

Animals in Advertising and Ecofeminism

by Ana-Maria Radu



The Second Wave of feminism begun in the 1960s and spanning through the end of the 1970s provided a platform for feminist thinkers to look at specific ways that the patriarchal social and cultural order was oppressive. Ecofeminists like writer Carol J. Adams crafted their philosophy around studying the similarities between the role of animals and the role of women in a patriarchal social order (Adams, Carol J., "About Ecofeminism"). They saw this social schema as being equally unjust and subjugating to both of these groups. In their article, "Eat Me Tender," Adele Tiengo and Matteo Andreozzi examine an advertisement through the ecofeminist lens, bringing up the point that this advertisement, and the representation of animals and women in advertising, "makes it clear that not much has changed, since the Sixties: females of all species are

'objects' of love and properties of men. (Andreozzi and Tiengo, 8)."

In a billboard for Osteria La Capannina, about "Meat Lovers," a man tenderly embraces a woman in bed, seemingly after sex, except the bed is a bed of hay and the woman is a cow, or "meat," represented by a goofy cows' head crudely pasted over the head of the woman's body. This confirms the ecofeminist point that, in Western civilization, women, nonhuman animals, and the environment, are categorized as objects, to be possessed by men. In "The Sexual Politics of Meat," written by Carol J. Adams and published in 1990, Adams uses her academic research to show how both women and animals are perceived as bodies to be consumed for men's pleasure. She points out examples of this link in advertising copy and imagery in ads and commercials

for meat. Advertising for meat is often targeted towards men and uses women's bodies to attract them.

The La Capannina advertisement, focusing on a seemingly tender embrace between a man and his partner, makes the suggestion that eating the cow's meat is ethically good, since the woman wants to be the subject of the man's attention, or wants to be consumed.

Additionally, the suggestion of marital love brings to mind another point that Adams makes in her book—the similarity in exploiting the reproductive functions of female animals and that of women in Western society. The patriarchal viewpoint is that women are valuable only in as far as their ability to produce offspring. Also, sexist men view women as being there to satisfy their desires, just as meat eaters and producers value female animals as being the most “succulent and tasty (p.8).” It is the manipulation of female animals' reproductive features, or the female animals, themselves, that we use to make the animal products we consume.

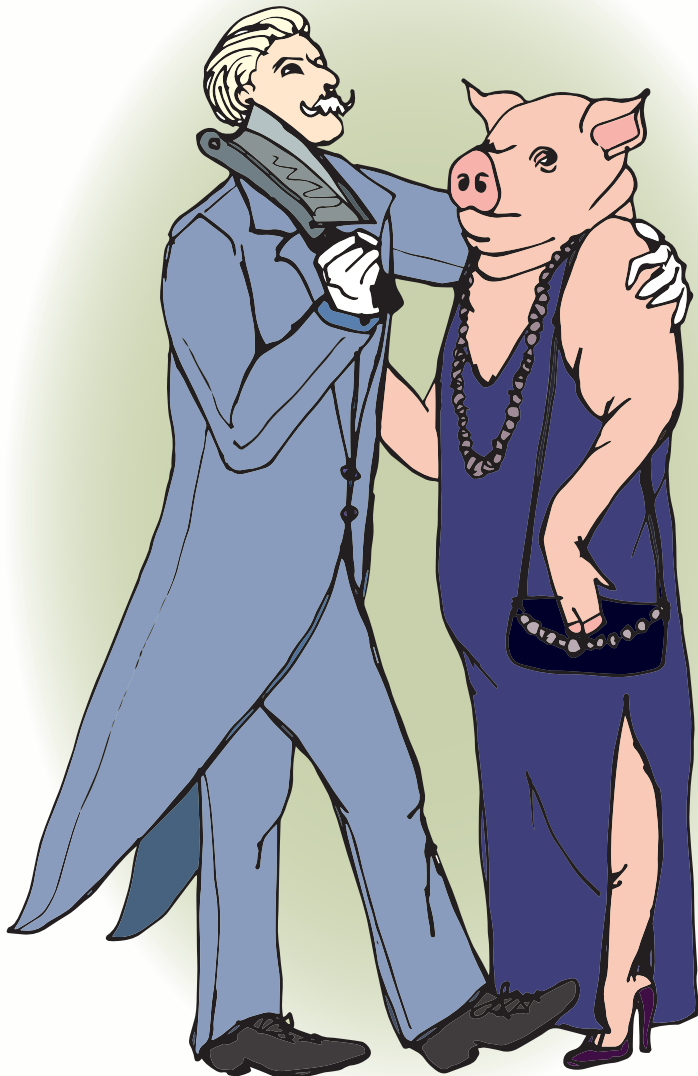
In a later article featured in the same issue of *Antennae*, Louise Squire writes about the growing trend of advertisers depicting animals “breaking out,” or being wild and free. To appeal to our humanity, our ethos, commercials and ads are showing animals more and more often as being happy and free. In this time of environmental concerns being brought into the limelight, it makes the viewer feel better that the animals that he is consuming or harming are “free agents. (Squire 42)” The article describes a commercial in which a herd of cows is personified by being the producers of the butter they advertise— they milk themselves, produce the butter, stamp it with their approval, package it, and load it to be sent out. This rather bluntly sends the message that it's ok to use cow's bodies for consumption, they aren't subjugated, they are willing participants and proud of what they produce (Squire 44). It's an easy leap from the human relationship with cow's bodies to the relationship between men and women, and how women are supposed to yearn to want to be consumed, and love being “in control” of how men want them.

Another way we assign value to animal bodies



is by how appealing they are aesthetically, the same way men attribute value to how physically appealing women are. In “Divine Plants and Magical Animal” from his book *Green Light: Toward an Art of Evolution*, George Gessert mentions that “Humans have bred animals with an eye to aesthetics for centuries (Gessert p.6).” Human-kind's manipulation of which animals and plants breed, or domestication, drives their evolution. Certain flower and animal hybrids exist and breed only in association with humans. It's an anthropocentric viewpoint that goes back tens of thousands of years, when we began using animals' and flowers' bodies more and more for pleasure rather than necessities. Gessert describes domestication as “two species [evolving] mutually beneficial (although not necessarily equal) relationships,” which causes one of the species to eventually be dependent on the other to live and function properly (Gessert p.6).

This brings to mind the view that females in our society and culture are supposed to look a certain way, in order to be attractive. Thus, a woman's role and value in mainstream society becomes that of an object of pleasure, and for breeding, for the sake of continuing the pattern of the looks that are attractive. Advertising, especially that whose target audience are straight males, projects this viewpoint by associating their product with an attractive woman wanting to be with a man who uses it. It isn't surprising that advertising for meat eaters, whose demographic are mostly straight males, also relies on the objectification of female animals as pleasing to the senses; in this case, taste.



The authors of “Eat Me Tender,” echoing Carol J. Adam’s ecofeminist ethics, point out how an advertisements such as the one depicted romanticize the consumption of farm animals. These farm animals which we consume are mostly the female ones, who are also made to breed more and more animals for us to consume. This parallels the biased gender roles and the value we attribute to women as a culture and society almost exactly. Gender politics and the politics of animal consumption are inevitably intertwined. Advertising—sometimes slyly, sometimes crudely—tries to convince us that there is not harm in taking advantage of the bodies of animals for our pleasure. This is damaging and unethical not only because it minimizes the value of animals, and our environment; but it supports the unjust, patriarchal framework through which our society assigns value.

References:

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