



Original Research Article

Obscuring the veil: Food advertising as public pedagogy

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Abstract

Working with Karl Marx's concept of commodity fetishism, the purpose of this paper is to argue that food advertisements and packaging work to further obfuscate the social, economic, and environmental relations behind the animal products and by-products consumed in Canada and the United States. The paper discusses the socio-ecological implications of the animal-industrial complex and employs a critical discourse analysis to examine how advertisements for animal products and by-products function as sites of public pedagogy to obscure these adverse effects. Finally, this paper outlines a vision of critical food pedagogies that both 'removes the veil' (Hudson & Hudson, 2003) and addresses the underlying generative framework that drives our relationship with an industrial food system.

Keywords: Commodity fetishism; advertising; animal-industrial complex; public pedagogy; critical food pedagogies

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DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v7i1.377

ISSN: 2292-3071

Introduction

The landscape of animal agriculture has changed drastically and is now dominated by a largely corporate and industrialized model (Gunderson, 2011; MacDonald & McBride, 2009; Rossi & Garner, 2014). Although this model has given the illusion of producing a large volume of inexpensive animal products and by-products, it has done so with significant burden to the environment and to the well-being of both humans and animals (Gunderson & Stuart, 2014; MacDonald & McBride, 2009; Rossi & Garner, 2014). Further, one of the implications associated with a growing and consistent food surplus, largely made possible through an industrial food system, is that fewer people need to be involved in the production of food (Albritton, 2012). Consequently, the industrial food system is premised on a profoundly different relationship with animals and the earth and both a spatial and conceptual distance between the producers and consumers of food (Kneen, 1993; Knezevic, 2012; Weis, 2012). A consequence of this distance is that the socio-ecological implications of industrial animal agriculture are largely hidden from popular consciousness and obscured by market imperatives, leaving consumers with limited knowledge about precisely what is involved in the food products they purchase and consume (Gross, 2012; Knezevic, 2012; Weis, 2012). While not speaking explicitly about an industrial food system, Marx (1990) referred to this general phenomenon as commodity fetishism, whereby the relations and costs involved in the production of commodities are minimized and difficult to comprehend. Commodity fetishism is prevalent in a capitalist system, whereby a consumer's experiences with the production of commodities are limited to the characteristics of the final product itself, such as price, convenience, quantity, and packaging (Hudson & Hudson, 2003; Marx, 1990; Sage, 2011).

With this context in mind, the purpose of this paper is to argue that food advertisements and packaging add “additional layers of meaning on to commodities” (Hudson & Hudson, 2003, p. 427) and in doing so, work to even further obfuscate the social, economic, and environmental relations behind the animal products and by-products we consume. In order to demonstrate this argument, I will begin by discussing the implications of industrialized animal agriculture for animals, the earth, and humans. I will then discuss how advertisements for animal products function as sites of public pedagogy. Using the methodological field of critical discourse analysis, I will demonstrate how such advertisements further obscure the adverse effects of industrial animal agriculture. Lastly, I will emphasize a vision of critical food pedagogies that work to not only “remove the veil” (Hudson & Hudson, 2003, p. 427) to reveal the socio-ecological implications of industrial animal agriculture, but to also address the underlying generative framework that drives consumers' relationship with food.

The implications of the animal-industrial complex

Bound to the overarching structure of capitalism, industrial animal agriculture has resulted in adverse effects for animals, the environment, and humans. Within the context of this paper, I will refer to this current model of producing animal products and by-products as the animal-industrial complex. Deriving from earlier concepts of the prison-industrial complex and the military-industrial complex, the animal-industrial complex refers to the largely opaque and overlapping interests of the agricultural sector, governments, agribusiness corporations, and the economy that together result in the commodification and objectification of animals (Fitzgerald & Pellow, 2014; Noske, 1997; Twine, 2012). Further, conceptualizing this model as the animal-industrial complex elucidates the ways in which animal agriculture is deeply entrenched in a capitalist logic that values profit over all else and depends on large-scale, highly technological, and depersonalized systems of production for mass consumption (Noske, 1997; Twine, 2012). As outlined by Rossi and Garner (2014), some of the definitive characteristics of this current model are corporate ownership, the merging of industries, the intensive confinement of large amounts animals, the use of growth-facilitating antibiotics, the use of remotely grown food, and extensive control over living conditions of animals in an effort to maximize efficiency and profit.

Implications for animals

In discussing the implications of industrial agriculture for animals, this paper emphasizes structural violence with a particular focus on how the forms of violence associated with breeding, growing, and killing practices are largely regulated and socio-politically legitimized (Cudworth, 2015). Although the specific methods and equipment used within systems of industrial agriculture vary among different species, a focus remains on minimizing costs and maximizing productivity and animals are thus often produced in barren and restricted environments and subject to mundane and routinized forms of violence (Kim, 2011; Mason & Finelli, 2013; Rossi & Garner, 2014). For instance, technologies of confinement such as battery cages, veal crates, gestation crates, and tethering inhibit an animal's capacity to stretch his or her legs or wings, turn around, or lie down comfortably (Kim, 2011; Mason & Finelli, 2013; Rowe, 2011). Issues of overcrowding are also present in systems that intensively house large numbers of animals and often require continuous manipulation of anatomy and physiology in order to maintain mass commodity production (Mason & Finelli, 2013). The harm inflicted on animals within spaces of industrial agriculture also stems from the ways in which animals are manipulated to live in systems that reflect human dispositions and economic modalities rather than their own natures and adaptations (Anthony, 2012; Corman & Vandrovцова, 2014; Davis, 2004/2010). Such systems ignore the fact that animals are sentient beings capable of developing profound social relationships and possess emotional lives, preferences, desires, and innate

tendencies that they would express in natural conditions (Davis, 2010; Corman & Vandrovцова, 2014; Medero, 2014).

Further, the animal-industrial complex relies on processes of reproductive manipulation to ensure continuous impregnation and the resultant production of future animal products and by-products (Cudworth, 2010; Gillespie, 2014; Rossi & Garner, 2014). For instance, dairy cows, like humans and other mammals, produce milk following pregnancy and delivery (Berreville, 2014). Consequently, to begin the process of milk production, cows are often forcibly ejaculated and impregnated using human hands, arms, and instruments (Berreville, 2014; Cudworth, 2015; Gillespie, 2014). Moreover, in order to speed up reproductive cycles, and to prevent calves from ingesting any of the milk intended for them that can instead be sold for human consumption, babies are often prematurely separated from their mothers and fed milk replacer or waste whole milk (Berreville, 2014; Mason & Finelli, 2013). Although industry-based and anecdotal evidence point to the negative impact that prematurely removing a calf from his or her mother can have, it is considered best practice - code for most profitable - to remove the calf shortly after birth (Berreville, 2014). This psychological violence caused by separation is therefore an inherent product of an industrial system, wherein the demands of uninterrupted milk production results in an endless cycle of insemination, pregnancy, calving, calf removal, and lactation for cows (Berreville, 2014).

Lastly, animals' lifespans are cut drastically short within systems of industrial agriculture in an effort to increase turnover time (Weis, 2013). For instance, cattle can now reach commercial slaughter weight in eighteen months, pigs in as few as six months, and broiler chickens in only six weeks (Weis, 2013). As this time approaches, animals may be shipped long distances to slaughter without food or water, are frequently exposed to extremes of heat and cold during transport, and experience overcrowding, making them subject to suffocation and crushing (Cudworth, 2015; Rossi & Garner, 2014; Rowe, 2011). According to a recent article published by CTV National News, Canada's livestock transportation rules are the worst in the Western world, allowing for pigs, chickens, and cattle to be transported for between 36 and 52 hours without access to food or water and without minimum or maximum temperature regulations to protect the animals from harsh winters or extreme heat (Schulman, 2016). As a result, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency highlights that between two and three million animals die during transport every year (Schulman, 2016). Further, animals are often handled roughly during transport, particularly during the stages of loading and unloading where they may be corralled using electric prods (Rossi & Garner, 2014). Moreover, given the expected line speeds within industrial slaughterhouses that may not allow time for proper stunning, animals may be scalded, skinned, or dismembered while partly or fully conscious (Rossi & Garner, 2014).

Implications for the environment

It is widely accepted that anthropogenic factors pose a considerable threat to the earth's ecology and systems (Magdoff & Foster, 2010). One particular human activity that exerts a substantial

impact on the environment is the food that we consume (Oppenlander, 2013; Sage, 2011; Weis, 2013). In particular, the rapidly growing and intensifying production of animal products and by-products yields one of the greatest environmental impacts when compared to other categories of food (Oppenlander, 2013; Sage, 2011). Livestock production is now considered to be one of the top two or three most significant contributors to some of the most serious environmental problems, including greenhouse gas emissions, water pollution and depletion, land degradation, and biodiversity loss (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2006; Reisch, Eberle, & Lorek, 2013; Weis, 2013).

First, research is beginning to document the substantial impact of animal agriculture on climate change, now considered to be one of the most serious challenges facing the human race (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2006). In examining the phenomenon of human-induced climate change, evidence suggests that animal agriculture is responsible for a larger share of greenhouse gas emissions than transport (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2006; Popp, Lotze-Campen, Bodirsky, 2010; Scarborough, P. et al., 2014). Second, in addition to reaching a maximum use of fossil fuels such as oil, many believe that ‘peak water’ has also been reached, due to the past and present use of freshwater as if it were a fully renewable resource and infinite in quantity (Oppenlander, 2013; Weis, 2013). In this way, along with climate change, water scarcity is likely to become one of the largest challenges the world will face (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2006; Oppenlander, 2013). The livestock sector contributes to such issues of water scarcity through immense water usage, water pollution, and inhibiting water replenishment (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2006; Ilea, 2009; MeKonnen & Hoekstra, 2012). Requiring substantially more water than plant protein, the production of animal protein is considered to be one of the most inefficient uses of water and the largest use of water as a single food product (Oppenlander, 2013; Pimentel & Pimentel, 2003; Weis, 2013). Third, the production of animal products and by-products also contributes a significant amount of waste to the environment, including manure, carcasses, excess feed, and feathers (Sorenson, 2010; Walker et al., 2005). Finally, animal agriculture is the single largest anthropogenic use of land, contributes to significant deforestation as forests are cleared to make room for grazing animals and to plant feed crops, and consumes more than a third of the world’s grain harvest (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2006; Ilea, 2009; Weis, 2013).

Implications for humans

The production of animal products and by-products within the animal-industrial complex also has immense implications for humans and communities. Although the meat, egg, and dairy industries are largely flourishing within the United States and Canada, the workers in the processing line do not share in this fortune (Oxfam, 2016). Employees of the animal-industrial complex, particularly within slaughterhouses, face one of the highest risk jobs in the United

States (Glasser, 2011; Oxfam, 2016; Wrenn, 2015). In 2005, the Human Rights Watch identified slaughterhouses as the most dangerous factory job, with an injury rate five times higher than the national average (Glasser, 2011; Nibert, 2014; Oxfam, 2016). Employees also endure long hours in difficult conditions and are at an increased risk of developing respiratory disease, hearing loss, musculoskeletal problems, and contracting zoonotic diseases or antimicrobial resistant bacteria (Dillard, 2008; Oxfam, 2016; Walker et al., 2005). A recent report from Oxfam (2016) draws particular attention to the deplorable working conditions experienced by slaughterhouse line workers, some of whom have come to be afraid to ask for permission to use the bathroom and have thus soiled themselves, taken steps to reduce their intake of fluids, held urinary and bowel functions for as long as possible, and worn diapers to work. Further, employees have little to no job security or voice in opposing unsafe working conditions and earn disparately low wages (Oxfam, 2016).

Additionally, research is beginning to address the psychological effects of working in a slaughterhouse and the trauma associated with being responsible for killing countless animals, observing animals being cut and dismembered while still conscious, and interacting with animals in various states of fear and pain (Dillard, 2008; Rowe, 2011; Weis, 2013). Given the increasingly rapid pace of slaughter that persists in an effort to maximize productivity, employees are expected to consistently kill animals using violent methods, causing lasting psychological implications (Dillard, 2008; Nibert, 2014; Oxfam, 2016; Rowe, 2011). To this effect, one slaughterhouse worker comments:

The worst thing, worse than the physical danger, is the emotional toll...pigs down on the kill floor have come up and nuzzled me like a puppy. Two minutes later I had to kill them - beat them to death with a pipe. I can't care (Dillard, 2008, p. 391).

Food advertising as public pedagogy

As industrial animal agriculture has intensified and consequent criticisms have insisted the practice is inhumane and both socially and environmentally destructive, “an assortment of corporate strategies have ensured that construct an image of a benevolently beneficial industry” (Glenn, 2004, p. 64). Consequently, a consumer’s interaction with animal products and by-products in countries like Canada and the United States is shaped by obscure market forces (Weis, 2012). The focus within the context of this paper is the use of advertisements as a particular corporate strategy to obscure the aforementioned implications of the animal-industrial complex. With over 40 billion dollars spent on food marketing, society is inundated with food advertisements on television, billboards, computer screens, bus shelters, and on food packaging (Roberts, 2013). As such, I argue that food advertisements for animal products function as sites of public pedagogy.

Although the term pedagogy has traditionally referred to the theory, principles, and practice of teaching within elementary, secondary, and postsecondary classrooms, the ‘pedagogical turn’ has expanded the definition of pedagogy to include the spaces and sites of teaching and learning outside the system of formal education (Flowers & Swan, 2012; Giroux, 2011; Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2009). In this way, we are constantly involved in processes of teaching, learning, unlearning, and relearning as educational activity is engaged in by not only professional teachers or academics, but also by journalists, activists, photographers, artists, film directors, musicians, writers, bloggers, etc. (Flowers & Swan, 2012; Mayo, 2014; Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2009). Such spaces are important in that they reflect a more democratized access to knowledge than is possible via formal education (Harper, 2010; Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2009). Consequently, given that less than 2% of the U.S. population is involved in the production of food (USDA, 2009, as cited in Specht & Buck, 2014), advertisements come to exploit an educational gap between the producer and consumer. In this way, such advertisements function as a contemporary process of teaching society about food (Flowers & Swan, 2012). Within the context of this paper, the central question then becomes, as tools of public pedagogy, what specifically are advertisements for animal products teaching us?

Methodology

Working within the context of the aforementioned body of literature, this project is grounded in a concern with the ways in which advertisements for animal products and by-products function as sites of public pedagogy to obscure the socio-ecological implications of the animal-industrial complex. In order to explore this particular problem, this paper utilizes a qualitative critical discourse analysis of 11 advertisements for meat, eggs, and dairy products. In this context, the term discourse is used to refer to the particular ways of conceptualizing a phenomenon that are circulated throughout society and reproduced in aspects of our daily life (Koc, Sumner, & Winson, 2012). Within this particular paper, I am interested in the discourses circulated regarding the animal-industrial complex via food advertisements. I will begin by discussing the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of critical discourse analysis. From there, I will outline the rationale for the chosen methodology, the research context, the data sources, and the data collection and analysis methods.

To begin, critical discourse analysis is understood as both theory and method (Fairclough, 2001; Rogers, 2011). First, critical discourse analysis considers current social relations as bound to a particular socio-historical context and as shaped by particular constructions or versions of reality (Locke, 2004; Wodak, 2001). In this sense, all discourses are historically produced and interpreted and can only be understood in relation to their social context (Meyer, 2001; Wodak, 2001). Second, within critical discourse analysis, power is understood as a central concept and force driving social relations (Jager, 2001; Rogers, 2011). Moreover, power is understood not as

necessarily maintained through overt force as much as resulting from discourses that privilege some individuals or epistemologies over others (Jager, 2001; Locke, 2004). In this sense, critical discourse analysis involves exposing the ways in which dominant discourses in society reinforce existing power inequities (Jager, 2001; Wodak, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Considering critical discourse as a method for collecting and analyzing data, critical discourse analysis examines the social context that produced a particular text and the processes through which individuals and groups create meaning as they interact with texts (Fairclough, 2010; Wodak, 2001). More specifically, critical discourse analysis posits these texts as a central part of social relations and involves a consideration of the reciprocity between these forms of meaning making and aspects of social relations such as social identities, values, and means of production (Fairclough, 2001). In this way, critical discourse analysis considers the ways in which power relations are reproduced, reinforced, or challenged within texts and narratives (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

It is with this context in mind that critical discourse analysis has been chosen as a suitable methodology to be used in addressing the problem underlying this research. In keeping with critical discourse analysis's focus on "the social processes and structures which give rise to the production of a text" (Wodak, 2001, p. 3), this research considers the ways in which the landscape and resultant socio-ecological implications of the animal-industrial complex have led to the production of particular texts, in this case advertisements. Moreover, by focusing on the ways in which power relations, specifically those related to processes of commodity fetishism, are reproduced within these advertisements, this paper explicitly aligns with critical discourse analysis's assertion that "inquiry into meaning making is always also an exploration into power" (Rogers, 2011, p. 1).

In keeping with critical discourse analysis, the first thing a researcher must do is situate the investigation within one particular discourse plane or research setting (Jager, 2001). The discourse plane or research setting for this project is advertisement, more specifically, those that have been circulated within Canada or the United States and reproduced online. The data source for this paper is drawn from 11 advertisements for meat, eggs, or dairy products. 11 advertisements have been chosen in keeping with a qualitative research approach, which posits that it is best to study a few individuals or cases in order to provide an in-depth and complex picture of the central phenomena (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010). The 11 spaces that comprise the research sample for this project have been purposefully selected. In this sense, purposeful sampling refers to the process whereby the researcher intentionally chooses information-rich sites or participants to learn about the central phenomenon under examination (Patton, 2002; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010). Consequently, the sites have been purposefully chosen as illustrative examples based on having been recently circulated via billboards, bus shelters, or in grocery stores within the past few years. Moreover, maximal variation sampling strategies have been used in an effort to select sites that best illustrate different perspectives related to advertising for meat, eggs, and dairy and processes of commodity fetishism.

In order to analyze the data, a series of topics were established to be used in the coding process. In this context, the coding process refers to “the process of segmenting and labelling text [and images] to form descriptions and broad themes in the data” (Creswell, 2002, p. 266). These codes were defined both before and during data analysis, derived from the literature review and the data itself (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Overall, the purpose of this coding process is to unveil broader patterns from the collected data about the degree to which food advertisements and packaging work to further obfuscate the social, economic, and environmental relations behind the animal products and by-products consumed in Canada and the United States. Analysis is understood to be complete “when it reveals no further contents and formally new findings” (Jager, 2001, p. 17). In this way, at a certain point in the analysis process, it is projected that I will achieve saturation and there will no longer be new ideas presented on a given theme.

Results and discussion

Up to this point, I have argued that food advertisements function as sites of public pedagogy, with the potential to circulate particular understandings of the process of producing meat, eggs, and dairy products in the United States and Canada. The purpose of this section of the paper is to therefore address the particular understandings – or discourses – being circulated in this educative process. Overall, the data reveal that advertisements for meat, eggs, and dairy products in the United States and Canada reinforce the notion that food is “largely something to be bought and sold in the marketplace rather than a biological and cultural necessity (MacRae, 2012, p. 310). Moreover, as one would come to expect, advertisements “try to highlight information that can sell the product while obscuring the information that may make us question the product” (Knezevic, 2012, p. 251). As such, in the sections to follow, I will argue that these pedagogical spaces attempt to teach us that farm life is picturesque, rustic, and serene, and that live animals as individual entities are inexistent. These particular strategies, henceforth referred to as the perpetuation of the rural idyll and the absent referent, function to “sell the product” (Knezevic, 2012, p. 251) and “construct an image of a benevolently beneficial industry” (Glenn, 2004, p. 64). Inherent to the use of both of these strategies is a perpetuation of the distance between the producers and consumers of food and thus the obscuring or veiling of the social, environmental, and economic conditions involved in production. Further, these particular strategies come to provide the industrial food system with a “cloak of legitimacy” (Knezevic, 2012, p. 250) and encourage the maintenance of complacency or “distancing without major objections” (Knezevic, 2012, p. 249).

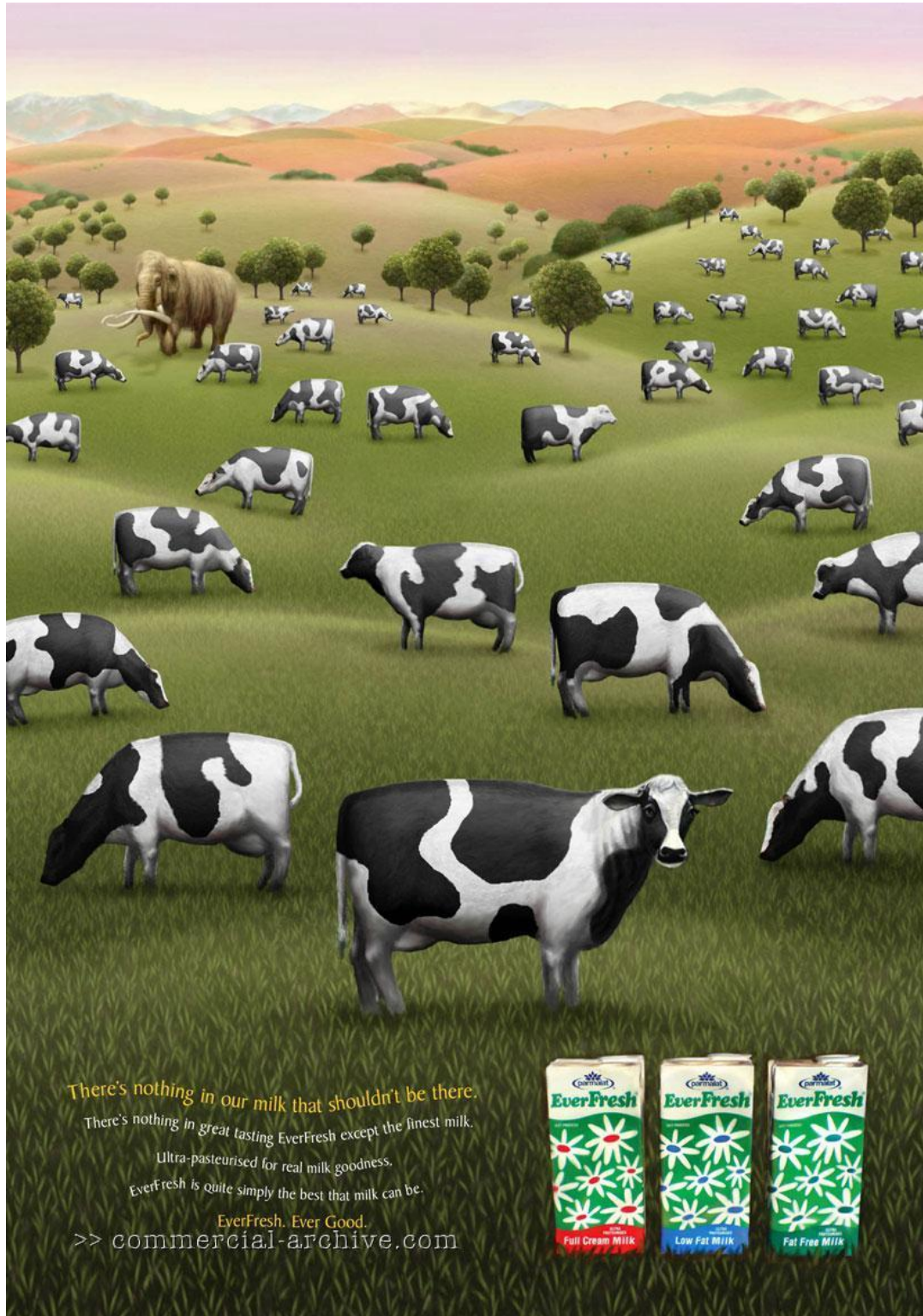
The rural idyll

The twentieth century was largely characterized by two conflicting processes – the increased intensification of animal agriculture and the romanticism of farming as a ‘rural idyll’ (Cudworth, 2003, Wiebe, 2012). Pedagogical spaces such as advertisements for meat, eggs, and dairy, serve an important role in romanticizing animal agriculture by circulating discourses of farm life as rustic and serene (Weibe, 2012). Mason and Finelli (2007) capture this sentiment well in saying,

In our mind’s eye the farm is a peaceful place where calves nuzzle their mothers in a shady meadow, pigs loaf in the mudhole, and chickens scratch about the barnyard. These comforting images are implanted in us by calendars, coloring books, theme parks, petting zoos, and the countrified labelling and advertising of animal products... The reality of modern farmed animal production, however, is starkly different from these scenes” (p. 158).

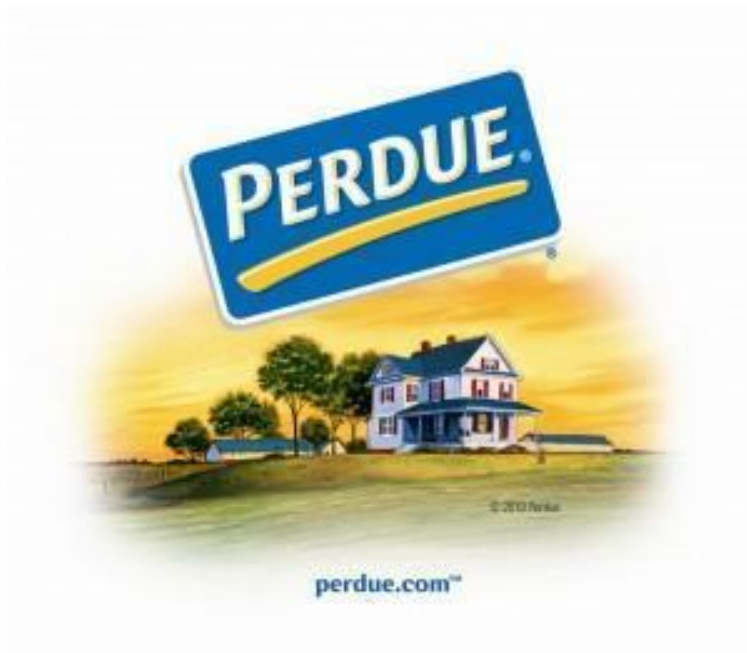
Figures 1 through 5 demonstrate the use of the rural idyll as a particular corporate strategy and these “comforting images” (Mason & Finelli, 2007, p. 158) in advertisements for animal products. These advertisements (see Figures 1-5) present images of rolling hills, grazing cattle, country homes, and small red barns in an attempt to circulate educative stand-ins for the reality of industrial animal agriculture. These pedagogical spaces reproduce a veil over the reality of the animal-industrial complex, wherein animals are often produced in barren and restricted environments and subject to a range of physical and psychological stressors (Mason & Finelli, 2013; Rossi & Garner, 2014), where slaughterhouse workers - a workforce comprised primarily of racialized and low income communities - face deplorable working conditions and an injury rate five times higher than the national average (Nibert, 2013; Oxfam America, 2016), and where the contribution to some of the most serious environmental problems, including greenhouse gas emissions, water pollution and depletion, land degradation, and biodiversity loss, far exceeds that of other industries (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2006; Oppenlander, 2013).

Figure 1: Advertisement for Ever Fresh Milk



Source: Plunket, Justin (2017). <http://www.justinplunkett.com/illustration>

Figure 2: Logo for Perdue Farms



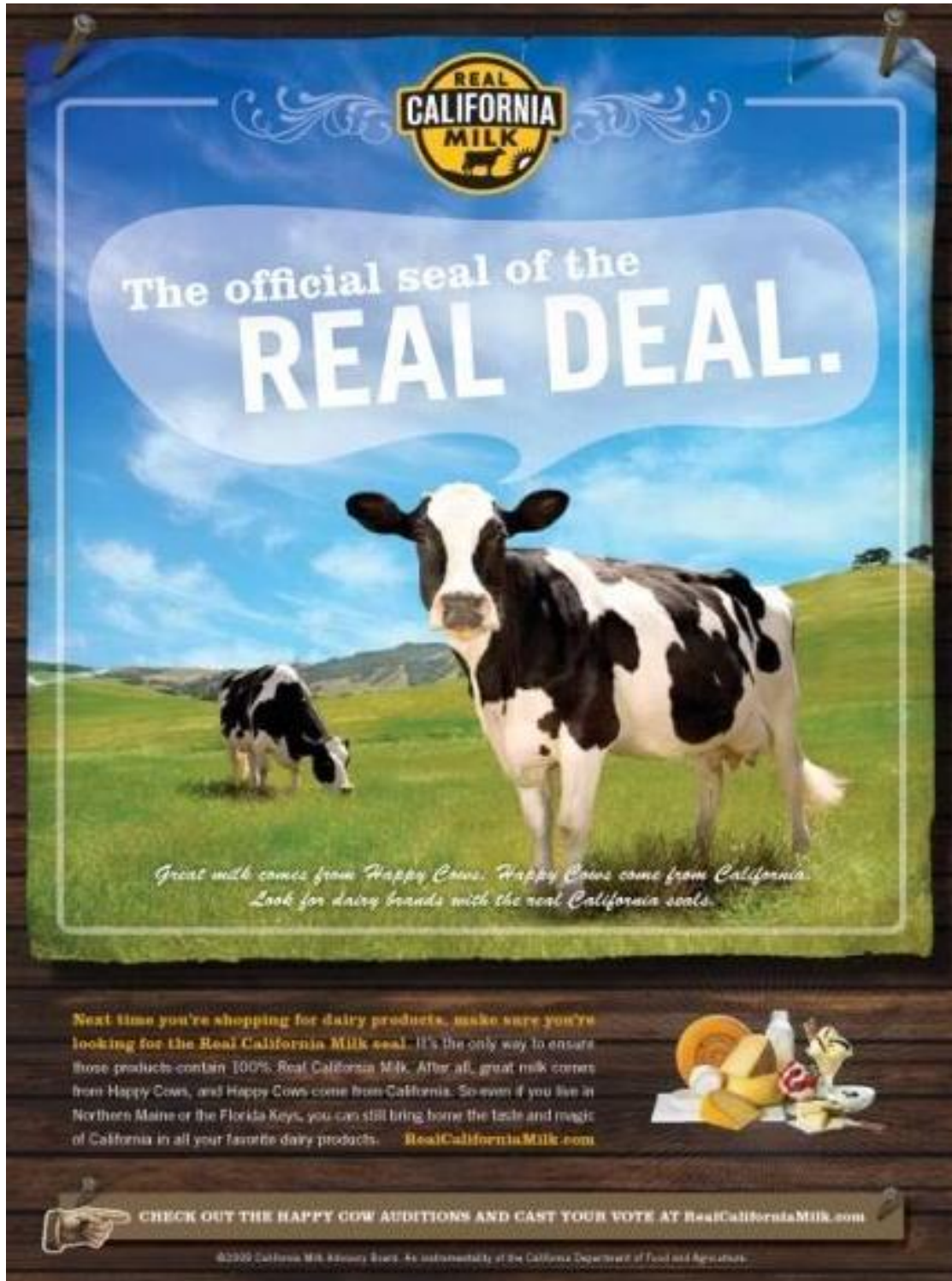
Source: <https://www.foodonline.com/doc/voluntary-class-ii-recall-issued-by-perdue-farms-0001>

Figure 3: Main image on Hans Dairy website



Source: <https://hansdairy.com/>

Figure 4: Advertisement for California Milk



The advertisement is a vertical poster pinned to a wooden surface. At the top center is the 'REAL CALIFORNIA MILK' seal, which is a yellow circle with a black border containing a cow silhouette and the words 'REAL CALIFORNIA MILK'. Below the seal, a large white speech bubble contains the text 'The official seal of the REAL DEAL.' in white. The main image shows a black and white cow standing in a green field under a blue sky with clouds. Another cow is visible in the background. Below the image, a cursive script reads: 'Great milk comes from Happy Cows. Happy Cows come from California. Look for dairy brands with the real California seals.' At the bottom left, a block of text says: 'Next time you're shopping for dairy products, make sure you're looking for the Real California Milk seal. It's the only way to ensure those products contain 100% Real California Milk. After all, great milk comes from Happy Cows, and Happy Cows come from California. So even if you live in Northern Maine or the Florida Keys, you can still bring home the taste and magic of California in all your favorite dairy products. RealCaliforniaMilk.com'. To the right of this text is an image of various dairy products including a carton of milk, a wedge of cheese, and a bowl of yogurt. At the bottom, a banner with a hand icon pointing right says 'CHECK OUT THE HAPPY COW ADDITIONS AND CAST YOUR VOTE AT RealCaliforniaMilk.com'. Below the banner is a small copyright notice: '©2008 California Milk Advisory Board. An instrumentality of the California Department of Food and Agriculture.'

Source: <https://loggersdaughterfinland.wordpress.com/2012/10/20/farm-to-fork-finnish-milk/>

Figure 5 : Lactantia Milk Carton



Source: <https://www.dizin.ca/p-rfiltre-2-milk-2l-lactantia/>

The absent referent

Originating in the field of linguistics, the concept of the absent referent has been taken up by Carol J. Adams, among other eco-feminist writers, to describe that which separates the meat eater from the animal and the animal from the end product (1991, 2010). As such, “live animals are the absent referent in the concept of meat” and “the absent referent permits us to forget about the animals as an independent entity” (Adams, 2010, p. 204). The increasing distance between the producers and consumers of food and processes that result in commodity fetishism that are characteristic of an industrial food system amplify the phenomenon of the absent referent, as many consumers will never encounter the live animal from which the product or by-product they purchase was derived from. In this way, the killing of animals for meat, eggs, and dairy products is largely removed from the public (Cudworth, 2015). Many people are never involved in or have to bear witness to the process of killing animals for food, and simply enter a grocery store and purchase plastic-wrapped packages of skinless and boneless flesh, perhaps adorned in images of “countrified labeling” (Mason & Finelli, 2007, p. 158), never having to see the animal from which it came or think about the conditions of his or her life and death. As such, consumer experiences with the production of meat, eggs, and dairy products “is limited to the final product of labor, its quantity, and its price” (Hudson & Hudson, 2003, p. 416).

Figures 6 through 11 illustrate the structure of the absent referent present within advertisements for animal products. In these advertisements, the animal is either reduced to his or her flesh (see Figures 8 and 9), animated (see Figures 10 and 11), or in the case of Figures 6 and 7, literally missing from the advertisement with the credit for production given solely to the farmer. Each of these images, once again, veils the conditions for animals within systems of industrial agriculture and erase the sentient animal as an individual entity from the equation.

Figure 6: Advertisement for McDonalds



Source: <https://www.manitobacooperator.ca/news-opinion/news/mcdonalds-rolls-out-campaign-thanking-farmers/>

Figure 7: Advertisement for Egg Farmers of Ontario



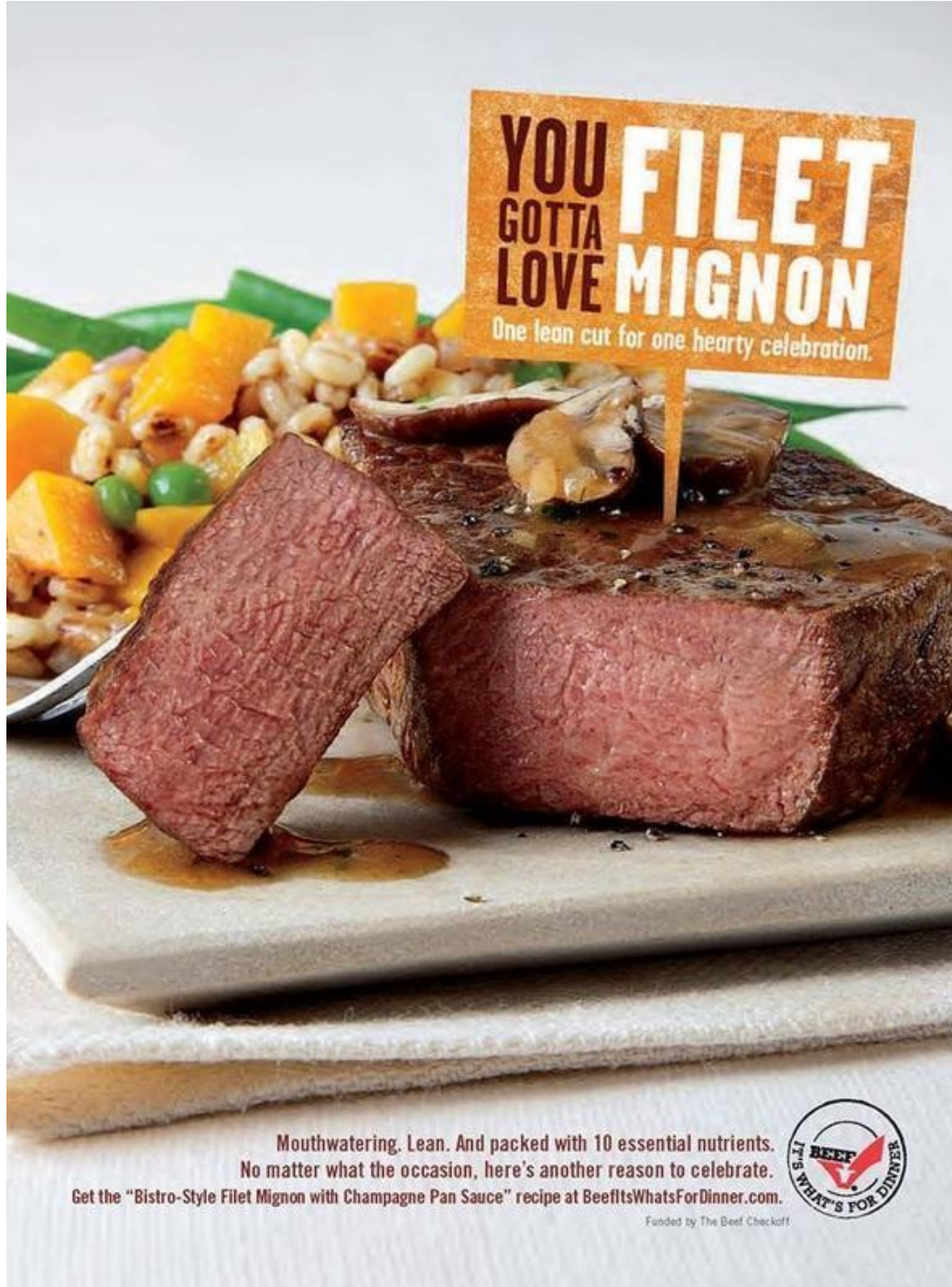
Source: <https://cargocollective.com/aaronbolyos/Egg-Farmers-of-Ontario>

Figure 8: Advertisement for Kentucky Fried Chicken



Source: <https://www.takefiveaday.com/2010/04/13/kfc-double-down-the-cheese-sauce-arent-fried-i-think/>

Figure 9: Advertisement for Beef, funded by The Beef Checkoff



Source: <https://ademarch2014-simpeixuan.weebly.com/ad-design-analysis/beef-its-whats-for-dinner>

Figure 10: Packaging for The Laughing Cow Cheese



Source: <https://www.thelaughingcow.com/>

Figure 11: Advertisement for Natrel Chocolate Milk



Source: <https://www.walmart.ca/en/ip/natrel-1-chocolate-milk-on-the-go/6000198484339>

Complacency

In addition to reinforcing food as a commodity to be bought and sold and perpetuating the rural idyll and the structure of the absent referent, I also argue that these advertisements encourage complacency with the industrial food system. Understanding the relationship between food advertising and labels, Knezevic (2012) suggests,

Food labels shape our understanding of the food we buy and consequently our understanding of the food system. They tap into what we want to hear (and read) by providing constant reassurance that the food system is under control and functioning. In the long run, they assist the industrial food system in minimizing criticism and challenges. For most consumers, who can devote only a fraction of their time to making food-purchasing decisions, they provide a sense of security and knowledge and at the same time discourage questioning of the food system. Most of all they assure us that it is acceptable to not know where our food comes from (p. 249).

In this way, the messages from food manufacturers, labels, and advertisements alike, become powerful educative tools for reinforcing the status quo of commodity fetishism and thus the obscuring of the social, environmental, and economic conditions involved in the production of food (Knezevic, 2012). Moreover, advertisements work to lull consumers into a false sense of assurance; that there is nothing truly broken or troubling about the industrial food system (Knezevic, 2012). Figures 3 and 8 are particularly relevant examples of capitalizing on the fact that many consumers “can devote only a fraction of their time to making food-purchasing decisions” (Knezevic, 2012, p. 249). Figure 3, an advertisement for Hans Dairy, boasts the tagline “We think about every ingredient so you don’t have to.” Similarly, Figure 8, an advertisement for Kentucky Fried Chicken’s ‘Double Down’ includes the pseudo-word “Unthink.” As such, both of these advertisements teach consumers not to think about where their food comes from and to simply trust that agribusiness corporations are doing the thinking to ensure what is best.

Implications: The role of critical food pedagogies

Knezevic (2012) argues, “because of its free-market foundations, the industrial food system is...inadequate in addressing the concerns regarding its social and environmental costs” (p. 247). It is therefore unlikely we can expect agribusiness to change in favor of a more equitable food system. Consequently, I argue that critical food pedagogies have a crucial role to play in challenging the industrial food system and producing genuine educative spaces that circulate counter-hegemonic discourses. In this sense, food pedagogies can be understood as educative

processes regarding how to engage with food in a variety of capacities, including growing, shopping for, eating, or disposal (Flowers & Swan, 2012). Critical food pedagogies then, are those not simply concerned with teaching and learning about food, but approaches that address power and injustice as related to food (Sumner, 2015).

In part, I envision the role of critical food pedagogies as “removing the veil” (Hudson & Hudson, 2003) that conceals the socio-ecological implications of the animal-industrial complex. Consequently, information must be widely accessible regarding the adverse effects of industrial animal agriculture on animal well-being, the environment, and employee rights and safety. However, critical food pedagogies that focus exclusively on merely creating awareness or greater transparency are likely to fall short of transformational change. It may seem logical to suggest that if we are unable to rely on large corporations or the government to make the right decisions regarding sustainable and equitable food systems, why can’t individuals simply make those decisions for themselves? I believe the answer to this question is similar to why many individuals choose to drive an automobile rather than ride a bicycle to get from point A to point B despite information regarding the environmental degradation caused by the automobile industry – our current infrastructure in many cities is designed for transportation via automobile. Similarly, our current infrastructure is designed for the consumption of processed foods, pesticide-laden produce, and large amounts of meat, eggs, and dairy products. In this way, it is problematic to assert that those who purchase and consume foods produced via the animal-industrial complex are fundamentally less knowledgeable or ethically inclined (Guthman, 2011; Wrenn, 2015). A focus on personal culpability ignores the collective power and institutional support of the animal-industrial complex and the structural conditions – those of which are beyond the scope of this paper to address – that contribute to a reliance upon it and limit access to alternative foodways (Wrenn, 2015; Wrenn et al., 2015). As such, the notion of simply creating awareness and hoping that change will occur at an individual level largely ignores the immense power imbalances that persist within the food system and within society more generally.

I therefore argue that critical food pedagogies must go beyond simply creating awareness or greater transparency, to addressing the underlying infrastructure and generative framework that drives our relationships with an industrial food system. First, critical food pedagogies such as non-profit organizations or activist groups, protests, social media accounts, workshops, conferences, documentaries, photography, artwork, etc. can work to undermine both the animal-industrial complex and the logic of capitalism within which it is situated. Groups such as Food Not Bombs, Food Empowerment Project, Sistah Vegan Project, Vegan Hip Hop Movement, Vegan Voices of Colour, and Striving with Systems do important educative work in not only shedding light on the immense burden of the animal-industrial complex, but do so alongside a critique of capitalism and in solidarity with other social justice movements. Second, this vision of critical food pedagogies would involve disrupting the discourse of food as a commodity and instead positioning food as a human right and both a physiologically and culturally nourishing life good (Knezevic, 2012; Wiebe, 2012). In this way, critical food pedagogies would challenge

the anonymity and commodification associated with an industrial food system in favor of a community food economy that lessens the distance between producers and consumers (Gross, 2011). This would involve the creation of counter-hegemonic possibilities within the food system, such as farmers' markets, community gardens, urban agriculture, community supported agriculture, school gardens, food co-operatives, and food-based education (Barndt, 2012).

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to argue that food advertisements obscure the social, economic, and environmental relations behind animal products. Moreover, I have argued that given the increasing distance between the producers and consumers of food in an industrial and commodity food system, food advertisements have come to serve as educative tools. Overall, as sites of public pedagogy, food advertisements for animal products teach society that food is a commodity to be bought and sold, that farm life is picturesque, rustic, and serene, and that live animals as individual entities are inexistent. Moreover, the advertisements encourage complacency among consumers in not challenging or questioning where their food comes from and thus tacitly reinforce processes that enable commodity fetishism. In order to move forward, I have emphasized the role of critical food pedagogies in not only "removing the veil" (Hudson & Hudson, 2003), but also challenging the underlying generative framework of capitalism that drives our relationship with food and creating counter-hegemonic possibilities for rebuilding the food system. As Sumner (2015) suggests,

By eating, we can learn to adapt to a dysfunctional individual food system that benefits a privileged few and downloads never-ending, unsustainable costs onto people, communities, nation states, and the environment. But eating can also help us to learn to think, to resist, and to build an alternative future (p. 205).

Through the important pedagogical work done via groups such as Food Not Bombs, Food Empowerment Project, Sistah Vegan Project, Vegan Hip Hop Movement, Vegan Voices of Colour, and Striving with Systems, as well as community focused food initiatives, I believe we can re-learn our way to a more sustainable food system. Further research in this area could explore the particular strategies used by such critical food pedagogies and their efficacy.

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