

Cannibalism in Montaigne, de Certeau and Derrida

Carles Serra Pagès

Copyright©2011 Carles Serra Pagès. This text may be archived and redistributed both in electronic form and in hard copy, provided that the author and journal are properly cited and no fee is charged.

Abstract: In this text we introduce the discursive strategies of Montaigne, de Certeau and Derrida in analysing the figure of the cannibal. Both de Certeau and Derrida use textual strategies for their analysis, but whereas de Certeau remains at the level of discourse and words and therefore at the level of phonocentric language, Derrida's analysis moves beyond Western ethnocentrism. These different approaches lead de Certeau and Derrida to different conclusions. During the Renaissance, the figure of the cannibal was the source of horror because it ate its own kind and married several women. De Certeau inverts this ethnocentric ethics and shows that cannibalism was a form of paying tribute to the valor and honor of the victim, and polygamy showed the devotion and fidelity of women towards their husbands, not as a sign of male domination. Contrary to de Certeau, but building upon his critique of ethnocentrism, Derrida does not bring about any reversal of values when analysing a particular cosmivision in the figure of the cannibal, for example. Taking the meaning of the word "eating" in both a literal and a figurative sense, Derrida shows that all cultures are organized around a notion of sacrifice that consists in clearing up an area that allows for a noncriminal putting to death. It is in this context that Derrida denounces the 'mass exterminations' of animals and the 'crimes' against the environment that sustain carnivorous and industrialised countries. The figure of the cannibal also provides a good example of how Western society constructs the height of its morality and good consciousness symbolically sacrificing and demonizing the other (the savage, the cannibal) just because it sacrifices another 'other': as all cultures are organized around sacrificial structures that are ethnocentric.

Keywords: Derrida, de Certeau, deconstruction, sacrifice, cannibalism, animal rights, environment.

In the context of the Congress "Food For Thought", organized by the Australian Studies Centre at Barcelona University in February 2010, the present article analyzes two different interpretations of cannibalism carried out by two French authors: Michel de Certeau and Jacques Derrida. Both authors are representative of the so-called "thinking of the difference", which originated with Heidegger. In "Montaigne's 'Of Cannibals': The Savage 'I'",ⁱ as the title indicates, de Certeau exposes his own method of textual analysis of Montaigne's "Of Cannibals". De Certeau's text will be compared with and contrasted to an interview with Derrida in 1989 by Jean-Luc Nancy, entitled "'Eating well', or the Calculation of the Subject".ⁱⁱ Their respective interpretations of cannibalism are a means to define Western culture and law in relation to a *hors-texte* (outside the text, (t)exterior).

Taken literally, the English expression “food for thought” is synthetic and a priori. It is synthetic because it is a statement about experience, and it is a priori because it is necessarily so – with the exception of God, a rational being always appears incarnated in a body that eats and can be eaten. This synthetic and a priori expression states the obvious in a context where the basic physiological needs are covered: nourishment, but also sleep, a basic sense of security, etc. (which means that “food for thought” is a necessary but not sufficient condition for thought). Moreover, still in its literal sense, the expression “food for thought” implicitly carries within it a moral imperative. It is necessary to have the biological need of nourishment covered so as to develop good eating-thinking habits, that is to say, to eat what tastes good and is specially nurturing. In spite of appearances, what we eat is mostly a cultural thing. In Western culture, insects are not usually eaten although they are highly nutritive, whereas mushrooms, which are barely nutritive, are very commonly eaten. In addition, taste and flavour are culturally determined, and what tastes good within a culture is also highly subjective. Therefore, we must eat, and we must eat well. And if we understand “food” in a figurative sense, meaning as all that which nourishes not only the body but also the soul, the spirit, the mind, the metaphor of eating covers the whole field of culture.

Most commonly, the expression “food for thought” is used as an idiomatic expression in English. On the one hand, it refers to what triggers thinking, something that awakens your attention and deserves to be carefully or seriously considered; sometimes, it can also be said of something which deserves a second thought altogether. In this sense “food” means that which nourishes the mind. On the other hand, “food for thought” also refers to those bits and pieces in a legal or social context which are in dispute and which cannot be digested. What is at stake or at issue is “food for thought” (in socio-political debates and discussions, research institutions, etc.), because it is toxic and poisons society and politics at large. The figurative expression “food for thought” has, then, a double and interrelated meaning. Sometimes it refers to that which nourishes thought, sometimes to that which in a certain sense poisons thought because it cannot be digested (“food poisoning”). “Food for thought” as a matter of dispute puts a limit to thinking at the same time that it is a challenge to it and, therefore, a motivation and an impulse.

For Derrida and de Certeau, what nourishes thought is 'difference'. In his reading of Montaigne's “Of Cannibals”, de Certeau expresses this thought in textual terms. He distinguishes between the “space of the other” and the “space of the text”. The “space of the other” constitutes and delimits the difference between the inside and the outside of a culture, the familiar versus the strange, and the way in which society is structured. It involves both ethnic and social values. On the other hand, the “space of the text” is the means by which the text structures itself and gives itself credibility, and makes a place of its own. It speaks about the other and it is the other that legitimizes in return the text that is produced in this way. The reader has to be made to believe that the text captures the truth about what it treats – its outside – whether the author relies on common opinion, myth, the authority of the Ancients and modern rationality or questions them in the name of “bare experience”, as it is the case in Montaigne's “Of Cannibals”. The “space of the other” produces the “space of the text” and the other way around. These are functional or “formal” distinctions, in between there is a “space of interplay” (this is how de Certeau interprets difference).

De Certeau explains this “topography” in the following terms:

The first aspect concerns the space of the other; the second, the space of the text. On the one hand, the text accomplishes a spatializing operation which results in the determination or displacement of the boundaries delimiting cultural fields (the familiar vs. the strange). In

addition, it reworks the spatial divisions which underlie and organize a culture. For these socio- or ethno-cultural boundaries to be changed, reinforced, or disrupted, a space of interplay is needed, one that establishes the text's difference, makes possible its operations and gives it "credibility" in the eyes of its readers, by distinguishing it both from the conditions within which it arose (the context) and from its object (the content). Montaigne's essay functions both as an *Index locorum* (a redistribution of cultural space) and as the affirmation of a place (a locus of utterance). These two aspects are only formally distinguishable, because it is in fact the text's reworking of space that simultaneously produces the space of the text (pp. 67-68).

De Certeau's cartography is elaborated in textual terms in the linguistic sense, that is, at the level of words and discourse. In Montaigne's text, the words "barbarian", "savage" and "cannibal" define that which organizes a language of culture in relation to its outside. But the outside always remains exterior to the topographical order that words and discourse place and organize. To that extent, these words name the unnamable, what allows a closure of culture in relation to an exterior, and that which threatens the symbolic order of language and culture. The "place of interplay" or difference between the outside and the inside is also what establishes a dynamic relationship between the familiar and the strange, and the inherent dynamism of every society. It is the same idea of difference that links what is familiar to what is strange ("what is near masks a foreignness", p. 67).

The cannibal is at the origin of a language of culture, it is that which is sacrificed for the sake of language and culture.

What is foreign is first of all the "thing". It is never where the word is. The cannibal is only a variant of this general difference, but a typical one since he is supposed to demarcate a boundary line. Therefore when he sidesteps the identifications given to him, he causes a disturbance that places the entire symbolic order in question. The global delimitation of "our" culture in relation to the savage concerns the entire gridding of the system that brushes up against the boundary and presupposes... that there is a *place* for every *figure*. The cannibal is a figure on the fringe who leaves the premises, and in doing so jolts the entire topographical order of language (p. 70).

Derrida's interpretation of difference is similar to de Certeau's in that it is also "textual", but Derrida resists talking about culture in topographical terms, and does not limit the meaning of "text" to linguistics, to words and discourse that amount to an inscription of speech and, therefore, to a phonocentrism, as de Certeau does. Interviewed by Jean-Luc Nancy, Derrida is questioned about the crisis of the idea of subject in the tradition of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas, Foucault, and others. In answering to these questions, Derrida refuses the idea that, previous to these discourses, there was a homogenous idea of the subject that would have been superseded. Instead, he contends that these discourses have "reinterpreted, displaced, decentered, re-inscribed" (p. 258) the idea of the subject. As a result, there have been some consequences regarding what is understood as ethical, legal, political or scientific objectivity, and the definition of the subject has been put in terms of who answers to the call "Who?" (even in those contexts when this question is not formulated in a natural language, as we will see), thus avoiding a substantialist metaphysics of the subject.

Talking about the "classic" (from Descartes to Kant and Husserl) and "recent" discourses on the subject, Jean-Luc Nancy proposes to do away with the word "subject" and to substitute it for a kind of topology, which is what de Certeau does: "But in lieu of the 'subject', there is something like a place, a singular point of passage... How might one name this place?" (p. 259). In answering to this question, Derrida explains what he understands as subject as a result of his analyses on writing,

which at the same time tells us how Derrida interprets difference. He explicitly avoids speaking about the subject in exclusively topographical terms:

In the text or in writing, such as I have tried to analyze them at least, there is, I wouldn't say a place (and this is a whole question, this topology of a certain locatable non-place, at once necessary and undiscoverable) but an instance (without stance, a "without" without negativity) for some "who", a "who" besieged by the problematic of the trace and of difference, of affirmation, of the signature and of the so-called proper name, of the je[c]t (above all subject, object, project), as *destinerring* of missive (p. 260).

This paragraph deserves some explanation. The "instance" which lacks "stance" refers to the openness of the "who" that, in this context, means subject. As such, it means that in its relation to self this "instance" "without stance" is open to events and to the other, the opposite of nihilism. A pure identity that always remains identical to itself is oblivious to events and to otherness, even if it is also true that there is no identity without some sort of "stance".ⁱⁱⁱ The "who" refers to the call that comes from the other and that, in this way, lays out what makes presence and identity possible (not presence and identity *as such*, as they appear within a particular cultural context). The one who asks or wonders (with or without words) "Who is it? Who is there?" already acknowledges somebody's presence without the need of the other to answer in a natural language and according to a specific semantics, in particular without the need to answer "I" with all the implications that stem from grammar, attributing essence or substance to the subject of a sentence ("How can we get away from this contract between the grammar of the subject or substantive and the ontology of substance or subject?" (p. 262)). What Derrida calls "the problematic of the trace and of difference" precisely refers to the critique he himself carried out of the "metaphysics of presence", the belief that what constitutes a subjective identity is the subject's relation to self without the need of language, which requires intersubjectivity and history. The expression difference, we will recall, means both deferral in time and difference in the sense of non-identity. The "problematic... of the signature and the so-called proper name" refers to the basic structure of the iterability of language. And the "ject" of "subject, object, project" to the projectile and to dissemination, "*destinerrance*", the fact that a missive, missile, letter or pro-ject may not reach its objective, its recipient. In conclusion, there are only traces, the always-already, there is no pure presence.

It deserves special mention in this context that Derrida elaborated the "problematic of... affirmation" in terms of a critique to Heidegger. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger defines "Dasein" (man in the sense of a singularity that does not amount to but is presupposed by all the categories of human subjectivity: self, reasonable being, consciousness, person, etc.) as that being that can question its own being as well as being in general. The power to ask questions, or the ability to question that institutes a sovereign subject that questions, is what defines "Dasein". Derrida critiques Heidegger in this respect because Derrida believes there is an autonomy that comes from otherness, a heteronomy that institutes the subject and is more originary – and it also involves an ethical responsibility – than the ability or the power to ask questions.

This is how Derrida states it:

I have spoken of the "yes, yes", of the "come" or of the affirmation that is not addressed first of all to a subject. This vigil or beyond of the question is anything but precritical. Beyond even the force of critique, it situates a responsibility as irreducible to and rebellious toward the traditional category of "subject" (p. 274).

The relation to self, in this situation, can only be difference, that is to say alterity, or trace. Not only is the obligation not lessened in this situation, but, on the contrary, it finds in it its only possibility, which is neither subjective nor human. Which doesn't mean that it is inhuman or without subject... (p. 260-261).

We will deal more extensively with Derrida's reference to antihumanism when analysing the figure of the cannibal and sacrifice.

Certeau and Derrida's thinking of the difference that we have just exposed is what keeps thinking going, it refers both to something that makes you think and to the inherent rationality of the one who thinks and therefore is made to think (these are, again, formal distinctions). Difference means rationality. It is "food for thought" in the sense of that which makes you think.

But, as we mentioned above, the idiomatic expression "food for thought" also means issues to be considered in the public or legal square. In de Certeau, the figure of the cannibal provides "food for thought" in that it constitutes and menaces the symbolic order of culture, we can always re-interpret the "horror" that cannibalism produces in Western cultures and turn it into a noble figure. Paradoxically, in the end the figure of the savage ends up teaching something about ourselves: "what is near masks a foreignness" (p. 67).

In de Certeau's text first comes a critique of the different forms in which the other (the savage, the cannibal) has been represented. De Certeau follows Montaigne's method and examples in this respect. First of all, common opinion or *doxa* about the savage appears reliable but lacks the rationality of the Ancients; the discourse of the Ancients about the barbarian are inaccurate because the Ancients had no travelling experience, and the cartography and cosmography of the moderns is unreliable because the moderns always add things to their experience, providing a generalized view in place of their particular experience. All this can be put together in the "inventions of poetry, philosophy and deceit" (p. 71), ignoring the fact that what appears in a fictionalized form is a conjunction of a series of disjunctions: "reliability without reason, reason without knowledge, knowledge without reliability" (ibid.). Before being able to understand the figure of the savage, one has to do away with all the prejudices that go with tradition.

The deconstruction of tradition is carried out by means of a theory of writing. The subject is a grammatical function which belongs to a particular system of symbolization and culture (there is no universal definition of who a subject is), and the object is also always caught in a particular system of representation that is different from the thing itself (the "thing itself" is not outside the text). Detached from a pure presence or essence, subject and object are always disseminated. The different series of discourse Montaigne deals with (*doxa*, the discourse of the Ancients and of the moderns) can only be artificially sym-bolized:

It is noteworthy that this "series" is structured as a *written* discourse: the written text, a *spatial* dissemination of elements destined for an impossible symbolization, dooms the unity it aims for (the thing, or meaning), as well as the unity it presupposes (the speaker), to inaccessibility (by the very fact of the exteriority of the graphs to one another) (p. 72).

In view of this theory of writing, which de Certeau shares with Derrida, one could ponder what form of knowledge is the best to adopt when faced with the figure of the barbarian, the savage or the cannibal, and also about the effects of this theory of writing in language.

What form of knowledge about the savage is the most reliable? Montaigne is of course familiar with the literature about the savage but he does not make any reference to it to remain faithful to his method. It is a matter of “going back to things themselves” as they are given in bare experience and expressed in a speech that has gone through the deconstruction of tradition or the speech of the “simple” man to the extent that he is not a scholar. The acknowledged sources in Montaigne's “Of Cannibals” are the things that have been brought from overseas (“he can see their objects and ornaments” (p. 75)), the “simple”, Western man that has travelled and lived among savages, and then the savage himself. If one wants to understand or learn about the savage or the barbarian, one cannot rely on common opinion, establish a difference or a definition in terms of a particular form of rationality (reflective, instrumental, etc.) or use the discourse of modernity that generalises in concepts that are empty shells. Instead, one has to rely on bare experience, and that is what “simple” means, because the simple man “admits the particularity of his place and his experience” (p. 72).

The effects of the above-mentioned theory of writing are the dissemination of language and its essential sacrificial structure. The dissemination of language is shown in that the words “barbarian” and “savage” and the meaning of “cannibal” appear disseminated within Montaigne's text. First, the word “barbarian” is used as a noun, then as an adjective. Its use as an “adjective” proves that what was initially over there can switch sides and come over here, it does not have a fixed reference but is caught in the play – or systemic nature – of language. Living in a natural state, cannibals are barbarian, whereas “Occidentals are barbarian because of their cruelty” (p. 73), so Occidentals are more barbarian than cannibals. “Thus, the name comes undone” (ibid.). And it is the role of what is referred to as “cannibals” or savage to name the place, within language, of that which is “emptied”, “vacant and distant” (ibid.). The words have no fixed meaning.^{iv}

The sacrificial structure of the language of the savage or the barbarian is seen in that “the savage body obeys a law, the law of faithful or verifiable speech” (p. 75). Ultimately, what this means is that the savage body is literally and symbolically sacrificed to speech.^v Once de Certeau has described the experience of the simple man as the true witness of savage society, the recourse to direct perception of the savage body and its “objects and ornaments”, and to the conversation with the savage itself, the description of savage society focuses in their modes of symbolization, in the way they come together as a social (and therefore symbolical) and unified body by means of speech: the body of the savage is subject to law by means of the sacrifice of the body of men in war and of women to their husbands. Men defend honour in war, and women are faithful to their husbands, and this is the origin of law and savage culture.

What first appears as a monstrosity, the cannibal eating the body of the enemy in a symbolic ritual and the domination of the wives by men, is reversed in Montaigne's discourse in terms of an “ethic of speech” and sacrifice. Cannibalism is a “variety of war” which is not colonization, because it is neither motivated “by conquest nor self-interest” (p. 75). It is motivated by a “demand for “confession” under pain of death”, and in the pursuit of honour and glory. The sacrifice of the enemy's body is a tribute to its honour and genealogy, it is incorporated in the victor's own genealogy, and there is a “communion with the ancestors through the mediator of the enemy” (p. 76). In the case of polygamy, the honour of women is shown in that they work at the service of their husband's honour and virtue “without jealousy” (p. 75). “In both cases, the value of speech is affirmed in the ‘loss’ of self-interest and the “ruin” of one's own body. It is defined as a ‘triumphant loss’” (p. 75-76). In that it responds to the system of language and the economy of ethics, cannibalism and polygamy express the authenticity of a savage society which institutes its law, honour and values by means of a sacrifice of the body of the warrior in its exterior (war among men) and of the body of the wife in its interior (polygamy). What was seen as a monstrosity is now seen

as heroic thanks to the symbolic structure of society and the systemic nature of language, as soon as we understand who or what is sacrificed at the expense of speech and ethics.

What gives “food for thought” to Derrida is that the figure of the subject has always been constituted by means of the sacrifice of what is not subject. The gesture by which Derrida describes and critiques the way the subject has been constituted in Western thought is slightly different from de Certeau's. Following Montaigne, we have seen that a positive view of the cannibal comes after the deconstruction of the discourses of the West (*doxa*, the reason of the Ancients, the knowledge of the moderns) which allows for a subsequent reversal of values. Cannibalism shows the honor of men in battle, and the incorporation of the enemy's body is seen as a tribute to the enemy's valor. Polygamy is not a sign of male domination, it shows the devotion and fidelity of women towards their husbands. Derrida also starts by deconstructing the prevalent philosophical discourses of the West about the subject, but not in order to bring about any reversal of values, because they all are constituted around another notion of sacrifice. Derrida interprets sacrifice as the place of a “non-criminal putting to death”, and questions the legitimacy of the sacrifice of the living in general (and not just of the sacrifice of the human subject), menacing in this way precisely the sacrificial structure that constitutes the subject.

In analysing the original call that institutes the “who” before language,^{vi} Jean-Luc Nancy asks about Heidegger's statement that the animal is sad because it is “poor in world”. Derrida answers that for Heidegger the animal is poor in world because the animal lacks all the categories that are characteristic of original existence in the phenomenological sense (in the reflective structure of the “as such”), for example, the animal does not have access to the world of man, truth, speech, death, or the Being of being. That is the reason why the animal is sad or appears sad compared to the society of man. And this is also the reason why Heidegger and the whole Western philosophical tradition think that the animal is not a subject. To the questions of whether the call heard by *Dasein* “can come originally to or from the animal”, “the voice of the friend can be that of the animal”, “or whether friendship is possible “for the animal or between animals”” (p. 278), the answer is always “no”. The subject or *Dasein* are essentially different from the animal, because the animal is “poor in world.”

Derrida contends that this poorness in world, the lack of the categories of original existence in the animal or the non-human living world in general is what constitutes “a place left open, in the very structure of these discourses (which are also “cultures”) for a noncriminal putting to death” (p. 278). In Western culture, this “noncriminal putting to death” is “as real as it is symbolic when the corpse is ‘animal’”, and it is symbolic “when the corpse is ‘human’” (ibid.). Western culture is carnivorous and vegetarian in that it sacrifices animals and plants without this sacrifice constituting a crime. Lacking all the categories of original existence, the living world that is not man is less than human and is worth less, because it is poor in world. The death penalty and the exportation of illegal immigrants are examples of symbolic sacrifice. That is the reason why, Derrida contends, the discourses of Montaigne, de Certeau, Levinas, Heidegger, etc. disrupt a “certain traditional humanism” at the same time that they “remain profound humanisms *to the extent that they do not sacrifice sacrifice*” (p. 279). Derrida concludes:

The subject ... and the *Dasein* are “men” in a world where sacrifice is possible and where it is not forbidden to make an attempt on life in general, but only on human life, on the neighbor's life, on the other's life as *Dasein* (ibid.)

Derrida also explains how the subject has been instituted as “human” and excluding the animal in the

discourse of Levinas. Levinas recognizes the other man in his facial traits, there is no animal face for Levinas. According to Levinas, the transcendence of the other is first of all constituted in an ethical bound that obliges me not to kill her and, in this obligation, institutes the subject as "self". The "Thou shalt not kill" (your neighbour, your friend, etc.) is the imperative that establishes the first figure of the other as subject and as man, first as other, then as self (oneself as other, the subjective structure). Consequently, responsibility towards oneself also comes from the other. As soon as you recognize the other you are not allowed to put him to death, you cannot kill the other without turning into a criminal and you are not allowed to kill yourself either. The "Thou shalt not kill" protects the figure of man as subject in the sphere of society; when a man kills another man, that's a crime, but he can kill animals with impunity.^{vii} Subject is subject before the law and subjected to the law, against the law the subject turns into a criminal, he is outside the law. That is why, for Levinas, the "Thou shalt not kill" the other man has "become meaningful in religious cultures for which carnivorous sacrifice is essential" (p. 279). For Levinas, the animal is not a subject.

Consequently, Derrida's critique of the subject involves a critique of sacrifice, and a respectively literal and symbolic interiorization of food and language. Derrida's critique of sacrifice involves acknowledging a moral imperative that is respectful toward the living in general, and not just man as subject. The definition of the concept of legal subject should not exclude animals and plants, the biosphere and the living generally, because it is in relation to them that the legal subject is constituted. The ideal of sacrificing sacrifice is very difficult to defend because most societies are carnivorous and vegetarian, but still, they must be granted some rights and be treated with some respect. Insofar as the symbolic is caught within the real and the other way around, the figure of man and that of the living world go hand in hand. The discourses about the animal and the living world are introjected as subjective psychic properties which allow us to define what is human and what is not. The interiorization of food is a real thing, in that we eat meat, and symbolic, because it is accepted as something good in our societies to eat a particular kind of food, and this symbolization structures the "fiction" of law in leaving aside an area, that of man and the human subject, where putting to death is a crime.^{viii} The ethical question revolves, then, around the question of how to eat well, about the most proper, respectful and giving way of eating, speaking, interiorizing the other in general. Finally, since every culture establishes its own legal and illegal sacrifices, there are "several infinitely different modes of the conception-appropriation-assimilation of the other":

If the limit between the living and the nonliving now seems to be as unsure, at least as an oppositional limit, as that between "man" and "animal", and if, in the (symbolic or real) experience of the "eat-speak-interiorize", the ethical frontier no longer rigorously passes between the "Thou Shalt not kill" (man, thy neighbor) and the "Thou Shalt not put to death the living in general", but rather between several infinitely different modes of the conception-appropriation-assimilation of the other, then, as concerns the "Good" [*Bien*] of every morality, the question will come back to determining the best, most respectful, most grateful, and also most giving way of relating to the other and of relating the other to the self (p. 281).

Going back to de Certeau's analysis of Montaigne, the cannibal eats human flesh because in war the symbolic structure of the culture to which he belongs allows for a non-criminal putting to death of an individual of his own species who is not part of his tribe. Let's remind ourselves that this act was carried out as a tribute to the enemy's valour, incorporating into his own flesh the flesh of their ancestors. The sacrificial structure is as symbolic as it is real, and it is universal. That is what made it possible for de Certeau to deconstruct and reverse the values that characterized cannibals. In that sense, Western culture is not better just because its symbolic structure does not allow for a remorseless eating of human flesh.

Symbolic sacrifice is ethnocentric. Non-cannibalistic cultures deem cannibalistic cultures as inferior because they do not eat human flesh, not on rational or biological grounds: “They practice a different mode of denegation” (p. 282). This denegation, the unawareness that ethics is constructed around sacrifice is what makes Western cultures believe that they are superior because they do not sacrifice, when the truth is that they simply carry out other kinds of sacrifice. The moral judgment that condemns cannibalism is in itself a symbolic form of cannibalism, in the sense that cannibals are judged as being less than human, they are non-human because they practice anthropophagy. This is the origin of morals, law, and politics: “The so-called non-anthropophagic cultures practice symbolic anthropology and even construct their most elevated socius, indeed the sublimity of their morality, their politics, and their right, on this anthropophagy” (ibid.). There is no culture that does not put itself together around an ethnic group and a certain form of sacrificial structure that delineates a particular form of ethics.

In conclusion, since sacrifice and the clearance of a space for a noncriminal putting to death within culture are irreducibly real and symbolic structures, the question is that of determining what is good to eat at the same time as the good as an eating-thinking process that takes place in language and by means of language. What gives “food for thought” in a figurative sense is something that makes you think, and the awareness that as long as there is sacrifice – and there must be sacrifice, otherwise there is no eating and no thinking (and we have seen how these issues are both biologically and symbolically connected) – there cannot be good-consciousness. But there are always better and worse ways of putting the other to death.

The moral question is open and continues to give us “food for thought”:

The moral question is thus not, nor has it ever been: should one eat or not eat, eat this and not that, the living or the nonliving, man or animal, but since *one must* eat in any case and since it is and tastes good to eat, and since there is no other definition of the good [*du bien*], *how* for goodness' sake should one *eat well*? And what does this imply? What is eating? How is this metonymy of introjection to be regulated? And in what respect does the formulation of these questions in language give us still more food for thought? (ibid.)

Works Cited

de Certeau, Michel, *Heterologies*, trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Derrida, Jacques, *Points... Interviews, 1974-1994*, trans. Peggy Kamuf and others, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995.

Carles Conrad Serra Pagès holds a double degree in English and Philosophy, and is currently employed as an Associate Teacher at the University of Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona), where he is working on his thesis on Derrida's concept of sign. He has been a member of the Australian Studies

Centre at the University of Barcelona since 2007.

i The text was first published in *Le racisme: mythes et sciences: pour Léon Poliakov*, ed. Maurice Olender, Brussels, Complexe, 1981, pp. 187-200. It was later on published as Chapter 5 of de Certeau's *Heterologies*, trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2006, pp. 67-79. All references in my text refer to the latter edition.

ii First published in *Cahiers Confrontation 20* (Winter 1989), the text appeared later on in Derrida's *Points... Interviews, 1974-1994*, trans. Peggy Kamuf and others, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995, pp. 255-287. All references in my text refer to the latter edition.

iii Later on in the text Derrida states, talking about the relationship to self of the subject in presence: "The subject assumes presence, that is to say sub-stance, stasis, stance. Not to be able to stabilize itself *absolutely* would mean to be able *only* to be stabilizing itself: relative stabilization of what remains *unstable*, or rather *non-stable* (p. 270)".

iv It is not that the dissemination of language and its essential sacrificial structure is discovered by a "simple man" (not a scholar) who has lived among savages and reported about his experiences once back in the West. If the experience of the "simple man" is privileged at one point in the narrative in disregard of the *doxa* and the knowledge of the Ancients and the Moderns, it is always with a prevision to make his experience the experience of a scholar or the other way around (by learning from the "simple man" or trying to see things as a "simple man" (also a child) would do, the scholar becomes a 'true' scholar). The outward journey is an inward journey, "what is near masks a foreignness..."

v This is also the case regarding the Western body, as we will see more extensively further on when discussing Derrida.

vi In the course of the interview, Jean-Luc Nancy comments: "you are keeping at a distance, under suspicion, the question "Who?" while you also increasingly validate the "Who?" You validate it by suppressing that which, a priori, would limit the question to humanity", to which Derrida answers: "Yes, I would not want to see the "who" restricted to the grammar of what we call Western language" (pp. 276-277).

vii The extent of this impunity would depend, of course, on the country and its legal system regarding animal rights or its policy regarding the environment. Some countries, like the UK and Australia, have strong laws regarding animal and environmental laws.

viii This is so in an ideal context, where all human beings are so regardless of their social class, national or ethnic origin, a context in which the words "rights" and "legal rights" are not limited either to the nation state and its language and tradition.