

# **Ethical Spaces: The Boundaries and Biases of the Industrial Food Chain**

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	3
I. Introduction .....	3
II. Nature and “Sentient Commodities”: Conflicting Views of the Farm .....	5
III. The Abattoir and the Other: Why the Slaughterhouse is Really Right Next Door .....	15
IV. Supermarket Blues: Food as a Litany of the Literary .....	26
V. Beef Good: What Eating Meat Means .....	38
VI. Conclusion .....	47
Appendix 1: Images .....	50
Bibliography .....	52

## Abstract

*Industrial food processes have emerged as a fairly recent development in human history, and their appearance on the scene of modern eating has problematized the eating process in unforeseen ways. The industrial raising of meat, in particular, has brought about a host of brand new ethical concerns that merit attention. By attempting to compartmentalize the steps of the industrial food process such that the slaughterhouse and the farm are separate from society and each other; the supermarket is a place where food is bought in isolation; and social norms don't impact and aren't impacted by these other steps, a set of linguistic and practical biases has emerged which makes it difficult if not impossible to contemplate meat production from an ethical standpoint. These biases include an Othering of slaughterhouse workers, a revitalization of the myth of the pastoral ideal through the misleading label or "organic", and a set of linguistic practices that render animals raised for slaughter nothing more than commoditized "units" to be consumed. This paper will explore these biases by attempting to follow the production of beef cattle from the farm onward, hoping along the way to elucidate both how difficult it is to sort through the various biases and miscommunications that arise as well as how connected all the steps of the process truly are. In concluding, this paper will suggest that, in order truly to lead an ethical life, being conscious of the ways in which the industrial food chain is connected is essential.*

*Keywords: animals, ethics, factory farms, slaughterhouse, bias, meat, consumer, supermarket, farm, beef*

## I. Introduction

What is it that drives us to make the food decision we make? What influences our perceptions about what food is healthy, ethical, or moral? The answer seems to be, briefly: a lot; in fact, almost everything. Very little about us is untouched by food; its presence in our lives is felt at every level. The problem is that many of these influences are competing, and, more importantly, that many of them are biased. Current farming practices are established by a firm set of rules, laws, and norms that aim particularly at the separation of the spaces in which our food is created. Slaughterhouses, which used to be in the open air in crowded, urban areas, have been moved to rural areas and enclosed, impenetrable spaces. Supermarkets have become mazes of “nutrition information” and labeling that are impossible to navigate. The beef that arrives at the supermarket looks nothing like the cows that it came from. Information is available about that beef—what it is now and where it came from before—but the truth is that there is so much of it

that the information ultimately conceals rather than illuminates the truth about the food. Meanwhile, consumers' perceptions as to what is healthy or ethical to purchase are often the result of incorrect beliefs about food, such as the definition of organic versus free range or any number of other terms that are available. This has created a prevailing myth that the steps of the industrial food chain are separate and separable from each other and from our daily lives. We can tell ourselves that the slaughterhouse, the farm, even the supermarket, need not be a part of our daily reality. But the laws and norms that have created these artificially compartmentalized spaces have not only enhanced existing biases in the system, they have created new ones as well.

The fact is that these separate spaces—the farm, the slaughterhouse, the supermarket, and the table—are not actually separate. They're also not connected in a progressive linear fashion that is clean and easy to follow. Instead they form a complex web of a food system in which everybody is participating but nobody can trace. In order to make decisions about how to participate in that system, it is essential to debunk the falsehood of separate (and separable) ethical spaces in the industrial food chain and to critically examining the biases with which human beings as eaters are presented. Once some of the dust is clear, there are ways in which careful ethical thinking can provide us with action guidance on (some) of the food dilemmas that we face.

This paper will attempt to take the four ethical spaces that have been fashioned in the human imagination, as enumerated above, and strip away some of the biases that surround them. Separating the spaces for the purposes of the paper serves two functions: first, it allows the discussion to become manageable in size, and second, it illustrates the deceptiveness of attempting to separate them when they in fact cannot be separated, either from each other or from the larger ethical implications they present. Afterwards, the paper will explore some ways

that ethical theory can provide possible ways forward. The paper will do all of this by attempting to follow the process of producing beef products from the farm onward. Though beef and cows are the primary focus, research into other factory farmed commodities will occasionally be used, where it illuminates the discussion.

## II. Nature and “Sentient Commodities”: Conflicting Views of the Farm

*[Nature] is a profoundly human construction. This is not to say that the nonhuman world is somehow unreal or mere figment of our imaginations—far from it. But the way we describe and understand the world is so entangled with our own values and assumptions that the two can never be fully separated.—William Cronon, qtd. in Glenn 2004, 65-66<sup>1</sup>*

Farming is a very problematic occupation these days. Farming practices have changed significantly and rapidly since the industrial revolution, and it seems as if most people are still reeling in confusion. Neither consumers nor farmers can escape the biases and paradoxes that surround modern farming. Among these are the conflicting perceptions of nature and modernity, the paradoxical nature of raising commodities that are alive, and the disconnect between what a farm should be or what it is thought to be and what it has really become. Many consumers are physically distant from any kind of farm and have never seen one, yet their emotional reactions to the bits of information about mistreatment they do receive are very strong. With farmers, “the physical distance between them and their animals is very small. On the other hand, the emotional distance between farmers and their animals is very great” (teVelde 2001, 213). These biases and many others make the farm as an ethical space problematic. The ethical space of “the farm” as something situated in a particular place with a particular relation to the animals and nature is a human invention; it does not exist. So why is it so culturally salient?

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<sup>1</sup> This first section will primarily discuss biased views of the farm as “natural”; in section IV I will explore why “natural” food might be preferred to “non-natural” food to begin with

Beginning with the perception of farms in terms of nature, people exhibit a nostalgic bias when they form a mental image of farming that is difficult to shake. First of all, there are the people who think of an idyllic, family farm system in the past and lament the fact that such a system no longer exists. In that case their bias is about the ideal nature of the past and not so much about the present state of farming (though of course they may be overly negative in those perceptions). What is more useful in terms of examining the creation of an ethical space are the second type of people, or those who idealize the current farming structure, usually because they don't know what it is really like. Though the industrialization of farming has become mainstream knowledge, for the most part, the misperceptions survive. Many people still don't know much about factory farming and may not want to. Finally, both of these (mis)perceptions reflect a bias that "natural" farming is better than "intensive" or "industrial" farming. So perceptions are biased both in that they do not conform to the reality of modern farming and that they favor one kind of farm practice over another. What here distinguishes a bias from a mere preference is not the preference itself but the action that people take because of it: preferences for natural farming are biased because people will adapt those preferences so that they remain even in the face of conflicting evidence. In other words, people will continue to find images of the pastoral ideal even when information about factory farms contradicts this notion, and people will continue to favor "natural" farming methods but they may change their definition of natural to suit the reality that already exists.

This bias or preference for "natural" farming is actually much more multifaceted than it may seem at first. B.K. Boogaard, et al. found that consumer attitudes about farming and naturalness were actually quite complex. There were conflicting views among the groups they took to visit farms as to how "natural" the landscape should be. Some focus group members

expressed appreciation for the technological, modern improvements to the farming process: “Dutch respondents mentioned, for example, that innovations, such as cow mattresses, increased the naturalness of the environment by imitating it or by compensating for a lack of it” (2010, 39). The authors represent the views of the respondents by using the image of a “threefold knot” which shows the relationship between modernity, naturality, and tradition in the respondents’ comments:

The knot reflects that the three angles of vision are complementary parts of the whole...Moreover, the threefold knot avoids notions of hierarchy or priority – all three angles of vision are equally important...the relationships appear less linear and...can represent transitions between, for example, modernity and tradition or naturality and modernity. (2010, 39)<sup>2</sup>

This complexity of relationship that they envision is brought out by the study, such as in the inconsistency present in identifying a cow mattress as “natural” because it “compensates for a lack of nature”; how can something that “compensates for a lack of nature” also be “natural”? It also comes up in the contrasting desires of the respondents, such as the difference between the Norwegian and the Dutch views of the farm’s place in the natural/urbanized dichotomy: Norwegians tended to view the farm as an intermediary space between the city and the “wild”, while Dutch respondents tended to view the farm as pure nature (2010, 44), which may explain why “many Dutch respondents expressed concern about modern dairy farming being unnatural and in conflict with nature” (2010, 39). There is, then, a genuine concern that farms *should* be natural, even if that idea of natural is slightly modified to include modern technology.

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<sup>2</sup> For an image of the threefold knot, see Appendix 1

At the beginning of their study, Boogaard et al. note some overarching views about the farm ideal. They describe people's attitudes toward farming by saying that they see "'life on the land' represent[ing] the good life compared to life in the city. Farming is portrayed as a *more natural, authentic life*, away from the artificiality of life in the cities" (2010, 25)<sup>3</sup>. They also point out that, as people become aware, albeit dimly, of the fact that this view is incorrect, they are remarkably good at ignoring that fact: "with modernization, farming became the offender instead of the defender of idyllic traditions and one could even say that this idyll has 'been turned against' farming"... however, "the rural idyll appeared remarkably persistent, in the sense that people seem willing to 'forget' or 'close their eyes' for the production-side of farming in favor of the idyll" (2010, 28). Even as the naturalness of the farm has been made suspect, people have found ways of circumventing their troubling new knowledge and either ignoring it or incorporating it into their view of the "natural" farm. This explains, more than anything else, the apparent conflict between asserting that naturalness is preferable, but that technology can provide a *more natural* naturalness than nature itself. By adding technology into their *definition* of nature, participants in the factory farm food chain can avoid the conflict altogether. Farmers too have a constructed vision of nature that they have adapted to their modern farming practices. Farmers interviewed in the Netherlands would make assertions such as "at least my calves have a better life than calves have in free nature, because in free nature, life is very hard. Out there it is about eating and being eaten" (teVelde, et al. 2001, 211). This vision of nature, as something to be kept out of farming rather than to be a fundamental part of it, serves the farmers' interests (which will be discussed in more detail later): since what they're doing is, in many ways, not that "natural", the story becomes that farming is *preferable* to nature and that it is its own kind of

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<sup>3</sup> Emphasis added



nature that is, in fact, *safer* and *better* for the animals. Furthermore, in what way can farms, in contrast to the nature of that farmer's account, be said *not* to be about “eating and being eaten”?

The realities of the modern farm are nothing like the natural, idyllic image that many people have. Even the respondents in the Boogaard study expressed some mild disenchantment (“I am a bit disappointed about the noise of all the machines at the farm. There is more noise pollution here than in a city centre” (2010, 41)), and they were visiting fairly pastoral farms in the Netherlands and Norway. Michael Pollan, in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, describes his visit to the steer he purchased after it has been transported to a large beef feed lot in an even more jarring way. He directly contradicts the farm-as-rural-ideal by describing the feedlot as “very much a premodern city...teeming and filthy and stinking, with open sewers, unpaved roads, and choking air rendered visible by dust” (Pollan 2006, 72). The choice to describe the feedlot as a “premodern city” is particularly illuminating in light of the Boogaard study because it contradicts the images of both modernity *and* naturality that are typically evoked when discussing a farm. The feedlot, in Pollan's view, is a setting that is both urban and thoroughly archaic. The modern machinery does nothing to diminish the sanitation problems caused by things such as the “lagoon”: “the body of water is what is known, in the geography of CAFOs [Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations], as a manure lagoon. I asked the feedlot manager why they didn't just spray the liquefied manure on neighboring farms...[H]e explained...the nitrogen and phosphorus levels are so high that spraying the crops would kill them. He didn't say that feedlot waste also contain heavy metals and hormone residues...CAFOs...transform what at the proper scale would be a previous source of fertility—cow manure—into toxic waste” (Pollan 2006, 79). Lagoons are a common feature of modern “farms”, and they change everything about the geography and the space of the farm, literally and ethically.

“Farms” is actually a misleading term in itself. The truth is that the modern equivalents of farms don’t even call themselves farms; they call themselves “Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations”. Dissecting that name for even a moment reveals the real purpose of the feedlots. Though calves are kept in a more traditional, pastoral setting for the first few weeks of their life, this is only to prepare them for the intensity of life at the CAFOs, which they probably couldn’t survive more than a few months of (Pollan 2006, 78). Farming isn’t about “living the good life” or getting in touch with nature: it’s about producing a commodity in the most efficient way possible. Looking at other naming conventions in factory farming reveals the same tendency: the U.S. Department of Agriculture classifies cows, pigs, and sheep as “grain-consuming animal units” (qtd. in Glenn 2004, 67) and the Internal Revenue Service classifies farm animals as “inventory” and “items” that are *financed, capitalized, depreciated, invoiced, leased, and liquidated*” (qtd. in Glenn 2004, 69)<sup>4</sup>. On the other end of the spectrum, the National Cattleman’s Association consciously pushes the phrase “family farm” as a euphemism for consumers in contrast to “factory farm” or “high-intensity farming” (Glenn 2004, 69) so that even the largest (multi-billion dollar) farming industries in the world can maintain the quaint title of “family farm” and the PR benefits that go with it<sup>5</sup>. This euphemism implies the deliberate attempt to mislead consumers as to what modern farming considers its real goals to be.

Thanks in part to such discursive practices, the industrialization of the farming process seems to have gone relatively unnoticed by consumers: they still want and expect their food to come from a farm that matches the image in their minds. Farmers, however, are uniquely aware of the modernization of their line of work. The awkwardness of their position lies in the fact that the commodities they’re producing are, in fact, alive. Really they are more than just alive: they

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<sup>4</sup> Sic

<sup>5</sup> The NCBA also claims that domestic cattle “live in the lap of luxury” (1998, qtd. in Fraser 2001, 636b)

can feel pain and express that pain; they can move and resist being moved; and farmers can form emotional bonds with them. Farmers—and the entire farming system more generally—have to develop ways to cope with this. One way is desubjectifying the animals through commoditizing discourse, as shown above. By removing the subject from the animal and focusing only on the commoditized notion of it, farmers can attempt to avoid the emotional contradictions of raising living commodities; industry discourse does its best to hide the living thing and bring the commodity to the forefront. Even more commonly known terms such as the word “livestock” imply this productive paradox. In her study in Northeast Scotland, Rhoda Wilkie observed that “non-farming visitors referred to them as ‘farm animals’” while “livestock” appeared to be used mostly by those within the industry (2005, 221); she further points out that the term itself “implies that we view both food of animal origin and the animals that provide that food as a commodity” (qtd. in Wilkie 2005, 221), but the first part of the word—the “live”—implies the paradoxical nature of the whole system: “the juxtaposition of life and death in the livestock process” (Wilkie 2005, 222). As one woman she interviewed put it, “livestock is deadstock” (2005, 222).

This paradox might be solved in the consumer mind by the notion that farmers *have to* care for their “livestock” in order for them to produce the profitable commodities the farmers want and need. The sentiment that “happy animals produce healthy products” (Harper and Makatouni 2002, 295) is common among shoppers and is perpetuated by the industry. “Traditional agriculture” is viewed as being “epitomized by good husbanding skills, the practical basis of the social contract [between human beings and farm animals]. The extent to which stockmen adequately met the physical and biological needs of animals in their care would directly impact on how well the animals thrived” (Wilkie 2005, 215), but this is not the case in

factory farms. This view “best reflects a predominately urban public’s idealised understanding of farmers and their livestock” (Wilkie 2005, 215) and, again, doesn’t reflect the realities of modern farming. Consumers who ignore the mistreatment of animals may tell themselves that animals produce best when they are being cared for, so it is in the best interest of farmers to make sure they are healthy, and this idea is certainly reinforced by factory farm discourse. Besides the euphemistic language working on both ends, factory farm discourse employs the idea of “happy animals” through the myth that animals *have* to be happy and healthy in order to produce; their welfare is “built into the system”, as it were. In fact, research shows that animals who are very sick can produce quite well: “Hens with deep, infected wounds or broken bones lay eggs at a normal rate...cows with foot disease produce abundant milk. Sows and ewes ‘crippled by lameness’ reproduce. Pigs with pneumonia grow as desired” (qtd. in Glenn 2004, 71).

Compounding this is the fact that, in the industry, even “practices such as branding, dehorning, and castration are said to be done ‘to ensure the welfare of the animal’” (Fraser 2001, 637a). The line between care and abuse has become blurred through claims about what is actually in the animals’ best interests.

Returning to beef feedlots more specifically, Michael Pollan discusses how the very notion of a sick or healthy beef cow on a modern CAFO is flawed. He says that the only thing preventing the high levels of disease on a CAFO from being like those in a real premodern city is antibiotics (2006, 73). Besides the highly unsanitary conditions, the diet of modern beef cattle actually puts them in a *constant* state of illness. Since cows are designed to eat roughage, yet they are fed them primarily grain (corn), they get all sorts of liver infections, bloating, and acidosis. It is now becoming generally acknowledged (except in agriculture, as Pollan points out), that overuse of antibiotics is leading to the evolution of antibiotic-resistant “superbugs”. In

the debate, “public health advocates don’t object to treating *sick* animals with antibiotics; they just don’t want to see the drugs lose their effectiveness because factory farms are feeding them to *healthy* animals to promote growth. But the use of antibiotics in feedlot cattle confounds this distinction. Here the drugs are plainly being used to treat sick animals, *yet the animals probably wouldn’t be sick if not for the diet ... we feed them*” (Pollan 2006, 78-79)<sup>6</sup>. So the myth of the healthy animal being necessary for production is just that: a myth. Animals who are sick will, and do, produce; modern beef cattle could be said to be nothing but sick for the majority of their lives, but they are still more economically efficient for the current system than grassfed cattle.

Farmers, too, enforce the myth that healthy and happy equals productive, and in many ways they can only solve the livestock/deadstock quandary for themselves by doing so. Farmers have to distance themselves from the sentience of the commodities they’re producing as well as assuage public worry about the health of the animals on modern “farms”. One way of dealing with this is not only to assert that the animals are healthy, but also to position themselves in such a way that their only real concern is some commoditized state of health for the animals, as opposed to “comfort” or “care”. Rhoda Wilkie found that, in her study, “those involved with breeding animals express varying degrees of emotional attachment [with their animals] whilst those preparing livestock for slaughter expressed varying degrees of emotional *detachment*” (2005, 215)<sup>7</sup>. This may explain why farmers interviewed in the Netherlands study primarily discuss *health* when talking about animal welfare (teVelde et al. 2001, 207), as opposed to comfort, happiness, or naturality. TeVelde et al. further note that that “farmers’ perceptions...correspond with their *interests*. The price they receive for their animals is directly related to the ‘number of kilograms’ that are produced” (2001, 208). A livestock farmer’s

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<sup>6</sup> Emphasis added

<sup>7</sup> Emphasis added

livelihood is openly dependent on the number of pounds of meat he or she can produce, so the amount they care for the animals can only be in relation to that end; if they become *too* attached, then the paradox of raising livestock merely for the purposes of slaughter would be overwhelming. For the farmers in the study, “their definitions [of animal welfare] actually support the way they [already] keep animals. It seems convenient for them to reduce animal welfare to health, since this will help them keep away possible feelings of guilt. If, for example, animal welfare should include all kinds of natural behavior aspects, the farmers would face a problem” (teVelde et al. 2001, 211). When dealing with their animals, “commercial farmers are expected to relate to livestock in a detached manner, but to handle them with care” (Wilkie 2005, 218). Almost unanimously, the farmers in Wilkie’s study reported that enjoying working with animals was a necessary qualification of farming, yet that enjoyment is tempered with the constant knowledge that they can’t enjoy it *too* much; they can’t get too attached. It is not necessarily out of deceptiveness to consumers that farmers have adapted their notion of health for their own purposes: they *have* to do this in order to cope with the paradoxical nature of what they do.

Biases about “naturalness,” not only how it exists on the farm but what it actually means, can accommodate the guilt felt on both sides of the factory farm. In spite of the evidence, farmers and consumers continue to view farms as “natural,” but with very different definitions. Euphemistic discourse hides the subjectivity and sentience of the commodities that farmers work with, and stories about how healthy the animals really are, that in fact they *must* be healthy in order for the system to work, may make everybody feel better, but in practice none of these methods erase the paradox of the sentient commodity. The fact is that farm workers “enjoy working with their animals but are instrumental in preparing them for slaughter” (Wilkie 2005,

226). This may be the most difficult reality of the farmer's job, and the various attempts to hide this paradox haven't succeeded. Perhaps the most profound attempt to resolve the paradox, and the one that has arguably created the most unforeseen problems, has been the dramatic change in the way the slaughtering process works and the institutional removal of the slaughterhouse from the farm and from society.

### **III. The Abattoir and the Other: Why the Slaughterhouse is Really Right**

#### **Next Door**

*You have just dined, and however scrupulously the slaughterhouse is concealed in the graceful distance of miles, there is complicity.—Ralph Waldo Emerson, qtd. in The Omnivore's Dilemma, Pollan 2006, 226-227*

*Abattoir (n): "a slaughterhouse for cows"; from the French abattre, "to beat down" + suffix -oir (with Latin -orium), "a place for"*

The first and most glaring problem with the modern slaughtering process is that it doesn't solve any of the problems its removal from the general population was meant to solve. The attempt to separate the abattoir both from farmers and from the general public was done so that towns would no longer be exposed to the animality that accompanies a large-scale slaughterhouse and under the guise of being more sanitary and humane for the animals and human beings involved. The slaughtering of cattle used to take place in open, urban areas. In the past few decades, the slaughter of animals for meat has been characterized by several major changes, notably "the relocation of slaughterhouses to rural areas, a depression in wages [for slaughterhouse workers], and the increased recruitment of immigrant workers" (Fitzgerald et al. 2009, 160), in addition to a separation of the slaughtering process from the raising process. Since slaughter is kept away from the eyes of both the farmer and the consumer, neither really knows

about the process (though many consumers assume that those who rear livestock *are* involved in the slaughtering process) and the potential for abuse grows. Raising livestock and slaughtering them are not and cannot be truly separate processes, and the attempt to make them such has created many more problems than it has solved. Instead of asking those who tacitly participate in the process to be active seekers of information and to acknowledge the what goes on behind slaughterhouse walls, complicity is encouraged; “rather than facilitate a genuinely *ethical relation* to animals, one that recognizes and respects them for what they are, modernity engages in a complex form of *moral regulation* that separates and constrains animal expression in order to minimize the potential danger to its cultural logic” (Smith 2002, 50a)<sup>8</sup>. This is why slaughter facilities have been moved away from city centers. The illusion that the slaughterhouse is now a separate space, that it doesn’t emotionally, physically, or psychologically affect every member of the factory farm food chain in some way is a profound and dangerous fiction that allows for the abuse of the animals being slaughtered as well as the people who work in the abattoir, the farmers who raise those animals, and the consumers who eat them. It perilously disperses the blame over a huge number of actors. No one is accountable for the ethicality of their eating habits because they are not held responsible for examining the process; indeed, it is impossible to do so. The division is maintained not only by physical removal of the slaughterhouse but through “a series of practices and discourses, including moralistic discourses of ‘hygiene’ and ‘humane’ slaughter, that enable those outside [the slaughterhouse] walls to maintain their carnivorous habits whilst pleading, if challenged, a kind of ‘diminished responsibility’” (Smith 2002, 50b). The prevailing “cultural logic” of the eating habitus in the United States allows for and even encourages this kind of mental and physical separation of the slaughterhouse, but the separation is a falsehood.

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<sup>8</sup> Sic



The division of raising and slaughter is supposed to partially resolve the livestock paradox for farmers as discussed above. Farmers are constantly aware that they are raising their animals to be killed, but they no longer have to be involved in the killing. But this separation only in theory solves the problem of emotional involvement with a sentient commodity. In practice, farmers still report feeling distress when their animals are collected for slaughter:

I've got four [cattle] going away tomorrow morning ... I'll wail out the four that I need, load them up, take them up to the killing house and put them in the lairage there. But I don't want to see them going down the chute and actually having the bullet put in their face, don't want to see that, hear that, or know about that. As far as I'm concerned they left me healthy and I'm looking for that cheque the next day. But I *could* not see them being shot, that's not my job." (qtd. in Wilkie 2005, 226)

Other farmers in Wilkie's study express similar feelings. Along with the general public, farmers are now "physically shielded and spatially separated" (Smith 2002, 53b) from the slaughtering process, a fact which may help to explain a very puzzling incident in modern farming. When there was an outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Britain in 2001, thousands of animals suspected of infection were slaughtered, and many farmers openly wept and expressed great emotional distress at the event. Why? Because today "it is even possible for farmers to distance themselves from the slaughter process ... the abattoir's uncalled for arrival on their very doorstep may quite literally have brought home to them some grim realities" (Smith 2002, 53b)<sup>9</sup>. The physical removal of the slaughterhouse doesn't remove its spectre from farm work, and because

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<sup>9</sup> It may be, in a much more cynical vein, that the farmers' grief was due purely to economic loss. If that is the case, I would argue they are not taking seriously the slaughtering of living things being placed in their care and that that is very problematic in its own way.

it's no longer out in the open where farmers can see it and participate in it, it has arguably made them *more* anxious about the whole process. They don't see what's going on, and they don't want to see because the glimpses that they do get are extremely unpleasant. One of the many ironies of producing sentient commodities is that farmers often enjoy working with their animals, "but are instrumental in preparing them for slaughter" (Wilkie 2005, 226), and in fact doing the actual slaughtering *used* to be their job, even though it no longer is.

Farmers used to have an even more intimate connection with the animals they raised. Though it would be naïve to claim this process was always ideal and perfectly ethical in the past, the slaughtering of one's own animals did produce several desirable effect from an animal welfare standpoint. First of all, it made the slaughtering more transparent: consumers and farmers both knew, mostly, where and how their meat was being prepared. Second, it kept things small-scale. This facilitated slower, more careful slaughtering of each animal as well as a relationship in which the farmer *had* to be emotionally conscious of the slaughtering process. Though this may have been more emotionally uncomfortable for farmers, it added a gravity to the process that could not be brushed aside as it can today where the slaughtering is done behind closed doors. The owner of Polyface Farms, a grassfed farm ecosystem of sorts on which Pollan worked for a week, wants to do the processing himself. He says "the way I produce a chicken is an extension of my worldview" (qtd. in Pollan 2006, 227) and he would consider it disrespectful to the animals as well as unsanitary to process them in a large facility (though he is forced to do so anyway). After working in the open-air abattoir on Polyface, Pollan "began to appreciate what a morally powerful idea an open-air abattoir is...there's nothing to prevent [Polyface customers] from showing up early and watching their dinner being killed...More than any USDA rule or regulation, this transparency is their best assurance that the meat they're buying has been

humanely and cleanly processed” (2006, 235). This is in stark contrast to the industrial slaughtering process, which was the only part of the life and death of steer number 534—the steer he purchased—that Pollan was not allowed to view. Gradually, “the abattoir itself has been shifted away from the city centres of a populace increasingly shielded from the sight and sound of the violence committed in their name” (Smith 2002, 51a).

Current federal regulations actually prohibit the “processing” (another industry euphemism) of most food animals, with the exception of small poultry operations, by the farmers themselves; by law it must be done in a state or federally inspected facility (Pollan 2006, 227). This is done in the name of “sanitary” and “humane” slaughter, but the regulations are actually incredibly biased toward large-scale, industrial operations. For example, “federal rules stipulate that every processing facility have a bathroom for the exclusive use of the USDA inspector” (Pollan 2006, 227), which clearly favors multimillion dollar operations that can spread the costs out over the millions of animals they process in a year. Additionally, Pollan visits a man who tried to open a smaller-scale processing plant to work with artisanal farmers, but after the plant became operational “the USDA abruptly pulled its inspector, effectively shutting him down. They explained that [he] *wasn’t processing enough animals fast enough to justify the inspector’s time*—in other words, he wasn’t sufficiently industrial, which of course was the point of the whole venture” (2006, 246)<sup>10</sup>. Though this is done in the name of sanitation, the owner of Polyface has had his chickens tested by an independent lab and they have much lower bacteria counts than supermarket chickens. Actually, the USDA doesn’t set standards for the amount of food-borne pathogens that can be in food at all; they only regulate the sort of facility the food can be processed in. If they did set such thresholds, “that would require the USDA to recall meat from packers who failed to meet the standards, something the USDA, incredibly, doesn’t have

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<sup>10</sup> Emphasis added

the authority to do” (Pollan 2006, 229). Though slaughterhouses are reported to be more sanitary than open air facilities, there’s no way to actually enforce that they are, and even if a smaller enterprise can prove that it is sanitary, it doesn’t matter. In light of this, it doesn’t seem to be about sanitation any more. What exactly is the modern space of the slaughterhouse like? Has this space accomplished a more ethical or humane understanding of the slaughtering process? Has it even succeeded in shielding people from the morally problematic work of slaughter?

It’s clear that farmers haven’t really escaped the spectre of the abattoir; it goes along with their livelihood. And those who work inside the abattoir certainly haven’t escaped either. Slaughterhouse workers are the only people who are not spatially shielded from the ethical implications of the slaughtering of livestock, but they are still kept at an emotional distance from the process, partially because they have to be. The tools used to maintain this distance are linguistic as well as functional. Jobs in the abattoir are titled in such a way that reflects their brutality, but also reflects the compartmentalization of the whole process: job titles include “Knocker, Sticker, Shackler, Rumper, First Legger, Knuckle Dropper, Navel Boner, Splitter Top/Bottom, Feed Kill Chain, and so on” (Schlosser 2001, 172; qtd. in Smith 2002, 51b). Though the titles are brutal in their brevity, they do nothing to illuminate the ethical implications of the work; they are short and precise. This is a linguistic manifestation of the whole slaughterhouse attitude that no one should think about what they are doing. The language regarding the animals is just as equal to this task. Not all slaughterhouse workers are able to stomach the actual killing of livestock, so their job is to “disassemble the animal once it has been shot and has become a ‘unit’ or object as opposed to a living thing” (Wilkie 2005, 219). This term “indicated a lack of interest in the individual animal” (2005, 219), where the only object of concern is how much the animal is worth in terms of the amount of meat it can produce.

These linguistic and functional tools are also a prime example of the disciplinary power of the slaughterhouse. Not only are the animals subjected to ever-increasing modes of supervision, such that “their very existence, growth, and reproduction are subject to constant and minute control through the manipulation of their almost entirely artificial environments” (Smith 2002, 51b), all of this is designed to enhance not only their “productivity”, but the productivity of the workers as well. Their jobs are reduced to the repetition of the minutest tasks: “each job is separated into a series of actions to be repeated over and over again as the bodies move on down the line and are progressively dismembered” (2002, 51b). This allows for the division of the workers into the highly specific job categories listed above and thus maximization of their efficiency as well as optimal control over their actions while at work. It is easy to see, if a worker has only one task to be repeated *ad nauseum*, when they are slowing or stopping that task. Furthermore, “the repetitive nature of the tasks involved, the speed of the conveyor belt, and the partitioning of tasks all act as a form of ethical insulation, they encourage a feeling of detachment from the task at hand ... so long as everything continues to run smoothly, the ethical implications of these activities remain suppressed” (Smith 2002, 52a). Several decades ago, slaughterhouses “processed” around fifty cattle in an hour; large, modern plants will dismember four hundred or more in that same time (2002, 51a-b). The goal of the modern slaughterhouse is to regulate the individuals in it—animal and human—to the point of maximum output. The danger of the work provides even less time for humane considerations: “the need to avoid kicking hoofs, sharp knives, or a fall into bone-crunching machinery from floors slippery with blood leaves workers little time for compassion” (2002, 52b). The monotony and the speed of such tasks is as effective an ethical shield as miles of distance and does just as little to *actually* shield the workers, as well as being an incredibly effective means to higher production.

Repetitive motion injuries are common in slaughterhouses due to the nature of the work and “human injuries in U.S. slaughterhouses run at three times the national average for factory work, and there is every reason to think even these figures are massively underreported” (Smith 2002, 52b). These workers are doing a dangerous job that is considered ethically and morally suspect by many people and they’re doing it where nobody in the general public can see the process (though if we did see the process as it is today, it is doubtful that we’d stop thinking it morally suspect). As a result, there is a lot of documented distrust of slaughterhouse workers among the general public: “such workers seem morally tainted by their noisome associations, as (apparently willing) participants in the ethically problematic process of changing farm animals into Farm Foods” (2002, 52b). It doesn’t help that “many of those employed are themselves regarded by the dominant culture as alien. They are immigrants whose first language is often not English” (2002, 52b). The abattoir relegates the “otherness” of both the cattle being “processed” and the workers doing the processing by brilliantly employing techniques of otherness with which people are already familiar. It is easy to other beef cattle and immigrants, because we already do so outside of the slaughterhouse. While these workers are doing dangerous jobs so that the “cultural logic” of modern meat eating can be maintained, they are also being scapegoated by the public as the reason for the ethical breaches that regularly occur in the slaughterhouse. The job itself is *designed* to force the workers to ignore these ethical breaches, and arguably even conditions them to commit them, yet it is they who suffer the scorn of a public that doesn’t want to implicate itself.

The killing of hundreds of animals an hour would seem to inevitably come with its own set of psychological problems, and it’s not difficult to see why slaughterhouses are often not a boon to the towns in which they are located. Crime rates in these communities are extremely

high (see Broadway, 2000 and Stull and Broadway, 2004 as cited in Fitzgerald et al. 2009, 160), with dramatic crime increases that far outpace the increase in population as a result of the influx of workers. Increases in violent crimes in these towns “have usually been attributed to increases in domestic violence and child abuse” (Broadway, 2000, 40 and Stull and Broadway 2004, 103 as cited in Fitzgerald et al. 2009, 160). Sociologically, this makes perfect sense; it’s not such a leap to posit “a connection between the victimization of animals and the victimization of less powerful human groups, such as children and women”, which Fitzgerald et al. do in their study of slaughterhouse towns and crime rates (2009, 164). They point out that “immigrants who relocate to [these] communities to work in slaughterhouses are often scapegoated by the general public, the media, government officials, and the meatpacking industry itself, in an attempt to explain away the resultant social disruption in communities where slaughterhouses have been sited” (2009, 161). This is made easy by the factors mentioned above: the otherness of the immigrants, the morally problematic work of the slaughterhouse in which the public does not want to be implicated, and the spatial removal and walled nature of slaughterhouse work, to name a few. The hypothesis being tested by Fitzgerald et al. is summarized as follows: that “the work of killing animals in an industrial process may have social and psychological consequences for the workers over and above other characteristics of the work” (2009, 162), so particularly, the authors are interested in the idea that *specifically* the work of killing animals produces a *greater* effect on crime than other, similar types of industrial work. The psychological effects of this kind of work are often ignored by the literature which “treats the work of killing animals as more or less the same as other assembly line work” (2009, 159). But they disagree:

Formal rules about requiring humane slaughter acknowledge that sentient creatures are being killed. Yet those who are engaged in the work of the

slaughterhouse also develop constructions that allow them to carry out this work. This contradiction *does not occur when the subject of the industrial process is not an animal*.

In this article, we test the argument ... that suggests that the work of industrial animal slaughter with its inherent contradictions has a *different effect* on local communities than other forms of industrial work. (2009, 159).<sup>11</sup>

The paradox of the sentient commodity, if their hypothesis is correct, is far from solved.

Using data from the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Fitzgerald et. al included in their study 142,372 workers classified as “Animal (except Poultry) Slaughtering” workers, as well as over 26,000 iron and steel forging workers, 30,000 truck trailer manufacturers, about 127,000 motor vehicle metal stampers, 83,000 sign manufacturers, and around 82,000 industrial launderers (2009, 165). These were chosen because of their similarity to the slaughterhouse industry: “they are categorized as manufacturing,...high immigrant worker concentrations, low pay, routinized labor, and dangerous conditions” (2009, 164). Using a variety of regression techniques, and controlling for many other possible explanatory variables such as age and unemployment, they found that “slaughterhouse employment is a significant predictor of both the arrest and report rate scales with all the control variables included in the model” (2009, 172) and, furthermore, that “*the comparison industries do not have parallel effects*” (2009, 172)<sup>12</sup>. This implies that previous work attempting to explain increases in crime in slaughterhouse locations is unsubstantiated by their research: they find that the increased number of immigrants, the industrial nature of the job, the high unemployment found in towns with large manufacturing plants, and the variety of other demographic variables they tested do

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<sup>11</sup> Emphasis added

<sup>12</sup> Emphasis added



*not* explain all of the increases in violent crimes, supporting the notion that “there is something unique about slaughterhouse work” (2009, 174) and its effect on workers and communities that is *over and above* all the other types of work they studied. Larger slaughter operations were found to produce even higher crime rates than smaller ones. The owner of Polyface Farms explains the logic of smaller farming in a less scientific way by explaining that they don’t raise hundreds of thousands of chickens because “it’s not just the land that couldn’t take it, but the community, too. We’d be processing six days a week, so we’d have to do what the industrial folks do: bring in a bunch of migrant workers because no one around here wants to gut chickens every day. Scale makes all the difference” (Pollan 2006, 230).

Slaughterhouses’ removal from urban areas has not diminished their effects on the population; it has merely relocated it so that migrant workers and their families, and others who live near the slaughterhouse out of poverty or necessity, are the ones who bear the negative burdens of having such a troubling industry at their doorstep. The view that the slaughterhouse is separate or that it should be separate—separate from farming, separate from cities, separate from society itself—and also that it is *separable*—that is, that it is possible to separate it without consequences, or at all—is wrong. Attempts to separate the slaughterhouse have only distanced most people further from their food and are directly responsible for the othering of the slaughterhouse worker, as well as the further othering of the animals being “processed”

But really the slaughterhouse is still at everybody’s doorstep. The “spillover effects” of the slaughterhouse into the larger community of workers and their families, meat eaters, and livestock farmers are inescapable. Because people don’t want to be implicated, they have created a regulated ethical arena that is physically removed but constantly present, and becomes even more present in the constant attempts to move it farther away. Despite our efforts to make it

otherwise, “the abattoir serves as a reminder,” rather than a removal, “of the symbolic, physical, and emotional distance we strive to put between animals and ourselves and the methods we employ to do so” (Smith 2002, 53a). The etymology of the word abattoir, coming from the French verb “to beat down” is remarkably apt: the abattoir beats down communities. It is easy to feel a kind of biased attitude toward the Other and attempt to relegate the moral responsibility of the slaughterhouse onto that Other (the immigrant worker), or alternatively to abdicate from responsibility altogether by claiming that that Other (this time the beef cow) doesn’t deserve moral attention. Neither of these approaches is adequate. Even if the latter approach were morally sustainable, it would still make people accountable for the human suffering that goes on in and around the cultural logic of the abattoir space. All the clean, modern processes in the world “simply mask the underlying immorality of constraining the existence and self-expression of Others for instrumental purposes” (Smith 2002, 56a). The bias against the Other is a big part of the creation of the space of the abattoir, and so are the modes of disciplinary power. As discussed briefly above, disciplinary power ensures the productivity of the modern slaughterhouse, which is considered in official circles to be a business. Thus, regulations are heavily biased towards the economic as opposed to the ethical considerations of the “enterprise.” All of this makes for the fairy tale of the slaughterhouse: a place that is constantly increasing its safety and cleanliness through regulation and that is completely separate from those who participate in the production and sale of its products on both ends. Both of these stories are at least incomplete. The slaughterhouse isn’t as far away as anybody thinks.

#### **IV. Supermarket Blues: Food as a Litany of the Literary**

*It has long been understood...that the presupposition that consumers want, will acquire, and, having acquired, will adequately understand and use the information supplied on labels is*

*invalid...Furthermore, labeling information is often inaccessible or useless to consumers.*

—Verbeke 2005, 359

This section isn't about whether or not consumers *should* care about the food they buy, but why they actually *do*: what motivates them and what do they think about different food products? It's also about the informational juggernaut that is the food industry, which is very closely related to what people think about different food products. In 1997, \$7 billion were spent on food advertising in the United States, making the food marketing system the second largest in the U.S. economy (Gallo 1999, 173). This money only accounts for traditional forms of advertising such as TV and magazine ads; what it doesn't capture is the amount of information that's available *after* one goes through the supermarket doors. Dizzying in size, modern supermarkets teem with information about the vast amounts of food they hold. From nutrition labels to advertisements about the organic status, to health claims, modern foods have it all. But what information is actually being conveyed to modern food consumers? There are a lot of stories told on modern food packaging, but many of them are misleading, whether purposefully or not. Is more information really better? Do people actually *want* more information? These aren't easy questions to answer, but let's start by answering a big question in terms of today's supermarket foods: what is "organic"?

When most people think of organic, their perceptions about what it is are bound to have a few things in common, but the thing they're most likely to share is that they are, in some way, probably wrong.<sup>13</sup> Though "organic food is perceived as food without 'chemicals' and 'growth hormones', food that is 'not intensively' produced, and is 'natural'" (Harper 2005, 289), frequently this is not the case. This confusion is a result of several factors, including the over-

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<sup>13</sup> See Harper and Makatouni 2002, Friedland 2005, Verbeke 2005 p.348, Grunert 2005, in particular p. 376, and McEachern and Schröder 2001

availability of terms and (mis)information used in an attempt to sell “ethical” products to consumers. There is a market for these products just like there is a market for “non-ethical” products, and the information that’s on either package is geared toward one thing: selling it. Though the primary focus of this paper is beef cattle, one case that’s very interesting to look at is the case of the egg. An article in The New York Times called “Sorting through the Claims of the Boastful Egg” points to the sheer number of terms that can be applied to eggs in a modern supermarket: “they can be cage free and free range, vegetarian and omega-3 fortified, organic, ‘certified humane’ or ‘American humane certified’” (Price 2008, 1), not to mention “pasture-fed”, “fertile”, “natural”, and “hormone or antibiotic free”. Most people think of these terms as somewhat interchangeable, and they probably think of almost all of them as being regulated and as meaning that the hens were raised in a “natural” environment, with access to the outdoors and a decent, stress-free life; most importantly, many people think that virtually all of these words are synonymous for and encompassed by the term organic. But in reality, “some claims on egg cartons are regulated by the federal government, some by the states, and some not at all. Some affect consumers' health, some touch upon ethics and some are meaningless” (Price 2008, 1). For example, the claim “100% natural” is completely unregulated by the USDA; under the USDA definition, “*all* eggs meet the criteria for 100% natural or all-natural. The term “natural” *doesn't indicate how the chicken was raised*, it simply means that nothing was added to the egg like flavorings, brines, or coloring” (AHHHHHHHHHH) (USDA Agricultural Marketing Service 2012)<sup>14</sup>. But surely this isn’t the image that comes to mind for most consumers when they see “100% natural”! The term “cage-free” is equally misleading. The USDA states explicitly that “cage-free hens *do not necessarily have access to the outdoors* and may live in crowded barns”

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<sup>14</sup> This information comes from a graphic released by the Agricultural Marketing Service; the picture is included in Appendix 1

(AHHHHHHHHHH) (ibid). The term “free-range” or “pasture-fed” means hens do have continuous access to the outdoors, but there are zero regulations as to what that outdoor space might look like, for example, how big it is or its similarity to a hen’s natural environment; in the words of the New York Times reporter “a concrete lot could do” (Price 2008, 2). These are just a few examples as to how the definitions of the terms themselves are unclear, but their carrying out in practice is even more troubling. The mother of all of the above terms is the “organic” label. People see the word organic and they probably think of every one of the terms mentioned above is encompassed by that word. In terms of eggs, USDA’s official definition states that “unlike ‘natural’, the USDA Organic label is highly regulated. Organic eggs are from uncaged hens that are allowed free range of their houses and have access to outdoor space. They are fed an organic diet that isn’t treated with conventional pesticides or fertilizers” (USDA Agricultural Marketing Service 2012). All of this sounds pretty good, and pretty in line with expectations. The real story may not be so promising.

Large chains that focus only on organic, such as Whole Foods, have become masters of perpetuating the organic story: Whole Foods *knows* what its consumers are looking for when they shop there and it’s going to sell that image, if not that reality, to them. Before embarking on his trip to Polyface, Michael Pollan reads the Whole Foods story book and finds it doesn’t end how he thought. He describes Whole Foods as a “literary experience” in which “it’s the evocative prose as much as anything else that makes the food really special” (2006, 134). Remarking on the higher price of the items, he says “I’m evidently not the only shopper willing to pay more for a good story” (2006, 135). The organic movement is partially responsible for the increase in information available about food. In contrast, “in the industrial food economy, virtually the only information that travels along the food chain linking producer and consumer is

price” (Pollan 2006, 136)<sup>15</sup>. But an organic label “tells a little story about how a particular food was produced, giving the consumer a way to send a message back to the farmer” (2006, 136). The organic label at its best, however, is just a stand-in for direct observation of a farm and direct attachment to where food comes from. It is designed to tell a story—and a particular, idyllic story at that—in which “farm animals live much as they did in the books we read as children” (2006, 137). The story of organic coincides with the story of natural that was examined above; a Whole Foods marketing consultant explained to Pollan that buying organic is “engaging in authentic experiences” (2006, 137).

Organic movements may have started out with this sense of pastoral authenticity, but nowadays they look “considerably less like a movement than a big business” (Pollan 2006, 138). Whole Foods, Inc., pulling in just over \$9 billion in revenue in 2010, is “industrial organic”, a label which would’ve been a contradiction in terms not too long ago, but now dominates the organic mindset. Like “agribusiness”, from which they are supposedly separate, industrial organic engages in practices that make small farms impractical and distort the pastoral images that they continue to deliberately conjure up. Pollan specifically tells the story of an organic broiler chicken he bought named Rosie, a “‘sustainably-farmed,’ ‘free-range chicken’ from Petaluma Poultry, a company whose ‘farming methods strive to create harmonious relationships in nature, sustaining the health of all creatures in the natural world’” (2006, 135)<sup>16</sup>. They certainly hit all the buzzwords there. Visiting Petaluma Poultry reveals a very different story:

I also visited Rosie the organic chicken on her farm in Petaluma, which turns out to be more animal factory than farm. She lives in a shed with twenty thousand

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<sup>15</sup> I would argue that this lack of a story is still a story of sorts: the lack of information belies the attempt to keep the farm and especially the slaughterhouse at bay. The package purposely doesn’t evoke any images of the production both because it doesn’t physically resemble the animal and it because it *doesn’t* tell us where it came from.

<sup>16</sup> These are direct quotes from the package

other Rosies, who, aside from their certified organic feed, live lives little different from that of any other industrial chicken. Ah, but what about the “free-range” lifestyle promised on the label? True, there’s a little door in the shed leading out to a narrow grassy yard. But the free-range story seems a bit of a stretch when you discover that the door remains firmly shut until the birds are at least five weeks old—for fear they’ll catch something outside—and the chickens are slaughtered only two weeks later. (Pollan 2006, 140)

According to several consumer surveys, many consumers report buying organic out of concern for small farming operations; one survey found that 46% of consumers “identified partnerships with small farmers as an extremely or very important attribute of organic food” (Friedland 2005, 409 ). But the 20,000 hen shed at Petaluma Poultry and the fact that “as of 2003, five extremely large farms controlled half of California's \$400 million organic produce market” and “Archer Daniels Midland, Coca-Cola, Dole, General Mills, H.J. Heinz, Kellogg, Mars, Kraft, Sara Lee, Tyson Foods, and many other large food companies have acquired or made partnerships with organic food brands or companies or have started their own organic lines” (409) doesn’t support the notion that organic is about small farmers.

In terms of other common notions of the organic story, people are often equally mistaken. Large-scale organic producers, or “big organic”, and smaller ones, “little organic,” have long been opposed to one another. This was an ideological clash between the organic industry and the organic movement, to use Michael Pollan’s words. And as far as policy measures go, the industry won. Some of the questions debated included could a factory farm be organic?; was an organic dairy cow entitled to graze on pasture?; and did food additives and synthetic chemicals have a place in processed organic food? Well, “if the answers to these questions seem like no-

brainers, then you too are stuck in an outdated pastoral view of organic. Big Organic won all three arguments” (Pollan 2006, 155). Though requirements state that organic food be raised without pesticides, chemicals, or genetically modified ingredients, it is often contaminated by these things anyway: “The organic regulations only address genetic engineering by prohibiting the intentional use of genetic engineering methods in the production of organic food. The regulations make no mention of contamination by bioengineered pollen or seed” and even if residue testing is done and genetically engineered contamination is found, “the regulations do not prohibit the product from being sold as organic” (Friedland 2005, 396); likewise for pesticides. Remember above, when it was discussed that the USDA can’t actually recall meat products that are contaminated, and because of this it focuses only on the slaughter *process* as opposed to the cleanliness of the *results*? That is exactly the logic behind Federal Organic regulations: the emphasis is on process, *not* product (Friedland 2005, 391). This means that foods that are grown as a result of the organic process are certified Organic *regardless of the amount of pesticides, GM materials, and other contaminants that are actually in them.*

Though the story told by Whole Foods and organic labels in general is misleading in terms of consumer imagination, it is *not* misleading in terms of Federal regulations. “Big Organic” won a lot of points when it came time to make Federal claims about what it meant to be organic, and not just the ones mentioned above. As a result, though foods thought to be organic may contain pesticide run-off, for example, or may not conform in other ways with consumer perceptions, the companies themselves are truthfully advertising their products as organic. However, these companies are also obviously playing on the consumer desire for organic food, as well as the perceptions they know shoppers hold, in order to capitalize on the price premium that organic food receives. The marketers at Petaluma Poultry didn’t craft that story about Rosie



for no reason. Its founder, “recognized the threat from integrated natural chicken processors like Tyson and Perdue [and] realized that the only way to stay in business was through niche farming...Philosophy didn’t really enter into it” (Pollan 2006, 170).

When most people think organic they, like Michael Pollan, “think family farm, [they] think small scale, [they] think hedgerows and compost piles and battered pickups—the old agrarian ideal” (2006, 158). But why do people *want* this ideal anyway? Many consumers feel that organic food is superior in some way: for decades now, consumers have cited health as a reason to buy organic and “every food scare has been followed by a spike in organic sales” (Friedland 2005, 410-411); others mention animal welfare (see Harper and Makatouni 2002); still others are concerned, as mentioned above, with supporting small, local farmers. If these are the things people are looking for in organic food, then their desires are likely not being met by current organic standards. Even if companies wanted to increase their standards to conform to consumer perceptions, it would be very difficult to do so. One major problem is that “the Organic Foods Production Act and the USDA NOP regulations restrict the use of the word organic in labels and marketing to products produced in accordance with the Act and regulations. It is illegal to even imply that any other product is organic” (Friedland 2005, 414). Furthermore, “an organic certifier could not attempt to distinguish the organic foods he certified by developing a reputation for requiring stricter organic standards. Instead [he] would have to create an entirely new marketing term—one that did not use the word organic” (2005, 414). Since consumers don’t fully understand what organic means now, and already import definitions of pesticide-free, free-range, and natural into their conception of organic, it would be extremely difficult to get them to understand the differences between a new term and the term organic.

In other words, people are biased when it comes to organic. They often prefer organic to other kinds of food, yet their understanding of the word “organic” is often flawed, like the biases regarding “natural” discussed above (since so many people use the terms interchangeably, this is no surprise). None of the vast amounts of information available on supermarket labels does very much to correct for these biases. The labels themselves are biased; they’re promoting a product and a business, and only a philosophy inasmuch as it will entice people to buy. It’s not a conspiracy: they’re genuinely complying with Federal regulations; but they’re also playing on peoples’ emotions and desires when it comes to their food. If consumers are so unsure about their food, then “the obvious solution to this market failure...seems to be the provision of more information. However...more information does not necessarily mean better informed consumers...Information is likely to be effective only when it addresses specific information needs, and can be processed and used by a target audience” (Verbeke 2005, 348).

But is not only the sheer amount of information and terms that makes processing information difficult. When it comes to meat in particular, there are intense dissociative factors at work. A continuation of the process of spatially and linguistically removing the slaughterhouse from daily life involves physically and linguistically removing the meat from the animal that it came from. It has been well documented that the cow one is eating is called “beef”, “hamburger”, or “steak”; never “cow” (Glenn 2004, 69; Singer 1990; Smith 2002, 54a). The packaging is equally neat and equally deceptive, with the meat inside it bearing virtually no resemblance to the animal it came from. (In fact it would be more accurate to say animals, because “a single hamburger can contain the mechanically recovered remains of more than a hundred different cows” (Smith 2002, 54a).) But the packaging belies this information, at the very least presenting the end of a very messy process in a shrink-wrapped, sterile shell, and often

going further, offering an image of the pastoral ideal that involves an appeal to nature or even advertisements that depict the animals as happily offering themselves for consumption (Smith 2002, 54b; Glenn 2004, 72-76, teVelde et al. 2002, 215). Furthermore, “in most butcher shops, carcasses are no longer visible” (teVelde et al. 2002, 215). The shape of the animal has gradually been removed from the supermarket, but also from consciousness more generally. Complex social pressures “led to the myth that our meat and milk are not produced and processed, but that they come directly from nature (or, as the alternative, directly from the package). Few people still realize that eating ... prime rib means that an end product of a long technological process is being consumed, that is cleverly packaged in pictures of wild nature” (Korthals 2004, 154). Prime rib only incidentally resembles something that was once alive, and it is likely that anything on the packaging referring to its previously-alive status will be pointing to how wonderful and natural that life was.

Despite the common assumption, shoppers may not actually want things to be otherwise. Normally, in neoclassical economics as well as other disciplines, the consumer is seen as “sending a message” or “signaling demand” for a product based on what they buy. Of course, this also assumes that customers have perfect information about what they’re consuming, which is simply not true. Consumers may want to feel better about animal welfare by buying organic, but they may not actually want the information that they appear to be seeking; “since World War II, consumers have been kept more and more distant from food production, and they have tolerated that. Consumers have *allowed* themselves to be banned from Foodland. Most consumers assumed that food can be produced somewhere just like automobiles, and that it is sufficient to keep informed about the end product” (Korthals 2004, 152)<sup>17</sup>. In fact, a 1999 report by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Fisheries in Britain was of the opinion that “animal

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<sup>17</sup> Emphasis added

welfare messages should not be targeted directly at consumers because of ‘the risk of reducing demand by reminding consumers of the link between animals and meat’” (qtd. in McEachern and Schröder 2002, 225-226). In order to sustain meat eating habits, it may be necessary to dissociate from the sentient half of the sentient commodity paradox. Farmers who raise livestock have to do it, and consumers may as well. Attitudes such as “I thoroughly enjoy eating meat so I don’t think about these things much because it would put me off”; and “I tend not to think about the background of how my meat got on the shelf, because if you thought too much about where your meat came from you would stop eating it” are common in surveyed consumers (McEachern and Schröder 2002, 229). One interviewed consumer stated that “I prefer chicken fillet because that doesn’t remind me of a living animal” (teVelde et al. 2002, 215), but it’s not hard to supposed that they are far from alone in that sentiment. This kind of concealment is used as a distancing device; “it protects consumers from having to detach themselves [in the way that farmers do], *as it is a detachment in itself*” (teVelde et al. 2002, 214)<sup>18</sup>. So while many consumers express concern about animal welfare and have some awareness that this welfare is often compromised in the industrial food chain (teVelde et al. 2002 213-214, “Animal Welfare Perceptions in the EU”, Harper and Makatouni 2002), they continue to buy meat products. In fact, the European Commission’s report on food attitudes states in the conclusion that “in spite of this awareness of animal welfare, *a slight majority of citizens [in the EU] do not seem to take account of animal welfare when buying food*” (73)<sup>19</sup>. Though it is easy to see all the misconceptions about organic food and animal welfare as mere deception on the part of agribusiness, in reality consumers don’t necessarily want the information about and access to their meat that would facilitate a more ethical relationship with the animals it comes from.

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<sup>18</sup> Emphasis added

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On the other hand, consumers aren't the only ones whose biases are at work. Many of them are simply misinformed about the state of the food they are buying. Not only are they not informed, but they may not be capable of acting on that information in a way that promotes change: "I must immediately refute the misconception that consumers have total say in the consumer society. That is not the case. Instead, it is the supermarkets and the consumer interest organizations that decide what consumers must want" (Korthals 2004, 151). The supermarket as a place in which consumers make informed decisions that "send a message" to growers what they're interested in is a fallacy. Producers and the government tend to cite lack of demand from consumers as a reason for not upping their ethical standards: if they wanted it they'd buy more of it; while consumers think they are free agents who knowingly choose their balance between ethicality and price. Shifting responsibility is another dissociative device employed when it comes to supermarket policy, but it's employed on both ends. Farmers point their fingers at consumers and have the attitude "if they were willing to pay more, we'd be happy to deliver animal welfare", while consumers shift the blame to the government and the supermarkets (teVelde et al. 2002, 214). Particularly, consumers are often portrayed as having "made their choice" between price and welfare: they are "indirectly criticized by researchers for their egoistic buying behavior. Without any respect for the situation in which consumers find themselves and no analysis thereof, they are accused of blowing every which way, or giving socially desirable answers, and, when push comes to shove, of choosing for the big money, leaving the animals and the environment to fend for themselves" (Korthals 2004, 157). This interpretation is just a way for farmers and retailers to abdicate their responsibility.

Neither of these accounts—that of the consumer as callous, egoistic buyer, nor that of the consumer as completely free agent desiring information and welfare but being denied it—are

truly accurate. The spaces and practices of the supermarket are defined by *both* sides of the production equation. Removal of the animal and the farm from most peoples' buying consciousness has created a tangled mess of an information gap in which everyone is pointing their finger at someone else. Though the meat production food chain has most likely never been completely simple and transparent, the separation and walling off of the various processes in the name of sanitation or humane treatment or efficiency has made the gathering of information next to impossible. This information gap has been filled with innocuous phrases and half truths that provide no tangible information at all. In an astounding proof of "more isn't always better," increasing the amount of information on labels has "overload[ed] the label or package, [making] a given desired amount of information *harder* to extract, or simply caus[ing] individuals without time or ability to process information to ignore it" (Verbeke 2005, 360)<sup>20</sup>. Unlike those who buy the Polyface open-air processed chickens, supermarket shoppers do not and *cannot* see where their meat is coming from. An information gap which didn't exist before the compartmentalization of meat production has appeared and been filled with nonsense. No wonder everyone is biased!

## V. Beef Good: What Eating Meat Means

*Secretary: "Principle Snyder, Billy Crandall chained himself to the snack machine again."*

*Snyder: "Pathetic little low life vegan."—Buffy the Vampire Slayer, season 2 episode 19*

*"But vegetarianism also has subtler effects that include ways of thinking and feelings that have narcotic effects. This agrees with the fact that those who promote narcotic ways of thinking and feelings, like some Indian gurus, praise a diet that is entirely vegetarian and would like to*

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<sup>20</sup> Emphasis added

*impose that as a law upon the masses. In this way they want to create and increase the need that they are in a position to satisfy.”—Nietzsche, The Gay Science 1974, qtd. in Korthals 2005, 14*

Kitchen tables are situated before, during, and after the supermarket; they are both the result of and the impetus for the entire food system. Farmers have kitchen tables that they must fill with food, so do slaughterhouse workers. Farmers and slaughterhouse workers are food consumers too, which is why the metaphorical kitchen table cannot be separated or placed in any specific location in the food process (the same logic applies to the supermarket, for that matter). As a matter of fact, the kitchen table is altogether too homey and private a metaphor, because all of the processes previously discussed, as well as a complex web of social perceptions and intuitions guide what ends up on somebody’s plate and what doesn’t. Attitudes about eating and not eating certain foods, meat in particular, run deep, and it is not only non-vegetarians who are biased. What people think about the acceptability of eating meat and how meat eating is viewed in a cultural context are a huge part of the industrial food chain.

The physical distance put between farms and slaughterhouses on the one hand and shoppers on the other both causes and is a result of the othering of animals. While linguistically biased terminology such as “grain producing animal unit” is the result of the modern space of the slaughterhouse in many ways, it is also the result of attitudes that were and are already present. There is a constant, pulsing dialogue going on in farm discourse that expands and contracts around a rhetorical center of animal otherness. Sometimes animals are like people and sometimes they are not. In studies, consumers reflect this ambivalence in numerous ways, for example “opposite judgments, such as ‘you shouldn’t compare animals with people’ and ‘the way animals are treated is inhuman’ were frequently made by one and the same person” (teVelde et al. 2002, 211). Modernity has defined animal “as humanity’s Other, as the non-human, the inhuman, the

less than human, the bestial ... animality is that state of being which, it is claimed, humanity has transcended” (Smith 2002, 49b). Yet animals and humans play an integral role in each other’s lives. The mechanism that has allowed people to “transcend their animality” is the subjection and commodification of those very animals. If raising animals for meat can be seen as a kind of “contract” in which animals give their lives in exchange for care and shelter, then it means that people have obligations as part of that contract, and “people must stick to their commitment: caring well for the animals, not reducing them to biomachines, to milk and meat machines” (Korthals 2004, 89). If this is truly the obligation that humanity has then it has failed, and the reasons why it has failed, though complex, can mainly be traced back to the massive changes and compartmentalization of the food process that have occurred in recent history. The habitus of modern meat consumption has come to depend on separation “and the removal/regulation of personal links between the animal corpse and human consumer” (Smith 2002, 50b) in the name of some kind of “coping mechanism,” but it has really made the food system all the more difficult to navigate.

Take the slaughterhouse as an example. Social norms played a direct role in the removal of slaughterhouses from public space, yet the social norms and values this move was supposed to help have been replaced by the abuse of workers and animals in the modern slaughterhouse, as well as the documented rises in violent crime found in slaughterhouse towns. For example,

...during the early nineteenth century, arguments for re-locating Smithfield livestock market claimed that the animals herded there for slaughter were not only a physical but also a moral danger to London’s populace. Their noisy presence and unrestrained expressions of animality, including openly sexual behavior, were likely ‘not only to disturb the vulnerable minds of women and children but also to



act as a likely stimulus to improper sexual practices on the part of the impressionable people living and working in Smithfield' (Philo 1998, 64). The inevitable conclusion was that 'livestock animals should be "kept at a distance" from the "normal spaces" of the refined city for the good of "public morals"' (64)" (Smith 2002, 50a).

What public morals have we protected by removing people—including farmers—from the slaughter process? All that's happened is that poor, immigrant, Other, slaughterhouse workers bear the burden of the complicity of everybody else. And the women and children who suffer increased domestic violence and rape from workers who have to learn the economics of abuse, have they been helped because their "vulnerable minds" have been protected? The separation of farms and slaughterhouses from "the public" has made it easy to uphold the fiction that they are separate from us and that we don't owe them anything, but it hasn't done so much to alleviate the ethical issues that will always go hand in hand with the production of sentient commodities: the animals we eat are neither fully commodities nor fully not commodities. Removal of the slaughterhouse has made the impulse to other stronger and has done little to protect society from spillover effects such as violence and lack of sanitation.

Another reason for the removal of the slaughterhouse can be found in Julie Kristeva's theory of abjection, which is very closely related to the othering and physical removal of animals for moral reasons, but encompasses a much more personal rejection of the abject, the disgusting, and the Other. From the beginning, Kristeva claims that there is a "primal repression" in which "the ... speaking being, always haunted by the Other, divide[s], reject[s], repeat[s]. Without *one* division, *one* separation, *one* subject/object having been constituted ... The abject confronts us

... with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of the *animal*” (Kristeva 239)<sup>21</sup>. Disgust is felt by certain kinds of food especially, and most of these abject foods are meat. They are identified, in contrast to the strong, virile nature of red meat, as *too* strong and they usually include other human beings, carnivores, and uncastrated animals (Twigg 21). When this food is rejected, Kristeva claims that it is an internal, *en masse* rejection; food is seen as a part of the self, even while the animal it came from is seen as the Other. Food is assimilated into *my* body, *myself*, so when it becomes disgusting to me “I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*” (Kristeva 231)<sup>22</sup>. The abjection of blood and decay are closely related to the eating of meat and the only way to deal with this is both to other the animal and to “divide, reject, repeat”, to move the smell and the sight of the slaughterhouse far away even though we continue to internalize its products.

Michael Pollan’s account of gutting a pig after a hunting trip is strongly reminiscent of this. The more he identifies with the pig the greater his disgust becomes: “the pig was splayed open now, all its internal organs glistening in their place like one of those cutaway anatomy dolls from biology... I’d handled plenty of viscera in the chickens I’d gutted on [Polyface] farm, but this was different and more disturbing, probably because the pig’s internal organs ... looked exactly like human organs” (Pollan 2006, 355-356). He even makes a brief comparison to cannibalism, remarking that the pig forced him to clean and gut a creature his own size who “on the inside at least, had all the same parts and probably looked an awful lot like I did” (358) ... and while eating a pig isn’t cannibalism by any reasonable definition, “you could forgive the mind for being fooled into reacting as if it were—in disgust” (358). If animals were present “in the flesh” in our daily lives, their status as “undeniably active (rather than simply reactive) agents

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<sup>21</sup> Sic

<sup>22</sup> Sic

[would pose] a real threat to the intellectually nurtured view of human exceptionalism. And, where they threaten to impinge on our consciousness, they also begin to trouble our conscience” (Smith 2002, 50a). The more an animal is othered—the less we have to see it and hear it—the less we are confronted with how un-other it really is.

Otherness is only one of the many social values that go into the assessment of the meat industry. Research about social attitudes toward meat have found that meat in general, and in some instances beef in particular, “represents a peculiarly ‘social’ food item; intake is highly influenced by certain kinds of social relationships” (Zey and McIntosh 1992, 251). Eating beef is an object of pride in the West: meat is “the most highly prized of food. It is the centre around which a meal is arranged. It stands in a sense for the very idea of food itself—a quality it shares with bread ... At the top of the hierarchy, then, we find meat, particularly red meat, for the status and meaning of meat is quintessentially found in red meat” (Twigg 21-22). Red meat is supposed to stand for masculinity and “reflects men’s control over nature and over women” (Zey and McIntosh 1992, 255). But none of this is always very obvious: eating and eating practices are taken as a given upon which other cultural and ethical practices are layered, while eating itself and the values it espouses go unquestioned and are seen as “organically” produced and “naturally” existing<sup>23</sup> (Twigg 18). In fact, research shows that “significant others and the social milieu have significant impacts on both the intention to eat as well as the actual eating of beef” (Zey and McIntosh 1992, 253), suggesting that meat dominates most diets because of these cultural and social interactions as well as other (largely unseen) social norms. Zey and McIntosh’s study on the intent to consumer beef found that believing the consumption of beef to have negative consequences “*has no direct effect on the intent to consume more or less beef*”

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<sup>23</sup> Though the terms “organic” and “natural” are here used as distinct from the “supermarket definitions” of these words, this was done intentionally. Isn’t it fascinating how these words come up over and over again?

(1992, 260-261)<sup>24</sup>. This seems like it would be a highly salient factor in the intent to consume beef, but it turns out that it isn't; what they find instead is that the single most important factor in determining how much beef people will consume in the future is how much beef their husband or wife or their friends think should be consumed (258-259). Thus "norms are of equal or greater importance than salient beliefs" (261) when it comes to how much beef someone in their study will eat.

Another obstacle that confronts decisions about eating meat is bias towards "alternative meat lifestyles," as well as bias within these different schools of thought. Vegetarian, vegan, raw, and all-organic diets are often confused with one another, as well as with many other habits and practices, and because of the dominant social schema already discussed, many people are very resistant to any of these alternative meat ideas. But this may not be entirely without reason. Besides identifying organic food in terms of pesticide content and animal welfare standards, many people hold the belief that "organic food is for higher socio-economic classes" (Harper and Makatouni 2002, 292). Furthermore, many people see the entire vegan and vegetarian dietary schemas to be fundamentally discriminatory and as being biased "in favor of adult, middle-class males living in high-tech societies—the group with the most power in our world. The appropriateness of vegan or vegetarian lifestyles is relative to individual and cultural circumstance" (George 1994, 21). Even if these non-powerful groups are granted an "exemption" from vegan or vegetarian lifestyles, those who argue for the morality of such lifestyles would then appear to be condescending to these less powerful groups, which "relegates them to a moral *underclass* of beings who, because of their natures or cultures, are not capable of being fully moral" (George 1994, 23). Thus veganism and vegetarianism in particular, and possibly alternative food lifestyles in general, are seen as being, and perhaps are, discriminatory towards

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<sup>24</sup> Emphasis added

less privileged groups: the poor, women, children, people who come from cultures with less access to different food options, and people with health problems, to name a few.

Bias toward veganism, however, exists as well, and the very (so-called) ideals of veganism that are supposed to be discriminatory may themselves be interpreted in biased ways. Perceptions as to what it means to be vegan are often imposed upon veganism as a dietary practice, even in scientific research and literature. The lay interpretation of veganism may be that vegans are self-righteous and obnoxious, but scholars misinterpret veganism in much more systematic and detrimental ways. In terms of “the vegan ideal,” the identification of such a thing is itself problematic. Particular lifestyles, such as the monastic lifestyle of living on bread and water or a macrobiotic, may be *a* vegan ideal, but it is certainly not *the* vegan ideal (Varner 1994, 36). Researchers, who should be particularly sensitive to the dangers of conflating these particular lifestyles with veganism, sometimes are not. A lot of previous research on the health impacts of a vegan diet have heavily favored “new vegetarian” groups such as macrobiotics or particularly strict religious sects; for example, one study stated that “‘in the United States, milk and certain other foods are fortified with vitamin D, but vegans, who avoid all animal foods *and* often *reject fortified foods and vitamin supplements*, do not obtain vitamin D from these foods.’ And on the same page, near the end of [the] discussion of calcium deficiencies...states flatly: ‘Vegans *avoid prescribed medications that waste calcium, rarely use large amounts of caffeine, [and] do not smoke*’” (Varner 1994, 36)<sup>25</sup>. None of these practices are part of the definition of a vegan diet and there’s no reason to suppose that even a majority of, let alone all, vegans would subscribe to these further lifestyle habits. Additionally, the identification of *one* “vegan ideal” is itself problematic: people are vegans for a variety of different reasons, ranging from health to

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<sup>25</sup> Sic

animal welfare, and it is unreasonable to suppose that all vegans are vegans because they think all human beings should be.

Even extremely common dietary advice is discriminatory toward vegans and vegetarians. Until 2011, the USDA's standard dietary advice graphic was the Food Pyramid, which recommended, in its most recent incarnation before the current "My Plate," three cups of milk a day and 5.5 oz of meat and beans a day. The previous Pyramid recommended two to three servings of dairy as well as two to three servings of "meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs, and nuts" (as opposed to simply "protein"). Not only are these recommendations biased against those who don't eat meat or dairy, they are also biased against people who are lactose-intolerant (for example), which turns out to be a heavily racialized category: according to a newspaper article about bias in the Food Pyramid, "some 90 percent of Asian-Americans, 70 percent of blacks, 50 percent of Latinos and 15 percent of whites have trouble digesting dairy products, according to medical data" (Texeira 1998). Which diet is more racially biased? The answer isn't simple, and the question may even be a little ridiculous; the fact is that it seems to be a lack of open-mindedness (and a healthy agricultural lobby) that is making both sides misunderstand the other.

This is a common problem when it comes to dietary habits and animal welfare more broadly. Emotions run high on both sides such that "modern disagreement about the ethics of animal agriculture has often taken the form of highly simplistic and emotionally charged pronouncements, either condemning animal agriculture as thoroughly bad or defending it staunchly" (Fraser 2001, 634b). But this may be a direct result of the difficulty of getting true information, rather than a perpetuation of that difficulty. If the system were simple and transparent, it wouldn't be so easy to believe the next semi-credible source that comes along.

## VI. Conclusion

Social norms rule the table, and the perception that at least the slaughterhouse, probably the farm, and even possibly the supermarket, are their own, separate worlds in which ethical decisions can be made apropos to those worlds alone is really the result of bias and misperception. Attempting to separate these spaces has only resulted in more confusion and less possibility of learning anything valuable about eating ethically. But there are things that can be done to remedy the situation. Most importantly, animals need to be included in ethical considerations (which doesn't mean everyone needs to become vegetarian or vegan) because failing to acknowledge their role in the food system is what has led to many of these problems and abuses. Animals don't need to be treated as humanity's moral equals, but it is too simplistic and simply ignorant to pretend that they don't exist and that we aren't complicit in killing millions of them every year. If human beings and other animals are involved in a sort of contract, then human beings have failed at their end of the contract. Biases created by the removal of the realities of the factory farm from everyday life have reinforced factory farm practices and allowed people to become complacent about a great deal of questionable practices that effect animals, yes, but human beings as well.

This paper isn't really trying to solve all of these problems so much as it is trying to illuminate them, to problematize them, which may be a partial solution in itself. Being aware of the industrial food process is so difficult these days, and being aware of it is really most of the battle for combating it. To say "you are what you eat" is to go a little too far, but certainly what we eat becomes a part of us to a large extent. Becoming conscious of our eating habits is the only way to truly care for ourselves, as well as the only way to begin to change any of the objectionable processes that are occurring in our name. If nobody knows what's going on, then

nobody can change it. There may not be a perfect food system out there, but the compartmentalized monster of an industry that we have today could certainly use some vast improvements. People thought that those improvements would come through the organic movement, but that movement has largely been incorporated into the industrial food system model. In fact, the organic movement has done a great deal of harm in some respects by revitalizing the myth of the pastoral ideal. Even people who are aware that industrial farms don't match the agrarian paradise in their minds think that organic farms do, that they have filled the pastoral void with free-range, grassfed cows.

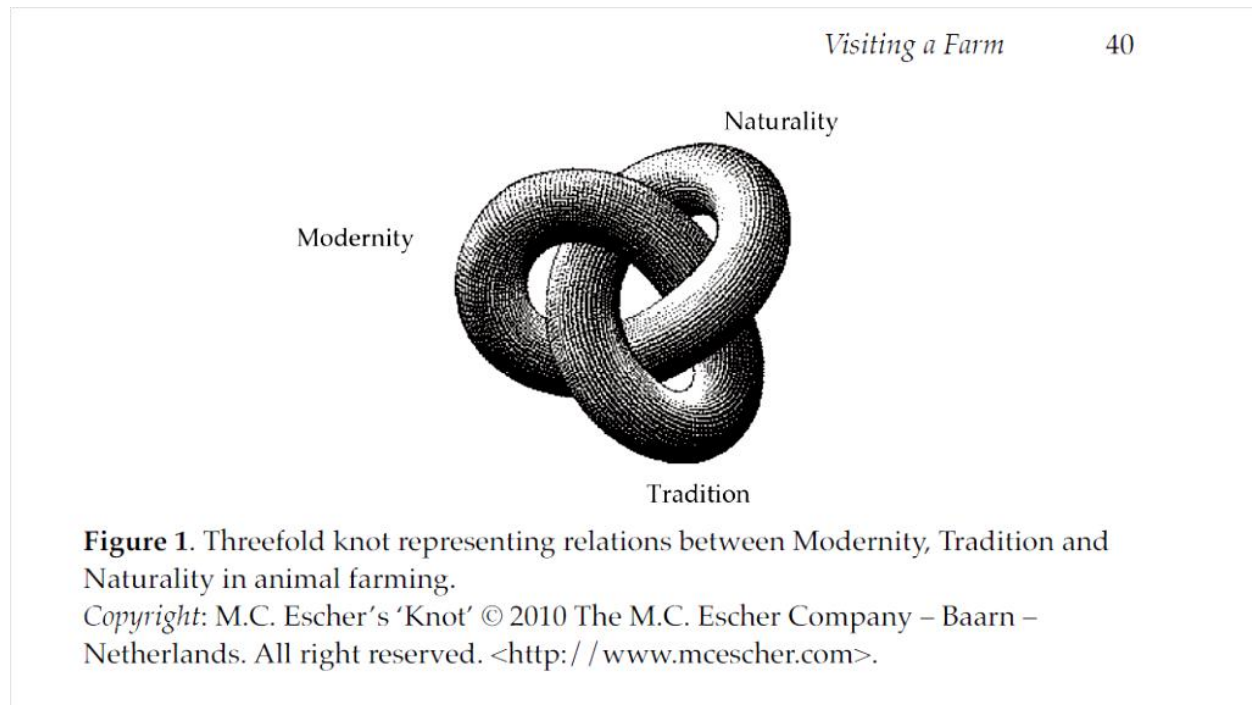
A lot of problems still remain, and most pressing among them seems to be the notion touched upon above that consumers may not actually *want* this information about their meat. If more information hasn't worked before, how can it work now? How can this information be given, in a way that is meaningful and would evoke change, to people who aren't seeking it? Further, as with the counterculture of organic, agribusiness has been remarkably adept at absorbing potentially industry-changing ideas and incorporating them into its existing framework. Several industrial scale organic growers were part of the original, hippie culture that was the organic movement in the 60s, but they felt that the only way to keep organic alive in any form was to approach it from a business standpoint. Codified laws and regulations continue to bog down small, artisanal farmers so that they are allowed to exist, in theory, but they are forced to participate in the agribusiness model in many ways—such as with slaughter facilities—and they face increasing pressure to grow in size and to adapt factory farm methodologies. What can be done about all of this, besides knowing it exists? These are questions for a different study, but they certainly present some challenges. Information may be something, but it isn't a solution on its own. Hopefully this paper has posed some ethically problematic questions that can be



expanded upon in the future. Though it doesn't necessarily give the answers to those questions, perhaps somebody else, based on new knowledge of modern food production, can.

## Appendix 1: Images

The threefold knot, as described in section II above, from Boogaard et al:



Below: the Agricultural Marketing Services graphic on egg facts



## GRADE

determined by quality factors, like defects, freshness, and shell attributes

There's very little difference between A and AA eggs. Grade B eggs are just as good to eat, and their thinner egg whites make them better for things like cakes or fluffy omelets.

## SIZE

ranges from jumbo to small and peewee

Extra large, large and medium are most commonly sold. Jumbos have 90 calories and nearly 8 grams of protein. That's almost 50% more protein than medium eggs, giving you more protein-rich nutrition for your buck.

## COLOR

determined by the breed of hen; white hens lay white eggs, reddish-brown hens lay brown eggs

There's no significant nutritional difference between white and brown eggs. The main reason brown eggs tend to cost more: the hens that lay brown eggs are larger and eat more food.

## FERTILE

laid by hens that have mated with roosters

If you buy them, you won't end up with chicks, since refrigeration stops the growth process. There is no nutritional benefit to fertile eggs over non-fertile. Fertile eggs also have a shorter shelf life and can be more expensive.

## 100% NATURAL

All eggs meet the criteria for 100% natural or all-natural.

The term "natural" doesn't indicate how the chicken was raised, it simply means that nothing was added to the egg like flavorings, brines or coloring.

## ORGANIC

unlike "natural," the USDA Organic label is highly regulated

Organic eggs are from uncaged hens that are allowed free range of their houses and have access to outdoor space. They are fed an organic diet that isn't treated with conventional pesticides or fertilizers.

## CAGE-FREE

also labeled "from free-roaming hens" are from hens allowed to roam in a room or open area, usually a barn or poultry house

Cage-free hens do not necessarily have access to the outdoors, and may live in crowded barns. There is no significant nutritional difference between cage-free and traditional eggs.

## FREE-RANGE

also referred to as "pasture-fed" are from hens raised outdoors or with access to outdoor space.

Their diets may include wild plants and insects in addition to feed. Currently no standards exist to define the outdoor environments and exposure to environmental contaminants like pesticides are minimal.

## NO ANTIBIOTICS

indicates that the laying hens were raised without antibiotics of any type

## NO ADDED HORMONES

hormones aren't allowed to be given to chickens ever

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