DISTURBING IMAGES

PETA AND THE FEMINIST ETHICS OF ANIMAL ADVOCACY

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The author applies a feminist analysis to animal advocacy initiatives in which gendered and racialized representations of female sexuality are paramount. Feminists have criticized animal advocates for opposing the oppression of nonhuman animals through media images that perpetuate female objectification. These critiques are considered through a close examination of two prominent campaigns by PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). The author argues that some representations of female sexuality may align with a posthumanist feminist ethic and need not be read as sexist. Examining PETA's famous anti-fur ads and the more recent Milk Gone Wild campaign, the author identifies where PETA's campaigns are objectionable under a feminist ethic and where they are subversive of an anthropocentric and male-dominated order alike. The article thus recuperates part of PETA's work from feminist critiques, but also reveals the constructions posthumanist advocacy should exclude to avoid elevating the status of nonhuman animals at the expense of women.

PART I: INTRODUCTION

It is no secret to those immersed in animal advocacy that there is a debate in the movement between those who believe in animal welfare initiatives and those who insist on rights-oriented approaches only (Francione
2000, Cavalieri 2001, Wise 2000, Regan 2004, Sunstein and Nussbaum 2004). Animal welfare initiatives are those that advocate for better living conditions for animals while they are being instrumentally treated. Such efforts do not target the instrumental use of animals, but try to improve the quality of the lives the animals lead while subject and subordinated to human ends (Francione 1995, 6–7, 1819). In contrast, rights-oriented approaches are not just concerned with the quality of lives that animals have, but whether or not the animal experienced freedom, autonomy, and other rights suited to her or his capacity and needs. Animal rights activists are more concerned with action that will undermine human practices that exploit animals by treating them instrumentally and as human commodities. The difference is succinctly stated by Tom Regan when he states, in the context of justice for farmed animals, that what animal rightists seek is not larger cages, but no cages at all (Regan 2004; Regan, Philosophy of Animal Rights).

The internal debate is not so much that animal welfarists do not also support animal rights measures, but whether animal rights advocates should compromise on the goal for animal rights by supporting welfarist measures (Francione 1996). One of the primary worries educated by welfare measures is their possibility of misleading the general public into thinking that with better conditions no further ethical issues exist with regard to human treatment of animals (Francione 1996, 181–82). The efforts of arguably the most recognizable (and successful) public face of animal advocacy, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), have been implicated and taken as paradigmatic of this controversy (Francione 1996, 22–25, 33). PETA's efforts to work with McDonald's, Burger King, and other fast food giants to improve the conditions in factory farms (rather than pressure them to cease their operations altogether) have attracted criticism from other animal advocates. These advocates are concerned that working with the industry will perversely give it legitimacy and credibility as a supporter of animal interests and, in the long-run, will do nothing to undermine the property and instrumental status of animals that permits human use of animals in the first place (Francione 1996, 34–35).

The welfare-rights debate, and the role of PETA in influencing its contours, is an important one. It is related to another debate over strategy developing in the animal advocacy community and the even more central
role of PETA's campaigns in generating it. It may be speculated that one of the reasons that PETA has become the organizational face of animal advocacy for the public is due to its celebrity endorsements, sexualized images, and provocative campaigns to garner attention for its cause. While there has been discussion of the ethics of using celebrities to campaign for social justice, many types of charitable and public interest organizations do this and have done so for years (Cummings 2001, 4). PETA has not attracted much specific negative criticism for this dimension of its public relations strategy. Instead, it has been singled out for critique for campaigns that use sexually objectified women's bodies to capture attention and other campaigns that have made comparisons between the ways in which animals are treated today and the ways in which humans have been treated in the past. PETA's “I'd Rather Go Naked Than Wear Fur” campaign, ongoing since 1990, and the short-lived “Holocaust on Your Plate” and “End Slavery” campaigns, are notable in this regard. Feminists have criticized the former repeatedly for relying on sexism to advance animal issues, while the latter met with recoil from representative Jewish and African American groups in the United States who accused PETA of equating them to animals, reducing the horror of those oppressions, and violating their human dignity.

These campaigns and their responses highlight the ethical question of how a group which advances a social justice agenda, and thus presumably self-identifies as progressive, may interact with—whether by disregarding, not addressing, harnessing, or exploiting—other social-justice causes. The strategies and tactics by which diagnosis of ‘social problems’ is translated into campaigns for social change invoke normative claims, reminding us that social-justice agendas may (also) involve the diagnosis of discursive formations that mark the structural supports of moral orthodoxies. Attention to the frame(s) through which animal activists orient their ‘social problems work’ is vital, not least because animal bodies are often invoked in practices of racialization. Culturally situated discourses regarding human-animal boundaries, and resulting norms of ‘animal practices,’ continue to be used to construct (racialized) differences between people and sustain power relations between dominant and marginalized groups (Elder, Wolsh, and Emel 1998).

This paper will assess PETA's campaigns involving the sexualization of women's bodies—a marker of current global animal advocacy—from
an intersectional feminist perspective, that is, a perspective that attends to the diversity of social markers of identities and the corresponding hierarchies of gender, race, species, etc., that inform them. This query connects to the welfare-rights debate in terms of focusing on the ethics of animal advocacy and asking the difficult question of how to best engage in an imperfect world to advance the interests of animals. Addressing the intersectional dimensions of animal advocacy, I will argue that the use of women’s bodies to “sell” animal rights must be read in its discursive context, and that women’s bodies will not always figure in the same way in animal rights campaign imagery. The presence of female sexuality in PETA campaigns should not be read immediately as sexist and problematic and may instead be productive and subversive for an intersectional feminist ethic. Part II of this paper introduces the relevance of intersectionality to the animal rights debate to briefly set out why those interested in human rights should care about animals and vice versa. Part III discusses the nature of the two controversial PETA campaigns, which are then normatively assessed in Part IV.

PART II: INTERSECTIONALITY AND ANIMALS

Intersectionality, which, in legal scholarship, emerged out of critical race feminism, is a theory that stresses that experiences of injustice are always already the products of multiple hierarchies working in layered and intertwined tandem (Crenshaw 1989; Wing 1997). It is a version of anti-essentialist critiques which are now familiar in feminist scholarship about the need to attend to multiplicity and diversity in social formation and not maintain a limited focus on gender when thinking about the interests of women (Spelman 1989). Much of the scholarship that merges the insights of intersectionality with animals comes from feminists (Bailey 2007, Adams and Donovan 1995 and 2000). The important contribution of ecofeminism to both environmental ethics and feminist theory is its delineation of the links among various forms of oppression that subordinate women, racialized peoples, and the Earth. Within ecofeminism, vegetarian ecofeminism has added the critical perspective of nonhuman animals to ecofeminist arguments (Gaard 2002, Seager 2003, Donovan 2006). In their revolutionary work in this area, Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan (2000) have traced the gendered and racial politics of animal use as well as the species politics of sexist and racist practices to argue that the commodification and exploitation of women, racialized peoples, and
animals are indelibly linked and mutually sustaining. Adams describes this in relation to her earliest project looking at the gendered cultures of meat-eating and pornography:

Once the existence of meat is disconnected from the existence of an animal who was killed to become that "meat," meat becomes unanchored by its original referent (the animal), becoming instead a free-floating image, used often to reflect women's status as well as animals.' Animals are the absent referent in the act of meat eating; they become the absent referent in images of women butchered, fragmented, or consumable. (Adams 2003, 14–15)

Adams draws our attention to the discursive connections between images of animals and images of women and how the two are often stand-ins for each other as the common subordinated denominator in hierarchical and commodifying exchanges of meat-eating and heterosexist pornography. In The Sexual Politics of Meat, and elsewhere (Adams and Donovan 2000), Adams argues that the potency of the absent referent to make animal and gendered bodies so fungible is enabled by a Cartesian binary mindset that associates femaleness and animality with the realms of the body and nature and associates all of these concepts to the subordinate end of discursive dichotomies such as reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature, etc (Adams 2000; Plumwood 2002). She and other scholars have noted that for feminists to effectively dismantle unjust practices against women, they must include animals and the concept of species difference within their ethical horizons. Similar to the arguments of intersectionalists, the argument underscores connections in the modalities of injustice in that they influence and construct one another (Adams 2000).

Similarly, as Cary Wolfe (2003a) has recently detailed, other scholars have extended critical cultural theory to animals by deconstructing the concept of human and species (Fuss 1996, Wolfe 2003b). They have explored the shifting and fraught meaning of the "human" in western societies and thus denaturalized it in current ethical theories. Just as a critical ingredient of human justice projects (feminism, postcolonialism, queer theory) has been to demonstrate the social constructedness of concepts traditionally imagined as natural (woman, man, gender, race, sexuality, etc.), these scholars have sought to destabilize the assumption that the human/nonhuman border is somehow more scientifically legitimate and without cultural genesis (Fuss 1996, 4).

An effect of this two-pronged critique is to highlight the connections
between human-based oppressions and animal-based ones in an effort to persuade those committed to human rights to think/care about animals. What has been less of a concern given the current arrangement of human ethical sensibilities is the need to persuade those who are committed to animals to also see these connections and thus care, if they do not already, about human-based oppressions. With the controversial PETA campaigns that have emerged recently, the concern is not so much that PETA is a group that does not support human rights and should because of the interactive nature of, for example, racism, sexism and speciesism. Instead, the worry surfaces that their campaigns exploit gendered and racialized logics and images which are harmful to women and racialized peoples and also, because of the interactive nature of oppressions, animals as well. The rest of this paper considers this concern, starting with a discussion of the campaigns.

PART III: PETA'S SEXUALIZED CAMPAIGNS

One visit to PETA's website makes clear the numerous campaigns that it undertakes with respect to animals in food, clothing, entertainment, research, etc. While not all of these campaigns involve nudity or overt sexuality, many do. I have chosen to focus on two campaigns only as illustrations of the type of advocacy in which PETA engages. I have chosen the I'd Rather Go Naked/Fur is Dead Campaign and more recent anti-fur and other skin ads, because PETA's work on fur is what caught the attention of the mainstream and helped cement the association of PETA with female nudity and sex. I follow this discussion with a description of the new Milk Gone Wild (MGW) campaign, which is perhaps a harbinger of future directions in advocacy for PETA.

A) Anti-Fur and Skin Campaign

PETA's anti-fur campaign has a long history. While the totality of the campaign is not about naked female bodies, and many serious ads exist relying on other emotions and cultural symbols to instill an anti-fur message, a prominent component of the overall anti-fur initiative has been the "I'd Rather Go Naked Than Wear Fur" campaign. In this campaign, PETA ran a series of print ads featuring famous and emerging celebrities, most of them female and most of them white, in partially nude shots. The famous slogan from this campaign is associated with a particular ad
featuring famous supermodels who claimed that they “would rather go naked than wear fur.” The slogan was continued in ads featuring non-model celebrities as well and formed a prominent, although not exclusive part, of PETA’s anti-fur advocacy. One of the print ads from the “I’d Rather Go Naked Than Wear Fur” Campaign still appearing on PETA’s website features 21-year old actor Dominique Swain posing nude. She is strategically placed in front of a chalkboard to cover sexually explicit areas but also to invoke not-so-subtle associations with her schoolgirl stature as the lead actress in the recent remake of the film, *Lolita*. She is writing “lines” on the chalkboard indicating that she “would rather go naked than wear fur.” The caption under her states that “kindness is a class act.”

Alongside the “I’d Rather Go Naked Than Wear Fur” campaign, is PETA’s Fur is Dead campaign. The visuality, or social meanings ascribed to white female bodies, is deployed here as well. One ad features Pamela

*Fig. 1. Dominique Swain’s “I'd Rather Go Naked Than Wear Fur” PETA Anti-Fur Ad.*
Anderson, PETA's international spokesperson and perhaps the contemporary embodied epitome of dominant white femininity as sexualized and on-display for a male heteronormative gaze, with her nude back to the camera and looking over her right shoulder. She is heavily made-up, and appears to be braving wintry weather without any clothing. Under falling snowflakes that accentuate the whiteness of Anderson, she tells viewers to "Give Fur the Cold Shoulder."

Still another ad, featuring a nude and white Miss Great Britain, Yana Booth, advocates against the use of bear skins by British guards with the caption "Bare Skin, Not Bear Skin." 

![Image](image_url)

*Fig. 2. Pamela Anderson’s “Give Fur The Cold Shoulder” PETA Anti-Fur Ad.*

Some of PETA's ads cross the threshold of simply drawing attention to fur through nakedness and sexualizing the white female body as object for male pleasure as the above ads do, to actually creating an explicit association between the discursive text message and the image of white women...
as sex objects. In this second category, in addition to the visual images, we have the extra-sexualized dimension of textual references to sexual activities or body parts. One anti-leather ad features white actress Alicia Silverstone in a black dominatrix/biker “chick” outfit that sports a label telling people to “Fake it—for the Animals’ Sake.” The caption underneath Silverstone reads: “Pleather Yourself,” harnessing the ability of the appellation for faux leather to play upon a more discreet term for masturbation.

Interestingly, the contrary message is delivered to women by Melissa Rivers who appears in an ad with what appears to be a fake fur coat, telling people (read: women) to “fake it...for the animals’ sake!” The ad exploits the cultural knowledge around the inability of conventional heterosexual sexual practices to sexually satisfy the majority of women. Instead of encouraging women to “pleather themselves,” they are told here to reenact a heavily gendered sexual script for the benefit of animals.

In yet another, the white Anna Nicole Smith adopts a pose surrounded
by white men who take pleasure at looking at her. It is staged to imitate Marilyn Monroe, the ghost rival of Anderson as the “classic,” whiter than white, sex bombshell, in her classic “Gentlemen Prefer Blondes” number in the film *Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend*. With an arm upraised to reveal a meticulously hairless underarm, intimating a similarly groomed nether area lying beneath the dress, the caption below Smith reads: “Gentlemen Prefer Fur-Free Blondes.”

A similar strategy was employed in an ad featuring the lower half of a bikini-wearing slender white woman. The woman’s pubic hair protrudes past the boundaries of the bikini fabric. The caption reads: “Fur trim. Unattractive.” Whereas the association with and double entendre to the “proper” appearance of female pubic hair in Smith’s anti-fur statement above (Fig. 6) is suggestive, here it is unmistakably explicit.

A similar association between animal and women bodies occurs in a print ad that features a naked Imogen Bailey, with a surprised look on her face, holding a white bunny against her to push up her breast while
shielding the nipple. The text reads “Hands Off the Buns.” The sexualized message can be read as an instruction to leave both animals and women alone.

Finally, to round out this sampling, we encounter an image (Figure 9) of Brazilian model, Fernanda Travares, appearing on a fashion runway in a tank top and mini skirt designed by vegetarian fashion designer Stella McCartney. She holds an anti-fur sign in one hand while she smiles playfully yet confidently into the camera. The text next to her reads “Models Should be the Only Foxes on the Runway.” Safely assuming that viewers will share a cultural lexicon which refers to women, with pejorative intention, as animals to convey various traits, with foxes denoting sexual desirability, the ad encourages the fashion industry to reject fur (Dunayer 2001).
B) Milk Gone Wild Campaign

Even after the heyday of the “I'd Rather Go Naked Campaign,” PETA continues to place sexuality, sex and female bodies at the center of its anti-fur and other animal advocacy. Protests impugning circuses, for example, have attracted controversy for their placement of minimally clothed women, with tigress or other animal markings, in cages under the banners of “Shackled, Loneliness, Beaten” with attendant calls to boycott animal circuses under the banners. A recent PETA e-newsletter provides a link to the “Chicks for Chicks” campaign which appears on PETA’s Kentucky Fried Cruelty website. There, one finds four photos of four female PETA activists and employees who have donned chickadee yellow bikinis in winter weather to draw attention to KFC’s treatment (described as torture on the signs the women hold) of chickens. This campaign also closely resembles the work of PETA’s Commando Chicks, women who do vegan activism focused on the treatment of chickens on factory farms.

But perhaps the most controversial new campaign juxtaposing female
sexuality with the animal rights message is PETA's Milk Gone Wild (MGW) campaign. This is a political spoof of the Girls Gone Wild (GGW) phenomenon. GGW is an industry that centers on a television show targeted at selling videos/DVDs of college-aged women who bare their breasts for the camera and engage in other sexually suggestive behavior with other women or by themselves. Although there are many women who participate in the filming with inclinations toward exhibitionism, the enterprise attempts to project a narrative of otherwise "nice girls" letting their sexual inhibitions down while on vacation to create a voyeuristic sampling for the viewer of the erotic/pornographic feast that awaits them on the even more graphic videos available for purchase. Indeed, the attractive young male cameramen who descend on drunken party revelers to scout for compliant women are given monetary bonuses if women they recruit fit the image of innocence the series covets (Hoffman 2006).

A typical vignette on the infomercials is for the camera to be focused on a woman or a group of women (again, overwhelmingly white) and the voice of the male photographer, or sometimes the thirtysomething CEO himself who figures prominently in the infomercials, asking them if they would take off their tops, expose their genitals, or sexually touch each other. Invariably, the women they show acquiesce to the demands and a censorship band will appear on the infomercial covering any overexposure of skin. In return for their nudity and sexual expression/objectification, the women may receive GGW clothing, one element of the lifestyle brand that the CEO is trying to cultivate, such as a T-shirt or a trucker's hat (Hoffman 2006). The vignettes are periodically interrupted by the plug to buy the products which do not contain any censoring and thus permit the purchaser to view even more. At last count, there were 48 or so themed videos/DVDs with the apparently titillating titles of Girls Gone Wild: Sex Starved College Girls, Girls Gone Wild: Ultimate Sex Rush, Girls Gone Wild: Dorm Room Fantasies, and even Girls Gone Wild: Canada.

The enterprise has become a $40 million player in the soft-porn industry (Hoffman 2006), not including the revenue generated from spin-off clothing and restaurant lines, and music CDs (Hoffman 2006). Given its presence in public culture, and especially with the younger college crowd, it is not surprising that GGW has become the object of spoof and imitation. PETA's Milk Gone Wild campaign parodies GGW. A visit to PETA's milkgonewild.com website reveals PETA's use of sex to draw at-
tention to the abuses involved in the dairy industry and the unnaturalness of drinking milk and consuming dairy. Visitors are invited to click on a banner featuring young women to “Join the Party.” Another box, which features a bobbing pink circle with an inner ring tells visitors to “Click on the nipple for some T&A...er...make that some Q&A.” Clicking on both boxes, of course, takes one to information and statistics about dairy consumption and tries to debunk myths and respond to arguments about why people would want to continue to drink milk.

The mainstay of PETA’s MGW website, however, is the TV spot that was banned from appearing during the 2006 Super Bowl. This is approximately a 28 second spot that follows the tropes of GGW: A moving camera enters a party zone/dance club/bar atmosphere and zeroes in on young white women who are encouraged to bare their breasts. The first two smile yet refuse, and then starts a stream of women who do reveal one or both breasts. As the clip continues, we have a woman gyrating in a bathroom and others waving their breasts around. The twist with MGW, is that the breasts the women reveal are cow udders—swollen, engorged and dripping with milk streaming down onto the floors and past the open mouths of drunken and crazed young, largely white, men whooping the women on. The clip closes with women’s voices declaring “Milk Gone Wild” (paralleling the women in GGW who state the brand after they have done something “wild” like baring their breasts), followed by a blackened screen that fades into the statement “Meet your Milk.” After the party shock segment is over, the video begins chronicling the treatment animals confront in milk production for several minutes, showing images of confinement, engorged udders, slaughter, and veal auctions.

**PART IV: CAMPAIGN ETHICS**

It is difficult to criticize the conviction that animates PETA’s campaigns. Animals are such an oppressed group and the exploitation that they undergo at the hands of humans is unfathomable. PETA’s attempts to reveal their horrific treatment with sex and sexualized images of women has been criticized for its seeming ‘forgetting’ of other oppressions and hierarchies—a criticism sometimes aligned with a presentation of animal activism and advocacy as a ‘problematic’ single-issue social movement. These critiques of ‘incomplete advocacy’ avoid engaging with the contexts of animal activism and the challenges of articulating the realities of institutional animal exploitation. It bears remembering the trauma that
animal advocates experience through advocacy replete with images and live visuals of animal suffering and the attendant disavowal of this suffering by the larger society (Bryant 2006). As Taimie Bryant explains in discussing the dismissive responses that animal advocates often receive to their feelings and work:

Is it any wonder that such dismissive, condescending responses from apparently caring people make it difficult for those so-treated to respond to others’ truth-telling about their own traumatic lessons? When activists, in any social justice movement, must be wholly dedicated to speaking truths that others will not or cannot hear, it is a gargantuan task for them to take on all of the forms of oppression intertwined with the truths they speak. Is it really any wonder that advocates seeking to end exploitation of animals for flesh food production are unable fully to consider the plight of minority workers from whom jobs would be taken as a result of their activism? Is it really any wonder that advocates seeking to end exploitation of workers are unable fully to consider the suffering of animals in those same enterprises? (2006, 114)

Bryant highlights the incompleteness of advocacy that some may perceive in a campaign that resists factory farming but is silent on repositioning factory workers in another non animal-abusing industry. She, of course, wants to resist the characterization of the advocacy as incomplete or in some way deficient. I join her in this resistance. But the argument I make here asks something different of animal advocates such as PETA. I am not suggesting that PETA must broaden its mandate to include women’s rights: Although such collaborative advocacy, as Bryant (2006, 126–27) terms it, would be a positive development, a focus on nonhuman animals is still legitimate.

Rather, PETA’s campaigns should be informed by feminist work. This means that their campaigns should not intentionally entrench sexism and other difference-based hierarchies or deny the oppressive realities for marginalized humans. To return to Bryant’s example, “(a)t the very least, animals’ advocates should not deny to those worker groups what they themselves are denied: recognized legitimacy of their claims” (Bryant 2006, 125). There are several reasons for this, but the one that I have advanced here is the intersectional argument: to the extent that the discourses supporting injustices against women are intimately connected through binary dualisms and otherwise to injustices against animals, the latter, which all animal advocates must care about by definition, will not
be undone (Gaard 2002, 133; Wolfe 2003b, 7). Emphasizing this connection, then, is not to devalue the critical work performed by animal advocates or the intensity of the trauma that work can produce. Rather, it is proffered to make animal advocacy more effective while encouraging people who already care a great deal to think of even more forms of marginality if they have already not done so (and, of course, many have). With this clarification in hand, I now turn to an assessment of PETA's anti-fur and skin campaign from an intersectional perspective.

A) Objectification

Although not all of the anti-fur/skin advocacy uses compromised images of young women, and though some of the images are arguably sex-positive and encouraging of female sexuality (Figure 4: “Pleather Yourself”), a subset of images exist that are problematic from a feminist intersectional ethic. This is because the images are evocative of the soft pornographic images that appear in publications such as Playboy and Penthouse in their reproduction of nude white female bodies to be consumed by a male, heteronormative gaze (Mulvey 1975, hooks 1992). Pamela Anderson strikes a classic “come hither” pose that is standard fare in the heteronormative representation of women for the pleasure of men (Figure 1). The ubiquity of the white, heterosexual male gaze watching women’s bodies is illustrated well by the schoolgirl stance Dominique Swain projects in her ad (Figure 2). Her suggestive gaze toward the viewer is framed by an apple left for the teacher whose position and disciplining authority and gaze we are asked to adopt. The images, and the popularity of long, nimble, blond, and able-bodied white model bodies that appear in them (Pamela Anderson, Dominique Swain, Alicia Silverstone, etc.), also engage and perpetuate a racialized, gendered, and ableist discourse of beauty and their attendant practices of self presentation to achieve impossible standards of attractiveness to heterosexual men (Bordo 1995; Wolf 1995; hooks 1992, 73).

The Gentlemen Prefer Fur-Free Blondes ad featuring Anna Nicole Smith (Figure 6) does this explicitly, while the other ads do this implicitly by featuring model bodies that uphold a standard of bodily “perfection,” including the perfection of whiteness that relies on extensive regimes of disciplining one’s body. Indeed, racial logics are critical to PETA’s campaigns insofar as they seek to underscore the innocence of animals by
choosing white bunnies and featuring them with young and white bodies (see Figure 8). As bell hooks (1992, 61–77) has noted, it is whiteness and white women’s bodies which remain the repository of innocence while Black women, for example, are permitted sexual representation, even agency, only as “fallen women” inhabiting sites of animality and lust.

Where PETA does include some images of naked white men, they are either comedic and non-sexualized (see Figure 10) or appear along with naked white women (see Figures 11 and 12). White men are not encouraged to modify their bodies for beauty (“Wear Your Own Fur”—Figure 10). Tellingly, the only sexualized men in a current perusal of PETA’s print ads gallery relating to fur reveals are those of racialized, and specifically, Black men (see Figure 13–15), thus instantiating the dominant pattern of the hypersexualized black body. The ad of Kristoff St. John (Figure 14) is particularly instructive of the dominant racialized narratives at play. At one level the ad reverses the tired representation of non-white men lusting after white female bodies by showing three women, dressed in office attire no less, in the background checking out St. John’s form. Yet, with this racialized female gaze (two of the women are white and one is Asian), St. John’s own subjectivity, enabled by his direct gaze toward the audience, is marred. In Figure 13, the Black male body is caged above the caption that “Fur Bites.” The choice of a marked Black body to stand-in for the animal, which retrieves the racist history of parallels between Blacks and animals (Gaard 2002, 125–6), overwhelms any subversive message regarding the associations between the incarcerating effects of animal and human oppressions.

Given the frequency with which PETA has used the soft pornographic trope to advocate for animals, it is not surprising that it has found itself at odds with feminists, both within and outside of animal advocacy, who have expressed concern and cynicism about the campaigns largely due to its gendered dimensions (as opposed to racialized representations) (Pace 2005, Craig 2002). A very recent interview questioned Ingrid Newkirk, the co-founder and President of PETA, about her views on the critiques PETA has generated from feminist critics who are sympathetic to PETA’s cause, but not necessarily the means PETA employs. In response to a question highlighting the difficulty of achieving revolutionary change by playing within the system (here: using women’s bodies to “sell” animal rights), Newkirk responds:
Figs. 10 & 11. David Cross’s “Wear Your Own Fur” PETA Anti-Fur Ad and Boss Models’ “Turn Your Back on Fur.”
Figs. 12 & 13. Jenna Morasca and Ethan Zahn’s “We’d Rather Go Naked Than Wear Fur” PETA Anti-Fur Ads and Mola’s “Fur Bites.”

Sure. We do play the game from within the system. That is what we have chosen to do. However, nudity per se isn’t offensive to us. I have a picture of a naked woman celebrating her mastectomy on my desk. She’s beautiful with one breast. Beauty doesn’t require nudity or Society’s (biological) idea of perfection, but there’s also nothing wrong, in my book, with the “perfect” human body being used to sell an idea. I resent the idea of some women assuming the role of father, brother, boyfriend, and telling me and other women to put our clothes back on, cover up and behave. If I want to strip for fun, to use my body as a political tool, whatever, it is my business....All the women and men in our “Naked” ads are volunteers, no one makes them do what they do, and if it competes with selling fur coats and makes people think you can be sexy, which, face it, is the goal of many consumers, great.44

After first denouncing the beauty ideal society upholds through the mastectomy reference,45 Newkirker defends the celebration and harnessing of beautiful bodies through the twin feminist values of empowerment (“I resent
the idea of some women assuming the role of father, brother, boyfriend") and autonomy ("no one makes them do what they do"). She admits that PETA has chosen the path of working within the system to achieve its goal of exposing the public to animal advocacy, but to the charge that PETA's use of one oppression to cure another is unacceptable in an ethical society, the values of empowerment and autonomy enable Newkirk to resist the characterization of PETA's campaigns as oppressive.

In doing so, she rehearses what have become staple feminist arguments in favor of certain forms of pornography, sex work, and commodification of female bodies. Some feminists have criticized the theories of influential anti-pornography feminists such as Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin as anti-sex and responsible for eclipsing the liberatory potential of public sexual expression for some women, given long-standing cultural representations of women as disinterested in sex (Rubin 1993a). Others, while acknowledging the existence of the (white, middle-class, heterosexual) male gaze to which the majority of cultural representations cater in entertainment and the peddling of pleasure, point to the incompleteness of cultural readings of sexuality that "cannot conceive of the pleasure of
being the image, the fetish, or the object of the gaze” (Halberstam 2005). Even the deep heteronormative frame of the pornography industry (Rubin 1993b) can yield self-actualizing results for women who, despite a range of options, choose to enter or continue with sex work (Narayan 2002; Kapur 2005). In a similar move that would align her with pro-sex feminist critiques, Newkirk insists that PETA’s ads are not sexist merely because they use sex since “(n)udity is not synonymous with sexism.”48 In giving this response, she is able to disarm the charge of hypocrisy leveled by the interviewer who asks “what kind of double standard does it send to feminists when on one hand you implore them not to become ‘human chauvinists’ in their outlook on nature and other lives, but on the other hand you allow sexism in your ads to dominate?”49

The debate between pro-sex and anti-pornography feminists over the meaning of pornographic sexual expression for women who choose to engage in it is long-standing and likely perennial (Langton 1993). I cannot hope to offer a resolution here. Rather, my concern is to at least acknowledge the concerns over women’s objectification that pornography raises as one element of the calculus that PETA strategists need to attend to as they craft their advocacy plans. To emphasize a point which, I hope, is now clear, attention to objectification is important not simply because it may harm women, but because it undermines the posthumanist project in general that PETA seeks to advance. If we take the sex-species system and theory of intersectionality seriously then how PETA uses women’s bodies to promote animal advocacy should matter even if we were to fully accept the arguments of pro-sex feminists. Any campaign that relies on standard representations of women that associate them with and even reduce them to their bodies continues the very same logic of commodification and objectification that is used against animals. Equating femininity with a body that is always already amenable to consumption by a masculine gaze reinforces a dualism that is also used to subordinate animals (Deckha 2006). Moreover, reducing women to their bodies in a context of animality, whether by presenting them as sexualized “bunnies” or “foxes” or simply connecting their sexualized bodies to the idea of animals, solidifies the trajectory of thinghood. All the usual suspects of things, rather than persons, are still aligned: women, body, animals.

It is critical to note that this familiar positioning serves to entrench animals into their dangerous side of dualistic modes of thought whether
the sexualization is experienced as empowerment by the women appearing in the ads or not (Pace 2005). While the possibility that PETA's images work to promote the personhood of women through a pro-sex reading of pornography or through a sense of embodied resistance to hegemonic uses of animals (Pace 2005), the perceived investment in the sex-species system nonetheless helps to dilute any prospect of personhood for animals that the campaigns hope to convey. The objectification argument, then, insists that representations that objectify women, whether empowering for women or not, continue a discourse of commodification that positions animals as objects as well, rather than subjects or legal persons. As discussed above, logics of racialization and ideal embodiment are also legitimated. The subversive impact of a campaign imploring people to respect the life and suffering of an animal over fashion and lifestyles is thus compromised.

B) Minimal Impact

A further argument against PETA's anti-fur and skin campaign comes from the possibility that the campaign will actually alienate more supporters than it will recruit. PETA risks alienating women (and men) who object to pornography for the sake of garnering attention and publicity even for a good cause. Indeed, PETA's campaign incorporates a cost-benefit calculus that assumes that increased attention will actually have a long-standing effect on posthumanist projects. Yet, it is not clear that this will materialize. To be sure, PETA's success in forcing major institutional animal users to modify some of their practices from a welfarist approach have been significant. Moreover, since it was founded, PETA has grown into the largest animal rights organization in the world with offices in the United States, Spain, the United Kingdom, France, India, Germany and the Netherlands; it has also grown into the wealthiest with over 1.6 million regular donors.

From one perspective, then, it may be concluded that PETA's use of sex and celebrity to promote animal-rights consciousness has registered an impact and that this marketing strategy works—why else would PETA, staffed in part by self-identified feminist women, continue it? But it is not certain whether PETA's regular supporters and core activists became interested because of the sex-clad ads and would not otherwise have become involved. As Rebecca Onion puts the point in commenting on an
environmental campaign that uses sexualized female bodies similar to the ways PETA does:

(\text{the kind of sacrifices and changes in outlook that becoming a true environmentalist entail are not going to be brought about by a moment of lust for a sexy girl in a buster, a strategically placed lettuce leaf, or nothing at all.}^{53} (2006, 31)

A similar concern arises with the responses to PETA's campaigns. For example, the “fur trim” ad (Figure 7) sparked a lot of debate in the pages of Ms. and elsewhere but, as Lesli Pace (2005) notes, “the “critiques of their ad did not focus on the importance of anti-fur campaign, but on the appropriateness of the ad itself.” Irrespective of the meanings ascribed to the images by the women who appear within them for PETA, their reception in the larger cultural terrain may obscure and shift the message the women wish to convey.

\textbf{C) Productive Sex}

Perhaps due to the criticism from women’s groups over the sexualized use of women’s bodies, it appears that PETA's campaigns have become more gender neutral. Recent co-ed nudity-inspired campaigns include a “Running of the Nudes” in Pamplona, Spain, to protest the Running of the Bulls that happens in that city annually.\textsuperscript{54} The “Sexiest Vegetarian” contest among non-celebrities includes both men and women entering for male and female honours respectively.\textsuperscript{55} As featured above (Figures 13–15), the current anti-fur campaign, “Ink Not Mink,” features primarily (Black) male celebrities in nude shots showing off body art such as tattoos rather than furs.\textsuperscript{56} But not all of PETA's sexualized campaigns have caught up to this standard. PETA's very recent State of the Union Undress, timed to coincide with President Bush's State of the Union Address on January 23, 2007 is the most sensational example. By visiting PETA.org, viewers (after indicating that they are over 18) are able to access a video where they can listen to a young, able-bodied white woman deliver a State of the Union address for PETA's strategy of using nudity on behalf of animals while they watch the woman take of \textit{all} of her clothes one by one.\textsuperscript{57}

What are the implications of objectification and minimal impact for PETA or any other socially-minded group that seeks to publicize and actualize a project of social justice? Does it mean that women's sexualized bodies can never feature in political advocacy aimed at social justice for
animals or otherwise? If it did this would, as Pace (2005, 39) has argued in applying feminist scrutiny to PETA's fur ads, alter a his/herstory of women's embodied subjectivity to generate political resistance. It might be possible, given certain contexts, to retain a productive possibility for sex and female sexuality in animal advocacy by finding images that “can serve as examples of working within a system of oppression while simultaneously critiquing it” (Pace 2005). This seems especially important, as Pace (2005, 39) notes, given women's low visibility in the public sphere vis-à-vis men otherwise. We have an example of what a resistive image that uses women's bodies might look like already with the Milk Gone Wild campaign. As discussed above, this campaign showcases representations (women with breast udders; milk dripping from their breasts, men lapping up the milk) that are disturbing, even disgusting, for its audience. But its purpose and effects are different from those sampled here related to the anti-fur and skin campaign in an ethically important way.

**Conventional Purposes**

In order to grasp the difference in purpose, it is helpful to unpack the discursive registers of the various campaigns. The majority of the ads forming part of PETA's anti-fur and skin campaign feature women's bodies as lures for attention; they are meant to titillate their audience to focus attention. These ads do not animalize women per se. The women are not meant to represent the animal either in part or in whole, but simply to catch attention. In this modest ambition, the first category of “I'd Rather Go Naked/Fur is Dead” ads (attention lures) perpetuate a discourse of sexual objectification of women for posthumanist ends without moving beyond the pornographic image other than to decry a particular use of animal fur or skin. Figures 1 to 3 above are examples of such Category 1 ads, which do not otherwise disrupt anthropocentrism and actively construct a posthumanist critique. The same limit inheres in the second category of ads that may be identified from the sampling above. These ads (Figures 4–7: “Pleather Yourself,” “Fake It,” “Gentleman Prefer Fur-Free Blondes,” “Fur Trim. Unattractive.”), use a sexual play on words to be provocative, sexually suggestive, and thus draw attention to the ethics of fur and leather. While this sexual play invites associations between animal bodies (fur and leather) and women's bodies (vaginas that are fur-free, and are at once the space of fake orgasms and orgasmic self-stimulation),
the cross-species identification is not a transgressive one disruptive of entrenched ideas of species difference. Moreover, the ads do not, either through image or text, attempt to dislodge the object structure of commodification that normalizes the fur industry in the first place. Instead, they seize the dominant markers of appropriately gendered female sexuality, which cast women as sexual objects.

A third category of ads in the “I’d Rather Go Naked/Fur is Dead” campaign discussed above, where women supplant animals in a particular cultural scene (Figure 10: “Women should be the only foxes on the runway”), gesture toward the subversive potential of cross-species identification. This ad is not simply a random use of female sexuality to sell an idea or message as in Category 1 ads, but uses women to stand-in for animals. The presence of a model and sexualized female body still has the intended potency of generating attention, and, as in the Category 2 ads, the reader is invited to make (sexualized) associations between animal bodies and women’s bodies. However, instead of equating women with animals to disparage both as occurs in conventional hegemonic gendered and racialized understandings of the human (Dunayer 2001), or reducing women to bodily parts to make the connection to animal suffering as in the Category 2 ads, the Category 3 ads make use of these associations in order to align animal bodies with female subjects. The entire woman, confidently looking at the viewer, appears in this ad—and her gaze suggesting a knowing subject, with (sexual) agency, even as her position on the runway reminds us of the context of this gaze, and the situated nature of this and all agency.

Through animalizing the bodies of consenting women (women as foxes), the ad attempts to make present the absent referent of those beings whose bodies are rendered completely abject and object in the constitution of human subjects. In this type of ad, though sex is still the lure, the cross-species identification subverts entrenched ideas of species difference. It is this strategy of antisubordination that can lend these images political value and marks them as part of a strategy of resistance (Razack 1996)—even as they continue to invite the objectification of women, enshrine deeply problematic aesthetic standards of beauty, and perpetuate a sex-species system by retaining the logic of commodification in characterizing these women as “foxes.” In this fraught domain, PETA approaches with this ad an idea of cultural space—the fashion world—where animal
bodies are left alone without fragmenting women's bodies or reducing them to a single part (as in "Fur Trim. Unattractive"—Figure 7).

My point here is not to celebrate the Category 3 ads, but to try to identify moments of resistive agency.\(^6^0\) Not only can the cross-species identification function as disruptive of entrenched ideas of species difference even as it retains the object structure of commodification, but white female privilege is encoded in the narrative of agency that makes such disruption possible. This subversive substitution of woman for animal (consenting foxes) is located in a context in which women are culturally understood, and understand themselves to be agents, both desired and desiring (to be beautiful) in a context of precarious yet recuperated female sexual agency and the fashion world of body-objects. Compare this ad to the previous discussion of the Kristoff St. John ad (Figure 14), in which a history of discursive formations linking the black body with the animal-as-object overwhelms any attempt at subversion. It is attention to the multiple dimensions of both oppression and agency, privilege and exclusion, that allows for a fruitful examination of the kinds of resistance possible in particular locations (Johnson 2002, 7–8), of the strategies and tactics that guide 'social problems work'.

I have suggested that Category 3 ads adopt a subversive strategy that attempts to make the absent referent present. In Carol Adams' work, the absent referent works through signs—overlapping and intersecting cultural codes that rename subjects as objects, naturalizing exclusion and absence. My attention to the location of strategies of resistance suggests that it is possible to re-stage these codes in order to set in motion a 'performativ e contradiction' (Butler 1997, 89) that exposes the contradictory or exclusionary character of previous formulations of subject-object boundaries. Judith Butler (1997, 159) suggests "the appropriation of such norms to oppose their historically sedimented effect constitutes the insurrectionary moment of that history, the moment that founds a future through a break with that past." However, this 'break' with history is not to be read as complete; the situation of the sign in a known discourse suggests that structures of the 'old order' are carried into the new as part of the 'meaningfulness' of the claim itself.

The Category 3 ads stage a 'performativ e contradiction' that challenges speciesism and the social construction of boundaries demarcating human animal-subjects and nonhuman animal-objects. However they do not do so in a way that challenges practices of objectification or the Carte-
sian dualisms at the core of humanist theories. A further critique might be that this ‘flooding of the field with agency’ sweeps away crucial differences between substitute and substituted for and avoids engaging with the implications of the absent referent. It might be argued that one reason PETA uses images of sexualized women is precisely because of the strength of the absent referent: animals have been made so absent from consciousness that we cannot fathom them representing their own needs. Furthermore, when animals are used to represent their own needs the images are often so disturbing that they are not allowed as advertisements (Adams 2000). Substitution might then be said to reinforce the power of the absent referent in making a living being absent. In her elaboration of the concept, Adams (2003, 58) suggests that the absent referent might be linked to ‘the problem of metaphor’—intimating that symbolic understandings play a role in the consumption of flesh-as-object. “The consumption of the referent reiterates its annihilation as a subject of importance in itself” (Adams 2003, 58).

The application of the concept of the absent referent, as developed by Carol Adams in The Sexual Politics of Meat (2003) and The Pornography of Meat (2003), is akin to the position of anti-pornography feminists in its reliance upon an understanding of discursive formations as deterministically constructed and impenetrable. The performative contradiction of subversive speech reveals that the sovereignty of meaning is constructed, contestable, and relies on the most fragile of boundaries, even as these boundaries are relied upon and (re)inscribed by continuing practices of objectification. It is instructive at this point to turn to PETA’s MGW campaign to consider another type of representation involving women’s bodies that may be read as counterhegemonic.

Subversive purposes

“Milk Gone Wild” is an example of a campaign that holds promise as a productive and subversive use of women’s bodies for animals and women. It takes the previous two layers of campaigns—1) randomly but intentionally using women’s bodies and, 2) using women as stand-ins for animals in order to make animals visible—and adds a third: 3) the blurring of species boundaries. In fact, the first two elements are put into the service of the third, which is the purpose of the ad—to expose the unnaturalness of dairy consumption and the abuses that inhabit the industry.

When I initially saw this ad I was struck and disturbed to an extent
that I have not been seeing the anti-fur campaigns discussed above. Indeed, the images are disturbing: (1) Women hybridized to have udders instead of breasts; (2) men acting out a (hetero)sexist male gender performance by trying to, with some success, drink the human/cow breast milk; and (3) the excessive spillage of milk into men’s mouths. These images possess, miraculously, potent value in an otherwise saturated media market of naked (white) female flesh. The possibility of a woman with cow breasts evokes cultural fears of the monstrous mother and of experiments with genetic engineering of milk and animals gone horribly in reverse to actually create animal-human hybrids (Shaw 2004). I suspect I would not be alone in my disturbed reaction since transgressions of hegemonic norms of bodily boundaries are often rendered abject and thus experienced as repugnant or perceived as perverse (Shaw 2004). The image of a man trying to drink breast/udder milk that is flowing over and spilling onto the floor as waste is the stuff of pornography not mainstream film (Giles 2004, 309). Images where the supplier of the milk is a hybridized woman are even further removed from the realm of the acceptable.

In juxtaposing these images, the ad conjures the fraught associations we have in contemporary western culture about human breast milk, the proper public (dis)appearance of lactating women, and the separation of sexuality and motherhood that straddles the Madonna/prostitute divide (Giles 2004). As Fiona Giles explains, the literal fluidity of breast milk is discursively contained within tight representational parameters:

The heteronormative profile for breastfeeding in the West is of the biological mother feeding her infant for between 3 and 12 months, so as to confer nutritional and developmental benefits on the child, and physiological benefits on the mother. While there is also literature supporting theories of increased bonding through breastfeeding, as well as its practical convenience and cheapness, the medical reasons are paramount and the most easily measured. The normative profile also shows breastfeeding to be an activity that is confined largely to private, domestic settings, and to involve only the mother and her child. This child is assumed to be her youngest biological offspring, and the only one being fed at the time, unless there’s a twin. Additionally, the breastmilk is assumed to be for the exclusive use of the baby, and to pass with as little notice as possible into its body, either via the breast directly or through hand expression or breast pumping into bottles, for later use. (2004, 309)
Giles' (2004, 306) description of the dominant profile for breastfeeding in contemporary Western representations is starkly different from PETA's portrayal of it in the MGW campaign. MGW is explicitly sexualized while the dominant profile is not—the lactating women are not asexual mothers conforming to the iconography of the Madonna-and-child dyad that prevails in breastfeeding representations. The recipients of the breast milk that spills out almost like seminal ejaculate are sex-crazed young white men; babies are nowhere to be seen. Indeed, the space of the MGW is the alcohol-infused bar/club scene, a space, as Rebecca Johnson (2005) has noted, where breastfeeding babies (and thus their mothers!) can be excluded as “minors” through liquor licensing laws. What is more, the overarching discourse when the animal subtext is removed is one of hedonism, not medicalization. To the extent that PETA offers a sharply non-dominant profile for breastfeeding to display a “transgressive breastfeeding behaviour,” (Giles 2004, 309) the MGW campaign offers a productive type of use of female sexuality.

Of course, sexualized maternity, and breast milk itself, is also eroticized through pornography, and it might be asked: How can MGW be transgressive if it adheres to a pornographic script that already sees women and their feminized protein as erotic? As I have suggested previously, MGW does not adhere to, but parodies the pornographic script. Imitation of both the ‘standard’ soft-porn of GGW and ‘lactation porn’ invites ridicule because of the replacement of female breasts with cow udders—subverting masculine desire. Indeed, what may have been truly disruptive was to have men lactating, but in this context the sexual imagery is both part of the campaign’s resistive strategy, and introduces subversive messages directed at conventional codes of masculine desire and consumption.

When the animal rights subtext is injected into the analysis, the subversive potential of the ad is amplified. It is precisely this commingling of images that subverts the wholesome image of milk, the dairy industry, and the treatment of animals within in that the dairy industry has carefully cultivated. A look on the sides of most cow milk cartons and you will find an idyllic painting of a cow grazing on fresh fields. You will not see pictures of cows confined to a pen barely larger than they are, in a state of near permanent lactation, hooked up to machines that continually pump milk out of them, with no light, movement, or ability to bond, nurture and raise their young (Hoffman 2006, Marcus 2005). The MGW campaign
not only, by the title and the swollen size of the udders, asks its audience to consider the excesses of the diary industry and inorganic character of milk. By associating cow udders with women’s breasts in a parodic context, and then depicting milk coming out of them being enjoyed by adult men, the campaign also makes a statement about the unnaturalness of drinking cow’s milk in the first place.

In other words, it should seem more or at least as natural for a human to drink the breast milk of another human rather than the breast milk of a non-human. Yet, remarkably, the reverse is presented as true in our culture. Somehow we have naturalized drinking the milk of another mammal, milk meant for that mammal’s offspring, even though it crosses species boundaries in a species-conscious culture where no other mammal drinks the milk of another species! Being shocked by the sight of a grown man drinking the milk that drops from a woman’s “cow” breast might provoke us to feel similarly about drinking any cow or non-human milk. MGW provides a complicated discourse that disrupts rigid norms, individual comfort levels and identities, and prompts consideration of the underlying social and cultural “ontological foundations” organizing our emotions, ethics and the rendering of certain objects as abject (Shaw 2004, 293; Pace 2005, 8).

Indeed, this is the message articulated in the remainder of the video following the spoof segment. This segment, entitled Meet Your Milk, narrates as follows with corresponding images:

Even though they give milk for the same reason that humans do, for their babies, on today’s diary farms mother cows are treated as nothing more than milk machines. 40% of dairy cows are lame by the time they reach the slaughterhouse. They are hooked up to machines a few times per day, machines that often injure them. At the end of their lives they are either sent straight to slaughter or are sold for slaughter at cattle auctions. More than 100,000 cows are unable to walk off the transport trucks every year yet they are slaughtered for human food anyway. At a fraction of their natural lifespan, they’re shipped to slaughter. Most hamburger in this country comes from spent dairy cows. Cows give milk for their offspring, not for human beings. These mother cows are impregnated annually to keep the milk flowing and their babies are torn from them shortly after birth, which causes both of them profound distress. Many of the males are sold to veal farmers who cram them into tiny crates where they cannot turn around or even comfortably lie down. If you are consuming milk you are supporting the veal
industry. Veal calves who can barely walk because their muscles have atrophied from a lack of use and anemia-inducing diet are often sold at auctions. (PETA, Milk Gone Wild Banned TV Spot)

From this segment of the ad, we see that PETA tries to address a number of issues relating to milk production: the confined and emotionally bereft lives of cows, the pain they endure during their life and at slaughter (one part of the video captures a hoisted up dangling cow whose insides are slit and is still alive while the blood spills out from her body), the danger in eating animal flesh, and the connection between milk and veal, the latter being a product with a higher measure of success in terms of consumer boycott because of ethical considerations (Marcus 2005, 37–38). The “wildness” of milk, then, appears to be the many ethical problems implicated in the related industries. There are thus notable political and subversive messages at play here that mark it as a different form of expression and knowledge-generator than the regular GGW campaign.

Using a spoof of GGW, and thus sexualized representations of women, to deliver this destabilization is not a gratuitous choice or a mere ploy for publicity and attention. Although the promise of women lifting their tops is no doubt the initial attention-grabber, the revelation of the udders and the sexualized images of these “lactating” women are important ingredients to disrupt the natural narrative of milk and the dairy industry as well as broaden the “narrow frame within which culturally sanctioned images of the lactating breast reside” (Giles 2004, 306). As viewers, seeing women with udders, and the milk spurtng from them, enables us to comprehend the idea that humans drinking milk from cows’ breasts is also unnatural and exposes us to an experience of breastfeeding that challenges the restrictive dominant profile that domesticates women. The images of the lactating women, while sexualized, are nonetheless valuable to a counterculture as what Judith Halberstam calls an “alternative form” of femininity. As Halberstam notes with respect to the visibility of gender in film and the dominance of the male gaze, “every now and then...the gendered binary on which the stability, the pleasure, and the purchase of mainstream cinema depend will be thoroughly rescripted, allowing for another kind of gaze or look” (2005, 85). We can extend this insight to MGW. Even though many representations of female sexuality are primarily contained within a heteronormative and racialized frame of pornography, it is possible and necessary to create alternative accounts to disrupt
the hegemony of the ones which enact violence (hooks 1992, 120). As bell hooks (1992, 130) stresses in her discussion of productive images of Black female bodies—representations that can install subjectivity where it is vacated and denied—the purpose of the bodily display matters. MGW “invite(s) the audience to look differently”—not to objectify, but critically reflect.

I am not suggesting that PETA could only have adopted its GGW-inspired spectacle to lodge its critique. One could imagine an abundance of ways in which to unpack our cultural stories around cow’s milk and/or disturb species boundaries to actually make consumers confront the idea of species difference and how it informs the politics of food. Yet, to the extent the MGW campaign does rely on sexuality here to construct its counternarrative, it is difficult to call it gratuitous or characterize it as discursively unrelated to PETA’s overall project of disturbing conventional notions of species difference and the value assigned to animal bodies. What is more, the campaign offers a transgressive representation for women with respect to breastfeeding, motherhood and sexuality. On this basis, it makes sense to acknowledge the work that sexualized images of women can enact for the benefit of animals (as well as women) and a posthumanist cultural critique.

PART IV: CONCLUSION

While awareness surrounding the treatment of animals is increasingly spreading to mainstream cultural venues, the issue of animal rights is still a low priority for the vast majority of the population. The attempt to elevate the cause in the public’s consciousness and generate compassion for animal suffering must be steadfast and creative in attracting and sustaining attention and generating counternarratives. Using the nude, largely white, female form is certainly one way of accomplishing this objective for animal advocates. Indeed, it is a strategy that PETA has employed. Yet, one needs to question the actual effect of such a campaign on PETA’s overall goals of abolishing the instrumental positioning of animals. While an understandable method for advocates desperate to capture more public attention, PETA and other animal advocates must take care that their use of the female form does not reenact problematic tropes of commodification and its concomitant objectification as well as other hegemonic modes of exploitation. Not only do these dynamics infect women’s personhood
across multiple axes of difference, it sustains a logic of oppression against animals that is counterproductive to the mandate and mission of groups such as PETA.

Moreover, it is possible to lodge a political campaign that showcases women’s sexuality in a more subversive, less domesticating manner. The MGW campaign is an instructive example of this type of representation. Its display of women’s bodies disrupts the hegemonic species boundary as well as normative representations of motherhood and sexuality rather than simply objectify women to call attention to animal suffering. More campaigns of this sort, where conventional representations of gendered, racialized, and sexualized logics are troubled, should be encouraged to the extent that campaigns use women and their bodies as a vital political tool. Such ads need not be a first choice for feminists working in animal advocacy as to the type of campaigns that should be preferred, but neither should they be categorically dismissed as simple exploitation.

NOTES
1. PETA is the largest animal rights group in the world with more than 1.6 million members and supporters and satellite offices in six countries. See PETA online: <http://www.peta.org/about>.
3. Consider the involvement of U2 frontman Bono and scores of celebrities in the Make Poverty History campaign, Princess Diana’s advocacy on land mines, Elizabeth Taylor on AIDS or the late Audrey Hepburn for UNICEF.

7. There is some debate over whether the animal activist movement is a social justice movement. Lyle Munro’s analysis of the animal movement through the lens of new social movement theory and resource mobilization theory is useful in this regard. Broadly speaking, a social movement may be characterized as a collective engagement in 'social problems work'—the diagnosis and categorization of 'social problems' and the concomitant challenging of moral orthodoxies and dominant social codes. See Munro 2005, at 3 and 33–37.

8. Peter Goodrich defines discursive formations as the relation of bodies of knowledge to social practices and structures (Goodrich, 1987, 132).

9. In rebuttal of challenges to the animal advocacy movement that suggest its 'single issue focus' precludes its association with broader understandings of the structural dimensions of social injustice, it may be noted that Munro suggests that 'speciesism' is “the term that most broadly identifies the animal movement's diagnostic frame” (Munro 2005, 75).

10. PETA online: <http://www.peta.org>.


17. PETA “Pamela Anderson” Anti-Fur Campaign online: <http://www.peta.org/pdfs/ADpam.pdf>.


21. Susan Bordo and Julie Burchill have discussed how even America’s paradigmatic symbols of white femininity could not approach the whiteness projected as ideal since the most famous blondes, including Monroe, were not natural blondes. See Susan Bordo, Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body and Julie Burchill, Girls on Film.

22. I thank my colleague Rebecca Johnson for pointing out this association to me.


32. PETA “Milk Gone Wild” Anti-Milk Campaign.
34. PETA “Milk Gone Wild” Anti-Milk Campaign, supra note 50; PETA “Click the Nipple for Some T&A” online: <http://www.milkgonewild.com/ mgw_qa.asp>.
35. Girls Gone Wild, online see note 30.
37. This is so obvious so as to obviate the need for support. For a recent detailing of the suffering in factory farms, see Erik Marcus, Meat Market: Animals, Ethics, and Money (Ithaca, NY: Brio Press, 2005). For a recent guide overall on the suffering of animals, see Catharine Grant, No-Nonsense Guide to Animal Rights (Toronto: New Internationalist Publications, 2006).
38. See Carol Adams’ specific discussion of PETA’s ads in connection with the male gaze around which pornographic representation is organized in “PETA and a Pornographic Culture, II: A Feminist Analysis of I’d Rather Go Naked than Wear Fur,” online: Feminists for Animal Rights: An Ecofeminist Alliance http://www.farinco.org/newsletter/v8_n3-4-94/petaporn2.html.

44. Newkirk also defends the choice of PETA's main spokesperson, Pamela Anderson, as follows: “Some people are very threatened by Pam Anderson, for example, with or without her clothes. I hear people who don’t know her, deride her, and it’s simply because she’s built like a sex bombshell. I know her and she is a super-kind, sensitive person who we should thank every day for using her fabulous body for the animals. I also think she’s a bigger feminist than a lot of whining ones, because she’s built her own body and face for business reasons and she won.”

45. For a general critique of the beauty ideal that dominates western cultures, see Wolf 1995 and Bordo 1995.

46. For an overview of these arguments, see Kathryn Abrams, “Sex Wars Redux: Agency and Coercion in Feminist Legal Theory” and Lynn S. Chancer, “From Pornography to Sadomasochism: Reconciling Feminist Differences”.

47. For a classic example of MacKinnon and Dworkin's work, see Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, eds., In Harm's Way: The Pornography of Civil Rights Hearings.


49. The interview references an actual article that Newkirk wrote entitled: “Animal Rights and the Feminist Connection.”

50. PETA engaged in a “McCruelty” campaign that lasted 11 months, with more than 400 demonstrations in 23 countries. McDonald's became the first corporation in U.S. history to agree to make improvements in their animal welfare standards. Following on the heels of their success against McDonald's, PETA targeted Burger King with their “Murder King” campaign. Burger King has continued to lead the fast-food industry toward improving animal welfare. Wendy's was next to come under fire with PETA's “Wicked Wendy's” campaign, which resulted in Wendy's agreeing to meet the animal welfare standards that PETA had negotiated with McDonald's and Burger King. All of these PETA campaigns involved provocative ads, celebrity support, and international protests. See PETA's Corporate Campaigns online: <http://www.goveg.com/corpcampaigns.asp>.

51. Letter from Jennifer Cierlitsky (20 December 2006) stated that: “PETA is an international nonprofit animal protection organization with more than 1,100,000 members and supporters dedicated to establishing the rights of all animals.” See also PETA online: <http://www.peta.com>.

52. In a letter replying to a feminist website critical of PETA's objectification of women, a PETA correspondent defends PETA's campaigns by noting, in part, that PETA is an “organization that is staffed largely by feminist women.” See Craft, “PeTA: Where Only Women Are Treated Like Meat,” see note 42.
53. Onion is commenting on the tellingly named campaign, “Fuck for Forests.”
56. PETA “InknotMink” Anti-Fur Campaign online: <http://www.furisdead.com/feat-tommylee.asp>; Dennis Rodman, see note 41.
57. See PETA “State of the Union” Campaign online: <http://www.peta.org/feat/stateoftheunion>.
58. The “Lonely, Shackled, Beaten” campaign commits a similar substitution to communicate its message. In this campaign, the audience is reminded of the absent animals through the bodies of present women who are adorned with animal markings and physically placed in confined spaces. See PETA “Imogen Bailey” Anti-Circus “Lonely, Shackled, Beaten” Campaign online: <http://www.peta.org/pdfs/imogen%20bb_LR.pdf>.
59. See, for example, Mann, 1994.
60. For Ratna Kapur, and other postcolonial theorists, the resistive subject is a deeply layered and multifaceted subject who produces resistance in coercive circumstances (Kapur 2005, 26).
61. Fiona Giles refers also to a few art house films that display sexualized representations of breastfeeding although not necessarily pornographic ones.
62. For examples of legal interventions attempting to police the erotica and sensuality of breastfeeding as well as any women who may be aroused by the sensation or are seen to transgress the normative boundaries the dominant profile dictates, see Giles, 2004 at 305.
63. I am indebted to Carol Adams for this insight. Editorial communication on file with editors.

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