not only left the job up to his neighbour in years past but had naturally grown kind of attached to Ernie during his stay on the farm and considered him “my buddy,” which is perfectly understandable – when you care for a living thing for so long, it must be hard for any reasonable conscience-equipped human not to feel a genuine connection. (p. 263)

On *The f word*, Tana Ramsay finds watching lambs being slaughtered a “very traumatic” experience, and even Gordon Ramsay admits to feeling “guilty” about the

slaughter of the pigs Trinny and Susannah, a feeling that he would have to “deal with” in his own time (Ramsay & Smith, 2006d); at the slaughterhouse itself he chokes back tears. Similarly, as he suffocates a clutch of chicks and stabs an adult chicken through the throat, Jamie Oliver makes a point of telling the rapt audience how “dreadful” he feels (Lazenby & Van Someren, 2008). These texts go to great lengths to present killing as a deeply emotional, traumatic and cathartic experience for the humans involved.

The New Carnivore emphasis on the farmer’s emotional concern for ‘their’ animals during slaughter, even whilst at other times they purport to literally ‘see’ these same animals as a walking amalgamation of meat portions, demonstrates that both instrumental and emotional attitudes towards ‘livestock’ animals can and do co-exist among people involved with animal farming (Ellis and Irvine, 2010, p. 31; see also Ellis, 2007; Wilkie, 2008). More than this, however, narratives emphasising the emotional toll exacted by sending a familiar animal to slaughter are, according to sociologist David Nibert (2002),

part and parcel of the legitimising process. They depict the guilt and heartbreak young people experience when they must abandon their beloved friends and see them sent to the slaughterhouse as a necessary rite of passage to adulthood, as a natural part of learning the ways of the world.
(p. 215)

This legitimising process applies not just to children, but also to the adults featured in these texts; *Portrait of a burger* (Lovenheim, 2002) is a good example. Referring to a favourite novel, a farmer rather pointedly tells Lovenheim (who is having second thoughts about killing ‘his’ calves) that “a boy grows up when he sees there’s things in the world he’s got to do, not just do the things he wants to do” (Lovenheim, 2002, p. 136). Lovenheim resolves to go ahead with the calves’ slaughter, speculating that the

experience might be one he can grow from (p. 155). Later, after witnessing the slaughter of the calves' mother, he reflects that now, "sentiments I've had about animals since childhood strike me as naïve" (p. 249).⁴ Animal slaughter is thus mythologized as a rite of passage to maturity. Through overcoming their 'sentimentality', the protagonists of these narratives of slaughter pledge their allegiance to the very specific understanding of 'reality' constructed and reinforced through the mechanism of myth: through participating in animal slaughter, they prove themselves to be mature, 'realistic', productive (and consuming) members of society.

Animal slaughter, these texts tell us, is a difficult yet rewarding process through which the human participants may come to a new and profound understanding of the way the world works, shedding the sentimentalism of childhood and becoming rational, 'realistic' members of society. This does not mean that "food" animals must always be conceived of, and interacted with, in a strictly instrumental fashion: animals can be named, emotional attachments can be formed with them, and they can even be referred to using human kinship terms. For example, Ramsay refers to himself as the "dad" of pigs Trinny and Susannah (Ramsay & Smith, 2006c), Te Radar is the "daddy" of pigs Willy and JT (Radar, Andrews & Rakena, 2009), and Janet Street-Porter is repeatedly referred to as the "mother" of calves David and Elton, who in turn become her "children" or "babies" (Ramsay & Northover, 2008a). However, these kinds of feelings towards animals must remain subordinate to the "realistic" attitude of instrumentality that finds its culmination in the act of slaughter. As Street-Porter is sure to tell *The f word's* audience, the calves "were always raised to make a point about veal" (Ramsay & Northover, 2008a): David and Elton's purpose in life is clear to her, and any bond she

⁴⁴Although Lovenheim ultimately decides not to send 'his' twin calves to slaughter, he continues to eat meat and other animal products, thus supporting the very same practices that he found intolerable when

forms with them or insight she gains into their personalities pales in comparison to this clear statement of ‘fact’. Ramsay likewise keeps the end goal of a tasty meal in mind, despite his feelings of guilt concerning the killing of animals who knew and trusted him. At the entrance to the abattoir, he bends down and whispers to Trinny and Susannah: “Yes, I think it’s sad, and I think it’s very, very, *very* unfair, but you’re going” (Ramsay & Smith, 2006e). ‘Unfair’ as it may be to send these ‘girls’ to slaughter, Ramsay is not going to let ‘sentimental’ attachments prevent him from enjoying his pork chops. Neither does Friend (2008) harbour any desire to run a slaughter-free “hobby farm” (p. 34) by “treating the animal like a treasured pet, complete with pink collar and a cute name” (p. 130). “As a farmer, I have a realistic relationship with my livestock,” she maintains (ibid.). Ramsay, Street-Porter and Friend all maintain that an emotional bond, of some kind or another, exists between farmer and farmed: this affective relationship only becomes silly, childish, and ‘sentimental’ if it interferes with the ‘realistic’ goal of profiting from their corpses. Affective attitudes to these animals can be expressed, but only as long as they are subordinate to, and left behind in favour of, the advance towards mature realism.⁵

“I THINK I WAS MORE STRESSED THAN THE SHEEP!”

That New Carnivore gastronomic texts emphasise animal slaughter as a marker of ‘reality’ is perhaps unsurprising, especially given that many of them are presented in a ‘reality’ television format. As Biressi and Nunn (2005) point out, reality television is a

it was ‘his own’ animals who were involved. Tsovel concludes that “the Lovenheim case implies that the common sense concerning ‘food animals’ is too hard to breach” (Tsovel, 2005:257)

⁵ Furthermore, the articulation of the farmer-animal relationship as analogous to that of the parent-child relationship illustrates how the logic of paternalism is invoked to justify and naturalize the exploitation of non-human animals, just as it has been invoked to justify and naturalize the exploitation of various human groups throughout history. See Spiegel (1996).

particularly loaded narrative format for the production of ‘truth’, “since by definition it should occupy a more privileged position in relation to the representation of the ‘real’ than overtly fictional forms” (2005, p. 3). Indeed, in reality television programming, ‘authenticity’ and ‘realism’ are often achieved through the presentation (or production) of highly emotional, even traumatic, scenes (ibid., pp. 5, 108): and of course, as the popularity of talk shows such as *Jerry Springer*, *Rikki Lake*, and *Jeremy Kyle* demonstrates, reality television producers are no strangers to the concept of engineering traumatic events for the sake of ‘good TV’ (ibid., p. 111). The producers of *The f word* are no strangers to this concept either: in manufacturing emotional trauma by emphasising the animals’ subject-status and treating them as quasi-pets before graphically slaughtering them onscreen, the programme achieves an emotional and dramatic climax that is undeniable in its realism. Furthermore, the killing of animals on film has a long history, frequently serving as a way to emphasise the ‘authenticity’ or ‘realism’ of a filmic text (Burt, 2002). In the infamous horror film *Cannibal holocaust* (di Nunzio, Palaggi & Deodato, 1980), for example, six animals (including a pig, a horse, and monkey) were violently killed on camera in order to make the (faked) human death scenes more realistic; animal killing in this instance served as “an assurance of realism” for the rest of the film (Clarke, Dosel, Merrin & Smith, 2009, p. 142; see also Petely, 2005, p. 174). Given the filmic association of ‘realism’ with animal killing, and ‘authenticity’ with emotional trauma, it hardly unsurprising that the New Carnivore texts examined here construct an authoritative air of ‘realism’ by combining graphic depictions of animal slaughter with detailed accounts of the corresponding emotional trauma experienced by the human protagonists.

More than just serving as an assurance of realism or making for ‘good’ drama, however, portraying animal slaughter as a difficult and emotional *human* rite of passage

appropriates the animals' own suffering, projecting it onto the more familiar subject of such attention, the human protagonist. As Te Radar says after slaughtering a lamb, "I was more stressed than the sheep!" (Radar & Andrews, 2008). In this curious reversal of the logic of the scapegoat, the myth presented in these texts simultaneously acknowledges and distorts the existence of animal suffering, exploring it through a human intermediary rather than directly facing the suffering of the animals themselves. As myth "hides nothing" (Barthes, 1973, p. 140), the cruelty inherent in the farming process – such as the summary disposal of unproductive animals or the trauma of maternal separation (see Masson, 2003, pp. 133-60) – is not hidden in these gastronomic texts. Ramsay and Pollan readily acknowledge that separating lambs and ewes is traumatic for the animals (Ramsay & Parsons, 2007c; Pollan 2006a, p. 71) and Lovenheim and Friend do not flinch from describing how a cow will bellow for her stolen offspring until she is hoarse (Lovenheim, 2002, p. 16; Friend 2006, p. 158). However, the animals' suffering is eclipsed in these texts by the narrow focus on the human protagonist, whose experience in participating in the slaughter of a 'beloved' animal is depicted as intensely emotional and traumatic. In appropriating the suffering of the victim by emphasising the suffering of the perpetrator, these narratives of slaughter neutralize or cauterize any sympathy for the bereaved or slaughtered animal. In true mythic fashion, slaughter is naturalized and justified, rather than hidden or denied.

The 'veal' episodes of *The f word* show how both the anguish of the bereaved cow and the suffering of her calves, are simultaneously appropriated. Janet Street-Porter, Ramsay's voiceover breathlessly enthuses, has taken an "amazing journey" in raising the two calves David and Elton for slaughter and consumption as 'veal' (Ramsay & Northover, 2008a). "She's nurtured her calves through rain and shine", the voiceover

continues, during a montage of Street-Porter frolicking with the calves in a green field, petting them, brushing their fur, and cooing endearments to them adoringly (ibid.).

“Now they’re at a good weight for slaughter, it’s time for Janet to cut the apron strings”, Ramsay proclaims. “Today is Janet’s last day of motherhood. At 20 weeks old, it’s time for the calves to leave the comfort of Janet’s back garden, and meet their fate” (ibid.). In these episodes of *The f word*, David and Elton are presented as Street-Porter’s metaphorical children, who are now all grown-up and ready to face their destiny; Street-Porter herself is the doting mother who must learn to “say goodbye” to her adored offspring. However, merely saying goodbye is not enough: in order to participate fully in this terrible but enlightening rite, Street-Porter must witness their slaughter personally: in doing so, she proves herself to be “a supportive mother to David and Elton, right up to the bitter end” (ibid.). Her tears and obvious distress at the slaughterhouse where she must finally bow to the inevitable and bid her ‘children’ goodbye only serve to emphasise what a good mother she really is. The trauma of slaughter, rather than being hidden, is transferred from the victim to the perpetrator. It is not the cow who must experience the loss of her babies, or the calves who must suffer the terror of the slaughterhouse – it is the human ‘caregiver’ who must shoulder the parental burden, bravely suffering through this emotional catharsis and emerging admirably and unflinchingly honest, purged of the petty sentimentalism that might once have stayed the killing blow.

SACRIFICE AND REDEMPTION

In *The compassionate carnivore* (2008), Friend’s slaughter narrative follows a very similar trajectory to that of Street-Porter in *The f word*. The sequence of events begins

with a vivid description of the woman's intimate, caring interaction with 'cute' animals, followed by the dawning realization that a particular animal is doomed and the emotionally traumatic experience of 'letting go', and concludes with a post-mortem rationalization of the slaughter which wraps up the series of events and upholds the carnionormative status quo. Like Street-Porter's, Friend's slaughter narrative goes to great lengths to emphasise the caring, maternal relationship between the farmer and the farmed. In a short chapter entitled 'Letter to my Lambs' (2008, p. 158), Friend writes to the animals she is about to send to slaughter, telling them: "I just wanted to let you know how much I've loved you these last nine months...it's been a joy watching you grow" (ibid.). The entire chapter reads as a parody of a mother wistfully reminiscing about her children's babyhood now that they are all grown up and leaving home. "When you were born, your ears were much too large for your face, so you looked as if you wearing windmills" (ibid.), Friend recalls fondly, before remembering how much she enjoyed cuddling the doomed creatures: "Your heart raced of course, but after a few minutes you'd relax and let me inhale your babiness, your warm, tightly curled wool, and stroke your fuzzy ears" (pp. 157-58). Still, such appealing "babiness" is not to last: "Before I could even blink, you were teenagers, and suddenly it was all about the food" (p. 158), Friend ruefully recalls, reasoning that as "teenagers" it is now time for the lambs to enjoy some "new independence" before they culminate their journey from childhood to adolescence at the end of a butcher's knife (ibid.). Like other New Carnivore slaughter narrators, Friend is keen to emphasise how difficult sending 'her' lambs to slaughter is: "Sending you off to the butcher is no easy thing," she writes, reassuring the lambs (or the readers of her book, more precisely) that, like Street-Porter's calves, they too will have a maternal figure to support them right up to the bitter end: "Melissa will be sitting in front of you every step of the way" (ibid.). Friend's

insistence on her maternal relationship to ‘her’ lambs may bring to mind an image of a monstrous, serial infanticide-committing mother, but this is not the writer’s intention. Rather, Friend’s almost defensive assertion that she really does love ‘her’ lambs is a textbook example of how people who regularly inflict harm on animals seek to protect their identities from damage by adopting strategies that allow them to “care *and* kill” (Ellis and Irvine, 2010, p. 33; see also Arluke, 1989; Arluke & Hafferty, 1996). Friend seems desperate to convince her readers that she is a very good mother who sincerely loves her babies, and is wise enough to know when it is time to let go.

In another passage that emphasises the dangerously porous boundary between ‘pet’ and ‘livestock’, Friend describes the moment when she first fully realized that these ‘babies’ she so lovingly cares for were the very same creatures she routinely sends off to be killed. This realization dawns as she is patting a particularly friendly lamb she calls ‘Cutie’:

my hands froze in midair. What was I doing? This lamb was almost ready for market. In one week this living, breathing, playful lamb would be dead – on purpose! ‘No, no, no,’ I muttered. “Leave me alone.” But the lamb, now bold, tugged on my barn coat, tentatively tasting the brown cotton. I watched, horrified, as he presented his head for another tap. He couldn’t be a pet. He was already slated to be meat. I suddenly noticed his heart-shaped face, the black spots gently splashed across one ear, his perky tail. How could I pay someone to kill him? I tapped the lamb’s head one more time, then fled. (Friend, 2008, p. 32)

Friend’s blow-by-blow recounting of her feelings of “horror” at the prospect of slaughtering an infant who trusted her serves much the same purpose as does the airing of emotional trauma on reality television programming: it imparts an air of

‘authenticity’ and ‘realism’ to her narrative, reassuring the reader that the farmer is not so deluded as to fully believe her own strange discursive fusion of loving motherhood and infanticide. Her obvious emotional turmoil, coupled with her assertion that she could find no alternative to killing Cutie (although she “searched frantically” [p. 32]), imparts the same message about slaughter and emotionality as *The f word* does: it is perfectly normal and acceptable to experience negative emotions at the slaughter of a beloved animal, these texts tell us – in fact, it’s preferable, as it makes for a much more exciting and realistic narrative – as long as one kills them in the end regardless of such reservations. By presenting Cutie and the other lambs’ slaughter as inevitable, the myth once again functions in a Barthesian manner, smoothing over concerns about problematic social practices not by attempting to hide them completely, but by subtly distorting them and rendering them innocent and eternal – in short, as something inevitable and wholly beyond reproach (Barthes, 1973).

Like *The f word* (Herlihy, 2005, 2006, 2007; Lazenby, 2008) and *Jamie’s fowl dinners* (Lazenby & Van Someren, 2008), *The compassionate carnivore* (Friend, 2008) presents slaughtering animals as a gruelling yet cathartic form of emotional labour for the farmer, thus obscuring the trauma of the animals who are actually the ones being violently disposed of. After taking the lamb to the slaughterhouse, for example, Friend describes how she waited sobbing in the truck: “I couldn’t stop crying. Huge, shuddering sobs. I was still crying when Melissa came out. She held my hand while she drove, and I cried all the way home” (2008, pp. 32-3). The vivid description of Friend’s emotional anguish, like Street Porter’s, Oliver’s, and Ramsay’s, seems to dwarf the (assuredly quick and painless) death of the animals themselves. Friend’s slaughtering narrative, however, is unique in that it foregrounds with startling clarity the particularly Christian ideas of sacrifice and redemption that underlie this mythic discourse of animal

slaughter as a “terrible but emotional rite” (French, 1999). Sitting in the pickup truck outside the slaughterhouse where her flock of ‘playful’, ‘babyish’ lambs are being systematically stunned, stabbed and eviscerated, the stricken woman rages against the unfairness of her own fate, bemoaning the heaviness of the burden she (and a small handful of other brave farmers) alone must bear: “Why did I have to face death so directly?” she asks, barely able to breathe through her tears. “Why did everyone else get off free, blissfully ignorant of the death that preceded their meat?” (Friend, 2008, p. 33). In (allegedly) experiencing intense emotional trauma as she takes ‘beloved’ animals to be slaughtered, Friend seems to imply that she suffers for the sins of the meat eating public-at-large, enabling them to consume meat guilt-free, safe in the knowledge that Friend herself has performed the difficult (yet necessary) emotional labour of attachment and detachment. In publicly declaring her emotional trauma over sending animals to slaughter, Friend cleanses the troubled consciences of the average urban meat-eater through her own selfless sacrifice. Later, as she discusses the slaughter of another personable animal (this time a calf), Friend further emphasises the sacrificial elements of her farming endeavour. The consumers of this “happy meat” (p. 35), Friend writes, “won’t have met the steer, nor scratched his head, nor watched his happy dance, but that’s okay. We’ve done all that for them, which is why we’re farmers in the first place” (p. 37).

The religious dimensions of Friend’s discourse on animal slaughter are impossible to ignore. The myth alluded to in this particular context is a very old one, deeply embedded in Western cultures *via* Judaeo-Christian metaphysics: the myth of sacrifice, of the lamb to the slaughter who takes on our suffering for us and purges us of our sins. Friend is not alone in her application of Judeo-Christian myth to the act of killing animals: themes of sacrifice run throughout contemporary discourses of animal

slaughter. The killing of laboratory animals is routinely referred to as ‘sacrifice’ (Arluke, 1989, 1994; Haraway, 2008, p. 76), and New Carnivore texts other than *The compassionate carnivore* often employ this language as well: on lifestyle reality show *Off the radar*, for example, host Te Radar speaks of slaughtered sheep as “commit[ting] the noble sacrifice” (Radar, Andrews & Pringle, 2008). Friend’s book is slightly more sophisticated than this, since the author makes the point that the lambs’ slaughter is not a voluntary sacrifice on their part: “I’d say that I appreciate your sacrifice, but you aren’t making the choice to die. I’m making it for you, and I take full responsibility for that,” she writes (2008, pp. 159-60). Rather, what the narrative of slaughter in *The compassionate carnivore* seeks to convey is that the real sacrifice is made not by the slaughtered animal, but by the farmer herself. It is Friend who must shoulder the burden of emotional trauma, suffering for the sins of the meat eating masses: in this case, the sins of sentiment, false consciousness, childishness, self-indulgence and a refusal to face the facts of life.⁶

Continuing with the religious theme, Friend and the other New Carnivores’ tearful, soul-baring displays of emotional turmoil – occasionally even articulated as guilt (see Bourette, 2008, pp. 7, 39; Ramsay & Smith, 2006e) – can be seen to function as the sort of secular confession that has become so central to a range of reality television genres (Biressi & Nunn, 2005, p. 103; White, 2002, p. 314;). The rite of

⁶ The New Carnivore emphasis on the suffering of the slaughterer, and the redemptive possibilities of bearing witness to animal suffering, are strongly echoed in *When Species Meet* (2008), the most recent book by acclaimed biologist and cultural theorist Donna Haraway. In a fashion startlingly similar to Friend, Street-Porter, and the rest of the New Carnivores, Haraway emphasises the “shared suffering” of animals and the humans who exploit them, not as part of any attempt to stop this suffering, but as “an *apology* for systematic animal abuse” (Weisberg, 2009, p. 38, original italics). Dismissively labelling the notion “of ending all suffering or not causing suffering” a “heroic fantasy” (2008, p. 75), Haraway instead proposes that the point of this “shared suffering” (ibid.) between humans and animals is “to serve witness to the need for something properly called forgiveness” (ibid.). As Weisberg (2009, p. 39) points out, Haraway’s notion of shared suffering does not seem to be motivated by any attempt to mitigate the suffering of the exploited; rather, it is a discursive exercise attempting to ease the conscience of the exploiter, who can seek a kind of absolution by “serving witness” to the suffering his or her appetites demand.

confession, like other mythic mechanisms, purifies and exonerates by revealing all; according to Foucault (1978), it is a “ritual of discourse” (p. 61) which “exonerates, redeems, and purifies [the speaker]; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation” (p. 62). The urban meat-eater watching or reading along at home can relinquish the burden of their carnal sins onto the waiting shoulders of the intrepid New Carnivore protagonist, who can then be redeemed herself by sublimating the sin and guilt in the orgiastic release of a tearful public confession. As *The compassionate carnivore* makes clear, it’s okay that most meat-eaters will never know the joy or the heartbreak of raising and slaughtering the animal that their meat once was – the New Carnivore ecclesiastic has done all that for them, suffering bravely by ‘facing death directly’ and paying the subsequent emotional toll, so that the rest of ‘us’ may indulge in our carnal appetites, guilt free.

MYTH, LANGUAGE AND MORAL RELEVANCY

The compassionate carnivore’s (Friend, 2008) exploration of animal communication provides another example of the power of myth to both illuminate and dismiss potentially troubling ethical dilemmas. Just as animal suffering is explored and subverted by these texts’ insistence that slaughter is worse for the farmer than it is for the animals, Friend’s book doesn’t hide or deny animals’ ability to communicate – far from it. An entire section of the book is devoted to shattering the stereotype of farmed animals as stupid and dull, as Friend relates her own personal anecdotes and draws heavily upon the work of both slaughterhouse designer Temple Grandin (with Johnson, 2005) and animal advocate and ethologist Jonathan Balcombe (2007). Friend acknowledges farmed animals as beings possessing their own unique and effective

methods of communication, but simultaneously trivializes these animals' communicative abilities as ultimately lacking when compared to the vaunted human ideal of verbal language. Thus, for Friend the recognition of animals as emotional, intelligent, socially complex beings is not an obstacle to their mutilation, commodification and slaughter.

In one particularly illuminating paragraph, Friend recounts an “amazing story” about how a pig theft at a huge livestock auction was noticed: the stolen pigs were all put together into the same pen, and the animals clearly acted as if they didn't know each other:

An employee had been stealing a hog from each truck and sticking the animal into this pen, thinking no-one would notice. The pigs noticed. And because one of the stockyard workers was able to understand pig communication, he was able to hear what they were saying: “Hey, these pigs aren't my friends. They smell funny. They look funny. I don't belong with these pigs!” (2008, p.176).

Friend presents the return of the pigs to their rightful 'owners' as a triumph on the part of the animals and the observant stockyard worker alike: the fact that these intelligent, social beings were promptly slaughtered after being reunited with their 'friends' is not a problem for Friend. “I obviously don't believe this intense and enriching communication means that we can't eat these animals,” she writes: “it means we feel closer to them, and even more committed to making sure we take good care of them while they are here on this farm, on this earth” (p. 176).⁷ Pigs may be intelligent creatures capable of participating in enriching communication with humans, but this is

⁷ Here again, the New Carnivore rhetoric is echoed in Haraway's academic literature: acknowledging the ethical interrelationality of humans and animals need not entail that we should refrain from exploiting them (Haraway, 2008; see also Weisberg, 2009, p. 26).

no hindrance to killing them *en masse* – indeed, as Friend’s anecdote demonstrates, the fact that pigs are so smart and socially aware can actually assist in their transformation into meat, by ensuring that the correct parties profit from their dead bodies.

While she acknowledges and celebrates animals’ rich and complex emotional lives and their ability to communicate with humans, Friend is nevertheless wary of learning too much about the communicative abilities of ‘meat’ animals. As Cole (2009) points out, although the ‘truth’ about farmed animals’ emotional and cognitive capacities are not denied outright in these sorts of discourses, “there is a powerful vested interest in remaining insensitive to particular kinds of truth, for instance the ‘expression’ of the mere desire to *continue living and evade death*” (p. 14, original italics). Several passages in *The compassionate carnivore* suggest that Friend retains a certain ambivalence about the morality of mutilating and slaughtering animals who are, by her own admission, so obviously sentient and sensitive social beings. Imagining a scenario in which animals can actually speak English, Friend speculates:

I suppose this sort of [verbal] communication with your pets would be pretty cool. But to try to communicate on this level with your meat? Hmm, maybe not. It seemed like the perfect recipe for disaster. What if you find out more than you wanted to know? What if you find out so much that you can’t actually keep farming?” (2008, p. 176).

For this reason, Friend is horrified to learn that her partner Melissa is taking courses at a workshop in animal communication, in order “to connect on an even deeper level” with the animals she exploits. She wonders:

What if you’re able to communicate with a hen and she says, ‘Please stop stealing my children and scrambling them and putting them in quiches’? What if a ewe says, ‘That needle hurts. Please don’t give me a shot!’ Or,

god forbid, what if a lamb, on the way to the abattoir, says, ‘Where are we going?’ No, no, no. Not a good idea (pp. 176-7).

Luckily for Friend, however, the “deeper level” on which Melissa learns to communicate with animals is mostly pictorial (and one-way): “sending images of good behaviour to whatever animal was doing something naughty” (p. 177). Friend is thankful that the animals she exploits cannot communicate with her in any human language, calling it “a relief, since talking animals belong in books and movies, not reality” (p. 118). Friend’s imaginary interactions with English-speaking animals seem almost calculated to confront the sense of unease she harbours at times for her chosen profession, to bring it into the light and dispel it – talking animals are only a fantasy, after all, and Friend can rest assured that animals she exploits will never be able to come right out and ask her the troubling questions she has obviously asked herself. While the self-identified “shepherd” seems happy to interpret animal behaviour as expressing, “Hey! These aren’t my friends! I don’t belong here!”, she is resolutely unwilling to hear any other, more worrying protests from the animals she routinely mutilates and slaughters, dismissing such thoughts as indulgent flights of fancy.⁸

It is tempting to read a rather pessimistic lesson about power and subversion into Friend’s giddy fantasy about talking farm animals. Taking a cue from the new historicists (who revolutionized literary criticism in the 1990s), one could argue that these examples demonstrate that “power depends upon subversive beliefs in order to

⁸ Once again, Friend’s darkly humorous fantasy about talking farm animals in *The compassionate carnivore* (2008) finds its academic doppelgänger in the work of Donna Haraway. In *When Species Meet* (2008), Haraway includes a cartoon in which laboratory mice attempt to lure their unsuspecting experimenter into a giant mouse trap, using a McDonald’s take-away bag as bait (2008, p. 68). Although, as Weisberg (2009) points out, “the cartoon is obviously poking fun at the expense of the all-knowing scientist, who gets his comeuppance,” (p. 57) such an act of rebellion could never take place. Therefore, “[a]s their oppressors we can laugh heartily at this fictional ruse, knowing it could never occur in reality. Our position of domination is still perfectly intact. Indeed... after a raucous laugh any trace of guilt or responsibility at the misery we might have caused other creatures is effectively obliterated” (Weisberg, 2009. p 57).

reinforce its constructions of reality and normality” (Brannigan, 1998, p. 64). By raising the subversive notion of animals who protest their own exploitation before laughing the idea off as an ‘unrealistic’ fantasy, Friend not only contains the subversive element, but in fact makes use of it to reinforce the status quo. This gloomy reading of *The compassionate carnivore* adheres closely to Barthes’ theory of myth, in which nothing is hidden but is instead acknowledged and distorted, thus becoming “innocent and eternal” (Barthes, 1973, p. 140). Animal subjectivity is not denied; these texts do not assert that animals are mindless automata. Indeed, there would be little point in doing so: with the growing willingness of the scientific establishment to entertain the notion of animal sentience, and the cultural visibility of animal advocacy counter-narratives, industrial modernity’s reductive claim that animals are merely protein-manufacturing machines has become increasingly hard for the general public to swallow. As Cole (2009) argues, “public disquiet has grown about the way of relating to and conceiving of, farmed animals that factory farming implies” (p. 2): the response to this in popular gastronomic discourses has involved “a deprivileging of mechanistic discourses and a valorization of the possibility of empathetic knowledge” (p. 10). Animals must be acknowledged as sentient subjects, rather than being reduced to insensate objects. By raising the subversive notion that this sentience might be considered an obstacle to the animals’ slaughter and dismemberment, only to laughingly dismiss it as an amusing fantasy, *The compassionate carnivore* is able to swallow this display of subversion whole, rendering the book’s consolidation of the status quo all the more effective.

CONCLUSION

The myths invoked in these texts to legitimize animal slaughter function in Barthesian terms to exorcise potentially disruptive threats to the established social order. A carefully negotiated continuum of ‘sentimentality’ and ‘reason’ is employed to decree which sort of relationships with which sorts of animals are acceptable, and which are not. The ‘pet’/’livestock’ divide is vigilantly policed, and the notion of animal edibility is negotiated particularly carefully around children. Animals themselves are often cast in the role of symbolic children, with the humans raising them for slaughter taking on the role of surrogate parents, a paternalistic myth that serves primarily to facilitate their exploitation. True to Barthes’ (1973) theory of myth, the trauma and suffering inherent in meat production (even the idealized “happy meat” narratives shown in *The f word* and *The compassionate carnivore*) are not entirely hidden, but rather are transferred to the human protagonist of the text, whose experience witnessing or participating in animal slaughter constitutes a "terrible but enlightening rite" of emotional catharsis (see French, 1999) which wholly deflects sympathetic attention away from the animal and towards the human perpetrator. Building upon the deep-seated Judeo-Christian myth of the sacrifice, the human protagonist overseeing the slaughter purports to bear the burden on behalf of not only the slaughtered animal, but also on behalf of meat eating people the world over, who can pass on to the compassionate killer the burden of ‘seeing and knowing’ about the short lives and violent deaths of the animals whose flesh they eat. Likewise, animals’ intelligence and communicative abilities are not denied, but rather are acknowledged and subtly trivialized, assuring the reader that for animal lives to matter in any serious sense, a complete mastery of human language would be essential; since such a development remains in the realm of fantasy, the morality of animal exploitation remains unchallenged. Through the mediating and distorting power of

myth, these texts are able to make visible the graphic details of animal slaughter, whilst continuing to present meat consumption as unproblematic.

However, although the New Carnivore project is ostensibly concerned with normalizing meat consumption by bringing the potentially problematic aspects of meat production out into the light of day, such a strategy is prone to backfire. Animal advocacy organization PETA reportedly received numerous calls and emails from horrified viewers who vowed to forgo meat consumption altogether after viewing scenes of graphic slaughter on New Carnivore reality shows like *Jamie's fowl dinners* and *The f word*.⁹ Media theorist Annette Hill (2005) likewise reports that although reality programmes featuring animal deaths (like *Animal hospital*) are generally favourably received by parents, who see the programmes as playing a positive role in teaching children about the nature of life and death, they are frequently very negatively received by the children themselves, who “are critical of the use of animal suffering for the purposes of making a television programme... [and] vocalise their compassion in relation to an ethics of fairness and animal rights” (p. 167). In counterpoint to the gloomy new historicist perspective, in which subversion is inevitably contained and cannibalized by the dominant structures of power, an alternate reading of the New Carnivore texts examined above might emphasise their potential for inciting successful subversive opposition (Brannigan, 1998, p. 10). The New Carnivore project's sympathetic presentation of nonhuman animals, as sensitive, sentient beings who deserve at least some compassion, might from a cultural materialist perspective be read as a crack in the structures of containment, through which successful opposition might

⁹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-464879/Gordon-Ramsays-pet-lamb-slaughter-turned-viewers-vegetarians.html>

be possible (*ibid.*).¹⁰ The examples of subversive sentiment cited above, although modest in scope, emphasise the importance of remembering that viewers and readers do a good deal of interpretive work in making sense of the texts they consume (Hill, 2005, p. 11). There is always room for ambiguity; in some instances, however infrequent, the New Carnivore project might actually undermine the very speciesist structures of power it is trying to reinforce.

¹⁰ Cultural materialism is a school of literary criticism arising roughly contemporaneously to historical materialism in the nineteen-nineties: the conventional comparison between the two interrelated schools of thought is that new historicism emphasises political containment of subversion whereas cultural materialism allows that subversive ideas can indeed overflow the structures of containment (Brannigan, 1998).

CHAPTER TWO: TASTE

Meat is the new black.

-Susan Bourette, *Meat: A love story* (2008, p. 7)

In considering the New Carnivore predilection for proudly displaying the slaughter of animals and savouring their butchered remains, a sound understanding of the notion of ‘taste’ is essential. The term has multiple, and overlapping, meanings, spanning from the sensory to the social, whose permutations have perhaps been most thoroughly explored by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984). Taste, he points out, can be understood both as “the faculty of perceiving flavours” and “the capacity to discern aesthetic values” (1984, p. 474). These two dimensions of taste are of course not discrete: although the perception of flavour is often assumed to be natural and spontaneous, Bourdieu points out that it is in fact a thoroughly culturally-mediated, constructed and performed capacity (Bourdieu, 1984). For Bourdieu, taste is first and foremost a project of distinction:

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed. (1984, p. 6)

Taste, Bourdieu argues, can serve as a powerful means of demarcating social distinction. By cultivating a certain quality of taste (such as the taste for fine wine, the opera, or, more pertinently to this discussion, hand-reared meat), the consumer aligns her/himself with certain privileged forms of authority and prestige. This allows the consumer to accrue cultural capital, a form of social wealth that money alone cannot guarantee. The acquisition of cultural capital, achieved through the cultivation and performance of ‘good’ taste, thus constitutes an ongoing project of self-improvement (Bourdieu, 1984).

Eating has long been recognised as a key arena in which taste and social distinction are performed (Bourdieu, 1984; de Solier, 2005; Ferguson, 1998; Mennell, 1996). In contemporary times, food media play an absolutely central role in defining culinary taste (Bell and Valentine, 1997, p. 203) and shaping popular dispositions towards the meaning of food in everyday life (Ashley et al., 2004, p. 180). The figure of the gastronome, a connoisseur who possesses the authority both to appreciate and to define ‘good’ food and drink, has become particularly influential in regards to culinary taste. Popularised by television cooking shows, celebrity gastronomes fulfil the role of “cultural intermediaries” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 371), displaying good taste and “culinary cultural capital” (Bell qtd. in Ashley et al., 2004, p. 180) while also instructing viewers how to exhibit and accrue their own. The didactic role played by cooking shows in giving watch-at-home would-be gourmands the opportunity to cultivate distinguished culinary taste is pivotal, according to de Solier (2005).

Watching TV cooking shows can be understood as a form of productive leisure, as viewers invest their free time in the “work of acquisition” of culinary cultural capital, as a means of improving the self through food

knowledge. The accumulated culinary cultural capital can thereafter be utilised by television viewers in projects of social distinction (p. 471).

De Solier's argument for the 'work of acquisition' involved in viewing cooking shows holds just as true for other popular gastronomy texts examined here, aimed at (and appealing most strongly to) "the so-called new middle class" (Bell & Valentine, 1997, p. 193) for whom leisure and consumption practices have long been intimately linked to identity (Ashley et al., 2004, p. 68). According to Strong (2006), these sorts of texts contribute to a "prevailing climate in which consumers with the financial means and disposition query the provenance of their purchases generally, motivated by considerations including food miles, organic farming, welfare standards, fair trade, and the preferred status such purchasing confers" (p. 35). What these diverse considerations have in common is a certain preoccupation with the *origins* of foodstuffs; discerning diners are encouraged to engage with a body of knowledge concerning the food they eat, and the process of that product's journey from farm to fork (Strong, 2006, p. 35). This knowledge about food's origins encompasses a variety of factors, from the geographical origins of a product to the methods used in its production. Terms like those mentioned above (including 'locally grown,' 'organic' and 'free range') have become essential jargon in the repertoire of any discerning gastronome. By engaging with this body of knowledge about the origins of food – for example by reading *The omnivore's dilemma* (Pollan, 2006a) or *The compassionate carnivore* (Friend, 2008) – would-be gourmards accumulate the social distinction that comes with fully appreciating all aspects of the food they enjoy, not just the final well-presented meal. The consumer can thus engage in a project of self-improvement through acquiring (a certain kind of constructed) 'knowledge' of food and its origins, accruing cultural capital demonstrating social distinction.

DOUBLE COMMODITY FETISHISM

Ian Cook and Mike A. Crang (1996) offer the concept of ‘double commodity fetishism’ as a useful way to illuminate how consumer knowledge of foods’ origins has lately become implicated in the performance of ‘good’ taste. They build upon the classic Marxist concept of commodity fetishism, which describes how a commodity’s value comes to be seen as inherent to the finished product, rather than added to that product through the labour it took to produce it (Marx, 1992[1867], p. 61). In this way the commodity becomes dislocated from its own means of production (Cook and Crang 1996, p. 135), fetishized and consumed as a means of constructing identity (Baudrillard, 1981 [1972]). In their discussion of edible commodities, Cook and Crang propose a second layer of fetishization that emphasises a constructed knowledge of where and how that food came to be; a kind of selective biography of certain foodstuffs’ production and distribution. This secondary fetishization, according to Ashley et al. (2004), is characterized by a “fascination with the origins and authenticity of particular produce” (102), particularly meat (see Strong, 2006, p. 35). This emphasis on origins and authenticity supposedly counteracts the consumer’s dislocation from the moment of production, thereby naturalizing the work of consumption as a way for consumers to ‘reconnect’ to the exterior world. Yet this search for origin and authenticity is undercut by the selectivity and superficiality of the knowledge offered (Cook & Crang, 1996, p. 145). Double commodity fetishism can thus be seen as a heady brew of certain ignorances and certain constructed knowledges (Bell & Valentine, 1997, p. 201). Rather than completely dislodging a commodity from its means of production, double

commodity fetishism selectively resituates it in its geographic and social context in order to add to its value.

As geographers, Cook and Crang focus their analysis of double commodity fetishism on the cultural-spatial aspects of the second fetish, illustrating their analysis with examples of the fetishization of ‘exotic’ cuisine. *Jamie’s great escape* (Oliver & Simpson, 2005) provides a typical example of this sort of “food tourism” wherein (as Strong puts it), “fashions are prompted and impelled by trendsetters who revisit, modify, and commodify the tastes and practices of other times and places” (2006, p. 35). *Meat: A love story* (Bourette, 2008) and *The shameless carnivore* (Gold, 2008) also prominently feature meat from exotic animals, including ostriches, rattlesnakes, and whales. Of course, the imperialism underlying the consumption of exotic foreign animals is not difficult to discern; from elaborate Roman feasts of African animals to the Victorian penchant for unusual meat, the consumption of exotic flesh has long been an important marker of class at elite social affairs (Ritvo, 1987, p. 237-240). According to historian Harriet Ritvo, the consumption of animal species from conquered lands has historically been an important part of the performance of class and Empire. “Such feasts expressed more than simple culinary flexibility,” she writes: “they enabled those who represented the elites of wealth and knowledge to figuratively reenact their positions at the table” (1987, p. 237).

The contemporary New Carnivore trend towards exotic animal consumption bears much in common with the Victorian feasts analysed by Ritvo (1987). Imperialist tendencies are readily detectable in *The shameless carnivore* (Gold, 2008); likening himself to a famous conquistador, Gold argues that “a true carnivore is an explorer, a meat Magellan ready to discover every delicious wonder that animals provide” (2008, p. 307). Gold attempts to become the “ultimate carnivore” by eating “no fewer than thirty-

one different animals in a single month – from llama to yak, rattlesnake, turtle, birds of every feather, and each creepy, crawly critter in between” (p. 16). He writes:

Just think about how many unique animals there are roaming the plains of the earth, soaring through the skies, scaling the mountains, slithering through the swamps, and quietly going about their business in the forests and jungles. I salivated at the prospect. Biodiversity? More like *biodiversilicious!*” (p. 24)

For Gold, like the Victorian upper-class feasters described by Ritvo (1987, p. 237), eating exotic animals is a way of figuratively reenacting his position at the table, as someone who is clearly at ‘the top of the food chain’, both socially and biologically. When the exotic origins of certain meat products are emphasised, the commodities themselves become doubly fetishized, selectively resituated in an exciting, ‘boy’s own’-style spatial imaginary that allows Gold to ‘discover’ the wonders of the world through killing, commodifying and consuming exotic ‘others’.

However, double commodity fetishism’s preoccupation with spatial provenance is not restricted to juvenile fantasies about exotic foreign lands, as recent gastronomic texts emphasising the virtues of locally procured food demonstrate. Dubbed the ‘locavore’ movement (a portmanteau of ‘local’ and ‘omnivore’) and popularised by New Carnivore books such as *Meat: A love story* (Bourette, 2008) and *The omnivore’s dilemma* (Pollan, 2006a), this kind of discourse is characterised by an emphasis on the environmental and social virtues of eating locally grown produce. In Pollan and Bourette’s gastronomic texts, food products that can be imaginatively or literally resituated as local in origin are highly fetishized – the merits of locally ‘grown’ meat, feature heavily in this kind of ‘locavore’ discourse (Stanescu, 2010).

A passage from Bourette's *Meat: A love story* (2008) illustrates how geographical and cultural knowledges about 'local' meat can function as a form of double commodity fetishism. Eating 'boudin' (a kind of sausage) at a local gathering in New Orleans, shortly after she "made eye contact with this pig as he was being walked down the plank to his death" (p. 245), Bourette experiences a gastro-cultural revelation:

And then it suddenly comes to me: the secret of boudin is the secret of all good food. You can watch, you can learn at the hands of the master, but the fact is that all good food is rooted in time, place and culture. It is idiosyncratic, unique, and expressive of the place where it's made and the people making it. The closer the food is to the place, the more it defines its makers and eaters the more intense its flavors. Not like the meat that is mass-marketed from factory farms, cleansed of all flavor by modern breeding and feeding...[Cajun pork-eaters are] respecting the pastoral, agrarian order while turning their backs on the hegemony of our supersized, superprocessed, superbland diet. Somehow they've managed to reconcile what eludes most of us eaters here in North America: the marrying of virtue with pleasure. (p. 248)

In her enthusiastic and uncritical endorsement of food that is 'rooted in place', Bourette demonstrates how locally slaughtered meat can become a fetishized commodity with the power to 'define its makers and eaters'. Local meat is thus imagined to be 'unique' product standing in sharp contrast to 'mass-marketed' factory farmed meat, which is derided as an affront to the discerning palate of the true carnivore. Bourette's breathless spiel about the heady delights of local meat epitomizes Cook and Crang's (1996) characterisation of double commodity fetishism as a distinctly geographic phenomenon: 'eating local' allows the eater to imaginatively and nostalgically sample a (distinctly

rural) time, place and culture that seems, to the meat eating urbanite, simultaneously foreign and familiar. In a similar vein, prominent ‘locavore’ Michael Pollan (2006a) waxes lyrical about a small-scale, ‘traditional’ commercial animal agriculture operation called ‘Polyface Farms’, and boasts of the lengths he is willing to go to procure local food, even (rather paradoxically) flying around the continent in order to sample the best of ‘local’ cuisine (see Stanescu, 2010). Texts like these encourage consumers to demonstrate their sophisticated and discriminating tastes while simultaneously purporting to marry virtue with pleasure, revealing how notions of ‘authenticity’ and geographical knowledge of food history have become fetishized in popular gastronomic discourses.

THE ANATOMY OF MEAT

Of course, knowledge about the ‘origins’ of meat encompasses more than just the spatial, the temporal and the cultural – the true gastronome must be familiar with the anatomical origins of meat as well, either by witnessing the process of slaughter, or by consuming animal body parts that are readily recognisable or jarringly unusual. Double commodity fetishism can thus help resolve some of the tensions between the ‘absent referent’ of meat in modernity (Adams, 1990, p. 40) and the recent nostalgic revalorization of slaughter and butchery in food media. Whether through an unflinchingly graphic documentation of the act of slaughter, or an enthusiastic endorsement of the joys of eating offal, New Carnivore culinary texts openly acknowledge, rather than disguise or deny, meat’s animal origin. Yet in that process, meat becomes all the more fetishized, insofar as its consumption allows consumers to demonstrate various kinds of social distinction.

Meat: A love story (Bourette, 2008) clearly demonstrates how this sort of embodied knowledge about meat's origins can form a secondary layer of commodity fetishism, thereby shaping culinary taste and allowing for the accumulation of cultural capital. Bourette's book – alternate titled *Carnivore Chic* – depicts consumers who know about and sometimes participate in slaughter and butchery as adepts in a fashionable new movement sweeping across the ranks of North America's cultural elites. "The carnivores are back," Bourette declares, pointing to the resurgence of fur in fashion design and the new popularity of sausage-making and butchery courses amongst upper-middle class urbanites as signs that the once-waning prestige of meat is again on the rise (2008, p. 7, 224):

Maybe the tipping point came with the makeover of New York's meatpacking district into one of Manhattan's more fashionable addresses. Today, there are new meat temples cropping up everywhere – from high-end butcher shops like this one to Madison Avenue's Nello, where a fourteen-ounce Wagyu sirloin sells at a heart-stopping \$750 a steak. (2008, p. 7)

Bourette labels the revived popularity (and visibility) of meat, butchery and slaughter "a shift in the cultural zeitgeist" (2008, p. 7), arguing that "something fundamental has shifted in our culture" in regards to meat eating (Hanes, 2008, no pagination). "It's the carnivores who rule cool," she asserts: "Meat is the new black" (Bourette, 2008, p. 7). Bourette is not alone in her enthusiastic endorsement of meat: according to a recent Canadian newspaper article, *Meat: A love story* is "just one example of a recent revival of the joys of carnivorous eating" (Hanes, 2008, no pagination). The article, enthusiastically entitled "Rediscovering the joys of meat", mentions both *Meat: A love story* and the similarly-themed *The shameless carnivore* (Gold, 2008) as two recent

“cookbooks” that “celebrate” their respective authors’ “personal and cultural love affair with meat” (Hanes, 2008. no pagination). The article proudly proclaims that “butcher shops are the new shopping grounds of a hip, elite and socially conscious clientele.” “Now, meat is in,” the commentary continues: “people are consuming it, albeit more discriminatingly, guilt free and with a renewed gusto” (ibid.).

Bourette’s book (and its reception by the mainstream media) clearly demonstrates the entanglement of taste, distinction and authenticity in contemporary gastronomic discourses, particularly those that emphasise the origins of animal flesh. In addition to reaffirming the traditional Western perception of (red) meat as a high-status food (Fiddes, 1991; Twigg, 1983), *Meat: A love story* exemplifies de Solier’s analysis of food media as centrally concerned with providing avenues for consumers to acquire culinary cultural capital by “improving the self through food knowledge” (de Solier, 2005, p. 471). The book is essentially a record of the author’s meaty journey of self improvements. It initially presents Bourette as a typical consumer largely ignorant of the origins of meat, before detailing her crash-course in modern meat production as she works undercover in an industrial slaughterhouse, an experience that results in her subsequent enlightenment about meat’s distasteful origins. Bourette briefly adopts a short-lived (and, according to the book, torturous) regime of guilt-induced “abstinence” from meat, before triumphantly returning to a more discerning, and all the more joyous, carnivory. Other New Carnivore texts follow a similar pattern, describing their protagonists’ trajectories as a “journey” or “quest” of self-improvement, from ignorance to self-assured enlightenment (see French, 1999; Friend, 2008; Herlihy, 2005, 2006, 2007; Lazenby, 2008; Lazenby & Van Someren, 2008; Lovenhiem, 2002; Niman, 1999; Pollan, 2006a). In documenting Bourette’s narrative of self-improvement through food knowledge, *Meat: A love story* functions both as a proud display of the author’s own

hard-won culinary cultural capital, and a how-to manual providing readers with avenues to acquire their own. Bourette's book, with its enthusiastic endorsement of 'carnivore chic', strongly encourages consumers to align themselves with the new 'hip', 'elite', 'cool' regime of New Carnivorism, demonstrating their own good taste and accumulating cultural capital through discriminating meat eating. Readers are assumed to already be sympathetic to the cause; as Strong (2006) notes,

[s]uch titillation by frankness operates as part of the hard 'Truth' about animal husbandry, meat production, and food, a communion of knowledge to which readers are admitted and/or assumed to be already in sympathy. This acculturating discourse is posited as existing in contradistinction to a soft majority worldview promulgated by the supermarket experience of easy-to-swallow packaged meat that elides economic reality and anatomical fact. (p. 31)

In eschewing the so-called "hegemony of boneless, skinless chicken breasts – and spineless cooking" (Philpott, 2007, p.106), consumers acquire the cultural capital of being adventurous, unflinching eaters, unafraid to look their meal squarely in the eye and improve themselves through their knowledge of where meat comes from.

THE CULTURAL CAPITAL OF OFFAL

Closely related to the new trendiness of DIY slaughter and butchery, the growing popularity of offal in New Carnivore discourses is another way in which the origins of meat have been incorporated into the commodity's fetishization. A key characteristic of the so-called New Carnivore is that that he or she "will eat the whole animal" (Hanes, 2008: no pagination). Bourette (2008) and Gold (2008) certainly bear out this

assertion in their respective gastro-memoirs, enthusiastically endorsing animal parts that many urban meat-eaters (supposedly) associate with poverty, or simply find gastronomically disgusting. At first glance, offal-eating would seem to contradict the argument that notions of taste and social distinction are key concerns of the New Carnivore project. However cultural capital is not simply composed of classical music, fine wine, the opera and other clichés of so-called ‘high’ culture. On the contrary, a cluster of behavioural, linguistic or culinary practices may be valued in some contexts even as they are devalued in others. For example, Gordon Ramsay’s much alluded-to background as someone from the wrong side of the tracks and his blunt, aggressive speech and mannerisms serve within the context of his television shows as signifiers of his authenticity and ‘street cred’. Jamie Oliver’s unfussy style, “Essex-boy patter” (Ashley et al., 2004, p. 175), and self-conscious rejection of the “slightly wanky, cheffy circle of TV chefs” (cited in Ashley et al., 2004, p. 179) similarly serve to establish his authenticity, as does Richard Till’s declaration that he usually “hate[s] people who have cooking programmes,” and his insistence that he himself is “the upside-down food snob” who prefers to make good food out of “the ordinary shit” (Till & Fraser, 2006a). In a similar vein, the New Carnivore preoccupation with offal borrows liberally (as gastronomy often does) from traditionally working-class and low-status food traditions, imbuing them with a new prestige as an ecologically conscientious, ethically consistent, anti-elitist and adventurous food choice (Strong, 2006). In an article entitled “The Modern Offal Eaters”, Jeremy Strong (2006) examines how the notions of class distinction are performed through eating offal. “The consumption of offal,” he writes, “has become largely the preserve of an affluent culinary cognoscenti whose cooking and eating habits are significantly determined by what they see and read... a middle class seeking

distinction through what and how they eat” (p. 30). He continues: “To be familiar with not only such traditionally cachet-laden foods as foie gras but also calves’ liver, tripe, brawn, and kidneys is to bespeak participation and membership in an elite social stratum” (p. 35).

Strong’s analysis of the cultural capital of offal is corroborated by the treatment of the topic in *Meat: A love story*. Bourette identifies “whole animal eating” as a fashionable “food craze” that has lately resulted in the “celebration of offal in white-tablecloth dinners around America” (2008, p. 237-8). “Indeed,” she writes, “foie gras, truffles, and other staples of gastronomic excess now find themselves sharing space on menus at five-star restaurants with cheeks, jowls, sweetbreads, and cold lamb’s brain on toast” (p. 238). Celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain agrees, attributing much of offal’s new popularity to fellow celebrity chef Fergus Henderson’s restaurant and the associated cookbook, entitled *Nose to tail eating* (2004 [1999]). “Every time you see pork belly or bone marrow, kidneys or trotters (increasingly ‘hot’ offerings) on an American menu you might owe a debt of thanks to Fergus,” Bourdain asserts. “Anytime you see cheeks, tripe or marrow on a New York City menu, you can feel the ripples of his influence” (cited in Strong, 2006, p. 33). As Bourette and Bourdain’s endorsement of the fashionability of offal dishes clearly demonstrates, for the New Carnivore, meats previously considered unusual or even disgusting are no longer an affront to upper-middle class urban sensibilities – far from it. Eating the brains, cheeks, organs, and genitalia of nonhuman animals is positively chic, and these items can be found in all the hippest eateries, to be consumed as a signifier of a refined and adventurous palate. Double commodity fetishism’s preoccupation with origins or authenticity here manifests itself not by drawing attention to the spatial and cultural aspects of food production, but to the simple fact that the origin of any meat product is

indeed a once-living animal. By consuming (with relish) animal body parts that remain confrontationally undisguised by any euphemistic terminology or anonymous fragmentation, modern offal-eaters accrue the cultural capital of seeming at once fearless and thoughtful – adventurous eaters who unflinchingly accept the animal origins of the meat on their plates. Incorporating the death and dismemberment of the animal into the fetishization of the final meat product allows the New Carnivore to savour it all the more.

However, both Bourette and fellow New Carnivore writer Scott Gold (2008) make a point of stressing that whole-animal eating is not simply a fad motivated by the frivolities of social distinction or gastronomic taste. Although Gold professes that he “genuinely enjoy[s]” eating offal, he is quick to emphasise that “it’s not just a matter of taste” (2008, p. 307). Bourette likewise argues that “It’s not merely competition among chefs to make bad things taste good; it’s an ethical movement” (2008, p. 238). In the words of one food writer, “a strange and attractive ethics” (Philpott 2007, p. 108) permeates the discourse on offal.

The reasons for the supposed moral superiority of offal-eating are twofold: ‘whole animal eating’ is held to be both environmentally friendly and more respectful to the animal in question. In support of the environmentalist argument for offal-eating, Gold (2008) invokes a certain strain of pop-anthropological wisdom regarding “the Native Americans, who have long been known to use every part of an animal,” before asking, “Wouldn’t anything less be wasteful?” (2008, p. 307; see also Bourette, 2008, p. 238). Offal enthusiast and UK celebrity gastronome Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall echoes these sentiments, arguing that eating as much of a dead animal as possible is to echo the ethos of “cultures more in tune with their environments and more fully and mutually engaged with their livestock”, and declaring: “Waste is not acceptable. It’s

all or nothing” (2004, p. 182). For Fearnley-Whittingstall, Bourette and Gold, whole-animal eating appeals to a certain commonsense thriftiness that has since been validated by the growing fashionability of appearing ecologically aware. Eating the seldom-used body parts of a slaughtered ‘meat’ animal thus becomes a virtuous enactment of an “environmentally conscious morality” (Strong, 2006, p. 36), a performance that accrues the cultural capital of ‘eco-cool’. “Given the scarcity of fossil fuel and the potentially catastrophic climate change evidently caused by burning it excessively”, one food writer asks,

can meat eaters really afford to consume only the center loin cuts[?]. . . The time has come for environmentalists to learn a lesson from the foodies: if we are to eat meat, ‘free range,’ ‘grass fed,’ and ‘local’ may not be enough. We should probably consume the whole beast, innards and all – and make good use of the bones, too. (Philpott, 2007, p. 108-109)¹¹

The second dimension to the “strange and attractive ethics” (Philpott, 2007, p. 108) of offal-eating stems from the perception that, in using as much of the corpse as is viable and striving to waste as little as possible, a consumer demonstrates respect for the ‘sacrifice’ of the slaughtered animal. According to Fearnley-Whittingstall, “offal offers us a chance to pay our respects, in a full and holistic manner, to the animals we’ve raised for meat” (2004, p. 182). Food writers concur: “if we must do the dirty deed of raising an animal to kill it, then we owe it to the animal to wring as much gustatory joy as possible out of the process,” writes Tom Philpot (2007, p. 108), while Marcia Gagliardi (2008, no pagination) similarly maintains that offal-eating is

¹¹ The assertion that eating as much of each dead animal as possible is beneficial to the environment is contentious at best, in light of the established and ever-growing body of scientific literature suggesting that a plant-based diet has far less of an environmental impact than an animal-based one (Steinfeld et al., 2006). Not breeding the animal into existence to kill and eat in the first place is, in all likelihood, the more environmentally-friendly option (Weber and Matthews, 2008).

“about respecting the whole animal”. Bourette (2008) is slightly more critical, perceptively dubbing ‘whole animal eating’ “the ultimate in feel-good carnivorousness, designed to respect the entire animal and thereby soothe the guilty conscience of the meat-eater” (p. 238), thus tacitly acknowledging that the ‘respect’ shown to the animal by eating offal benefits the eater rather than the eaten. Offal-eating appeases the consumer’s guilty conscience over the death of the animal whilst cultivating an aficionado’s honed appreciation of the more unusual foodstuffs that can be prepared from that animal’s corpse.

However, the offal eater’s claims of eco-friendliness and respectfulness do not always stand up to critical scrutiny. A magazine article entitled “Braving the Brain” (Azab Powell, 2008, no pagination), for instance, features a brief interview with a typical urban offal eater, who found the “old-fashionedness of [offal-eating]” appealing: “I wanted to go beyond just pork chops and ham and learn to use all the parts of the animal”, he explains (*ibid.*). This adventurous eater made a large quantity of ‘head cheese’ (a kind of meat jelly made by boiling the severed head of a pig), but ended up throwing most of it out (*ibid.*). In this instance, the offal-eater’s attempt to show respect to the corpse of the animal by not being wasteful backfired rather spectacularly. There are other indications that frugality is not the main goal of the ‘whole animal eating’ craze: as Strong (2006) points out, the New Carnivore preoccupation with using as much of the animal as possible does not extend to more modern methods of preventing meat ‘waste’, such as mechanically recovered meat (MRM, in which any remaining tissue on a carcass is rendered edible using high-pressure hoses and centrifuges) (see Fearnley-Whittingstall, 2004, p. 182):

That MRM represents the use of “any remaining meat” does not appear to afford it an equivalence of virtue to a small-scale farmer’s thrift. On the

contrary, the practice is consistently described as an industrial-scale deception... It is the consumer's lack of knowledge, as opposed to the insider's wisdom of the offal eater, that make[s] MRM bad.

(Strong, 2006, p. 32)

The MRM example suggests that the supposed respect or eco-thriftiness of offal-eating is not, ultimately, what makes it desirable – rather, it is the ‘old-fashioned’-ness of the process, as well as the opportunities it provides for the consumer to demonstrate the ‘insider wisdom’ and distinguished palate of the sophisticated gourmand, that make offal eating so appealing. That offal-eating primarily functions as an arena for the performance of class distinction is further reinforced by the fact that, although offal is popular in programmes and publications aimed at middle class sophisticates, this trend “has not percolated to those programs more clearly targeting a wider audience. *Ready steady cook* and *Can't cook, won't cook* very rarely feature offal, even in its more ‘acceptable’ manifestations” (Strong, 2004, p. 36). Class distinctions, it appears, remain central to the discourse surrounding offal.

DISTINCTION AND TRANSGRESSION

Not only is modern offal-eating a itself a signifier of class distinction, but the peasant-class origins of marginal meats such as offal or ‘vermin’ are themselves incorporated into the double commodity fetish. Eating these kinds of meats apparently allows the consumer to demonstrate a sophisticated palate whilst displaying an admirable, renegade transcendence of conventional food taboos and making a bold egalitarian statement about class. In *The shameless carnivore* (2008), for example, Gold enjoys eating a squirrel, an animal whose flesh (Gold asserts) has traditionally been devalued

as “poverty food” (p. 234). His culinary transgression is presented not as a faux pas against urban middle-class good taste, but as an admirable display of his mastery over conventional culinary norms and his commitment to anti-elitism. Gold laments that his father, who refused to taste any squirrel meat, “simply couldn’t get past his own preconceived notion of squirrels essentially being oversized rodents, dirty animals that nobody should ever eat unless their very existence depended on it” (ibid.). Gold has nothing but contempt for this attitude:

Americans have hunted and eaten squirrels as long as this country has been a country and well before that, and I have no doubt that they’ll continue to do so as long as there are squirrels out there to hunt and eat. I was now part of that ritual, and proudly so. As for everyone else, the squeamish eaters who refuse to try something a little different and the elitists who feel that such an interesting and intelligent animal is somehow a poverty food, something beneath their golden palates, I’ll say only this: Fooley. You don’t know what you’re missing. (ibid.)

Gold rejects the ‘squeamish’ or ‘elitist’ attitudes of those who rebuff squirrel-meat, appealing instead to a patriotic counter-narrative of rugged, rural self-reliance to justify and defend his supposed culinary transgression. In doing so, he himself garners cultural capital for his admirably consistent, adventurous, and socially progressive eating habits.

Armstrong and Potts (2004) identify a similar rhetoric of anti-elitism and settler self-reliance at work in New Zealand’s annual Hokitika wildfoods festival. The popular event, which features over a hundred stalls selling carnal delights such as sheep testicles, ostrich eggs and crocodile meat, demonstrates how distasteful eating can serve to accrue cultural capital by appealing to a sense of regional or subcultural identity (2004, p. 17). A brochure for the event features a prominent butcher and “ex-West

Coaster” proudly displaying his own working-class and regional credentials: “I will be returning to my roots... West Coast people are real so there will be no need for any poncy dishes” (cited in Armstrong & Potts, 2004, p. 16-17). Here, cultural capital is accumulated by embracing the consumption of obscure or marginal animals (or animal body parts) as food suitable for rugged, self-reliant locals and other adventurous eaters – in short, for ‘real people’ – even though (and perhaps because) they may be elicitors of disgust for ‘poncy’ out-of-towners and city-dwellers. As Armstrong and Potts point out, “several regimes of taste being negotiated here,” from those of local Pakeha nostalgically reconnecting to their colonialist forebears, to those of gourmet foodies “savouring their finely developed tastes for the wild,” eating fearlessly as a way to “diversify their own culinary portfolio” (2004, p. 25). The Hokitika festival, and the notion of wildfoods more generally, feature increasingly in print and radio media targeting the elite food consumer or urban bourgeoisie (ibid., p. 24). This gentrification of eating out of the ordinary is a testament to the lucrative potential of the middle-class urban market (ibid.), and illustrates how fearless (meat-)eating is intimately entangled in notions of taste, refinement and cultural capital.

Whilst many of the New Carnivore texts examined here facilitate the urban bourgeoisie’s fetish for unusual meats, they are also quick to emphasise that the spirit of this ‘fearless eating’ must not be tamed by polite euphemism. For example, as he graphically skins and butchers a squirrel’s corpse, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall derides any chefs who might attempt to disguise the origins of squirrel meat by presenting it as “flightless partridge”:

Squirrel meat is beginning to catch on in some rather fancy restaurants, but unfortunately, very few of the chefs who serve it actually have the nerve to

call it by what it is, so they invent strange euphemisms, like flightless partridge, or tree rabbit. (Fearnley-Whittingstall & Palmer, 1995)

For Fearnley-Whittingstall, attempting to disguise the feral origins of squirrel meat by renaming it as something more palatable to urban middle-class sensibilities completely contradicts the spirit of the entire endeavour. He berates those consumers who are happy to eat intensively farmed animal products and yet object to the consumption of a small wild rodent, arguing that “personally, I would much rather eat a squirrel that has run through the trees and lived off a fairly natural diet of nuts and berries, maybe the odd bird’s egg. At least it’s real food. *Wild food*” (Fearnley-Whittingstall & Palmer, 1995). Squirrel meat is such an attractive option for Fearnley-Whittingstall *because* it is unconventional, a ‘natural,’ ‘real’ and ‘wild’ antidote to the bland, unhealthy and ethically dubious offerings of industrial animal agriculture. Of course, it is almost inevitable that products endorsed by celebrity gastronomes and discursively aligned with such currently *en vogue* qualities as ‘natural’, eco-friendly and ethical would become sought-after commodities in ‘fancy’ cuisine. However, Fearnley-Whittingstall’s disdain for chefs who would seek to conceptually whitewash such products demonstrates that it is not simply the act of consuming the meat itself that allows the accumulation of cultural capital – rather, it is the attitude with which one consumes it. Meat must be eaten clear-headedly, with gusto and nerve and without recourse to self-deluding euphemisms – this is a central tenet of the New Carnivore project (Gold, 2008, p. 14). Only then can a consumer prove him- or herself to be a truly discerning carnivore. Offal, squirrel and other unusual meats are thus figured as “potent option[s] in the repertoire of the host seeking to impress”, comprising “a formidable instrument in the arms race of reciprocal hospitality” (Strong, 2006, p. 36). As the editor of *Meatpaper*, a self-professed “journal of meat culture” puts it, “Meat makes a better

party. It's a little bit raunchy, kind of gross... There's a daredevil aspect to it" (Schwaner-Albright, 2007, no pagination). Such "adventurous eating" demonstrates "dash and gutsy adroitness" whilst simultaneously allowing the consumer to display his or her knowledge of food by promoting "food talk" (Strong, 2006, p. 36). "To know what sweetbreads are, or *chimo*, or why a woodcock need not be eviscerated before roasting", Strong writes, "is to participate in the flaunting and exchange of esoteric food lore" (ibid.). To circumvent this 'flaunting of food lore' by disguising potentially distasteful or unusual meat products is to miss the point entirely.

To euphemistically rename unusual meat products would also thwart the New Carnivore's demonstration of fearlessness in the face of petty bourgeois culinary niceties. As Strong (2006) notes, appeals to the consumer to 'be adventurous' and eat more 'extreme' meat "coexist with images and descriptions selected precisely for their capacity to provoke the squeamish" (p. 31). The very transgressiveness of 'fearless eating' is itself a potent method of acquiring of cultural capital (Armstrong & Potts, 2004; Ashley et al., 2004; Lupton, 1996).¹² "The more repulsive the food," Lupton argues, "the more points are won for appearing gastronomically brave and adventurous, demonstrating mastery over accepted norms and one's own body in its very transgressive nature" (1996, p. 199). Such a display of culinary bravery is often highly masculinized; Lupton (1996, p. 199) dubs the contemporary urban middle-class trend towards eating previously forbidden food a "machismo of eating", and several New Carnivore texts corroborate this analysis. In *The shameless carnivore* (2008), for example, Gold attends a "Testicle Festival" featuring an array of testicle-based culinary concoctions, and writes of the overt atmosphere of over-the-top masculinity pervading

¹² 'Fearless eating' is an interesting form of social transgression, because it is one that does not expose the transgressor to any social or cultural risk – sharply contrasting with other forms of social transgression, such as sexual or gender transgressions, for example.

the event: “It became immediately apparent that this wasn’t just Testicle Festival in the literal sense that people were eating prairie oysters; this was *testicle* festival, figuratively, an unabashed, and truly shameless celebration of American testosterone. It was awesome” (p. 310). This no doubt has much to do with the remarkably pervasive notion that ‘you are what you eat’ – in eating the sexual organs of bulls (animals associated with physicality and sexual strength), human men are in effect consuming and internalizing a powerful of symbol of masculine virility (Twigg, 1983). Eating another animal’s genitals, it seems, functions as both a macho display of ‘fearless eating’ in which men prove their bravery by consuming potentially disgusting foods, and a talismanic ritual in which the virility associated with male animal sexuality can be transmitted to the human through the literal incorporation of animal genitalia.

In addition to winning points for appearing gastronomically adventurous and quasi-supernaturally virile, several anecdotes recounted in the New Carnivore texts examined here suggest that part of the appeal of eating male animals’ genitalia is that in doing so, one proves one’s willingness to skirt dangerously (but daringly) close to transgressing heterocentric, hegemonic masculine gender norms. Ashley et al (2004) assert that the “sensuality (for which the professional gastronome is accredited) involves a productive confusion of culinary and sexual pleasures” (p. 165). Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that the homoerotic undertones of self-identified heterosexual male humans fixating on, and orally interacting with, the sexual organs of male animals are not lost on several prominent New Carnivore personalities. “It was the best testicle I’d ever had in my mouth. And the first, I should hasten to say” writes celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain in his book *Kitchen confidential* (2000, p. 126). Bourdain intentionally confuses the two quite distinct oral activities of eating and fellatio, making sure to include a homophobic disclaimer reassuring his readers that the only testicle he

has ever put in his mouth is a severed one from a mutilated animal (Bourdain, 2000, p. 126). An online interview with a lesser-known chef-cum-blogger similarly demonstrates how the alleged homoeroticism involved in the eating of severed animals' genitalia is used within the New Carnivore discourse to reinforce homophobic sentiments: "Chris Cosentino doesn't want to eat penis, but if he has to, he will," the interview is entitled (Standen, 2007, no pagination). Gold's (2008) forays into eating a bull's penis have similarly homoerotic undercurrents. When the unappetizing-looking penis is served to him at a restaurant where he is dining with male friends – boiled and sliced yet still readily recognizable – Gold's recounting of the corny dialogue that ensues seems almost like the beginning of a bad pornographic movie: "'Dude,' said my pal Sam, 'I'd rather suck a dick right now than eat a dick.' All eyes turned to me. Would I do it?" (Gold, 2008, p. 325). Gold does it – eats the severed bull's penis, that is. The intentional ambiguity of what exactly Gold is being challenged to do – suck a dick or eat a dick – reflects both a playful willingness to entertain notions of non-heterocentric masculinity, and a deep-seated underlying anxiety with the prospect that must be exorcised with ridicule. Ultimately, genito-gastronomic obfuscations such as these serve much the same purpose as other varieties of 'fearless eating' – by eating in a way that supposedly transgresses the conventional norms of middle-class, urban (and, we might add, heterosexual) meat eating sensibilities, the heterosexual male testicle-eater aligns himself with a (suitably 'safe') spirit of renegade rebelliousness, accruing cultural capital by displaying mastery over his own body and over the petty, squeamish culinary niceties of the ignorant majority.

More than any other New Carnivore text examined here, *The shameless carnivore* (Gold, 2008) demonstrates most transparently how cultural capital is accrued by overcoming disgust at unconventional eating. In one passage, Gold expresses

disappointment that the “monkey gland sauce” listed on a restaurant menu isn’t actually derived from dead monkeys:

Tragically, the first words out of the waitress’s mouth were: “You may see the words ‘monkey gland sauce’ but I want you to rest assured that it has nothing to do with either monkeys or glands.” We let out a collective sigh of disappointment, quite possibly the first group of diners to be genuinely saddened by what our server obviously thought to be a comforting explanation. (Gold, 2008, p. 118)

Gold’s professed enthusiasm for monkey flesh, a taboo that for many Westerners skirts uncomfortably close to cannibalism is partially a simple shock tactic – in another passage in the book, he expresses a similar desire “to get my hands on some nice baby panda” (2008, p. 62). More than this, however, Gold’s anecdote serves to underscore the adventurous, renegade disposition of himself and his merry band of unconventional eaters. In being willing to try even something so potentially disgusting and ethically problematic as the flesh of a nonhuman primate, Gold distinguishes himself from the boring, squeamish, unadventurous diner, accumulating cultural capital by shucking the petty restrictions of bourgeois Western culinary etiquette.

THE SOUL MIXED IN WITH THE FLESH

Recent popular food media show a definite willingness to reincorporate the living animal into the dead meat, of which the new vogue for butchery, offal and ‘adventurous eating’ are several prominent facets. Another way to reincorporate the animal into the act of eating meat is to simply acknowledge that animal as a formerly living, sentient being. Value is added to the disembodied object of meat by imaginatively re-embodiment

it as part of a living creature. Thus, for many New Carnivore authors, killing and eating an animal whose subject-status is readily acknowledged seems to add something to the experience, rather than functioning as any kind of deterrent to meat eating. On reality television show *Off the radar*, for example, host Te Radar enthuses as he is attempting to catch a pair of escaped piglets and lock them back in their small dark shed: “Good boys! Feisty, Spirited! That makes good bacon!” (Radar, Andrews & Rakena, 2009). Apparently, the readily discernable ‘spirit’ of these animals contributes significantly to Radar’s perception of the taste of their flesh – the best bacon is fashioned from ‘spirited’ pigs.

These ideas are not a uniquely contemporary phenomenon; in the third century BCE, the philosopher Chrysippus voiced a similar sentiment regarding the importance of animal’s spirit to the flavour of meat. The pig, Chryssipus opined, “was created for no other purpose than slaughter, and God, in furnishing our cuisine, mixed soul in with the flesh like salt” (cited in S. M. Wise 2000, p. 9-10). Contemporary New Carnivore texts appear to be in agreement with the Stoic philosopher’s assertion that certain animals are effectively destined to be consumed: *The f word’s* Janet Street-Porter, for example, steadfastly maintains that ‘her’ calves were created explicitly to be killed, having “always [been] raised to make a point about veal” (Ramsay & Northover, 2008a).¹³ Like Chrysippus, Street-Porter considers that the animals in question have clearly been ‘designed’ to be slaughtered, whether that ‘designer’ was God, humanity, or the executive producer of a popular television show. However, for both the

¹³ Indeed, so completely are farmed animals considered by some to be “created solely for the purpose of slaughter” that sparing the animal’s life thwarts the fulfilment of that animal’s purpose. Thus, the veterinarian attending Courage, the turkey featured in 2009’s annual presidential turkey pardon, was reportedly “conflicted” about letting the bird live out his days: “He’s a bird raised for meat consumption, so to me it somewhat suborns his purpose and existence by pardoning him,” he said. “But if it gives people the opportunity to learn what turkeys are like, that’s a good thing.” See <<http://www.latimes.com/news/nation-and-world/la-na-turkey-pardon26-2009nov26.0.362350.story>>

philosopher and the television presenter the fact that that animal is also a sentient being adds a quasi-sacred dimension to the experience. Much is made in *The f word* of the calves' playful and affectionate personalities, and the television show repeatedly presents images of the pair frolicking in a grassy field or nuzzling each other contentedly (Ramsay & Northover, 2008a). Far from impeding the slaughter and dismemberment of the calves, this easy recognition of their subjectivity and interior emotional lives in fact serves to make the meat taste better. The calves retain their individual names even as they are spit-roasted and served with relish to marquee full of diners who rapturously describe the flavourful meat (Ramsay & Northover, 2008b). Rather than erasing the animal from the act of meat eating, or denying the subjectivity of the animal 'destined' for the table, it seems that an important part of this new theatre of slaughter is *acknowledging* the subjectivity of an animal being, and transforming her into an object regardless. In this way, these narratives of slaughter emphasise their distinction from industrial agriculture: rather than always having been the "raw material" (Berger, 1971, p. 1042) for industry, the animal farmed in this "friendly way" (Till & Fraser, 2006a) is recognised and treated as a fellow relational subject, *before* being disposed of as an object.

This recognition of the animal as a living, feeling being imbues the eating of her carcass with a special significance, allowing the protagonists of these texts to savour their meal all the more. As a chef specializing in local meat tells Bourette in *Meat: A love story* (2008),

For me to be able to cook food that people can appreciate, and then have a story line that's attached to it, is very important. From a chef's perspective, it always makes the food taste better. It's the kind of seasoning that I can't provide. (178)

Although he uses the term ‘food’ instead of ‘meat,’ the meals served at this chef’s highly fashionable restaurant inevitably centre on meat from locally raised animals. His comments encapsulate the idea of double commodity fetishism, showing how providing a ‘story line’ (selectively) illuminating the origins of the meat and reassuring consumers of its authenticity, improves its flavour, and thereby increases the prestige associated with its consumption.

Partly, this back story is concerned with providing geographical and anatomical knowledge regarding the origins of a particular animal food; however, a key plot point in this ‘story line’ of meat seems to involve the simple recognition that the meat on the plate was indeed once a living, breathing animal. The farmer who supplies Blue Hill Restaurant with its pork makes this perfectly clear: “To work here you’ve got to love and respect the animals – and relish eating them,” he tells Bourette (2008, p. 159). Only through acknowledging animals as living beings, deserving of love and respect, can one truly relish eating their corpses, in a suitably refined, discerning and well-informed manner. The acknowledgment of the animal’s subject-status effectively seasons his or her butchered remains: the meat will taste all the sweeter for the soul mixed in with the flesh.

However it seems that acknowledging, respecting and even loving the animal one is eating need not entail a personal connection to that individual animal. Indeed, several New Carnivore writers maintain that just one experience participating in animal slaughter allows them to imaginatively re-value meat of all kinds, free-range or intensively farmed, and consume it with ‘respect’, epitomizing Cook and Crang’s assertion of “the superficiality of the knowledges provided by consumer cultures” (1996, p. 145). This tendency will be explored in more depth in the concluding chapter of this thesis; for now, let us end with the words of *The f word’s* Gordon Ramsay, who

both asks his children and answers the question for them as they devour “Trinny-sausages”: “Do they taste better because you reared and grew them? YES!” (Ramsay & Smith, 2006f).

“HAPPY ANIMALS MAKE THE TASTIEST MEAT”

Meat from animals who (when alive) can be imagined as being ‘happy’ is particularly prestigious in New Carnivore texts, lending weight to Cook and Crang’s (1996: 143) identification of “meat products that are ‘animal friendly’” as an example of double commodity fetishism at work. *Meat: A love story* (Bourette, 2008), *The omnivore’s dilemma* (Pollan, 2006a), *The compassionate carnivore* (Friend, 2006), *The shameless carnivore* (Gold, 2008), *Off the radar* (Andrews, 2007, 2008) and *The f word* (Herlihy, 2005, 2006, 2007; Lazenby, 2008) all display a fascination with the ‘honest’ ‘authenticity’ of ‘organic’ or ‘free-range’ meat that can be rebranded as ‘happy’, and repeatedly assert that ‘happy animals make tastier meat’. According to an upmarket pork producer interviewed in *Meat: A love story*, for example, “A happy pig is a great-tasting pig” (2008, p. 179). The producers of *The f word* concur: “I do think that happy meat tastes better,” a guest asserts, to the resounding applause of Ramsay and Fearnley-Whittingstall (Ramsay & Parsons, 2007b). “It’s the truth: happy animals make the tastiest meat,” agrees Gold in *The shameless carnivore* (2008, p. 15). Like Chryssipus’ assertion that the soul mixed into an animal’s flesh improved its taste, these New Carnivore texts maintain that animal happiness improves the flavour of meat. Sociologist Matthew Cole (2009) points out in his own analysis of these kinds of ‘happy meat’ discourses that

happiness becomes an adjunct of the meat itself, something to be consumed along with the muscle fibres, fat and blood. The ‘ethical consumer’ is morally satiated by consuming the happiness of the animals at the same time as her or his belly is filled with their corpses. (2009, p. 17)

Coles’ insights are borne out in the gastronomic texts examined here: as Bourette exclaims in *Meat: A love story* (2008), whilst eating at trendy, upmarket farm-cum-restaurant: “So, this is the secret ingredient! Happiness! The spice, the herb that keeps patrons lining up for months for a table here at the three-star Blue Hill Restaurant, where these Bershires will be transformed from pig into pork” (2008, p. 155). For Bourette, happiness is a flavouring, akin to a ‘spice’ or ‘herb,’ that acts as a ‘secret ingredient’ improving the taste of the meat, making it a highly sought after commodity that patrons will ‘line up for months’ to publicly consume.

However, the capacity to discern such fine subtleties of flavour is not innate, requiring instead the conscious cultivation of a sophisticated palate. The first time Bourette eats this virtuous variety of flesh, she is disappointed that she cannot perceive the special taste that ‘happiness’ is supposed to bestow:

I eagerly anticipate a wallop of flavor, something to knock me off my stool. Sadly, it never comes... Some trumpet the lighter texture of grass-fed meat. They argue its flavors are more complex. Perhaps my palate isn’t refined enough to distinguish this complexity. It only knows what it knows (2008, p. 179-80).

Bourette’s use of the word ‘refined’ here, rather than simply ‘trained’ or ‘learnt’, is revealing. Connotations of purity surround the term ‘refined’, suggesting that an appreciation of the flavour of grass-fed meat is somehow ‘natural’ to the human palate: it just needs an opportunity to show itself. Thus, Bourette attributes her initial failure to

discern the gustatory superiority of free-range, local, organic, ‘happy’ meat to of factory-farmed meat’s corrupting influence on her sense of taste:

This pig is the real thing. Not man-made – fed a steady diet of hormones antibiotics, and fattened with grain. My taste buds, in all likelihood, have been corrupted. Perhaps enjoying this genetically superior pig fattened on grass will take some acclimatization for the majority of us in North America who equate the taste of a good pork roast with the flavor of meat that tastes more of grain than grass (2008, p. 180).

The taste for doubly fetishized meat must be refined, honed, polished – the connotations of authenticity and happiness that imbue the meat with its added prestige require a discerning palate to truly appreciate them. That one’s sense of taste must be highly refined in order to properly savour ‘happy’ meat is in itself an indication of its high social standing: “there’s nothing ostentatious here”, Bourette writes, lauding the taste of ‘happy’ meat as being “as subtle as fine pearls, as the best linens” (p. 181). Upon further reflection, Bourette (unsurprisingly) finds herself appreciating the subtle flavour, once she thoughtfully considers how “rich [the pork is] in color, history and legend” (ibid.). She writes:

Gazing out the window, reflecting on all that I have learned this week on the farm and respect I have gained for farmers like Craig Haney, I take another bite of pork. I savor it for a moment. I can taste it now – the joy, the bliss. It is most certainly a Happy Meal. (ibid.)

CONCLUSION

According to de Solier (2005), “television cooking shows have historically operated to serve class distinctions based on culinary taste” (p. 471), and true to form, a definite preoccupation with performing an aesthetic of taste that is inherently class-based is discernable in these narratives. As Moseley (2001, p. 231) points out, access to cultural capital, just like access to economic capital, is not uniform across ethnic, gender, and class divides, and indeed, phrases like ‘high-end’, ‘fashionable’, ‘elite’, and ‘discriminating’ recur throughout *Meat: A love story* (Bourette, 2009). The fact that the new prestige of offal has not yet percolated down into gastronomic texts targeting a broader socio-economic audience (Strong, 2006:, p. 36) suggests that such ‘adventurous eating’ remains an upper-middle class preserve, and the consumption of value-added, doubly-fetishized ‘free range’, ‘organic’ or simply ‘happy’ animal flesh is a pleasure mainly open to pursuit by those who possess both the inclination *and* the financial security to do so. Geographical access to the small specialist meat retailers is far from uniform (Strong, 2006, p. 182), and the sheer expense of many of the value-added meat products endorsed by the New Carnivore movement so rapturously endorses is likewise prohibitive to the majority of consumers (ibid.). These texts make environmental and ethical appeals entreating consumers to buy meat from small butcheries, buy meat that is ‘animal friendly’ and buy meat that is ‘adventurous’, facilitating a certain amount of self-congratulatory back-slapping among the ranks of the culinary elite.¹⁴ Taste and cultural capital, however, are the driving forces behind the New Carnivore movement, not ecological awareness or respect for nonhuman animals. In his article analysing the high esteem of offal, Strong (2006) writes:

¹⁴ For example a reviewer for culinary journal *Gastronomica* rather smugly writes: “Happily, haute US food culture has embraced the concepts [of the environmental and ethical virtues of offal consumption]” (Philpott, 2007, p. 109).

familiarity with foods and their origins has become a marker of prestige... [including] a certain vaunting of the understanding that to eat meat is to participate in an economy of life and death. For the modern offal eaters their knowledge and consumption of liver, kidneys, and trotters signifies an especially pronounced participation in this culture of food awareness, an engagement with food at its most primary. With majority tastes shepherded toward convenience and away from blood and guts, offal has acquired a new potential to signify discrimination. (p. 38)

Strong's insights regarding offal are just as applicable to the wider discourse of the New Carnivore movement. By witnessing animal slaughter, displaying a sound knowledge of butchery, being willing to eat unusual varieties of meat with gusto, and freely acknowledging the meat on one's plate as a formerly sentient living being, the New Carnivore vaunts the "understanding that to eat meat is to participate in an economy of life and death". Texts like these, Strong suggests, purport to acknowledge "the bloody facts" and "partially to ameliorate them through informed purchasing" (2006, p. 35) – in doing so, gastronomes like Bourette, Gold and Ramsay display their credentials as informed and adventurous eaters, and perform "a species of superiority over those who balk at offal, game, and the truth about their own food" (ibid.). Perhaps Linda Covington puts it most succinctly in a New Carnivore magazine article entitled 'Flesh Mob' (2009, no pagination): "knowing what happened to your meat makes a better meal", she asserts. By incorporating a constructed knowledge of meat's origins (geographical or anatomical) into the fetishization of the final commodity, the New Carnivore texts examined here offer new avenues for consumers of the requisite class and inclination to perform 'good taste' and accumulate cultural capital.

CHAPTER THREE: GENDER

[W]hen I stand the rack on its end, bend it into a circle, and tie it tight with another skin-biting pull of the twine, like a tug at a Southern belle's corset, the crown roast is a thing of beauty, emphatically female... It looks rather sluttish there, nestled amid the more pedestrian pork chops.

-Julie Powell, *Cleaving: A story of meat, marriage and obsession* (2009, p. 123)

This chapter analyses the gendered aspects of the new visibility of slaughter in popular gastronomy, examining how ideas of femininity and masculinity are played out in two distinct yet interrelated groups of New Carnivore texts. First, I will examine how gender is negotiated and performed (see Butler, 1999 [1990]) in contemporary cooking shows that prominently feature animal slaughter. Examples are drawn from several episodes of British cooking/reality show *The f word* (Herlihy, 2005, 2006, 2007), in which celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay raises in his own backyard and finally helps to slaughter seven turkeys (Ramsay & Smith, 2005) and two pigs (Ramsay & Smith, 2006a). I will also examine an episode from the fourth season of the programme (Lazenby, 2008), in which Ramsay has passed on the duty of animal killing to a secondary presenter on the show, "food correspondent" Janet Street-Porter (Ramsay & Northover, 2008a). Part of the miniseries *Jamie's great escape* (Oliver & Simpson, 2005), in which Jamie Oliver participates in a wild boar hunt and slaughters a lamb before preparing meals with the remains, will also be analysed. Examples are also drawn from several episodes of *Kiwi kitchen* (Ritchie, 2007, 2008), including one in which chef Richard Till visits a New

Zealand farm to discuss the slaughter of a sheep for the preparation of a meal of roast mutton (Till & Fraser, 2006a), and several others wherein Till “celebrates” different meat products and cooking processes (Till & Fraser, 2006a; 2006b; 2006c; 2007a; 2007c). Considered as a group, these cooking programmes disparage farmed animals themselves, and humans’ emotional concern for them, by belittling both as feminine; simultaneously, slaughter and meat eating are presented as inherently masculine and are celebrated as such.

However, the New Carnivore ideology does not appeal solely to men. In the second part of this chapter, I analyse one prominent example of a woman-authored New Carnivore text: Julie Powell’s gastro-memoir *Cleaving: A story of meat, marriage and obsession* (2009), a book that thoroughly blurs the boundaries between cookbook, confessional and travelogue. In *Cleaving*, like the cooking shows outlined above, notions of normative gender are negotiated with reference to the slaughter and dismemberment of nonhuman animals. Rather than equating meat eating and butchery with masculinity, however, *Cleaving* presents the performance of (certain forms of socially acceptable) violence towards animal bodies as a bold revision of traditional feminine gender norms, as well as performance of female empowerment.

THE FEMINIZATION OF FARMED ANIMALS IN COOKING SHOWS

As I have outlined in Chapter One, ‘livestock’ animals tend to exist in a somewhat liminal space: neither beloved companions (like pets) or respected strangers (like wild animals), farmed animals are instead commonly assumed to be stupid, slow-moving beasts that have, through the long process of domestication, been all but created solely for the purpose of serving human appetites (1999, p. 41). As feminist theorist Karen

Davis (1995) points out, certain hierarchical assumptions about gender characteristics permeate these sorts of discourses denigrating farmed animals:

Animals summoning forth images of things that are “natural, wild, and free” accord with the “masculine” spirit of adventure and conquest idolized by our culture. Animals summoning forth images of things that are unnatural, tame, and confined represent a way of life that Western culture looks down upon... Not only men but women and animal protectionists exhibit a culturally conditioned indifference toward, and prejudice against, creatures whose lives appear too slavishly, too boringly, too stupidly female, too ‘cowlike’ (1995, p. 196).

Davis argues that farmed animals are commonly thought to exhibit a cluster of traits that patriarchal society has filed under ‘feminine’, and that the “stupidly female” nature of these traits is a key a factor in the degraded moral status of these animals.¹⁵

Ironically, the “stupidly female” ways that workers within the slaughter industry ascribe to farmed animals come to the fore most prominently when these animals fail to conform to the notion of feminine passivity. In her onsite interviews with British meat industry workers, sociologist Erika Cudworth found that animals who were not docile or easily manageable were frequently labeled “cunts” or “bitches”, and observed that animals of either sex tend to be feminized metaphorically at the slaughterhouse by these sorts of insults (Cudworth, 2008; see also Lovenheim, 2002, p.170). Bulls, too, can be the target of sexualized verbal abuse if they are perceived to commit gender transgressions. In *Portrait of a burger as a young calf*, writer Peter Lovenheim observes

¹⁵ Indeed, women have been considered near to the animal state throughout much of Western history. According to historian Keith Thomas (1984, p. 43), “[o]ver many centuries theologians had debated, half frivolously, half seriously, whether or not the female sex had souls, a discussion which closely paralleled the debate about animals and was sometimes echoed at a popular level” (p. 43).

workers vitriolically abusing ‘mounts’ (bulls who are ‘mounted’ sexually by other bulls for the purpose of sperm collection): “Come on, you fucking cocksucker!”, one man shouts as he kicks a ‘mount’ in the stomach (2002, p. 38). Lovenheim’s own response to these ‘mounts’ treads the line between sympathetic concern and outright homophobia: reflecting that these animals have “the lowest job in the world”, Lovenheim derisively calls the ‘mounts’ “prison bitches” (ibid.). Here, even male animals who behave (or are forced to behave) in ways that transgress hegemonic, heterocentric gender norms of masculine aggression and virility are discursively feminized as “bitches”, and derogated accordingly.

Farmed animals are also feminized in the language used to describe their physical appearance. On television cooking programme *Kiwi kitchen*, for example, chef Richard Till marvels at the feminine contour of a deer’s leg before butchering, roasting and consuming it: “a very slender, delicate little leg they have too, if you look here, a lot of women would be very happy to have a leg like that” (Till & Fraser, 2007c). On *The f word*, a pig breeder informs Ramsay that in selecting piglets to raise for meat, careful appraisal of their physical appearance is paramount: “You don’t want them too fat, but you want nice rounded bottoms” (Ramsay & Smith, 2006a). Chosen for their rounded buttocks, Ramsay names these “girls” after female celebrities based on his own appraisal of their physical similarities: piglets Trinny and Susannah, named after popular style gurus Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine, gain their monikers “because one’s got a fat arse and one’s got small nipples” (ibid.). The pair are even entered into an agricultural show, where they are judged by “criteria such as shape, mobility and teat alignment” (Ramsay & Smith, 2006c) – a porcine beauty pageant where being a winner is no guarantee of survival. (Indeed, some “best of breed” contests culminate in the slaughter of the finalists so that the interior physiology of the winning

contestant may be judged as well [Cudworth, 2008: 39]).

WOMANISH PITY, CHILDISH SENTIMENT

In chapter one I outlined how allegations of ‘sentimentality’ are used in New Carnivore discourses to denigrate attitudes towards ‘livestock’ animals that are not based primarily on their utility to humans, depicting such ‘sentimentality’ as completely at odds with any realistic, mature perception of the world. Equally important to remember, however, is that the derogatory connotations of ‘sentimentality’ are inextricably linked to the concept’s feminization. In his seventeenth century philosophical treatise *Ethics*, for example, Spinoza dismissed opposition to animal slaughter as based upon “superstition and womanish pity” (cited in Midgley, 1983, p. 10). Three and a half centuries later, the charge of ‘sentimentality’ continues to be highly feminized (Donovan, 1990, pp. 350-2; Luke, 2007, pp. 210-13). As philosopher Brian Luke (2007) argues:

A central Western patriarchal ideology is the elevation of the “rational/cultural” male over the “emotional/biological” female. Women’s rage (labelled “sentiment,” “hysteria,” etc.) is thus divested of political significance by interpreting any female reaction against the established order not as a moral challenge to that order, but as a biosexual phenomenon to be ignored or subdued (p. 211).

Emotional concern for animals thus becomes labelled as mere ‘womanish sentiment’, an irrational and inconsequential foible of the fairer sex. In his analysis of ‘sentimentality’ in modern literature, literary critic Philip Armstrong (2008) makes a similar point, arguing that ‘sentimental’ narratives have tended to be “associated with the least

authoritative expressions of cultural life: femininity rather than masculinity, childishness rather than maturity, fancy and whimsy rather than rationality or reason” (p. 165). ‘Sentimentality’, then, tends to be constructed in Western discourses as a naïve, emotionally manipulative, feminine counterpoint to masculine instrumentalist rationality. The cooking shows examined in this paper continue in this tradition, trivializing emotional concern for animals as both feminine and infantile, and sharply contrasting such ‘sentimentalism’ to the masculine, mature, ‘realistic’ attitude of instrumentalism espoused by the chefs and cuisine ‘experts’.

An episode of the television cooking show miniseries *Jamie’s Great Escape* (Oliver & Simpson, 2005) provides a good example. During the episode, Oliver visits a rural Italian family, sampling the local cuisine and lifestyle by hunting a pig and slaughtering a lamb. Gazing reflectively at the stripped carcass of his latest kill, Oliver justifies the animal’s death partly by implying the inherently feminine and infantile nature of objections to such killing: “Not all things in life are pretty, are they? It’s not all about teletubbies, is it?”, he states. Here, compassion for animals is derided as both a feminine foible (like a stereotypically feminine affinity for ‘pretty’ things) and a childish indulgence (like watching a television show aimed at toddlers). Oliver himself, as the eponymous protagonist of the reality show-cum-cooking programme, is presented as having a mature and realistic attitude about the business of killing: he is able to look the messy and painful act of slaughter square in the face, thus distancing himself from the childish or womanish idea that animals should not be made to suffer for human gastronomic pleasure.

Gordon Ramsay adopts a similar attitude towards animal killing in *The f word*, worrying that the relationship developing between his children and the pigs he is raising for slaughter is becoming inappropriately “sentimental” and taking appropriate actions

to ensure that “they remember the reason that they’re here is for food” (Ramsay & Smith, 2006b). Ramsay explains that his reason for raising animals for meat at his family home is that he doesn’t want his children to grow up into “softies” (Ramsay & Parsons, 2007a): by indoctrinating his children to renounce ‘sentimental’ emotional attachments to animals and become complicit in their slaughter, he is in effect purging them of their infantile and hyper-feminine ‘softness’ and teaching them to relate to animals in a more ‘rational’, economically motivated and purportedly masculine manner.

THE MACHISMO OF SLAUGHTER

As many theorists have noted, animal killing is an act that retains a certain machismo in Western societies (Adams, 1990; Fiddes, 1991; Kheel, 1995; Luke, 2007). The overwhelming majority of recreational hunters are male (Kheel, 1995; Luke, 2007), and the writings of many hunting advocates are suffused with (hetero-)sexualized overtones (see Kheel, 1995; Luke, 2007). Upon attending a hunter safety training course, for example, ecofeminist theorist Marti Kheel was struck by use of highly sexualized language:

Bullets were called “balls,” firing was called “discharge,” and when a bullet hit an animal it was called “penetration.” The power of the gun was referred to as “penetration power.” If a bullet was accidentally fired before the intended moment, it was labeled a “premature discharge” ... whoever first “penetrates” an animal and draws the “first blood” has the “privilege” of “finishing the animal off,” and claiming the body of the animal as his own. (Kheel, 1995, pp. 91-2).

Here, as elsewhere, (see Luke, 2007, pp. 83-92) hunting advocates discursively liken the 'possession' of animal bodies through penetrating them with bullets to the 'possession' of women (particularly virgin women from whom the man draws 'first blood') through penetrative heterosexual.

The slaughter of domesticated animals, like the killing of their wild brethren, likewise retains a certain macho mystique. Although it is of course not unheard of for women to work on the kill floor, slaughter remains a largely male-dominated industry, exhibiting, according to Cudworth's (2008) research, "patriarchal closure in terms of both the gender segregation of employment and the masculinization of its work culture" (2008, p. 40). According to an interviewee in the study, "people get into [the slaughter industry] 'cause it's macho like. It appeals to young men 'cause of the macho-thing. It's a really manly job" (2008, p. 41). Cudworth herself observes that the men she interviewed working on the kill floor seem "something of a caricature of masculinity", muscular and bare-chested with large "boning knives" hanging from their belts (p. 41).¹⁶ The interviews suggest that for many slaughterhouse workers, "despite the low status of butchering and slaughtering, killing and fragmenting animals may be a means of enhancing machismo" (Cudworth, 2008, p. 41). These sentiments are echoed in the words of Janet Street-Porter, a 'food correspondent' on *The f word* who expresses reluctance to witness the slaughter of the two calves she has helped to raise. "You know, I don't have to prove I'm macho, I'm *not* as macho as Gordon", she exclaims with exasperation (Ramsay & Northover, 2008a).

Street-Porter's comments reflect an acute awareness of Ramsay's carefully constructed macho persona (see Hollows, 2003, p. 230), and illustrate how a very specific notion of masculinity as violent, primal and brutal can become implicated in the

slaughter of animals. Of course, ‘masculinity’ is a concept neither monolithic nor timeless; rather, it is historically and culturally variable, with many alternative understandings available to address the question of what, precisely, it means to “be a man” (Kimmel, 1997, p. 224). However, social authority or power is rarely distributed evenly across this varied array of masculinities, and the term “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell, 1995) thus becomes useful as a flexible concept denoting the generally accepted “norm” of masculinity endorsed, reinforced and replicated by those in a position of cultural authority. Hegemonic masculinity in Western culture tends to be defined by what it is not; constructed in opposition to a range of ‘others’, both human (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1997; Plummer, 2005) and, a growing body of literature suggests, nonhuman (Adams, 1990; Cudworth, 2008; Fiddes, 1991; Kheel, 1995; Luke, 2007). *The f word* seems particularly preoccupied with defining masculinity in relation to both female and animal ‘others’. Perhaps in an effort to distance himself from the conventionally feminized activity of food preparation, Ramsay’s persona and mannerisms emphasise his aggressive, domineering personality, repudiating the stain of kitchen-bound domestic femininity by becoming a swaggering caricature of hegemonic hetero-masculinity. Ramsay thus can be seen to exemplify the assertion of gender theorist David Plummer (2005) that, as part of a strategy to eschew any association with the anti-masculine ‘other’ he terms the “hegemonemesis”, men can be pressured “to publicly embrace hegemonic masculinity and sometimes to pursue extreme and fundamentalist masculinities” (p. 229).

However, the construction of masculinity in Ramsay’s *The f word* and in Jamie Oliver’s various programmes is not as simple as just forcibly rejecting ‘feminine’ softness or concern for animals and swaggering around gripping a blood-splattered

¹⁶ Boning is a slang term for heterosex.

boning knife. Admittedly, in the first season of *The f word*, Ramsay does retain his macho, aggressive persona during the build up to the act of slaughter, asking sarcastically as he carries a struggling turkey to the kill shed, “Do I feel any remorse, do I feel slightly guilty? Do I *fuck!*” (Ramsay & Smith, 2005). In later seasons, however, he becomes more emotional about the ordeal, admitting to feeling “guilty” about the upcoming slaughter of pigs Trinny and Susannah (Ramsay & Smith, 2006d) and even choking back tears at their death (Ramsay & Smith, 2006e). Likewise, Oliver freely admits to feeling “horrible” about slaughtering chickens (Lazenby & Van Someren, 2008) – still, both chefs’ masculine credentials appear to remain intact. This ambiguity reflects how simultaneously fluid and rigid concepts of masculinity can be. Several theorists have noted the tension displayed in Oliver’s persona between competing models of ‘caring’, ‘rough’, or ‘cheeky’ masculinity (de Solier, 2005; Hollows, 2003; Moseley, 2001), and Ramsay’s television persona likewise oscillates between staunchly disregarding ‘sentimentality’ and openly grieving at the death of a beloved animal. Emotional outbursts, concern for others, and a certain degree of ‘softness’ are perfectly permissible to the model of masculinity espoused by these celebrity gastronomes. Ramsay and Oliver’s masculine credentials come not from their wholesale denial of these qualities, but from acknowledging and overcoming them, thus not allowing ‘concern’ to hypertrophy into ‘sentimentality’. Emotion only becomes ‘sentimental’ or ‘womanish’, it seems, if it interferes with the slaughter of the animals in question. In addition to reintegrating the animal ‘absent referent’ into the act of meat eating, the theatre of slaughter presented in these programmes demonstrates how tensions between conflicting ideals of modern masculinity are explored and partially reconciled in popular media, negotiated in direct relation to both human and nonhuman ‘others’.

MEAT AND MASCULINITIES

The preoccupation with performing hegemonic masculinity through violence towards animals extends through to the dismemberment of the creature's corpse. According to *Kiwi kitchen's* Richard Till, for instance, "one of the joys of buying meat from the butcher [is] you get, sort of, the handyman experience of sawing through the bone" (Till & Fraser, 2006a); in this paradigm, dismemberment becomes equated to the conventionally masculine skill of carpentry. In certain circumstances, even the cooking of the meat is a men-only domain: a wealth of literature exists to support the idea that cooking meat outdoors is one of the few forays men have made into the mundane, feminized realm of day-to-day food preparation (Neuhaus, 1999, p. 541; Sobal, 2005, p. 138; Villamayor et al., 1999), and *Kiwi kitchen's* Richard Till himself recalls that, whilst growing up, the only time he ever saw men cooking was at a barbecue (Till & Fraser, 2006b). Till labels the barbecue "the cornerstone of guy cooking", describing it as "the simple, brutal application of heat to meat" (ibid.). This statement echoes Levi-Strauss' (1970) classic structuralist analysis of cooking methods: roasted meat remains close to a state of rawness, highlighting the connection between animal slaughter and meat consumption and rendering more 'natural' the bond between meat eating and masculine domination over nature (see also Fiddes, 1991). The 'brutality' of the barbecue is not simply a feature of men's cooking style; according to Till, it is indicative of "a brutal simplicity that men bring to everything they do" (Till & Fraser, 2007b). It comes as no surprise that women are excluded from this realm: Till goes on to imagine "the lady struggling with the lighter trying to have a barbecue but never really quite pulling it off because there's no guys around to take care of it for her" (ibid.). Whether intended partly in jest or not, the gender roles and stereotypes expressed in this celebration of

flesh, dismemberment and masculinity are remarkably conservative and derogatory. Echoing Luke's (2007) analysis of hegemonic masculinity's "brutal" relationship to nonhumans almost word for word, Till's statements highlight how hegemonic masculinity is indeed defined in relation to 'others': both to human 'others' whose gender excludes them from representation in this celebration of macho barbecue culture, and to the animal 'other' whose dismembered body is roasting on the grill.

As Till's passion for barbecuing animal flesh demonstrates, the connection between meat and hegemonic masculinity in western culture is deep-rooted and pervasive (Adams, 1990; Armstrong & Potts, 2004; Fiddes, 1991; Sobal, 2005). Although farmed animals themselves are discursively feminized, once these animals are rendered into meat they cease to be a passive, subordinate creature and instead become a symbol of the dominance that has been asserted over them (Fiddes, 1991): thus, meat is seen as 'men's food' and contrasted with plant foods, historically seen as feminine and passive (Adams, 1990, p. 36-7). Animal flesh is associated with power, virility and strength (Twigg, 1983), meat is widely considered essential for the sustenance of healthy male bodies, and meat eating is intimately linked to the performance of normative masculinity (Potts & Parry, 2010).¹⁷ In *Kiwi kitchen* (Ritchie, 2007, 2008), for example, a special kind of 'meat hunger,' inherent to men, is emphasised almost to

¹⁷ I do not mean to suggest that the relationship between meat eating and hegemonic masculinity is as straightforward or reductive as the simple equation meat = masculine. For example, Merriman's (in press) research suggests that patriarchal privilege can mean that men are more likely than women to be perceived as autonomous agents fully capable of controlling and managing their own bodies and appetites. Thus, men's vegetarianism can be accepted much more readily (by peers and family members) than women's vegetarianism, which is more likely to be pathologized as a health risk or trivialized as merely a smokescreen for weight-loss dieting. Gordon Ramsay's television programmes seem to support Merriman's thesis. Although Ramsay shows no qualms about ridiculing a vegetarian man and tricking him into consuming a meaty slice of pizza (Ramsay & Hall, 2005), it is only with a vegetarian woman that Ramsay apparently feels authoritative enough to attempt a genuine reform of her dietary deviance; the chef chides the woman for neglecting her health, before paternally prescribing a bloody steak to "help Hannah back on the road to recovery" (Ramsay & Northover, 2008a).

the point of caricature.¹⁸ Till stresses his conformity to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity by indulging in aggressive fantasies centred around meat consumption: he announces that “if there was one muttonbird left on a buffet table, it would be dangerous to get between me and it” (Till & Andrews, 2006c), and boasts that he is “prepared to fight for the mince pies” (Till & Fraser, 2007a). Till’s remarks, and those of Ramsay and Oliver on their respective television shows, clearly demonstrate how intimately linked the performance of gender is to meat consumption, and to attitudes to animals in a wider sense.

DOMINANCE AND EMPOWERMENT

Just as the cooking shows analysed above negotiate the tensions between conflicting models of masculinity partially by recourse to the animal ‘other,’ New Carnivore texts written by women, such as Julie Powell’s *Cleaving: A story of meat, marriage and obsession* (2009), negotiate recent debates in feminist theory and praxis through the slaughter and fragmentation of nonhumans. In this autobiographical book, Powell tames her unruly predilection for rough extra-marital sex and salvages her sense of self-worth by learning how to butcher animals. Butchery is explicitly linked to female empowerment: as the back cover blurb promises, “In this riveting memoir of love, marriage and meat, a voyage into the world of butchery becomes a metaphor for learning to stand on one’s own two feet”.

In presenting women’s participation in the slaughter, dismemberment and consumption of animal ‘others’ as a way to assert female power, *Cleaving* actively

¹⁸ For a discussion of the remarkably widespread cultural notion of “meat hunger”, see Fiddes (1991, p. 13-14).

engages in feminist debates over the appropriate relationship between women and animals. The animal is a particularly contentious figure for many feminists: in trying to connect feminist politics to animal issues, feminists run the risk of reinforcing the damning historical positioning of women as “closer” to animals and nature, thus providing ammunition for patriarchal oppression. “Animals and nature,” anthropologist Barabra Noske contends, “have become a threat, having issued woman with qualities which men take advantage of in order to assert dominance over women” (1989, p. 110). Thus, the perceivedly “polluting legacy” (Noske, 1989, p. 110) of woman-animal continuity is sometimes forcibly repudiated in feminist discourses.¹⁹ Women are fully human beings, and to be human (so the argument goes) means to be preeminent over animals (Birke, 1995, p. 36). A woman’s status as a rational, cultural and human being, fully the equal of any man, in this paradigm becomes something that can be performed by dominating animals. Animal advocate and attorney Maria Comninou has noted this trend of “successful women adopting the standards of men with a vengeance” (1995, p. 142). She points out that women’s participation in practices like sport hunting and animal experimentation seems to be increasing, and wonders, “Will animal exploitation become the ultimate symbol of equality with the white male?” (ibid.).

Professional expertise in exploiting animals certainly functions as a symbol of equality in *Cleaving*. Powell’s “voyage into the world of butchery” (2009: back cover) is in large part concerned with subverting traditional gender stereotypes of what constitutes appropriate employment for women. Nevertheless, it is not insignificant or coincidental that Powell chooses butchery as her path to self-empowerment, instead of

¹⁹ For a discussion of the repudiation of animality in feminist discourses, see Adams and Donovan (1995, pp. 1-8).

pursuing a career in other male-dominated areas (civil engineering, say, or competitive motorsports). Butchery's status as a male-dominated profession is only part of what endears it to Powell; it is because butchery is also an animal-dominating profession that Powell seems to find it so empowering. For example, having fashioned a turkey's body into a tidy, boneless 'roulade', Powell declares: "I'm not a sculptor who's found the face that was already there in the marble. I'm a trainer who's broken a wild stallion, neutered it [sic] and rendered it [sic] safe for children to ride in circles around a dusty ring in summer camp" (2009, p. 128). Powell's analogy illustrates the inherently dominating, violent and exploitative nature of the work she is undertaking, as she likens butchery to 'breaking', castrating, and demeaning a wild animal. Even the alternative pathways she imagines towards self-empowerment involve exerting dominance over animals: "Maybe I'll change my mind tomorrow, decide I'm really into, I don't know, dog racing", she muses (p. 21). In mastering the 'art' of dismembering nonhumans, Powell wields supreme power over other animals; by repeatedly performing violence upon animal bodies she is in a sense exorcising the lingering connotations of animality that still inform certain discourses on women.

Control is central to dominance, and likewise to Powell's experience of butchering animals. While she acknowledges the destructiveness inherent in butchery, it is by exerting total control over herself and over the body of the dead animal that she achieves her goal of serenity and empowerment. "The joy I take is not – well, not *only* – in the power I now have to hack and cut and destroy", she writes. "It's about something else, something calm and ordered... I spend my days now breaking down meat, with control, gentleness, serenity. I've craved certainty in these last troubled years, and here I get my fix" (2009, p. 7). In her carefully controlled and targeted violence towards animals, Powell performs her humanity by dominating the prone bodies of nonhuman

others. By transforming a natural (former-) subject into a cultural artefact, she imposes order on the natural world, and all that world represents, including the elements of her own personality supposedly associated with animality, ‘nature’ and the body. Powell’s butchery forcibly imposes a rational, instrumentalist order upon the natural jumble of an animal’s body, whilst simultaneously instilling in herself the self-discipline needed to impose order and reason upon the irrational, over-emotional jumble of her own bodily impulses. Throughout the book, Powell intersperses lurid details of her illicit and emotionally destructive affair with a man known only as ‘D’ with paragraphs describing her rendering animal bodies down into tenderloins and skirt steaks. The suggestion that a connection exists between the two activities is not subtle – Powell has made sense of her tangled emotional life, *Cleaving* tells us, by cutting, fragmenting, and ordering the tangled flesh of nonhumans (2009, pp. 43-48).

Indeed, in many ways Powell’s butchery project is about taking her mind off one set of out-of-control carnal desires by engaging in another carnal pursuit with steady-handed control and precision. The book’s entanglement of sex, butchery and meat is remarkably graphic. While making sausages, for example, Powell laments: “at this moment, I think I’ll never be able to eat sausage again, however delicious, without feeling in some little part of me that I’d rather be engaging one way or another with D’s penis” (2009, p. 61). In another passage, as her husband eats one of the pork chops she has butchered and cooked for him, his remarks are loaded with sexual innuendo: “‘Jesus *Christ*,’ he whispers. ‘Isn’t this the best thing in the fucking world?’” (p. 37). The sexual undertones are made explicit on the next page, as Powell fantasizes about her own body inspiring such rapturous ecstasy in men; she imagines herself with her secret lover, with whom she feels like she herself is “[s]omeone to whom you’d murmur, as you slid inside her, and felt that answering clench, ‘isn’t this the best thing in the fucking

world?” (p. 38). Significantly, at this stage in Powell’s “butchery voyage,” the focus remains on how the various men in her life experience the carnal delights she has to offer, as the pleasurable taste of meat is conflated with a man’s pleasure in heterosexual intercourse.

As Powell begins to take more authoritative control over her emotionally destructive sexual life, she explores her own pleasurable reactions to (gastronomic) carnal gratification. Whilst eating pig’s heart bonbons with a female friend, she asks the reader, “Have you ever had a food-related orgasm? They’re much like the traditional variety – uncontrollable, accompanied by unseemly moans, somewhat embarrassing to experience in public places” (2009, p. 90). Powell depicts her own “food-related orgasm” as an act of female empowerment:

Upon letting the pig-heart bonbons melt on our tongues, Jessica and I achieve simultaneous ones. “Holy Christ...” “Oh my *fuck!*” Jessica throws her head back. I growl and beat my open palms on the table top. Our eyes meet and it’s magic. (ibid.)

Powell and her female friend’s liberating moment of shared ecstasy, achieved *sans* men via the consumption of a nonhuman animal’s heart, demonstrates both women’s ability to transcend the messy emotional and sexual entanglements with the men in their lives. Not only is butchering and consuming nonhumans empowering, *Cleaving* tells us, it is explosively pleasurable as well.

In addition to appropriately channelling the unruly desires of the female body by dismembering the bodies of nonhumans, *Cleaving* (2009) presents butchery as a means of subverting and challenging traditional gender stereotypes of women as inherently delicate or prim. Powell emphatically distances herself from the charge of gore-induced, womanish hysteria. When a “boring sticklike” woman, either “vegetarian or merely

squeamish”, is “forced by whatever circumstance” into the “unapologetic temple of meat” that is Fleisher’s butchery (2009, p. 7), Powell revels in the opportunity to display her transgressive, blood-spattered feralness:

I realize with a certain savage glee how I must look to her, bloody and wild-haired under my wide-rimmed leather hat...I hold my hands up to her, turning them back to front so she gets a good look at the brown gunk under my nails, the stains and unidentifiable bits of goo stuck to my skin, the bloodstained leather band around my wrist. “I’m a little messy right now.” I grin toothily just to provoke a shudder, then turn on my heel (p. 8).

The idea that women’s relishing of red meat is somehow revolutionary or subversive also circulates in wider culinary and lifestyle discourses. An article in the *New York Times* entitled “Be Yourselves, Girls, Order the Rib-eye” (Salkin, 2007) reports that red meat is becoming an increasingly popular food for women eating out, especially on first dates. Although the article applauds the trend’s potential to subvert gendered stereotypes of finicky, salad-eating women, it ironically ends up supporting the supremely regressive cliché that a woman’s behaviour is primarily motivated by her desire to snag a husband. Nevertheless the article contends that red meat consumption is an empowering act for women, “an effective statement of self-acceptance” and “a declarative statement, something along the lines of ‘I am woman, hear me chew’” (Salkin, 2007, p. 1).

Cleaving presents women’s participating in the process of butchery and relishing the taste of red meat as a means of subverting retrogressive gender roles and achieving self-empowerment – in short, as “the ultimate symbol of equality with the white male” (Comninou, 1995, p. 142). Powell affirms her own status as truly human by butchering animals, demonstrating her equal competence in a traditionally male-dominated

profession and asserting her right to consume high-status food products traditionally associated with men. In doing so, Powell's paradigm of femininity internalizes the accusations of 'womanish pity' that have long plagued discussions on women and animals. Although the focus is on femininity rather than masculinity, the domination of animals remains just as central to the performance of gender in *Cleaving* as it is in the other 'New Carnivore' cooking shows examined above.

CONCLUSION

The 'New Carnivore' texts examined here reveal how thickly entangled the notion of gender is with the figure of the nonhuman 'other'. Functioning as "primers not so much on how to cook, but on how to live" (Ashley et al., 2004, p. 184), the lifestyle/cooking shows *The f word*, *Jamie's great escape*, and *Kiwi kitchen* valorise a particular form of masculinity that associates true masculinity with (controlled) aggressiveness and (appropriately targeted) brutality towards nonhuman animals. Similarly, *Cleaving: A story of meat, marriage and obsession* presents butchery as a means of shucking the oppressive stereotypes of docile, sentimental women, constructing instead a reactionary brand of femininity that embraces targeted brutality towards animal bodies. In both cases, gender is something that is 'done' (Butler, 1999 [1990]), at least in part, by dominating nonhuman 'others'.

However, a very palpable anxiety pervades these "gastro-philosophical treatises" (Bourette, 2008, p. 36) on gender and carnivory. Ramsay and Oliver's cautious negotiation of emotion and reason during the process of slaughter, Till's exaggerated display of meat-loving machismo, and Powell's combative assertion of her bloodstained feminine empowerment all come across as somewhat neurotic in their insistent and

repetitive performing of gender via the domination of other animals. These texts strive to convince us that meat eating and the domination of animals are essential components of either hegemonic masculinity or empowered femininity. What they instead end up highlighting is how contested and labile the dispositions that characterize contemporary gender and sexual politics now are, and how ideas about gender are frequently mobilized to legitimize violence towards nonhuman animals.

CHAPTER FOUR: NATURE

What we are really celebrating when we gather for a meat meal is our reconnection to the earth.

- Susan Bourette, *Meat: A love story* (2008, p. 281)

In my first chapter I argued that New Carnivore gastronomic texts present human participation in animal slaughter as a difficult yet rewarding process through which one may come to a new and profound understanding of the way the world works, shedding the sentimentalism of childhood and becoming a rational, 'realistic' member of consumer capitalist society. However, as the above excerpt from *Meat: A love story* demonstrates, these texts' portrayal of meat eating and animal slaughter as a means of reconnecting to 'Nature' is no less striking. Witnessing or perpetrating lethal violence towards animals can trigger a kind of secular epiphany for the New Carnivore, allowing him or her to rediscover an essential truth of human-'Nature' continuity that modern urban life has long since obscured. Consequently, meat eating is naturalized as a fundamental constituent of 'human nature', and vegetarianism is derided as an unnatural contradiction of this essential truth. By daring to look unflinchingly at the cold hard truth of animal death (and indeed, to capture and commodify it in celluloid or print), the New Carnivore texts examined here purport to heal the deep rift between humans and 'Nature' that industrial modernity has allegedly inscribed upon Western society's collective soul.

As part of their general fetishization of 'Nature', many New Carnivore texts appeal strongly to an idea of a pre-industrial rural idyll, wherein humans lived in

harmony with ‘Nature’. This pastoral Eden, these texts hold, has been crushed beneath the iron wheels of industrial techno-capitalism, leaving the urban consumer spoiled and pampered yet fundamentally and detrimentally disconnected from the ‘natural’ world. By participating in some way in the process of killing animals, the protagonists of these texts reconnect with this nostalgically-constructed pastoral yesteryear, and in the process prove themselves to be just as capable and resourceful as their highly valorized animal-farming (and hunting) forebears. This fetishization of rural life in New Carnivore texts functions by appealing to a deep-seated nostalgia for the West’s pastoral past. Before the discursive interaction between ‘Nature’, slaughter and the rural idyll can be further analyzed, a discussion of the term ‘nostalgia’ is in order.

RURAL NOSTALGIA AND NEW CARNIVORISM

Nostalgia, according to cultural theorist Stuart Tannock, is a “structure of feeling” (Williams, 1977) that calls upon a positively evaluated past world in response to negatively evaluated contemporary one (Tannock, 1995, p. 454). In contrasting the “once was” to the “now” (Stewart, 1988, p. 227), nostalgic rhetoric posits a discontinuity between the present and the past (Tannock, 1995, p. 456) and searches for a means to re-establish some sort of continuity (Davis, 1979, p. 35). The intertwined Classical and Biblical notions of a ‘Fall’ from a ‘Golden Age’ are common tropes in contemporary nostalgic rhetoric (Tannock, 1995, p. 454). Frequently, these ideas are articulated *via* what Stanescu (2010, p. 20) terms “a literary pastoral fairytale”: an ahistorical, idealized vision of pastoral tranquillity situated sometime in the amorphous ‘olden days’. This rural utopia features prominently in New Carnivore discourses, figured as an exemplar of human-‘Nature’ continuity lost to average supermarket-

shopping urbanite. From *The omnivore's dilemma's* (Pollan, 2006a) glowing descriptions of the idyllic rural family farms of yesteryear, to *The shameless carnivore's* (Gold, 2008, p. 267) disapproving tongue-clucking directed towards today's ignorant "children of the supermarket", a deep nostalgia for the rural 'Golden Age' preceding the 'Fall' of urbanization suffuses these New Carnivore narratives.

Of course, the historical accuracy of the happy rural past posited by this sort of nostalgic rhetoric is hardly watertight, since it requires a selective ignoring of those many aspects of life in earlier times that are not consistent with ideas of a 'Golden Age': class and gender-based social inequalities, for instance, or severely curtailed life expectancy (Williams, 1973, p. 43). This selectivity, combined with the concept's frequent appropriation by reactionary, conservative political groups seeking to maintain an unjust status quo, has fuelled a great deal of hostility towards nostalgia in academic cultural criticism (Tannock, 1995). However, as Tannock (1995) cautions, care must be taken not to conflate the way nostalgia has been used by these groups with the structure of nostalgia itself: nostalgia can inspire liberationary social reforms as just as it licenses attempts to quash them (Tannock, 1995, p. 455; Williams, 1973, p. 43).²⁰ Bearing Tannock's warning in mind, I will now consider how a very specific kind of pastoral nostalgia, readily discernable in contemporary New Carnivore texts, both diagnoses and attempts to remedy a disconnection not just between the past and the present, but between humanity and 'Nature' itself.

²⁰ Often, the difference is simply a matter of perspective: the nostalgia for 'old fashioned' farming methods that infuses New Carnivore rhetoric, for example, can potentially inspire farmed animal welfare reform even as it legitimizes the institutionalized use (and abuse) of animals by human societies. Nor are New Carnivore texts themselves necessarily oblivious to how nostalgia for a rural Golden Age has been enlisted to sell meat products; Pollan (2006a) in particular is highly critical of what he calls "supermarket pastoral", arguing that it is little more than marketing spin designed to dupe the gullible consumer into believing that "by buying organic he is 'engaging in authentic experiences' and imaginatively enacting a return to a utopian past with the positive aspects of modernity intact" (p. 137). Pollan's astute criticism of the meat industry's appropriation of rural nostalgia, however, falters when the journalist fails to self-reflexively consider how his own 'meet your meat' quest appeals to the very same nostalgia in order to

According to cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1973), a discursive contrast between countryside and city has been discernable since classical times. Although both positive and negative connotations have accrued around each category (cities have been seen as both degenerate and sophisticated, the countryside as both ignorant and innocent), in large part rural life has been seen as “a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue” (Williams, 1973, p. 1). This pastoral “myth of the happier past” centring around “the timeless rhythm of agriculture and the seasons” (Williams, 1973, pp. 9, 4) is remarkably durable; nostalgia for the pastoral ‘Golden Age’ in England was so strong that the nation’s literature remained chiefly rural for a generation after the country’s population became predominantly urbanized. Today, the idea and the ideal of rural countryside continue to exert considerable sway over England’s cultural imaginary (Williams, 1973, p. 2).

English attitudes to the pastoral past were exported to the colonies, where they soon developed their own local flavour. In North America, for example, nostalgia for the ‘untouched’ open spaces of the frontier became integral to the construction of bourgeois, White masculinity.²¹ The North American variety of frontier nostalgia was heavily influenced by the intermingled Romantic and social Darwinian emphasis on nonhuman ‘Nature’ as first and foremost ‘red in tooth and claw’, a violent and bloody realm that was nevertheless admirable for its uncivilized authenticity (Armstrong, 2008). The frontier nostalgia of the nineteenth century drew heavily upon these ideas, with Anglo-American men of the requisite class and financial status seeking out the wild frontier as a space where “a man could be a real man, the rugged individual he was meant to be before civilization sapped his energy and threatened his masculinity”

legitimize a kind of bourgeois fetishization of ‘organic’, ‘free range’ or ‘happy’ meat.

²¹ The supposedly ‘untouched’ expanse of American’s Western frontier was, of course, already inhabited by indigenous peoples at the time of European settlement.

(Cronon, 1995, p. 8). The American frontier was a place where a man could test his mettle; in other British colonies (such as New Zealand) a similar nostalgia has accumulated, a persistent discursive valorisation of the rugged, semi-wild rural lifestyle epitomised by earlier generations of White settlers (Armstrong & Potts, 2004).

The rural nostalgia outlined above is readily apparent throughout the New Carnivore discourse. From the bestselling U.S. book *The omnivore's dilemma* (Pollan, 2006a) to the popular New Zealand reality television programme *Off the radar* (Andrews, 2007, 2008), New Carnivore texts consistently posit an “essential disconnect” (Radar & Andrews, 2007b) between humanity and ‘Nature’ caused by the excesses of industrial capitalism. The solution to this problematic rupture between ‘Nature’ and humanity, according to the New Carnivore credo, is to attempt to “reconnect the dots” (Lovenheim, 2002, p. xix) by cultivating consumer awareness of the provenance of certain foodstuffs (Strong, 2006). Given the high prestige and potent symbolic currency of meat (Fiddes, 1991) and its fundamental association with both the rural and the frontier idylls, it is unsurprising that the food products singled out for attention tend to be of animal origin. As I have argued in chapter one, the means by which the disconnection between meat and animal can purportedly be healed are myriad; here, I would like to focus on how New Carnivore gastronomy advocates a form of urban-to-rural ‘downshifting’ in order to ‘reconnect the dots’ between culture and ‘Nature’, and between the contiguous past and the ruptured present.

Narratives of downshifting enjoy a high profile contemporary popular media (Hollows, 2006) and constitute a “recurring motif” in the New Carnivore discourse (Strong, 2006, p. 36). A ‘downshifter’, according to Strong, can be loosely defined as an “urban professional who has quit city life for a rural existence that involves farming and the aspiration to self-sufficiency in horticulture and animal rearing” (2006, p. 36).

Narratives of downshifting are strongly informed by what media analyst Joanne Hollows calls “a nostalgic revalorisation of ‘the rural idyll’” (Hollows, 2006, p. 108): urban life is depicted as stressful and unfulfilling, and is unfavourably compared to a glowingly-described pastoral wonderland in which the pressures of city life melt away (Hollows, 2006). In *The compassionate carnivore* (Friend, 2008), for instance, former economist Catherine Friend turns her back on her high-pay, high-stress profession to raise sheep for meat on a small rural farm. The language she uses to describe her new life is evocative and emotive, highlighting how downshifting narratives function through nostalgically revaluing rural spaces as idyllic:

There’s nothing like plopping down under a thick canopy of branches, taking care not to sit in any recently deposited manure, then grabbing a stem of tender grass to tear apart or wind around your fingers as we talk. When there’s a refreshing breeze sweeping over us and birds are twittering overhead with a background chorus of crickets, everything falls away – bills, jobs, health problems, conflict. Breathe deeply, then join me on a meandering walk through the pasture. (2008, p. 121)

In *Righteous porkchop* (2009), lawyer Nicolette Hahn Niman likewise extols the benefits of her new, rural, existence as the wife of a cattle farmer. The book’s dust-jacket blurb describes Niman’s downshifting to the countryside as a real-life fairytale romance, as the urban professional is “swept off her feet by a high-profile cattle rancher” and “soon finds herself transitioning to ranching life at the famed Niman Ranch in Northern California”. The allure of downshifted rural life is compounded by cattle ranching’s nostalgic cultural associations, which have long tended to emphasise the rugged self-reliance and pioneering spirit of colonial American animal farmers

(Cronon, 1995): “There is, I have to admit, a bit of Old Western movie glamour to the life we lead here, but just a touch” (2009, p. 172), Hahn Niman writes modestly.

In other New Carnivore texts, a similar nostalgia for the rural past is discernable. Animal farming is lauded as an inherently virtuous, honest and authentic expression of the human-‘Nature’ relationship, with the protagonists of these New Carnivore narratives looking to ‘real farmers’ for guidance in how to heal their own self-diagnosed disconnection from the natural world. Lovenheim (2002), for example, writes of his having to “earn the right” (p. 63) to wear the boots and coveralls of a dairy farmer, and *The f word*’s Janet Street-Porter praises the diligence of animal farmers, enthusing: “I really enjoyed being a farmer, but then I take my hat off to real farmers ’cos they work every hour god sends for very little money, and it’s a tough job” (Ramsay & Northover, 2008a). Several of the texts’ protagonists express a desire to pass on these ‘rural’ values of hard work and practical ‘realism’ to their children. Visiting an agricultural fair, Friend is “struck by what a great opportunity this was for city kids” to get close to (caged) farm animals: “I passed a young boy sitting on his haunches, gazing through the pen bars into the eyes of a Toggenburg dairy goat”, she fondly recalls (Friend, 2008, p. 13). Lovenheim (2002) has similar hopes that his own children can learn from the example set by rural farmers and be “inspired by the young people who sleep overnight on cots in the pens with the animals they’ve brought to exhibit” at the agricultural fair (121). Strikingly, never do any of these texts critically reflect upon how the economic and power relations between farmers and farmed animals might influence the former’s perceptions of and attitudes towards the latter; as Ariel Tsovel (2005) notes in her analysis of *Portrait of a burger as a young calf* (Lovenheim, 2002), the author “seems not to notice the conflict between following a cow as a subject and associating with people whose occupation relies on objectifying her; it is doubtful whether he discerns

two distinct tasks at all” (Tsovel, 2005, p. 252). The nostalgia for the rural past here functions to obscure how animal farmers in capitalist societies must, of necessity, objectify and commodify animal bodies in order to profit from them. Animal farmers are held up as ‘experts’ with a direct line to the authentic, ‘Natural’ truth of who (or what) nonhuman animals truly are; their experience is material and practical, and their authority to determine which kinds of human-animal relations are appropriate is undeniable.

The nostalgic rhetoric invoked in New Carnivore discourses tends to emphasise the admirable authenticity of animal farmers as ‘pioneers’ or ‘forebears’ with a special connection to the pre-modern, ‘Natural’ world; in spaces where this kind of nostalgia is prominent, the slaughter of animals for food and profit can easily come to be celebrated, rather than obscured (Armstrong & Potts, 2004, p. 21). Thus, it is perhaps unsurprising that the contemporary gastronomic texts examined here exhibit a strong tendency to celebrate animal slaughter as the most potent and effective means of reconnecting to a positively evaluated rural past. In “Killing a Lamb Called Dinner” (1999), for example, Kimberly French maintains that witnessing ‘her’ lambs being slaughtered has enabled her “to see and know what my forebears had seen and known” (p. 4). On *Off the radar*, host Te Radar professes that his core motivation in doing so is to “do all the things our forebears could do” (Radar & Andrews, 2007a). After witnessing the home-kill slaughter of a dairy cow in *Portrait of a burger as a young calf* (2002), Lovenheim similarly writes: “This must be what making meat was all about, before it became an industry, and how Peter and other farmers still view it. It’s an image I’d somehow been missing, and it felt deeply calming to finally realize it” (p. 252). At one point, Lovenheim even goes so far as to consider his ‘failure’ to slaughter ‘his’ calf as a betrayal of the farmers’ ideals: “Not killing him would feel as though I were betraying

the Smiths and the Vonglisses and all the other people I've met who labour to make food for the rest of us" (p. 155). By participating in the raising and slaughtering of animals, Lovenheim, French and Radar all attempt to re-establish a sense of continuity with the mythologized achievements of their settler forebears. In doing so, they seek to uncover some long-forgotten truth of unity with 'Nature' that the luxurious comforts of urban existence have long since obscured.

SLAUGHTER AS A SECULAR EPIPHANY

These texts' nostalgic valorization of animal farming (and animal slaughter) as a uniquely authentic method of reconnecting to the world of nonhuman 'Nature' can fruitfully be read as contemporary examples of what literary critic Philip Armstrong calls "redemptive therio-primitivism" (2008, p. 147). Redemptive therio-primitivism is a recurring theme in modernist fiction, in which true nobility is purportedly found in "the pre-industrial, pre-modern intimacy between primitive man and primitive animal" (ibid.). This idea is not wholly original in itself, having been espoused a century earlier by the Romantic movement, which advocated periodical immersion in the beauty of nonhuman 'Nature' as a panacea for the Industrial Revolution's ills of civilization (Armstrong, 2008, p. 125). For literary modernists, however, the Romantic version of therio-primitivism was entirely too 'sentimental', in that it advocated humane sympathy for animals (Armstrong, 2008, p. 97).²² However, for influential modernist writers like Ernest Hemingway, whose works prominently feature heroic descriptions of big game hunting, marlin fishing and bullfighting, human-'Nature' continuity was not to be attained through peaceful contemplation, but rather through violent spectacle.

Armstrong (2008) calls Hemingway's writing "the crudest form of redemptive therio-primitivism" (p. 150), arguing that his books are

impelled by the conviction that the human can step out of the empty artifice of modern living and into truth – that is, an authentic and immediate relation to the vital essence of existence – by means of the struggle to the death between human and beast. (ibid.)

Hemingway's writings are primarily concerned with large, imposing animals such as enraged bulls or wild marlin, whereas in *New Carnivore* texts the animals killed to effect an imaginative reconnection to 'Nature' are predominantly of the domesticated variety. Nevertheless, both sets of writing promote the idea that the artifice of modern living can be shed by participating in some form of lethal violence towards nonhuman animals. In *The shameless carnivore* (Gold, 2008), for example, slaughtering an animal is presented as a harrowing yet undeniably authentic experience through one can attain a profound enlightenment regarding the 'natural' state of relations between humans and nonhuman 'Nature'. Bravery and a strong stomach is required to truly experience the profundity of the process; as Gold writes,

It was all I could do to keep from turning my head or covering my eyes as Paul prepared to place the barrel of his rifle against [calf] Ernie's temple, but I held on, knowing that shying away from the hardest part of the day would be counter to the entire reason I was there in the first place. (2008, p. 266).

Gold says "a prayer for Ernie, vowing that his short life would not be in vain" (p. 266), then goes on to describe his thoughts and feelings as the farmer holding the gun against Ernie's temple pulls the trigger:

²² Indeed, many prominent thinkers in the Romantic movement were vegetarians (Perkins, 2003).

It's difficult to describe exactly how I felt at that moment. There was this sudden, profound intensity, an increase in the sharpness of colors and smells and sensations, as though everything around me had become hyperreal... It must have been the sudden proximity to death, the site [sic] of hot blood steaming on the ground, the pungent animal smells, the fatalism of it all... I was rattled. Not ashamed or regretful, per se – like it or not, this had been Ernie's fate since birth – but definitely stirred up. Once more, I was reminded that *this* is what happens to cows that become beef, and it's been happening for thousands of years. (ibid.)

Gold describes his participation in the Ernie's slaughter as a revelation: it is as if a veil is stripped from his eyes, and his sensory perception becomes heightened, attuned with 'profound intensity' to the world around him. Gold is 'stirred up', awed by the fatalism of the moment and bolstered in his certainty that, in firing a bullet into the brain of a trusting calf, he has the authority of thousands of years of tradition on his side.

For Gold, witnessing Ernie's slaughter is a truly revelatory experience enabling him to reconnect on a profound, almost spiritual level with the cold hard 'truth' about humanity's proper relation to the rest of nonhuman 'Nature'. Indeed, his description of the ordeal is very much in line with another favourite trope of literary modernism: the secular epiphany. In his analysis of epiphanies in modernist literature, Morris Beja (1971) defines an epiphany as "*a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether from some object, scene, event, or memorable phase of the mind – the manifestation being out of proportion to the significance or strictly logical relevance of whatever produces it*" (p. 18, original italics). In modernist writer James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (2003 [1917]), for example, an epiphany is a sudden, vivid and life-changing event – be it beautiful, horrifying, vicious or all three at once – which allows

one access to the authentic truth of existence. According to Beja (1971), the concept of epiphany “has been both immensely important and unique to our time”; moments of intuitive insight or revelation appear with “astonishing frequency” in twentieth century fiction, and “a sense of epiphany, or something very close to it, is vital to the artistic concepts and aims of many of our most significant novelists” (p. 18), including Hemingway, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Wolfe and William Faulkner (p. 22).

Contemporary New Carnivore writers such as Scott Gold seem to be drawing upon this modernist tradition, purporting to experience real-life epiphanies of their own through killing nonhuman animals. Subsequently, they are able to reconnect on some primal, essential level with the cold hard ‘truth’ about humanity’s proper relation to the rest of nonhuman ‘Nature’. Throughout the New Carnivore literature, the redemptive, revelatory potential of animal slaughter is stressed: imagining the act of slaughter as quasi-mythic ritual is a recurring motif in New Carnivore literature. In *The omnivore’s dilemma* (2006a), for example, Pollan decries the vulgarity of animal slaughter in contemporary Western society, lamenting that we as a society find ourselves unsure as to the rightness of continuing to eat meat precisely because “[w]e no longer have any rituals governing either the slaughter or eating of animals” (p. 332).

Pollan’s solution to this dilemma is to (re-)imbue the killing and consumption of animals with some kind of profound, ritual significance. His quest for gastro-philosophical enlightenment leads him to participate in a wild pig hunt, where he embraces the viewpoint of philosopher and hunting advocate José Ortega y Gasset, who famously wrote of the spiritually restorative qualities of hunting (1972 [1947]). Ortega y Gasset’s writings are very much in line with the redemptive therio-primitivism and brutal epiphanies of modernist literature, wherein ‘truth’ and ‘essence’ are to be found through violent encounters with other animals. Although hardly unique within hunting

discourses, his writings have been strongly criticised as anthropocentric, androcentric and regressive in their glorification of male violence towards (frequently feminized) animals (see Kheel, 1995; Luke, 2007).

Pollan is at first of much the same mind as these critics, dismissing Ortega y Gasset's writing as a "macho conceit", a "straight faced reveling in primitivism" attempting to disguise a "barely concealed bloodlust". However, through his own hunting experience (shooting a panicked sow in the head as she runs for cover), Pollan has come to re-evaluate his opinions on what he had previously dismissed as "hunter porn":

Hunting is one of those experiences that appear utterly different from the inside than from the outside. Irony – the outside perspective – easily withers everything about hunting, shrinks it to the proportions of boy's play or atavism. And yet at the same time I found that there is something about the experience of hunting that puts irony itself to rout... When I reread Ortega y Gasset's description of the experience I decided that maybe he wasn't so crazy after all, not even when he asserted that hunting offers us our last best chance to escape history and return to the state of nature, if only for a time – for what he called a "vacation from the human condition". (Pollan, 2006a. pp. 337, 342-3)

Pollan's participation in hunting a wild animal, as well as his experience slaughtering several captive animals, apparently allows him to speak from a position of authority that trumps the uninformed disapproval of armchair critics. Although initially sceptical about the high-minded airs of "hunter porn", through his own participation in the ritual of hunting Pollan has come to agree with the claim that killing animals with firearms allows one return to a 'state of nature', transcending the messy social entanglements of

contemporary human existence and tapping into a vein of pure ‘truth’ regarding the ‘natural’ ways of the world. His enthusiastic endorsement of the restorative benefits of hunting highlights how ideas about ‘Nature’ underpin much of the discourse surrounding animal killing. For Pollan, shooting a wild pig is more than a rite of passage from sentimentality to rationality, more than a demonstration of machismo or a gesture of environmentalism; rather, it is a moment of epiphany allowing him to reconnect to the unadulterated truth of ‘Nature’ itself.

Appealing to a nostalgic vision of rural stoicism and drawing heavily upon the modernist literary trope of the cruel epiphany, the New Carnivore texts examined here present consumer participation in animal slaughter – even through the vicarious media of television or print – as a potent method of reconnecting to ‘Nature’. By emphasising violence towards animals, rather than, say, growing tomatoes, as the method par excellence for communing with ‘Nature’, these texts again reiterate the general New Carnivore anti-‘sentimentalism’ I have described in chapters one and three, wherein sympathetic attitudes towards animals are derided as hopelessly juvenile and feminine, wholly out of touch with ‘the way things really are’. Paradoxically, however, the palpable nostalgia pervading these gastronomic texts might just as easily be dismissed as sentimental, mawkish and self-indulgent in its florid insistence on the essential *rightness* of a pastoral Eden that never really existed (Stanescu, 2010, p. 13). Precisely which kinds of sentimentalism count as valid or deplorable, it appears, is a matter open to interpretation.

NATURE, HUMAN NATURE, AND MEAT

Unsurprisingly, given the New Carnivore preoccupation with reconnecting to ‘Nature’ through the killing of animals, a central concern in many of the texts analysed here is the ‘natural’ status of meat consumption. This invocation of ‘natural’ as synonymous with ‘justifiable’ occurs through the process of naturalization (Barthes, 1973, p. 156; Joy, 2009, p. 107). Naturalization, according to Roland Barthes (1973), is often the end goal of the process of myth-making (which, as I outlined in chapter one, serves in the context of New Carnivore gastronomy to trivialize sentimentality, reify the distinction between ‘pets’ and ‘livestock’, and cast animal farmers in a paternalistic role). By rebranding potentially problematic social practices as ‘natural’, they become “innocent and eternal” (Barthes, 1973, p. 140). As psychologist Melanie Joy (2009) explains, “when an ideology is naturalized its tenets are believed to be in accordance with the laws of nature”, simply and irrefutably “the way things are *meant to be*” (p. 107, original italics). Naturalization maintains an ideology by rendering it “historically, divinely, and biologically irrefutable” (Joy, 2009, p.109; see also Barthes, 1973, p. 156). According to Joy, narratives that emphasise the ‘naturalness’ of contemporary human carnivory thereby attempt to hoist meat eating beyond the reach of social or political criticism, to justify and naturalize the practice as simply a manifestation of “the natural order of things” (2009, p. 107).

The understanding of ‘Nature’ invoked to validate meat eating is, I have argued, partly a nostalgic construction of a pre-industrial rural idyll, where humans and farmed animals peacefully coexisted in a symbiotic relationship of mutual benefit. Another aspect of ‘Nature’ that is frequently invoked in these texts to license meat consumption in contemporary Western societies is of a more interior kind, revolving around ideas

about precisely *what* constitutes the essential truth of ‘human nature’. In *The omnivore’s dilemma*, for example, Pollan (2006a) privileges the continued consumption of animal products as a “biological fact” hardwired into humans as part of our ‘nature’: “This fact of evolutionary history is reflected in the design of our teeth, the structure of our digestion, and, quite possibly, the way my mouth still waters at the sight of a steak. Meat eating helped make us who we are” (2006, p. 314). Meat eating, Pollan argues, has done much to shape our ‘nature’, “both body... and soul” (2). Like Hemingway, whose writing presents certain modes of animal killing as “re-enactments of primal rituals, regenerative links to the anthropological and ontological foundations of human being” (Armstrong, 2008, p. 150), Pollan sees animal slaughter and meat consumption as a means to reconnect to our own ‘human nature’. His sentiments on animal killing and ‘human nature’ echo not only some of the key tropes of literary modernism, but also aspects of contemporary philosophical literature. Philosopher Ned Hettinger (2004), for example, argues that

since humans have evolved as omnivores (i.e. we have the capacity to be nourished by both plants and animals), meat eating and hunting are truer to our *own* ecological history than is a vegetarian abstinence from killing and consuming animal life. (p. 295, original italics)

Being ‘true’ to our own ecological history is, somehow, construed as entailing the consumption of farmed animal flesh. As Pollan puts it, in “giving up” meat (p. 302), we going against the grain of our own biologically hardwired ‘natures’; vegetarian diets entail nothing less than “the sacrifice, the sublimation, of part of our identity” (p. 314).

In the novel *Elizabeth costello* (2003), acclaimed writer (and long-time vegetarian) J. M. Coetzee explores the notion proposed by Pollan: that meat eating is integral to ‘human nature’. In the novel, a meat eating questioner invokes the classic

satire *Gulliver's tales* (2003 [1726]) to counter the arguments of the eponymous Costello, a vegetarian animal advocate. Attempting to justify meat consumption as part of 'human nature', the questioner asks:

Are you not expecting too much of humankind when you ask us to live without species exploitation, without cruelty? Is it not more human to accept our own humanity—even if it means embracing the carnivorous Yahoo within ourselves—than to end up like Gulliver, pining for a state he cannot attain, and for good reason: for it is not in his nature, which is human nature? (Coetzee, 2003, p. 55-56)

To live as a vegetarian, according to the fictional character quoted above, is to 'pine' for a state one cannot truly attain, at least not without the sacrifice of one of the key pillars of 'human nature' (see Parry, 2009, p. 252). Pollan's views on the subject are nearly identical: in a passage that admirably demonstrates the muddled fashion in which evolutionary theory is generally invoked in popular politics, he argues that "Even if the vegetarian is a more highly evolved human being, it seems to me he has lost something along the way" (p. 302). What the vegetarian has lost, according to Pollan, is a connection to 'Nature' itself: vegetarianism and animal advocacy ideologies "could only thrive in a world where people have lost contact with the natural world" (p. 325).

In asserting that vegetarians are spiritually or biologically impoverished because hunting and meat eating were causal to the development of humanity as we know it, these New Carnivore texts draw heavily upon a rather dated (but still widely influential) paleoanthropological theory known as the 'Man the Hunter' hypothesis. This hypothesis argues that the supposedly all-male activity of hunting was integral to shaping human social relation structures, particularly in regards to sex-roles (Noske, 1997, p. 104).

Given that narratives of human evolution have, throughout the last two centuries, tended

to reflect the social and political preoccupations *du jour* (Landau, 1991), and given that the Man the Hunter hypothesis was developed during the heyday of America's nuclear family ideology (Haraway, 1989, p. 187), it should come as little surprise that the Man the Hunter hypothesis reads like an allegory of 1950s American suburbia. Early hominid man went off to work to bring home the bacon, while woman pottered around the campground caring for the children and doing chores, waiting for her husband to get home so she could trade him her greatest asset – sex – in exchange for a juicy chunk of meat (Noske, 1997, p. 104). As Noske points out, in the Man the Hunter hypothesis,

males are supposed to have played the decisive economic role (in hunting) as well as the decisive reproduction role (choice of females in pair-bonding), and so it is males who are thought to have provided the foundation for human economies and for the human (nuclear) family.
(ibid.)

As a just-so story, the Man the Hunter hypothesis not only naturalizes the subordination of women and glorifies (supposedly) male activities as *the* essence of humanity, but also posits meat eating and the killing of animals as the primary mechanisms through which Man [sic] became truly human. This too is hardly surprising, given that the social context in which the hypothesis was developed was not only characterised by reactionary gender politics, but also by a carno-centric dietary ideology wherein meat enjoyed a near-talismanic prestige as the building block of American manhood (Adams, 1990) and hamburger chains were spreading like wildfire (Steinberg, 1996). In the Man the Hunter hypothesis, meat eating is understood as “a potent sacrifice, where the animal is consumed to make the man” (Haraway, 1989, p. 217). The ideological significance with which animal killing is imbued in this hypothesis far outweighs any objective analysis of the nutritive benefits of readily-accessible flesh-based proteins and

lipids.²³ As biologist and cultural historian Donna Haraway wryly points out, in the Man the Hunter hypothesis, “Hunting was not about getting enough B12” (1989, p. 217).

Of course, even if hunting and meat eating were truly causative of the development of humanity as we know it, this would not make animal farming and meat eating moral imperatives in contemporary post-industrial societies. As philosopher Jennifer Everett (2004) argues, just because a certain behaviour has been evolutionarily advantageous and perhaps even pivotal in the development of humanity as a species, it does not follow that atavistic attempts to relive that behaviour – through, say, meat eating or recreational hunting – are morally acceptable. “Humans as we know them might not exist,” Everett points out, “had our early ancestors not engaged in rape” (2004, p. 210). She asks:

Should contemporary men congratulate themselves for their respect for nature if they invest minimally in their children and engage in promiscuous infidelity, provided they do so in order to emulate an evolutionarily advantageous strategy without which our species would be quite different? (ibid.)

Everett allows that “valuing humanity in a properly environmental way might require having a certain ecological respect for the fact that we wouldn’t exist if not for the past predominance of behaviours (such as hunting or aggression or sexual dominance)” (ibid.). However, as she argues, to show such respect “would certainly not require an unqualified affirmation of these behaviours, or a desire to emulate them in the present” (ibid.).

²³ Indeed, feminist anthropologists have proposed an alternative “woman the gatherer” hypothesis, arguing that the collection and preparation of vegetable foods were undoubtedly also important to early hominids’ nutrition and social development (Noske, 1997, p. 105).

Despite the possibility of these kinds of criticisms, the New Carnivore authors analysed here regard the consumption of nonhuman animals as simply and irreducibly humanity's natural birthright, without which we would be immeasurably diminished and quite incapable of connecting in any meaningful way to the 'natural' world. Not only is vegetarianism an impoverished and unnatural state of 'abstinence' (Gold, 2008, p. 4) that cannot adequately accommodate the quintessence of 'human nature', the ideology of animal advocacy is quite literally goes against the 'Nature' itself. "Killing a lamb called dinner" (French, 1999), for example, demonstrates how ideas of the rural idyll and the 'naturalness' of meat eating coincide to paint vegetarianism as thoroughly unnatural:

We have the privilege of asking the question whether humans should eat meat precisely because we are so cut off from the process of where our food comes from. If we had grown up seeing animals slaughtered, if we depended on the animals we raised or hunted for our livelihood or survival, if we had to kill our own animals for meat, no one would ask the question (p. 7).

For French, vegetarianism is an effete perversion of an authentic pre-modern truth, born of privilege and ignorance and symptomatic of an alienated urban lifestyle. Her experience in slaughtering a lamb she facetiously names 'Dinner' has cured her of the unnatural, naïve, and peculiarly urban malaise of ethical vegetarianism. Other New Carnivore texts agree: in *Righteous porkchop* (2009), for example, Nicolette Hahn Niman disapprovingly writes that "lots of vegans subsist on utterly unnatural foods", and contrasts this "totally artificial" existence with "wholly real" diet and lifestyle of her meat eating, cattle-ranching husband (p. 133). In *The omnivore's dilemma* (2006a), too, Pollan devotes several pages to the 'unnaturalness' of vegetarianism and animal

advocacy: “You begin to wonder if their quarrel isn’t really with nature itself”, he concludes (p. 323). Pollan’s opinions here again reflect those of philosopher Ned Hettinger (2004), who argues that any opposition to the human consumption of animal flesh, even that procured through the parasitical institution of farming rather than any kind of ‘natural’ predation, potentially represents a hatred of ‘Nature’ itself (pp. 298, 300). A proper attitude of love and respect for ‘Nature’, the New Carnivore ideology suggests, entails a willingness to fully participate in the ‘natural’ mechanism of meat consumption. The vegetarian animal advocate’s opposition to the unnecessary killing of other animals is simply a “puritanical” manifestation of an “urban and parochial” unease with the cold hard truths of ‘Nature’ (Pollan, 2006a, p. 325).²⁴

However, the ideas about ‘nature’ being invoked in defence of contemporary human carnivory are of a very specific, and arguably very skewed, variety. In emphasising the role of aggression and predation far more than that of empathy or compassion, Pollan, Gold, and Hettinger perpetuate the long-held tendency for human social commentators to characterize nonhuman ‘Nature’ as rather excessively “red in tooth and claw” (see Midgley, 1983, pp. 24-25). The view that “cut-throat competition

²⁴ Everett (2004) offers a rather original response to the charges of ‘Nature’-hating leveled at animal advocates by Hettinger (and Pollan). In response to Hettinger’s contention that environmentalists must view predation, and by extension contemporary human carnivory, as intrinsically “good”, Everett responds:

It’s as if we dare not acknowledge that anything in nature could rightly be regarded by moral agents as bad, ugly, or unfortunate, for fear that we won’t be able to love it anymore. Such an attitude, I submit, is more akin to *infatuation* than mature love or respect. To be infatuated with someone is to see only her merits, to cast her character and actions always in a radiant light, and to be (perhaps willfully) oblivious to or excessively indulgent of her faults. It is a fragile sort of admiration, however, which cannot endure an honest evaluation of morning breath, bad moods, and stomach flu. We may be able to be infatuated with someone whose faults we deliberately overlook or pretend to find charismatic, but we could not genuinely know her, much less love or respect her. Hettinger is willing to acknowledge the *facts* of pain, terror, and suffering in predation, but seems unwilling to see these aspects of nature ungilded by his determination to find her attractive in all aspects and all ways. (p. 312)

Everett concludes that “vegetarians can value the role of predation in evolution and in producing other values even while deploring the suffering it causes and, in addition, that to require more than this is to demand infatuation rather than respect for nature from would-be environmentalists” (pp. 312-3).

between species is the law of evolution” (Midgley, 1983, p. 24) is a reductive version of Darwinian evolutionary theory that became popular with the growing cultural authority of industrial capitalism: to the budding tycoons of the late nineteenth century, the mantra ‘survival of the fittest’ held an obvious appeal. However, as philosopher Mary Midgley (1983) argues, “[t]he reading of such pop-gun fantasies into evolutionary theory is a serious error” (p. 24). Violent competition is only part of the picture: Darwin himself can be read as emphasising cooperation and social bonding just as much as competition and aggression (Midgley, 1983, p. 24). As ethologist Jonathan Balcombe (2007) succinctly puts it, “Nature is not nearly so grim as she is made out to be” (p. 35). Everett (2004) similarly questions the New Carnivore claim that meat-eaters have the authority of ‘Nature’ on their side. “If admirable environmentalists must emulate behaviours that turn the crank of evolution,” she writes,

then those who dismiss the vegetarian’s sympathies for suffering creatures must swallow the tail of their own critique. There is, after all, every reason to think that a sympathetic affective response to the suffering of others, no less than predatory skill, was essential to our evolutionary history, and that we would be a vastly different species without it, and that such responses enable nonhuman creatures to survive and thrive in the wild. The capacities to comprehend and lament another’s terror and agony thus do not set us apart from natural processes – and certainly not above them. To acknowledge this, rather than dismissing it as a product of hypercultural sentimentality, is to be fully connected with the kinds of beings we are, and share something in common with many of nature’s other inhabitants. (2004, p. 313)

Meat-advocating critics who interpret animal advocates' sensitivity to suffering as a desire to "transcend nature" apparently assume that such sensitivity is somehow "unnatural". Such an assertion is simply "untenable" (Everett, 2004, p. 313). Drawing upon the data obtained from the extensive, unobtrusive observation of animals in their natural habitats, ethologists have for decades argued that nonhuman animals are indeed sentient, sensitive beings with complex emotions and social structures all of their own (see de Waal and Tyack, 2003; Bagemihl, 1999; Balcombe, 2007; Bekoff, 1972, 2007; Goodall, 1986). The reductive 'red in tooth and claw' characterization of 'Nature' invoked by the New Carnivores is in fact a thoroughly outdated paradigm. As Everett memorably puts it, "our moral capacities are as much a part of nature's bounty as the wolf's distinctive howl" (2004, p. 313).

CONCLUSION

As the gastronomic texts analysed here demonstrate, ideas about 'Nature' are integral to the contemporary New Carnivore project. 'Nature', as it is invoked in these texts, is something "innocent and eternal" (Barthes, 1973, p. 140) simply and irrefutably "the way things are *meant to be*" (Joy, 2009, p. 107). Even 'human nature' is monolithic and essential in the New Carnivore paradigm, with the definitive truth of what it means to be human biologically hardwired into our digestive systems (Pollan, 2006a, p. 314). By invoking the authority of 'Nature' in support of meat eating, the New Carnivore discourse naturalizes the killing of other animals and the eating of their flesh (Joy, 2009, p. 109). A glowing editorial review of *The omnivore's dilemma* illustrates the effectiveness this process of naturalization: according to the review, Pollan's book is completely free from bias, as the author is "too dogged a researcher to let ideology take

over” (Kaufman, 2006, no pagination). Eating meat is ‘natural, and ‘Nature’ transcends ideology: pitted against this unassailable, indifferent fortress of absolute truth, the petty, sentimental moralizing of a few ‘Nature’-hating vegetarian cranks shrivels to the status of utter irrelevance.

However, although these gastronomic texts claim to be simply and objectively pointing out ‘Nature’s way’, they must resort to invoking both a whitewashed, nostalgic ideal of an animal-farming rural utopia (Williams, 1973) and an outdated paradigm of ‘Nature’ as excessively ‘red in tooth and claw’ (Midgley, 1983) in order to justify the killing and consumption of other animals. In doing so, these gastronomic texts reveal how entirely un-‘natural’ their appeals to ‘Nature’ really are: far from being “historically, divinely, and biologically irrefutable” (Joy, 2009, p. 109), ideas about ‘Nature’ are inevitably inflected with social and political concerns.

CHAPTER FIVE: BACKLASH

Scott Gold issues a red-blooded call to arms for the meat-adoring masses to rise up, speak out, and reclaim their pride.

- Promotional material for *The shameless carnivore* (Gold, 2008).²⁵

As the above quotation from the promotional website for *The shameless carnivore* (Gold, 2008) demonstrates, New Carnivore discourse tends to paint a picture of a silent meat eating majority who have been victimized by a vocal vegetarian minority. New Carnivorism, we are told, is a burgeoning social movement comprised of meat-hungry citizens speaking out against the rising tide of vegetarian critics and reclaiming the authority that is rightfully theirs. The “carnivorous consciousness”-raising (Friend, 2008, p. 8) fostered by the leaders of this “blooming movement” (Eng, 2008, p. 138) has allowed ordinary folk, who have unfairly been made to feel guilty for doing something so patently natural, to finally “reclaim [their] rights as meat-eaters” (Bourette, 2008, p. 7).

The New Carnivore discourse closely echoes the rhetoric used by other reactionary ‘enough is enough’ movements.²⁶ Like the ‘ordinary folk’ speaking out against ‘rabid’ feminists, ‘uppity’ homosexuals, ‘dole-bludging’ ethnic minorities, and other excesses of ‘political correctness’, the New Carnivore discourse depicts a fed-up

²⁵ http://www.shamelesscarnivore.com/?page_id=35

²⁶ ‘Enough is enough’ was the slogan chanted by the conservative religious group Destiny Church during a series of rallies protesting New Zealand’s newly passed Civil Unions Bill (2004). The Bill, which has

majority reclaiming their rights by speaking out against a pushy minority, striking a blow for democracy and ‘common sense’ in the process. The “neo-carn” (LaVeck & Stein, 2007, no pagination) uprising is self-consciously concerned with refuting the restrictions of the vegetarian zealots and reinstating the kind of ‘common sense’ wisdom that naturalizes exploitation and upholds the status quo. In this way, these New Carnivore texts are manifestations of a backlash – a phenomenon arising “when taken-for-granted privileges are being questioned and are or might be removed” (S. H. Wise, 2000, no pagination). Backlashes represent hostile responses towards policies, politics and social trends that seek to redress injustice, potentially threatening the privileges that members of a particular ethnicity, class, gender and (I argue) species have long enjoyed at the expense of less fortunate others. Depicting vegetarianism as a ‘failed experiment’, an unfashionable dogma, and an assault on personal freedom, these gastronomic texts comprise a hostile backlash against the animal advocacy movement.

However, backlashes can be subtle (Faludi, 1992; Cudd, 2002; Mansbridge & Shames, 2008), and the New Carnivore backlash is no exception. By insisting that ‘happy meat’ erases any ethical issues surrounding the killing of animals and the eating of their flesh, the backlash co-opts many of the animal advocacy movement’s arguments, swallowing them whole and regurgitating them in support of a more discerning, more ‘conscientious’ kind of carnivorism. In other words, the New Carnivore backlash functions not only by ridiculing vegetarianism as too ‘PC’, but also by attempting to make slaughter and meat consumption *more* ‘PC’: as one New Carnivore magazine article puts it, “It isn’t yet politically correct to eat meat, but it is a lot less politically incorrect” (Waters, 2008, no pagination). In doing so, the backlash

since become an Act, granted legal rights analogous to marriage to couples of all genders. (Crewdson, 2005, no pagination).

demonstrates not only the impressive ideological convolutions underpinning the New Carnivore worldview, but also the subtle and chameleonic inner workings of backlashes in general. Before the specificities of the New Carnivore anti-vegetarian backlash can be unpacked, however, the concept of ‘backlash’ itself needs to be put into theoretical context.

BACKLASH THEORY

Popularised in the early nineties by journalist Susan Faludi (1992), the term ‘backlash’ has historically been used to describe resistance to a broad range of social and political movements. Various critics have identified backlashes against civil rights (Lipset, 1968), gay liberation (S. H. Wise, 2000), environmentlism (Rowell, 1996; Switzer, 1997), feminism (Faludi, 1992); liberalism (Lipset, 1968; Lipset and Raab, 1970; Rogers and Lott, 1997; Dettmar, 2006), and ‘political correctness’ in general (Davis, 1997); indeed, as Thomas (2008) wryly notes, in popular discourses “‘backlash’ is used nearly everywhere nearly all the time” (p. 615). In its political sense the term is usually understood to mean a conservative reaction to liberal social change (Mansbridge & Shames, 2008, pp. 623-4). Mark Davis’ (1997) analysis of anti-‘PC’ sentiments is a good example of a politicized reading of backlash, in large part because ‘political correctness’ is a vast umbrella term potentially encompassing all of the movements listed above. ‘Political correctness’ originally described the avoidance of language deemed offensive or insulting by marginalized social groups. In conservative discourses, however, the term ‘political correctness’ (‘PC’) has come to be understood as a repressive form of liberal censorship. As Davis argues, the anti-‘PC’ backlash is highly heteronormative and strongly associated with privileged ethnicities and social

classes, infused with both anxiety (at the prospect of ‘minority’ groups gaining political and social traction) and nostalgia (for a positively-evaluated past era when women, non-Whites, and queer people ‘knew their place’). “Most of those complaining about ‘PC’”, Davis writes, “are in fact white, middle class males who seem to be worrying about their own declining proprietorial role in society as other groups come to the fore” (1997, p. 31).

Like many analyses of backlashes, however, Davis’ (1997) critique fails to adequately define the term ‘backlash’ itself (see also Faludi, 1992); indeed, until recently, the term has been chronically under-theorized in academic literature (Cudd, 2002, p. 3; Mansbridge & Shames, 2008, p. 623; Thomas, 2008, p. 615). This research gap has lately begun to be addressed by social theorists. For philosopher Anne. E. Cudd (2002), backlash is a regressive reaction to societal progress. Cudd is careful to precisely delineate these rather problematic terms: ‘progress’, she specifies, involves a society “coming to view as equal in dignity and worthy of respect those it once viewed as lesser beings”, so that “individuals in these groups suffer fewer harms, on average, than they previously did” (Superson & Cudd, 2002, p. xix). Regress, on the other hand, is the exact opposite: occurring when whole social groups are denied the respect that is their due (Cudd, 2002, p. 7). Political scientists Jane Mansbridge and Shauna Shames (2008) emphasise the centrality of power to the phenomenon of backlash: according to them, backlash occurs when a social group uses coercive power to regain their own lost or threatened power, in an attempt to reinstate or maintain the status quo (pp. 626-627). Coercive power can include overt force, divide-and-conquer strategies, and the “soft repression” (Ferree, 2004, p. 85) of ridicule, stigma and silencing (Mansbridge & Shames, 2008, p. 629; Thomas, 2008, p. 621).

Social theorists examining backlash agree that it never occurs in a vacuum, but is

always *against* something; backlashes arise in reaction to the threat posed by new social movements seeking to rethink or restructure existing power relations (Cudd, 2002, p. 10; Mallison, 1992, p. 7; Mansbridge & Shames, 2008, p. 627; S. H. Wise, 2000).

Backlashes need not be consciously mean-spirited, nor do they entail some kind of organized conspiracy (Cudd, 2002, p. 10): as Faludi rather eloquently puts it, the workings of backlash “are encoded and internalized, diffuse and chameleonic. Not all of the manifestations of the backlash are of equal weight or significance either; some are mere ephemera” (1992, pp. xxi-xxii). This lack of orchestration, however, doesn’t make backlashes any less effective in stymieing progressive social change: the combined weight of these multiple, disorganized, perhaps even unconscious incidents of “soft repression” (Ferree, 2004, p. 85) can be very persuasive (Cudd, 2002; Faludi, 1992).

Part of the power of backlash lies in its ability to depoliticize the political, naturalizing oppression by representing it as simply ‘common sense’, a supposedly ideology- and culture-free intuition of right and wrong, good and bad, sensible and stupid (Davis, 1997, p. 31; Faludi, 1992, p. xviii; Joy, 2009, p. 107). Backlash appeals to this self-authorizing essentialism to denounce efforts to redress unjust or oppressive social structures as counter-intuitive censurings of ‘common sense’. Importantly, although backlashes arise in reaction to social progress (Cudd, 2002), they come to prominence “when advances have been small, before changes are sufficient to help many people... It is almost as if the leaders of backlashes use the fear of change as a threat before major change has occurred” (Miller, 1976, pp. xv-xvi). Ultimately, backlashes are a reaction to the threat of change, revealing a deep-seated anxiety on the part of those social groups currently in a position of power that such change might destabilize their authority.

THE NEW CARNIVORE BACKLASH

The New Carnivore gastronomic texts examined in this thesis conform neatly to the definitions of backlash sketched above. If backlashes occur when the “taken-for-granted privileges” of pre-existing power relations are being threatened (S. H. Wise, 2000, no pagination), then the privilege under threat in the New Carnivore backlash is “the normative practice and ideology of human dominance over nonhuman animals” (McDonald, 2000, p. 1), as epitomized by meat eating (Fiddes, 1991). If a backlash is a reaction to social progress, and progress entails a society “coming to view as equal in dignity and worthy of respect those it once viewed as lesser beings” (Superson & Cudd, 2002, p. xix), then the ‘progress’ the New Carnivore backlash is reacting to is that being made on behalf of nonhuman animals, whose firmly entrenched status as ‘lesser beings’ has been seriously challenged by the animal advocacy movement. Backlashes utilize divide-and-conquer strategies or the soft repression of ridicule, stigma and silencing in order to resist progressive social movements (Ferree, 2004; Mansbridge & Shames, 2008); here, too the New Carnivore backlash adheres closely to the theoretical criteria. Several theorists have argued persuasively that the dividing-and-conquering of the animal advocacy movement is well under way, as media and industry collaborate to split ‘radicals’ from ‘realists’ in order to isolate the former and co-opt that latter (Kew, 1999, 2003; LaVeck, 2006; LaVeck and Stein, 2007). Sociologist Barry Kew (2003) argues that mainstream media engagements with the animal advocacy movement exhibit a “discernable pattern” of intentional confusion and redefinition, when indeed animal advocacy perspectives are not simply excluded entirely (Kew, 2003, pp. 31, 34-40). The New Carnivore gastronomic texts examined here are certainly a prominent manifestation of this pattern. However, comparatively

little has been done to thoroughly examine how the “soft repression” (Ferree, 2004, p. 85) of ridicule and stigma are utilized in the anti-vegetarian, anti-animal advocacy backlash – a research gap I aim to address in the remainder of this chapter.

Before examining how the New Carnivore backlash functions, however, it must be demonstrated beyond all doubt that the backlash is, indeed, lashing back against something in the first place. There is ample evidence to suggest that the recent explosion of New Carnivore gastronomic texts in fact a reactionary phenomenon, an anxious attempt to reassure meat eating consumers of the legitimacy of their dietary habits in light of the double threat posed by an increasingly vocal animal advocacy movement (Innes, 2006) and an increasingly beleaguered meat industry, plagued by a spate of food scares and health crises throughout the late twentieth century (Fiddes, 1991; Jackson, 2010). These developments are cited within the New Carnivore literature itself as motivating forces driving the current upsurge in ‘carnivore pride’: the promotional website for *The shameless carnivore* (Gold, 2008), for example, laments that the combined influence of self-righteous vegetarians and Mad Cow disease have made meat eating “somewhat déclassé”.²⁷ Similarly, a New Carnivore newspaper article entitled “Back to the Rack” (Waters, 2008) specifically mentions the animal advocacy movement and the well-publicized health risks of high-meat diets as key contributors to the declining status of meat. The result of this unique combination of social developments – the rise of vegetarianism and animal advocacy ideology coinciding with the “turbulently declining reputation of meat” (Fiddes, 1990) – has been a calling into question of the taken-for-granted privilege of carnivory itself. For perhaps the first time in Western history, meat-eaters have found themselves (to whatever small degree) having to defend their dietary habits.

The beleaguered state of Western carnivory should of course not be overestimated. Meat industries remain powerful players in both national and global arenas, and the vast majority of Westerners never stopped eating the flesh of nonhuman animals: the “déclassé” reputation of meat was only really noticed by those members of the Western urban middle classes for whom gastronomic chic was a significant element of their cultural capital. Nevertheless, in these specific contexts within contemporary Western society the practice of meat eating is not as beyond reproach as it once was; this is often exaggerated to an almost comical degree, as New Carnivore authors depict meat eating as a venerable institution besieged by an angry horde of rabid vegetarians. Bourette (2008), for example, writes:

Up until recently, when many of us did consume meat, it was with a supersized order of guilt. We know all too well the arguments against meat-eating: It clogs our arteries, destroys the ecosystem. It’s a cruel massacre of innocent victims.... The sin, the immorality of meat eating has been the overriding leitmotif of the past few decades, ever since those first pot- smoking, bead-loving longhairs hijacked the debate and determined what the nation *should* have for dinner (p. 7, original italics).

As the above excerpt suggests, Bourette’s book positively seethes with resentment towards vegetarians and animal advocates, a group she perceives as having “hijacked” the discussion about agricultural ethics and recklessly branded as “immoral” the dietary preference of an the overwhelming majority of Western consumers. Similarly, in *The shameless carnivore*, Gold (2008) depicts the institution of carnivory as “taking fire from the go-veg militants on all sides” (p. 249). Meat, according to the New Carnivore credo, has unfairly been given a bad name;

²⁷ <http://www.shamelesscarnivore.com>

vegetarians, variously described as ‘bead-loving longhairs’ or ‘militant’ zealots, have dominated the gastro-cultural landscape and forced their minority view of dietary deprivation upon a helpless meat eating populace.

Bourette and Gold’s unmistakable indignation at being told what (or whom) they *should* (or should not) eat for dinner is an important reminder of how power, if one has become sufficiently accustomed to it, can often come to be perceived as an inalienable right (Mansbridge & Shames, 2008, p. 627); this naturalization of might-equals-right is a typical motif in backlash rhetoric (see Davis, 1997; Faludi, 1992). Bourette, Gold and the rest of the New Carnivores seek to redress this imbalance, and reclaim the rights of meat eaters; namely, the right to consume nonhuman others with impunity. Echoing both the white, upper-middle class, heterosexual male backlash against ‘political correctness’ (Davis, 1997), and the white, upper-middle class, heterosexual female backlash against the ‘victim politics’ of radical feminism (Faludi, 1992), the New Carnivore backlash against vegetarianism similarly constructs itself as a long-overdue re-assertion of traditional ‘common sense’. It is in this vein that Gold (2008) writes:

This is my rallying cry. A call to arms. I believe that there’s a veritable army of carnivores out there, ready and waiting for someone to come forth waving that blood-red banner high, unabashed, in true carnivorous splendor. And if, as I suspect, that army – a legion of honest, meat-loving individuals who are made to feel morally lacking simply because they consume in a way that’s so natural and elemental – is longing to be vindicated, and should you, gentle reader, happen to be among them, I’m here to say that you’re not alone. Repeat after me: I am a carnivore, and I’m damned proud of it. (pp. 3-4)

Bourette echoes the language used in Gold's carnivore polemic almost exactly: after decrying the rising cultural authority of vegetarianism, Bourette writes:

Still, it gnawed. Deep in our guts, we knew Homer Simpson was right when he told his meat-eschewing daughter on the way to a neighbourhood barbecue, "Lisa, you don't win friends with salad." So, we began to rally. To reclaim our rights as meat-eaters. (2008, p. 7)

According to Bourette and Gold, eating the flesh of other animals is nothing less than an inalienable right, so "natural and elemental" that any attempt to take it away simply defies 'common sense', constituting a veritable affront to human dignity that should rightly be met with pride banners and rambunctious political rallies. The revolutionaries will not be denied: as Bourette puts it, "The carnivores are back. It's like a bitchslap to all those reedy, high-minded herbivores (2008, p. 5). New Carnivorism's status as a backlash phenomenon could not be any more obvious – the current upsurge in 'meat pride' rhetoric is clearly, at least in part, a reaction to the threat that the taken-for-granted privilege of Western carnivory might be in jeopardy.

If Bourette's rather vitriolic (not to mention violently misogynistic) rant about 'bitchslapping' vegetarians seems excessive, this is because the New Carnivore backlash is not just a reactionary response from a social group threatened with the loss of power; it is a retort to what is perceived as a personal attack upon meat-eaters by vegetarians. Monin, Sawyer and Marquez (2008) explore this dimension of backlash in an article entitled "The rejection of moral rebels: Resenting those who do the right thing". They point out that although "moral rebels" (such as the whistleblowers on the Abu Ghraib torture incidents, or the participants who refused to comply with Stanley

Milgram's [1965] infamous obedience experiments²⁸) are generally lauded by people with minimal involvement in the problematic incidents in question, they often suffer "intense backlash" from their peers (p. 76). Furthermore, "this backlash does not just come from peers who stand to suffer from the rebellion, but also from peers who merely failed to report or oppose the abuse" (ibid.). The same behaviour is praised by some and reviled by others, depending on their degree of involvement in the situation (p. 77). Monin, Sawyer and Marquez argue that this is because although such moral rebels "may think that they are only taking a stand against the status quo ... bystanders who did not take that stand can take this rebellion as a personal threat" (ibid.). This kind of moral reproach, even if it is only implied, can be extremely destructive to an individual's sense of self worth (ibid.).

Monin, Sawyer and Marquez's insights are directly applicable to the New Carnivore anti-vegetarian backlash. Ethical vegetarians perfectly fit the psychologists' definition of moral rebels as "individuals who take a principled stand against the status quo, who refuse to comply, stay silent, or simply go along when this would require that they compromise their values" (pp. 76-77). In challenging the ideology of human dominion over nonhuman animals, vegetarian 'moral rebels' implicitly condemn those who, by their dietary choices, go along with the speciesist status quo. As Monin, Sawyer and Marquez succinctly put it, "by claiming the moral high ground, rebels are effectively calling everything else the low road" (p. 77) – and no one likes to be accused of taking the low road. It is this kind of defensive reaction to

²⁸ In an attempt to gain some insight into the psychological mechanisms underlying many ordinary German people's complicity in the atrocities of the Holocaust, Yale psychology professor Stanley Milgram devised an experiment to test whether, and how far, personal morals could be compromised through obedience to authority. Milgram ordered the subjects of the experiment to give what they believed to be painful electric shocks to another person every time he answered a question incorrectly (in actual fact, this person was an actor and was not being shocked at all). Contrary to his own predictions, Milgram found that a majority of subjects were indeed willing to administer massive and painful electric shocks to another person, provided that in doing so they were 'just following orders'.

the threat of personal rejection that is discernable within the New Carnivore ‘bitchslap’ to vegetarianism and vegetarians.

THE CONVOLUTIONS OF BACKLASH

That the New Carnivore movement is, at least in part, a backlash against vegetarianism is incontrovertible: indeed, the term ‘backlash’ has even been used by prominent figures within the gastronomy industry to describe the recent proliferation of ‘meat pride’ texts. In the introduction to the 2006 edition of *Best food writing*, for instance, editor Holly Hughes exerts her influence as an ‘expert’ with the power to define precisely what constitutes ‘good’ gastronomy by sympathetically proclaiming that she can “detect a backlash, too, among fed up gourmands who refuse to renounce foie gras and caviar just because they are produced by less-than-noble methods” (Hughes, 2006, p. xi). As political scientist and literary critic B. R. Myers notes, the “just because” that Hughes is careful to include in her proclamation speaks volumes; the tone in which this editorial statement is made is distinctly approving (Myers, 2009, p. 1).²⁹ An essay from *Best food writing 2006* by *Cleaving* (2009) author Julie Powell provides a good example of backlash Hughes so appreciatively identifies. “Lobster Killer” (Powell, 2006) is a light-hearted anecdote documenting Powell’s first experience of boiling lobsters alive; the anthology’s editor purported to find the piece “hilarious” (Hughes, 2006, p.147). Several other New Carnivore texts also conform to this manifestation of the backlash, in which extremely violent and graphic imagery of animal dismemberment is combined with a jocular tone, and ethical concerns are ridiculed (Bourette, 2008, p. 47; Gold,

²⁹ Hughes use of the unwieldy term “less-than-noble” is also revealing, an attempt by the influential gastronome to void the word ‘cruel’ of its normative moral significance by means of coy litotes.

2008, p. 213-14). Gold's (2008) discussion of foie gras is a good example. The food writer approvingly quotes a passage from an influential gastronomy tome that is quite shocking in its blunt assertion that animals exist solely to gratify humanity's collective tastebuds. "I think this passage in the *Larousse Gastronomique* puts it best", he writes: "The goose is nothing, but man has made of it an instrument for the output of a marvelous product, a kind of living hothouse in which there grows the supreme fruit of gastronomy. (cited in Gold, 2008, p. 214). The food writer's agreement with this supremely anthropocentric sentiment is so whole-hearted that he sums it up in a single word: "Snap!" (p. 214). Clearly, Gold is a prominent voice in the anti-vegetarian backlash; he is exactly the kind of "fed up gourmand" referred to by Hughes (Hughes, 2006, p. xi). As if to further hammer home his point, Gold goes on to describe in a flippant and light-hearted fashion the traditional, and now-illegal, preparation of orlotan (a small bird in the bunting family). Gold jovially relates how this "adorable little songbird" is blinded, artificially fattened and drowned in alcohol before being cooked, pointedly refusing to express any disapproval for the infamous practice (p. 214).

However, instances in which the gourmand simply refuses to refrain from eating meat that is produced via controversial methods are the exception, not the rule; as I have argued in this thesis, the New Carnivore project is in large part an attempt to find 'ethical' solutions to some of the most harshly-criticized aspects of the modern meat industry. Once again, ideas about taste are of paramount importance in deciding which kinds of meat production are excessively cruel and which are permissible in the name of gastronomy: foie gras may get a reprieve, but cheap, mass-produced factory farmed meat usually does not. In *The omnivore's dilemma* (2006a), for example, Michael Pollan spends an entire chapter denouncing the horrors of factory farming, and many other New Carnivore texts are similarly unequivocal in their condemnation of CAFOs (confined

animal feeding operations) (see Friend, 2008; Herlihy, 2005, 2006, 2007; Lazenby, 2008; Niman, 2009). These texts borrow key arguments from the animal advocacy movement; Friend (2008), for example, approvingly cites ethologists and long-time animal advocates Marc Bekoff (2007) and Jonathan Balcombe (2007) in her description of the rich social and emotional lives of farmed animals. Even Bourette and Gold, whose slant on New Carnivorism is not particularly notable for its emphasis on ethics, do not (always) deny that animals deserve some moral consideration: several times throughout *The shameless carnivore*, Gold recounts how he likes to say “a quick prayer” to the animal he has just killed, “vowing” that their deaths “would not be in vain” (2008, p. 231, 266).

In “saying a prayer for [slaughtered calf] Ernie” (2008, p. 266) in one breath, while insisting that “the goose is nothing” (p. 214) in another, Gold highlights an interesting contradiction in the New Carnivore tactic. The New Carnivore either (supposedly) honours the animal by constructing slaughter as a grave responsibility and a sacred ritual that reconnects everyone to the circle of life, or (in full backlash mode), he or she flippantly and glibly somersaults back over decades of animal advocacy to a time when the animal behind the food was “nothing”. Gold (2008) and Bourette (2008) employ both tactics in their respective books, seemingly without awareness that any contradiction or inconsistency in their discursive treatment of animals exists. Clearly, however, a significant disjunction exists between perceiving the animal as ‘nothing’ and seeing him or her as a sentient being, perhaps even one with a soul to be prayed for. That Gold and Bourette fail to recognize (or at least admit) any contradiction in their attitudes towards animals demonstrates once again the ideological contortions involved in the New Carnivore’s supposedly ideology-free, natural, ‘common sense’ attitude towards meat and slaughter.

Contradictions and convolutions aside, select parts of certain New Carnivore

writings could almost be mistaken for animal advocacy literature, a fact not overlooked by the authors themselves.³⁰ However, although the backlash concedes that in certain (carefully delineated) circumstances animal advocates might indeed have a point, in promoting vegetarianism they have quite clearly carried on well beyond common sense and into the realm of farce, and are thus ripe for ridicule. This is a standard backlash pattern: by opening with the reassurance that ‘some of my best friends are women/black/gay’ before moving on to the declaration that ‘but now, things have gone too far’, this kind of rhetoric attempts to block accusations of outright bigotry before shifting gears and once again appealing to the authority of ‘common sense’ to support oppressive social arrangements (Davis, 1997).

So ridiculous is the notion of living without meat, these texts tell us, that hordes of vegetarians are now returning from their self-imposed dietary exile *en masse*. On *The f word*, for example, Ramsay makes a veritable spectacle of feeding Elton the ‘veal’ calf to a group of fifty “vegetarians” who “want to try meat again” (Ramsay and Northover, 2008c). Similarly, in Pollan’s *The omnivore’s dilemma* (2006a), “in a passage that shines with all the veracity of a letter to Penthouse, a former PETA supporting vegetarian comes to Polyface farms to kill a chicken and thus resume eating meat again” (Myers, 2009, p. 4). In *Cleaving* (2009, p. 125), Powell delights in recounting how a former vegan came to realise the “insanity” of his lifestyle and proceeded to open his own butchery, and Bourette (2008) smugly relates how she has recently “watch[ed] longtime vegetarian friends and acquaintances fall like dominos” (p. 7). A preoccupation with “converting” vegetarians back to the fold of carnivorous normalcy suffuses Gordon Ramsay’s various television programmes. The celebrity chef berates a

³⁰ For example, as Bourette listens to meat-loving pig farmer and New Carnivore personality Craig Haney denounce battery and broiler-hen cages, she observes: “If you didn’t know better, you might mistake Haney for an animal rights activist, or a rad vegetarian” (2008, p. 159).

long-time vegetarian woman for neglecting her health, then cooks her a bloody steak (Ramsay & Northover, 2008b);³¹ he surreptitiously slips meat products into the food he is serving to a catered vegetarian party (Nikkah, 2005); and he feeds a vegetarian man a meaty pizza, guffawing, “look, you’ve converted a vegetarian!” (Ramsay & Hall, 2005). The message to be taken from these gastronomic texts is clear: vegetarians are ‘falling like dominos’ and switching back to the carnivore team, even if, like dominos, they sometimes need a little push.

‘ETHICAL MEAT’ AND THE REDUNDANCY OF VEGETARIANISM

The prime reason why vegetarians are rescinding their dietary deviance in such numbers, these gastronomic texts tell us, is because new ‘ethical’ options have become available that allow these self-righteous eaters to retain their sense of virtue whilst consuming meat. A restaurateur interviewed in a cover article for a local Californian newspaper, for example, relates how putting “humanely raised” on the menu was all it took for “two friends of mine, both vegetarians for over 17 years, [to] start eating meat again at our restaurant” (Waters, 2008, no pagination). In an article featured in *Best food writing 2009*, Monica Eng (2009, p. 138) similarly describes how “ethical meat options” have allowed former vegetarians to eat flesh with impunity. During the vegetarians’ bleak reign, Eng recalls,

[c]ool, conscientious folks used to slump guiltily next to their righteous vegan friends, knowing they were baddies for eating factory-farmed animals, but not seeing much choice. Today, however, many proudly

³¹ The uncomfortable Hannah was ultimately unable to eat the steak, apologetically admitting that “I haven’t quite managed to take on the beef” (Ramsay & Northover, 2008b).

proclaim their meat love – especially for pork – with the near-virtuousness of vegetarians. That’s because ethical meat options have expanded faster than you can say “ex-vegetarian”. (2009, p. 138)

Throughout these New Carnivore texts, a similar sentiment is echoed. “I suddenly woke up to the fact that I had access to meat I feel great about,” says a former vegetarian woman in a *New York Press* cover article entitled “Flesh Mob” (Covington, 2010, no pagination). The article’s author expresses her joy that “these days, newly carnivorous New Yorkers are able to cushion their consciences with locally grown, free range and all-around-happy meat. It’s guiltfree grub, and there’s no shortage of eaters buying into it.” (ibid.). In the *Best food writing 2009* article cited above, Eng (2009, p. 138) describes herself “joining a blooming movement of ethical meat eaters”, and Lennon (2008), in an article from the previous year’s edition entitled “Why Vegetarians are Eating Meat”, likewise contends that meat eating is now the most ethical option available to the conscious consumer. “A growing number of vegetarians are starting to eat humanely raised meat”, she writes, because “seeking out and paying a premium for sustainably raised meat ... is the right thing for us to do” (Lennon, 2008, no pagination). Other former vegetarians have since become “happy meat” mavens (Marx, 2009; Powell, 2009, p. 125; Waters, 2008). According to a *Gourmet* magazine feature article, “butchers who were once vegetarians have become a small but driving force in reshaping the meat market” (Marx, 2009, no pagination). The article depicts former vegetarians as “perfect leaders” with the power to validate and sanction the consumption of certain kinds of meat: “Years of saying ‘no’ to meat have made them incredibly finicky about what merits a ‘yes’” (ibid.). Taken as a whole, the message of these texts is clear: new ‘humane’ production systems have improved ‘meat’ animals’ lives so greatly that even vegetarians are now willing to renounce their position and tuck

in with gusto. In this way, contemporary gastronomy echoes the anti-feminist backlash, one strand of which asserts that feminism has already achieved its goal of emancipating women and is hence redundant and pointless (Faludi, 1992). The New Carnivore backlash similarly asserts that animal advocacy movement (or its subcategory, the animal welfare movement, at any rate) has already accomplished its goal of improving the lot of farmed animals; now that there exists a plethora of ‘ethical meat options’, remaining vegetarian is simply masochistic.

Indeed, these texts tell us, those vegetarian holdouts who refuse to hop back on the meat bandwagon are motivated more by fuzzy-headed ideals of innocence and a misguided sense of moral superiority than by any real concern for animals. Pollan (2006a), perhaps the most influential voice in the North American branch of the New Carnivore movement, expresses exactly these sentiments, writing that

there is a part of me that envies the moral clarity of the vegetarian, the blamelessness of the tofu eater. Yet part of me pities him, too. Dreams of innocence are just that; they usually depend on a denial of reality that can be its own form of hubris. (p. 352)

The ‘reality’ that the tofu eater denies, according to Pollan, is the reality that humans dominate animals; “believing that the sheer force of human will can somehow overcome [this reality]” is a folly and potentially even an “immorality” in itself (p. 352). Pollan also claims that, unlike the conscientious carnivorism that he practices himself, vegetarianism is not about animal ethics at all: rather, it is about “the internal consistency of our moral code or the condition of our souls” (Pollan, 2006a, p. 327).³²

³² Pollan’s views on vegetarianism are closely echoed in the academic literature by Donna Haraway, who dismisses veganism as a “romantic” notion appealing to those who aspire to be “pure of heart” (2003, p. 4), and condescendingly maintains that to believe it is possible to eat without killing is “to pretend innocence and transcendence or final peace” (2008, p. 295). While Pollan and Haraway may be correct that eating entails necessarily entails killing (of field mice accidentally killed while harvesting crops, for

By erecting and then demolishing the straw men of ‘purity’ and ‘innocence’, Pollan is able to denigrate veganism as ‘denying reality’ without ever seriously engaging with the philosophy of animal advocacy.

Other New Carnivore texts echo Pollan’s disparagement of the animal advocacy movement, arguing that vegetarianism is more about moral superiority than anything else; adjectives such as “smug” (Lennon, 2008, no pagination;), “self-righteous” (Niman, 2009, pp. 133, 175, 278) and “sanctimonious” (Niman, 2009, p. 278; Powell, 2009, p. 126) liberally pepper the New Carnivore discourse on vegetarianism. Gold (2008) goes into some depth on the topic, citing insider knowledge from his “former vegetarian and vegan friends” to back up his assertion that

vegetarianism’s greatest attribute is the accompanying sense of moral superiority. There are a lot of these people, and you can’t blame them for adopting this attitude. It’s empowering to feel that you have a one-up on the others, that the way you conduct your life is better than the way they conduct theirs. This isn’t conjecture, either. I have former vegetarian and vegan friends who are quick to note that this sense of righteous indignation was one of the biggest selling points of the lifestyle (they weren’t roped in by the delicious recipes, that’s for certain), and they’re not too proud to admit, now that they’ve returned to being carnivores. (p. 106)

By characterizing vegetarianism as stemming from self-serving arrogance rather than any genuine concern for nonhuman others, the New Carnivore backlash reinforces the validity of meat consumption and scuppers arguments to the contrary as simply a form of self-righteous intolerance.

instance), this true is only in the most narrow and pedantic sense: while some harm may be inevitable, it remains obvious that people can at least do their utmost to avoid killing sentient others through their dietary and lifestyle choices (see Weisberg, 2009, p. 43).

PURITANISM, DOGMATISM AND ABSTINENCE

According to the New Carnivore discourse, vegetarians and animal advocates attain their sense of “moral superiority” through deprivation and self-denial. Pollan (2006a) is particularly damning in his depiction of flesh-rejecters as abstemious moralizers: according to the popular food writer, “a deep current of Puritanism runs through the writings of animal philosophers” (Pollan, 2006a, p. 325). Other gastronomic texts agree with Pollan’s characterisation of vegetarianism as a form of pleasure-denial: a review of the influential New Carnivore cookbook *Nose to tail eating* (Henderson, 2004 [1999]), for example, argues that the offal-promoting book proves that the “true costs” of meat eating “can be paid in a way that bestows pleasure – challenging a puritanical strain in US culture that flourishes even today among certain vegetarians and vegans” (Philpott, 2007, p.108). Other texts concur; vegetarianism can be defined as “abstaining from meat” (Niman, 2009, p. 2; Covington, 2009, no pagination), a renunciation of earthly pleasures in favour of the smug sense of superiority that asceticism can provide. Bourette (2008) even asserts that on her “first brush” with vegetarianism as peer-pressured college student, she went one better than simply renouncing meat and renounced worldly goods as well: “Along with giving up meat, I also took a vow of poverty”, she writes (Bourette, 2008, p. 35).

New Carnivore gastronomy texts are not alone in their characterization of vegetarianism as pleasure-denying or ascetic. As Cole (2008) points out, the language of abstinence and asceticism saturates the mainstream social scientific literature on vegetarianism and veganism. Cole argues that these sorts of ascetic discourses implicitly reproduce a hierarchical ordering of Western diets that place

veganism in particular at the bottom. By reconstituting veg*ans³³ as ascetics and veg*anism as a form of abstention, social research situates veg*anism beyond the scope of “normal” food practices, and thereby replicates a commonsense understanding of veg*anism as too difficult to maintain for many people, and of veg*ans as in some sense exceptional. (2007, pp. 707-8)

The reassertion of ‘common sense’ wisdom regarding the inherent *rightness* of existing power imbalances is, of course, a recurring theme in many backlashes, from the anti-‘PC’ (Davis, 1997) to the anti-feminist (Faludi, 1992) to the neoconservative (Rogers & Lott, 1997). When the ‘strictness’ or ‘deprivations’ of a meat-free diet are emphasised, both veganism and the associated animal advocacy movement are constructed *contra* common sense, as an extreme and difficult regime that can only be maintained by wild-eyed zealots. However, as Cole points out, the language of abstention is rarely invoked by vegetarians or vegans themselves in their own descriptions of their meat-free lifestyle. The characterization of vegetarianism as ascetic in social scientific research discourses, Cole concludes, “can therefore be seen as reiterations of these kinds of assumptions, rather than empirical descriptions of the experience of veg*ans and veg*anism” (2007, p. 709). As usual, the supposedly ‘common sense’ attitude turns out to be anything but, founded not on any ‘natural’ ontology or objective evaluation but instead on a whole pattern of ideological assumptions. There is nothing inherently ascetic about vegetarianism; labelling it as such reveals more about the assumptions of the labeller than it does about the movement itself.

This emphasis on vegetarianism as a form of abstinence leads some New Carnivore writers to fuse together carnal desires of both the gastronomic and sexual

³³ Cole uses veg*an(ism) as a blanket term covering both vegetarianism and veganism.

varieties. Pollan (2006a) overtly equates the desire to eat meat with the desire to engage in heterosexual intercourse:

The human desire to eat meat is not, as the animal rightists would have it, a mere gastronomic preference. By the same token we might call sex – also now technically unnecessary for reproduction – a mere recreational preference. (p. 315)

Pollan's intention in the above passage is to naturalize the desire to eat meat as a biological imperative, thus placing it beyond the scope of social or political criticism. However, his choice to liken the desire to eat meat to the (hetero-)sex drive is revealing. Pollan is not alone in equating meat eating with sex, and vegetarianism with abstinence: an article featured in *Best food writing 2008* (Hughes, 2008), for example, describes a lifelong vegetarian who has decided to eat meat for the first time: in the article, entitled "Losing my carnivirginity: diary of a lapsed vegetarian", the author relates how an older woman "seduced me with steak", thus "ensur[ing] that my first experience would be a memorable one" (Oser, 2008, p. 58). The tendency to link vegetarianism with sexual abstinence reflects the long-standing entanglements of meat with ideas of (male) sexual virility (Adams, 1990; Potts & Parry, 2010; Sobal, 2005; Twigg, 1983). Carnal appetites of one kind tend to be collapsed with carnal appetites of another; in certain discourses the refusal to eat meat is construed as indicative of a refusal to engage in sexual activity (Potts & Parry, 2010: 60). In light of this thorough blurring between the categories of 'vegetarian' and 'celibate', it comes as little surprise that New Carnivore discourses tend to emphasise vegetarianism as a form of abstinence. Furthermore, the New Carnivore linkage between vegetarianism and sexual frigidity closely parallels the 'postfeminist' backlash identified by Faludi (1992); just as the 1980s anti-feminism backlash branded feminism as prim and proscriptive in its attitudes to (hetero-)sexuality,

so too does the New Carnivore backlash brand vegetarianism as puritanical when it comes to forbidding the consumption of dead animal flesh.

Closely related to the notion of vegan abstinence is the idea that veganism is a quasi-religious prohibition or dogma. A *New York Press* cover article on ex-vegetarians (Covington, 2010), is a good case in point. The article, the subheading for which reads: “[t]ired of the no-kill dogma, New York’s vegetarians have come down with some serious bloodlust”, presents vegetarians and vegans as “fundamentalist animal lovers” toting their “dogma against meat-loving foodies” (Covington, 2010, no pagination). The article features quotes from contemporary ex-vegetarians who recount how they were eventually put off the practice by its inherently prohibitionist and moralizing undertones. “I was just sick of that dogma that just seemed outdated,” says one typical interviewee: “If I wanted to eat bacon, I would eat bacon” (ibid.). As animal advocate and New York style icon Joshua Katcher persuasively argues in his online analysis of the article, “[t]he point that Covington tries to make is that veganism and vegetarianism are like annoying religious beliefs based on personal choice, whose proselytizing followers are falling out of style” (Katcher, 2010, no pagination). Other New Carnivore texts similarly present vegetarianism as dogmatic and cultish; celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain, for example, refers to vegans as members of a “Hezbollah-like splinter faction” of vegetarianism (2000, p. 70),³⁴ and Oser (2008) jokingly asks that “the vegetarian gods strike me down” when he admits to eating and enjoying foie gras (p. 329). Just as the popular gastronomic discourse of vegan abstinence is mirrored in the social scientific literature on the subject, so too is the discourse of vegan religious

³⁴ Bourdain’s attempted slur has since been reappropriated by the vegan community: shortly following the publication of Bourdain’s rant, a cooking blog entitled “Hezbollah Tofu” was established, with the aim of ‘veganizing’ all of Bourdain’s recipes. Although the blog has since been removed, a photo gallery of vegan versions of many of Bourdain’s signature dishes can still be found at http://www.flickr.com/groups/hezbollah_tofu/pool/

fervour: sociologist Keith Tester (1992, p. 190), for instance, derisively refers to the animal advocacy movement as a “cult”. This emphasis on vegetarians as an annoyingly vocal religious sect constitutes another facet of the New Carnivore backlash: by depicting the vegetarianism and the animal advocacy movement as puritanical, ascetic cults, the legitimacy of cruelty-free consumption practices is completely undermined, and the ‘commonsense’ status of carnivory is reinforced.

UNFASHIONABLE, OUTDATED, AND JUST PLAIN RUDE

In addition to being cultish and dogmatic, these texts tell us, vegetarianism is also passé; an outdated fad whose popularity has long since peaked. “Once upon a time, vegetarianism or veganism was the calling card of the socially conscious 20-something”, writes Covington (2010, no pagination), whereas “these days, as high-profile chefs... resolutely refuse to cater to an animal product-free world, many New York vegetarians are giving up the greens and developing a taste for flesh” (ibid.). Other New Carnivore texts concur in their characterization of vegetarian as a fad that is now passé (see Bourette, 2008, p. 5; French, 1999, p. 6). In “Killing a Lamb Called Dinner”, (1999, p. 6) French makes a rather snide passing dig at “canvas-shoe wearing vegans”; whilst on television cooking show *Kiwi kitchen* vegetarianism is featured only in an episode devoted to “fads of the eighties” (Till & Fraser, 2007b). A former vegetarian interviewee in Covington’s (2009) article sums up the New Carnivore position succinctly: “Everyone who was eating tofu in 1992 is eating lamb now” (no pagination). As Katcher (2010) points out, “The vegetarian-cum-butchers who[m] Covington interviews wear the ‘former vegetarian’ label like a boy-scout patch: Oh you’re still a vegetarian? Been there, done that” (Katcher, 2010, no pagination). Here

again, the New Carnivore backlash echoes the anti-feminist backlash identified by Faludi (1992): while the ‘postfeminist’ backlash painted feminism as an outdated and unfashionable relic of the 1970s, the ‘meat pride’ backlash similarly characterises vegetarianism as an outdated fad. Several texts attempt to paint a picture of the vegetarian movement as composed of ageing hippies rapidly being replaced by a chic new variety of meat-loving radicals. In *Cleaving* (2009), for instance, Powell describes the young founders of a trendy new butchery as “nouvelle hippies” or “meat hippies” (p. 125), who “hold Humvee drivers and sanctimonious vegetarians in equal contempt” (ibid.) and are “infinitely cooler” than their vegetarian predecessors (p. 125). Powell’s glowing description of “meat hippies” illustrates how the anti-vegetarian backlash seeks to re-imagine New Carnivore meat eating as the successor to quaint, outdated, 1970s-style Puritanism of the “bead-loving longhairs” (Bourette, 2008, p. 6) who advocated vegetarianism. Other New Carnivore texts agree with Powell’s diagnosis: eating local or organic meat is the truly radical act, and the days when vegetarianism was culturally relevant are long gone. In *Real food*, for example, Planck (2006) invokes the spectre of ‘political correctness’ in order to denounce the stranglehold that vegetarian dogma once had over idealistic young radicals in the 1970s: “in those circles, being a vegetarian – better yet, a vegan – was environmentally, nutritionally, and ethically correct”, she rather derisively opines (p. 13). Flash forward thirty years, and “[t]imes have changed. Now the workers buy raw milk, eat local venison, and dream of keeping chickens, goats and cows on their own farms” (ibid.). Vegetarianism, Planck asserts, is simply old hat: whilst vegetarians might have been able to claim the moral high ground in the early seventies, nowadays it is conscientious carnivores with a taste for “natural meat” who are the real revolutionaries (p. 88). Indeed, as another New Carnivore gastronome asserts, dishes

like “Rolled Pig’s Spleen or Lamb’s Brain, Endives and Shallots might be just as radical and transgressive as the complete soy-based proteins promoted by Frances Moore Lappé a generation ago” (Philpott, 2007, p. 108).³⁵ The backlash is very clear on this point: vegetarianism is outmoded and outdated, a relic of a bygone era. The gastronomic radicalism of the new millennium, these texts insist, is not vegetarianism but ‘conscientious’, ‘compassionate’, ‘discerning’, ‘natural’ or simply ‘new’ carnivorousness.

Another way the backlash against vegetarianism functions is through depicting the practice as impolite. In *The omnivore’s dilemma* (2006a), for example, Pollan briefly becomes “a reluctant and, I fervently hoped, temporary vegetarian” (p. 313) so that he “can decide in conscience if I can continue eating meat” (ibid.). Making no attempt to contact any members of the vegetarian community – a glaring discrepancy in a book that filled with interviews and observations about animal farmers of all varieties, as well as a textbook example of the ‘silencing’ component of backlash’s soft repression (Ferree, 2004) – Pollan complains that his vegetarianism makes him feel like a rude guest during meat-eaters’ dinner parties. “On this matter”, he writes, “I’m inclined to agree with the French, who gaze upon any personal dietary prohibition as bad manners” (p. 314).³⁶ Former vegetarian Khyber Oser (2008) has written an entire article about his attempts to “make amends for [the] past slights” that his dietary “prohibition” caused during his tenure as an adolescent exchange student in France (p. 326). Oser revisits his former host families as an adult, resolving to “eat whatever is served” (ibid.) and to “make up for lost meals” (p. 330): “I don’t want to

³⁵ Francis Moore Lappé’s is the author of the bestselling *Diet for a small planet* (1971), an immensely influential book advocating vegetarianism as a means of direct environmentalist action.

³⁶ Chef Gordon Ramsay would certainly agree with Pollan’s denouncement of vegetarianism as bad manners: when a guest on *The f word* complains about the lack of a vegetarian option in the special

be a high-needs guest this time”, he proclaims (ibid.). Although the ex-vegetarian is briefly sad to lose “part of my identity, my uniqueness” (p. 238), for the most part Oser thoroughly enjoys his meat holiday, even indulging in a little goose-liver paté: “I must admit – with my deepest apologies to force-fed fowl the world over – foie gras is amazing” (p. 329), he gushes. However, his “true redemption meal” (p. 330) is of a simpler sort: a roast chicken cooked by his former host-mother. “It felt wonderful to graciously partake in one of her specialties that I hadn’t been able to (didn’t want to) eat the first time around”, he writes (ibid.). Oser is unequivocal in his condemnation of vegetarianism as the height of impoliteness: although it may be “one thing to eat a certain way within the four walls of my own kitchen”, to “impose” those personal foibles by requesting a vegetarian meal when one is dining with others is just plain rude (p. 331). In this instance, the backlash against vegetarianism appeals to social custom in order to defame dead animal-free diets: in standing by their meat boycott, vegetarians are committing an unforgivably impolite social *faux pas*. It is only by realigning his or her values to those upheld by the meat eating majority that the vegetarian can be redeemed.

CONCLUSION

The texts examined in this thesis are far from homogenous, spreading across a range of media and several continents; the anti-vegetarian backlash, however, is a constant thread running throughout them. These New Carnivore texts present vegetarianism as outmoded, unfashionable and unnecessary, and vegetarians themselves as militant

lunch he prepares for her group, an exasperated Ramsay irritably shoots back: “Didn’t you get the message? Vegetarians aren’t welcome here” (Ramsay & Parsons, 2007a).

cultists fervently and self-righteously espousing a dogma of puritanical self-denial. Vegetarianism is relegated to the bottom rung of a constructed hierarchy of eating habits, an ill-mannered and demanding deviance viewed by ordinary folk as an affront to common sense. In reality, however, numbers of self-identified vegetarians and vegans are increasing (Inness, 2006, p. 157) and vegetarianism enjoys an increasingly high public profile. Openly vegan celebrities are now commonplace and vocal,³⁷ pro-vegetarian literature tops the bestsellers list and garners critical accolades (see Safran Foer, 2009), and vegan fashion designers routinely shatter the unfashionable “canvas-shoe wearing vegan” stereotype that French (1999) retrogressively alludes to. More directly threatening to culinary ‘experts’ such as Ramsay and his ilk are the recent flurry of popular vegetarian and vegan cookbooks and dietary guides (Inness, 2006, p. 151), some of which play upon the same ‘anti-PC’ rhetoric that Ramsay himself has found so lucrative: the best-selling dieting book *Skinny bitch* (Freidman & Barnouin, 2005), for instance, mixes diatribes against the meat industry with cheerfully profane language, with the end result being a strong endorsement of dietary veganism. Cultural historian Sherrie Inness writes that “[v]egan writers, chefs and activists have given veganism an appeal that it has lacked in earlier decades” (2006, p. 157), arguing that while vegetarians and vegans were once seen as ‘hippy-dippy’ or pleasure-deniers, meat-free diets are increasingly coming to be seen (in North America, at least) as fashionable, hip and sexy, especially in large cities. It is precisely this increasing visibility and viability of vegetarianism in popular urban culture that the “über-meat pride” (Katcher, 2008, no pagination) texts examined here are lashing back at.

³⁷ Actress Natalie Portman, for example, announced in a Huffington Post op-ed piece that reading *Eating Animals*, Jonathan Safran Foer’s bestselling cogitation on carnivory and vegetarianism, “has turned me from a twenty-year vegetarian into a vegan activist”. See http://www.huffingtonpost.com/natalie-portman/jonathan-safran-foers-ia_b_334407.html

Vegetarianism, however, is not (necessarily) just about diet; it can be a challenge to the dominance and objectification of animals that the act of eating meat represents (McDonald, 2000). Thus, to some media commentators, the “über meat-pride” backlash discernable in New Carnivore discourses is a sign that the animal advocacy movement is at making at least some headway, and that (in certain circumstances) meat-eaters are on the defensive (Katcher, 2008, no pagination). Likening animal advocacy to other social justice movements throughout history, Katcher (2008, no pagination) maintains that the current anti-vegetarian backlash is an inevitable, if infuriating, part of the process of change. Backlash theorists caution that backlashes tend to arise when advances have been small, before changes have been sufficient to dramatically alter the oppression of others (Faludi, 1992, p. xx; Miller, 1976, pp. xv-xvi). Slight though the shift in attitudes towards nonhuman animals may be, however, the presence of a ‘meat pride’ backlash suggest that that change has been nevertheless been felt: as Mallison (1992) points out, “only as you are viewed as a potential challenge to established power arrangements do you feel a backlash” (p. 7).

CONCLUSION

I've seen its life. I respect its death. And I feel okay.

- Peter Rubin (2008, no pagination, cited in Cole, 2009, p. 20)

Animal slaughter is more visible than ever in the new narratives of slaughter that have been the focus of this thesis. The New Carnivore texts examined in the preceding chapters all reinforce the ideology of meat eating by presenting the killing of animals for food as a noble, honest, and inherently *authentic* method of human-animal interaction, whilst depicting vegetarianism as unfashionable, impractical and irredeemably sentimental. Slaughter is constructed as a quasi-mythic rite of passage enabling the protagonists of these texts to shed their 'unrealistic' urban sentimentalism and reconnect to 'Nature', whilst simultaneously accruing the cultural capital associated with being knowledgeable about food lore and performing their own obedience to the norms of both gender and taste. The categories and rites that enable this transformation of animal into food are constantly policed, and ethical objections to animal exploitation and meat eating are delicately sidestepped before being decisively discarded.

However, it should be pointed out that in at least some of these texts, the line between animal advocacy and meat propaganda is somewhat blurred. *Jamie's fowl dinners* (Lazenby & Van Someren, 2008), *The omnivore's dilemma* (Pollan, 2006a), *The compassionate carnivore* (Friend, 2008), and even certain episodes of *The f word* (Herlihy, 2005, 2006, 2007; Lazenby, 2008) have indeed brought ethical concerns regarding intensive farming to a mainstream audience. Chef Gordon Ramsay has

featured exposé-style video footage of sow crates on his cooking show (Ramsay & Smith, 2006b), foodies Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall have both received RSPCA awards, (RSPCA, 2008), and journalist Michael Pollan has received the Humane Society of the United States' highest award for his writing on animal agriculture.³⁸ These New Carnivore luminaries have no doubt played an important part in sustaining the mainstream legitimacy of once-radical endeavours such as 'free-range' or 'organic' produce. Perhaps in highlighting the plight of factory farmed animals and exhorting consumers to find a more ethical solution to their meat habit, these texts do indeed have a positive, practical impact in reducing the suffering of non-human animals.

However, the possibilities for animal welfare reform that these texts seem to promise need to be treated with caution. Bell and Valentine (1997) point out that even "seemingly radical practices can always be recuperated and sold back to us (often with an 'ethical premium' upping the price tag)" (p. 199); the cultural capital accrued through the purchase of expensive 'happy' meat is a clear example of this sort of moral mark-up (see chapter two). Rebranding is usually cheaper than genuine reform: supermarket chains such as Sainsbury's and Walmart both stock animal products that technically adhere to a narrow definition of 'organic' or 'free-range' while simultaneously being produced in a manner completely at odds to the wider ethos of such movements (Pollan, 2006b). Social theorists have expressed doubts that meaningful reforms in farmed animal welfare can in fact be accomplished in the context of a meat-hungry, profit-driven, consumer-capitalist society in which animals retain the legal status of property (see Best et al., 2007; Francione, 2000; Torres, 2007)—certainly, 'happy meat' discourses all too frequently simply "remoralize the exploitation

³⁸ http://www.michaelpollan.com/pollan_presskit.pdf

of farmed animals in such a way as to permit business as usual, with the added ‘value’ of ethical self-satisfaction for the consumer of ‘happy meat’” (Cole, 2009, pp. 2-3).

Doubts about the veracity of meat companies’ advertising claims and the feasibility of significant reform within a consumer-capitalist framework aside, the case could still be made that the ‘happy meat’ promotion so central to many New Carnivore texts does in fact result in a net decrease of animal suffering, however slight. However, as sociologist Matthew Cole (2009) argues,

while ‘animal-centred’ welfare reform and ‘happy meat’ discourses promise a possibility of a somewhat less degraded life for some ‘farmed’ animals, they do so by perpetuating exploitation and oppression and entrenching speciesist privilege by making it less vulnerable to critical scrutiny.

(2009, p. 1)

A *Meatpaper* article entitled “Head games” (Azab Powell, 2008) provides a good example. The author of the article, a former vegetarian, relates how whenever she feels “guilty” about eating meat, or finds herself thinking “longingly of the much simpler moral and culinary calculus of vegetarianism” – for instance, when confronted with a “piglet’s defrosting head, his eyes so sweetly closed. He even had eyelashes” – she can simply remind herself “that human animals live in a mutually beneficial partnership with domestic ones”, and tuck in with gusto (*ibid.*, no pagination). The article forcefully demonstrates how the mere idea of ‘happy meat’ can be invoked in New Carnivore discourses to render speciesist practices immune to critical examination.

Indeed, firsthand knowledge of idyllic ‘free-range’ animal farms and their ‘friendly’ slaughtering methods is frequently cited by New Carnivore protagonists as factors legitimizing their continued consumption of animal flesh – even when that flesh does not come from ‘happy’ animals at all. The author of “Killing a Lamb Called

Dinner” (French, 1999, p. 7), for example, writes that “whenever I eat meat, the reverence I felt eating the lamb I raised stays with me” without stipulating whether that meat is from free-range or factory farmed animals: such a distinction seems less important than the simple recognition that the meat she is eating did indeed come from a living animal. Even award-winning animal welfare crusader Michael Pollan is unwilling to give up factory-farmed meat altogether – he enjoys meat-centred dinner parties and franks at the ball-park far too much to stick to any blanket ban on factory farmed meat (2006a, pp. 313-314). Rather than actually demanding better conditions for farmed animals, the New Carnivore project all too frequently simply fetishizes and commodifies a sense of ‘reverence’ for the animal-that-meat-once-was.

The animal welfare reform promised by many New Carnivore texts is further obstructed by their insistence that it is each consumer’s inalienable right to find a personal balance between taste and ethics. As Catherine Friend makes clear at the beginning of *The compassionate carnivore* (2008), “There’s only one rule you need to keep in mind as you approach the idea of becoming a more conscientious, compassionate carnivore, and here it is: the first being on whom you must practice compassion is yourself” (p. 7). Calling any absolute refusal to eat feedlot-raised meat a counterproductive form of “hysteria” that “compassionate carnivores need to fight” (p. 199), Friend emphasises that “there is no right or wrong way” to become a more ethical meat-eater (p. 193). “Everyone draws a different line”, the author maintains, explaining that although she herself has “drawn the line at [factory farmed] pork”, she is “not an absolutist”: she keeps a jar of intensively farmed bacon bits in her fridge door because “some days I just don’t have the time” to fry up a non-factory farmed alternative, and will happily eat the flesh of factory farmed pigs if she “find[s] herself in a social situation where the host will be upset if I decline” (p. 199). Similarly, although she

advocates choosing vegetarian dishes when dining out at restaurants that serve intensively farmed meat, “if you’re in a restaurant and hate all the meatless options, don’t flail yourself with a bamboo cane because you chose factory meat” (p. 238). Friend herself continues to eat factory farmed meat in about one out of every four of her meals; during the final few weeks of writing *The compassionate carnivore*, she reports that her intensively-farmed meat consumption increased to three out of every four meals, as the author found herself too busy to cook from scratch and had to rely instead on pre-packaged frozen meat meals (pp. 240-241). Friend is not at all bothered by this dissonance: “I accept that there’s a gap between my real and ideal and just move on”, she pragmatically shrugs (p. 241).

The ‘meet your meat’ projects discussed above, then, reinforce rather than subvert the legitimacy of meat eating in consumer capitalist societies. Appealing to the sensibilities of urban middle-class meat-eaters, the New Carnivore project reassures consumers that they need not give up the flesh they are accustomed to eating. Rather, they simply encourage consumers to buy ‘organic’ or ‘free range’ products wherever convenient, or even merely cultivate a mentality of reverence, in order to continue eating meat as always and wash one’s hands of any guilt or complicity in animal suffering. What is involved is essentially an adjustment of perception; in this regard, the New Carnivore project echoes the new age and self-help movements, emphasising the importance of ‘feeling ok about yourself’ for living whatever life you’re living, rather than actually changing the way you live it. In purchasing ‘happy meat’ (however infrequently), the busy consumer symbolically reenacts the rites of reconnection with animals and nature that the slaughter narrative protagonists have gone through. In this way, an underlying attitude of reverence and good faith towards ‘food animals’ can persist even when the animals eaten by the consumer are mostly factory farmed ones:

indeed, the consistent rejection of all factory farmed meat is derided as a form of hysterical absolutism in the New Carnivore discourse. Constructing elaborate myths of rural utopias and loving killers to present animal slaughter as natural and inevitable, these texts repackage meat eating and sell it back to middle-class aspiring gastronomes. The slaughterhouse walls may have become (somewhat) transparent with the rise of the New Carnivores, but the slaughter continues unabated.

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