CHAPTER 14

Critical Ecofeminism: Interrogating ‘Meat,’ ‘Species,’ and ‘Plant’

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Do we need a ‘plant ethics’ that responds to vegetal instrumentalization in an allied manner to the ways animal ethics has responded to the animal-industrial complex?
—JONI ADAMSON AND CATR SANDILANDS, Vegetal Ecocriticism (2013)

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The above question might alert animal studies scholars to a pending omnivore backlash against the decade-long success of animal studies, launched by Jacques Derrida’s “The Animal That Therefore I Am” (2002) which catapulted vegan perspectives into academic credibility. Like animal studies, plant studies scholarship has been ongoing for some time, but only recently has emerged as a cutting-edge academic field. One could compare Peter Singer’s Animal Liberation (1975) with Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird’s The Secret Life of Plants (1973) as foundational works for two movements that would later become recognized as companion branches of posthumanist thought, though in thankless academic fashion, the founders of each branch have been strongly critiqued, Singer for his human rights-based moral extensionism, and Tompkins and Bird for their ‘new age’ unscientific speculations. Invoking the field of “critical plant studies” and author of The Omnivore’s Dilemma (2006), the carnivorous locavore Michael Pollan, Adamson and Sandilands anticipate my comparison in their description of a “Vegetal Ecocriticism” pre-conference seminar for the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) 2013 biannual conference:

As critical animal studies and animal rights scholars/activists have effectively worried constitutive boundaries between human beings and other animals, plant studies scholars have questioned the similarly political line between plants and animals: plants communicate, move, decide,