

6-9-2006

# The Sexual Politics of Meat Substitutes

Gregory James Flail

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english\\_diss](http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english_diss)

---

## Recommended Citation

Flail, Gregory James, "The Sexual Politics of Meat Substitutes." Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2006.  
[http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english\\_diss/9](http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english_diss/9)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gsu.edu).

# THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF MEAT SUBSTITUTES

by

GREGORY JAMES FLAIL

Under the Direction of George Pullman

Food choice has intrigued generations of scholars seeking insight into the rituals that characterize the cultural and sub-cultural values of various nations and eras. Among the more recent cultural phenomena to influence theories about the body is food choice. Perhaps there is no argumentative issue more pervasive than that of food choice, because everyone must eat. The morsels that people consume are chosen as often as not for their symbolic value. A review of the literature of dietary discourse and representation reveals a gap where studies of vegetarian and vegan identity, mass media, and mass markets are concerned. This dissertation utilizes theories of representation, cultural studies, and discourse analysis to uncover culturally specific attitudes in the marketing of food with regard to vegetable-based diets, the foods that they consist of, and the people who eat them.

INDEX WORDS: Index term, Dissertation, graduate office,  
Student Graduate degree, Georgia State University

THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF MEAT SUBSTITUTES

by

GREGORY JAMES FLAIL

Under the Direction of George Pullman

ABSTRACT

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

Copyright by  
Gregory James Flail  
2006

THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF MEAT SUBSTITUTES

by

GREGORY JAMES FLAIL

Major Professor: George Pullman  
Comittee : Murray Brown  
Calvin Thomas

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Georgia State University  
May 2006

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER

I. Introduction to Dietary Discourse & Vegan Identity Politics .....	1
I.A. Need for Study .....	6
I.B. Problem to be investigated & Research Questions .....	11
II. Theory & Methodology Review .....	13
II A. Critical Discourse Analysis .....	15
II.A.1. Discourse As Constitutive of Identity .....	22
II. A. 2. Visual Rhetoric.....	27
II B Hermeneutic Method .....	29
II B.1. Intertextual Analysis .....	30
II B. 2. Intratextual Analysis .....	30
III. Orienting .....	30
III A The Dominant Dietary Paradigm in America .....	32
III A. 1. Myth of Masculine Meat .....	42
III A 2. Fruits & Vegetables – queering the produce, producing the queer .....	60

III B. Challenges to Dominant Dietary Paradigm .....	70
III B 1. Meet the Vegans – antecedents, terminology, & discourse.....	72
III B 2 Origins of Meat Analogs & Substitutes .....	90
IV. Intertextual & Intratextual Analysis .....	98
IV. A. Intratextual Analysis .....	98
IV. A. 1. Meat Marketing (or shelf life is no life at all).....	99
IV. A. 2. Meat Analog Marketing .....	133
IV B. Intertextual Analysis Dietary Discourse.....	152
V. A. Findings.....	163
V. B. Short Comings.....	172
WORKS CITED .....	174
TABLE .....	183
APPENDIX .....	184

## The Sexual Politics of Meat Substitutes

### I. Introduction to Dietary Discourse & Vegan Identity Politics

“Nobody talks about the purpose of the life of animals, unless, perhaps, it may be supposed to lie in being of service to man. But this view is not tenable either, for there are many animals of which man can make nothing, except to describe, classify and study them; and innumerable species have escaped this use, since they existed and became extinct before man set eyes on them.”

– Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1929

“Who killed the pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?”

– Allen Ginsberg, “A Supermarket in California,” 1955

Lately, while cruising through Sevananda, my local health food store, I find myself thinking about sex toys, not for the usual reasons, but rather as cultural artifacts, because every few weeks I see ever-greater varieties of fake flesh adorning the shelves of the refrigerated aisle – much more imitation flesh than one would likely encounter at any of the local sex shops. I’m not just talking *notdogs* and *veggieburgers* here, but genuine imitations of ground chuck, barbecued pork ribs, and tuna in a can. I have become so drawn to the phenomenon of *meat substitutes*, and more specifically the meat look-alikes which industry experts call *meat analogs*, that I’ve been lingering over them during my weekly shopping trips, taking mental notes, reading ingredient labels, and sometimes snapping pictures of foods that I have no intention of buying or eating.



As for the meat analogs that I do buy, I scan their packaging into my computer with the thought that one day my collection of images will represent the cutting edge of food pornography.

My obsession with *meat analogs* started almost three years ago when, after reading Heather Findlay's critique of "Freud, Fetishism, and The Lesbian Dildo Debates," I realized that certain vegetarians and lesbians share at least one core value: contempt for phallocentrism, specifically those ideologies that make normative gender roles and dietary practices politically and ethically reprehensible. And yet, vegetarians and lesbians have been known to purvey products whose most distinguishing features recall phallic imagery. Of course it's easier to regard dildos as phallic symbols, given that they, like erect penises, have been designed to the best of their makers' abilities to penetrate, occupy, and perform a number of other life-like feats best left to the imagination. But with the exception of soy wieners, *meat analogs* are usually not penis-shaped, although everything about them seems haunted by imagery that recalls western culture's traditional assumptions about food and gender. It's no secret that masculine power has been linked with meat's alleged superiority to other foods in terms of building muscles and filling stomachs; furthermore, as many historians have noted, working class men have traditionally consumed the largest amount of meat at every meal in the belief that they need the largest amount of protein, when, in fact, women's bodies have been shown to possess a greater need for it when pregnant and/or lactating. Critic Nick Fiddes describes this cultural construct more precisely in his book, *Meat: A Natural Symbol*, where he writes,

the muscularity that meat is reputed to endow is a popular masculine ideal. In the language of structuralism, it might be said that the conventional linguistic relationship of women to meat is metaphorical, whilst that of men is more often metonymical. In other words, men are meat in the sense that meat is full of power, whereas women are meat in the sense that it is consumed as a statement of power (154).

For vegetarians who must routinely deconstruct the myth that strong muscles are made of meat and strong men are made of muscle, *meat analogs* can serve as an unwelcome reminder of the dietary values that place a taste for machismo above ethics and health. Like it or not, though, meat and penises wield huge amounts of symbolic currency in western culture. They both connote control, power, and strength; they both promise satiety, pleasure, and a little death, irrespective of what they might actually deliver.

However distasteful and unappetizing some lesbians and vegetarians might feel the dominant culture's objects of desire to be, others still feel differently. Heather Findlay rightly points out in her article, that while almost all dildos are phallus-shaped, they are not necessarily representative of penises and, thereby, the hetero-patriarchy. Also, in terms of political activism and image politics, it would probably be pointless for lesbians who currently enjoy penis-shaped dildos to cease and desist from this practice. Similarly, we can say that *meat analogs* do not necessarily reinforce what Jacques Derrida might call "carnophallogocentric" dietary paradigms or, more simply, the meat-headed food ways that require meat to be present at every meal. However, the most important difference between dildos and penises, as well as that between *analog*s and

animal-based foods, is really to be found in the ways these commodities are used. How antithetical to woman-identified sexual practice can a phony penis be when wielded by a woman? How deathly can a *veggieburger* taste when it is carefully grilled and seasoned by a vegetarian chef?

If “life-like” dildos and *meat analogs* do threaten various lesbian and vegetarian ideologies, they do so because their representation in mass markets and mass media speaks for these subcultures without their full endorsement. Superficially, it would seem redundant to market *meat substitutes* and *analogs* as “suitable for vegetarian or vegan diets”; but, by doing so, marketers allow for a more broad-based appeal: straight meat eaters can find in *analogs* the very same imagery that has helped to define heterosexual gender roles, and vegetarians regardless of sexual orientation can at last find in *analogs* the recognition that mass markets have historically denied them.

But, perhaps, vegetarians will be the eventual losers in the battle of image politics, as market ploys convince ever-increasing numbers of consumers that *meat analogs* are what you’re supposed to eat when becoming vegetarian. When accompanied by the familiar imagery of the meat-centered western meal, the terms “vegetarian” and “vegan” seem less radical, much less likely to call to mind the imagery of the slaughterhouse that makes them threatening to tradition in the first place. For the carnivorous shopper who happens upon products like Now & Zen’s *UnSteak*, whose mascot is a smiling cartoon cow, or The Wide World of Soy’s *Tofurky*, which boasts new features like imitation wish-sticks and pseudo giblet gravy, the *meat analog* seems designed specifically to override the negative connotation of vegetarian fare as that

which wantonly lacks meat; and yet these products tend to suggest very little about why it might be beneficial to stop thinking of animals as tasty objects and start thinking of them as sentient beings with whom we share the planet. Meaty imagery serves to reassure carnivorous shoppers that their tastes are indeed correct and that all people, even those who avoid animal-based foods, are somehow biologically predisposed to preferring them. This carnivore-friendly conception of vegetarianism, which we might call *veggie-lite*, fails to address the issues that have inspired so many people to embrace diets that are not only delectable and delicious on their own terms, but also animal-friendly, environmentally-friendly, and nutritionally-complete.

Despite cranky vegetarian critiques like this one, manufacturers of *meat analogs* make huge profits from their depoliticized versions of vegetarianism, even as their companies get bought up by huge food conglomerates whose other product lines are anything but vegetarian-friendly. The increasing effectiveness of their advertising and the success of their *meat analog* products serves first to emphasize just how much our culture fetishizes animal-based foods, second how much consumers are beginning to realize that their continued health depends on finding alternatives to dominant dietary paradigms, and third how enduring our powers of denial can be when faced with the fact that our taste for *meat analogs* is derived almost entirely from our nostalgia for the belief that killing, dismembering, and eating animals is the healthiest, tastiest, and most natural course for all concerned. If *meat analogs* could somehow manage to displace animal-based foods as the focal point of the western diet, they just might end up doing as much for vegetarianism as the dildo does for lesbianism.

## I.A. Need for Study

Among the more recent cultural phenomena to influence theories about the body is food choice. Food choice has intrigued generations of scholars seeking insight into the rituals that characterize the cultural and sub-cultural values of various nations and eras. Some anthropologists have attempted to find the precedents for contemporary eating habits in the human species' ancestral and recent past in works such as Craig Stanford and Henry Bunn's *Meat-Eating and Human Evolution*, Marvin Harris' *Good To Eat*, and Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*. Others scholars have focused on the significance of diet and animals in literature, as do Timothy Morton's *Shelley and The Revolution in Taste* and Randy Malamud's in *Reading Zoos*. There are innumerable historical works, like Carol Andreas' *Meatpackers and Beef Barons* and Stephen Mennel's *All Manners of Food*, that illustrate the correlations between food choice and class, ethnicity, gender, or religious affiliation. But food choice has since become an important designator of identity in other more personal and self-consciously political ways as well. Vegan and vegetarian culture have proliferated in the past decade, spawning new restaurants, like electronica maestro Moby's "Teany" restaurant in Greenwich Village, and online outlets from animal-friendly clothes and information, like those purveyed by *Mooshoes.com* and *TheMeatrix.com*. Because food choice is an integral part of lifestyle and lifestyles so often have far-reaching political implications, diet can be seen as a rhetorical practice, a means of reproducing and representing the ideological predispositions that have made such diets possible. Food

choice, as critics in many disciplines have noted, serves as a kind of discourse by which subjects construct their identities. Food choice marks an intersection between the body and (what is commonly called) nature, but it also constitutes the intersection of the personal and the social; as such, it is an influential branch of dietary discourse, because everyone, not just nutritionists, chefs, and burger kings help to produce and reproduce it. In doing so, we structure our understanding of diet along axiomatic lines.

The approach to this study of vegan representation takes for granted that our notions of dietary discourse should not be limited to reading, writing and speaking about diet, but should also include the significance of the several roles consumers play when eating, cooking, or shopping for food. In this sense, everyone, at least every consumer, actively participates in the discourse of diet; every act of consumption is a conspicuous one, regardless of consumers' intentions. In the contemporary marketplace, for example, even a lone shopper, who manages to scan her own groceries and check out unseen, participates in discourse not only by indicating her acceptance, even if it is a grudging one, of the price of her purchases, but also because her purchases will be converted to data, the analysis of which will effectively render her consumer choices as a symbolic activity which, in turn, will have a very real effect on day to day operations in and of the marketplace. The cash register is not merely a site of monetary exchange, but also a site of symbolic exchange.

With the image of the wired grocery store in mind, we can see more easily how many consumer choices commonly contribute to the discourse of diet and how communication technologies allow marketers to know more readily than ever whether

their strategies are effective. Consumer choices might be regarded as essentially rhetorical in themselves, claims consumers make by the mere conspicuousness of their consumption, such as *“I’m the kind of person who possesses this kind of commodity,”* or *“These are the kinds of purchases people like myself make,”* or even *“Consumers want more of this and less of that.”* Statements like these might bear comparison to the popular aphorism *“you are what you eat,”* but they understate the complexity of the issue of consumption. Common sense might tell us there is a link between our diets and our bodies, but it fails to explain *why* we choose some foods over others, *where* the rationale for our choosing foods originated, and *how* certain foods acquired significance in excess of their nutritional value and effect on the body. For those kinds of explanations, we must survey the range of influences that compel subjects of food choice to choose as they do. Food preferences and aversions are core values typically rooted in our affiliations with national identity, family, gender, or religion. When cultures experience significant shifts in food preference, as western cultures seem to be doing (however slightly), it is imperative for our understanding that we chronicle the way in which the culture in question represents this shift to itself. Understanding the semiotics of food choice requires that we understand both the personal as well as cultural assumptions about food and its relation to our personal and collective identity.

To this end, the following work is concerned with a branch of dietary discourse that requires research on two fronts: first, of a body type, the vegan body, as it is currently constructed, gendered, and represented by a popular dietary discourse, and, second, of the genealogy of the relevant branches of that discourse, specifically

those that make meat eating central to the American diet and thereby make meat-free diets marginal, so that we might better understand the ideologies which contextualize vegan identity and give it meaning to society. For the sake of clarification, I must elaborate. By ‘body type,’ I mean a body possessed of particular appetites and desires as well as the implications such appetites and desires have for vegan identity. And, by ‘popular’ dietary discourse, I mean those texts commonly encountered in marketplaces, magazines, newspapers, on television, and on the web, as well as those more obscure discourses, such as those implied in the visual rhetoric of food preparation and presentation or product placement in the marketplace. Many examples that I take from these sources contribute to the discourse in non-linguistic ways, through the use of visual images and their arrangement in advertisements and on product packaging. A more comprehensive explanation of these images and the visual rhetoric they employ will be discussed in.

Like all other discourses, the discourse of diet is a means of channeling desire, of making our appetites predictable, and thereby profitable, for those who have vested interests in society’s infrastructure, including the production of foodstuffs as well as the production of efficient laborers and avid consumers. These interests may seem somewhat abstract and intangible to most of us, but only because of the ubiquity of dietary discourse in our daily lives. The level at which most people engage in dietary discourse allows for the perception that discourse is not a factor at all, because the supermarkets and groceries where most people shop for food create the impression that an infinite number of choices await consumers who are limited only by their budgets.



Understandably, to the subject of food choice, consumption almost always seems a matter of personal taste and seldom a matter of discourses wrought by the dominant dietary paradigm. It is my hope that a study such as this one will help to bring to light the power that dietary discourses exert on our habits of consumption.

## **I.B. Problem to be investigated & Research Questions**

In his *Introduction to Discourse Analysis*, James Paul Gee writes, “no piece of work can, or should, ask all possible questions, seek all possible sources of agreement, cover all the data conceivably related to the data under analysis, or seek to deal with every possible relevant linguistic detail. [...] A discourse analysis argues that certain data support a given theme or point.” The theme I have chosen, the sexual politics of meat substitutes, is an allusion to Carol Adam’s seminal work *The Sexual Politics of Meat* and the data I have chosen is limited to product packages and advertisements for meat substitutes and analogs. Although this may seem a very narrow gap in the discourse of diet, it is one that has yet to be investigated. Diet is at once a distinctive and hybrid subject. It incorporates several other discourses, those of nutrition, of taste, of the body, of regimes, of animal welfare, and of the environment. The convergence of these discourses and their respective rhetoric provide a unique cross-section of consumer culture.

The guiding research questions for this dissertation are concerned with the identity politics of veganism, the role of visual rhetoric in these politics, and the sexual politics of meat substitutes marketed as vegan or vegetarian:

- 1) How do representations of vegan culture in mass markets and mass media work as rhetorical elements in a larger cultural debate about issue of diet? How do these representations elaborate a response to the question, “what does it mean to be a vegan?”

- 2) How do products marketed as suitable for vegan diets characterize the aesthetics of veganism? How does this characterization construct the diet in terms of its conformity to or subversion of the dominant dietary paradigms? How do the visual and textual elements apparent in the marketing of meat analogs make appeals to non-vegan consumers or, in other words, do marketers of meat and meat analogs use the same appeals to attract customers?
- 3) How do representations of vegans in advertisements for meat analogs serve as evidence of an extant or emerging typology and how do these types “work” as gender markers?

As yet, there are few critical investigations of vegan culture, and none that concern its representation in mass markets or mass media. There is an abundance of cultural criticism about the way in which discourses construct other types of identities, but as yet there has been scant research on the discourses that assist in the construction of vegan identity. Such a study will be a useful and relevant example of the discursive construction of identity, the rhetoric of social movements, and discourses of power. Critiquing the types of identities implied by representations of vegan culture can assist us in understanding the values of the culture that produces them and can enable us to articulate the way culture inscribes ideology on the body.

## II. Theory & Methodology Review

The obvious question that arises within the context of this dissertation is “What does diet have to do with rhetoric?” Rhetoric and, more specifically, material rhetoric, play an integral part in the process of turning a set of practices, like foodways, into an identity category; the proliferation of food-related images in mass markets and mass media serves as a forum for the discussion of what people should and should not do with their diets. Because food choice can be viewed as a discourse as well as something that people have to do in order to survive, its power as a signifier is amplified, both by the frequency of its repetition and its importance to our physiological needs. Often, the kinds of claims these images make about diet are overt, such as a recent commercial for *Thomas E. Wilson’s Fine Quality Meats* whose spokesperson declares, “A meal just isn’t a meal without meat.” But usually claims about diet are either more subtle, either because they are too vague, as in “you gotta eat” or “you can’t eat just one,” or because they are understated, as in the anthropomorphisms featured on meat product packages which depict happy animal faces either smiling or licking their lips. Perhaps there is no rhetorical question with greater implications for identity than “What’s for dinner?” because the answer to that question is almost always already determined by the ideological preconditions that contextualize it, such as the concept of dinner itself, or merely the presumption that one meal may differ from the next. Here, I am making the assumption, which other theorists have formulated and that I have elaborated upon here previously, that identities are largely discursive entities and that

participation in discourse is a transformative process in which information, amplified and contextualized by rhetorical practice, becomes common knowledge.

If trends or thematic elements can be traced through representations of veganism, we will be better able to view veganism and vegan identity as an historical construction, one with its own genealogy. In choosing such an approach, I do not wish to suggest that vegetarianism or veganism should only be seen as a homogenous set of practices and beliefs; rather, my intention is to collect and analyze a substantial number of mass-market images that suggest veganism is constructed as much by the writings, practices, and portrayals of self-identified vegans as it is by the representations of veganism that appear in advertising, and on product packages.

## II A. Critical Discourse Analysis

This dissertation is not an empirical study, but a qualitative one that employs critical discourse analysis to investigate the effect of ideology on identity. The focus in this work, as in many other cultural studies, is “with the generation and circulation of meanings in industrial societies” (Potter 61). Additionally, because I adopt the point of view that identities are discursive by nature, my dissertation topic, the marketing of meat substitutes, can be conceived as being essentially rhetorical in that it concerns phenomena that are fragments of dietary discourse, a discourse that assists in characterizing particular identities according to scientific, commercial, and sub-cultural claims. Ultimately, the goal of this dissertation is to provide sufficient answers to the guiding questions expressed in section II D, for the purpose of theorizing about the relationships between social movements and their commodification.

The theoretical foundations for critical discourse analysis (hereafter, *CDA*) derive from Foucault’s radical notion of discourse in *Archaeology of Knowledge*. Foucault classifies discourse not simply as a medium of communication, but also as a mode of discipline, an exercise of power, whose end result is the production of identity. Several critics have already summarized the importance of Foucault’s explanation of the work discourse does. Wodak and Meyer state, “discourses exercise power as they transport knowledge on which the collective and individual consciousness feeds. This emerging knowledge is the basis of individual and collective action and the formative action that shapes reality” (38). In other words, discourses, as repositories

of information, provide the contexts in which action may be undertaken, in which inquiries may be made, and identities may be formed -- the crucial point being that discourse precedes our subjectivity. Discourse, as Gillian Rose writes,

disciplines subjects into certain ways of thinking and acting, but this is not simply repressive; it does not impose rules for thought and behavior on a pre-existing human agent. Instead, human subjects are produced through discourses. Our sense of self is made through the operation of discourse. So too are objects, relations, places, scenes: discourse produces the world as it understands it. [...] [I]t might be said that certain kinds of masculinity are produced through a discursive visuality that is voyeuristic and fetishistic (137).

Additionally, it is important to note that CDA has expanded the Foucauldian notion of discourse beyond the verbal to include other forms of symbolic communication (Wodak and Meyer 45). Discourse analysis seems a fitting methodology for understanding the way particular texts assist in the construction of particular identities, especially because understanding the “fetishistic” appeal of visual images in marketing is crucial to understanding the way that consumers construct their identities by purchasing commodities commonly perceived as having significance for gender (or other crucial aspects of identity). Since many of the discourse fragments cited in this study are print-based advertisements that employ visual imagery, it is necessary to elaborate on the means by which these will be analyzed. Most of the discourse fragments I examine are analyzed in terms of their subversion of or conformity to the myth of the superiority of meat as an American foodway or the superiority of animal-based foods in general;

furthermore, these discourse fragments are analyzed in terms of the degree to which they employ or appeal to gender stereotypes in order to uphold what I refer to as the dominant dietary paradigm. Each of these images may be seen as a unit of ideological work on behalf of that paradigm.

Although the question of an image's status as an argument is not entirely resolved, I am adopting the position that visual imagery, especially in marketing, is part of the rhetoric at work in an underlying argument for participation in consumerism, a practice that depends, in part, on peoples' identification with advertisements. The kind of identification at work in most advertisements is not necessarily a conscious one. In many ways, we do not need to consciously agree or disagree with the implicit arguments of advertising for them to work; they do not necessarily need to state propositions about their product or anything else, as so many contemporary advertisements illustrate. After all, why should marketers bother to argue, if they don't really have to? Ads simply need to reiterate what is already known about our socio-economic status, what we already believe about ourselves, thus stoking our desires, affirming our ambitions, or encouraging our complacency. These reiterations are the essence of ideology, "the indispensable practice – including the 'systems of representation' that are its products and supports – through which individuals of different class, race, and sex are worked into a particular 'lived relation' to a socio-historical project" (Kavanagh 319). The project, as one may guess, is the commodification of everything. But, because their effect is often reiterative, and not argumentative, advertisements resemble narratives left unfinished, fragmented,



or abridged. Advertisements are the shortest short stories, the most sudden, most microscopic fiction. They offer us glimpses of ideology in thirty-second spots and four-color spreads.

Stuart Hall defines Representation in media not as a process that expresses the meaning of phenomena in itself, but instead as a “signifying practice” that determines “the way in which meaning is *given* to the thing depicted” [my italics]. Hall’s theory adopts the post-structuralist approach to semiotics in that it does not assume events have one fixed meaning that re-presentations of those events depict accurately or inaccurately; rather, Hall asserts that events have no meaning *until* they are represented. The primary forces that make meaning possible are culture itself and the audience’s familiarity with cultural concepts, which Hall refers to as “maps of meaning.” The way in which representations make claims on meaning is represented in the following equation:

*What an audience expects, but does not actually find in an image*

*Contrasted with*

*What is actually found in the image.*

Following this equation, we can deduce that an increase in contrast produces an increase in the argumentative nature of the image and thereby an increase in the image’s function as an argumentative claim.

In “The Rhetoric of Visual Arguments,” J. Anthony Blair neatly characterizes the rhetorical aspects of visual images when he asks, “what distinguishes arguments from other kinds of ‘symbolic inducement?’” (44). In the classical sense, an argument’s

most distinguishing trait is its appeal to reason, or logos. Blair notes that, from the classicist's point of view, it might seem a categorical mistake to judge images, such as advertisements or packaging, in the same way that we judge the credibility of an argumentative claim, because images, unlike orators, are not available for rebuttal and, thus, are often dismissed for an apparent vagueness that poses barriers to the truth-distilling process of dialectic. Because advertisements may not be pressed for further details, for evidence supporting a proposition, or for clarification of a particular point, they seem an inferior form of argument, supplemental at best. Yet, their persuasive power is immense, because the limits for reasoned discussion that visual arguments impose are useful for fixing the meanings that words alone often seem incapable of signifying so instantaneously, if at all. Blair believes that a more proper context is all we need to see how well visual rhetoric dovetails with the more traditional, logocentric notion of argument:

Visual arguments are typically enthymemes – arguments with gaps left to be filled in with the participation of the audience. [...] So, the arguer has to be able to predict the nature of the audience's participation. Given the vagueness of much visual imagery, the visual arguer must be particularly astute in reading the audience. Thus, in a variety of ways, visual arguments rely particularly on the astuteness of the arguer for their success. We may say, then, that visual arguments are distinguished by their rhetorical power. What makes visual arguments distinctive is how much greater is their potential for rhetorical power than that of purely verbal arguments (52).

Blair suggests that visual argument is deliberately enthymematic; if so, the source of its persuasive power lies in the rhetor's anticipation of an audience's capacity to supplement the abbreviated argument with either the absent proposition or the missing evidence that would necessarily form a more complete, functional syllogism. Furthermore, if this suggestion is correct, then visual arguments need not be regarded as sacrificing the breadth and depth that are so highly valued in speech or writing, but instead, as substituting a seemingly more palpable and immediately gratifying appeal that persuades as it flatters, encouraging audiences' participation in the argument, rewarding them for their contribution to the argument's completion, and, in turn, predisposing them to identification with the text in question. It is important to note that though visual arguments are similar to other arguments that employ enthymemes in one important respect: they do not necessarily make for accurate, or even truthful, syllogisms. In fact, the absence of deliberate propositions and detailed support can turn fallacious syllogisms into successful advertisements. Who, for example, would even want to argue against the claim, "you deserve a break today?" The possibilities for making sense without actually saying anything are limitless and, in the case of enthymemes, sometimes desirable.

The key to the success of effective marketing, as both critics and marketers seem to agree, is identification, or the way that audiences imagine themselves in a given scenario or the way in which audiences imagine an advertised product as a natural part of their own lives (Hall *The Media*). Visual imagery provides everything audiences need for this process and often more. Why more? Raymond Williams explains:

It is impossible to look at modern advertising without realizing that the material object being sold is never enough: this indeed is the crucial cultural quality of its modern forms. If we were sensibly materialist, in that part of our living in which we use things, we should find most advertising to be of an insane irrelevance. Beer would be enough for us, without the promise that in drinking it we show ourselves to be manly, young in heart, or neighbourly. [...] But if these associations sell beer and washing machines, as some of the evidence suggests, it is clear that we have a cultural pattern in which objects are not enough but must be validated, if only in fantasy, by association with social and personal meanings which in a different cultural pattern might be more directly available (quoted in Marris 462).

While many people would agree that many ads offer too much information, or more than is necessarily relevant, Williams claims that ads in themselves are excessive, suggesting that the discourse they offer works on more than one level, not only making claims about the product and those who use them, but also justifying consumerism in the first place. This study takes Williams' claims for granted. However, the task of this study is to illuminate those superfluous aspects of advertisement, which might otherwise go unnoticed, and to suggest reasons for their being as they are given the major cultural predispositions toward both the commodity (meat analogs and substitutes) and its consumers (the subjects of food choice).

### **II.A.1. Discourse As Constitutive of Identity**

Post-structuralist theories about the construction of identity through discourse like those of like those of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler have revitalized scholarly interest in the analytical potential of Rhetoric, especially in the study of representation, identity politics, and social movements. Rhetorical analysis can explore the unstated ideological assumptions present in the discourses that construct identities such as vegan identity. Popular dietary discourse seems ideally suited as a subject for a postmodern rhetorical analysis because it participates in the construction of the contemporary subject of food choice in much the same way that post-structuralist rhetoricians construct the subject of discourse – not as a sovereign, autonomous, centered, rigidly individuated subject, but as an articulation of an otherwise indefinite point on a continuum between the self and otherness.

Because identity is discursive, it is thereby unstable. That is, once one's identity is established, or presented, it does not remain intact, but must, instead, be reestablished, represented, even when those actions are repetitive or redundant. To complicate matters even more, identities are not always represented by the same subjects who embody them.

And so, a study of identities implicated in and by social movements, if it is to be a poststructuralist one, should focus not on individuals who seem to epitomize the strictures that characterize their respective social movements, but instead on the way in which the rhetoric of a particular social movement serves as a means of

exchanging the desire for power for power itself. One of culture's foremost functions, according to Michel Foucault, is to utilize desire, to channel its energy, so that culture can be reproduced and society can continue to function. Important to note here is that Foucault sees the relationship between the state and individuals as productive. Societies recognize that individuals' desires would be beneficial to control, as Foucault famously points out in his account of the way in which homosexuality was transformed from a discrete practice into an identity category. Among the more common ways of making desire productive in contemporary culture is to commodify it and to make available for consumption all those objects (and more) to which desire can be affixed, but always at a price, an expenditure that, in turn, constructs the consumer's identity. To express desire through consumption is to become the subject of an economy, to be made identifiable by one's habits of consumption and to comply not only with the consumption of the commodity, but also in the system of its production. The means by which consumers' desires are solicited and elicited constitute a discourse that lends itself to a study like this one.

In the broadest sense, this dissertation is intended to be a qualitative study of the identity politics of veganism and the ways this identity category is shaped by ideology through discourse, particularly that of diet. As Terry Eagleton writes in *Literary Theory*:

Discourses, sign-systems and signifying practices of all kinds, from film and television to fiction and the languages of natural science produce effects, shape forms of consciousness and unconsciousness, which are closely related to

maintenance and transformation of our existing systems of power. They are thus closely related to what it means to be a person. Indeed, 'ideology' can be taken to indicate no more than this connection – the link or nexus between discourses and power (183).

Like other discourses, the discourse of diet is invested with ideological predispositions which transform information in such a way as to create a body of knowledge; this body of knowledge, in turn, is disseminated by commercial, medical, and popular sources, each of which contributes to the complex and, oftentimes, paradoxical representations of vegan identity.

Representations of various sub-cultural practices and practitioners appeal to the generally curious as well as those who identify with or against the subculture in question. What follows that moment in which representations are confronted makes all the difference in the little worlds that envelops our lives. Because our identification with representations can enable us to be considerate and appreciative and because such states of mind can help us develop the kind of familiarity that turns otherwise indifferent passers-by into members of a supportive community, it is important that those of us who learn about others primarily through representations in mass markets and mass media maintain a degree of skepticism about the verisimilitude of representations in general. What makes representations so valuable as data for discourse analysis is that, despite their inevitable inaccuracy, particular representations are reflective of the ideology that makes them understandable, credible, and even familiar to particular audiences. Representations, visual and otherwise, can assist

discourse analysts in answering questions about how discourses change in accordance with power over time.

If we should find that answers to our questions about why discourses change at all, we must remember that no representation is ever complete. As the cultural and media studies critic Stuart Hall has said, “the world must be made to mean.” According to Hall, the attempt to fix or “naturalize” meaning, a process which he calls “closure,” involves hiding the fact that representation does ideological work. Although much of the western philosophic tradition tends to emphasize the rational processes by which people recognize “facts” and “truths,” beliefs are maintained through repetition. In brief, each representation abridges, amends, or reiterates the subject it represents and, in doing so, inevitably makes a claim about the subject. The means by which this claim is made and its implications for the subject are of primary interest here. Representation can assist us only partly in analyzing the construction of veganism as an identity category; it is more useful in analyzing veganism as a text that has become useful to marketers.

More specifically, this study focuses on the marketing of products designated as suitable for vegan diets and seeks to elaborate on the implicit claims such marketing has for veganism. Veganism is a discourse whose regime impinges upon the dominant dietary discourse in western culture, especially American culture, because it attempts to offer consumers an adequate alternative to the animal-based foods that are crucial to national economies and have important symbolic value in the construction of gendered identities as well. Accordingly, this study will serve as an accessory to feminist and



gender studies insofar as it concentrates its analysis on the association of meat-eating with masculinity and the association of alternatives to meat-eating with femininity.

Until recently, food and its history were underserved topics in critical theory, As Brian Harrison writes in his article “The Kitchen Revolution,” food as fare for critics is important:

not just for its own sake, but because it indirectly illuminates a host of political, social, and economic changes that straddle the conventional categories of historical study. Nor has it been helped by the advance of women’s history, given that feminist writers are keen to get women out of the kitchen. [...] Food somehow seems a frivolous research topic that fails to enhance the seriousness and scholarly image they seek (141).

Harrison’s critique of the unpopularity of food as a scholarly topic for theorists underscores the degree to which dietary discourse influences our perception of gender and identity even at the level of scholarship. The perspective to which Harrison refers is one that this study seeks to revise.

## **II. A. 2. Visual Rhetoric**

This study will also incorporate semiotic analysis wherever the signs in question are affected by visual imagery, because, as other critics have asserted, Semiology is “concerned with the construction of social difference through signs” (Rose 96), and this study concerns a variety of signs associated with the marketing of foodstuffs that give meaning to the term “vegan.” The kinds of “difference” being investigated here are those of gender as implied by those of dietary preference. Semiotic analysis is relevant to this study in two additional ways: first, in discerning the cultural values that make these commercial texts make sense to us now and, second, in delineating a larger history in which these texts serve to reproduce and/or revise dominant dietary paradigms in American culture. Semiology takes for granted that texts are “encoded” by their authors and “decoded” by their audiences and it also accepts that texts are not always decoded as they were intended to be, because of the arbitrary nature of signification itself; thus, every text has as much potential to proliferate meaning as to channel and fix it. One advantage to categorizing the process of meaning-making in terms of “coding” is that it chronicles the very real, but often unseen, “work” that must be done in order for meaning to exist. This approach conveniently dispenses with the notions that meaning is pure, natural, and unaffected by culture’s influence, or that human subjects can perceive things “just as they are” without the assistance of discourse and ideology.

Although a hybrid of theories will be exercised here, this study will largely be

the result of discourse analysis insofar as the reader is willing to entertain, first, the notion of advertisements and product packages as discursive elements and, second, to conceive of identity as a discursive affair. Because advertisements and product packaging are generally accepted as being essentially persuasive, the rhetorical nature of this study is implicit; obviously, marketers wish to persuade audiences to become consumers of their products. However, the means of persuasion employed by marketers does not always conform to those traditionally used in written or spoken argument. Instead, the persuasive appeals in advertisements and on product packages are not as readily apparent as the appeals made in a speech or essay because of their visual nature; and so, a more traditional rhetorical analysis, which might ordinarily focus on appeals and devices, for example, will be useful, but not entirely sufficient for interpreting the texts in question. Fortunately, for this study, it is common practice for rhetoricians to employ other methodologies (often several at once) to supplement their analyses.

## **II B Hermeneutic Method**

In an article entitled “Reading Maternity Materially,” critic Barbara Dickson defines material rhetoric as an analytical practice that “takes for its object of study the significations of material things and corporeal entities – objects that signify not through language but through their spatial organization, mobility, mass, utility, orality, and tactility. [...] It shares, in this, the assumption of discourse analysis that all meaning is produced intertextually and all knowledge consensually” (297-298). Dickson structures her critique of a photograph featuring a nude Demi Moore that appeared on the cover of *Vanity Fair* with two readings: the first of the photograph as a text in itself and the second as survey of texts that shape the contexts of the photograph’s production and reception (the reasons it was produced and for whom). This is a fairly common hermeneutic methodology that is equally well-suited to a reading of the texts of meat substitutes.

### **II B.1. Intertextual Analysis**

Intertextual Analysis involves the explanation of the rhetorical elements at work within a particular discourse fragment such as a single advertisement or product package.

### **II B. 2. Intratextual Analysis**

Intratextual Analysis involves the analysis of rhetorical elements at work among discourse fragments such as those apparent in an advertisement as well as the magazine in which it appears.

## **III. Orienting**

The purpose of this section is to provide the contexts from which the fragments of dietary discourse have been selected for this study. American attitudes toward animal-based and plant-based foods and diets are of particular importance, as are the ideological predispositions that foster these attitudes. In part, the dominant dietary paradigm is shaped by ever-expanding scientific and medical discourses; but it is also shaped by traditions that precede those discourses by hundreds, and, in some cases, thousands of years. The following subsections provide an orientation for understanding the cultural complexities associated with a food product designed to imitate meat yet remain completely distinct from it. I begin with a description of what I call the ‘dominant dietary paradigm’ and its role in the construction of gender for subjects of food choice. Then I describe the challenges to the dominant dietary paradigm

and examine the origins of vegan culture as well as the origins of meat analogs and substitutes. The section serves to remind the reader that the advertisements analyzed in sections IV and V did not materialize in a vacuum, that they are meaningful as reiterations of a pre-existing discourse, that opposition to that discourse can be articulated, and that these articulations can affect the dominant dietary paradigm by broadening or narrowing the meaning of terms which comprise its discourse.

### III A The Dominant Dietary Paradigm in America

*They say they don't need money.  
They're living on nuts and berries.  
They say animals don't worry.  
You know animals are hairy?  
They think they know what's best.  
They're making a fool of us.  
They ought to be more careful.  
They're setting a bad example.  
They have untroubled lives.  
They think everything's nice.  
They like to laugh at people.  
They're setting a bad example.*

– Talking Heads, “Animals” (1979)

*The cultural influences that train our taste and the political relationships that govern its regulation are part of a network of social relationships that includes our private world, the home, and our public world, the public sphere, of cultural and political life.*

– Barbara Willard, “The American Meat Myth”

The Dominant Dietary Paradigm, which I capitalize here to make it seem more authoritative and important, is a specialized term that I use to describe the most persistent and pervasive elements of what it means to be “eating well” in a given culture; the dominant dietary paradigm is a regime whether or not it is acknowledged as such. It directly influences the predominant model for meals and represents the standard to which the perceived healthfulness of all other regimes is compared. The basis of the dominant dietary paradigm is the particular food that a culture regards

as essential to nutrition and/or people's well being. In anthropological as well as nutritional terminology, foods of such high importance are the central elements in the complex of behaviors known as *foodways*. Frederick Simoons' classic study of meat avoidances, *Eat Not This Flesh*, defines foodways as:

modes of feeling, thinking, and behaving about food that are common to a cultural group. The foodways determine which of the available resources a group eats and which it rejects; through cultural preference and prejudice they may present major barriers to using available food resources and raising the standards of nutrition (3).

In America, meat has been the primary foodway since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century insofar as it transplanted the preference for meat-centered dishes from England and continental Europe (McIntosh 82). Although, as I will demonstrate in the next section, the meaning of the term 'meat' has shifted significantly since it first appeared in the English language, indicating foods of various animal as well as plant origin, the term's symbolic value. Furthermore, the term's symbolic value and its power over the appetite has remained undiminished by every other type of food and its rate of consumption has remained steady, wavering slightly only recently. Almost all Americans have always eaten as much meat as they can afford to eat. It has proven to be as much of cultural constant as one is likely to find.

Among the most common misperceptions about the American diet is that it is the result of natural processes, a combination of biological predispositions, evolution, and natural selection that have kept our dietary preferences unchanged for eons. Part of the strength of this belief depends upon the vagaries inherent in the term *natural*.



Depending only how strictly one chooses to use the term, human beings have been removed from the natural world of food choice following the agricultural revolution – and thus the beginning of our altering the natural course of plant life – some ten thousand years ago. The connection between the diets of contemporary human beings and those who lived and ate prior to the first era of food production is probably very thin. Our physiology is virtually identical, but our environments and our behaviors, especially where food choice is concerned, are worlds apart. The rise in population that accompanied the burgeoning mastery of agriculture was afforded by a proportionate increase in the consumption of grains, not meat.

Even as late, by evolutionary standards, as the middle ages, most Europeans, nobility not included, rarely ate meat as a daily staple. For example, England, between the thirteenth & fourteenth centuries, with its population peaking and its most fertile lands already in use, was maximizing its resources in such a way that the range of foodways between the highest and lowest classes reached its most extreme. The nobility often consumed more than 4,000 calories per day, while peasants consumed little more than 2000 calories per day; the disparity between these two figures is even greater given the energy expenditures of laboring people (Hinton 2). Yet, many members of the peasant class, unbeknownst to peasants and nobles alike, were enjoying a diet superior to that of the noble class. This is not to suggest that peasant food was more tasty or that their meals were coveted by anyone with the means to obtain more costly food, but, by today's nutritional standards, those peasants who managed to meet their daily caloric needs often met their requirements for vitamins and minerals as

well, whereas diets of the nobility were frequently deficient in these aspects, despite a typically high caloric intake (Flandrin 169).

Still, for many contemporary consumers, meat eating is synonymous with a more natural, primal state and the belief that the sense of taste has led them, as members of a species, down from the trees of prehistory, upright across the plains, and into line at the drive-thru. Not only is such a judgment of taste culturally specific, but also any resemblance between the animal-based foods of early hominid diets and the meat of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is purely coincidental (Fiddes 20). Our earliest hominid ancestors, when they were not gathering the plants that comprised most of their caloric intake, were scavenging for carrion, occasionally killing and eating small animals, or settling for insects or larvae (Spencer 16; McIntosh 19-20).

At first glance, the statistical account of total food consumption per annum for Americans in the past century does not seem to indicate an especially dramatic struggle between health and malnourishment when compared to other centuries. Of course, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Americans' food supply did experience several drastic fluctuations due to poor harvests, economic depression, and the rationing that accompanied the World Wars (Levenstein 80); but nothing close to famine has occurred here since colonial times. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the food supply in the United States had reached a "saturation level, not only of animal products, but of total food" and, as a result, food consumption has stabilized in the sense that dramatic changes in diet due to scarcity are diminished (McIntosh 217). This fact is truly world changing. If a populace has an unending supply of foods they can afford to prefer, then shifts in

dietary practice are not attributable to environmental factors unfavorable to agriculture, such as droughts, floods, and frosts. Any change in dietary practice, even a relatively small one, represents a significant revision in people's attitudes toward the dominant dietary paradigm. A saturation level puts human beings at the farthest remove from "nature."

Whether behavioral, environmental, or genetic factors have the greatest influence on the evolution of the American body is very difficult to say. Less difficult is the question of whether the dissemination of valid medical and scientific information about diet, exercise, and nutrition has produced a body politic whose individual bodies measure up to the prevailing standards of health and fitness. It is not entirely uncommon or unreasonable to believe that this information has been ineffective, if the editorial opinions of medical journals as mainstream and well respected as *The Lancet* can be taken seriously:

Hardly a week goes by without further evidence that developed countries are at the dawn of an exploding new threat to population health, which will reverse many gains made by improved diagnosis and treatment. This threat is not the emergence of new infectious diseases, such as SARS or avian influenza, and it is not the potential for exposure to chemical or biological weapons. It is much simpler and less glamorous, but arguably much more difficult to combat. People are getting fatter and less physically active, and are therefore more prone to killer chronic illnesses, such as cardiovascular disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes ("The Catastrophic Failure of Public Health").

If we accept the health standards prescribed for the populace by government agencies, then the majority of Americans fail to meet those standards, at least where body mass is concerned. This failure, it would be safe to say, is not due to a lack of information; certainly there is an extensive body of knowledge comprised by the discourses of diet, fitness, and medicine to which scholars and experts are continually adding their expertise. Adopting healthy dietary practices, then, is not entirely a matter of an awareness of regimes and theories, but, perhaps, a matter of understanding and of persuasion, the latter of which belongs to the realm of rhetoric.

Although there are many ways of measuring health, not least of which is one's own sense of it, the most basic way of measuring health is by calculating a person's body mass index, a fairly reliable indicator of percent body fat, which, according the National Institute of Health, is a measure of the likelihood of contracting diseases associated with obesity. Based on a survey of the population's body mass index, the nation's official statistics show that America has a higher obesity rate than all other industrialized countries, that 64% of American adults are currently overweight or obese, that there are more overweight Americans per capita than ever, and that they are gaining their excess weight earlier in life than previous generations had (Schlosser 241; U.S. Dept. of Health). According to recent statistics from the Centers for Disease Control, not only are more Americans overweight and obese than they were 1960, but also, "the percent of adults with healthy weights declined approximately 10 percent from 1960 to 1994, with an additional decline of approximately 8 percent from 1994 to 2000" (U.S. Dept. of Health). It appears that Americans are not only getting fatter

in greater numbers than ever, but they're getting fatter faster too. How is this possible?

Well, theories abound.

If we conceive of the American body as a site of rhetorical struggle between health-inducing discourses and health-reducing discourses, then the latter, based on the above figures, seem to have been winning the argument for nearly half a century. But to base our judgment of a nation's health on a survey of that nation's percent body fat is too simplistic, because it fails to take into account other important factors such as infant mortality rates, immunity to disease, and longevity. As several critics have noted, the perception of fat as a health crisis coincides with the perception of slenderness as a desirable trait in sexual partners, particularly women, but also men, beginning in the early sixties and continuing beyond what many suspected would be the end of trend, "heroin chic" (Levenstein 239; Bordo, *Twilight* 112-3; Schlosser 243). Although the official figures describing the contemporary American body strike us as indicative of crisis, the statistics concerning consumption, when compared to other eras, might reveal a different story. In fact, fatness was not always entirely unfashionable, depending on one's social class.

The bulging stomachs of successful mid-nineteenth century businessman and politicians were a symbol of bourgeois success, an outward manifestation of their accumulated wealth. By contrast, the gracefully slender body announced aristocratic status; disdainful of the bourgeois need to display wealth and power ostentatiously, it commanded social space invisibly rather than aggressively, seemingly above the commerce in appetite or the need to eat. Subsequently, this

ideal began to be appropriated by the status-seeking middle class, as slender wives became the showpieces of their husbands' success (Bordo, *Unbearable* 192).

Unlike body images, however, the relationship between obesity and disease is not a merely trendy phenomenon; many credible health professionals agree that obesity is inextricably linked to a wide range of serious health risks and, as recently as 1999, obesity was considered the second leading cause of death in the U.S. (Allison 1530). Also, meat consumption in the U.S. has risen steadily to near record levels, approximately 192 pounds of meat per person per year in 2002 and approximately 221 pounds per person in 2004 (USDA "Profiling;" USDA "Statistical Highlights"). For reference, in the first year of the Great Depression, the average American ate half a pound of meat a day, for a yearly total of 130 lbs; while, in the 1830s, the average American ate approximately 178 lbs. of meat, mostly salt pork, yearly (McIntosh 82). These facts, along with the average 25% rise in the total number of calories consumed per person per day since 1970, account, in large part, for Americans' unique physique (USDA). However, while a reasonable case can be made for the claim that Americans' consumption of meat has debilitating and even lethal consequences, the degree to which the dominant dietary paradigm is responsible for either the relative health or *haute-ness* of the nation is not something this study seeks to determine. Rather, this study seeks to answer questions about the nature of the paradigm's effect on a marginal discourse, one, which, while touted by several reputable sources to be a preventative against many of the diseases associated with obesity and animal-based foods, garners

modest praise as well as a vilification whose intensity seems grossly disproportionate to the number of people who attest to the validity of the discourse.

No matter how great the influence of the dominant dietary paradigm may be on marginal dietary discourses, their relationship can only begin to be better understood through an analysis of the discourse fragments associated with its arguably, most persuasive appeal, the superiority of animal-based foods (in every imaginable respect), and through an analysis of discourse fragments associated with one of its most extreme challenges, veganism. Often, our impulses, or mine at least, are to regard sources of power, like those embedded in and embodied by discourse, as repressive of desires and appetites. From a Foucaultian perspective, the proliferation of dietary discourse about animal-based foods does not necessarily represent a repression of the individual, but it opens space for the subject of food choice to occupy. Just as language is constitutive of the subject of identity, discourse is constitutive of the object of knowledge, not only because one may choose to emulate the dominant paradigm, but also because the dominant paradigm's very existence provides a discourse that can be reformed, resisted, or subverted.

The argument that usually begins most discussions of the inadequacy of vegetarian and vegan diets is that meat eating is essential for proper nutrition because people have always eaten it, and that those who haven't in adequate quantities have either become extinct or have been relegated to the margins of history because their foodways have had debilitating effects in their pursuit and control of resources, territory, and surplus wealth. Meat, as I have written, is the American foodway, the

central staple of the diet, the standard against which all other foods are measured; in turn, it is also the food that has been at the center of scientific inquiry and governmental regulation. Of all our tastes, the taste for animal-based foods is the most regulated of all (Fiddes 18). Most Americans are accustomed to seeing the USDA's stamp on the packaging for meat foods; that stamp carries with it the power of the dominant dietary paradigm, reminding those of us who have never known anything first-hand about foraging, gathering, and hunting that eating the bodies of dead animals is natural.



### **III A. 1. Myth of Masculine Meat**

What, if anything, is more obvious about American masculinity than that it has an anxious preoccupation with meat? Never before have so many Americans, men and women alike, eaten meat in such massive amounts. Statistically, American males eat markedly more meat per year than female Americans; accordingly, female vegetarians outnumber male vegetarians four to one. Centuries ago, when meat was too costly for most men to eat, their preference for it was expressed by patriarchs who ate what little meat there was, leaving nothing or next-to nothing for everyone else in the household. Today, meat is plentiful and relatively inexpensive and men's preference for meat is expressed by consuming it more frequently or in greater quantities than women do. One recent study describes the relationship in terms of meat and vegetables as follows: "Although women were not statistically different from their male counterparts regarding their preference for red meat, they generally preferred more meatless meals" (Rimal 42). American men still have a large stake in eating meat, and they are more averse to vegetarian fare than American women. This is nothing new.

Still one may wonder, why are American men so insistent on eating animals? There are two obvious reasons: because they can and because, at every turn, for more than a century, American culture has given them every reason to believe that meat is good for their bodies and essential to their masculinity. In "The American Story of Meat" Barbara E. Willard offers three themes that historically link meat with American culture: first, rugged individualism and manifest destiny; second, human dominion

over nature as suggested by the book of Genesis; and, last, the masculinization of meat consumption (108). She writes:

The overarching understanding of meat eating that I uncovered is deeply rooted in the American economic and philosophical system of capitalism, consumerism, and free will. This perspective positions all non-human life as a potential resource. It depicts humans as caretakers and stewards of the land. It maintains that material and economic growth is essential for human progress. It places faith in technological solutions to respond to environmental problems. And it celebrates consumerism as a given right of all humans. Guided by the characteristics of the anthropocentric philosophy and a historical understanding of meat eating practices, the alteration of this story over time has both upheld and transformed the meaning of America's foodway. The characters of the story either produce or consume meat reinforcing the anthropocentric position that humans have dominion over nature and are stewards of the land. The primary theme is the glory of meat in a capitalist environment: Meat, it's a good investment for the body, the family, the economy, and the land (116).

Each of these themes characterize men as central to a narrative, separate from nature, superior to animals, and as predators whose physical strength is the source of their power, and whose meat eating is the source of their physical strength. In reality, human beings' physical strength alone has not been the only or, arguably, even the most significant factor naturally tapping them for the food chain fast track. There are several varieties of primates whose strength is greater than that of humans. In addition, there have been stronger hominids who became extinct despite their great strength. Yet

human evolution is consistently regarded as having been achieved through strength gained from meat consumption. Such is the nature of myth.

In evolutionary terms, animal-based foods seem to have been a very minor staple in the human diet for tens of thousands of years. Compared to plant-based foods, meat is estimated to have represented between thirty and forty percent of early *homo sapiens* diet. Whether the amount of meat was larger or smaller, we can safely claim that “modern man” is undeniably an omnivore and not, as one smiling wife says of her husband in a recent television ad for a supermarket chain’s meat department, “a carnivore.” In any case, we should be cautious in a study like this one and avoid trying to trace contemporary behavior to strictly biological or material precedents:

The expression in contemporary populations of traits adaptive to ancestral conditions, [sic] is not easily made. The amount of evolutionary baggage we carry may be quite different for various behavior patterns, depending upon the rigor of natural selection upon them through time and upon their malleability. Thus, without specific knowledge of the genetic and cultural bases for contemporary behavioral predisposition, it may be difficult to evaluate the extent to which a behavior pattern had wholly or in part been determined by our prehistoric past. [...] The evidence comes from physical and cultural anthropology, comparative animal behavior, and, indeed, any relevant source. For past hominid populations, only indirect and fragmentary evidence remains, and it is inevitably subject to conflicting explanations and to revision as new paradigms and information emerge (Hamilton 118).

Culturally speaking, then, meat consumption has risen to its current rate over a

relatively short period of time. The eclectic, aristocratic taste for meat in Europe at end of the middle ages was a preface to the novelty of other classes having meat for themselves. Although most people could not afford to eat meat, let alone a variety of it on a regular basis, all classes seemed to cherish it above other foods (Henish 126). Meat then, as now, was considered the most important part of a substantial meal, but the expression of its importance was to include it in as many dishes as possible, rather than to serve large, unadorned portions. Meat, in the most affluent households, was not served as a sole course to the exclusion of other foods. In fact, the prevailing culinary aesthetic of the middle ages was such that cooks and kings alike favored the blending together of many ingredients to create one unique dish, a dish that made its ingredients taste “as never before” (126). As a result, meat was often mixed into pastries, soups, stews, stuffing, and other dishes, turning up unexpectedly, giving diners the impression of plentitude and feelings of satiety (127). At one feast, the chef was inspired to serve a creature the likes of which had never before been seen: “A capon and a pig were each cut in half, boned, and then sewn together [...], filled with stuffing, roasted on a spit, and painted with egg yolks, saffron, ginger, and streaks of green parsley juice” (131). Not surprisingly, this culinary aesthetic did indeed contribute to huge amounts of meat consumption among those who could afford it. For common people, peasants, meat consumption was miniscule. With the exception of several short-lived surpluses of meat (and other foods) in the wake of the Black Death, meat consumption rose only slightly from the beginning to the end of the middle ages (Fiddes 22). It rose slowly, but steadily, as urban populations increased and the merchant class evolved throughout the

Renaissance to the end of the eighteenth century. Then, suddenly in 19<sup>th</sup> century, meat consumption among ordinary American people spiked in a way that would have made the slaves, serfs, and tradesmen of former centuries salivate.

As frequent meat consumption trickled its way down the social food chain, the customs and rituals surrounding it gradually changed too. In his history of manners, *The Civilizing Process*, Elias describes the gradual change in the way meat is served as an illustration of the shift from meat eating as an upper class ritual to more common practice. This change involves the proximity of meat carving to those at the table. From the middle ages and well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, books on manners stress “how important it is for a well-bred man to be good at carving” (119). The sign of a courteous and worldly person was his skill in carving, not least because this skill was a public spectacle, always performed at the table. However, as feudal culture gradually disappears, the institutions that once maintained the age’s version of civility give way to new social structures that result in smaller households, smaller family units, and the removal of large-scale food processing from the home. As is the case today, the majority of households after the middle ages gradually became units of consumption, not production (120). Elias explains:

The direction is quite clear. From a standard of feeling by which the sight and carving of a dead animal on the table are actually pleasurable, or at least not at all unpleasant, the development leads to another standard by which reminder that the meat dish has something to do with killing of an animal are avoided to the utmost. In many of our meat dishes the animal form is so concealed

and changed by the art of its preparation and carving that while eating one is scarcely reminded of its origin. [...] This carving, as the examples [from books on manners; my note] show, was formerly a direct part of social life in the upper class. Then the spectacle is felt more and more to be distasteful. Carving itself does not disappear, since the animal must, of course, be cut when being eaten. But the distasteful is *removed behind the scenes of social life*. Specialists take care of it in the shop or the kitchen. It will be seen again and again how characteristic of the whole process that we call civilization is this movement of segregation, this hiding “behind the scenes” of what has become distasteful. The curve running from the carving of a large part of the animal or even the whole animal at table, through the advance in the threshold of repugnance at the sight of dead animals, to the removal of carving to specialized enclaves behind the scenes is a typical civilization-curve (121).

As this particular performance of masculinity became obsolete, men had one less routine by which to demonstrate their worldliness, their skill with a knife, and their cognizance of the hierarchy of diners at the table. Other performances necessarily took the place of carving.

In the butcher shops and markets of Shakespeare’s London, a call for “meat” would have carried the very same meaning with which most Americans are now familiar: the fat, flesh, muscles, and organs of animals used for food. This narrow sense of the term existed contemporaneously with the broader sense until the early twentieth

century when the sense of “meat” as a “meal” attained its present archaic status. In fact, for many residents in the southeastern United States, “meat” had narrowed even further by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, meaning *the flesh of pigs used for food* (Harris 209). Today, as almost any dictionary will tell you, the term denotes either animal flesh or when preceded by the adjective red, all but that of birds, fish, and pigs.

But, long before Renaissance writers and printers began to standardize their spelling of “meat,” most speakers of English associated this term with the satiety and pleasure derived from eating a meal. In fact, to most Anglophones, “meat” usually meant food, all kinds of it, animals, fruits, or vegetables. Although the term served metaphorically as well – in the sense that anything capable of sustaining us, like faith or love, might be regarded as meaty – it was long after the Middle Ages that the term began to signify other, specific things. Initially, this term was borrowed in the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. from the Old Frisian term “mete,” an equivalent of the Old Saxon word “meti” (*OED*). In its original English sense, “mete” meant almost anything nourishing to the bodies of people and animals, much like the “sweetmeat” of the King James Bible. Many speakers would have considered it synonymous with “meal” or used it to distinguish between solid and liquid foods, as in “meat and drink”. For more than 300 years, the term retained this original, more general meaning, except when paired with adjectives, possessives, or inserted in phrases, such as in Wyclife’s morbid refrain of 1380, a complaint against elaborate funerals, “Alas that so gret cost and bisynesse is sette abouten the roten body, that is wormes mete”. By 1460, the literature of the Renaissance reveals that Anglophones had not only changed their spelling of the term

from “mete” to “meat”, but they also were infusing it with more specialized meanings.

Shortly after meat began signifying food derived from animals, the term acquired another specialized meaning still widely noted in current slang dictionaries. According to Jonathan Green’s *Dictionary of Slang and Euphemism*, the other so-called “meat” of the 16th century denoted “a body, usually a woman’s, as an object of sexual pleasure” (777). The *OED* offers a gloss of Shakespeare’s *Henry IV Part II*. Here, the sex worker Doll Tearsheet scorns the sexual advances of Pistol, one of Falstaff’s minions, by saying “Away, you mouldy rogue, away! I am meat for your master” (II.iv.126). Insofar as Tearsheet’s profession demands her body be used for the satisfaction of another’s appetite, she figures as meat, not necessarily as that which will be consumed, but definitely as that which is afforded life for the sake of appeasing another’s appetite. Read from a feminist perspective this expression reveals the degree to which lexicon reflects a patriarchal ideology. Tearsheet does not perceive herself as “meat” literally or perhaps she would eat rather than prostitute herself; instead, she perceives that other people, whoremongers specifically, perceive her as meat. Tearsheet’s word choice is both euphemistic, because prostitution is socially stigmatized, and it is metaphoric, because the renaming of flesh as “meat” makes it available for consumption. Because her survival depends upon her ability to solicit, Tearsheet must concede an aspect of her lexicon, and thereby her identity, to make a euphemism of her profession and a commodity of her body. In her work *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, critic Carol Adams writes that the function of usages like these is to create an “absent referent.” She writes:



Animals are made absent through language that renames dead bodies before consumers participate in eating them. Our culture further mystifies the term “meat” with gastronomic language, so we do not conjure dead, butchered animals, but cuisine. Language thus contributes even further to animals’ absences. While the cultural meanings of meat and meat eating shift historically, one essential part of meat’s meaning is static: One does not eat meat without the death of an animal. Live animals are thus the absent referents in the concept of meat (40).

Seen from Adams’s perspective, the term meat whether it refers to animals or people seems lacking the fullness of expression its absent referents deserve. Thus, meat can serve to mask the commodification of animals and women by the dominant culture. If live animals are absent referents in the concept of meat, then dead animals, as well as the processes which commodify them, are absent referents in the entire lexicon of terms which signify the consumption of meat both as a food and as a commodity. In addition, many other words in English -- such as bacon, beef, hamburger, frankfurter, mutton, pork, poultry, scrapple, sausage, and venison, to name a few -- have been borrowed from other languages to serve as signifiers for “food.” Each serves as a kind of synecdoche for the entire process of converting live animals into socially sanctioned foods. Due to their steady presence in the marketplace, these terms have become pervasive historically and culturally, and thereby standard. Together these words form a lexicon that serves as a middle ground between the slaughterhouse floor and the dining room table. Though ordinary, these words are social necessities; as any Ms. Manners

will tell you, a person who refers to his or her food in anatomically correct terms at mealtimes quickly becomes an unpopular dinner guest. The lexicon of animal-derived foods literally re-presents the animal by masking the gore in gourmet. The terms for various “meats” can also be viewed as dialectical variants -- in this case, the dialect of carnivorous culture.

The effect of a predominantly carnivorous culture on the lexicon of food affects not only those terms that refer to animal-based foods, but also those that threaten or seem to threaten the foodways of the dominant culture. The etymology suggests that this uniquely powerful, yet common term has been specially redefined, its narrowing semantics coinciding with dietary changes both in Renaissance England and Industrial America. The term specialized to suit the needs of British culture whose consumption of animal-derived foods increased with the rise of the urban middle class. Later, in 1882, the United States saw advances in railroad transportation and refrigeration converged, creating a nationwide meat assembly line that hauled cattle from the western plains, to the slaughterhouses of Chicago, and delivered them to hundreds of points along the eastern seaboard (Harris *Good* 118). The speed with which this line was run is best reflected in the term, taken from early railway jargon, “meat run,” meaning a very fast train (Wentworth et al. 336). With newfound speed, protection against spoilage, and a jungle of systematized slaughterhouses, virtually every American between Chicago and New York who wanted meat, now had easy access to it (Levenstein, *Revolution* 31). These changes in the abundance and availability of animal-based foods, and the corresponding increase in Americans’ consumption of

fresh beef as well as pork, narrowed the general meaning of term meat such that any reference to plant-based foods was excised. The meaning meat had formerly signified for Anglophones in the twelfth century, the same meaning that it had conveyed even *prior* to the existence of English itself, as “any nourishing food,” had become extinct at the dawn of the twentieth century.

The meaning of meat, as a term, has since remained largely unchanged for more than a century, except when combined with other terms, as in “meatware,” for example, which refers to the human components, aka “people,” necessary for operating computers (Sullies; *Facts on File*). Also, meat analogues provide a variety of supplemental definitions for terms like burger, hot dog, sausage, etc. It is even conceivable that the popularity of meat analogues and substitutes will eventually have a broadening effect on the term meat, as well as other terms for animal-based foods, such as milk and cheese. Apparently almost anything can be imitated with soy or wheat gluten, though, by most accounts, few meat analogues are likely to be mistaken for the foods they imitate.

Perhaps it doesn't seem strange that most American men eat greater amounts of meat than American women do or that meat advertising is so pervasive. It seems almost natural, taken for granted – perchance it's even sublimated. What is the cultural significance of the fact that at the moment when the food supply has become saturated, the term “meat” denotes only animal-based foods and men are still its greatest consumers?

Among Jacques Derrida's many, as yet unpopular notions, his characterization of western culture as predominantly *carno-phallogocentric* re-contextualizes the function of humankind's domination of nature as formative of subjectivity. The concept deserves some explanation here, at least, because it lends credibility to the argument that the dominant dietary paradigm's overvaluation of meat is not simply a matter of the taste buds leading human beings toward a diet fit for the fittest survivor. Carno-phallogocentrism does not describe the biological individual as formed by nature and the experience of it through the senses, but the subject as formed by those cultures, languages, and powers that pre-exist it. Human beings' relationships with animals, as well as animal-based foods, are fostered by cultural traditions imbedded in every practice from art to zoology, all of which reinscribe ideology on the bodies of individuals. The force of the concept carno-phallogocentrism is rooted in its illuminating all the basic assumptions about the consumption of animals, such as their superiority as a nutrient dense food (usually the first line of defense in arguments favoring meat-based diets) and as a taste (usually the last, and weakest, line of that defense). These assumptions are overturned or at least problematized by the philosophical question of human subjectivity. Derrida explains:

I would still try to link the question of 'who' and 'sacrifice.' The conjunction of 'who' and 'sacrifice' not only recalls the concept of the subject as phallogocentric structure, at least according to its dominant *schema*: one day I hope to demonstrate that this *schema* implies carnivorous virility. I would want to explain *carno-phallogocentrism*, even if this comes down to a sort

of tautology or rather hetero-tautology as a priori synthesis, which you could translate as ‘speculative idealism,’ ‘becoming-subject of substance,’ ‘absolute knowledge’ passing through the ‘speculative Good Friday’: it suffices to take seriously the idealizing interiorization of the phallus and the necessity of its passage through the mouth, whether it’s a matter of words or of things, of sentences, of daily bread or wine, of the tongue, the lips, or the breast of the other (quoted in Cadava 113).

Carno-phallogocentrism, despite its encumbering effect on the tongue, is shorthand. It describes the ideological forces that structure subjectivity. These ideologies are not consciously adopted; they structure the subject. Unlike Freud’s account of subject formation, the reality principle, in which the subject enters ‘reality’ by accepting a substitute for its preferred object, Derrida claims the act of repression is constitutive of consciousness. The process of attaining subjectivity depends on being recognized as a subject by others who can do so only when the formative subject represents the behaviors, specifically the use of signs and language, that are recognizable, and thus imitable.

That which I am calling here *schema* or image, that which links the concept to intuition, installs the virile figure at the determinative center of the subject. Authority and autonomy [...] are, through this schema, attributed to the man (*homo* and *vir*) rather than to the woman, and to the woman rather than to the animal. And of course to the adult male rather than to the child. [...] The subject does not want just to master and possess nature actively. In our cultures,

he accepts sacrifice and eats flesh. [...] In our countries, who would stand any chance of becoming a *chef d'Etat*, and of thereby acceding 'to the head,' by publicly, and therefore exemplarily, declaring him- or herself to be a vegetarian (114)?

Beyond subject formation, Carno-phallogocentrism is a complex of value systems imbedded in our culture that privilege, in no particular order, the self-present over the de-centered subject, the spoken over the written word, masculinity over femininity, human over other forms of being, and animal-based foods above all others. The complexity of these value systems defies the simple binary oppositions with which they have been expressed. However, it is the latter binary that plays the largest part in most people's lives. Animal-based foods, even if they are not recognized as such by consumers, repeat the story of human dominion over animals at almost every American meal.

Derrida's definition of sacrifice is important because it portrays the killing of animals as an anthropomorphic event. Killing domesticated animals raised for food is not prohibited or even questioned by most members of western societies.

These animals are recognized only by a category reserved for non-humans (112).

Derrida writes:

I feel compelled to underscore the sacrificial structure of the discourses to which I am referring [namely the metaphysical view that animals are soulless (without *Dasein*); my note]. I don't know if 'sacrificial structure' is the most accurate expression. In any case, it is a matter of discerning a place left open, in the

very structure of these discourses (which are also ‘cultures’) for a noncriminal putting to death. Such are the executions of ingestion, incorporation, or introjection of the corpse. An operation as real as it is symbolic when the corpse is ‘animal’ (and who can be made to believe that our cultures are carnivorous because animal proteins are irreplaceable?), a symbolic operation when the corpse is ‘human’ (112).

The killing of human beings, of course, occurs with the full consent of the law in many special cases such as in war, as penalty for killing, for self-defense, etc. These circumstances are exceptional and extreme care is taken in regulating them. By contrast, domesticated livestock, while protected from cruelty, are slated for death categorically. The significance of putting animals to death is that the sacrifice is twofold. The life of an animal is literally taken as a right of humankind to sustain itself. The difference between people and animals is also taken. Much like the male subject of Freud’s theory of fetishism, it is not taken as a qualitative difference, but as a quantitative lack – of soul, of speech, of consciousness, and other arbitrary traits. The possible criminality of killing animals for food is not an issue taken seriously, even with the proliferation of information about the more malevolent aspects of factory farming and slaughterhouses. There are laws against the killing of animal companions or “pets,” yet these laws are not rights-based. They are essentially property law, protection against loss, theft, and damage. Even if the issue were to be taken seriously, consumers are insulated from the sights and sounds of industrial agriculture that more than likely have the potential to give them pause. Just as the medieval tradition of

carving meat, a text reiterative of power, quickly disappeared in the wake of outmoded forms of food production and preparation, so have contemporary Americans food habits changed as meat has become more affordable, less visible, and faster to gather, prepare, and consume.

Fast food is perhaps the most vivid example of the increasingly estranged relationship with the sources of our food in general and the increasing importance of meat consumption to constructions of masculinity. Unlike a feast in 14<sup>th</sup> century England, eating fast food is a less hierarchical affair. The most prestigious or revered guests do not receive the best bits, because there are no best bits. Instead, the experience of ordering, purchasing, and eating fast food has a democratizing effect on consumers. Meals are standardized, regulated, and seemingly inexhaustible. To eat a Quarter-Pounder in Poughkeepsie is to eat a Royale with Cheese in Paris -- perhaps not a transcendental signified, but certainly a kind of cross-cultural communion. Everyone tastes exactly what everyone else tastes. Even non-descript graduate students can obtain the same quality and quantity of meat that kings or presidents do, presuming that they were so inclined to disregard the health information that most people of their educational backgrounds are all likely to have read (Rimal 46). The paradox of fast food is that its consistency, affordability, and accessibility come at the cost of alienation and exploitation on almost every level, between advertisers and consumers, consumers and their food, employees and customers, as well as industry and its resources. Is there anything less intriguing than the sight of motorists driving along eating fast food wrapped in brightly colored paper that will later double as advertising along the streets



of your city? I don't think so. Terry Eagleton probably doesn't either:

Fast food is like a cliché or computerese, an emotionless exchange or purely instrumental form of discourse; genuine eating combines pleasure, utility and sociality, and so differs from a take-away in much the same way that Proust differs from a bus ticket. Snatching a meal alone bears the same relation to company as talking to yourself does to conversation. It is hardly surprising that a civilization for which a dialogue of the mind with itself has provided a paradigm of human language should reach its apotheosis in the Big Mac (205).

Fast food is a triumph of the industrial era and its global marketability a triumph of the post-industrial era, but a triumph of what over whom?

The consumption of animals has always held significance in excess of its nutritional value. The eating of particular animals, for example, or of particular body parts have served in many cultures at one time or another as a means of assimilating their perceived attributes (Simoons 117). But, today in America, the symbolism of consuming animals is more evident in the act of eating them than in the type of meat. Eating meat is almost categorically an essential trait of masculinity, not because of the attributes of the animal – after all, most of the animals eaten by Americans are herbivorous and docile – but mostly because of the attributes of the relationship established between consumers and the consumed, between the man and the sacrifice. Whoever performs the sacrifice resurrects the boundary between criminal and non-criminal killing. Because the food industry has removed most men from the work of slaughtering, the consumption of slaughtered animals becomes even more crucial as

a performance of gender, as it is, almost to the point of its being over-determined. Because there are few markers as obvious as chopping blocks, cleavers, smokehouses, or meat hooks (metaphors aside) in men's lives anymore, their association with meat must be even more conspicuous, more emphatic if they are to continue to embody the role of the patriarch, the sacrificer. Much of the emphasis for maintaining the structure of carno-phallogocentrism can be found in meat advertising, as I will later demonstrate. Despite the decreasing fat content in meat over the past fifty years, and despite the widespread shift from eating primarily red meat to eating more chicken, Americans today have somehow managed to become more overweight than ever before. To consume any commodity is to make conspicuous one's approval of its use, one's complicity in its production, and one's status in a larger economy. To consume the commodified bodies of animals is also to approve of and comply with the production of masculinity as that which legitimates killing in a carno-phallogocentric hierarchy.

### III A 2. Fruits & Vegetables – queering the produce, producing the queer

**vegetal** – *adj* consisting of or relating to vegetables or plant life in general. 14<sup>th</sup> century: from Latin *vegetalis*, from *vegetare* to animate.

– *21<sup>st</sup> Century Dictionary*

**vegetate** – *v* (*vegetated, vegetating*) *intr* **1** said of a person: to live a dull inactive life. See also VEG. **2** to live or grow as a vegetable. 18<sup>th</sup> century in sense 1; 17<sup>th</sup> century in sense 2.

– *21<sup>st</sup> Century Dictionary*

**vegetable** *n* [1980s+] (US gay) a lesbian [play on FRUIT *n.* (2)]

– *The Cassell Dictionary of Slang*

“*[V]egetative state* [my italics] is a clinical condition of complete unawareness of the self and the environment accompanied by sleep-wake cycles with either complete or partial preservation of hypothalamic and brainstem autonomic functions.”

– American Academy of Neuropathy

Although plants have always been an abundant and nourishing food source throughout the course of human evolution, their reputation took a turn for the worse the moment advancements in agriculture made animal husbandry a reliable means of food production. As a consequence of animal-based foods’ centrality to the dominant dietary paradigm, all other foods become displaced accordingly. This displacement is marked in the usual ways that any sign whose referent suggests supplementarity is marked as subordinate, exorbitant, and excessive. As Carol Adams writes in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*:

The word vegetable acts as a synonym for women’s passivity because women are supposedly like plants. Hegel makes this clear: “The difference between

men and women is like that between animals and plants. Men correspond to animals, while women correspond to plants because their development is more placid.” From this viewpoint, both women and plants are seen as less developed and less evolved than men and animals. Consequently, women may eat plants, since each is placid; but active men need animal meat (37).

The steady and gradual semantic shift of the term vegetable in western culture from something that denotes vitality and growth to something that is lethargic, inanimate, queer, or unconscious parallels the increasing importance of animal-based foods and the industries that produce them. But it is the use of the terms fruits and vegetables to describe gays and lesbians that best illustrates the way food serves as a foundational metaphor for gender; clever wordplay aside, plant-based foods, in this case, are clearly associated with non-reproductive sex and, depending on your perspective, non-normative sexual practice. Whether one is a fruit or vegetable, there is no way to forge a lineage, no way to prove one’s potency, virility, or fertility, and, strictly speaking, no way to perpetuate the patriarchal line. The expression that vegetables “were despised in the Middle Ages, since these were what the peasants ate, [...] but they were still eaten by all classes” is still partly true today (Hammond 141), except that working-class people spend a great percentage of their income on meat more than do other classes in America (Rimal).

Part of the process of devaluing virtually anything in patriarchal culture is to feminize it and thereby associate it with all those who are bereft of the privilege of

inheriting male power whether it is as the head of a family or, more essentially, at the level of the sign.

As Luce Irigaray and Jaques Derrida have argued, patriarchal thought models its criteria for what counts as 'positive' values on the central assumption of the Phallus and the Logos as transcendental signifiers of Western culture. The implications of this are often astonishingly simplistic: anything conceived of as analogous to the so-called 'positive' values of the Phallus counts as good, true or beautiful; anything that is *not* shaped on the pattern of the Phallus is defined as chaotic, fragmented, negative or non-existent. The Phallus is often conceived of as a whole, unitary and simple form, as opposed to the terrifying chaos of the female genitals (Moi 67).

Of the several devaluations to which representations of veganism are subject in a carnophallogocentric culture, most are analogous to those that women have suffered when represented in mass media. It seems redundant to point out the correlations between the changing status of American women working as industry laborers circa WWII and the corresponding popularity of film noir in which leading ladies were frequently cast as femme fatales. Nonetheless, during the 1940s, women who were eager to enter the wartime workplace represented an implicit threat to the value of post-war manpower. Thus, women who took jobs outside the normative roles for women were seldom represented in film as heroic or industrious, if at all. Instead, female characters who are not in minor roles, such as waitresses, nurses, or maids, are often working as cabaret singers, mistresses, or widows in training. They are almost always scheme-stresses

and deceivers, like Mary Astor's portrayal of the amoral Brigid O'Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon*, Barbara Stanwyck as Phyllis Dietrichson, the murderous adulteress in *Double Indemnity*, or even Ingrid Bergman, whose character, Ilsa Laszlo, betrays both her husband and her lover, in *Casablanca*. These femme fatales whose lives are typically ill-fated and whose arrest, death, or reunion with their spouses restore patriarchal order are celebrated today as heroines for their strength, their strong sense of self-preservation, and their subversion, even if it is only temporary, of traditional gender roles.

The plotlines of these films and others like them involve characters and situations that threaten conventional conduct, the motion picture industry that produced them was legally bound by the Hayes Production Code to edit any material that was deemed inappropriate. Typically, that inappropriate material would have consisted of depictions of sex or violence. Obviously, deleting scenes from a film or editing them out of the script caused serious, though not insurmountable, problems for directors who wanted to maintain continuity in their plots. The ironic result of the code is that it inspired the development of innovative techniques that were suggestive, even explicit, but never graphic. In an essay on the neo-noir film *Lost Highway*, Slavoj Žižek answers his own question about the effect of the code on films of the forties: "Are we not claiming that these unintended, perverse by-products, far from effectively threatening the system of symbolic domination, are its inherent transgression, i.e., its unacknowledged, obscene support" (7). What Žižek refers to as "the inherent transgression," in this case, is the way in which ambiguous textual elements like a segue or a scene that fades-to-

black serve to meet the codes that prohibit taboo content not by eradicating their very possibility, but by entrusting the policing of that content to the audience until the text can resolve those issues structurally.

Zizek chooses a scene from *Casablanca* as an illustration of cinema that does not explicitly transgress the era's strict codes against the portrayal of sexual activity but, at the same time, leaves open the possibility that the film's main characters may be rekindling their adulterous affair. In the crucial scene, the protagonist Rick and Ilsa find themselves alone, pressed closely together, speaking passionately, veering suggestively toward a fade-to-black moment. What happens in the midst of that brief, portentous gap is necessarily left to the imagination – except for the low-angled image of a rainy airfield at night, its only tower standing impressively beneath the circuitous sweep of several spotlights. It is easier, according to Zizek, to explain this well-known scene as having been written and directed for the sake of appealing not to an entirely wholesome, unassuming audience, but one that is split: one half who supplements the film with their own fantasies and another half who honestly doesn't mind the gap at all. The same scene satisfies both kinds of filmgoer. However, as Zizek points out, these contradictory preferences may exist in the individual as well:

At the level of its surface narrative line, the film can be constructed by the spectator as obeying the strictest moral codes, it simultaneously offers to the “sophisticated” enough clues to construct an alternative, sexually much more daring narrative line. This strategy is more complex than it may appear: precisely BECAUSE you know that these fantasies are not “for real,” that they do not count

in the eyes of the big Other. [...] [W]e do not need *two* spectators sitting next to each other: *one and the same spectator*, split in itself, is sufficient (5).

From this point of view, the Motion Picture Association's codes were subverted as much by cinematographic skill as by the audience's own capacity for imagination. Because the taboo topic is implied but not depicted and because the marked gap between the scenes is just long enough for viewers sit in the darkness and ponder, privately, all the possibilities, viewers are afforded an opportunity they would not have had if the plot had been made more explicit. They internalize the action such that even an audience of one is split in two. The film's extra-textual meaning or message, its enforcement of a moral code by offering a substitute scene for a primal one, reinscribes the transgression in the audience sophisticated enough to ask "what's wrong with this picture?"

Norbert Elias asserts that as societies increase their population density, specialize their labor forces, and expand their industries, their cultural norms shift in favor of manners that conceal the body, limit physical contact, and disguise the grim fact of mortality. People, he writes, "in the course of the civilizing process, seek to suppress in themselves every characteristic that they feel to be 'animal.' They likewise suppress such characteristics in their food" (120). If Elias is correct, and even if he is not, we may view present day meat marketing as a uniquely difficult rhetorical problem: how to persuade people to consume a commodity that not only implicates them in creophagy, but one which, when immodestly consumed, has been proven to be conducive to several ailments that result from high cholesterol, high blood pressure,



and low-fiber diets. I would like to suggest that consumers of meat in contemporary culture are like Zizek's movie goers or like audiences of any carefully regulated medium in that they are spared the potentially mortifying spectacle of carnality and yet they are able to cast the desirability of meat in adjectival terms that both allude to and conceal its corporeality – fresh, juicy, marbled, tender, or thick. This split is necessary so that subjects can maintain two core western values – those of civility and of dominion over nature. Almost nothing indicates the peoples' commitment to these values more palpably and consistently than the ritual performance of their tastes in choosing and consuming food. When those tastes compliment the dominant dietary paradigm, every meal is a performance of taking for granted all the sacrifices that construct the subject of food choice and naturalize relations between consumers and industrial food production. In a carno-phallogocentric culture, the taken-for-granted inequities in the relationship between human and non-human beings is the transgression inherent in that culture's concept of civility.

However, even before the food industry had fully removed the slaughter and butchering of animals from everyday life, people were performing their own form of self-censorship, along gendered lines, of course. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the association in western culture of masculinity and meat eating had been well established. In both the US and the UK, the growing urban middle class could afford more meat than anyone, other than the wealthiest people, could have ever afforded before (McIntosh 93). This change in meat's availability seemed to accompany an amplification of its significance, and, accordingly, body image, with respect to a person's weight as well

as fatness or thinness, also became a significant symbol of one's perceived character (Bordo, *Unbearable Weight* 192). Thinness began to be seen as evidence of self-control, mastery over bodily appetites, and of superior moral character.

No food (other than alcohol) caused Victorian women and girls greater moral anxiety than meat. The flesh of animals was considered a heat-producing food that stimulated production of blood and fat as well as passion. Doctors and patients shared a common conception of meat as a food that stimulated sexual development and activity. [...] Meat eating in excess was linked to adolescent insanity and nymphomania (Brumberg 166-7).

Plant foods were the decent lady's food of choice. Many middle class women, accordingly, became vegetarian and, as such, became among the first to buy and consume vegetable-based processed foods like those manufactured by Sylvester Graham, who invented the Graham cracker in an attempt to create the perfect food (Spencer 260), Dr. John Kellogg, the inventor of granola whose name is still synonymous with processed cereals, and C.W. Post, an ex-patient of Kellogg, who invented Grape Nuts (Goody 346).

As an appetite for meat signified to Victorian sensibilities a desire for carnality in general, and for sex in particular, vegetarianism came to signify chastity and sexual purity. Accordingly, both of these significations became polarized by gender. Perhaps no American did more to extend this false binary's reach into the 20<sup>th</sup> century than Kellogg whose Battle Creek Sanitarium endorsed the vegetarian dietary practices of the 7<sup>th</sup> day Adventists and "cured" patients

of their carnality by excluding “meat and spicy foods for the supposed aphrodisiacal qualities” (Levenstein, *Revolution* 92).

Curiously enough, the Victorians seem to have managed to reproduce despite their apparent aversions to meat’s libidinal side effects and to the animality implicit in sexual relations. This is an important point, for while many women shunned meat and its connotations of untamed sexual desire, they did not shun men, for whom meat seemed meant to be eaten and in whom animality could be commanded and deployed as necessary. Insofar as vegetables had become symbolic of female passivity, they also became a sign that genders the rhetoric of one’s diets and meals (Adams 157). In other words, women’s passivity and men’s aggression were cultural givens that complimented one another, preserved order, and reproduced the culture on both personal and social levels. Food choice served as a sign system that ritualistically inscribed these values.

Today, the same basic feminine/masculine, vegetable-based/animal-based foods binary oppositions persist and, as the discourses about marginalized genders become more prominent in mainstream discussion, the binary is extended beyond the feminine so that (straight) masculinity opposes not only femininity, but also gay and lesbian sexualities. Nowhere is the more evident than in television commercials for fast food. In one 2003 commercial for chicken salads, Wendy’s Restaurants, whose claim to fame is an “old fashioned” square-shaped hamburger patty, make clear that their new salads are good tasting, filling, and have nothing to do with homosexuality. Two young Caucasian men dressed in office casual wear appear to be having lunch together at a Wendy’s where they discuss the merits of their respective meals. Their conversation, to

the best of my recollection, culminates like this:

“So, two guys, sitting together, talking about salad. You know?”

“Grow up, man.”

“Oh, uh, sorry.”

Although the apology of the last line might be a gesture toward political correctness, it does nothing to explain why two men “talking about salad” are likelier to be homosexual than two men talking about where the beer might be. The only conclusion one can draw from such a queer association is that for the average American who watches television commercials and eats fast food no explanation is necessary.

### **III B. Challenges to Dominant Dietary Paradigm**

Being a subject of food choice, a subject of consumption (conspicuous or not), is to permit a kind of writing on the body. The body can be seen as a kind of hieroglyph whose meaning, while not always clear or easily translated, can be recognized only as it is re-inscribed by personal regimes, cultural constraints, genetic inheritance, and the benign as well as the deleterious effects of environments and social circumstances. In his essay “Genealogy and The Body,” Scot Lash writes, “if Classical punishments consisted of the physical engraving directly on our bodies, in Modern punishment it is discourse which creates such a memory” (259). Although vegans haven’t been in existence long enough to endure the rigors of classical punishment or even a modern one as indelible as that depicted in Kafka’s penal colony, it is undeniable that some representations of veganism serve to discipline and punish bodies. These representations may not result in welts, bruises, and scars; however, the vegan body is largely deficient in healthy public image. The vegan body is an amalgamation of the various discourse fragments that have articulated it as malnourished, diseased, disordered, unnatural, weak, impotent, prone to indigestion, and productive of the most malodorous flatulence. Yes, even that.

As discussed in the previous section, the dominant dietary paradigm is formed by the repetition and reiteration of texts and themes that emphasize the importance of animal-based foods in diet while ejecting or “absenting,” to use Carol Adams’ term, undesirable significations that pertain to commodification and consumption of animals

and/or their secretions. In fact, the key to understanding the paradigm's importance to American culture lies in the way its discourse subsumes and incorporates challenges both to the paradigm and to the hegemonic processes that re-inscribe it. From Dr. John Kellogg's invention of granola and other "natural foods" in the 1860s to many other nutrient-dense foods of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, meat alternatives have had only negligible appeals to consumers, but the recent success of meat analogs and substitutes in mainstream groceries and supermarkets represents a significant change in the marketing of food as well as a change in attitudes for subjects of food choice. Although vegetarianism and veganism are the most conspicuous social movements to have steadily promoted the view that plant-based diets are a direct and practical means of improving the well being of animals, environments, and personal health, their success is evident in the roughly 2.5% of the population of the United States and England who identify themselves as vegetarian or vegan. As social movements, vegetarianism and veganism have traditionally been regarded as antagonistic, because they not only attempt to displace meat's centrality in diet but, in doing so, they also destabilize a hegemonic system of signs by making more apparent all that which was previously absent – fruits, vegetables, and "un-American" cuisines in general. While the dominant dietary paradigm maintains itself through discourses that articulate the current relationship between people and food as a natural one, vegetarian and vegan discourses serve to denaturalize the relationship between people and their diets and between consumers and food industries.

### III B 1. Meet the Vegans – antecedents, terminology, & discourse

*He lives, then, on ginger-nuts, thought I; never eats a dinner, properly speaking; he must be a vegetarian then, but no; he never eats even vegetables, he eats nothing but ginger-nuts.*

– Herman Melville, 1856  
“Bartleby, The Scrivener”

*How does one classify vegetarians who refused to eat meat on the basis that it emitted ‘bad vibrations?’*

– Harvey Levenstein, 1993  
*Paradox of Plenty*

*“Vegan” or “Strictly Vegetarian” means ingredients of plant origin (vegetables and fruit). [...]The Delegation of France also pointed out that the word “Vegan” should be translated into French as “Vegetalien.”*

– World Health Organization, 1999

The terminology of diet is a fascinating indicator of the degree to which normative dietary practice constructs the way in which we understand and perceive alternatives to it. Since its coinage in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term vegetarian has markedly broadened. Where it once signified a person whose subsistence is maintained solely on edible vegetation, it has broadened, in some contexts, to the point where a vegetarian diet is nearly indistinguishable from an omnivorous one. Many people from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to the present seem to think that vegetarian means *avoiding only red meats but consuming chicken, eggs, fish, pork, as well as cows’ milk, goats’ milk, and every variety of cheese*, despite the fact that animals, their eggs, and their secretions are not technically, colloquially, or even figuratively, fruits and vegetables.

And yet, despite the broadening of the term, vegetable-based meals continue to be represented in our language as radical departures from the normative dietary paradigm. In 2003, for example, the American Dialect Society declared that the most useful term of the year was ‘flexitarian,’ a word which denotes a person whose diet frequently includes vegetarian as well as omnivorous meals; this neologism seems to suggest that American culture’s perception of meals that do not include animal-based foods in abundance or at all are so far from normative that an entirely new coinage is needed to designate such an aberration.

A recent study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* set out to define vegetarians not according to what their diets lacked, but instead according to their daily food intake. The study is simply entitled “What Do Vegetarians in the United States Eat?” and involved approximately thirteen thousand participants who reported their dietary intake over a three year period. For the purpose of answering the question posed by the study, the researchers compared the reported daily food intake on two non-consecutive days for each of the participants and listed their findings according to the type of diet with which the participant had initially identified (vegetarian and non-vegetarian). The results indicate that vegetarianism in the opinions of those who define themselves as its practitioners has less to do with whether one eats animals or not and more to do with how many and which kind:

Only self-defined vegetarians who did not eat meat reported consuming food items such as tofu, hummus, almonds, and flax seeds more than any of the other groups. Non-vegetarians who did not consume meat on the recall days reported



consuming meat substitutes, lentils, and seeds more often than those who ate meat. [...] In this nationally representative sample of the US population, two-thirds of those who identified themselves as vegetarian reported eating meat, fish, or poultry on either or both of the 2 d[ays] of dietary recall collected in the survey. Similar results have been reported in other studies. Thus, the avoidance of all flesh foods cannot be assumed (Hadadd et al. 629S).

What this range of definitions, prescriptions, and contradictions surrounding the terms “vegetarianism” and “veganism” suggests is not simply that it is a highly mutable diet, or that vegetarians are undisciplined or fickle, but instead that western culture is so thoroughly carno-phallogocentric that even the limiting of meat in one’s diet is perceived as divergent from normative dietary practice. It requires an entirely separate title, designation, or sign to indicate its difference from the dominant dietary paradigm. Simply stated, these terms are antagonisms to the paradigm and must be rebutted or dismissed if its continuity is to be maintained.

By name alone, vegetarians have not been around for a very long time; the oldest citation for ‘vegetarian’ in the *OED* is dated 1836. But, depending on how current your sources are, you will find one of two competing opinions on the matter of just how long vegetarian diets have been in existence. Anthropologists who differ on the question of early human diets, generally believe either that human beings could not have evolved into their present form without meat-eating or that throughout the course of evolution, from the age of our earliest homonid ancestors until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, most of humanity was sustained by a vegetarian diet with little or no meat:

The available data, including observations of present day primates would indicate that primates are omnivores of a particular type. That is, they focus primarily on plant foods, augmented by only small amounts of animal matter. Strong support for this view is provided by the gut morphology of the primate. The normative primate gut is relatively unspecialized, indicative that primates, particularly the anthropoids (including humans), traditionally have focused on very high-quality plant foods that are not extensively fibrous or lignified, supplementing them with second trophic level foods [such as small game; my note] (McIntosh 14).

The latter opinion still provokes a considerable degree of skepticism among anyone who ever entertained the notion of human ancestors as bands of savage, slouching hulks, clad in furry animal skins, stalking woolly mammoths with spears, stones, and clubs. Many, perhaps most people have not been keeping up with current accounts of human evolution, especially those accounts that don't confirm, contribute to, or validate the ideologies that confirm current normative American foodways. There is scant textual evidence about early eating habits and food preparation. Among the earliest literate peoples, meat eating was already a normative practice among the most powerful, wealthy citizens, and thus it might seem to us that those cultures were predominantly non-vegetarian, primarily because those citizens who could afford gourmet meals were the ones whose menus and recipes were most likely to succeed and endure in the most literal sense. These are just a few factors contributing to our culture's reading of the body and its optimal dietary regimen.

Semantic shifts in terms that denote exclusively herbivorous foodways suggest that meaning broadens or becomes pejorative whenever its sense conflicts with dominant ideology. Herbivorous diets have been common throughout history. However such diets have always stirred curiosity or incited contempt. Vegetables, as many historians have noted, “were despised in the Middle Ages, since these were what the peasants ate [...] but they were still eaten by all classes” (Hammond 141). Still, vegetable-based diets were not specifically perceived as an ideological threat in western culture until 1800, when London-based Swedenborgians of The New Jerusalem Temple deserted their minister William Cowherd who suggested that the congregation adopt an entirely vegetable-based diet (Spencer 253). Cowherd’s suggestion was quite in keeping with Swedenborg’s belief that eating animals was “the most vivid symbol of our fall from grace”; but, despite its adherence to Swedenborgian mysticism, the congregation as a whole chose not to commit to the ordained diet. However, two members of Cowherd’s prodigal congregation later spread the word about herbivorous diets further than their minister could have ever imagined. The first, Reverend William Metcalfe, gathered together twenty adults and twenty children and sailed for Philadelphia in search of greener spiritual pastures and wayward souls in need of Swedenborg’s food for thought. The second of Cowherd’s semi-faithful, Joseph Brotherton, became a member of Parliament and, in 1847, chaired the first meeting of people who professed the benefits of a vegetable diet. This group of 140 mostly middle-class men and women coined the word “vegetarianism” (261) and christened themselves the Vegetarian Society. Theirs was the first era in which herbivorous

dieting had assumed a central place in philosophy. Until 1847, vegetarianism had been practiced merely as a tenet of other belief systems, like those of the Pythagoreans, Brahmins, Neoplatonists, Paulicians, and Swedenborgians. Now that vegetarianism was regarded a distinct and independent philosophy, it could be properly derided and parodied as one.

Perhaps the only other significant and influential voice advocating a decreased consumption of meat prior to the emergence of vegetarianism as a social movement was that of George Cheney (1671 – 1743), the popular British physician and member of the Royal Society whose dietary regimens were followed by the likes of Samuel Johnson, David Hume, and Alexander Pope (Turner “Discourse of Diet” 160). During Cheney’s lifetime, England was the “most carnivorous” nation in Europe and urban environments, like London and Bath where he practiced medicine, were stricken with diseases commonly associated with a lack of fresh fruits and vegetables (Spencer 214). Cheney was an educated man, influenced by René Descartes whose view of the body as a machine catalyzed a wave of medical rationalism that spread throughout Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Turner “Government” 260). Cheney, like Jean Jacques Rousseau, constructs the nature/culture binary as pure/impure, thereby attributing to urban culture those “culinary arts which unnaturally stimulate the appetite” (261). Although at one point Cheney is reported to have weighed almost 450 pounds, his experiments with dietary regime to improve his health and decrease his weight were successful and served as the basis for his published theories about health and diet, including his book *The English Malady*, in which he prescribes diet as the primary cure for “melancholy.”

Interestingly, Cheney's advocacy of meatless diets had little, if anything, to do with "the animal question" and almost everything to do with a new conception of the body and an appreciation for the effects of environment upon health. At the age of sixty he writes, "My regimen, at present, is milk, with tea, coffee, bread and butter, mild cheese, salads, fruits and seeds of all kinds, with tender roots (as potatoes, turnips, carrots), and, in short, everything that has not life, dressed or not, as I like it, in which there is as much variety than in animal foods, so that the stomach need never be cloyed" (quoted in Spencer 218). Cheney's longevity, extensive publications, and persuasive power among leading cultural figures of his day paved the way for a more widespread embrace of plant-based diets more than a century before there was a word for such a regime.

The term "vegetarian" is a good example of a term that broadened and became pejorative in a relatively short period of time. The *OED* traces the term as far back as 1839 when a combination of "vegetable" and "-arian" (as in "parliamentarian") enabled one Georgian Plantation resident to pen the following confession in his journal: "If I had had to be my own cook, I should inevitably become vegetarian." In this primary sense of the term, the writer implies that subsisting exclusively on vegetables is not unlike being in the impoverished position of being unable to afford servants willing to do the dirty work – an apparently well-to-do citizen's point of view. So, from the outset the term appears to have been associated with a lack, an absence. "Vegetarian" did not describe someone whose diet was "full of fresh veggies," but one whose diet was wanting something, particularly those animals which good gentlefolk saw fit to

savor, yet not to butcher, not personally anyway. Within a decade the term became more common due to the publications of the Vegetarian Society whose members were given to frequent zealous and hyperbolic testimony regarding the health and longevity afforded by vegetable food (Spencer 267). The 140 self-defined “vegetarians” attending the first Vegetarian Society conference at Ramsgate in 1847 created a subcultural ideology from a practice that had been regarded for more than two-thousand years as the eccentricity of stoics and mystics. Soon after the Ramsgate conference, the *-ism* advocated by the Vegetarian Society took on pejorative connotations. This pejoration occurred within the larger British culture for three major reasons.

First, animal-derived foods have been traditionally perceived as men’s food, especially among lower class peoples whose more meager resources allow them only small purchases of “meat”. Although the bodies of children and pregnant women are arguably more needful of the high concentrations of nutrients and proteins found in animal foods, working men, especially of the Victorian Age, consistently received the larger, if not the only portion, of meat (Adams 27-8). In addition, Victorian women were particularly self-conscious where diet was concerned. Many cultural critics agree that current obsessions with body image and thinness originated with styles and attitudes of Victorian women.

the reigning body symbolism of the day, a frail frame and lack of appetite signified not only spiritual transcendence of the desires of the flesh but *social* transcendence of the laboring, striving economic body. Then, as today, to be aristocratically cool and unconcerned with the mere facts of material survival

was highly fashionable. The hungry bourgeoisie wished to appear, like the aristocrat, above the material desires that in fact ruled his life. The closest he could come was to possess a wife whose ethereal body became a sort of fashion statement (Bordo 21).

Because it is perceived as that most filling of foods – and, in fact, most fatty meats putrefy well before they can be fully digested (Yntema 21) -- meat became the entrée to masculinity for most men and the foible of femininity for many women, thereby creating a false binary of “manly” meat and “effeminate” vegetables.

The second major factor contributing to the pejorative sense of “vegetarianism” trickled down from the upper classes of British Society who consumed en masse large quantities of animal foods. Not only did they consume larger quantities of meat more frequently, but men and women shared this dish more equally than did the men and women of the working and middle classes. For these people of modest or humble means “meat” had become symbolic of prosperity and upward-mobility. As Engels observed in *Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*:

Where wages are less, meat is used only two or three times a week, and the proportion of bread and potatoes increases. Descending gradually, we find the animal food reduced to a small piece of bacon cut up with potatoes; lower still, even this disappears, and there remains only bread, cheese, porridge and potatoes until, on the lowest round of the ladder, among the Irish, potatoes form the sole food.

Thus class distinctions largely determined one’s perception of meat. While eating it with any regularity was only feasible for upper class men and women, an occasional

slice for the middle and lower class man was truly conspicuous consumption.

Abstaining from meat was only regularly practiced by middle class and working class women, and, even then only involuntarily, until their comparative thinness became fetishized by culture at large.

Third, the early demise of the Vegetarian Society's founding father -- James Simpson died at the age of 48 -- made for disastrous publicity. There is no conclusive evidence that Simpson's death resulted from nutrient deficiency; evidence may suggest that Simpson's early demise resulted not simply from diet, but more likely from deleterious environmental factors common to Victorian Industry. His home stood in close proximity to a factory that regularly spewed soot and sulfuric acid vapors onto the grounds Simpson used for his garden and orchard (Spencer 267). Regardless of its cause, this prominent vegetarian's sudden death ruined the credibility and force of any health arguments. By 1870, the Vegetarian Society had fewer members than when it had begun (274).

No human population has ever subsisted entirely on meat alone and survived for very long or to a very great age. Even Eskimos have managed to include plant foods in their diet by eating the undigested algae, plankton, and seaweeds from the stomachs of the fish, walrus, and whales they catch. Fossil records indicate that many human beings and many of our hominid ancestors have subsisted solely on vegetable foods either as part of common practice, seasonal adaptation, or ritual ceremony. Throughout most of human evolution scarcity of resources and economic poverty have always guaranteed that certain populations would be vegetarian. However, the question as to whether



human bodies are really “meant” to eat nothing but fruits vegetables was virtually unanswerable for thousands of years. Nonetheless, its proponents utilized every other available appeal, including moralizing and offering their own physiques as evidence for the healthfulness of the diet, a tactic which occasionally backfired. According to Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, for example, the omnivorous critics of Pythagoras were treated to his heavy-handed retort, “Forbear, O mortals, to spoil your bodies with such impious food.” James Simpson, the first president of the Vegetarian Society, declared on his deathbed that an overworked mind, not an undernourished belly, had made him susceptible to the illness which killed him in his prime (Spencer 267). However moving these defenses may have been, vegetarian arguments seemed not only eccentric to most people, but dangerous as well.

Despite the nearly three-thousand-year history of impassioned testimony from herbivorous mystics, philosophers, and statesmen, the vegetarian argument was probably best spun from ethical or emotional points. But, as many skeptics rightly observed, people cannot eat ethics and most emotional appeals are likely to cause indigestion. Prior to the twentieth century, nutritional science simply did not possess the requisite data to determine if vegetable diets lacked anything but popular appeal. As McIntosh writes in *American Food Habits in Historical Perspective*:

Most of our knowledge of the nutritive value of food did not emerge until the twentieth century. Why did it take so long? The answer is that until the 1900s, the level of knowledge within those sciences which related to nutrition, and the

necessary analytical tools, had not become sophisticated enough to identify and measure the different nutrients in foods (5).

Confusion over protein synthesis has promulgated many new terminologies such as “essential amino acids,” “combining proteins,” and “complete proteins” -- coinages reflective of the understanding that certain amino acids are produced by the body while others must be obtained from food. Not until the 1950s did scientists begin fully to understand how amino acids synthesize proteins in the body (Grew 111). In 1956, the United States Department of Agriculture created the “Basic Four Food Groups”, a concept of nutrition influenced by more recent knowledge of protein and the belief that it was best obtained by eating animal flesh (Adams, *Neither* 33). Half of the “Basic Four Food Groups” consisted of foods derived from animals; the “meat” and “dairy” groups were emphasized as superior sources of protein compared to “fruits & vegetables” and “breads & cereals”. This concept of nutrition appeared on posters in schools throughout America for the next three decades and helped create the impression that diet was incomplete without meat. As a result, vegetarian diets are still not only perceived as lacking meat, but also as deficient in nutrients.

The USDA later contributed more directly to the distortion of the vegetarian diet by adding the prefixes *lacto-* and *ovo-* to the term and thereby inventing new kinds of “vegetarians”. The results were clearly oxymoronic. By definition one cannot subsist solely on vegetables and also consume eggs and cow’s milk. However, these terms prevailed. Ironically, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals also contributed to the shifting semantics of the term “vegetarian” when the

organization coined and proliferated the terms *pesce-vegetarian* and *pollo-vegetarian* during the 1990s (27). Defined as such, American vegetarians are not vegetarians at all; they appear to have more in common with the majority of other Americans. Although many Americans don't consider fish and chicken to be "meat", no one classifies them as plants either. Instead of denoting specific ethical concerns and dietary practices, "vegetarianism" at the end of the twentieth century has come signify a more discerning approach to mixing the "fruits & vegetables" group with the "meat" and "dairy" groups. For vegetarians, this signification is the dietary equivalent of being frequently monogamous or mostly heterosexual. Just as the narrowing of the term 'meat' suggests how meaning has been transformed by mainstream culture's increasing focus on animal-based foods as essential to every meal, the broadening of the term 'vegetarian' illustrates the way in which 'terms' whose meanings connote resistance or opposition to predominant dietary paradigms are altered, diluted, or subordinated, as in "lacto-ovo vegetarian", "pesce-" or "pollo-vegetarian."

A few members of the Vegetarian Society attempted to reinvest their movement with the very same ethical connotations that dominant culture had chosen not to represent in its appropriation of their term. Prescient of the slippage that was affecting the terminology that denoted their peculiar lifestyle, several members of the London vegetarian society formed a splinter group and, after a great deal of debate, decided on the *nom de guerre* 'vegan', in hopes that it might resist the same kind of slippage to which vegetarianism had fallen prey. Founded in Leicester, England, 1944, a year of rationing and deprivation for most of the country, the Vegan Society seems to have

maintained its autonomy to the present day. Its first issue of *Vegan News* defines the term as “the practice of living on fruits, nuts, vegetables, grains, and other wholesome non-animal products (*OED*). Accordingly almost everyone knows them as the “strict” vegetarians. The term “vegan” unlike its predecessor has become fairly widespread in the American marketplace and currently retains its original meaning. Evidence that the term may be weakening is already mounting, however. For example, two recent dictionaries define vegan not as Watson’s *The Vegan* once did, but predictably as lacking something: “meat, fish, dairy products or any foods containing animal fats or extracts, such as eggs, cheese, and honey, often avoiding using wool, leather, and other animal based substances” (*Barnhart Dictionary of New English*) and “no animals or animal products are used” (*21st Century Dictionary*).

More often, representations of vegetarian cultures in mass markets and mass media are devalued not with epithets, but by association with marginalized discourses, such as those of animal rights activists and environmentalists, or by their being recast in terms that can be reconciled with the dominant culture’s foodways; hence the semantics of the term “vegetarian” which once meant, a diet full of fruits, nuts, and vegetables, has broadened and can potentially signify a diet comprised of milk, cheese, eggs, as well as chicken, fish, and other beings that don’t resemble vegetables or fruit in the slightest. In her book, *Living Among Meat Eaters*, critic Carol Adams investigates a myriad of cultural and cultural associations between meat and masculinity, but she also explores the effect that meat, as symbol of masculine power, has had on the valuation of other foods and those who, by choice or circumstance, consume them (36). Among

the many effects are the stereotypes of vegetarian identity often used to dismiss the critique that vegan practice implies. The stereotypes Adams identifies are characterized by connotations of deprivation, hypochondria, neurosis, over-sensitivity, and zealotry:

- The Ascetic
- The Bambi Vegetarian
- The “Freak”
- The Holier-Than-Thou Vegetarian
- The Phobic
- The Puritan (49 – 52).

Each of these characterizations, like most stereotypes, utilizes generalization and hyperbole to call attention to the places in dietary discourse where articulation meets antagonism. Certainly, each of these stereotypes contains a thread or two of truth.

The unusually passionate and dedicated people who have practiced and supported vegetarianism and whose accounts, appeals, and have from ancient Greece to the present day are . However, these types also reflect the gaps in popular culture’s perception of the personal or environmental benefits of an optimal vegetarian diet.

None of these stereotypes exaggerates the longevity, physical strength, and immunity to disease that many vegetarians and vegans experience. All of these stereotypes, however, allude to dated cultural texts, the most recent being *Bambi*, a film from the 1940s, and “the freak,” a term which has connoted intense enthusiasm, for a wide variety of self-centered pursuits, healthful and otherwise, since the 1960s.

Derogatory terms for vegetarians and vegans continue to proliferate – one recent reference in the *Jewish World Review*, for example, characterizes their ranks as “the Tofu Taliban” (Campos) – even conservative *New York Times* columnist William Safire seems to signal the dawning of a paradigm shift in our perception of plant-based diets when he writes a lighthearted essay in which he states that his “problem with vegan, now affirmatively used as self-description by roughly two million Americans, is its pronunciation. Does the first syllable sound like the vedge in vegetable, with the soft g? Or is it pronounced like the name sci-fi writers have given the blue-skinned aliens from far-off Vega” (Safire). Just as this shift from nearly complete to a more partial contempt has begun in popular articles, it has been preceded by an identical shift in more scholarly publications as well. Joan Sabaté, author of one recent study in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, sheds some light on the tendency of researchers to view vegetarian diets as causes of illness, claiming that health risks have been overestimated because of historical, methodological, and cultural biases (503S). Since the mid-sixties, this tendency appears to be reversing. Half of all articles on vegetarianism published in the decade following 1966 focused on “nutritional adequacy issues, such as deficiency diseases;” however, by 1995, not only had that fraction dropped to one quarter, but also the number of “articles on the preventative and therapeutic aspects of vegetarian diets such as modification of risk factors, incidence of chronic diseases, and management of certain medical conditions” nearly doubled (503S).

Other, arguably more subtle representations of “strict vegetarianism” as a diet defined by the absence of animal parts began to enter the American marketplace in

greater numbers than ever before. Prior to the 1990s, very few mainstream supermarkets made concessions to vegetarian consumers and almost none to vegans. Vegetable foods high in protein were usually limited to beans, cereals, rice, and nuts. Currently, however, many supermarkets carry protein-rich vegetable-based products intended to compete with animal foods like bacon, chicken patties, eggs, frozen hamburgers, ground beef, sausage, and even sushi. The appeal to vegetarians is obvious -- convenience without compromise. To omnivorous consumers, the appeal may be based on growing evidence from nutrition experts that foods high in fat and cholesterol are associated with degenerative diseases like cancer. Body image is also incontestably a concern of many Americans who limit their caloric intake for the sake of maintaining a desirable figure (Breidenstein 113). Not surprisingly, vegetable-based foods manufactured to meet daily requirements for protein, but not to exceed those for fat and cholesterol, are growing in popularity. Although, both vegetarian and vegan diets have been dismissed as fads, they have a combined history that is almost two centuries old. If, as some critics and polls seem to suggest, veganism and vegetarianism have been gaining more popularity in the U.K. and the U.S. over the past decade (Fiddes, "Declining", 263; FDA), their success has been assisted by the increasing availability of specialty foods (aka "health foods") in general grocery stores, supermarkets, and the influence of grocery chains like "Whole Foods" that purvey a range of organic produce, meat, and meat alternatives.

Unlike other marginalized groups who have reacted against discourses that marked them as outsiders by appropriating the slurs and epithets by which they were

commonly known, Vegans originally named and identified themselves in a self-conscious manner. Veganism began as a branch of the vegetarian movement and was as much a codified practice as it was a reaction to the vagaries to which the term vegetarian had been reduced little more than a century after it entered the language. In much the same way that we can explain the narrowing of the term 'meat' and the broadening of the term 'vegetarianism' as the effect of ideology, specifically that of carno-phallogocentric culture on the lexicon of food, we might also expect both the theory and practice of veganism to have been similarly affected. However, its meaning has remained fixed for over sixty years. Given their low numbers in both the U.S. and the U.K., vegans are not exactly the darlings of western culinary culture. Yet, recent statistics show that more people are choosing to eat a vegetarian diet (FDA). Vegetarians currently represent approximately 2.5% of the US population and vegans .9%, modest increases since the late 1990s (Hadadd 629S-630S). For groups that represent a very small percentage of the population, both seem to attract a great deal of attention, argument, and vitriol; insofar as these dietary discourses seek to raise consciousness, even their power to incite counter-arguments may be seen as a successful rhetorical tactic. As a term, veganism has drawn its contradictory force from the fact that it is defined, in part, in reactions to the broadening and generalization of the meaning of vegetarianism. Vegans' outsider status is symbolic, not of their resistance to inequitable treatment, not of any unlawful or unethical practice, but simply of their commitment to a set of beliefs and practices that contradict the dominant dietary paradigm.



### III B 2 Origins of Meat Analogs & Substitutes

Meat substitutes provide us with an explicit example of the way in which marginalized practices, as they become commodified and institutionalized as recognizable identities, are recast in the terms of dominant practices, often with a peculiar similarity that borders on the parodic. What can the advertising and packaging of these products tell us about veganism, its commodification, and the way in which consumers' experience of these products affects their perception of veganism?

To answer these questions, we must look at the phenomena of meat analogs and substitutes as parts of a sign system, of which each individual product is a sign intended to rearticulate an antagonistic discourse in terms that affirm the more dominant one.

Terry Eagleton writes of the unique power of food as a sign:

A sign expresses something but also stands for its absence, so that a child may be unsure whether receiving nourishment from its mother's hands or breasts is a symbol of her affection or a replacement for it. Perhaps a child may rebuff its food because what it really wants is some impossibly immaterial gift of affection, rather as a symbolist poet wants to strip language of its drably functional character and express its very essence. Food looks like an object but is actually a relationship, and the same is true of literary works. If there is no literary text without an author, neither is there one without a reader. [...]

Language is at once material fact and rhetorical communication, just as eating combines biological necessity with cultural significance ("Edible écriture" 205).

The cultural significance of eating is even more evident in those foods that are “processed” and have no “natural” name. The term “meat substitute” is commonly used, but something of a misnomer, especially because it is not always clear which aspect of meat has been substituted. Technically speaking, meat substitutes need not resemble meat in appearance. They need only stand in for it in some way, nutritionally, conceptually, or palatably. One might just as readily refer to vitamin pills containing the requisite nutrients as meat substitutes. “Meat,” after all, is a term whose etymology has embraced multiple and oftentimes contradictory meanings in its long history. But the jargon of industries that produce items like veggieburgers or “not dogs,” the products need more specificity: their products are referred to as “meat analogs.” The company Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) has claimed responsibility for producing the original meat analogue. Their website’s ‘about us’ section characterizes their cultivation and use of soy as cutting edge and their role in its development as pioneering:

In 1967 we developed the first meat analogue, TVP, textured soya flour [*TVP stands for “texturized vegetable protein”*; my note]. Today ADM’s leadership continues – with a breadth of protein isolates, concentrates and complementary ingredients for making really delicious and succulent meat analogues, innovative soya dairy analogues, frozen prepared soya foods, soya pasta, dry mix dinner kits and much more (ADM).

But in what ways is TVP analogous to meat? As a raw ingredient it bears a closer resemblance to styrofoam than anything animal or vegetable; but cooked, its texture

is chewy, like meat, and its taste is salty. More importantly, soy is analogous to meat in that it is the one of the most protein-rich vegetables. To use a term that would have been especially relevant in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it is a “complete protein” and makes meat, nutritionally speaking, obsolete. So, soya flour, in the form of TVP, could have been marketed on the strength of its being a food that does not need to be consumed in conjunction with other foods whose amino acids combine to form a complete protein, but, for most consumers who have no intention of quitting meat altogether, this terminology might as well be jibberish. To call such a product a substitute or analog may also serve as a kind of nutritional shorthand for protein-rich vegetable-based foods.

Neologisms aside, ADM’s claim is most likely incorrect. It is widely known that imitation meat dishes are part of Asian cuisines and that Christian monks in the middle ages were sworn to enduring deprivations, such as avoiding meat, and, accordingly, devised many dishes to supplement this lack. Barbara Ketcham Wheaton, in her history of culinary traditions, *Savoring the Past*, describes the range of this monastic cuisine:

Almond milk was an expensive substitute for cow’s milk, and on occasion it was curdled, pressed, drained, and presented as a substitute for cream cheese. Imitations were a feature of medieval cooking, and it pleased both the cook and the diner to pretend to break the fast, with ‘eggs’ fabricated from fish roe or curdle almond milk, or with the grandest hoax, a ‘ham’ or ‘bacon’ slices made with salmon for the pink meat and pike for the fat. Recipes for such imitations were still being published in France in the eighteenth century (quoted in Spencer 178).

This medieval monastic practice bears a striking resemblance to the contemporary marketplace's targeting of vegetarian and vegan consumers. In both instances, the group who has voluntarily forsworn a common practice incorporates crucial visual and other aesthetic elements into its own uncommon practice. In psychoanalytic terms, this practice can be viewed as an "economy of the same," the expression given to Lacan's reading of Freud's account of the way in which castration anxiety begets fetishism. Fetishism according to Freud assists the male psyche in coping with the fear that his member might be dismembered. The origin of this fear, according to Freud, is the boy's perception that his mother's anatomy is not complete, but has been mutilated by the father. The perception that the mother's body was once like the boy's is, in Lacan's terminology, an economy of the same. The boy is incapable of perceiving a body without a phallus as anything but lacking one. Fetishes are the symbols in which the male subject invests his psychic energy to distract himself from the absence of the phallus and deny his fear that he, like the mother, might be castrated. It goes without saying that Freud's account leaves much to be desired and fails to explain the pervasiveness of fetishism not only between both sexes but also in our culture at large.

Advertisements that imply analogs and substitutes can appeal to masculine tastes are responses to the anxiety that many omnivorous men, as well as the women who shop for them, experience when choosing these imposter foods. The ads placed in *Vegetarian Times* since the late nineties are typically compensatory, reassuring, and affirmative when the issue of masculine taste is at hand. Ads featuring serving suggestions for veggie burgers, soybean dogs, and wheat gluten sausages give

consumers all the imagery they need to channel the power of fetishized meat. By offering meaty aesthetics, the nostalgia of familiar packaging, or the curious grin of an anthropomorphized animal licking its lips, these ads recall the presence of the phallus in an attempt to allay our anxieties. They compensate. They allay our fears. They promise protein. They are the mythic Led Zeppelin in Robert Plant's lunchbox. Yet, if they were simply compared to other vegetable-based foods, like cornbread, grits, or hash browns for example, meat analogs and substitutes might be considered just as tasty as any other dish deemed worthy of sharing the plate with meat. But, because such a comparison is not likely to lure meat-lovers or 'flexitarians,' marketers make sure that the more meaty qualities are represented, amplified, and fetishized.

We might say that the demand for meat analogs & substitutes, if they are fetishes, results from the psychic process of repression. As the story goes, for Freudian boys (and they men they become), the fetish assists in repressing castration anxiety, the implicit threat that the father represents to the child who, in one way or another, sees the vagina not as difference but as a lack. Little boys want give to their mothers the phallus in a big way. Anything that recalls what mother lacks is treated with utmost contempt, like an effeminate schoolboy getting bullied at recess. Meat analogs & substitutes are always held to the highest standard and subjected to the staunchest criticism, criticism which is usually a little more vehement, more personal, more bitter, and more irrational, in my view, than criticism of other foods people regard as merely unhealthy or unpleasant, like fast food or smelly cheeses, for example. Those foods are fully possessed of the phallus. But the distaste for analogs and substitutes, when it is

excessive or especially prejudicial, can be attributed to the fetishistic power of meat, real meat, because the presence of an analog or substitute at the table signifies that the man's meat is missing. The phallus called, can't make it for dinner: anxiety ensues.

Whatever the degree to which analogs and substitutes afford us pleasure, they always beg comparison with an un-recovered object of desire and they always prove inadequate. In terms of aesthetic, meat analogs and substitutes reaffirm the dominant dietary paradigm because they beg comparison with their namesakes. After all, it is not the fact that meat analogs are substituting or "standing in" for meat that makes them so controversial; instead, it is that they are devoid of that referent which is merely absent in meat. In other words, meat substitute is just another name for processed vegetables. Branded with names like "Cheeze," "Milk," and "Un-Steak," these imitations illustrate the rupture and redoubling of the semiotic structure of the term "meat," making plants the absent referent. The "controversy," if controversy is the proper term for the usual distaste that accompanies many peoples' reaction to analogs and substitutes, lies not in the fact they stand in for meat, but that they suggest a radical option for subjects of food choice, to relinquish the sense of having dominion over animals, if only for one meal, one portion, or even one taste. Compared to the meat they imitate, most analogs and substitutes will fall short of the mark and, thereby, fail to satisfy the omnivorous palate. In *Meat: A Natural Symbol*, Nick Fiddes writes that the wide variety and availability of meat analogs and substitutes

testifies to the centrality of the *concept* of meat, not to its dispensability.

Many people wishing to avoid meat feel that the gap left in their habitual food

system needs to be filled with a direct equivalent which mimics the form or the nutritional content of meat itself. [...] But it seems likely that even if a perfect substitute for meat were developed, indistinguishable in any respect from the real thing, many meat eaters would be reluctant to swap. There is just something important about its having come from an animal (16-7).

Like meat itself, analogs and substitutes do involve sacrifice, but one made by consumer, not the consumed. Obviously, this sacrifice might not please everyone who makes it, because, no matter how many times one politely avoids discussing, or even thinking about, the process by which animals become food, one never entirely forgets it. People recall or imagine that process only when occasion demands which, because of the industrialization of food production, is increasingly rare. That knowledge is repressed, uninvestigated, or censored whenever it threatens representations either of ourselves as well-mannered or of our food industry as one that promotes bucolic landscapes, grazing cattle, free-ranging fowl, independently-owned farms where everything seems to depend upon a red wheelbarrow.

Meat analogs and substitutes reaffirm the dominant dietary paradigm because their design and their advertising originates as an attempt to place consumers in a position to compare vegetarian and vegan fare with other cuisines rather than to evaluate it on its own merits. Insofar as they fetishes, meat analogs and substitutes are no more recoverable than any other unrecoverable object of desire, including meat itself. Both meat and its imitators are symbolic of the phallus, imbued by their consumers with significance in excess of their status as food. Choosing either food

can be utilized as a substitute for a more comprehensive understanding of the body's nutritional needs. For many subjects of food choice, meat stands for an assurance that their essential nutrients have been obtained and their appetites will be satisfied.

For others, meat analogs stand-in for what meat stands for, opening the possibility for that kind of semantic shift that sometimes accompanies a re-conceptualization of traditional practice.



#### **IV. Intertextual & Intratextual Analysis**

This section will present fragments from the discourse of diet. These fragments often serve as evidence for or against the validity of the dominant dietary paradigm. The first subsection (IV. A.) analyzes the way in which meat-analog marketers have appropriated the visual and verbal rhetoric of meat marketing. The second subsection (IV. B.) analyzes the way in which these products are contextualized by advertisements for specific audiences.

##### **IV. A. Intratextual Analysis**

In this section, I analyze the aesthetics of meat and meat analogs as well as their respective marketing campaigns, including packaging and product placement, so that we can better understand the way in which meat analog marketing appropriates, reiterates, and, in some cases, subverts aesthetics that appeal to prevailing views about gender and food.

#### IV. A. 1. Meat Marketing (or shelf life is no life at all)

“The visual rhetoric of advertising rests in the cumulative effect of ubiquitous images – separate promotions that collectively celebrate the righteousness of the consumer ethic.”  
– Diane S. Hope

“No one can deny seriously, or for very long, that men do all they can in order to organize on a global scale the forgetting or the misunderstanding of this violence that some would compare to the worst cases of genocide.”  
– Jacques Derrida

“They’re animals anyway, so let them lose their souls.”  
– *The Godfather*

Ironically, the common conception of “what people were meant to eat” seems to be based on a myth of an almost entirely meat-eating ancestor whose dietary needs were supplemented by vegetables only when meat was scarce or absent. This myth pervades our culture, especially in commercial dietary discourse, like one recent ad for a supermarket meat department in which a white, presumably middle-class, housewife warrants her claim for the quality of the grocery’s meat products by patting her husband’s stomach and exclaiming, “he’s a carnivore!” Although her use of the term is humorous, and metaphorical, recent statistics seem to indicate that many Americans’ eating habits mirror those of this television husband. As we’ve discussed earlier, the natural fact of our human ancestors predisposition to a carnivorous diet is difficult to prove. That “fact” is not reflected in the physiological or archaeological remnants of human ancestors, yet when regarded with skepticism, the all-too common recourse is to counter by turning to the very unnatural methods of medicine, nutrition, and anthropology, all of which

acknowledge human beings' omnivorous predisposition and confirm that the bulk of the diet in human ancestry is comprised of vegetables. Nonetheless, the meat myth and its importance for the myth of masculinity persist, even flourish in commercial environments, sometimes subtly, but often less so.



**Figure 4.1**

Inside a Kroger supermarket in midtown Atlanta, the produce department's mist-sprayers activate automatically. Springing to life, as they do almost every fifteen minutes, they are accompanied by a pre-recorded cacophony of thunder and cloudburst. Each of the otherwise inconspicuous speakers that broadcast these peculiar sounds is affixed with a small strobe light that flashes with each rumble of thunder. Attempts have been made, with limited success, to disguise these speakers with plastic ivy vines (*figure 4.1*). Ordinarily, this multi-media event might conjure up images of the great outdoors – long tracts of plowed fields and lush vegetation untouched by litter, pollution, and other man-made wastes – the kinds of places consumers would like to believe their food originates. And yet, the soundtrack, with its automatic mist and synchronized lightning, is too intrusive and monophonic to be truly imitative of “nature” and too contrived to be anything but an ironic compliment to a landscape of climate-controlled bins where fruits and vegetables are segregated by price, brand, and the conditions under which they were grown.

At this particular Kroger, the produce and meat departments, like those in many

supermarkets, stand adjacent to one another. As customers proceed through the aisles of fruits and vegetables and approach the meat counter, the décor changes markedly. The cases are whiter and shinier. Almost everything is pre-wrapped or encased, from the vacuum-packed smoked sausages to a large, murky aquarium, in which a few lethargic lobsters await their fate with clamped claws (*figure 4.2*). The overriding theme in the meat department is that of containment, of strict control over an object with qualities that must be retained if it is to remain valuable. Amongst the various kinds of meat, the bucolic noises of the nearby produce department have grown so faint as to be virtually unnoticeable. The meat department has no pre-recorded soundtrack of its own and it would clearly be a nuisance. There is the frequent noise of the nearby slicing machines to contend with, and customers, as they browse for beef, chicken, pork, and seafood “fresh as the ocean breeze,” need to converse with the delicatessens and place their orders. Yet, I often wonder, wheeling my shopping cart past the counter, how much of an effect a soundtrack might have on sales here, especially if, instead of samples of thunder and rain, or the lowing of contented bovines, the soundtrack were more reminiscent of the actual environments in which most livestock are raised, transported, and slaughtered.

Perhaps those of us who have not heard an actual slaughterhouse soundtrack have already imagined it well enough – it’s hard to say – but it would bear no comparison to the produce department’s soundtrack, except that they are both equally unnatural.



**Figure 4.2**

The problem marketers face is that the more complex the food industry becomes, the less natural meat seems. Consequently, more of a burden is placed on marketers. Marketing tactics necessarily have to refrain from recalling or alluding to the obvious fact that meat foods result from a complex system of killing, carving, processing, packaging, and transporting animals' bodies – a system whose components include farms, stockyards, slaughterhouses, and grocery stores. No one wants to live next door to the slaughterhouse, but everyone wants to have a grocery store nearby. Marketers, understandably, want to fill those stores with their products, animal-based or not. The rhetorical strategy at work here is, in large part, to dissociate animal-based foods from industrial processes and to reinvest meat with notions of natural, healthful, and wholesome modes of consumption – i.e., the belief that “human beings have always eaten meat foods like these” and that “eating foods like these is natural.” Part of this dissociative effect is generated by the structural elements of the industry. For example, improvements in transportation, refrigeration, and preservatives have allowed food production sites to be located at a much greater remove from areas of high population density where those foods are sold.

The elision of the realities of the food industry takes many other forms as well, not all of which are especially repressive, censorial, or secretive. These realities are simply missing from commercial dietary discourse, both visually and textually. To today's consumers, the imagery of modern meat industry doesn't seem to possess the same appeal as the imagery of pre-modern industries do. Discovering the route that food takes to the dinner table is not impossible, but consumers must undertake such

research themselves. Meat marketing tactics, like those of most other foodstuffs, simply disregard the fact of meat as an industrial product altogether, by using product placement, packaging, and advertisement to focus attention on meat's appearance, taste, and cost. Other tactics depend upon rhetorical devices deployed in words or images: metonymy, personification, and allusion. The words "organic," for example, "free-range," and "non-GMO" are a few of the more blatant attempts to appeal to consumers' sense that their food was once in residency at old MacDonald's farm rather than an old McDonald's-affiliated slaughterhouse.

To detail in the simplest way possible this gradual change in the marketing of meat, let's let our fingers do the walking. During the last half of the twentieth century, the supermarket has supplanted the butcher shop as the primary source from which people obtain their animal-based foods. It also provides a crucial new step in the civilizing process, because it places consumers at a greater remove from butchering process. Consider, for example, the fact that there is no longer any listing for "Butcher", in the business directory of Atlanta's *Real Yellow Pages*. The only related listing is that of "Butcher's Equipment and Supplies" where one finds a single entry, the innocuous, "Holly-Jones and Associates," which, if anything, is reminiscent of winter flora. Under the "Meat" heading in the same directory, however, a few more listings indicate the scant remains of a once thriving business are still to be found. For the purposes of this critique, however, they are interesting nonetheless:

*Big Daddy's Discount Meat*

*Castleberry Meats*

*Cool Runnings Meat and Fish Market*

*Discount Meat World*

*Griller's Pride*

*Heavenly Ham.*

The names of the above businesses are equally suggestive that both the civilizing process and the sexual politics of meat are at work wherever meat is encountered. As one might expect, the usual tropes of meat marketing are immediately recognizable: patriarchy, nature, appeals to taste, religion, and an emphasis on low cost. Yet the scarcity of listings for butchers in Atlanta is just one small textual detail in the story of the eradication of the animal and its body from the post-industrial consumer world. Today, consumers buy meat with very little knowledge about the lives or the “lifestyles” of the animals they consume – factors that greatly affect the nutritional quality of their diets.

It would be a mistake to claim that the appeal of meat products to consumers is merely or entirely rhetorical. Just ask most self-avowed “carnivores.” But, matters of taste aside, meat products, or more accurately termed *animal-based foods* are convenient for their availability and affordability, but also for the relief they provide. A shopper doesn't have to kill and butcher an animal or dispose of as many inedible, unusable, or unsightly remains. The supermarket meat department and the pre-packaged shelf-ready meats have made this immensely easier over the past century. In fact, the development of the supermarket parallels the development of prepackaged foods. The ability to stack and store packaged goods gave the supermarket its internal structure of shelves, aisles, and, eventually, shopping carts complete with a basket that converts to a child's seat

(Hines 129-134). Today, almost nothing in the consumer landscape suggests the on-going confrontation between species. More than ever, consumption is a no fuss, no muss affair. This may not seem to be an especially new phenomenon, as people have been bartering for and buying animal-based foods in market places for millennia. As Jacques Derrida writes, in "The Animal I Therefore Am," the average contemporary person's cognizance of animal suffering is a necessarily diminished one:

This has occurred by means of farming and regimentalization at a demographic level unknown in the past, by means of genetic experimentation, the industrialization of what can be called the production for consumption of animal meat, artificial insemination on a massive scale, more and more audacious manipulation of the genome, the reduction of the animal not only to production and overactive reproduction (hormones, genetic crossbreeding and the so on) of meat for consumption but also all sorts of other end products, and all of that in the service of a certain being and the so-called human well-being of man (394).

Unlike previous generations of customers whose purchase of meats brought them in closer contact with larger sections of animal corpses, contemporary consumers now enjoy a much less sanguine transaction in supermarket meat departments. This, as James Kavanagh writes in his essay on Ideology, is one the effects of living in a (mass-) mediated world: "modern cultural texts are experienced as complex of psychological and personal events, oriented around the provocation and pacification (or in more high brow forms, the intellectual exploration) of thrill and/or anxiety" (311). Applying Kavanagh's insight here, I would like to suggest that meat marketing serves to pacify any guilt



consumers might feel for their complicity in what seems like an unstoppable industry and an irreversible consumer trend. By eradicating imagery that alludes to the visceral aspects of the meat industry and by representing the trends such an industry makes possible as natural and historic facts, meat marketing effectually reduces the possibility that consumers will question fundamental assumptions about the relationship between human beings' diets, animals, and their environments.

Packaging is especially helpful in this regard because it helps to close the deal between consumers and carno-phallogocentrism. Consumers may select from hundreds of attractively pre-cut, pre-wrapped meat products. In the process, consumers gain another chance to be choosy about their purchases. As Thomas Hines explains in his history of American packaging:

Extending the industrialization of butchering all the way to the retail level through the cellophane wrapping of meat removed this element of individual responsiveness. Instead, it made it possible to greatly expand the size of meat retailing operations and thus to offer such a wide choice of sizes and cuts that the shopper would not feel deprived. Indeed, such sales techniques gave shoppers a sense of greater control over their purchases. They did not have to depend on their butchers. They could see what they were being offered and make their own judgment about what to buy (128).

Today, supermarket butchers have already rendered the animal corpse into parts so small as to be unrecognizable. Value, not to mention meaning, has been added. Furthermore, when animal-based foods are prepackaged, brand-named, and labeled attractively, they



**Figure 4.3**

are contextualized as another iteration in the discourse of commerce. With effective packaging design, meat can be made to be experienced as a commodity, unrelated to transactions other than the purely commercial. In transparent packaging or

packages with “windows,” those edible parts of an animal’s corpse are typically disguised as tasty morsels, thus reducing the un-pleasurable tension that some shoppers may feel (*figure 4.3*). Not everyone is likely to feel such tension, of course, but some probably do, whether it is experienced it as a vicarious guilt for “complicity” in having been indirectly responsible for another being’s pain and death or, more simply, as a fear or anxiety arising from mortification – meat as a *memento mori*.

While consumers normally only encounter food animals as sanitized, packaged commodities ready for cooking and consumption, or as occasionally glimpsed denizens of pasture, sty or coop, some individuals may find that the institutional or psychological shields which protect them from confronting the origins of meat are all too easy to circumvent, or are torn down by some unwelcome glimpse of one of the ‘back regions’ of animal husbandry (Beardsworth and Keil 286).

The success of the design of meat packaging, meat departments (as opposed to butchers), and the interior decoration of supermarkets is due to the fact that these structural components of the industry not only slow the spoilage of animal-based product, increasing shelf-life and maximizing advertising potential, but also, by providing an

entire environment of sensory and semantic stimuli geared toward sales, they also reduce people's relationship with their food sources to pure commerce. Shoppers are merely taking products off the shelves. One's sense of responsibility, culpability, or complicity in a given mode of food production typically ends at the checkout lane. People's relationship to animals or the environment in which animals live is seldom taken into consideration, because everywhere that contemporary shoppers look for their food, the evidence of animals has been disguised or hidden altogether.

Supermarket meat departments offer much more than butcher shops generally do for the purposes of sparing customers the potential unpleasantness of buying animal-based foods. Generally speaking, meat eaters don't question the means or the manner by which an animal becomes foodstuff, but neither does a meat eater want to purchase meat that has exceeded its shelf life. The shelf life sticker and the "use by" date are simply less sanguine ways of reminding us how quickly bodies decay. Critics of the "use-by date" often claim it is ineffectual, because it is overlooked by consumers and overshadowed by other cues such packaging, placement, and, in the case of transparently-packaged red meats, coloring. As recently as 2003, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the use of "MAP," or Modified Atmosphere Packaging, for meat products. MAP allows packagers to package "**fresh cuts of case ready muscle meat and case ready ground meat**" in vacuum-sealed containers with carbon dioxide or carbon monoxide, instead of regular air, to "**maintain wholesomeness, provide flexibility in distribution, and reduce shrinkage of the meat**" (USDA/FSIS). **The effect of this packaging technique is to prolong meats' capacity to retain a red color and, ultimately, to convince**

**consumers to buy meat on the basis of a fresh appearance that it would otherwise not possess (CNN).**

Most shoppers refrain from asking questions about freshness with regard to meat. Asking the counterperson, “Has this been freshly killed?” or “How many days since this was slaughtered?” is rude. It is easier, and more polite, to assume that the meat is fresh, that the counter people are performing their jobs to the letter of a law which guarantees that the meat will not only be tasty, but free from disease also. Though fraught with ambiguity, the concept of freshness has become so powerful in marketing that its overuse and misuse prompted the FDA in the early 1990s to request that manufacturers, packers, and others who label food products and who do not now use the term ‘fresh’ on their labels to refrain from using the term (Welford 8). Whether or not the word itself is present, freshness seems omnipresent in the world of meat marketing. It functions as an appeal in an argument that persuades consumers to buy meat because of its readiness to be consumed. Is it ironic that fruits and vegetables are among the most common means by which this appeal is conveyed? Not if you take the dominant dietary paradigm for granted.

To allay consumer’s concerns about the freshness of foods featured at the meat counter, supermarkets have developed fresh-making strategies that employ visual and aural imagery more ubiquitous than those described above. The meat counter itself is a marketing tool, one designed to enhance visual appreciation of the products it contains. Its oblong, white cases, with wide panes of spotless glass entreat shoppers to gaze at the products neatly arranged on silver or white shelves decorated either with leafy green

things or a shiny plastic material colored and cut to resemble grasses or leaves (figure 4.4 - 4.6).

One isn't really expected to eat the garnishes anyway, but these faux garnishes suggest more clearly than parsley or cilantro ever could that

“freshness,” in the visual rhetoric of marketing, is purely a symbolic matter, having nothing to do with the actual commodity or even the items surrounding it. After all, even old meat is “fresher” than plastic grass.

Once you begin to notice the degree to which vegetables and vegetable imagery are featured as garnishes in meat counter displays, you begin to understand how differently our culture regards foods derived from animals and those derived from fruits and vegetables. Imagine, for example, how odd it might seem if bacon bits or meatballs were used to freshen-

up the appearance of red leaf lettuce or bunches of parsley on the supermarket shelves.

The color, shape, and placement of vegetable garnishes in the composition provide a sharp contrast. This familiar, even archetypal, marketing tactic conceals the absent referent implicit in meat by depicting vegetables or other plants in close proximity to it



**Figure 4.4**



**Figure 4.5**



**Figure 4.6**

as a border, decoration, or garnish. Their greenish hues compliment the reds and pinks so often associated with carnality, their shapes and size help to make meat seem more substantial, and their placement calls attention not only to the cut of the meat, but to its centrality in both compositional and dietary contexts as well. Also, with vegetables or their stand-ins as contrasting images, presumably the imagination is more likely to think of meat in contrast to vegetables rather than in comparison to the living animal it had recently been. Relegated to the margins where they serve, not as food, but as a kind of backdrop, scenery enhancing the ‘natural’ and ‘fresh’ qualities of the food in question, vegetables further distance consumers from unpleasant facts about how animals become food and how poor the average American’s health can become when animal-based foods are perceived as central to satiety and nutrition.

What many consumers, vegetarian or not, find strange is that this same trope frequently accompanies the packaging of meat analogs, as a reminder of the kinds of foods for which they have been substituted. Additionally, this trope performs another task in the service of carno-phallogocentric ideology: the role of vegetables where meat is concerned is always a diminished one. In most serving suggestions, vegetables are presented as “side items,” in lesser quantities, and are usually off-center, pushed to the margins to make way for more meaty imagery. However, their proximity to meat in most serving suggestions, and even supermarket display cases, assists the viewer in recognizing the appetizing aspects of the central image, its apparent freshness, naturalness, and the vividness of its color, instead of those less appetizing associations, such as bloodiness, deadness, and the vast array of not-so natural processes that take

place outside the realm of the modern supermarket. What the visual rhetoric in most serving suggestions for meat analogs tells us is that vegetables which look and taste like meat are superior to vegetables that have yet to improved through the miracle of industry.

Before moving on, let's reconsider the materials at work in the rhetorical situation at the local supermarket. While there certainly are functional qualities to the design of supermarket meat and produce departments, the way in which their design is influenced either by the imagery of idyllic farmland, freshness, cleanliness, and containment is purely rhetorical. Display cases packed with mounds of crushed ice that glisten in the florescent light go a long way toward preserving and presenting their contents, but they also convey the notion that the relationship between people and animals is analogous to that of the shopper and the commodity, a notion that is clearly ideological. The white (sometimes faintly stained) uniforms of counter people, the counter equipment with its electronic meters and scales, the windows and doorways that permit customers to glimpse the premises in which larger sections of animal bodies are prepared prior to their internment in display cases, and lastly, the wrapping of meat in brown or white wax paper, or in transparent plastic wrap and styrofoam. In addition, the imagery of the idealized farm that pervades so many produce and meat departments often recalls pre-industrial agriculture, a golden age long before the coining of terms like 'free range' and 'organic.' The appeal of this imagery is that it enables consumers to partake in a collective fantasy about a mode of production that now seems more 'natural' precisely because it was not industrial and it therefore lends itself to images of lush landscapes. The apparatuses of the modern-day slaughterhouse and factory farm are not easily



**Figure 4.7**

imagined to those who have never seen them and too easily remembered for most of those who have (*figure 4.7*). Although, as Derrida suggests, everyone knows what happens to animals when they are tendered as capital and rendered as food (396). To dwell on

those events without changing one's relationship to animals and to represent (or even pay attention to representations of) that transformation may seem a kind of futile cruelty, first, to oneself and, second, to animals. Accepting these narratives about food production is one way of sparing absent animals the pain, cruelty, and early deaths we must inflict on them in our imaginations if we are to understand animals' lives without witnessing them firsthand. While the material and mythical aspects of meat marketing can easily be seen to function as visual rhetoric, that is, as appeals in the argument for the naturalness and freshness of meat, the appeals they make to consumers' sense of normative behavior is arguably more subtle and effective.

Most dietary texts, especially those evident in mainstream media and commercial advertisements, can be seen as attempts to homogenize dietary practices in general and to slow the emergence of newer dietary practices in particular so that food industries can maintain profitability with commodities they already produce. As with many other types of advertising, food advertising attempts to make the consumption of a product normative by associating it with other normative behaviors (or at least those that are presumed to be normative) like heterosexuality and monogamy. If food or consuming food is a metaphor



for sex, marketers fashion it as a hegemonic metaphor, a heterosexual one. And, if this metaphor is a projection of patriarchal power, of carno-phallogocentrism, as I believe, then the consumed must be represented as feminine, the consumer as masculine.

Although the comparison might seem exaggerated, a great deal of advertisements do make direct and undisguised appeals to the viewer's taste for eroticized imagery and innuendo. Much like pornography, the imagery of meat marketing typically positions consumers in a patriarchal vantage point. The standard trope about men representing *what they can do to you* and women representing *what they can do for you* (or *what can be done to them*) is evident in most advertisements and product packaging, but especially in their use of serving suggestions. Serving suggestions are always ready for their close-up and deliberately position the viewer as the consumer at mealtime, towering over tasty morsels, yet close enough to savor their color, shape, and texture. They entice, they arouse, and they await our pleasure.

Take, for example, a current Burger King webpage, entitled "Subservient Chicken," as representative of the more hyperbolic illustrations of the way sexual politics construct the consumer's relationship to food products and the animals from which they are made. During 2004, the "Subservient Chicken" webpage accompanied the corporation's promotion of the new chicken-based foods on their menu. The webpage's composition appropriates the design of live-chat, web-cam, pay-per-view pornography, which are, in essence, an appropriation of the actual, as opposed to virtual, pay-per-view booths that made Manhattan's 42<sup>nd</sup> street notorious for its unabashed commodification of sex, prior to its having been redeveloped, or 'Disneyfied' by some accounts, in the

mid-1990s. In a typical 42<sup>nd</sup> street viewing booth, customers would have had a phone booth's worth of privacy, a locking door, and three walls, one of which permits, for a small price, a view of a stage where exotic dancers solicit tips for tricks. Except for the exchange of currency, physical contact would not have been encouraged, because of its illegality. However, customers would have the pleasure of requesting that the dancers assume various poses and proximities that gratify their personal aesthetic. Burger King's "Subservient Chicken" webpage seeks to recreate the experience of the viewing booth first by providing a narrow text box that resembles the slot through which customers would ordinarily pass tips. When the webpage initially loads, this textbox offers a brief, italicized explanation of the site's purpose, "*Get chicken just the way you like it. Type your command here*" (figure 4.8). Viewers are treated to a web-cam style view of an otherwise spartan living room in which a chicken rises into the center of the frame as if it had been nesting. Of course, the "chicken" in question is neither a real animal nor a cartoon; instead, it appears to be a real person, probably male, dressed in a chicken suit and garters. The chicken diligently obeys most typed commands provided that they are not too complicated, too abstract, or too blatantly sexual. Typing in "go vegan," for example, elicits the not-so surprising response of "thumbs down;" and simply typing in a noun, like "kitchen," without a verb has the bizarre effect of making the chicken practice a kind of barnyard tai chi; but, given the most



**Figure 4.8**



**Figure 4.9**

blatantly sexual commands, the chicken lunges toward the camera, wagging a feathered finger (*figure 4.9*). To its credit, the chicken has a wide repertoire, including a little shtick that involves the repeated snapping of its garters (*figure 4.10*), but

while this “little piece of chicken” may prove entertaining to some web surfers, it doesn’t seem to have very much to do with a specific product Burger King is promoting. And yet, the website has been active for over two years, which may seem a fairly long time for, say, a fast-food campaign to run on television. But for the more recent advertising strategies, such as branding and viral marketing, which depend on creating a campaign for a corporation rather than its products, the longer they remain active, the more “buzz” is generated by word of mouth, spamming, and blogging about their promoting. Keeping the Subservient Chicken in its cyberspace peepshow is but one campaign in a historic struggle to make all of nature a function of the human will. Of the more innovative aspects of this campaign in particular are its duration and its approach. Instead of dissociating food from the animal, as many marketers do, Burger King’s Subservient Chicken helps to dissociate the animal from the food. Only a simple, second-hand idea is being sold. After all, there is no urgency, no shelf life, and, best of all, no charge for the peepshow.



**Figure 4.10**

By contrast, a McDonald's television commercial, which did not stay "on the air" very long, presents a glimpse of lunch hour in the contemporary American office. We, viewers of the commercial, are positioned behind and slightly above a computer monitor. The scene involves three twenty-something men in collared shirts and slacks crowded into a cubicle. Two of the men are standing in the corner, behind the third who, seated at his desk, stares desirously into the computer screen. His colleagues look over his shoulder. The men say very little, but their vocalizations, though guttural, are clearly affirmative. They nod their heads, stroke their chins, and lick their lips. From this scene's peculiar camera position and from the men's rapt attention, viewers of the commercial might find it more than likely that these young men have decided to spend the precious minutes of their workday surfing for pornography on the Internet and that they've found something truly arousing. Suddenly, the scene changes. A young, attractive, and more professionally attired female colleague strides down a nearby hallway. As she passes by the cubicle, she stops momentarily for a glance at the young men, and, in an expression equal parts shock and scorn, rolls her eyes at what she espies in their cubicle. "Men!" she scoffs. Here, the scene changes again, and, contrary to any unsavory expectations that some viewers may have had, we see that the men are actually ogling, not pictures of naughty nymphs, but a freshly unwrapped McDonald's lunch instead. Accordingly, the camera zooms in on a large hamburger, fries, and soda. And then, the hard sell is under way once more, complete with voice over and bold graphics. In addition to wryly undercutting the issue of politically incorrect surfing in the workplace, this commercial perfectly reiterates the sexual politics of meat. It creates a work-a-day McWorld in which

meat appeals to men, women reject it, and meat consumption is linked to masculine appetite. It also equates the arousal of the heterosexual male's libidinal instincts through pornographic images with the arousal of appetite for animal-based foods spurred on by the sight of meat. As a subtext, this equation results in a mixed metaphor in which the terms for eroticized women and objectified animals are interchangeable. In its own way, it comments on the absurdity of the fetishization of meat, a comment that the commercial's producers apparently didn't perceive as a significant threat to sales of its product.

This particular instance of sexual politics expresses the converse of the premise of the commercial for Wendy's chicken salads mentioned in a previous section: straight men can be identified by their fixation with meat and with women. In the Wendy's commercial, however, gay or queer men can be identified by their fixation with vegetable-based meals. Here's where the scene opens: two male coworkers are spending their lunch hour at a Wendy's restaurant, trying out new salad dishes, the "BLT Chicken Salad" and the "Mandarin Chicken Salad." In their conversation, the men establish how good-tasting and filling their respective orders are and that the salads are so plentiful they'll have leftovers. After cutting to a "serving suggestion scene" in which an omniscient narrator describes the dishes in detail, the commercial returns its viewers to the two men's lunch hour conversation. One man, looking up from a forkful of lettuce, remarks in a leading tone, "So, here we are, two guys, having lunch, talking about *salads*..." But, before he can continue, the second man replies dismissively, "Grow up, man," and the commercial ends. The sexual politics necessary for understanding the second man's response to the first man's insinuation is apparent: men who dine together and eat anything other than a

red-meat-based food can be “read” as queer or something other than straight. Obviously, even the presence of chicken is not meat enough to overcome the emasculating effects of consuming salad for lunch. The commercial attempts to legitimate (or rather, straighten) its product by labeling the first man’s insinuation as adolescent, scolding him, for shame; and, in the process, it apologizes for itself, because at its core it too is a substitute for a kind of fast food commercial that is not ready for prime time yet: one that deliberately features positive representations of gay men. It would seem that we’ve come a long way since the days of the infamous Reagan-era Wendy’s commercial that coined the phrase “Where’s the beef?” (*figure 4.11*). When

uttered by the commercial’s spokesperson (and then octogenarian), Clara Peller, who plays a cantankerous old woman angry about the bun to burger ratio, this question was funny for reasons difficult to put one’s finger on. Peller’s age lent



**Figure 4.11**

her the ethos to suggest that she came from a time long ago when people wouldn’t dare to skimp on the beef; perhaps the humor derives from watching a old woman, one who is past the age commonly regarded as one’s sexual prime, become so impassioned about the size of meat. Nonetheless, that very question put Wendy’s Restaurants on the map and became so pervasive it even entered the political discourse of the 1984 presidential election. For a time, it seemed that anyone who asked this question would win favor with his audience. Although it didn’t work for Walter Mondale, the commercial’s catch phrase is one of the most memorable of all time. As a rhetorical question, it calls attention to a

serious lack in the competition and, in doing so, suggests that the inquirer measures up or knows better than to accept an inadequate substitute. Asked properly, and the question can be taken as both a slight and a boast at the same time – standard machismo. Most importantly, though, the question also suggests the symbolic power of beef and red meat in general with their connotations of substance, strength, quality, and authenticity. Twenty years later, Wendy's can't seem to shirk its beefy image without internalizing the text that equates hetero-masculinity with the consumption of the cow.

As these fast food commercials suggest, whenever a man's eating habits are made public, the question of his masculinity is inevitably raised. In each commercial, that question is answered along stereotypical lines. The meaning of the male character's masculinity generally depends on what he eats, and whether it is animal or vegetable, how much of it he eats, and with whom. Beyond its nutritional content or perceived healthfulness, meat, especially red meat, means something special to men. It means that they possess the object of their desire and that they will be satisfied. The foods men eat in these commercials are inevitably charged with a sexual significance that contributes, in part, to the larger discourses of diet and gender through which identity is constructed. These commercials and others like them help to reproduce normative gender roles and, in the process, to link their products to traditionally held notions about animal-based foods and gender.

But one of the most egregious examples of the use of buxom female bodies as an appeal in the argument for eating meat appeared on television screens early in 2005, during the promotion of yet another Burger King burger-style sandwich. This particular

sandwich features chicken, bacon, and cheese and its commercial, “The Bacon-Cheddar Fantasy Ranch,” seems like a scene from musical theater (*figure 4.12*). The commercial combines a number of pop cultural myths with music video cinematography in an



**Figure 4.12**

effort to appeal to a wide range of viewers.

The ballad it contains, for example, is an adaptation of a depression-era song, “The Big Rock Candy Mountain,” which details one hobo’s daydream about a land of plenty and was recently featured on the soundtrack

of a successful film, *O Brother Where Art Thou*. Similarly, the ballad of “The Bacon-Cheddar Fantasy Ranch” details the landscape of a mythical place where food is free, riches abound, work is scarce, and women happily assume subservient roles. In less than a minute, the commercial manages to allude to a number of American myths, or texts: the American west, singing cowboys, the music video, the idealized farm, the Great Depression, *The Wizard of Oz*, the “Kingdom of Burger,” and, most conspicuously, the rarefied beauty of swimsuit models and cheerleaders. Even the Subservient Chicken has a two-second cameo in this commercial. Each of these elements asserts its own peculiar influence in the 30-second narrative that has serious implications about the gender, food, and animals, including the human ones. The amalgamation of these seemingly disparate sources creates a captivating juxtaposition.

However, what doesn’t appear at “The Bacon-Cheddar Fantasy Ranch” is equally important. None of the animals whose bodies or secretions are used for the sandwich



have been cast in the commercial. The only “real” animal in the commercial is a horse, saddled, mounted, and still, reminding us with its seeming indifference to the surrounding commercial chaos that animals are meant to serve or be served. Anything even remotely resembling food production is also idealized, accompanied by fantastic, eroticized imagery. Chicken breasts sandwiches that grow on trees, yellow brick roads paved with cheese, and rivers of ranch dressing are all tended, temped, and tasted by attractive, young women. As Seth Stevenson, a contributor to National Public Radio and the online magazine *Slate*, describes it, the “Tendercrisp Bacon Cheddar Ranch” commercial doesn’t emphasize information pertinent to the product as much as it relies on the spectacular imagery that constitutes its narrative.

[It] tried almost desperately to focus on the sandwich at hand. The song had lots of sandwich-related lyrics, and there were even props like giant onions and buckets of ranch dressing. Of course, all anyone will remember is Darius Rucker (a.k.a. Hootie himself), the Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders in skimpy outfits, and the generic spokes-hottie Brooke Burke—all of them thrown together, in a surrealistic stew, for reasons utterly unclear to us and utterly divorced from the product (Stevenson).

Stevenson’s critique hinges on the claim that the commercial’s message is unclear because its style and celebrity upstage its substance. While it’s true that, as meat marketing goes, this commercial has comparatively high production values, to me its narrative is no less substantial than those of other fast food commercials. The sandwich being advertised here does get plenty of “play” in both word and image, quite a

different approach than the one taken by the subservient chicken website. Ultimately, both commercials utilized similar tactics to provoke positive responses to the notion of consuming their animal-based products. Eating animals is naturalized through its repeated association with normative gender roles, even when the representation of these roles is hyper-sexualized, inaccurate, or fantastic. Furthermore, contemporary advertising does not always have the sale of a particular product as its goal, when an emphasis on branding can effectively encourage patronage in general. Although the strategy at work may have failed to impress the writer for *Slate*, it seems comparable to that of other commercials previously discussed. After all, perpetuating the behaviors that enable the consumption of one's products might, in the long run, be more effective than promoting a single item.

As an argument for meat eating, this commercial employs more imagery and allusion than most; its heterosexual bias seems over-determined and as desperate as the Wendy's commercial is to prove that eating chicken can be just as manly as eating beef. At the Tendercrisp Bacon Cheddar Ranch, each and every image, allusion, and figure of speech attempts to link an appetite for animals as food with a desire for attractive women as sex partners or, less simply, a desire for fetishistic pleasures derived from gazing at representations of women. For the sake of making this process more evident, I have included a brief list (see *Appendix 4.1*) of the correspondence between the lyrics of the song, the image of food, and the image of women.

The absent referent seems to have taken up permanent residence at this particular fantasy ranch. For starters, its effect can be seen in the very first name of the product. The term "Tendercrisp," yet another neologism coined courtesy of commerce, is a

trademarked word that signifies a food in terms of the qualities with which it has been imbued. However, the term also functions synecdochically in that it subsumes the noun that it would ordinarily describe, focusing on the aesthetic aspects of the food and obscuring reference to its animal of origin, the chicken. A similar syntactic as well as visual elision occurs in the first description of the product; when “Hootie” sings the line, “the breasts they grow on trees,” not only is the word chicken left on the slaughterhouse floor, but the chicken parts are left out of the scene completely. The only tree of this variety that viewers are permitted to see compares to those in the enchanted forest that lies along the yellow brick road outside of Oz. So, instead of mere chicken breasts, this animated tree dangles entire Tendercrisp Bacon Cheddar Ranch sandwiches. Its limbs extend themselves toward the camera as the camera zooms in, creating an unearthly sense of movement. Interestingly, the resulting close-up frames not just the fruit of tree, but also the orchard’s sole worker. She is attired in a tight, gingham blouse, which is unbuttoned to reveal substantial portions of the only “breasts” visible in the scene. The orchard worker plucks one of the sandwiches from the “Tendercrisp” tree and, lowering the sandwich to her mouth, her eyes gaze, not at her food, but directly, perhaps even subserviently, at the camera, which zooms ever closer, offering viewers a serving suggestion that is more suggestive than most. The ample bosom of a stereotypical country “girl,” especially one portrayed by a woman whose mature looks suggest that she is well past the age of consent, is sure to garner as much attention amongst a heterosexual male audience as any chicken breast ever could.

Let’s rethink the imagery in this scene. In the absence of chicken breasts ripening

on the bough, we see entire sandwiches, larger than life, dangling like fruit, not meat. There are no chicken breasts to be seen, interned, as they are, in oversized buns and “doctored” with vegetables. To compensate any viewer whose “overactive” imaginations might have inadvertently conjured up mortifying images of bloodied chicken bodies, the scene offers a woman whose physique and scant attire might prove a welcome distraction to most heterosexual men. This visual pun works synecdochially not just for the absent referent, which would be too gruesome to broadcast, but also for the sexy orchard worker, who might just as easily stand-in for the others like her who are implicated in the line, “the breasts they grow on tress.” Figuratively speaking, this means simply that women abound at the ranch and we needn’t think of them as anything more sentient than a boob orchard. Although the commercial is intended to be fantasy, its implications are ordinary. Much like the Wendy’s campaign for chicken salads, the Fantasy Ranch commercial tries to promote its use of chicken instead of cows in their products by capitalizing on predominant gender stereotypes and the objectification of the female body. Nothing new there either.

As Susan Bordo writes, “fantasies are constructed to meet needs that have not or cannot be met.” Typically, the fast food commercial’s primary appeal is to heterosexual male sexuality as evidenced by frequent use of sexual subtexts. In the Tendercrisp Bacon Cheddar Fantasy Ranch commercial, however, each and every reference to food is accompanied by eroticized representations of women, naturalized images of food production, or both. Obviously, chickens, in whole or part, do not grow on trees, orchard workers don’t (usually) look like pin-up girls, rivers don’t run with ranch dressing, and

bacon strips won't roll themselves onto a ranch like so many tumbleweeds. And yet, while viewers are well aware of these "facts," critics who dismiss these "surrealistic" images as needless excess will miss the larger point. Getting people to buy fast food is the easy part. Getting them to modify their prevailing notions about the sexual significance of red meat is slightly more difficult. Whether or not these commercials contradict the actual means by which food is produced, the significance of meat to sexual identity remains constant.

The aesthetics of meat foods and their corresponding lexicon are functions of the dominant dietary paradigm insofar as they focus on qualities that fail to recall animals. Whether juicy, marbled, and Tendercrisp™ or rare, medium, and well-done, these descriptors function euphemistically, recasting the materials in question not as possessed of corporeal qualities, but only of pleasant flavors and textures. This is a classic example of the treatment of animals as absent referents. Carol Adams describes this process as a function of culture:

Animals are made absent through language that renames dead bodies before consumers participate in eating them. Our culture further mystifies the term "meat" with gastronomic language, so we do not conjure dead, butchered animals, but cuisine. Language thus contributes even further to animals' absences. While the cultural meanings of meat and meat eating shift historically, one essential part of meat's meaning is static: One does not eat meat without the death of an animal. Live animals are thus the absent referent in the concept of meat. The absent referent permits us to forget about the animal as an independent entity; it also



**Figure 4.13**



**Figure 4.14**

enables us to resist efforts to make animals present (*The Sexual Politics* 40).

Interestingly, not all meat marketers have avoided representations of animals in their advertisements and many of these campaigns have proven successful. Some companies even include images of animals as part of their corporate identity. In 1951, Hatfield, a major pork producer in Pennsylvania, established the longest lasting of their corporate logos, which incorporated both its name and the image an anthropomorphized

pig, wearing a chef's hat, a bib, and a broad grin (*figure 4.13*). While the smiling cannibalistic pig defies all reason, there is a clear marketing rationale in getting consumers to associate a company's name with the source of its product. The "smiling porker," as Hatfield refers to it, and the expression, "the other white meat" are effective rhetorical devices for distracting us from the inevitable implications of the classic nursery rhyme, "Little Piggy Went To Market." Recently, however, Hatfield changed its logo by ditching the pig in favor of a slickly designed illustration of a sun that adds a touch of color and abstraction to its previously patriotic color scheme (*figure 4.14*). It's a telling change. Hatfield Meats has retreated from anthropomorphism as its primary marketing tool and has opted instead to deploy in its logo the imagery of a bright, yellow, minimalist

line drawing. The rays of this sun, alternately dark and light, recall the furrowed topography of freshly tilled farm fields. Nothing about the new Hatfield logo suggests animals or industry. Not even their logo's text, which currently reads "Hatfield, A Family Tradition of Quality Since



**Figure 4.15**

1895," or the slogan on their homepage, "Share The Goodness" have any specificity about their product or their business. All the consumer needs to know is that the sun always shines on Hatfield. For what purpose, no one can really tell. Half a century ago, it may have seemed more important to associate Hatfield's meat products with representations of the primary ingredient in their products, even if it meant taking a few liberties with verisimilitude. The portrayal of an animal as pleased or even optimistic about its own consumption is a pretty common trope that nonetheless completely contradicts everything most educated people know about sentient life. The old Hatfield logo took this trope even further, giving their smiling mascot an elegant chef's hat, suggesting both his approval and complicity. Today, Hatfield's approach to its logo has none of the black humor of "the smiling porker." Instead, their logo and slogan reiterate all of the seriousness of family, tradition, quality, and goodness – none of which suggest the product in the least.

On their website, Hatfield provides a pictorial timeline of the "evolution" of their branding. The most recent addition to Hatfield's marketing strategies is not a farm animal, or even a farmer, but an ordinary, not-quite middle-aged, Caucasian male, whose name, we are told, is Hank (*figure 4.15*). In various corners of the Hatfield website, Hank,

whose smile is as indelible as Yellow #5, finds himself depicted in a variety of suburban weekend wear, sometimes donning an apron or holding grilling utensils. Preparing, eating, and promoting pork is his life's work. Over half a century, the image of Hatfield's corporate logo has shifted from an anthropomorphized animal to a reified human.

Whereas "the smiling porker's" visage projected the satisfied consumer's emotions onto an illustrated animal's face, Hatfield's Hank character is a direct representation not of the product, but of the consumer. Furthermore, Hank isn't an illustration. His photogenic presence is more "real," and easier, presumably, to identify with than most cartoon animals. Strange as it may seem, Hatfield is no longer selling "the other white meat" as a mere foodstuff. Now, it's a lifestyle.

Finally, meat is not masculine, consuming it is. So the myth goes. Domesticated animals are not masculine per se either, but turning their bodies into human muscle is. Thus, meat has the magic potential to make the consumer more masculine by yielding and transferring its life-sustaining and muscle-making properties to a body that can make the most amount of it. Women may eat meat without fear of becoming unfeminine, of course; but men, if they are to remain real men, must eat it. Of course, all this creophagy throws the sexual identities of those who do not eat meat into question, first, because vegetable-based diets are statistically non-normative, second, because they contradict the dominant dietary paradigm and, third, because choosing vegetable-based foods seemingly rejects or devalues one of the signifiers with which traditional notions of heterosexuality are expressed.

If the eroticized images that accompany advertisements for animal-based



foods (fast or otherwise) promote the perception that a meat-based diet is an essential characteristic of normative sexuality, then the association of non-normative gender roles with other foods makes a subtle claim about their undesirability. Consider this last example: an advertisement for an “SUV” advertised in the June 2002 issue of *This Old House* magazine. Although not intended to sell a specific animal-based food, the ad does make clear the carno-phallogocentric texts that marketers perceive as necessary for attracting the potential consumers in a predominantly male audience. In the ad, a large red vehicle tows a long silver trailer up a steep highway incline on its route to some vague outdoor adventure. At the wheel another version of “Hank” gazes at the road ahead, beside him, a white female passenger sits reading what appears to be a map. Behind them, in the darkened recesses of the backseats, we can see nothing, but clearly there is room enough for a kid, or two, or six. Sound like a good time? If not, perhaps the experience of driving the large, powerful Dodge Durango will make it a tad more gratifying. In any case, the caption to this not-so thrilling scene reads, in bold capitals, which I reduce to plain lower-case here, “It’s a big, fat juicy cheeseburger in a land of tofu” (*figure*



**Figure 4.16**

4.16). Unless this slogan is intended to call the audience’s attention to the gross disparity in terms of nutritional density between these two foods, it would be safe to say that

the marketing of the vehicle depends entirely on taste. The camera angle of this shot has the effect of increasing our sense of the vehicle's size. Although, the vehicle is clearly traveling uphill and the camera is positioned before the vehicle, higher up the hill, the camera angle is low, emphasizing the height of the vehicle. As with most car ads (and many ads in general), this one offers no practical information – such as fuel efficiency or engine type, for example – about the product in question, despite the fact that the ad takes up two-pages, centerfold style. Although gas prices were not as steep in 2002 as they are at the time of this writing (\$2.15/gallon), it is safe to say that miles per gallon are not the strongest selling point in this ad and, if we bother to think of nutritional density (or the ratio of nutrients to calories) as the body's own fuel efficiency, it would be safe to conclude that the Dodge Durango and big, fat, juicy cheeseburgers have much more in common than even the authors of this ad ever suspected.

So far, this has probably seemed a very cranky critique, I know, but hopefully it is not an entirely inaccurate one. Judging from the prevalence and perpetuity of these types of ads, many people, both marketers and consumers alike, often seem oblivious to their non-commercial implications. If it seems that the rhetoric of meat marketing pointed out here is simply typical in most other kinds of advertising as well, we must remember, then, that nothing seriously prevents meat marketers from making an honest case for the consumption of animals; such a case might suggest that their consumption and the means of production that sustain it are ethical and beneficial for animals, people, and the environment. As we are well aware, this case is almost never made. It would be a difficult one to make, even more difficult, perhaps, than selling a “Gay Burger” with

relish. However, to suggest that all Americans assume there is truth in advertising or that consumers slavishly succumb to the urgings of ads, commercials, and product packaging would be an absurd exaggeration. Rather, the point of this critique is only to illustrate the ideological assumptions about animals, diet, and gender evident in such marketing appeals and to explain how each of these assumptions helps various advertisements, commercials, and product packages “make sense” to a general audience, even an audience sophisticated enough to know how easily one can make sense without being especially accurate or correct.

#### **IV. A. 2. Meat Analog Marketing**

From the most commercial to the most academic sources, American culture produces a wide range of dietary information which details a variety of perspectives about the importance that taste, foods, and eating habits have for subjects of food choice. Given the proliferation of many excellent studies being done on nutrition and diet, why would anyone look to advertising and product packaging as sources of valid information? Perhaps no one consciously decides to make dietary decisions on the basis of commercial claims, but the nature of contemporary American culture is such that, short of living under a rock, people simply cannot avoid advertising. The reasons I have chose this subject matter depend first, on its accessibility, or as critic Diane S. Hope calls it, the ubiquity of advertising in everyday life, and, second, on its potential to persuade.

The argument I am making is that vegetarianism and its “extreme” mode, veganism, have been temporarily altered through their commodification in ways that suggest their similarity to the dominant dietary paradigm and, by and large, their inferiority to it. Thus, the attendant aesthetics for products labeled ‘vegan’ obscure the movement’s ethical concerns, because the more consumers feel as if they aren’t eating any differently when consuming products labeled “vegan” or “vegetarian,” the less they are confronted with an aesthetic that challenges presumptions about why people eat the way they traditionally do. Vegans are a remarkably small minority, compared to omnivorous Americans, but products bearing their name are now sold in

many supermarkets nationwide. Suddenly, vegan food is everywhere, though vegans are still scarce enough that meat analogs and their marketing campaigns are likely to be the only contact most people will have with vegan culture. The potential for this single aspect of vegan culture to influence most people's conception of what veganism is or means is much greater than most other aspects and, in turn, it helps to construct a version of vegan identity, whether this version is authentic or not. The marketing tactics for many meat analogue products provide an ironic compliment to the same tactics used for marketing animal-based foods, a compliment that recycles the discourse fragments with which the dominant dietary paradigm is constructed. Specialized terms, neologisms which absent certain referents, anthropomorphism, the suggestion of naturalness, the imagery of idealized modes of production, and appeals to pathos, especially those emotions associated with sexual arousal or anxiety, all contribute to generating interest in and acceptance of vegetable-based foods that seek to displace meat. When meat analogue marketers appropriate the strategies used by marketers of animal-based foods, they inevitably introduce more ambiguity into the question of what kind of diets these foods purportedly represent and, by extension, the kinds of motives people have for following them.

Meat analogues may be appropriated by anyone capable of stomaching the cost, not to mention the concept. They can serve as props in an imitative performance of the dominant dietary paradigm, as a subversion of normative dietary practice, and a subversion of non-normative dietary practice as well. In any case, meat-analog marketers have not only attempted to appropriate the gustatory aspects of meat, but also

the visual and textual rhetoric of meat marketing with great success. Roland Barthes notes this apparent irony in his essay, “Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption.”

In a semantic analysis, vegetarianism, for example (at least at the level of specialized restaurants), would appear as an attempt to copy the appearance of meat dishes by means of a series of artifices that are somewhat similar to costume jewelry in clothing, at least the jewelry that is meant to be seen as such (27).

As Barthes points out, even when this appropriation of meat marketing tactics seems ironic, the parodizing of meat products does not seem to diminish the power of the phallic imagery or, more precisely, carno-phallogocentric imagery as an appeal. Where meat is 24 carat, other foods are mere carrots

However, there is no denying that meat analogs are meaty. They appropriate the color, texture, and taste of animal-based foods as best they can and, their packaging appropriates the packaging styles of meat products and serving suggestions. For almost every kind of meat that can be bought, there is a substitute. The variety is astonishing, especially when we consider that less than twenty years ago most mainstream supermarkets did not carry any meat substitutes, unless we count (the mostly soy-based) “hamburger helpers” designed to prolong the consumer’s supply of red meat.

Unlike the prepackaged additives of yesterday, modern meat analogs are complete retreat from meat. Their packages, however, retain a nostalgia for it and compensate accordingly. Products like the Barbeque Organic Sunshine Burger and



**Figure 4.17**

Stonewall’s Jerquee use imagery of the wild west and cowboys to boost their products machismo (*figures 4.17 & 4.18*).

And just like the branding of cattle, serving suggestions on veggie burger packaging

often emphasize the appearance of sizzling

meat, branded and grilled. For example, Boca Burger’s Vegan

Original cleverly superimposes the word “meatless” as if it

were branded onto the face of its soy-based patty (*figure 4.19*).

Similarly, Garden Burger’s vegan burger package advertises

its “flame grilled” flavor as if it had been carved onto an old

wooden sign (*figure 4.20*).



**Figure 4.18**

The effectiveness and recent success of advertising for these meat analogs indicate that marketing has carved an even more important place for itself in dietary discourse. A Nielsen report in July of 1998 estimated that “vegetarian burgers represent 70 percent of meatless sales, up 57 percent from the previous year” (Bogo).

In particular, the hamburger substitute, Boca Burger, which began a print advertising campaign in 1998, saw its sales double within one year; within that same year, the Boca Burger, a vegetable-based substitute for ground beef patties, suddenly became available in 75% of supermarkets nationwide (Fitzgerald). Similarly, *Gardenburger*, which spent \$1.4 million in 1998 for a thirty-second spot on the final episode of *Seinfeld*, which drew millions of viewers, saw its sales go from \$10 million in 1997 to \$100 million in

1999 (Pollack). These two rival burger brands detail a trend that began in the mid nineties and continues today. Meat analogs are an accepted part of mainstream supermarket culture, even if most people aren't already vegan or vegetarian.



**Figure 4.19**

Although there are no meat analogs or substitutes intended to imitate organ foods of animals, such as brain, kidney, or liver yet, one enterprising company has begun to promote a



**Figure 4.20**

product known as “Hufu.” According to the company’s website, Hufu is an analogue for human flesh or, as the “Eat Hufu” website describes it, a “healthy human flesh alternative” and assures potential customers of its vegan-friendliness. In actuality, it is made mostly of soy beans and processed to give it, as much as “humanly possible, the taste and texture of human flesh. If you’ve never had human flesh before, think of the taste and texture of beef, except a little sweeter in taste and a little softer in texture. Contrary to popular belief, people do not taste like pork or chicken.” The appeal of such a product is not likely to be as widespread as that of other soy-based foods, like veggie burgers, but Hufu has attracted a great deal of attention from various media outlets like *The Daily Show* and dozens of online food forums. A meat substitute for human flesh calls certain ethical and ontological matters into question in a way that neatly illustrates the ambivalence some vegetarians and vegans exhibit toward meat substitutes. For example, if a particular kind of meat is unacceptable for a particular



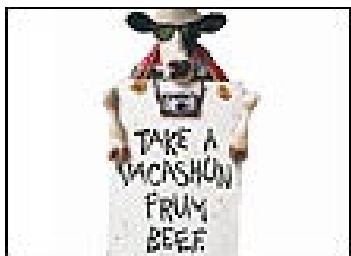
culture, what of its substitute's acceptability? For most people, it is easy to "humanize" the would-be victims of cannibals and to see a justification, even if it is a mocking one, for a product like Hufu, because eating people is not only taboo, but illegal also.

A similar, humanizing tactic has been used for marketing chicken-based fast food by Atlanta, GA's own Chick-Fil-A. The marketing strategy employed by this unique fast-food franchise utilizes anthropomorphism in their company name and logo, the first letter of which, a capital, cursive 'c,' doubles as the head and neck of a yet to be "filleted" chicken that gazes down the length of the word to which it is attached (*figure 4.21*). Apparently, the company chicken is not quite as literate as the company cow. Or perhaps he is merely indifferent to his fate. In either case, this is the typical anthropomorphic ruse – the depiction of animals as accepting, complicit, indifferent,



**Figure 4.21**

or even pleased about their impending consumption. Unlike other marketing campaigns that "humanize" only the animals from which their products are constituted, Chick-Fil-A has also humanized the animals that constitute the foods manufactured by their primary competition. Consequently, it is not uncommon for commuters to glimpse billboards on which anthropomorphized cows appear to be pleading for their very lives by scrawling messages (always in red) like "Eat More Chikin" [sic] and "Take A Vacashun Frum Beef" [sic] (*figures 4.22 & 4.23*). The cows in these billboard advertisements are three-dimensional sculptures, often dressed in human clothing, standing upright, using (written) language, and, making arguments, however rudimentary, against the consumption of ruminants. The company also produces an



**Figure 4.22**



**Figure 4.23**

annual calendar filled with pictorial variations on the theme of the anthropomorphized cows. For example, the 2002 calendar, entitled “Cows To The Extreme” features cows engaged in all the seasonal activities they would undertake if only they were both human and free from the conditions that make their lives short, nasty, and brutish (figure 4.24). Chick-Fil-A’s campaign has been both successful and enduring. According to the company’s website, the company won the kinds of advertising awards and accolades that it would be unwise to lie about having received, like having been voted as having the “Cleverest Billboard Advertisement” of 1998 by readers of the *Atlanta Business Chronicle*. Perhaps more importantly, from both a business and cultural perspective, the company claims that since the campaign debuted in 1995, Chick-Fil-A sales have more than tripled, from just over \$500 million in 1995 to in excess of \$1.975 billion in 2005. The success comes in spite of the somewhat grim subtext of the campaign, escaping slaughter. The association of slaughter and death with fast food apparently does not always spawn widespread aversion to animal-based foods or catalyze empathy for domesticated animals. The cow as well as the chicken who, at least in terms of image politics, is the real loser in this fast food fantasy are no better off in any literal sense as



**Figure 4.24**

a result of this campaign.” Unlike other “innovative” approaches to advertising, such as the Burger King Fantasy Ranch commercial discussed in the previous section, this ad campaign has *not* been criticized for failing to make its product the primary visual focus of its marketing campaigns. The company is not oblivious to this fact; a press release on the company’s website describes the award-winning campaign as the cows’ “desperate, self-preserving antics in an effort to convert beef eaters to chicken fans.” If the Chick-Fil-A billboards succeed where other fast food advertisements have not, perhaps it is because the chick-Fil-A cows allow consumers to imagine that their consumption of chicken sandwiches is not entirely cruel, because it might somehow allow feedlot animals to live freer, more natural lives.

The subtext of the Chick-Fil-A ads and others like them has not been lost on the animal rights organization, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. PETA has attempted to increase consumers’ awareness of animal suffering by equating it with human suffering. Part of PETA’s strategy is to provoke outrage by using images of sex and violence in what many critics consider inappropriate times and places. For several years, PETA has placed full-page, full color advertisements of nude women to promote their cause in a number of popular magazines, often using the slogan “I’d rather go naked than wear fur” (*figure 4.25*) or something akin to it. Their appropriation of “woman as sex object,” the standard visual rhetoric used to lure



**Figure 4.25**

hetero-male audiences, has come as a surprise to many people. The difference in their approach to promotion became apparent when one of their ads (and subsequent real-life imitations of it) equated the objectification of the female body with the objectification of domesticated animals' bodies. This ad, whose caption reads, "All animals have the



**Figure 4.26**

same parts,” depicts a nude woman whose make-up goes beyond the typical standards of fashion modeling to include demarcating those regions of her anatomy that would be analogous to the cuts of meat that a butcher would take from an animal’s body (*figure 4.26*). Although this ad utilizes the very same objectifying techniques that have long been the bane of feminist critics like Andrea Dworkin

and Laura Mulvey, the ensuing controversy over these images has served PETA well. Indeed, controversy often seems to be their goal. Though careful placement of their ads and the timing of their demonstrations, their ads and their message is more widely disseminated. One PETA billboard, for example, competed for the attention of Georgian motorists on a stretch Interstate 85 that passes through southwest Atlanta, GA, alongside the “home of the Atlanta Braves,” Turner Field. For over a month in the Spring of 2002, PETA’s billboard stood high above the interstate, as visible from the stadium as the highway. The largest, boldest text of the billboard seemed to be asking passers-by about their stance on the issue of abortion. “Pro-Life?” the billboard reads. Instead of a photographic image of a human

foetus or a new-born baby, passers by can see an image of a fuzzy, baby chicken emerging from an egg in the midst of other unhatched eggs (*figure 4.27*). Given Atlanta's recent history as the site of an abortion clinic bombing and its historically conservative view of reproductive rights, it would



**Figure 4.27**

not be surprising if such an ad commanded more attention than it would elsewhere (CNN "Blasts"). But, for all the audacity of its placement, what made this advertisement even more interesting was its close proximity to a



**Figure 4.28**

Chick-Fil-A billboard. Perhaps this juxtaposition was ultimately serendipitous, but it was nonetheless arresting. Like its previous incarnations, this Chick-Fil-A billboard featured a pair of anthropomorphized cows promoting the consumption of chicken sandwiches (*figure 4.28*). Among the many unsavory subtexts of this ad campaign are its celebration of a lack of choice for consumers, its fostering of the illusion that eating chicken sandwiches somehow improves conditions for cattle or spares them a visit to the slaughterhouse, and, lastly, its suggestion that there's cause for laughter when (presumably) sentient beings are forced to argue for the right to live, have rights, and not be eaten by a species that has the power to do otherwise.

The anthropomorphism present in meat analog marketing bears a strong resemblance to that utilized by the Hatfield Company to market their pork products.



**Figure 4.29**



**Figure 4.30**



**Figure 4.31**

The “*Un-*” brand of analogs, for example, uses packaging that appropriates a “futuristic” graphic style from the era in which Hatfield’s “smiling porker” was conceived, the 1950s, and the deliberate irony characteristic of more contemporary culture. The effect is uncanny, a kind of retro-nouveau (*figures 4.29, 4.30 & 4.31*). Each of the animals depicted on the *Un-* packages has good reason to be smiling; a quick glance at the ingredients label confirms no body parts or secretions: “Vital wheat gluten, yuba (soybeans, water), nutritional yeast, expeller pressed canola oil, white wine, spices, sea salt.” These ingredients may not seem especially tasty to many consumers, but they are a text, however dull, that underscores the logic of the package’s visual rhetoric.

These anthropomorphized animals, at least, have as much of a plausible reason for smiling as consumers do.

At its most antagonistic, the vegetarian and vegan discourse found in analog marketing appropriates the tactics of its competition. In commercial advertising, this antagonism is subtly understated. The visual rhetoric evident in some product packaging seeks to reverse the rhetoric of animal-based food marketing. The myth of a “naturalized” relationship between people and the origin of their foods is debunked. Often the effect of these packages is to rearticulate the dominant dietary paradigm

as an unethical, unhealthy, and unexamined regime. Insofar as it attempts to raise consciousness about animal rights and animal welfare, vegetarian discourse often attempts to reveal the systems by which animals transformed as commodities and the degree to which animals suffering is both like human suffering and, ultimately, avoidable, undesirable, and non-essential. However, foods marketed as alternatives to animal-based foods have recently drawn more than contempt from the industries whose products they imitate. Lawsuits against analog companies are nothing new. They have been filed by the manufacturers whose products are being imitated or threatened by competition. In 1963, for example, Hormel Foods, the manufacturer of “Spam,” the infamous canned meat product, sued Worthington Food Inc. because Hormel claimed that the Worthington was infringing upon their trademark by marketing a frozen imitation pork product called “Wham” (*figure 4.32*), despite the fact that it was neither meat, in the narrower sense, nor



**Figure 4.32**

canned. The suit was later dropped when James Hagle, the treasurer at Worthington, responding to his plaintiffs in person. Hagle claimed that if Hormel pursued the suit he would simply change the name by turning it upside down. In a gesture that recalled the wordplay that gave powdered milk the brand name “KLIM” during WWII, Hagle wrote the word on a pad, and demonstrated his point. Thus, it would read “waym” and, presumably, be the beginning of yet another costly and pointless lawsuit. The suit was subsequently dropped, (Worthington) and both products still occupy shelf space in their respective corners of the supermarket today.



As new foods enter the marketplace and create new possibilities for the subject of food choice, they become potent signs for the reproduction or revision of extant dietary paradigms. One aspect of meat advertising is that it often utilizes images of vegetables or other plants, and, by literally pushing these images to the margins, they serve, not as food, but as a background or scenery that enhances the ‘natural’ and ‘fresh’ qualities of the food in question, further distancing us from the unnatural and unpleasant facts about how animals become food and how poor the average American’s diet becomes when meat is perceived as essential to satiety and nutrition. Somewhat ironically, this same trope frequently accompanies the packaging of meat analogs, as a reminder of the kinds of foods for which they have been substituted. Additionally, this trope performs another task in the service of carno-phallogocentric ideology: the role of vegetables where meat is concerned is always a diminished, yet important one. Vegetables are always presented as “side items,” in lesser quantities, and are usually off-center, pushed to the margins to make way for more meaty imagery. However, in most serving suggestions, and even supermarket display cases, vegetables proximity to meat assists the viewer in recognizing the appetizing aspects of the image, its apparent freshness and naturalness, and the vividness of its color, instead of less appetizing associations.

Some analogs are not meaty at all, but milky or cheesy instead. While non-dairy products, like creamers, margarine, and “cool whip” have been in the marketplace since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, they did not encounter the same kind of resistance from both consumers and other marketers that milk and cheese substitutes met when they



started to go mainstream in the late 1990s. In 1996, Silk became the first refrigerated soymilk to be both mass-produced and sold in the same tall cardboard cartons that milk is sold in. It is easy to imagine shoppers mistaking Silk for a carton of cow's milk, at a distance, or becoming curious about whether soymilk is an acceptable substitute for cow's milk simply because the packages are similar. Prior to Silk's arrival in supermarkets, most varieties of soymilk were sold unrefrigerated, packaged in small, quart-sized boxes that seldom found their way out of health food stores into larger markets due to the high cost of "slotting fees" that national franchises typically charge for producers for shelf space. In the case of Silk, however, the most powerful rhetoric from a competitor's point of view has little to do with nutrition and everything to do with product placement and packaging. Demos, decided that consumer's reluctance to try soymilk was linked more to their uncertainty about what it was than how it tastes. To disarm both their prejudices, Demos used the front panel of the carton as an opportunity to provide a serving suggestion that consumers might not have arrived at if he'd left it to their own imaginations. The current carton's serving suggestion depicts a white wave of soymilk splashing into a cereal bowl (*figure 4.33*). According to Demos, marketing consultants discouraged him from using the image: "They said, 'You're limiting your marketing opportunity.' I said, 'Don't worry. I trust their intelligence -- they'll find the glass'" (Greco). Following that decision, Silk soymilk, much to the dairy industry's dismay, became very successful and was the first soymilk to be carried nationally,



**Figure 4.33**

courtesy of Kroger supermarkets.

One of the most interesting conflicts in the annals of analog legal history involves a trade complaint filed with the FDA by the National Milk Producers Federation against the White Wave company, who makes Silk, for their alleged misuse of the term ‘milk.’ The plaintiffs claimed that the term was their proprietary right because it refers only to milk from animal sources, obviously, cow’s milk. As Robert Byrne, the NMPF’s Vice President of Regulatory affairs, writes, upon his registering of a trade complaint with the FDA:

NMPF believes that these soy-based beverage products are, at best, imitations or substitutes, as defined in 21 CFR 101.3 (e) and must be prominently labeled as such if they are to continue to use the term “milk” as part of the fanciful name for the products. NMPF believes that the true common or usual name for these products is “Soy beverage” or “Soya drink”, since they have traditionally been marketed as such, and, in fact, many firms continue to do so (USDA/DHSS *Docket*).

The trade complaint seems specious for some very basic reasons. First, other brands of soymilk have been using the term “milk” for decades. Also, other non-soy-based foods that use the term have been widely available for many years – coconut milk, almond milk, milk of magnesia, and mother’s milk tea, for example. Furthermore, the term “milk” has been in the English language since the Middle period and has always had multiple shades of meaning both literal and metaphoric. To its credit, the FDA dismissed the complaint and, accordingly, White Wave won the right for its soymilk to share shelf space with cow’s milk in the refrigerated section where another possible

reason for the lawsuit seems more evident. When the FDA in 1999 gave soy milk manufacturers permission to post heart-healthy statements about soy on their products if they conformed to certain nutrient requirements, the soy milk market began booming. Silk's annual sales jumped from \$10 million in 1999 to \$194.7 million in 2002 (Van Der Pool).

The market phenomena of meat analogs and substitutes suggest that mainstream consumer culture is beginning to accept that vegetable-based diets can be healthy, but remains stuck on the idea that meals that lack meat should at least taste like it. According to Robert Seymore, Nutrition Department Manager at the *Ansley Kroger* supermarket in Atlanta, GA, whom I interviewed in April of 2000, the supermarket's fastest growing department is the Nutrition Section. Just past the in-store pharmacy and florist, a dozen aisles hold an "alternate reality" of canned, dried, frozen, and refrigerated foods marketed to health conscious consumers. From December 1999 to March 2000, sales in the Kroger Nutrition Department increased from \$15,000 per week to \$22,000 per week. Seymore attributes this increase in part to the wide variety and availability of "meat substitutes" like veggie burgers and not-dogs. As one critic has noted, these "meat substitutes" are likely to appeal to vegetarian and vegan diets alike, but they appear to be marketed to the omnivorous consumer who has become adept at the ability "to dissociate [...] concerns for the live animal from the item on [his or her] plate [...] easy to achieve with processed food that has no physical resemblance to its original state" (Lacey 142). Except for an item commercially known as "Tofurkey," most substitutes and analogs are not shaped like the imitated

animal's body parts. Instead, the majority are packaged, processed, and advertised so that they resemble processed animal-derived foods. As one might guess, this is not always what vegans and vegetarians really want in terms of their food's taste, texture, and appearance (146). However, mainstream supermarket selections are largely limited to these kinds of products, analogs and substitutes, whereas foods that bear no resemblance to meat and can be processed locally, like tofu, tempeh, and seitan, are kept in comparatively short supply and are almost never available fresh as they have been in Asian countries for centuries.

While this market phenomena alone might not appear to lead directly to a weakening or pejoration of the terms “vegan” or “vegetarian”, the growing number of products which include these terms as part of their name imply that the vegan and vegetarian aesthetics of food are identical to the omnivorous aesthetics. *Table IV A2* contains a list of product names for meat substitutes commonly sold at Kroger supermarkets and groceries specializing in “health foods.” Some of these are neologisms that allude to meat through figurative or homophonic language; others are not as playful and simply state which animal-based food they are meant to resemble.

It should come as no surprise that the terms “vegetarianism” and “industrialism” were coined in the same era. The narrowing and broadening of the terms “meat” and “vegetarian” or “vegan” over the past two hundred years indicate the deleterious effect that carnivorous culture has had on terminologies that challenge the dominant dietary paradigm. To challenge that paradigm and its foodways is to challenge the powerful and profitable industry that supports and supplies them. Presently, the food industry's

introduction of vegetable-based foods that resemble animal-derived foods seems to capitalize on the cachet that vegetarianism and veganism have gained from their being “mainstreamed” by sources that Americans recognize, if grudgingly, as authoritative – the American Dietetic Association, the American Medical Association, and the Department of Health and Human Sciences. Gaining the approval of these agencies is essential to entering into the larger discourse of diet and, by extension, in the discursive practices of those who have access to it. A recent study summarizes the correspondence between income and shifting dietary patterns:

Household income positively influenced consumers’ preferences toward more meatless meals and less red meat. Increases in household income had positive marginal effects on the probabilities for other categories such as “somewhat agree” and “strongly agree” for more meatless meals and less red meat. That is, each \$10,000 increase in annual household income increased the probability that respondents’ “strongly agreed” they were eating more meatless meals and less red meat by 1.4 and 12 percent. The marginal effect is more impressive for less red meat than it is for meatless meals (Rimal).

So, when the marketers of meat analogs and substitutes appropriate terms like vegetarian and vegan for the sake of promoting foods that are meaty in taste, texture, or appearance, the terms that once denoted exclusively herbivorous foodways are more likely to become further dissociated from the ethical concerns many vegetarians and vegans originally expressed about the industrialized production, slaughter, and consumption of animals. Because the juxtaposition of words and images in meat analog

marketing equates vegetarian and vegan tastes with flavors traditionally found in the cooked body parts of animals, it should not seem unreasonable to suggest that the ethics of both vegetarians and vegans have been effectively, if temporarily, suppressed. And yet, the dominant dietary paradigm does appear to have entered an era of flux where meat is concerned. Americans eat less red meat now than they have in fifty years, yet their total consumption of meat remains as high as it has ever been. The sudden successes of meat analog and soy milk marketing in most supermarkets, and the success of the soybean, in carving out a place for itself in an hitherto unyielding food pyramid, all point to the emergence of a new strand of dietary discourse in American culture.

## **IV B. Intertextual Analysis Dietary Discourse**

This section describes the context or the rhetorical situation in which marketing images appear, specifically the way in which vegetarian or vegan diets are represented by articles, editorials, and images that accompany the periodicals in which meat analog marketers advertise their products.

### **IV. B.1 Dietary Discourse in Popular Publications**

“Magic is always an unsuccessful attempt to provide meanings and values, but it is often very difficult to distinguish magic from genuine knowledge and from art. The belief that high consumption is a high standard of living is a general belief of society. The conversion of numerous objects into sources of sexual or pre-sexual satisfaction is evidently not only a process in the minds of advertisers, but also a deep and general confusion in which much energy is locked” -- Raymond Williams, “Advertising, The Magic System” (quoted in Marris 464).

When looking at food products and their packaging in isolation, it is difficult to say that they make any claim at all about the identity of consumers, let alone the gender of those consumers. Only if one accepts that meat and vegetables are historically intertwined with the construction of gender through dietary regimes do these commercial texts seem to convey information about identity. The way in which this notion about the interrelatedness of gender and diet is structure accounts, in part, for the success of meat marketing in general and fast food marketing in particular. Masculinity and femininity are constructed, in part, by the relationships that men and women have with food. Seldom do commercials declarative claims about this issue. Rather, the implications for gender with regard to meat are contextual in most

advertisements. In many instances, which I will subsequently demonstrate, men are not even in the picture. When they are in the picture, they are often the beneficiaries not only of the advertised product, but also of the implicit care of the woman who purchased, prepared, or served it. The underlying text, the masculine meat myth, tirelessly continues its work even in ads for meat analogs. The ideological function of this myth is enculturation, turning individuals into subjects of food choices that support extant dietary regimes.

As discussed in the previous section, heterosexual men are typically represented in commercials as needing or desirous of meat, and, while women may eat meat too, their sexual status is not transformed by this act of consumption, because it has been normalized by patriarchy. The perceived role for females as objects of male desire is what most distinguishes them from men and links them with meat, as sisters, in a sense. Furthermore, this gender difference is usually represented as a natural, uncontested, taken-for-granted matter. One of the stereotypical concepts evident in meat marketing that comes through strongly in advertisements for meat analogs is that women's relationship with food is different than men's. The stakes for women are different with meat analogs, however, because serving meals without meat challenges essential assumptions about the dominant dietary paradigm as well as hetero-masculinity.

This conception of vegetarianism is embedded in a branch of dietary discourse that incorporates magazines concerned with women's health, fitness, and beauty that determine, to a large extent, the meanings of specific foodstuffs and their consumption. Ads that depict the act of ritual of consumption, in either the commercial



or gustatory sense of the term, its representation becomes conspicuous in itself, such that consumers do need to be “caught in the act” of consumption for that act to be a conspicuous one. Advertising provides consumers with a plethora of imagery with which to identify lifestyles, circumstances, and other conspicuities preferable to those consumers actually possess. Commercials and advertisements create an opportunity for consumers to project or to imagine themselves taking part in specific consumer events. Consequently, the act of shopping, selecting, buying and using products allows consumers an opportunity to recall that ready-made projection of themselves and to imagine that the gratifying images previous supplied by advertising have now become an intrinsic part of their own otherwise ordinary lives. This process, which implicates the individual in a commercial fantasy, illustrates Althusser’s definition of ideology: “the imaginary relationship of individuals to the real conditions of their existence.” In a culture whose foodways are steeped in meat, vegetarian diets contradict the dominant discourse. Following the typical argument offered by almost every subaltern group, the contradiction or challenge must be rebutted, squelched, settled if the dominant paradigms and the lucrative industries that depend on them are to be maintain stability. Nonetheless, vegetarianism and veganism are two practices whose potential threat to culture seems diminished by the relatively small percentage of people who identify themselves as such.

Although recent statistics show that vegetarianism and veganism appear to be on the rise in the U.S., representations of vegans and other dietary deviants are usually few and far between. Estimates range between 3 and 12 million vegetarians in the

U.S. A Zogby poll commissioned in 2000 by Vegetarian Resource Group, estimates that 2.5 percent of Americans are vegetarians, an increase of nearly 1.5 percent since 1997 and that the split between male and female vegans is about equal, while twice as many women are vegetarian as men (Fetto). They are certainly less familiar to us than representations of identities based solely on class, ethnicity, gender, occupation, etc. Products that are marketed as staples or compliments to these diets naturally present them as positive, health inducing and good tasting. As veganism and vegetarianism become more pervasive in American culture, mass media tends to allude to these practices more frequently with varying degrees of condescension.

Let's have another look at the demographics of the vegetarian and vegan subculture in the United States. If meat is men's food, if more women than men are willing to have meatless meals, and if the number of female vegetarians is double that of men, then why do product designers and marketers feel compelled to create meat analogs that are analogous aesthetically? It would seem that women do not need to be convinced as much as men, but those who do need persuading are as likely as men to value the taste of meat. Here, it is important to recall that the discourse of diet is, like all discourses, a means of channeling desire, of making appetites profitable for those who would prefer that people eat in established and predictable ways. Predictable regimes are profitable, or functional from a capitalist point of view, for many reasons; obviously, because they help to regulate production of foodstuffs, to make food industries more efficient, and to create concomitant industries, but they are also profitable because these regimes produce particular types of bodies whose

relative health and longevity can be accounted for by actuaries, accountants, employers, insurance salesmen, physicians, pharmacists, and undertakers.

Advertisements are one of the most influential ways that culture represents ideological predispositions; they are inter-discursive, in that they reiterate, rebut, or revise aspects of larger discourses, in this case, normative and non-normative dietary practices such as veganism, and vegetarianism. In her essay “Gendered Environments: Gender and the Natural World in the Rhetoric of Advertising” (in Hill & Helmers *Defining Visual Rhetoric*), Diane S. Hope argues:

When image based advertising complicates images of nature with gender narratives, a rhetoric of gendered environments works to obscure the connections between environmental degradation and consumption. Advertisements that combine images of nature with narratives of gender offer consumers visualizations that cloak the impact of consumption on the environment with essentialist fantasies of masculinity or femininity (156).

Representations of vegan culture in mass market advertising relies upon several gender assumptions. Of these typologies, *a few* point specifically to gendered characteristics. Needless to say, masculinity and femininity are constructed, in part, by the relationships that men and women have with food. As new foods and diets enter the realm of possibility for subjects of food choice they become potent signs for reproducing or revising extant dietary paradigms. When advertisers use traditional tactics to advertise foods for non-traditional diets, their ads, their products, and the potential acts of conspicuous consumption they create can become potent signs not

only for the revision of dietary paradigms, but also for the revision of paradigmatic gender roles. It seems absurd to think that one's gender should be linked to diet in a way that is entirely unrelated nutrition and health, but this is evidently the case. Carol Adams reminds us:

Men who become vegetarians challenge and essential part of the masculine role. They are opting for women's food. How dare they? Refusing meat mean a man is effeminate, a "sissy," a "fruit." Indeed, in 1836, the response to the vegetarian regimen of the day, known as Grahamism, charged that "emasculatation is the first fruit of Grahamism" ("The Sexual Politics of Meat" 38).

This 19<sup>th</sup> century attitude prevails today as well. Recently, for example, a Brazilian-style Churrascaria restaurant called the Samba Grill, where meat is barbecued on a spit, has been advertising in a Salt Lake City newspaper, promoting its meaty fare with pictures of its roasted, impaled meats lined up side by side like actor's headshots in a "shoot 'em up." The ad makes simple declaration, "Vegetarians are pussies!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! [sic]" (*figure 4.34*). What more can one say?

Inevitably, meat analogs are intertwined with the discourse of meat. Those who eat these foods or who are presumed to eat them become intertwined with the gender stereotypes that have evolved in a carno-phallogocentric culture. Of these typologies, *a few* point specifically to gendered characteristics. The campaigns and

packaging for frozen and canned meat foods, such as **Figure 4.34**



*HungryMan*, *Manwich*, and *Manhandler*, and the television commercials that feature professional athletes from the National Football League who champion meaty foods are innumerable. But, at the time of this writing, there has yet to be an ad campaign that features professional football players spooning up big bowls of miso soup at halftime or bikini-clad supermodels wolfing down veggieburgers. Carol Adams, in *Living Among Meateaters*, claims that the guiding principles in the sexual politics of meat at that meat is manly and vegetables are feminine. The effect of these principles is to create a number of stereotypes about vegetarians that emphasize attitudes that are generally regarded as effeminate or undesirable:

Both the words “men” and “meat” have undergone lexicographical narrowing. Originally generic terms, they are now closely associated with their specific referents. Meat no longer means all foods; the word *man*, we realize, no longer includes women. [...] A complete reversal has occurred in the definition of the word vegetable. Whereas its original sense was to be lively, active, it is now viewed as dull, monotonous, passive. To vegetate is to lead a passive existence; just as to be feminine is to lead a passive existence. Once vegetables are viewed as women’s food, then by association they become viewed as feminine (36).

While the placement of meat substitutes in women’s health magazines and *Vegetarian Times* is an implicit acknowledgement that the sexual politics of meat (and vegetables) still carry a lot of currency in American culture, they also suggest the potential for a radically different politics. Insofar as men *are* implicated by the ads that appear in such publications, their role in advertisements as passive recipients of women’s nurturing



**Figure 4.35**



**Figure 4.36**

and care has an important significance to the larger discourse. The fact is, as these ads suggest, some men are willing to try meatless meals. Furthermore, when they are represented as heterosexual, monogamous, and “family-oriented” men, the suggestion is that carno-phallogocentrism can be revised at an infrastructural level. If fathers and husbands can be vegetarian or, gasp, even vegan, then the potential for entire families to follow such a diet is more easily realized. Such ads have some serious implications for the sexual politics of meat because they not only suggests that men can go meatless, but also that vegetarian and vegan men are not necessarily gay, queer, or effeminate, and that, for all appearances, they have normative sexual relation with women. I’m not suggesting that male vegetarians and vegans should breed themselves into predominance, but, more simply, that the marketplace in trying to capitalize on a strange “new” foodway has inadvertently created a new stereotype: the vegetarian patriarch. Accordingly, they have also created products for vegetarian kids. One such product, *The Good Lunch*, advertised in vegetarian magazines, depicts vegetarian kids, one boy and one girl, whose happy, white, cartoon faces proclaim their love for the flavor of the product and whose happiness is the result of adding all the components of the “good lunch” together (*figure 4.35 & 4.36*). One the back of the package, a cartoon mother hawks the goods: “From taste to nourishment



**Figure 4.37**



**Figure 4.38**

– it’s all good! Give your kids something to munch on – it’s convenient for you and tasty for them!”

Similarly, the Silk Ads that appeared opposite the editorial page of *Vegetarian Times* for several months in 2001, convey not only the impression that vegetarian-friendly foods are of interest mostly to women, but also that women have a special connection to earthly matters. *Vegetarian Times* has brought vegetarian issues to a popular audience for several decades. A review of the kinds of articles about vegetarianism and veganism that appear in *Vegetarian Times* and similar magazines reveals popular cultural assumptions about the motives of women who not only choose not to eat meat, but who also purchase meat substitutes and analogs.

The editorial page always features the writing of a

female editor who shares with readers her opinions on topics from the most mundane magazine matters, like changing offices, to planning menus. The editorial page is always accompanied by photos of the contributing female editors and staff: attractive women who appear to be in their prime. The repeated juxtaposition of the editorial page with Silk advertisements would seem to imply that Silk’s ad gains women’s attention by floating their concerns about feminism and ecology on the surface a soymilk ocean

– all neatly contained in a cereal bowl. In one ad, bits of (un-presweetened) cereal form the symbol for female while floating on the pure white surface of soymilk; the caption reads, “It’s one of those soy meets girl love stories” (figure 4.37). In another soymilk ad, the bits of cereal form the shape of a world map and instructs the viewer to, “Think Globally. Spoon Locally”

(figure 4.38). Although representations of women in *Vegetarian Times* sometimes include the single woman whose pursuit of a career, a fit body, and a unique vegetable-based diet are signs of her independence, strength, and ethical stance, these kinds of representations are more likely to turn up in a magazine like *Health*, in which the ads depict women trying soy foods for the first time, comparing it to the first kiss, or gazing down the length of a soy weiner and



**Figure 4.39**



**Figure 4.40**

out of the margins of the ad at a new love interest perhaps (figure 4.39 & 4.40).

Usually, ads for meat analogs in *Vegetarian Times* are more likely to include women who are married or striving to be married and who make dietary choices for both themselves and their loved ones. Many of these ads also have deception as their subtext (figures 4.41, 4.42 & 4.43). Of course, not everyone is wowed by meat analogs' verisimilitude. Few taste-tests indicated that test subjects were “fooled” into substitute





Figure 4.41

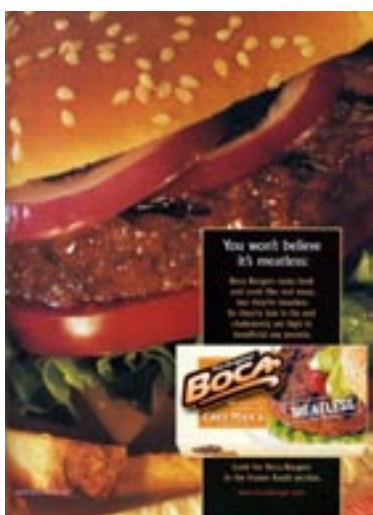


Figure 4.42



Figure 4.43

analogues for animals. But being fooled, ultimately, is not the point. Whether analogues and substitutes taste like meat or not, their very presence in the marketplace suggests that meat can indeed be replaced. What marketers must try to convince people is not that analogues replicate all the desirable traits of animal-based food and avoid all the undesirable ones, but, more importantly, to convince consumers to change their purchasing habits long enough to try analogues and to make them part of their regular dietary regimes.

## V. A. Findings

The belief that people's taste buds have guided them to foods that are nutritionally complete is one of the more gross misunderstandings of recent dietary history. At the very end of the conclusion to his oft-quoted, widely discredited critique of eating culture, *Good To Eat*, anthropologist Marvin Harris writes:

With the rise of transnational corporations that produce and sell food on the world market, our foodways are being constrained by an ever more precise but one-sided form of cost-benefit reckoning. To an increasing extent what is good to eat is good to sell. [...] The cost in terms of obesity and cardiovascular disorders have already led to a widening aversion to high-fat, high-cholesterol animal foods. Neither over-nutrition nor the reaction it has produced can be understood apart from the complex interaction of practical restraints and opportunities with their different and often inversely related bottom lines for consumers, farmers, politicians, and corporations. As I pointed out [...], optimization is not optimization for everybody. That is why *this is not the moment in history to advance the idea that foodways are dominated by arbitrary symbols* [my emphasis]. To eat better we must know more about the practical causes and consequences of our changing foodways. We must know more about food as nourishment, and we must know more about food as profit. Only then we will really be able to know food as thought (248).

Harris wrote the above passage more than twenty years ago and, although his

observation that the food industry influences food choice seems as prescient as ever, it seems odd that Harris, an avowed optimization theorist, would discourage further attempts to understand the arbitrary, symbolic nature of foodways, if, as he seems to believe, food choice is constrained, rather than enabled by industries. Earlier in the conclusion, he writes, “If we do not understand the causes of existing systems, it seems unlikely that we can devise better systems to replace them” (235). While I agree that understanding changing foodways is dependant, in part, on an awareness of the available resources as well as their nourishing potential, I believe Harris would unnecessarily limit our understanding of foodways by putting off until later the advancement of “the idea that foodways are dominated by arbitrary symbols.” In evolutionary terms, it is only a recent event that humankind’s food supply has become saturated and that so many people have access to so many varieties of foods year-round. While it the survival of many peoples in undeveloped nations depends on others hastening to find ways of utilizing their unprecedented plentitude to the benefit of all, our ability to make such beneficent progress depends upon the distinction between a notion of social reality as prescribed by natural, biological imperatives or a notion of social reality as constructed by symbols, language, and signs. In my view, it is only by interrogating the symbols that construct our identities that the possibility for personal and social change remains open. Without an understanding of the symbolic power of food to subjects of food choice, our everyday lives are drawn further from realities that sustain them. The discourse of diet is fat with information about “food as nourishment,” and the fact that food is profitable could not be more obvious for, at the time of this

writing, the local McDonald's sign indicates that there have been simply too many billions of hamburgers served to merit specifying a number and so it simply states, "billions and billions served."

Harris' anthropological perspective puts an undue faith in humankind's ability to optimize the benefits and reduce the costs of foodways and, perhaps, prior to the agricultural revolution, there is some merit in the belief that eating culture evolves because those who eat best live longest, but, if this was once the case, it is no longer. The contemporary subject of food choice is an alienated and de-centered subject. For him, food does not grow on trees and water does not trickle from a spring any more than billboards advertised yams and woolly mammoths for prehistoric hunter-gatherers. The majority of our food choices today are always already made by forces that often have little to do with food's nutrient density. It is not through natural selection or an inherent optimization gene in human beings that the American diet, in the most heterogenous sense, has become dangerous to our bodies and our environment. On the contrary, marketers and industries have much more influence over the contents of the American meal than our "natural predispositions," whatever they may be. Today, Americans are fatter, if not healthier, than they were ten, twenty, thirty, and forty years ago. The amount of quality dietary discourse available to them, like the nation's average waistline, has only gotten greater in size and quality. Yet, the symbolism of food, the meanings it conveys upon our identities, and the choices it inspires people to make are no less powerful for its having been ignored. I believe that this is precisely the time to undertake what Harris discouraged us from doing two short decades ago.

What makes advertisements so valuable as data for discourse analysis is that, despite their inevitable inaccuracy, particular representations are reflective of the ideology that makes them understandable, credible, and even familiar to particular audiences. Representations, images, and allusions can assist discourse analysts in answering the questions, “Who is supposed to buy this?” and “Why?” The conspicuous consumption of particular foods serves as an example of the way that people can identify themselves and others as participants in constructing a discourse of diet. Dietary discourse is the primary means by which most societies produce bodies fit for social activities specific to their culture. Obviously, these activities are often in conflict with one another. It lends itself to inquiries about the symbolism of food choice and diet, the ideologies that invest food and diet with symbolic value, and the rhetorical practices that convey these values.

The question of what it means to be vegan and what the term “vegan” means are as problematic as any other question that conflates identity with etymology. To be able to find the answer or answers by looking up the word in the *OED* would be convenient, but the definitions we would find there are too prescriptive to be entirely descriptive. We might look instead to interviews with self-identified vegans or read the position statements of groups like the Vegan Society or People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, who advocate, among other consumer and activist practices, eating nothing but fruits and vegetables. But, understanding veganism, both as signifier and signified, requires an understanding of the discourse in and through which it exists, a discourse which is seldom consistent or uncontested. Veganism, after all, is not only

a social movement comprised of individuals, but also a sign, or term, embedded in and embodied by texts, whose significance is always a little unstable, depending, as it does, upon the interpretations of people who regard those texts as credible sources of information about diet.

The “image” of vegans is a political issue because it affects consumption, bodies, and economies. Their image is not only a visual representation, nor solely a marketing image, but it is also incorporated into what we may call those “discursive structures” that “constitute and organize social relations and result from articulatory practices” (DeLuca 37). This notion of Articulation, as explained by describes the way in which various “ideographs” become linked and, in turn, create an association that alters their perceived identity. Articulation includes not only speech acts, but “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified. [...] The practice of articulation, therefore, consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning” (Laclau and Mouffe, quoted in Deluca 38). By labeling products and characters as ‘vegan,’ advertisers and media outlets give consumers and audiences more than a new word. In naming something or someone ‘vegan,’ they forge an association between a varied and diverse practice and a limited number of representations. This is an articulation. If foods and commodities, as well as characters in television programs and advertisements, are labeled ‘vegan,’ then this labeling creates not only an appropriable object of desire, but also a new means by which audiences and consumers can either portray an identity or identify a portrayal. Thus, articulations, even if they are inaccurate or incorrect, affect not only those discourses of

which they are a part, but also the identities of those who subscribe to those discourses.

Changes in food habits often seem to reveal the interdependence of broader social changes in a more conspicuous way than most other cultural phenomena. Consider the way that diet is portrayed in a recent commercial. This 30-second spot is not for a brand of tofu, but for a T-mobile cellular telephone text messaging service. In it, a young white male on his way to a blind dinner date. He's "texting" both the young woman he's going to meet and a friend whom he's keeping informed about the evening's events. After receiving a message from the woman about where to meet for dinner, the young man "texts" a question to his friend. "What's a vegan?" the message reads. When the young man arrives for his date at the appointed restaurant, he sits down at the table and receives his friend's reply: "Does she have horns?" What that response means is anyone's guess, but mine is that the friend is implying that the woman is an alien or an animal or a mythical creature of dungeons and dragons fare. The commercial ends with a close up of the young woman at the table. She is smiling, she is beautiful, she has no horns, and she's quick with a keypad. So, that's a vegan for you. Fade to black. Obviously, the commercial is making direct appeals to a young audience, one familiar with the latest technology, new courtship rituals, and new types of cuisine. As a narrative, this commercial portrays its protagonist as a person with a handle on friendship, dating, and great phone service, but he is missing something. He lacks knowledge, knowledge that only technology can supplement, knowledge that will help him have a successful date. The rhetorical question offered by his friend via text message – "Does she have horns?" – is meant as a joke, but, for the commercial's

audience, that joke will only be funny if they have some idea of what a vegan probably is. My guess is that most Americans don't. Our commercial's hero is about to learn something about this woman and the strange food she eats, the details of which may be texted in the not too distant future, or so this commercial would have us believe.

Among the most conspicuous aspects of meat analog marketing is the predominance of meaty imagery over other qualities of animal-based that analogs might replicate such as its nutrient density or compatibility with other kinds of foods. Manufacturers of traditional animal-based foodstuffs, like Dean Foods and Kraft, have countered the ill-effects that a boycott of animal foods might cause. In those cases, vegan and vegetarian consumers politics are more re-visionary than revolutionary, because the boycott implied by vegetarian and vegan diets does not result in reduced profits, but diminishes losses and reduces competition. In many other cases, such as those of Silk soymilk and Boca Burgers, the products, when combined with mass marketing, proved to have higher profit margins than traditional foods, because they were able to reach a previously untapped niche market. This market, as marketers soon discovered, included not simply effeminate pretty boys and butch eco-feminists, as some stereotypes might have lead us to believe, but a cross-cultural consumer base. In the case of soymilk, marketers found that their niche was a nexus, inadvertently catering to the dietary practices of various religious denominations, ethicists, fitness enthusiasts, and many Asians, African-American Americans, and Hispanics who often experience lactose intolerance as adults.



Representations of various sub-cultural practices and practitioners must appeal to the curious as well as to those who identify with or against the subculture in question. In general, fictitious portrayals provide a typology by which audiences can identify actual certain kinds of consumers without ever having to meet them. What follows that moment of recognition makes all the difference in the world. Because recognition enables us to be considerate and appreciative and because such states of mind can help us develop the kind of familiarity that can turn otherwise indifferent passers-by into members of a supportive community, it is important that those of us who learn about others primarily through representations through mass media also maintain a degree of skepticism about the implications of those representations.

After all, it would be presumptuous to characterize dietary choices people make as strictly rational, logical, or instinctual, knowing as we do the importance of tradition, ritual, and health as factors that influence consumers of food choices. Very few people possess the kind of nutritional education necessary to evaluate the efficacy of their own diets. How many Americans, for example, know how many grams of that precious nutrient, protein, they should eat every day? It suffices to say that the number is small. Without knowledge of these kinds of nutritional facts, however, it is impossible for people to evaluate their diets, the relative importance of meat to their health, or the suitability of vegetable-based proteins as a substitute for meat. Why then should we expect marketers of meat analogs to be rational in making the case for consuming their products? It is my hope that the preceding critique makes clear that we should not rely on marketing images for credible information about food (or anything else) and that

marketers are unlikely to ever provide such information given the constraints of limited time, space, and literate audiences. But then, why provide information at all, when redeploing age-old appeals to pathos with the occasional bit of ethos on the side still works wonders.

### **V. B. Short Comings**

This study does not look at the marketing of meat analogs diachronically. Such a perspective might allow us to see whether these marketing campaigns are developing in response to the success or failure of particular rhetorical strategies. Tracking such a development might reveal the effectiveness of particular marketing strategies with a given audience over longer periods of time than discussed here. Marketers, for example, would find it especially valuable to know which is the more effective rhetorical strategy for a given demographic, and how to characterizing meat analogs best. As flawless substitutes? As superior nutrition? As good for the planet, or just good to eat?

Also, this study doesn't attempt to undertake the daunting task of measuring whether the marketing of meat analogs has had any real effect on attitudes toward vegetarian or vegan diets. The critique I offer about gender with respect to diet is based solely on the kind of masculinity and femininity *implied* by the discourse fragments which structure the meat and meat-analog marketing campaigns in question. While first-hand accounts of actual consumers of those products would certainly shed light on customer's conscious impulses and aversions to commercials, ads, packages and their visual rhetoric, I feel it is sufficient to examine dietary discourse in itself as my primary subject because the

Lastly, because this is a qualitative study, it has neglected many empirical considerations. However, my interest has not been to determine which images are

most prevalent or which themes and types predominante in marketing texts, but only to identify the types of characterizations that pertain to gender given the conspicuous consumption or rejection of meat and meaty aesthetics.

## WORKS CITED

- Adams, Carol. *Living Among Meat Eaters: The Vegetarian's Survival Guide*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001
- . *Neither Man Nor Beast*. New York: Continuum, 1994.
- . *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. New York: Continuum, 1992.
- Adamson, Melitta Weiss (Ed.). *Food in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*. New York: Garland Publishers, 1995.
- Adamy, Janet. "Nature's Way: Behind a Food Giant's Success: An Unlikely Soy-Milk Alliance." *The Wall Street Journal Online*. 1 February 2005. <<http://online.wsj.com/>> February 2006.
- American Academy of Neurology. "PRACTICE PARAMETERS: ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF PATIENTS THE PERSISTENT VEGETATIVE STATE." *Summary Statement*. 1994. 22 Nov. 2005 <<http://www.aan.com/professionals/practice/pdfs>>
- Archer Daniels Midland. "Soya Foods." *Nutrition Homepage*. Official Website. 1 October 2005. < <http://www.admworld.com/euen/nutrition/>>
- "Aim for a Healthy Weight." United States. Dept. of Health & Human Services. 10 October 2005. <[http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/lose\\_wt/risk.htm#limitations](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/lose_wt/risk.htm#limitations)>.
- Allison D.B., et al. "Annual deaths attributable to obesity in the United States." *JAMA* 282 (1999): 1530-8.
- Barthes, Roland. "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption" in Counihan: 20 – 27.
- Bearsdworth, Alan and Teresa Keil. "The Vegetarian Option." *The Sociological Review*. 40.2 (1992): 253 – 293.
- Blair, J. Anthony. "The Rhetoric of Visual Arguments" in Hill.
- Bogo, Jennifer. "WHERE'S THE BEEF?" *E Magazine: The Environmental Magazine*. 10.6 (1999).
- Bordo, Susan. "Hunger as Ideology." *Eating Cultures*. Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz, eds. Albany, New York: SUNY, 1998.

- , *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and The Body*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993.
- , *The Male Body*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1999.
- , *Twilight Zones*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Breidenstein, B.C. "Changes in Consumer Attitudes Toward Red Meat and Their Effect on Market Strategy." *Food Technology* 41: 112 – 116, 1988.
- Brumberg, Joan Jacobs. "The Appetite as Voice" in *Counihan*: 159 – 179.
- Burger King Fantasy Ranch*. Dir. David LaChapelle. 29 January 2005.  
<<http://www.davidlachapelle.com/videos/index.shtml>>
- Burn, Andrew and David Parker. *Analysing Media Texts*. New York, NY: Continuum, 2003.
- CNN. "Blasts probed at Atlanta family planning clinic." *CNN Interactive*. 16 January 1997. <<http://www.cnn.com/US/9701/16/atlanta.blast.update/index.html>>  
15 February 2006
- , "Carbon Monoxide Keeps Meat Looking Red Longer." 26 February 2006.  
<<http://www.cnn.com/2006/US/02/21/meat.carbon.monoxide.ap/index.html>>
- , "Milk producers file complaint against soy 'milk.'" 14 February 2000.  
<<http://archives.cnn.com/2000/FOOD/news/02/14/soy.milk/index.html>>  
15 February 2006.
- Cadava, Edward. *Who Comes After The Subject?* London: Routledge, 1991: 96 – 119.
- Caplin, Pat (Ed.). *Food, Health and Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Carrico, Dale. "Impurity, Solidarity, and Pleasure in the Politics of Vegetarian Identities: Carol Adams on Animal Rites." 23 March 2004. *Socrates*.  
<<http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~dalec/Impurity.htm>> 10 October 2005.
- Corner, John. *Studying Media: Problems of Theory and Method*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.
- Counihan, Carole and Penny Van Esterik, Editors. *Food and Culture: A Reader*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

- John Coveney. *Food, Morals and Meaning: The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- DeLuca, Kevin Michael. *Image Politics*. New York: Guilford Press, 1999.
- . *Image Politics*. New York: Guilford Press, 1999.
- Derrida, Jacques. “ ‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida” in Cadava.
- . “The Animal I Therefore Am.” *Critical Inquiry* 28.2 (2002): 369 – 419.
- Diane S. Hope “Gendered Environments: Gender and the Natural World in the Rhetoric of Advertising” in Hill.
- Dickson, Barbara. “Reading Maternity Materially” in Selzer and Crowley.
- Dyer, Christopher. “Did Peasants Really Starve in Medieval England?” *Food and Eating in Medieval Europe*. Martha Carlin & Joel Rosenthal, (eds.). London: Hambledon Press, 1998.
- Dyer, Christopher. “English Diet in the Later Middle Ages.” *Social Relations and Ideas: Essays in Honor of R.H. Hilton*. T.H. Aston, P.R. Coss, Christopher Dyer, & Joan Thirsk, (Eds.). New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Eagleton, Terry. “Edible écriture” in Griffiths: 203 – 208.
- “Eat Hufu.” 01 June 2005. <<http://www.eathufu.com/home.asp>> 12 September 2005.
- Edelstein, David. “Big Mac Counterattack: *Super Size Me* and the case against fast food.” *Slate*. 6 May 2004. 1 October 2005. <<http://slate.msn.com/id/2100114>>
- Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Elias, Norbert. *The Civilizing Process*. Edmund, Jephcott (trans.). New York: Urizen, 1978.
- Evans, Mary. *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies (Vol. III)*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Facts on File Dictionary of New Words, The*. Lerner, Sid et al. (eds.) New York: Facts on File, 1988.
- Farrier, Susan E. “Hungry Heroes in Medieval Literature.” in Adamson (145-159).

- Featherstone, Mike, Mike Hepworth, and Bryan S. Turner. *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, 1991.
- Fenton, Alexander and Eszter Kisban (Eds.) *Food in Change: Eating Habits from the Middle Ages to the Present day*. Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1986.
- Fetto, John. "It Ain't Easy Eating Green." *American Demographics* 22.5 (2000): 13. Academic Search Premier. 14 March 2006. <http://search.epnet.com>.
- Fiddes, Nick. *Meat: A Natural Symbol*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Findlay, Heather. "Freud's 'Fetishism' & The Lesbian Dildo Debates." *Feminist Studies* 18 (1992): 563 – 580.
- Fitzgerald, Kate. "Boca Burgers." *Advertising Age*. June 2000. Vol. 71 Issue 27.
- Flandrin, Jean-Louis and Massimo Montanari. *Food: a culinary history from antiquity to the present (English Edition)*. Clarissa Botsford (trans.). New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Gee, James Paul. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: theory and method*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- George, Kathryn Paxton. *Animal, Vegetable, or Woman?: A Feminist Critique of Vegetarianism*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000.
- "Glossary." *Vegetarian Times*. Dec 1998 Issue 256
- Goody, Jack. "Industrial Food: Toward the Development of a World Cuisine" in Counihan: 338 – 356.
- Greco, Susan. "Marketing: 1+1+1 = The New Mass Market." *Inc. Magazine* Jan 2003.
- Grew, Raymond. Ed. *Food in Global History*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999.
- Griffiths, Sian and Jennifer Wallace. *Consuming Passions: Food in the Age of Anxiety*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.
- Haddad, Ella H. and Jay S, Tanzman. "What Do Vegetarians in the United States Eat?" *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 78 (suppl) (2003): 626S-32S.
- Hall, Stuart. *Representation and the Media*. DVD. Media Education Foundation. 1997.
- Hammond, P.W. *Food and Feast in Medieval England*. Phoenix Mill, England: Allan Sutton Publishers, 1993.



- Harris, Marvin. *Good To Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985.
- Harris, Marvin and Eric B. Ross, eds. *Food and Evolution*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987.
- Hamilton, William J., III. "Omnivorous Primate Diets and Human Overconsumption of Meat." in Harris and Ross: 117-132.
- Harrison, Brian. "The Kitchen Revolution" in Griffiths.
- Henish, Bridget Ann. *Fast and Feast: Food in Medieval Society*. London: Penn State, 1976.
- Hill, Charles A. and Marguerite Helmers. *Defining Visual Rhetorics*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2004.
- "Is Vegetarianism Healthier Than Nonvegetarianism?" *American Council on Health and Science* 9.3 (1997). 3 April 2001 <<http://www.acsh.org/publications/priorities/0903/vegetarianism.html>>
- Jost, Walter and Michael J. Hyde. *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Our Time: A Reader*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Kavanagh, James H. "Ideology" in Lentricchia.
- Keane, Anne. "The palatability of healthy eating advice" in Caplin.
- Lacey, Richard W. *Hard to Swallow: A brief history of food*. Cambridge: CUP, 1994.
- Lash, Scott. "Genealogy and the Body: Foucault/Deleuze/Nietzsche" in Featherstone: 256 – 279.
- Leiberman, Leslie Sue. "Biocultural Consequences of Animals Versus Plants as Sources of Fats, Proteins, and Other Nutrients" in Harris.
- Lentricchia, Frank and Thomas McLaughlin (Eds.). *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Levenstein, Harvey. *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- *Revolution at the Table*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Lippit, Akira Mizuta. *Electric Animal: Toward A Rhetoric of Wildlife*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Marris, Paul and Sue Thornham, eds. *Media Studies: A Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996.

McDonald, Barbara. ““Once You Know Something, You Can’t Not Know It’: An Empirical Look at Becoming Vegan.” *Society & Animals* 8.1 (March 2001): 1 – 23.

McIntosh, Elaine. *American Food Habits in Historical Perspective*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1995.

McNair, Rachel. “McDonald’s ‘Empirical Look at Becoming Vegan.’” *Society & Animals* 9.1 (2001): 63 – 69.

“Meat Substitutes range from tasty to terrible.” *Successful Farming*. Feb. 1994: 52.

Mennel, Stephen. *All Manners of Food*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996.

Moi, Toril. *Sexual Textual Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1985.

Morton, Timothy. *Shelley and The Revolution in Taste*. Cambridge: CUP, 1994.

Pollack, Judann. “Gardenburger.” *Advertising Age* 70.27 (1999): s2. Academic Search Premier. 14 March 2006. <http://search.epnet.com>.

Potter, W. James. *An Analysis of Thinking and Research About Qualitative Methods*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1996.

Pringle, Rosemary “Women and Consumer Capitalism” in Evans.

Rimal, Arbindra P. “Factors Affecting Meat Preferences Among American Consumers.” *Family Economics and Nutrition Review*. 14.2 (2002): 36-43.  
< <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/FENR/FENRv14n2/fenrv14n2p36.pdf>>

Ritzer, George. *The McDonaldization of Society (revised edition)*. Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Pine Forge Press, 1996.

Robinson, Randall. “New Orleans.” *Huffington Post*. 2 September 2005. 1 October 2005.  
<[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/randall-robinson/new-orleans\\_b\\_6643.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/randall-robinson/new-orleans_b_6643.html)>

Rose, Gillian. *Visual Methodologies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001.

- Sabaté, Joan. "The contribution of vegetarian diets to health and disease: a paradigm shift?" *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 78 (suppl) (2003): 502S-7S.
- Safire, William. "On Language: Vegan." *New York Times* 30 January 2005, late edition, section 6, page 24, column 1.
- Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.
- Schreffin, Deborah, Deborah Tannen, & Heidi E. Hamilton. *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.
- Selzer, Jack and Sharon Crowley. *Rhetorical Bodies*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *A Vindication of Natural Diet*. New York City: AMS Press, 1975.
- Simoons, Frederick J. *Eat Not This Flesh. 2nd ed.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994.
- Spencer, Colin. *The Heretic's Feast: A History of Vegetarianism*. London: 4th Estate, 1993.
- Sullies, John. "Transcending the meat: immersive technologies and computer mediated bodies." *Journal of Experimental & Theoretical Artificial Intelligence*. Dec. 2000.
- Stevenson, Seth. "The Last Days of Dada." *Slate*. 25 April 2005. 23 January 2006. <<http://www.slate.com/id/2117322/nav/ais/nav/ais/>>
- Talking Heads. "Animals." *Fear of Music*. Sire, 1979.
- "The Catastrophic Failure of Public Health." *The Lancet*. 363.9411 (2004): 745.
- The Raven*. Dir. Roger Corman.
- The Triple Tofu Tower*. Dir. Kirby Ferguson. *Goodiebag TV*. 10 October 2005 <<http://www.goodiebag.tv/video/ttt.htm>>.
- Thomas E. Wilson Fine Quality Meats advertisement*. Aired during Winter Olympics. NBC. 10 Feb. 2002 10:30 pm  
"A meal just isn't a meal without meat."
- Thompson, Stephanie. "Gardenburger Goes Grassroots." *Advertising Age*. 17.36 (2000): 6.

- Titscher, Stefan, Michael Meyer, Ruth Wodak, and Eva Vetter. *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000.
- Turner, Bryan S. "The Discourse of Diet." in Featherstone.
- , "The government of the body: medical regimens and the rationalization of diet." *The British Journal of Sociology* 33.2 (June 1982): 254 – 269.
- United States. Dept. Of Health and Human Services. Centers for Disease Control. *National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey*. July 2003. 10 Oct. 2005. <<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhanes/databriefs/adultweight.pdf>>
- USDA. DHHS. *Docket Number 97POO78ICP*. 24 May 2000. <<http://www.fda.gov/ohrms/dockets/dailys/00/jun00/060200/c000104.pdf>> 15 February 2006.
- United States Dept. of Agriculture. *Food Safety and Inspection Service Directive 7120.1 Amendment 1*. "Safe and Suitable Ingredients Used in the Production of Meat and Poultry Products." 3 November 2003. January 2006. <<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/rdad/FSISDirectives/7120.1Amend1.htm>>
- , "Profiling Food Consumption in America." *Agriculture Factbook 2001-2002*. 1 October 2005. <<http://www.usda.gov/factbook/chapter2.htm>>
- "2004-2005 Tables -- Livestock." *Statistical Highlights*. 5 November 2005. <<http://www.usda.gov/nass/pubs/stathigh/2005/tables/livestock.htm>>
- United States District Court for the District of Maryland, Southern Division (U.S. Dist. Lexis 18598) 1999. *HQM, LTD., and HATFIELD, INC., Plaintiffs, v. William B. Hatfield, Defendant. Civil Action No. AW-99-2093*. 31 January 2006. <<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/property00/domain/HQMShort.html>>.
- Van Der Pool, Lisa, and Sonia Reyes. "White Wave Rides Soy Milk Tide; First TV Foray Tackles 'Cheese' Envy." *Brandweek* 44.9 (2003): 10. Academic Search Premier. 13 March 2006. <http://search.epnet.com>.
- Watson, Donald. "The Vegan News" (*Quarterly Magazine of the Non-Dairy Vegetarians*.) 1.1. Newsletter. November 1944.
- Welford, Win. "Supermarket Semantics: The Rhetoric of Food Labeling and Advertising". *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*. 49.1 (Spring 1992): 3 – 18.
- "Wendy's Mandarin Chicken and Chicken B.L.T. Salads." *Wendy's Restaurant Commercial*. UPN 69 Atlanta (8:30 pm) 9 April 2003.

- Wentworth, Harold and Stuart Berg Flexner (eds.) *Dictionary of American Slang*. New York: Thomas Crowell Company, 1960.
- Willard, Barbara. "The American Story of Meat: Discursive Influences on Cultural Eating Practices." *Journal of Popular Culture* (June 2002): 105-118.
- Williams, Raymond. "Advertising: The Magic System." in Marris.
- Wolfe, Cary. *Animal Rites*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Wodak, Ruth & Michael Meyer. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001.
- World Health Organization. *PROPOSED DRAFT GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF THE TERM "VEGETARIAN"* (W.H.O. doc CL 1999/10-FL May 1999).
- Worthington Foods, Inc. "The First to Offer Frozen Meat Analogs." *Press Release*. January 1988 <[http://www.worthingtonmemory.org/TextFiles/wbl0027\\_001.txt](http://www.worthingtonmemory.org/TextFiles/wbl0027_001.txt)> 1 February 2006.
- Zachary, G. Pascal. "Why the Soy Milk King Still Reigns By selling out to the nation's largest dairy distributor, White Wave president Steve Demos turned Silk into a beverage for the masses." *Business 2.0 Magazine*. 1 April 2004. <[http://money.cnn.com/magazines/business2/business2\\_archive](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/business2/business2_archive)> 1 February 2006.
- Zizek, Slavoj. *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway*. Seattle, WA: Walter Chapin Simpson Center for Humanities, 2000.

**TABLE OF Product Names For Meat Analogs in SPOMS**

Company name	Burger/Red meat	Chicken	Hot dogs/deli	Misc
SMART DELI			a. Meatless Fat Free Slices (pseudo lunch meat) • Old World Bologna Style • Country Ham Style	
LIGHTLIFE	Meatless LightBurgers		Lean Italian Links (pseudo spicy sausage)	Lean Breakfast Links (pseudo breakfast sausage)  Gimme Lean (tube of vegetable protein flavored for "real beef" & "real sausage" taste)
YVES	Veggie Ground Round (meatless & fat free vegetable protein)			Canadian Veggie Bacon ("facon" discs for breakfast)
SOYA-KAAS				Fat-free Soya-Kaas 'a natural cheese alternative' (sliced cheese tease)
AMY'S	California, Chicago, & Texas Veggie Burger (looks as real as the real thing)  Veggie Loaf (a big slab of meatlessness)			
BOCA	The Original Boca Burger (hamburger hoax on a bun)  Boca Burger Original Vegan (the same as above but vegan)			
WORTHINGTON	Fri Pats (hamburger hoax)  Stakelettes (steak substitute)	Chic-Ketts (slice-able pseudo chicken in a tube)  Crispy Chik Patties (pseudo chicken from vegetable protein)	Leiners ("not" dogs)  Stripples ("facon")	Fillets (phony fish)

**APPENDIX 4.1**  
**BACON CHEDDAR RANCH COMMERCIAL**

When my belly starts  
a-rumbling and I'm  
jonesing for a treat

["Hootie" sings dressed as troubador  
cowboy in rhinestone outfit, silk scarf,  
and white hat]



I close my eyes for a big  
surprise

[film changes from b/w to color as  
in The Wizard of Oz and soundtrack  
becomes clear, modern, hi-fi]



The Tendercrisp Bacon  
Cheddar Ranch

[shifting background images of  
oversized vegetables, ]



I love the Tendercrisp  
Bacon Cheddar Ranch  
The breasts they grow  
on trees

["chicken" breast orchard where  
scantly clad country "girl" plucks a  
sandwich from tree branch]



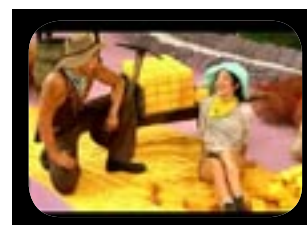
and streams of bacon  
ranch dressing flow  
right up to your knees.

[twin women dressed as twin girls  
dancing while using their fingers to  
spoon dressing from their pails]



There's tumble weeds  
of bacon and cheddar  
paves the streets

[shirtless man in overalls and  
attractive "cowgirl" in short shorts  
using cheese blocks for cobblestones]



Folks don't cuss you  
'cause you've got the  
juice

[handsome cowboy on horseback]



There's a train of ladies  
coming with a nice  
caboose  
Never get in trouble,  
never need an excuse  
That's the Tendercrisp  
Bacon Cheddar Ranch.

[a railroad hand car, propelled by two  
women wearing conductor's caps,  
rolls past, behind Hootie; the only  
"caboose" featured is the metaphoric  
one, belonging to swimsuit model  
Vida Guerra]



I love the Tendercrisp  
Bacon Cheddar Ranch.  
No one tells you to  
behave.  
Your wildest fantasies  
comes true

[cut to subservient (yet free-range)  
chicken]



Dallas cheerleaders  
give you shaves

[Mustachioed cowboy leans against  
barber pole while being shaved by  
aforementioned cheerleaders]



Red onions make you  
laugh instead

[Midriff cowgirl hula-hooping with a  
giant red onion ring]





And french fries grow  
like weeds

[two handsome black cowboys  
eat their sandwiches in a field of  
french fries, some of which are  
remarkably phallic]



You get to vege all day.  
All the lotto tickets pay.  
There's a king that  
wants you to  
have it your way

[The Burger King pushes a young  
brunette belle on a swing and, as  
she swings closer to the camera, she  
extends her hand which happens to be  
holding the sandwich in question]



That's the Tendercrisp  
Bacon  
Cheddar Ranch

[zoom in on sandwich such that it is  
perfectly placed between the belle's  
breasts and smiling face]



[fade to black].

