How Meat Changed Sex: The Law of Interspecies Intimacy After Industrial Reproduction

The article explores the recent history and structure of American laws criminalizing sexual contact between humans and animals. It notes that the majority of these have been enacted within the past three decades and contain language that explicitly exempts animal husbandry and veterinary medicine from prosecution. The article explores the legislative politics that produce these exemptions and exposes an underlying ambiguity: in the age of industrial reproduction, the “accepted practices” of animal husbandry can only be distinguished from bestiality through legal fiat. The article contends that the structure of the laws exempt human sexual contact with animals only when it enables the reproduction of livestock biocapital, a distinction that positions “perverse” bestialists and “normal” farmers as opposed rather than mutually constituting categories. Finally, the article reads this insight against biopolitical theorist Giorgio Agamben’s concept of “anthropogenesis” and notes that such exemptions reveal a fundamental limitation in Agamben’s theory. In place of the timeless ritualism of Agamben’s “anthropological machine,” the article argues for an account of speciation that recognize strategic gradations of pain and pleasure, the critical role of sexual violence and reproduction, and processes of trans-speciative procreation.