

It IS about Chicken: Chick-fil-A, Posthumanist Intersectionality, and Gastro-Aesthetic Pedagogy

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Dan Cathy, CEO of the fast-food chain, Chick-fil-A, came under fire in 2012 for his public support of “traditional” marriage.¹ His comments generated immediate backlash from the LGBTQA community, and a heated ideological divide ensued between supporters of (exclusively) traditional marriage and supporters of same-sex marriage. Across the nation, thousands of loyal consumers waited hours in line at Cathy’s chains on August 1, 2012—“Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day”—to buy chicken sandwiches. Meanwhile, advocates for marriage equality, exclaiming “this is not about chicken!” protested the restaurant through public demonstrations of compassion and acceptance during “Chick-fil-A Kiss-ins.” It was heartwarming to see the protesters come together nationwide to denounce heteronormativity. Such acts of compassionate protest are very necessary and important, but from the point of view articulated in this essay, they were inadequate because not the slightest concern was expressed for the voiceless, powerless animals born into the abhorrent world that is the global meat industry. Even in light of the media attention this case drew, the billions of sentient birds who are subjected to the unimaginable cruelty of modern factory farming and industrial slaughtering remained invisible. As both friends and foes of Chick-fil-A turned to social media, they single-mindedly focused on humans while ignoring the animals whose flesh comprises the almost 300 million chicken sandwiches Chick-fil-A serves annually.² As a contribution to the burgeoning literature exploring the role of nonhuman beings in educational contexts (DeLeon, 2011; Dolby, 2012; Kahn, 2008; Pederson,

2009; & Rowe, 2009, 2011, 2012), this essay does not take animals for granted and attempts to rethink the Chick-fil-A controversy through the framework of posthumanism (Wolfe, 2010).³

Chick-fil-A is related to several areas of interest for scholars who study commercialism in education (Boyles, 2008; Molnar et al., 2013; & Norris, 2011). Food is a primary way corporations infiltrate educational institutions; they maintain a presence through school lunch, food services, advertising, vending machines, sponsorships, and curricular programs. The problems of this particular fast-food chain are much more insidious than serving fatty, unhealthy, greasy fast-food to school children (though we should not overlook the deadly effects of such food). Deron Boyles (2005) has provided a critical analysis of Chick-fil-A's partnership with schools. Chick-fil-A markets its conservative Christian, corporate fast-food agenda by way of the "character education" curriculum, "Core Essentials." Boyles finds that Core Essentials is essentially "a program funded by a fundamentalist Christian whose company uses 'kids meals' as a bribe for behaving in docile, disempowered, uncritical ways" (p. 55). While the program claims to impart values such as "courage," "honesty," and "respect," students are in no way encouraged to contemplate the honesty of the program, the values or motives of a company that profits from serving a fast-food diet to children, or the broader effects of corporate encroachment on public education. Food corporations like Chick-fil-A provide revenue for some school districts, but they are also part and parcel of the neoliberalization of the public sphere, undermining equity, health, political participation, and democratic education (Apple, 2001; Boyles, 2008; Norris, 2011; & VanderSchee, 2004). It seems, then, there is plenty reason to further scrutinize this case, but as important as these areas of concern are for education, my interest lies in extending the framework of criticality beyond the schoolhouse. This essay is ultimately not just about a single controversy over marriage equality, nor is it just about corporate fast-food in schools; it is about these issues but also much more. The Chick-fil-A case provides a launching point for a critical conversation of the parallels between human and animal exploitation.

This article serves several functions. First, I begin by moving beyond a human-only account of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2005) to raise questions concerning species as a category of difference that interacts with other categories in constructing ideologies and hierarchies of domination. I hope to demonstrate that the plight of nonhumans is not a second-rate subdivision of critical theory or social activism. As I discuss, critical inquiry should not be hierarchal in positing humans over and above nonhumans; such a reductionist approach to grappling with problems of privilege and oppression only reproduces mutually depen-

dent systems of injustice. The theoretical framework of posthumanist intersectionality, I argue, destabilizes the continued reliance on an underlying anthropocentric worldview that maintains the structures that exploit animals as well as human *others* perceived by their oppressors as “subhuman” or “animal.”

In the second half of the essay I discuss eating animals as a matter of aesthetics, turning introspection to the body’s gustatory and gastrointestinal systems. We are conditioned to view animal exploitation, in the form of meat eating, as normal, acceptable, or even necessary.⁴ The causes of this socialization are many but the role and influence of the body should not be undervalued in the fortification of this habit. My intent is to contribute an educational perspective to the somatic turn in philosophy and more specifically to the discipline Richard Shusterman (1999) has developed, *somaesthetics*—“provisionally defined as the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one’s body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (*aisthesis*) and creative self-fashioning” (p. 302; italics original). What I want to develop is a more concrete way educationists might think about somaesthetics in the context of eating animals. In my response to a provocative question Susan Laird (2008) has posed—“Could philosophers of education deploy somaesthetics to theorize means of teaching and learning discernment of hungers, tastes, and satiety?” (p. 4)—I set out to sketch the preliminary characteristics of a pedagogy of food that concentrates attention mainly to the sense of taste and the body’s gastrointestinal tract. As a particular area of somaesthetic interest, I undertake an exposition of eating animals as a way to give more “systematic attention to the body’s crucial roles in aesthetic perception and experience” (Shusterman, p 310). What I call “gastro-aesthetic pedagogy” aims to reduce the cognitive dissonance between the living body of the eater and the dead body of the eaten—enhancing the relationship between corporeality and consciousness for a more fleshly way of knowing. The unification of the (human) *self* and (animal) *other* through this somatic act incarnates the theoretical posthumanist call to dissolve the human/animal binary—human flesh physically intersecting and absorbing animal flesh. The profundity of the gastro-aesthetic, I submit, is that it characterizes transformation in its most fleshly and intimate form: becoming through eating. With the gastrointestinal system as the “locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation,” my argument is that corporeal transformation should not be overlooked in discussions on becoming and transformative education—discussions that have taken on a noticeably abstract character. Yet I will exercise caution here by troubling the assumption that becoming and transformation are unquestionably positive and desired (certainly they are not

so in the context of consuming animals). Finally, I conclude by calling into question anthropocentric discourse employed to differentiate and elevate our kind of animal above all other animals on Earth. In an effort to reconsider ourselves as *human animals* in a posthuman world, I imagine what it might look like to reclaim our animality by looking “below” to our animal kin.

Posthumanist Intersectionality

The question of eating animals is ultimately driven by our intuitions about what it means to reach an ideal we have named, perhaps incorrectly, ‘being human.’

—Jonathan Safran-Foer, *Eating Animals* (2009, p.264)

Should Cathy’s opinion on marriage warrant our attention and criticism? Well, if the issue was just as simple as that—an individual’s opinion—then no, but there are more important issues and persons at stake. In a *Huffington Post* op-ed titled, “We are not arguing over Chicken,” Conor Gaughan (2012) commented to Chick-fil-A patrons: “Eat all the chicken sandwiches you want. But realize that behind this debate are real people” (para. 7). The “real people” Gaughan is referring to are the queer persons who live with routine psychological and physical abuse, some even beaten to death because of their sexuality; the real people are the same-sex couples that experience institutional discrimination (if they are even recognized as a couple) and denied equal access to the same public benefits as heterosexual couples; and the real people are the gay and lesbian teenagers who “are four times more likely to take their own lives” (para. 4). By refocusing the discussion from the purchasing of chicken sandwiches to the broader political and social meaning of the debate, Gaughan captured a common sentiment of those in support of marriage equality and LGBTQ rights: The Chick-fil-A standoff was not really about buying or not buying chicken; it was, and still is, about a basic level of dignity for all persons, regardless of their sexuality. The real people behind the debate are related to my discussion but, admittedly, they are not my primary focus. With this section, I discuss another entry point to help understand the scope of this case, one that speaks up for another group of persons, the chickens.

Posthumanist intersectionality investigates the interrelationships of human and nonhuman oppression, attempting to interrogate, understand, and disrupt hierarchies of difference that enable systemic inequity and injustice (Adams & Donovan, 1995; Cudworth, 2010; Deckha, 2008, 2010; DeLeon, 2010; &Twine, 2010). Social constructs of difference, and the discursive practices and power structures that correspond and interact

with these constructs, are more complex and multi-dimensional than previously thought. “Our identities and experiences,” writes Maneesha Deckha (2008), “are not just gendered or racialized, but are also determined by our species status and the fact that we are culturally marked as human” (p. 249). By incorporating the concept of species as a hierarchical marker of privilege and power, posthumanism stresses how the standard humanist concerns of difference (race, gender, sexuality, ability, etc.) are also “based on and take shape through speciesist ideas of humanness vis-à-vis animality” (Deckha, p. 249). Moreover, the so-called “species boundary” between human and animal is a social construction that is contingent upon human interpretations of difference that differ with scientific, metaphysical, and epistemological standpoints, as well as socio-political contexts (Elstein, 2003; Wilson, 1999). Similar to essentialist binaries of, for example, Black/White, gay/straight, abled/disabled, the binary of human/animal⁵ also begs for critical interrogation. “Human” and “animal” are not neutral categories that simply exist as fixed biological facts independent of culture, ideologies, and structures of power (DeLeon, 2010). In questioning the merits of the concept of species in general and the human/animal binary in particular, posthumanists, of which I count myself, are not suggesting that diverse, complex, and unique life-forms don’t exist; instead, we aim to contest the assumptions, constructs, and categories that underpin and reify discourses of difference that are used as tools to legitimize hierarchies of domination.

Now I would like to elucidate the general scope and aims of this theory by responding to two common objections. While the first objection is theoretically hollow, it is still important because it is commonly raised to those of us who write and do activist work on behalf of nonhumans. It goes something like this: “Why are you so concerned about animals when there is so much human suffering in the world? The problems that animals face are not as urgent or important as the injustices of fellow human beings. Shouldn’t we first work to eradicate human oppression before we worry about animals?” There are too many unfounded speciesist assumptions here to unpack in this article.⁶ For our purposes, it will suffice to point out that the reason why this objection is reductive is because it unnecessarily forces one into a false dilemma—either humans or animals—but we should not have to choose one before or over the other since the violence against animals and the violence against humans are not exclusive. In one of the most influential works of human-animal intersectionality, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, Carol Adams (2000) critiques patriarchal society through a close study of the institution of meat eating, describing the structural patterns that do violence to women and food animals. She is helpful on this point:

when people buttonhole me...and insist that we have to help suffering humans first, I am not thrown off by such assertive narrowing of the field of compassionate activism. I know that vegetarianism and animal activism in general can accompany social activism on behalf of disenfranchised people....we have to stop fragmenting activism; we cannot polarize human and animal suffering since they are inter-related. (p. 16)

Discussion of the plight of animals is part of understanding the plight of humans, since subjugation and exploitation exist in multi-faceted ways, crossing and intersecting between and among species. Posthumanists, then, maintain that humans don't exist on some separate, superior echelon of justice or political activism, and that questions raised concerning nonhuman injustice not only can be, but should be, explored simultaneously, side by side, with human injustice.

The second objection is more substantive and interesting. It goes something like this: "marginalized humans have been victims of colonialists, racists, and sexists who justify their aggression by comparing their victims to animals. European colonialists, for example, conquered and enslaved indigenous cultures, in part, because they viewed these groups as inferior and animal-like in nature—made up of barbaric and uncivilized 'savages.' Given this history, don't you see that it is offensive to make comparisons between animals and certain groups of humans that were historically oppressed because they were compared to animals? You are further *othering others* and reducing the importance of their unique oppressions by associating them with animals."

To begin with, it important to take into account the source and intent of the comparison—who is doing it and why. The comparisons made by posthumanists (and other animal advocates and theorists who may not identify as 'posthuman') are certainly not the same, and involve different motivations and purposes, than the comparisons made by racists and imperialists. The former want to critique and topple systems of exploitation and violence, envisioning a more comprehensive way to address hegemony in the world; the latter want to maintain the status quo and use animals' inferior status to continue to demean humans. Additionally, we need to acknowledge that posthumanist inquiry does not attempt to equate human experiences with animal experiences. To say that two things are comparable is not to say they are identical; there is always room for discussion of the nuances and distinctions in the comparison of things. It would be more accurate to say that posthumanists try to unearth and critique the patterns that reinforce mutual systems of hierarchy and violence for both human and animal. Drawing similarities among animal and human does not mean that we forget or debase hu-

man experiences; in particular we don't forget or debase exceptionally horrendous instances of genocide where specific groups were targeted because their oppressors *perceived* some innate defect that positioned them as "beasts" to be exterminated. On the contrary, we may now better understand the commonalities between various experiences of oppression, and these commonalities, in turn, may help us recognize the more fundamental logics and legitimizations behind why humans methodically torture, enslave, and kill each other. In comparing atrocities with sensitivity, posthumanism identifies overlapping structures between species without ignoring how those structures impact human and nonhuman in various ways.

The reason why I said this objection has substance is because the premises are true. Across the globe, there are peoples who have been, and still are, *othered* and subjugated by means of dehumanization in the form of animalization. In discussing "the ascent of Civilization," Deckha (2008) explains how 19th century Europeans:

could retain their claim to specialness and humanness by distancing themselves from their ape ancestors and the bestial origins they wished to disavow. This distancing was primarily accomplished by inserting 'inferior' culture and gendered Others between themselves and animals. While not a precise calibration, the ascent to Civilization was an index of bestiality/humanness wherein the ascent toward Civilization was also ascent toward humanness. As racial, cultural, and gendered Others proved themselves more or less civilized under an imperial gaze, they were seen as correspondingly more or less human.... These Othered humans were, in turn, animalized such that the construction of race contained within it assumptions about animals and species difference... The management of species difference and human dignity relied deeply on racial and cultural constructs... [W]hat it meant to be human was as much a matter of species as it was of race, culture and gender. (pp. 252-53)

When humans are dehumanized, they are perceived and treated as both *nonhuman* and *subhuman*. The malicious intent of the colonizer is to proclaim not just difference but also inferiority: a less-than-human other. To dehumanize is to dissociate and degrade by using animals' lesser, objectified, repressed position to further the exploitation and oppression of humans (while maintaining the subordinate status of animals). And since it is much less disputed to dominate the nonhuman, then it is that much easier for colonizers and racists to dominate humans perceived as not fully human. Nevertheless, to say that humans are harmed because they have been dehumanized only scratches the surface of what we need to understand. There is something more fundamental going on when

humans are perceived by their oppressors as subhuman (Deckha, 2010); such perceptions are the means to exploitation but not the only means to exploitation because nonhumans are exploited, too, though they are not dehumanized. To be exploited is the fundamental wrong, not to be simply associated with others who are exploited. Even though colonialism is fraught with procedures and meanings of animality, it doesn't follow that the experiences of (supposedly inferior) animals should not be compared with the experiences of human beings. Such comparisons may be unsettling and controversial, but they certainly are not irrational or unreasonable.

As I see it, the main problem with this objection is that it takes for granted the foundations of othering that generate the oppressive ideology of dehumanization. The humanist framework draws upon our assumptions about animal inferiority but doesn't challenge these assumptions in any serious way, failing to question many of the rationales for coextending the hierarchal worldview that lumps animals and animalized humans together in systems of exploitation. While rightly protesting the wrongs committed against humans, humanist frameworks still permit the underlying "index of bestiality/humanness," so that violence is less justifiable as one moves through the index away from animals—but that violence still exists, and always will, as long as it is placed on a certain point of the index: typically on or near the animal, the point around which many humans are placed. Posthumanism wants to do away with the index altogether. Cary Wolfe sees it this way:

as long as this humanist and speciesist *structure* of subjectivization remains intact, and as long as it is institutionally taken for granted that it is all right to systematically exploit and kill nonhuman animals simply because of their species, then the humanist discourse of species will always be available for use by some humans against other humans as well, to countenance violence against the social other of *whatever* species—or gender, or race, or class, or sexual difference. (as cited in Deckha, p. 260; italics original)

Both the colonizer and colonized, both the oppressor and oppressed, operate under the same anthropocentric worldview—both internalizing the subordinate, subjugated status of animals that provides dehumanization its ontological basis.

Yet even the activist circles attempting to eradicate dehumanization and ameliorate human suffering are not exempt from the hegemonic anthropocentric worldview. For example, animals are continually used in metaphors to make meaning of some human group's exploitation ("I was treated like an animal" is one of the most common). Adams discusses the use of metaphors of animal butchering that are regularly drawn on

to communicate the experiences of rape victims (“he treated me like a piece of meat”). She contends that:

Despite this dependence on the *imagery* of butchering, radical feminist discourse has failed to integrate the *literal* oppression of animals into our analysis of patriarchal culture... Whereas women may feel like pieces of meat, and be treated like pieces of meat—emotionally butchered and physically battered—animals actually are made into pieces of meat. (pp. 55, 57; italics original)

To continue to rely on the experiences of animals—without questioning the metaphor, the ubiquity of relying on the metaphor, or the violent reality behind the metaphor—in order to say something about human victimization appropriates “the metaphor of butchering without acknowledging the originating oppression of animals that generates the power of the metaphor” (p. 54). In doing so, the denigrated status of animals, essential to ideologies of dominating human beings thought of as not fully human, fails to be altered or even acknowledged. “The originating oppression,” writes Karen Davis (2004), “that generates the metaphor must not be treated as a mere figure of speech, a mere point of reference” (p. 1). We need to question why it is okay “to appropriate the treatment of nonhuman animals to characterize one’s own mistreatment, but not the other way around” (Davis, p. 4). When we ignore or diminish the meaning of the originating oppression, we leave in place the groundwork that buttresses the power dynamics energizing dehumanization.

Will those concerned about the processes of domination continue to draw the line of demarcation, conveniently and sharply, at the species boundary—a boundary that an increasing number of cultural theorists, scientists, ecologists, and moral philosophers understand as arbitrary and specious? To continue to do so may prove self-defeating since the oppressions of different species have so much in common. For example, human beings systematically enslaved animals before we enslaved each other. This is not to suggest that animal domestication is the same thing as human slavery; it is to recognize that there are significant connections—particularly regarding the violent methods employed—between the earlier form of domination that rounded up herds of (animal) *others*, perceived as inferior and usable, and the later form of domination that rounded up herds of (human) *others* also perceived as inferior and usable (Best, 2007; Patterson, 2002; & Spiegel, 1997). Posthumanism scrutinizes the popular, yet largely unexamined, view that humans (including our oppressions) are distinct from animals (including their oppressions), hoping to show that animal comparisons are not debasing

but instructive because they shed light on larger modalities of power that exploit some humans and even more animals.

One might say that the humanist version of intersectionality is really about what it means to be human: the culturally significant characteristics that make up a person's identity are joined together in the formation of a subject. But how can we continue to deny the role of species in understanding what it means to be human if what it means to be human carries with it simultaneous meanings of what it means not to be human—that is, *animal*? “Human is a category only meaningful in difference,” observes Erica Fudge (2002), since the “qualities that are often claimed to define the human...are actually conceivable through animals; that is, they rely on animals for their meaning” (p. 10). Posthumanists find it erroneous to continue to write and theorize about “being human” in a manner that ignores the nonhuman.

Intersectionality is a dynamic approach to understanding how identity, privilege, and power operate in the world, but it can become even more edifying if openness is maintained to less anthropocentric forms of inquiry. The attempt to incorporate species difference will certainly trigger resistance from those who are more concerned with maintaining a privileged place for humans than recognizing interlocking practices of injustice. However, if theorists turn the critical gaze toward themselves and interrogate the reductionist discourse that purports unexamined, taken-for-granted claims about human dignity and animal inferiority, then the core principles of intersectionality will uncover much about the hegemonic order:

Intersectionality rightly highlights the multiplicity and interactivity of differences of gender, race, class, culture, age, ability, etc. To follow its own logic regarding difference, however, intersectionality needs to resist the comfort of the humanist paradigm and reach across the species divide to consider species as a force of social construction, experience formation, and source of difference. Just as feminism has turned toward intersectionality, intersectionality itself must now turn toward posthumanism and integrate species into its analysis. (Deckha, 2008, pp. 266-267)

The human arrogance (or willful ignorance?) to unblinkingly disregard billions of beings directly wronged by paralleling constructs that operate to the detriment of humans is inimical to the very values, methodologies, and aims upon which intersectionality prides itself.

Posthumanists want to join the protests outside Chick-fil-A restaurants, but in doing so, call attention to another facet of dispute: “You’re right: We are not arguing over chicken. And that’s the problem. Maybe we should.” The commentary about real people behind the debate ought to be amended: Realize, too, that behind the debate are real nonhuman

people—millions of sociable, intelligent, curious, sentient animal *persons* (Davis, 2009). To further disrupt and interrogate this case is to question the assumption that humans are the only persons at the center of the debate; this case *is* about chicken—or more specifically, it is also about chicken. The birds are fundamental to this debate because their anguish and gruesome deaths supply the daily operations that the entire chicken fast-food industry is built on; it is their flesh at the center of the controversy over same-sex marriage; and it is our routine, day-in and day-out consumption of their flesh that perpetuates a destructive industrial food system that holds devastating health, ethical, social, and ecological consequences (Davis, 2009; Eisentz, 2007; Motavalli, 2008; Robbins, 2001; Singer, 1990; Singer and Mason, 2006; & Tuttle, 2005). The corporate purpose of Chick-fil-A (2013) is: “To glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us. To have a positive influence on *all* who come in contact with Chick-fil-A” (para. 2; italics added). What is really meant by “all?” I’m sure whoever drafted this statement is solely referring to human beings, and it is clear that “all” excludes far too many fellow humans. But more to the point, no rational person with a trace of commonsense would say that the chain’s factory-farmed and industrially slaughtered chickens have a “positive” experience (as we’ll soon see). The posthuman framework extends “all” to include the millions upon millions of chickens that Cathy’s company breeds into this world only to mutilate and exploit to make a profit.

The Chick-fil-A case was not a single lapse in critical consciousness but a symptom of what happens when the objectification and exploitation of animals becomes normal through institutional mechanisms and cultural practices. As such, how do we raise consciousness to the point where it becomes difficult to not think about the chickens? How do we make it so that “all” includes animals? How do we move animals off the periphery of our critiques of power, privilege, and exploitation, and at the same time, bring them into our visions of justice, peace, and freedom? I have no comprehensive answer to these questions, though I do offer a pedagogical possibility that may render posthumanist intersectionality more concrete and embodied.

Becoming-Animal and Gastro-Aesthetic Pedagogy

Lurking in the background of all acts of eating one can discover that which is destroyed or being consumed, thereby losing its own identity while sustaining that of another.

—Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste* (1999, p. 188)

The Chick-fil-A instance was illustrative of how exploitation of the

animal body is both everywhere and nowhere. For the most part, each party involved, with maybe the exception of fringe animal rights protesters, remained indifferent or silent even as the animal body was all around—dead, scorched bird flesh literally to be ruminated over. But this indifference should be no surprise. Virtually every day, for years and years, we have consumed animals and have thus established deep-seated corporeal patterns that function as impediments to conscious reflection on the forces that endorse the habit. “Entire ideologies of domination,” writes Shusterman, “can thus be covertly materialized and pre-served by encoding them in somatic norms that, as bodily habits, typically get taken for granted and therefore escape critical consciousness” (p. 303). Gastro-aesthetic pedagogy, however, aims to bring bodily eating habits into the realm of introspection and awareness, thus encouraging eating food as a somatic practice of intentionality.

Elsewhere I have explored the ethical significance of killing and eating animals and the implications this practice holds for educational philosophy (Rowe, 2009), but this article turns attention away from abstract ethical arguments to an aesthetic (re)consideration of the practice. In his insightful book, *Eating Animals*, Jonathan Safran-Foer (2009) writes that “the problem posed by meat has become an abstract one,” mainly because farm animals, and the particulars of their deaths, escape most consumers (p. 102). Perhaps possible ways to address the problems posed by meat have also become abstractions: potential solutions often take the form of unfamiliar, aloof “foodie” movements that necessitate adopting an “ism” (like veganism or vegetarianism) that many people think of as rigid and dogmatic. Admittedly, posthumanism is also abstract, which is why I see it essential to add to the discussion something more palpable wherein the focus remains on the embodied processes of taste and digestion that we relatively all share. Perhaps we can allow more room for open-ended appraisals and alternatives if we engage the problems of meat through somatic-aesthetics. To sense the world in a new way, we need to eat in a new way. To eat in a new way, we need a variety of food pedagogies that work to bring more mindfulness to this fundamental act of consumption.

Routinely conceptualized as an instinctual function “too closely identified with the body and our animal nature,” the sense of taste, writes Carolyn Korsmeyer, has been viewed as frivolous in Western modernity, failing to garner serious theoretical investigation and seen as unworthy of aesthetic attention (Korsmeyer, p. 1). And yet even when the physical senses are incorporated within the study of philosophy and aesthetics, there remains a hierarchy of the senses. The “higher” senses of sight and hearing are considered more objective and reliable because

they are object-oriented and thought to be “detached from experiences that are phenomenally subjective” (Korsmeyer, p. 3). Sight and hearing sense external data that can be independently perceived, compared, and assessed by others. The “lower” senses of touch, taste, and smell are relegated to the bottom of the hierarchy because they rely on the body to a greater degree; touch, taste, and smell are internal, subject-oriented senses that draw more heavily on subjective experience. Philosophers of food see major problems with this strict ranking and argue it a mistake to hold onto this largely unexamined hierarchy, which repeatedly fails to give taste its intellectual due. Food scholar Glen Kuehn (2004) maintains that taste is a highly engaging sense and constitutes a profound way we know (in) the world: “no other aesthetic experience involves such an intense level of connection between the self and its environment... Taste cannot be experienced without our taking a bit of the world and putting it into our body” (pp. 235, 244). Taste, as Korsmeyer describes, is “an intentional activity...a conscious event that is directed to some object or other” (p. 96). In challenging the privileging of the mind over body, as well as the debased role of taste, the gastro-aesthetic provokes us to take part in a broader epistemological and aesthetic discussion about how human faculties generate knowledge and what is worthy of philosophical study. I now want to describe how transformation unfolds through eating animals, and as I do, it’s important to keep in mind that I am offering a descriptive, not normative, account.

Drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987), Abraham DeLeon (2010) has explored the transformative potential of transgressing the species boundary in order to think differently from a nonhuman perspective—or, *becoming-animal*. Taking on the perspective of the animal other disrupts the social categories of animal and human, subverting static constructs for a new theoretical location that strives to understand otherness and difference in general. “Metaphorically, becoming is about questioning us as human subjects and attempting to write from a different position... Becoming-animal is about trying to transcend our own social limitations and boundaries in creating new spaces for resistance and transformations to occur” (DeLeon, p. 17). Becoming-animal relies heavily on language, writing, and discourse, inspiring a de-centering of the human experience in order to think, write, and create from a more holistic and ecological orientation. While not opposed to this view, I would like to complicate and complement it with a discussion that hinges more on the physiological dimensions of being and becoming. Together, the metaphoric and the somatic, comprise powerful ways to not only *write* and *think* differently but also to *sense* and *experience* differently—to feel becoming-animal through the somaesthetic practice of eating animal.

The corporeal transformation observed here is not mutually exclusive of—nor is it the same thing—as the theoretical metamorphosis of Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming-animal. Instead of underscoring *what could be*, I want to underscore *what is*: the always-present role of bodily change that needs no call to enact itself, except for that of ordinary, everyday consumption. As we’ve seen, a major aim of posthumanist intersectionality is to dissolve the human/animal binary (or at least challenge it). In directing exegesis to the physical dimension of becoming, we find human and animal bodies literally intersecting together—posthumanist intersectionality made flesh—to produce a materially-constituted self. This transformation is ontological, embodied, and deeply personal; it exists in our *being* and its location is the body—more specifically, the gastrointestinal system: the olfactory, esophagus, stomach, intestinal tract, and rectum. Nothing is transcended and no new space is required for this familiar, millennia-old form of becoming. With this change, the human self is constituted from the fleshly material of animals. While we may creatively and imaginatively aspire to transgress constructions to become animal through writing, in the flesh, we are already there. In this context, being precedes becoming.

Meat eating is a unique somatic practice that dissolves the self/other dichotomy.⁸ By eating dead animal flesh, we transform *it*—more precisely, the remains of a once living and breathing nonhuman person, a *he* or *she*—into our physicality. “Clearly the distinction between self-directed and other-directed somaesthetics cannot be floppy, since many practices belong to both” (Shusterman, p. 306). Consuming animals belongs to both: the dead inanimate *other*, as objectified meat, does not vanish but becomes one with our living *self*. Most of us are *other*-eaters; it is not just what we do as part of our social identity or cultural tradition, but who we are, as part of our material reality and physical constitution. Meat eaters *physically become* through ingestion, engagement, and assimilation of the animal *other*. “Food stands in an ontological relationship to the self,” writes Kuehn, because “I know that what [or *who*] I eat will be incorporated into my being” (pp. 236, 239). Killing a chicken for the Chick-fil-A Original Recipe sandwich indeed puts an end to the bird’s life, but we do not completely eradicate the bird because chicken consumption constitutes the integration of the flesh into our living bodies. Through taste, the “most physically intimate of the five senses,” our bodies begin the process of absorbing the dead (Kuehn, p. 235). The body of the (nonhuman) animal will become one with another (human) animal body. It is more accurate to say that animal becomes human.

While a pedagogy of food should concern itself with the food production practices prior to consumption, the mouth is the focal point where

gastro-aesthetic concentration intensifies. “Taste not only is the most physically interactive of the senses,” writes Kuehn, “it also relies on the other physical senses” (p. 235). Here’s an example. I first *see* the dead cow, as steak, as it arrives at my table at a steakhouse. Then, beginning with cutting and stabbing the piece of flesh with my knife and fork, I bring the tender forked-flesh to my lips. By this time, digestion has already begun as the mucosa membranes and salivary glands in my mouth begin to secrete saliva to produce enzymes that begin the process of breaking down the steak. Mastication occurs in the mouth; while I bite and chew, my teeth tear the flesh apart. Not only do I *touch* and *smell* the meat, I also *hear* the sound of the animal remains separating in my mouth. As the meat is moved around and on my tongue, my taste buds activate their receptor cells and I begin to *taste*, experiencing a medley of complex sensations, not merely what was once believed to be only four rigid categories of sweet, sour, salt, and bitter (Korsmeyer, 1999). But gastronomic experience lies beyond the oral cavity. As I swallow the meat, it glides down the esophagus (hopefully smoothly) and the object is well into the process of becoming one with my living cells. The meat enters my stomach, where this organ’s mucosa membrane layer works to digest the meat, which will soon further break down as it traverses the intestinal tract. What cannot be assimilated into my being is expelled from the anus. Even as I flush the feces down the toilet, the story doesn’t end here—either for us as living beings or for the object that is forced out the self. At this point, the gastronomic takes an ecological turn because now we have feces—shit—an amalgamation of human and animal discarded tissue (among other matter) that is actually not waste or refuse that simply disappears but is a potent substance that is collected with even more shit (gallons upon gallons) and then relocated and integrated into other parts of the world where, quite possibly, food is grown, prepared, or consumed. Every step in the process is of utmost importance to my physical constitution and becoming. If I take the effort to develop sensory-aesthetic appreciation, insight and knowledge of both eater and eaten are gained.

Taste is an “educable faculty,” according to Korsmeyer (p. 103). I agree. I have learned that this sense can be cultivated with a sensibility that is profoundly *other* related. Like most bodily practices, taste requires conditioning and maintenance, and when this habituation is challenged, new insights emerge. Though I have been writing in the first person when referring to eating meat, the truth is that I am physically repulsed by the taste of animal flesh, to the extent that my body will try to reject it. But this wasn’t always the case. How is that I now cannot taste meat without a visceral reaction of disgust? Because: taste is an

educable faculty. Years ago, as I began to contemplate the origins of the meat I was eating, the physical sensations in my body began to change as well. What I once experienced as gratifying and pleasurable—eating a savory, delicious steak, for example—will now, on rare occasion when I inadvertently taste the flesh of a cow or pig or chicken, cause a gag response (in a culture of ubiquitous meat consumption, the flesh of these animals finds its way into the most unlikely places). My revulsion was *learned*. Yet I didn't just unlearn a taste for meat; my palate refined a *distaste* for animal flesh while refining a taste for plant-based foods. For me, this was powerful transformation, but a different human person, eating a different nonhuman person, might experience a different outcome. All the same, my point is this: Sense the animal as you masticate, ponder her or his destiny as you swallow, and be sure, despite what the Western philosophical tradition tells us: this is a deeply contemplative event.

As we've seen, posthumanist intersectionality links animals and humans in theoretical inquiry; more fundamentally, though, humans are literally intersected with the fleshly substance of animal kin. For most people becoming is not abstract metamorphosis but rather a physical process of transformation. While transformation, becoming, and dissolving the self/other dichotomy are typically esteemed as unquestionably positive and desirable in theoretical-educational contexts, this is far from the case with the corporeal transformation I have featured. Putting aside the likely ethical wrongs one endorses in eating animals, there is other rationale for exercising caution or outright resistance to this form of becoming.

With formative change comes great risk. "Because tasting and eating alter one's very constitution," writes Korsmeyer, "their exercise requires trust. We must trust that our foods are healthful and not poison" (p. 189). But many times foods are poisonous. Are we internalizing fish and tuna with high levels of mercury? Or feedlot cows standing ankle-deep in manure, fed a genetically-modified corn-based diet (or fed the flesh of their own kind), and routinely given anti-biotics which we then consume? The transformations that take place in the body may result in, on one hand, nourishment, health, and vitality; but on the other, spikes in cholesterol levels, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, food poisoning, or even sudden death from food-borne illness, such as *E. coli* O157, salmonella, or other pathogens (I acknowledge these dangers are present in eating plant-based foods as well). For example, in 2008 undercover investigations of the Hallmark Meat Packing Company resulted in the largest meat recall in the history of the United States. Over 143 million pounds of beef was recalled because Hallmark was processing "downer" cows who were unable to walk so they floundered in feces, which increases susceptibility to pathogens that can be then introduced into the meat

supply. What does this have to do with education? Hallmark supplied meat to the Westland Meat Company, recognized as the 2004-2005 “supplier of the year,” serving schools in thirty-six states as part of the National School Lunch Program (Brown, 2008; HSUS, 2008). Depending on the other foods we are eating, as well as our general health, genetics, and environment, the alterations that occur in our bodies from consuming animals can function as daily sustenance or extreme hazard. Ethical or not, flesh eating is dangerous transformation.

A Difficult-to-Swallow Posthuman Conclusion

As we talked of freedom and justice one day for all, we sat down to steaks.
I am eating misery, I thought, as I took the first bite. And spit it out.
—Alice Walker, “Am I Blue?” (1988, p. 8)

The Chick-fil-A controversy is about animals—both human and nonhuman. In destabilizing the binary between “us” and “them,” post-humanism extends and incorporates the other to include nonhuman life, but this incorporation, as I’ve hoped to show, runs much deeper than any intersectional lens of theoretical inquiry. That is why Alice Walker, in her essay, “Am I Blue?” no longer seeing a steak but instead the *othered*, dead remains of a fellow animal self, “spit it out.” At first glance, this essay—what Anthony Lioi calls “a personal recollection” (2008, p. 17)—is a story about Walker’s friendship with a horse named Blue. But, in gripping fashion, Walker then links the exploitation of Blue with the exploitation of historically oppressed humans, specifically women, slaves, and Native Americans. At the end of the story, Walker comes to the realization—during a taste-sense encounter with a dead cow—that something is amiss in human liberation and justice movements that continue to write off the nonhuman. For Walker, talk of “freedom and justice one day for all” is empty, ineffectual rhetoric unless it reaches into the depths of the ugliness of exploitation of *all*, including Blue—and the cow. For Walker, the violated and killed cow is now *felt*, now too real, too non-other to keep chewing. Notice that taste was activated and experienced in the mouth, as the bite was taken—the digestion processes had already begun—and then the flesh, too difficult to swallow, was rejected instead of being fully internalized. Becoming-animal was resisted, as another form of transformation occurred. This is the power of gastro-aesthetic pedagogy: cultivating the “somatic sensibility” to exercise agency in choosing which life-forms will and will not constitute one’s being (Shusterman, p. 303).

Earlier I highlighted what I see as a limitation to the theoretical project of becoming-animal, but that does not mean that I don’t agree

that theoretical efforts in deconstruction and critique are necessary for the improved treatment of nonhuman and human animals. In her discussion of deconstructing political discourses of the body, Judith Butler (1992) explains:

To deconstruct these terms means, rather, to continue to use them, to repeat them, to repeat them subversively, and to displace them from the contexts in which they have been deployed as instruments of oppressive power.... To call a presupposition into question is not the same as doing away with it; rather, it is to free it up from its metaphysical lodgings in order to occupy and to serve very different political aims. (p. 17)

Butler's call for deconstruction holds profound implications for the way we think and talk about human and nonhuman animals. Dare we call into question our presuppositions about animality and animalization being offensive or debasing? Are they not only so from the perspective of our current reality of status quo anthropocentrism? What if we continue to use the terms "animality" and "animalization," but to use them, as Butler suggests, repeatedly and subversively, to displace them from their current hegemonic-humanist context in which they work to inferiorize and oppress *others*?

In "Am I Blue?" Walker provokes her readers to entertain similar questions when she makes comparisons between animals and marginalized humans. Walker writes about how European "settlers" considered Native Americans "to be like 'animals,'" but the settlers, not being able to see beyond their own anthropocentric worldview, "did not understand their description as a compliment" (pp. 5-6). Then, in a posthumanist move at the end of the essay, Walker, as Lioi argues, "runs the logic of the slave-holders backwards":

it is not that Black women are like animals, and therefore things, it is that animals, like Black women, are *creatures*, in the special sense of Genesis, artifacts that are beings-in-themselves, related to God as both Maker and Parent and therefore kin, though not the same. (p. 20; italics original)

I am left wondering what it might look like to embrace human animality—to reclaim it—as a way to liberate ourselves from the perils of human superiority. Like Alice Walker, daughter of sharecroppers in the American South, we need to activate a disordering of the hierarchical scale of "humanness" and "animality" that has proved foundational to so much violence in the world. Instead of outright rejecting animalization, the posthuman challenge is to reimagine and liberate the *animal* from its current "metaphysical lodgings." In doing so, animalized humans are also better positioned for improved treatment because to be considered

animal would be no longer perceived as subhuman or beneath the human—different in ways but not inferior. Today, we know that we don't want to be dehumanized, but I look forward to the day when we don't want to be deanimalized.⁹

Notes

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¹ Cathy said the following during a radio interview on the Ken Coleman Show: "I think we are inviting God's judgment on our nation when we shake our fist at Him and say, 'We know better than you as to what constitutes marriage.' I pray God's mercy on our generation that has such a prideful, arrogant attitude to think we have the audacity to define what marriage is about" (Coleman, 2012, para. 3). Later, Cathy would comment: "We [Chick-fil-A] are very much supportive of the family—the biblical definition of the family unit. We are a family-owned business, a family-led business, and we are married to our first wives. We give God thanks for that" (Blume, 2012, para. 27, 28). Cathy's comments were not isolated, off-hand remarks. Chick-fil-A has financially supported numerous conservative organizations that actively oppose gay and lesbian rights. For example, the LGBTQ watchdog, Equality Matters (2012), reported that in 2010 Chick-fil-A donated \$8 million to the WinShape Foundation, a group that regularly donates to a variety of anti-gay/lesbian causes.

² According to the Chick-fil-A website (2011, para. 2), 282 chicken sandwiches were served in 2010.

³ While the term "posthumanism" denotes more than one meaning, I am using the term in a particular way that challenges anthropocentrism and human superiority. Here, discussion of posthumanism differs from the term's perhaps more popular use in reference to the posthuman cyborg or transhumanism. I approach posthumanism similar to how Cary Wolfe (2010) discusses it. For Wolfe, posthumanism is not an outright negation of humanism but a framework that challenges our reliance on current conceptions and meanings of "the human," mainly as autonomous, rational beings who privilege particular ways of being and knowing in the world specified as characteristically and uniquely 'human,' e.g., human reason, consciousness, autonomy.

⁴ I recognize there is a diversity of meat eating practices among different peoples around the globe. But for this article, when I use "we," I am referring to those living in highly commercialized, industrial societies who are far removed from the animals they consume, including the vast majority of Americans.

⁵ A major function of this essay is to disrupt the human/animal binary. However, for the sake of communication, I (hesitatingly) use the term "animals" to refer to all animals other than human animals. With that said, I will also make use of the term "human animals" and "nonhuman animals" to minimize the gulf between human and nonhuman beings.

⁶ For additional philosophical discussions on speciesism and the ethical

arguments as to why animal suffering warrants equal moral consideration with that of humans, see the work of, for example, Cavalieri, P. (2001), *The animal question*; DeGrazia, D. (1996), *Taking animals seriously*; Regan, T. (1984), *The case for animal rights*; Regan, T., & Singer, P. (Eds.) (1989), *Animal rights and human obligations*; Rollin, B. (2006), *Animal rights and human morality*; and Singer, P. (1990), *Animal liberation*.

⁷ Elstein (2003), for example, draws heavily on the work of Charles Darwin, who argued species was a tenuous, arbitrary concept. For instance, in *Descent of Man* (1964) Darwin wrote, "I look at the term species as one arbitrarily given for the sake of convenience to a set of individuals closely resembling each other, and that it does not essentially differ from the term variety" (p. 53). After Darwin, the view that humans and animals are categorically dissimilar, each possessing an essential nature, clearly fixed and delineated, implodes under careful scrutiny. Also, see works cited in note 6.

⁸ Admittedly, meat eating is like any other form of food consumption in regards to the process involved, but if the process involved does not make eating meat fundamentally different from other forms of eating, then certainly the human response associated with the practice does. "From one angle of vision, meat is just another thing we consume, and matters in the same way as the consumption of paper napkins or SUVs—if to a greater degree. Try changing napkins at Thanksgiving, though...and you'll have a hard time getting anyone worked up. Raise the question of a vegetarian Thanksgiving, though, and you'll have no problem eliciting strong opinions—at least strong opinions. The question of eating animals hits chords that resonate deeply with our sense of self—our memories, desires, and values...Food matters and animals matter and eating animals matters even more" (Safran-Foer, p. 264).

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