



CARNIVOROUS CAPITALISM*

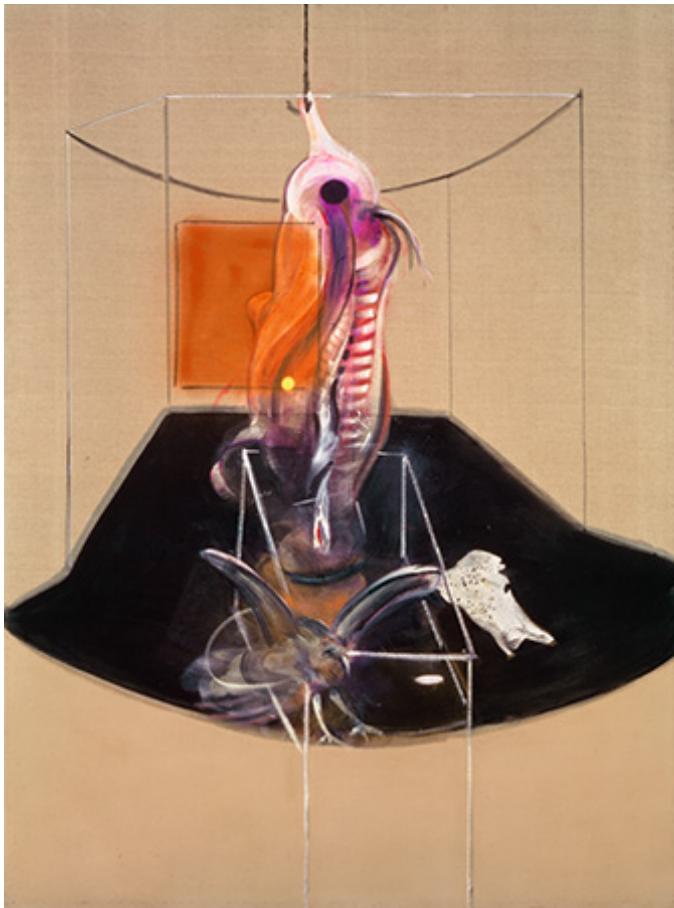
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Think of some meat. Maybe a juicy steak seared a shimmering brown, the color of bourbon by a campfire, its marinated marbling laid out like a sensuous maze. Or how about a crispy piece of perfectly fried chicken, its steaming skin a cluster of golden crackles beneath which peeks that white flash of flavorsome flesh. Poultry. Meat.

Sounds delicious, right? I'm not here to tell you you're wrong. As long as I can remember, meat has always been a presupposed part of my personal diet. It was only human to eat meat, after all. Hadn't the earliest Homo sapiens been hunters as well as gatherers? And, anyways, eating meat was part of my national identity. It's as American as America gets. Meat's expansive industries employ over 6 million people and bring in over 6% of the entire country's GDP. In shirts that scream BODY BY BACON we triple-stack our burgers beneath the Golden Arches and cheer on someone stuffing 74 wet hotdogs down their throat in under ten minutes time. The average one of us eats about 270 pounds of it a year, and we get it cheaper than anyone else so we buy more of it than everyone else too.



At some point, though, it's healthy to step away from the frenzy. Our appetite is ravenous, and in this excitement it's easy to ignore the harm our diets inflict on the environment, the animals, and ourselves. (I'll spare you the recitation of facts and figures that prove the devastatingly negative effects the meat industry has on pretty much everything—you've probably heard them all already.) There's a savage system in place



that encourages this willful-naivety, a confluence of capitalistic forces that enable caring only at its most minimal. And its most insidious encouragement is through language, the words we use to talk about the meat we eat and the ways in which it's made.

We euphemize things we find distasteful. And, maybe because mankind bears so many obvious biological and social resemblances to the animals we raise and slaughter for food, we work into our language ways to obfuscate that troublesome truth. We have diction to distinguish between what we pet and what we eat. It's beef not cow; pork not pig; veal not infant bovines. This may seem like a small semantic step, but

it's a springboard from which we make the intellectual jump from thinking of animals as creatures kin to ourselves to valuing them as a surplus good to be sold, bought, and eaten. By the 17th century, when the term "livestock"—a combination of the living and the commodified—was popularized, the linguistic gulf separating the consumer from the consumed was wide enough for Industry to step in and create an infrastructure that reinforces this divide.

There's money in meat—billions of dollars—and whenever there's that much power at stake industrial greed is an inevitability. Capitalism produces a procreant urge for profit, so businesses get bigger and figure out ways to cut financial costs at a greater ethical one. It's all dressed up in the euphemisms of efficiency:

Technological advancements that put "good food on hard-working Americans' plates for a good price." They tout their "managerial intensity" (more sows in smaller cages), and sell us "30% more product per Broad Breasted White Turkey," not mentioning the bird's been bred so monstrous it can't stand up straight let alone mate without human assistance. And in case that isn't obscure enough there are also an



army of acronyms to complicate things: CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations); FCRs (feed conversion ratios); rBGHs and rbSTs (recombinant bovine growth hormone and somatotropin)... But who are we to know such jargon? Our energies, sapped by the sugar-crash of postmodern capitalism, are stretched thin, and when we can manage to collectively call out the abominations concocted by the meat industry they turn around and repackage them in the negative, proudly announcing their new GMO-free line or celebrating their now cage-free eggs-leaving out the bit about the hens still being confined to a coop with no natural sunlight for their entire unnatural lives.

It's no secret that 99% of the animals we eat live horrible lives and die horrendous deaths, but through linguistic mazes, complex supply chains, and smoke-and-mirrors marketing we forget what it is we're actually eating. Despite the rhetorical blinders, remember that meat is flesh, the same, more or less, as yours and mine. There's an ancient Hindu saying that goes something like, "He whose meat in this world do I eat/ will in the other world me eat." Imagine that. Your life flashes before your eyes, a white light engulfs you, and when your sight returns you face an angry army of cows and chickens, pigs and turkeys, goats and sheep. They eat your flesh for all eternity. "Wise men say that this is why meat is called meat."



I write all this not to force some burden of guilt upon anyone who's ever eaten a hamburger (Vishnu only knows how many I've scarfed down myself), but rather to alleviate some of it, with hope to help us see things for how they are, not how they're packaged. Eating more responsibly is really rather simple-be conscious from meal to meal and just, ya' know, eat fewer animal products. Google the phrase "easy vegan meals" and you'll get about 803 million results, all of which will, at worst, be edible. Continually consider what it is that's on your plate, how it got there, and who sold it to you. And if those thoughts give you a bad feeling in your stomach maybe it'd be better if you didn't eat that thing. Consume with agency and you'll be taking your power back from an Industry that dishes it out cruelly. ###