

Margret Grebowicz

When Species Meat: Confronting Bestiality Pornography

In *The Pornography of Meat*, Carol Adams makes the argument that feminism in general, and the critique of pornography in particular, ought to address the condition of animals.¹ She points out that animals have been historically excluded from feminist inquiry because of the feminist rejection of denigrating comparisons between women and animals. The feminist message has been “we are not animals!”, an investment in rightful belonging to humanity right down to the bumper sticker that reads, “feminism is the radical notion that women are people too.” I follow Adams in her demand to reinscribe the animal into feminist inquiry, but critiques like hers lack a robust interrogation of the ontology of animal being in general. Contemporary discourses of posthumanism explore “the animal” as a contingent, historical, and contested concept in dynamic and co-constitutive relation to “the human,” and raise possibilities for new ontologies of animality (see not only Haraway, but also Derrida, Latour, and Agamben). In what follows, I argue that, in this posthumanist context, the feminist task is to construct theoretical structures in which to begin to think not just animality in general, but animal sexualities in particular, from the vantage point of a critical rethinking of “the human.”

My particular subject of inquiry will be bestiality pornography, a discourse which thus far has been dealt with only in the margins (if at all) of both animal studies and feminist critiques of porn. Though the ethics of sexual relations between humans and animals warrant serious research and discussion, I am less concerned with them in this particular project, focusing instead on the interspecies imaginary that bestiality porn produces. I firstly examine the role of this imaginary in the ongoing construction of two related fields: that of femininity on one hand and of feminism on the other, and secondly attempt to organize theoretical resources for thinking about—and living alongside—animals as active co-agents in the production of meanings, rather than passive screens for our anthropomorphic projections.

I. Gendering animals. Not surprisingly, Catherine MacKinnon’s recent contribution to animal studies literature focuses in part on the use of animals in pornography (2007, 320-22). She describes the relation of the law to animals as gendered, which in her analysis means that animals are feminized and women are figured in terms of “animal nature.” Both groups are subordinated to the law of humans, the most powerful of

which are biological men. This is most obvious, she writes, in the use of animals in commercial pornography, where animals and women occupy the same subordinate position. Both groups are victims of an unequal power relation, which is subsequently eroticized. The actors are men, the objects acted upon are women and animals. However, a quick survey of internet bestiality porn shows imagery and narratives which do not align neatly with MacKinnon's schema. In fact, there is quite a variety of imagery available, making up an internally inconsistent kaleidoscope of constructs and norms, and indicating that bestiality pornography tells us little about the practice of bestiality. An analysis of the semiotics of gender particular to both cultural practices yields important information about how we view women and how we view animals.

In mythology and throughout the history of art and literature, images of women with animals (and masculine beast-men) are much more frequent than images of men with animals. But if we take commercial pornography to be a qualitatively unique, historically and materially situated phenomenon of culture, rather than, say, just another genre of literature, the proliferation of zoo porn cannot be read as just a natural extension of the story of Leda and the Swan or the Rape of Europa. How do narratives of interspecies desire change when mediated by this particular technology and logic of democratization of information? The most widely available bestiality (also called "zoo") pornography depicts women having sex with male horses and dogs, two species which have evolved in close proximity to humans, and which appear as figures of masculinity throughout our culture. Indeed, horses and dogs almost always appear as the male actors in the pornography itself, situated in narratives in which animals are substitutes for men where men are missing ("horny farm girl needs horse cock," "teen's first time with dog," etc.). What is eroticized in this imagery is not the power difference between the male viewer and the animal, which may be trained or forced into doing (almost) anything, but something very different: the size and virility of the horse, the eagerness of the dog, etc. Intense anthropomorphism fuels these narratives, rather than the eroticization of the power of humans over animals on which MacKinnon focuses. There is also extensive "gay" zoo porn involving animals, with men performing the same acts as the women in the "straight" zoo porn—giving fellatio and receiving (in this case) anal intercourse. In fact, the very designations "straight" and "gay" in this context signify properly only if we assume that the horses and dogs substitute quite directly and unproblematically for men. This type of imagery makes up the majority of bestiality porn on the internet.

How do I know? I looked. In fact, the account I offer here is a result of a deliberate decision to look at/for porn sites in the way a casual consumer of internet porn would: searching for free imagery, taking “tours” of paysites, registering as a user of file sharing sites, and just clicking around, getting a general impression of what is available and under what conditions. I kept a log of the search terms: animal sex, bestiality porn, zoo porn, zoo sex, animal porn, and once I was more familiar with the terminology: farm sex, free beast toons, animal sex galleries, bestiality porn share, monster hentai, and so on. Rather than statistics about the production and consumption of this subgenre, I was interested in the intersection of this particular technological mediation with graphic narratives of inter-species desire on an experiential level. As post-Foucauldian philosophers of subject formation, we should attend in particular to the subjective and intersubjective effects of the circulation of this discourse. *Who are the consumers of this imagery?* is a very different question than *what is it like to be a consumer of this imagery?*, and a philosophical inquiry into the production of patriarchal and naively humanist subjectivity conceives of the empirical in terms of the latter.

The more one clicks, the more nuanced a story emerges. There is another kind of narrative widely available, one in which the women are so insatiable that “they’ll fuck anything!” Sites like *www.fuckthmall.com* and others invite viewers to watch women with “all” animals, as many different kinds as possible, penetrating themselves with snakes, eels, and other fish. The story here seems to be a bit different: the women are even more insatiable and out of control sexually, while the masculine element is not quite as present here as in the bodies of the dogs and horses, often for the simple reason that we are no longer watching penises, but entire animals being inserted into orifices, animals like fish, onto whom it is more difficult to project anthropomorphic fantasies. In this kind of material, the animality of the animals is emphasized. The insatiable women will do anything to satisfy their needs, including fellating “filthy” dog penises, for instance (see *www.bestialityfacial.com*). The recurrence of the word “filthy” is important to note, because it serves to remind the viewer that this is precisely an animal penis, not a human one, marking a departure from the narratives which rely on the power of anthropomorphic projection. For instance, *www.beasttoons.com* shows a cartoon woman dressed up in a maid’s outfit and with a gorilla looking up her skirt. She wonders to herself, “A gorilla is so similar to a human. I wonder if he can get me pregnant?” A few web pages later, the same site shows the same cartoon woman straddling a bucket which houses a chicken, whose head is up her vagina.

Finally, there are occasional, rare images of human penises in animal vaginas (usually those of dogs or sheep, though there are also photos of penises inside chickens). On *www.zoohan.net* there are multiple images of men having intercourse with animals, but they are tagged with the words “extreme” and “shocking.” Following these photos to further links, one can also find the occasional photograph of either an entire forearm inside a cow’s vagina, or even just photographs of animal genitalia alone, but with a very different appearance from today’s glossy porn. They tend to be single images, rather than entire galleries or films, and the same image gets circulated among multiple sites. The fact that many are yellowed indicates that they are scanned prints, not digital photographs. They are shot in the dark with flash, usually very close up and never showing a person’s face. In fact, all of the imagery of this sort that I encountered had the appearance of home-grown, amateur porn, or possibly even images made in veterinary contexts and not intended for pornographic use, but in any case, not commercial porn produced under conditions of some degree of regulation and budget. In this pornography, the animal is always on the receiving end of the sex, its vagina or anus clearly substituting for that of a woman.

Thus, in contrast to MacKinnon’s claim that bestiality pornography invariably feminizes animals just as it feminizes women, it appears that there are at least three different classes of bestiality porn, in which the semiotics of gender function in different ways. To speak in broad terms, in the first class, the animals become “men.” In the second, the animals become “animals” and it is the species difference which is eroticized. I would like to suggest that in this, the least anthropomorphic of the constructs, the animal is almost genderless, or at least that the erotics of the narratives and images arise not from gender difference, but from species difference. In the third, the animals are “women.” Thus, we can see more than one distinct way of anthropomorphically gendering animals, and, in the case of the animalizing of animals, we encounter a de-gendering. How does this, a more nuanced reading of the gender semiotics of bestiality porn, affect feminist critiques of porn, and how does it speak in particular to a critique of this imagery as a site where the oppression of women and that of animals intersect?

MacKinnon’s critique of the pornographic feminization of animals seems more like an engagement with bestiality rather than with bestiality porn. The cultural practices are quite different. The most significant difference for the purposes of my analysis is that the majority of zoo porn shows women having sex with animals, while real-life, prosecuted cases of bestiality involve men almost exclusively. The legal literature as well as bestiality (also called “zoophilia”) blogs indicate that the people having sex with animals off-camera are in fact men. Our cartoon maid has a chicken’s head in her

vagina, but, as the blogs indicate, when humans have sex with chickens it is a man inserting his penis into the hen's cloaca, an encounter which is usually fatal for the hen. The kinds of rare images tagged as "extreme" are thus anything but—they show the banal truth of the sex with animals that humans actually practice. In contrast, the women having vaginal or oral sex with horse penises, at the forefront of every "zoo" or "farm" paysite, make rare appearances in the legal literature (one recent exception, the 2008 case of Diane Whalen and Donald Siegfried, in which the Oklahoma couple was charged with bestiality, was a matter of porn production: Whalen's son discovered numerous films which Siegfried had shot of the family dogs having sex with Whalen²). This is significant, since gender does not officially signify in the legal prosecution of bestiality cases, in the case of either the humans or the animals involved. Moral debates about bestiality also obscure this fact, with blanket references to "humans" and "animals", as if neither were gendered, and as if gender-as-power-difference were not at work in sex acts between humans and animals.

This is certainly not the only instance in which porn does not depict the realities of sex. Lesbian porn for straight male viewers and incest porn are just two subgenres about which it is common knowledge that the actors are in fact acting, faking pleasure in the interests of a narrative, acting as "real" lesbians or members of the same family in order to produce a fantasy, in contrast to amateur straight porn, whose appeal lies in the fact (is it?) that non-actors are experiencing real pleasure. However, one must be careful about the use of the word "real" in the context of the pornography debates. MacKinnon has warned at length about the tendency to figure porn as fantasy, when the sex taking place in order to produce the "fantastic" images is in fact very real. Thus, my own distinction here between bestiality porn and "real" bestiality is quite tenuous. It may be more helpful to distinguish between sex with animals for money and sex with animals for personal pleasure, focusing on distinctions between intentions, motives, pleasures, and privileges, rather than any ontological difference between more or less "real" events.

However mediated and "fake" zoo porn may or not may be, zoo sites have a particular way of linking onto websites about off-camera bestiality practices. They often piggyback on "information" sites about zoophilia, defined as "love" relationships with animals, usually to the exclusion of humans and including sex. Although zoophilia websites actively disassociate themselves from porn sites and make strong distinctions between bestiality practices and the production of bestiality porn, openly condemning the use of animals in porn as "cruelty" and "exploitation," the porn sites' invariable

insistence that what they show is real (“100% real animal sex!!!”) works to reinforce the connection. Bestiality is presented as something which must be kept secret, like the use of internet porn itself. Websites open in a sea of warnings and the experience is that of entering ever deeper levels of something forbidden, when in fact there is nothing illegal under US law about the viewing of most pornography, including bestiality porn and virtual child porn (most of which remains decriminalized in the US since the Supreme Court decision of 2002).

At the same time, however, because this imaginary is one of repression and the failure of society to understand the viewer’s “needs,” it is also of community, file sharing, and underground trafficking of information among users who form a network. It is presented as an instance of the democratization of knowledge, with the internet making access to knowledge easier, faster, and less expensive than ever.³ *www.beastwiki.com*, a site devoted to reviews of all of the bestiality paysites available, looks exactly like *Wikipedia.com*, except that the links are red and not blue. Sites like *www.zooshare.com* are not only for file sharing, but for posting blogs, commenting on posts, reviewing and rating the pornography, while users often describe themselves as keeping a secret, hiding their true selves, and being deeply misunderstood. *www.beastforum.com* invites users to “share you opinions, creations, and experiences with others,” and on *www.beasttoons.com*, in the very same frame in which the aforementioned French maid cartoon protagonist encounters the gorilla, she promises us an educational experience: “with your membership you’ll also get full access to our extensive zoophilia database that covers everything you want to know about animal sex.” Blogs often include expressions of gratitude for the forum, a place where users can finally show their true selves. While some blog posts discuss the considerable challenges of sharing one’s desire for zoo porn with a sex partner, typically a new girlfriend who might be scared off, others post about something very different, namely the difficulties of a life in which animals themselves are the sex partners. Thus, the connection between bestiality porn and bestiality is further reinforced by this imaginary of persecuted subculture, shared understanding, and access to important-but-forbidden information.

II. Meaningful consent in the case of animals. In the US most states have laws against sex with animals, and of those, a majority deems the act a felony, not a misdemeanor. Most states classify bestiality under their animal cruelty statutes.⁴ If significant money is involved, the criminality extends to property damage, as in the case in which an Illinois man confessed to having had intercourse with the mares in the stables in which he was employed over the course of 20 years.⁵ MacKinnon (2007) asks the important question why laws against sex with animals exist at all. Her answer takes

us out of the problematic in which both the law and so much of animal studies are explicitly located, that of suffering, and places us squarely in the problematic more proper to feminist jurisprudence surrounding rape and bodily integrity, namely that of consent.⁶ Since “people cannot be sure” that animals consent to the sex, the law exists to protect the animals. More specifically, she writes, “we cannot know if their consent is meaningful” (321). And yet, there are clearly cases when we know that the animals do not give their consent to the sex: in the Illinois mare case, for instance, the man was caught after 20 years of intercourse with the horses only because one of the mares died in the act. He had bound her in such a way as to constrict her neck, presumably in hopes of successfully immobilizing her, and the mare had fought the intercourse so hard that she had strangled herself. Or, to take a less dramatic example, in much dog porn the animal is lying down, being fellated or mounted by a woman, often with the help of at least one other person, so that the whole scene is obviously highly mediated and reads as forced. When animals fight back or show their indifference, it seems easy to make the claim that they do not consent. MacKinnon writes, “Do animals dissent from human hegemony? I think they often do. They vote with their feet by running away. They bite back, scream in alarm, withhold affection, approach warily, and swim off” (324). So when exactly is it that “we cannot be sure” about their consent? It is when animals appear as willing participants in these acts that the question of consent becomes complicated. We know that they say no, but it is much less thinkable that they might say yes.

Indeed, in zoo porn, only those animals that are figured as intelligent enough to be agents to some degree are the ones that may be believably presented as consenting to the sex. This is most prevalent in the imagery which genders the animals male. A dog mounts a kneeling woman from behind, or sniffs between her legs, or the horse ejaculates in her mouth—this is where the issue of consent takes on considerable ambiguity. The presentation of the animal as an agent in the sex becomes believable, and the animals are continuously described as “lucky,” “hungry,” and “horny.” Numerous sites advertise photo galleries accompanied by narratives of dogs “raping” innocent girls or other “first timers.” In all of the sites classified as “animal rape,” the animal, usually a dog, is present as the perpetrator, not the victim, of a rape. This rape narrative sometimes depends on claims about the animal’s intelligence, as in *www.zooshock.com*, which shows photos of a woman having intercourse with a pig. The accompanying narrative states that she was raped by the pig in a shed, a claim which is then supported by the following sentence, which explains that pigs are among the most intelligent animals on the planet, comparable to dogs. The trajectory from

intelligence to sexuality is clear: the more intelligent the animal, the more credible the narrative in which the animal is a sexual agent.

However, when we compare this pornographic valuing of the intelligence and complexity of “higher order animals” with the ways in which this densely gendered inter-species imaginary manifest itself legally, we encounter some contradictions. MacKinnon points out that “commercial pornography alone shows far more sex with animals than is ever prosecuted for the acts required to make it” (321). Indeed, though I will not offer a review of the legal literature concerning bestiality cases, it is striking that the sheer amount of bestiality porn on the internet is disproportionately large in comparison to the number of bestiality cases which make the daily or weekly news. It is also significant that the cases which do make the news rarely describe the kind of sex that makes up the majority of the porn. Women receiving cunnilingus from dogs (and occasionally cats), women penetrated by dogs and horses, and occasionally pigs and goats, women performing fellatio on dogs, horses, goats, even camels—these acts are almost never prosecuted. Why might this be? I imagine that MacKinnon would answer: because the law, with its First Amendment absolutism, turns a blind eye to whatever is required to make pornography, which it is committed to protecting. This is why legislators do not go after the people engaged in the various acts of “sodomy” required to make porn. In other words, MacKinnon’s answer to the question does not depend on the contents of the imagery at all, or on its semiotics of gender, but on her reading of the Supreme Court’s investment in the First Amendment. MacKinnon would argue that, just as the very real unwanted sex that must take place for porn to exist at all is virtually unprosecutable, the sex with animals remains invisible to the law. Her equation would be simple: we don’t prosecute bestiality just like we don’t prosecute rape, because we hate animals just like we hate women.

Once again, an analysis of the semiotics of gender at work in the discourses yields a different answer. The legal landscape is ostensibly void of gender distinctions when dealing with bestiality, but this is not the case de facto. If MacKinnon is right that US anti-bestiality law exists to protect animals from sex to which they do not consent, then it follows that the law is harsher on sex acts with animals in which the anthropocentric projection onto the animal is that of feminine vulnerability and passive receptivity. When the projection is of masculinity, on the other hand, as in the case of the acts required to make most animal pornography, acts which go unprosecuted, the law appears much softer. The message seems to be that if the animals are doing things that any red-blooded heterosexual man would enjoy doing, then we are no longer

dealing with cruelty. To put it bluntly, the law is more able to recognize sex with animals as cruelty when the animals are figured as women, rather than men, and is thus more likely to prosecute “real” bestiality (in which men have intercourse with predominantly female animals) than the acts required to make porn (in which women have intercourse with predominantly male animals). For this reason, it could be argued, the majority of the real sex in bestiality porn goes unprosecuted.

This is consistent with MacKinnon’s reading of the legal treatment of rape in general: the easier it is to establish a lack of consent, the easier the rape conviction. And as MacKinnon points out, we know when animals say no. The harder it is to prove that no consent took place, the harder the rape conviction. It is here that MacKinnon’s claim that the relation of the law to animals is gendered must be turned on its head. It is gendered, but not in the sense that the animals are necessarily feminized. On the contrary, in the making of the majority of bestiality internet porn, they are twice masculinized: once in the pornographic imagery, where they substitute for men and are (more or less believably) figured as taking pleasure in the activities, and again when the laws against sex with animals are not enforced specifically in the context of the acts required to make the pornography. The animals are made into men on two levels: once, in the pornographic narratives and a second time, in the law’s blindness to the criminal acts required to produce the narratives. The resulting equation is a bit different than MacKinnon’s: when we do prosecute bestiality, it is when the animals are figured as women and not when they are figured as men. Even as the law does not gender animals (bestiality is defined as sex between humans and animals, regardless of gender), a very predictable semiotics of gender is at work in its enforcement. Before the law, the animals’ “desire” is naturalized, just as men’s sexual response is naturalized. In contrast to the pornographic narrative, where desire is linked to intelligence and complexity, and so results in the anthropomorphic projection of agency, the legal functions according to a logic in which the willing animal, as virile masculinity, is exhaustively programmed by nature and thus incapable of agency.

III. Denaturalizing animal sex. MacKinnon is perhaps best known for her analysis of meaningful consent in the case of women. She claims that in conditions of social inequality in which power differences are eroticized and women’s subjugation is coextensive with their positive value as sex objects, there is no possibility of women’s meaningful consent to sex (“Privacy vs. Equality: Beyond Roe vs. Wade” in MacKinnon 1987). This is often caricatured as her “all sex is rape” thesis. This does not mean that women cannot consent to sex. Clearly, they do so all the time. But MacKinnon asks us

to consider how “meaningful” this consent is, how seriously we ought to take it given the cultural production of femininity as sexually available and servile. Though she has famously been criticized for denying women any possibility of sexual agency, what interests me more immediately is the paradox to which this argument leads, one which is useful for thinking through consent and thus sexual agency in the case of animals.

Note that the law does not protect entities that cannot consent, like sex dolls, vibrators, doorknobs, or watermelons, with which it is not illegal to engage in sexual activity. The only kind of creature with whom sex might be prohibited is the kind of creature that is capable of some degree of consent or dissent, an *agent* whose agency and consent cannot be established conclusively because of external mitigating factors, but an agent nonetheless. In other words, only a being that is capable of consent is capable of denying its consent and thus being raped. Thus, there is something logically problematic about the very idea of the being that *always* consents (as in MacKinnon’s description of the construction the feminine in the legal imaginary, which, as she demonstrates, makes it so difficult to prosecute rape in the case of adult, sexually active women), as well as the being that never consents (the child, the animal, the mentally disabled adult).

In order to escape this paradox and develop a more nuanced account of sexual agency across the board, we must pool feminist and posthumanist theoretical resources. This, I propose, points to the future of feminist animal studies: the possibility of thinking the agency (erotic, ethical, semiotic) of animals in sexual practices, in an effort to counteract the received claim that they are exhaustively programmed by “nature.” Feminism has barely begun to denaturalize or queer animal sexualities. For instance, Carol Adams persuasively argues that the sexual objectification and consumption of animals and of women follow the same models. She proposes that feminism should approach the animalizing of women and the feminization of animals in patriarchal culture as a unique opportunity, namely the chance to study the oppression of animals as a particular symptom of androcentric social organization. However, Adams’s work on the visual culture aspect of meat consumption is devoted to exposing the logic and structure of a pattern of oppression and exploitation, a position which depends on one important assumption: that humans are the only actors in this practice. The structure of her argument follows an identifiable Second Wave feminist formula in which power and privilege are pretty unambiguously distinguishable from subjugation. In that sense, it offers rather limited resources for a post- or neo-Foucauldian feminist analysis of power, desire, and norms, of the production of truths and practices, and the complexities of the care of the self.⁷

What happens if, in contrast, we begin from the assumption that animals are actors, too, insofar as they are the kinds of beings that can not only deny consent, but give it? The position appears dangerous at first, as if one were on the side of the contemporary zoophilia communities I describe here, which also rely heavily on a particular rhetoric of animal consent and even “pleasure.” How might we begin to distinguish between the sexual agency we anthropomorphically project onto animals (in the production of porn, for instance) and their real sexual agency, the very thing which renders them rapeable (at least in human legal terms) in the first place? How to think critically about the law which purports to protect animals without in the course of our critique leaving them wide open to exploitation? And furthermore, what kind of account of agency is available in a post-Enlightenment world in which we have abandoned human exceptionalism, in which we take evolutionary biology seriously, but also in which we no longer conflate “nature” with “programming”? What is the relationship between consent, agency, and responsibility in this posthumanist landscape? And finally, does this starting point commit us to the progressive potential of bestiality?

Haraway’s latest book, *When Species Meet*, offers an ontology of the political subject which includes non-human animals, or to put it differently, demonstrates that the inclusion of non-human animals in the body politic will call for the radical transformation of that body. She, too, reminds us of the reasons animals were actively excluded from much early feminist inquiry, in this case Marxist feminism :⁸ “They tended to be all too happy with categories of society, culture, and humanity and all too suspicious of nature, biology, and co-constitutive human relationships with other critters.” Feminism never questioned the reserving of the categories of desire and sexuality for human beings (73-4). But surely, it cannot be by accident that the comparisons between animals and women are made in pornographic contexts in particular. Neither is it accidental that animals are gendered in pornography. The patriarchal logic which depends on an assumption of woman’s animal nature makes this assumption specifically in the context of sexuality, insofar as we imagine that sex is where humans are at their most animal. And we do imagine this: in his controversial piece “Heavy Petting,” Peter Singer actually defends bestiality on the grounds that “there are many ways in which we cannot help behaving just as animals do — or mammals, anyway — and sex is one of the most obvious ones. We copulate, as they do. They have penises and vaginas, as we do, and the fact that the vagina of a calf can be sexually satisfying to a man shows how similar these organs are” (2001). According to Singer’s logic, the zoophile’s desire for the animal is always already proof of our

animality. Zoophilia itself becomes a symbol of the breakdown of human exceptionalism and perhaps even proof of evolution.

But clearly, this collapsing of desire into “nature” is not where feminism will wish to end up. If the received wisdom is that woman=sex and sex=animality, and if feminism today must reinscribe the animal it has exiled from its literature, *then it must put at the forefront of this reinscription the complex naturecultural problematic of animal sexualit(ies) in particular*. Just as feminism has interrogated, historicized, and unhinged the connections between femininity and sexuality in an effort to denaturalize exploitative sexual practices, it must do so in the case of animality. The idea of denaturalizing animal sexuality is obviously problematic, at the very least because it complicates our relationship to the discourse which offers the most detailed information about non-reproductive sex among animals, namely animal behavior studies. Feminist theory will need to do much more than cite studies by empirical scientists which describe, for instance, same-sex sexual behaviors among some primates, manatees, certain whale species, and those famous big horn sheep that recently made the news.⁹ It will have to also examine the political and ontological commitments which underpin projects seeking to naturalize non-reproductive sex among animals.

One important task is to thematize and explore the difference between the anthropocentric projection of consent (as in the pornographic narratives, for instance), and the real agency of non-human animals, the agency which renders them active partners in interspecies sex and thus in the production of the posthuman sexual imaginary. What, if any, epistemological resources do we have for making this distinction? In Derrida’s *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, sexuality is precisely the site of the human-animal difference and the site where both humans and animals are denaturalized. Rather than challenging the modern anthropomorphic opposition between human and animal by pointing out how very animal we are in our sexualities, as Singer does above, Derrida performs a contrasting gesture. He exposes the human as a highly mediated philosophical construct by exploring the degree to which animality poses the ultimate limit to the human. The animal is “more other than any other,” and it is so precisely “on the threshold of sexual difference. More precisely, of sexual differences” (36). Animals thus become not just another “other” for feminism to include in its ever-expanding list of oppressed identities, but quite possibly the question mark itself, the philosophical problem of sexuality par excellence. Engaging philosophically with animality means engaging with the idea of sexual differences in the plural, a bottomless heterogeneity of sexual possibilities. This undermines the modern fantasy that humans

are on one side of the divide and a homogeneous group called “animals” is on the other. Derrida writes,

Philosophers have always judged and all philosophers have judged that limit to be single and indivisible, considering that on the one side of that limit there is an immense group, a single and fundamentally homogeneous set that one has the right... to mark as opposite, namely the set of the Animal in general.... It applies to the whole animal kingdom with the exception of the human (40-1).

Animality, understood as the site of limitless sexual differences, overturns this received order and allows a feminist engagement with animals that does not fall prey to fantasies of a Nature from which Politics is absent.

Haraway’s *Companion Species Manifesto*, an account of the complexity of dog-human interdependence and co-evolution which argues for the necessity of a posthuman or animal political ontology, ends with a rather racy sex scene. She makes the case that dogs are not “natural,” using the example of complex, unique sexual play between two dogs, one of which is spayed:

None of their sexual play has anything to do with remotely functioning heterosexual mating behavior—no efforts of Willem to mount, no presenting of an attractive female backside, not much genital sniffing, no whining and pacing, none of that reproductive stuff. No, here we have pure polymorphous perversity that is so dear to the hearts of all of us who came of age in the 1960s reading Norman O. Brown. The 110 pound Willem lies down with a bright look in his eye. Cayenne, weighing in at 35 pounds, looks positively crazed as she straddles her genital area on top of his head, her nose pointed towards his tail, presses down and wags her backside vigorously. I mean hard and fast. He tries for all he’s worth to get his tongue on her genitals, which inevitably dislodges her from the top of his head. It looks a bit like the rodeo, with her riding a bronco and staying on as long as possible. They have slightly different goals in this game, but both are committed to the activity. Sure looks like eros to me. Definitely not agape (99).

Haraway's political philosophy depends on the claim that humans and dogs (and many other animals) are semiotic agents¹⁰ in the production of naturecultures. The central role played by non-reproductive sex play is crucial to her position, which seeks to undermine the notion that animals are programmed by nature while humans are not (and insofar as they are, they are animals). Haraway denaturalizes animal sex at the same moment that she endows the dogs with not just desire, but sexual agency: "they invented this game" (100). Note the importance of the claim that this is eros and not agape, perversity and not necessity—in short, a certain sense of indeterminacy, possibility, rather than bondage to a stable and knowable script of practices and significations.

Invention—in the form of non-reproductive sexual practice—appears here as an alternative to a view of nature as programming, as ordered, predictable and thus controllable. It plays the same role in Haraway's text as the limitless plurality of sexualities does in Derrida's. In the work of these theorists the animal understood as a sexual agent becomes the figure of radical possibility and openness. If bestiality is defensible, it is so not on the grounds that as animals we are all programmed by nature (and so both the bitch in heat and the man who enjoys penetrating her can't help themselves), but that posthuman sexuality means precisely the possibility of agency, resistant practices, queer bodies, and culturally unintelligible pleasures, and that within this landscape no practice may be prohibited preemptively. As philosophers know, however, agency does not erase power structures or protect the agent from exploitation. We also know that with agency comes responsibility, which means that no practice among agents is immune to ethical examination. It is precisely when we take animals to be agents that interspecies sex becomes irreducible to questions of pleasure for the parties involved (pace the zoophile's insistence on the pleasure of the animal partner). Thus, while a denaturalizing of animal sexualities makes it impossible to prohibit bestiality preemptively, it remains possible (and perhaps becomes even more urgent) to make post-emptive prohibitions, upon ethical examination of cultural constructs, beliefs, and practices in the presence of existing power structures.

In contrast to the view that would have us believe that animality=sexuality=nature=woman, posthuman animality explodes the universalizing category of Nature as homogeneous and predictable. It is this figure of the animal with which feminist critique should engage today precisely because it unmistakably announces that we don't know what we thought we knew about any of the players in the above equation--about sex, women, and least of all about "nature." The task, then, may be more accurately described not as re-inscription of the animal in feminism, but as the

inscription of a wholly new imaginary of animality, the condition for the possibility of new imaginaries of gender.

Notes

I'd like to thank Cara O'Connor for her insightful commentary on this piece and for Anne O'Byrne for organizing the "Feminists and Other Animals" symposium at SUNY Stony Brook, February 2009.

1. See also the account of zoos as an instance of pornography in Acampora (2005).
2. http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/article.aspx?subjectid=11&articleid=20080708_11_Avete78514&allcom=1
3. For more on this subject, see my article "Democracy and Pornography: On Speech, Right, Privacies, and Pleasures in Conflict," forthcoming in *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 26:1.
4. <http://www.animallaw.info/articles/ovuszoophilia.htm>
5. <http://lists.envirolink.org/pipermail/ar-news/Week-of-Mon-20030804/004730.html>
6. My point is not that consent is a more important category, or that consent and agency are the most significant concerns to raise in the problematic of animal sexuality. My point is more modest: that sexual agency is an important problem to raise about animals from a *feminist* perspective.
7. Take the ubiquitous "Rabbit Vibrator" (made famous by the television show "Sex and the City"), which has a soft little vibrating animal attachment, working to stimulate the clitoris while the penis-shaped shaft does the work of penetration. The animals depicted are almost exclusively rabbits (hence the name) and dolphins, with occasional appearances by mice and seahorses. These products are marketed (apparently with great success) exclusively to women, arguably to sexually self-aware, adventurous, perhaps even queer or "fluid" women. The animals in play are sexy (rabbits and dolphins) or diminutive (mice and seahorses), and note the absence of any figures of masculine virility, like dogs or horses. What exactly is happening here? This is one example of a cultural phenomenon which Adams's particular way of reading the

intersection of women and animals in pop culture does not help us to analyze robustly (though, to be fair, her own analysis is concerned exclusively with the welfare of material animals, not semiotic puzzles like this one).

8. A self-described Marxist feminist, MacKinnon nevertheless offers an important resource for this conversation by opening the space for the question of meaningful consent of animals. How might an analysis of commercial bestiality pornography benefit from Haraway's writing about labor, inequality, relations of use, and freedom in the context of the work animals do in experimental labs (2007, 73-77)?

9. <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1582336,00.html>>

10. In future projects, I hope to work out exactly what is meant by "agency" in a Harawayan schema. This remains a difficult and ambiguous term in her work.

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