

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

MARKETING FOOD, MAKING MEANING:
THEMES IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN FOOD
ADVERTISING

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

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Norman, Oklahoma

2005

UMI Number: 3206133



UMI Microform 3206133

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THEMES IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN FOOD
ADVERTISING

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY

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Acknowledgments

To paraphrase a food ad, I can't believe I wrote the *whole* thing. I didn't do it alone, though, so there are many whose support and encouragement I want to acknowledge here:

Karl Offen
Advisor *extraordinaire*

My committee:
Andy Wood
Bruce Hoagland
Heidi Mau
Robert Rundstrom

Gavin Bridge

The OU Geography Department faculty and staff

My fellow geography graduate students (see, it *does* end!)

The OU Graduate College

My family—no more school after this, I promise.

Uncle Ken and Aunt Sally, my wonderful godparents.

Uncle Dave and Aunt Ruth, for the gift of the farm in my life.

Marie, Paul, and Tim, my biking therapy team:
They pulled me uphill and into the wind the whole way.

Friends who never let me forget they were on my side:
BJ • Bird • Brooke • Cindy & Tim • David • Deena • Geoff • GFJ •
Hildegard • Jane • Jim • Joan • Joyce • Julie & Matt • Kaye • Lea & Todd •
Libby • Linda • Mary • Melissa • Monica • Periann • Rae • Regina • Sweet
Adelines • Wayne & Kathy • Wendy

and Bill Hicks, a constant reminder that it's just a ride.

Thanks, all of you.

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Abstract

Though both advertising and the idea of nature are ubiquitous in American culture, little work has been done to examine how the former constructs the latter. Advertising is everywhere, and nature is everywhere in advertising—as a background, a concept, a place, a commodity. This study uses advertising for food in magazines from 1920-1975 as an entry point into an exploration of the narratives of nature used by the advertising industry over a 50-year period to frame the themes used to market foods. It describes how four different themes, memory, place, health, and convenience, were used throughout this period in food advertising, and how each of these themes embodies different narratives of nature. These narratives include nature as an idyllic past, nature as a paradise or pastoral setting, fresh and untouched, nature as both a good raw material and a dangerous threat, and nature as a lifestyle problem.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In her recent (2003) novel, *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood envisions a future in which the current fascination for meddling with genetics, pathogens, and pharmaceuticals, combined with the absolutist insistence on market efficiency as the ultimate value, is taken to its logical extreme. Chicken breasts and drumsticks are grown as “chickienobs,” and pigs, with the addition of a rapid-maturity gene and some other tinkering, are transformed into “pigoons,” created especially to grow transplant organs for human beings. Children play “Extinctathon” on the computer, adults take drugs to maintain emotional equilibrium, and scientific whiz kids work for companies who create illnesses and the drugs to cure them simultaneously.

In this brave world—there’s not much new about it—nature is little more than a raw material to be shaped into new forms to facilitate the accumulation of capital. In Atwood’s vision, capitalists, through the control of genetic material, have managed to circumvent the historical difficulties posed by agriculture as an industry dependent on the natural environment and its cycles. Instead of the machine invading the garden to shock us out of a reverie as Leo Marx (1964) explicated, the garden is become the machine, the very antithesis of the pastoral ideal. The following passage illustrates both the transformation of nature and different attitudes toward it:

“This is the latest,” said Crake.

What they were looking at was a large bulblike object that seemed to be covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin. Out of it came twenty thick fleshy tubes, and at the end of each tube another bulb was growing.

“What the hell is it?” said Jimmy.

“Those are chickens,” said Crake. “Chicken parts. Just the breasts, on this one. They’ve got ones that specialize in drumsticks, too, twelve to a growth unit.”

“But there aren’t any heads,” said Jimmy. He grasped the concept—he’d grown up with *sus multiorganifer*, after all—but this thing was going too far. At least the pigeons of his childhood hadn’t lacked heads.

“That’s the head in the middle,” said the woman. “There’s a mouth opening at the top, they dump the nutrients in there. No eyes or beak or anything, they don’t need those.”

“This is horrible,” said Jimmy. The thing was a nightmare. It was like an animal-protein tuber.

“Picture the sea-anemone body plan,” said Crake. “That helps.”

“But what’s it thinking?” said Jimmy.

The woman gave her jocular woodpecker yodel, and explained that they’d removed all the brain functions that had nothing to do with digestion, assimilation, and growth.

“It’s sort of like a chicken hookworm,” said Crake.

“No need for added growth hormones,” said the woman, “the high growth rate’s built in. You get chicken breasts in two weeks—that’s a three-week improvement on the most efficient low-light, high-density chicken farming operation so far devised. And the animal-welfare freaks won’t be able to say a word, because this thing feels no pain.”

“Those kids are going to clean up,” said Crake after they’d left.

The students at Watson-Crick got half the royalties from anything they’d invented there. Crake said it was a fierce incentive.

“ChickieNobs, they’re thinking of calling the stuff.”

“Are they on the market yet?” asked Jimmy weakly. He couldn’t see eating a ChickieNob. It would be like eating a large wart. But as with the tit implants—the good ones—maybe he wouldn’t be able to tell the difference.

“They’ve already got the takeout franchise operation in place,” said Crake. “Investors are lining up around the block. They can undercut the price of everyone else.” (Atwood 2003, 202-3)

Jimmy, like many a consumer who has come face to face with industrial food

production, cannot see himself eating a “chickienob.” He has been lucky—or perhaps unlucky—enough to catch a glimpse behind the curtain that separates production from consumption. His friend, Crake, sees no problem, referring to the creature variously as a chicken, chicken parts, a growth unit, a sea anemone body plan, and a chicken hookworm. All but “growth unit” are words that relate the new life form to a familiar, easily understood creature. Jimmy’s mind cannot, however, connect the two; what he is looking at is so unlike his mental image of a chicken that the transformed chicken seems obscene and unnatural to him.

While Jimmy’s attitude is one of horror in the face of such transformation, the woman represents a pragmatic, commercial point of view. What matters to her is efficient production and the inability of opponents to protest the treatment of the animal because it feels no pain. The idea that the transformation itself might be a gross mistreatment does not even occur to her. Crake’s attitude is the most ambiguous of the three. He sees the horror and understands Jimmy’s reaction well enough to reach for familiar things to describe the creature to him. Yet his own response is calm and accepting of the transformation, as if such manipulation is itself natural. He acts as the bridge between the two; he is the one who makes it possible for Jimmy to see behind the curtain in the first place.

Jimmy also wonders whether he would taste the difference if he did eat a “chickienob.” This implies that if he did not know what was going on behind the curtain, he would not have any qualms about eating the product if it tasted the same as “real” chicken. Thus knowledge and perception are factors in taste. Even if a product tastes the

same, knowledge of what is in it or how it was produced can influence consumer choice. Food manufacturers who use genetically engineered (GE) ingredients in their products have long fought against labels that would inform consumers of that fact. Although up to 60% of the processed foods in US grocery stores contain GE ingredients (Mendelson 2002, 148), consumers do not “taste the difference” that knowledge might make, and thus lack the ability to decide.

While Atwood’s vision of the future is hardly inevitable, it certainly resonates as a possibility. Part of the reason it does is the distance between production and consumption, the luxury of ignorance Americans enjoy about the wheres and hows of an abundant food supply. The power of supply and demand as market regulators relies on individuals having knowledge; producers can hardly argue that people want genetically engineered foods when most do not even know they are eating them. While some consumers do find themselves in Jimmy’s position of horrified disbelief, most never explore food beyond shopping for it, cooking it, or eating it.

As a product of the natural world, there is something of a built-in bias toward food as “natural.” With the exception of so-called junk foods, other food, regardless of how it is produced, is assumed to be good for you. Health and diet books advise readers to eat fruits, vegetables, and meat, but few address pesticides, hormones, genetic engineering, bacterial contamination, and the reduction in nutrients due to long-distance transit and shelf life. It is, as William Cronon (1995) writes, the maintenance of a “dangerous dualism.” Cronon’s dualism referred to the pretense that as long as we preserve some nature as wilderness, we can escape responsibility for the things we have created out of

the raw materials of nature. In the case of food, we pretend that as long as we have an abundant supply, how it is produced makes no difference. Processed foods may be more or less nutritious, but agriculture and its products are themselves good.

Yet agriculture always has been an activity that involves the manipulation of nature, while food, the product of that manipulation, has embodied social, cultural, and religious meanings. Inherent in those meanings are attitudes and beliefs about nature. Regardless of who's trying to define it, nature belies any easy definition. Almost everyone starts with Raymond Williams (1985: 219) and his assertion that nature is "perhaps the most complex word in the [English] language." Williams (1972: 146) also made the observation that "Any full history of the uses of nature would be a history of a large part of human thought." The idea of nature is tied to any number of concepts in Western thought, including God, romanticism, freedom, wilderness, democracy, and health.

There is no shortage of studies which grapple with the interaction between society and nature (Coates 1998, Cronon 1995, Glacken 1967, Merchant 1989, Olwig 1996, Ross 1994, Soper 1995, Wilson 1992, to name but a few). As Coates (1998: 2) writes, "Nature, like us, has a history." That history includes the concept of an external nature, the idea that nature is "out there" rather than something of which human beings are a part. The problem with this dichotomy is that separating human beings from nature limits our choices. Denying our place in nature both absolves us of responsibility for the lives we lead (Cronon 1995) and deprives us of the ability to act by limiting what we perceive to be our choices. Smith refers to the man/nature dualism as an "ideology of nature" because it "blinds us to the realities of nature within modern capitalism" (as cited in Castree 2003:

278) and serves as a justification for processes in which nature is made internal to the processes of capitalist development. In the terms of the dualism that Cronon (1995) describes, anything we do to nature in the pursuit of agriculture is all right, because it is not pristine nature anyway, it has already been defiled by human activity. In that sense, all food is “unnatural” food, the product of a humanized, or transformed, nature.

Yet obviously there is a difficulty in where to set the boundaries. The fact that we must eat to live is accepted; thus in some way nature must be harvested or cultivated to feed us. When does the manipulation of nature in agriculture go too far for the product to be considered food though? While no one would mistake an automobile called a Jaguar for a real jaguar, few can tell the difference between a wild salmon and one genetically engineered for rapid growth in a fish farm. They bear the same name but they are not the same thing. Likewise with the chicken “growth unit” that Atwood describes; it is not so different from the broiler chickens raised today that are bred to gain the maximum amount of weight in the shortest amount of time. These particular chickens are so heavy that their legs cannot hold them up (Adams 2003, 143). When an animal is transformed from a creature with its own destiny and purpose into a living machine for the purposes of others, what should we call it? When is a chicken no longer a chicken? For Jimmy, “chickienobs” was going too far; for some modern-day consumers, anything raised in a factory farm system is going too far.

For someone shopping for salmon or chicken, the difference is knowledge, which is precisely what consumers are often denied. Where our food comes from, how it is produced, and how it might affect our health are often the least important aspects in

marketing it. Like Jimmy, we might wonder if we can taste the difference if we do not know the realities of production. As far as industry is concerned, if we cannot taste the difference it does not matter how food is produced. “Protein is protein” say feedlot operators who include dead pigs, chickens, and horses, chicken manure, and cattle blood in the feed for the beef cattle they fatten (Schlosser 2001, 202).

Yet even as industry inserts the genes from a flounder into a tomato, celebrates an 18-day shelf life for “fresh” ground beef, and lobbies to allow meat irradiation instead of cleaning up slaughterhouses, industry strives to make these changes palatable by relying on familiar stories about food production. Consumers are encouraged to nurture a fantasy of small family farms producing safe and wholesome foods. In Atwood’s book, we learn that Jimmy eats “chickienobs” later, despite his first-hand knowledge of what they are. Fried and sold in a “bucket,” they become familiar, a food that Jimmy recognizes although the source of that food was itself unrecognizable to him.

Creating foods that people recognize in spite of how they are produced has long been a challenge for the food industry. What we now think of as “creating a market” is simply the process of familiarizing people with a product and creating associations they understand with it so they will want to buy it. People once had to be convinced to buy some of the foods we now take for granted. A good example is Jell-O, one of the first processed foods in America and “a dessert that is essentially flavored and colored boiled animal skins” (Wyman 2001, xi). In the more than 100 years of its existence, however, Jell-O has become a quintessentially American food, a standby for potlucks, institutional menus, and food fights. Nothing is said about boiled animal skins in ads, however; what

is emphasized was the similarity of Jell-O to the instant gelatins that already existed, and the fact that everyone could now easily make gelatin molds that previously only the wealthy could afford.

Thus, keeping production out of view to sell a product involves the manipulation of knowledge and perception. Rather than actually changing food production practices, the image of wholesome food, or images of something completely unrelated to food, is more important than the reality. To maintain the image, the curtain that distances production from consumption must be kept closed. If the public does not know what is going on, it will not taste the difference. A closed curtain is not enough, though. There must be a substitute, an alternative vision that people find more acceptable than an “animal-protein tuber.”

This is a dissertation about those substitutes, the visions to which food is connected for marketing purposes. You might say that the curtain that separates production from consumption serves as a screen onto which these visions are projected. The means of projection are varied; the one I will concentrate on is advertising. I contend that in the process of marketing new food products to consumers, advertisements construct and reinforce meanings in food. These meanings are not necessarily unique to advertising, but are instead plucked from the larger culture, then recycled and reinforced through their use in marketing foods. They constitute what Jacques Ellul (1965) called “integration propaganda,” ideas and images that support the existing system, normalizing a specific set of values, behaviors, and social relations.

Advertising has been called by some the “commercialization of creativity” (Ewen

1976, 66), but I think of it more as a privatization of meaning, a reference to the fact that other cultural elements that create meaning, like religion, art, and literature, have lost a lot of ground to commerce. Art, as Ewen recognizes, has been especially commercialized, and often the meanings expressed in commercial art are framed to meet the needs of commerce, not society.

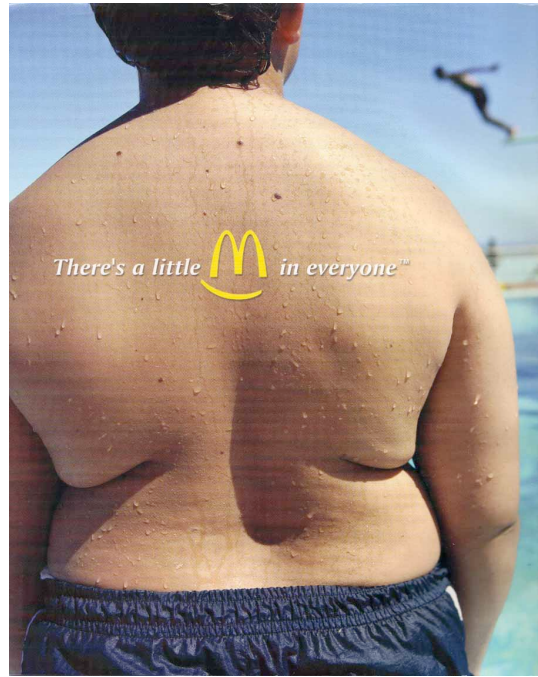


Figure 1.1: "Little Bit," 2002.

Though advertisers do not own meaning *per se*, they own the means to finance the mass reproduction of the meanings they find most useful. As such, advertising offers one means of observing the ways in which commerce conceptualizes social relations and meaning.

As a Canadian group called Adbusters can testify, trying to get ads that present an alternative vision of the status quo published is difficult, even if one can pay for the space (see Figure 1.1 for an example). The political economy of the industry itself narrows the vision; most media outlets are supported by advertising revenue, and are reluctant to bite the hands that feed them by running ads that oppose consumption of the products that their regular advertisers manufacture. Media consolidation is another factor; as fewer companies own more and more different businesses, an editor might be faced with the dilemma of whether to cover a story that exposes poor behavior on the part of another company under the same corporate umbrella.

This is not to say that advertising is the only game in town and that people are helpless in the face of it. I only want to make the point that advertising is a big game in town, and that we ignore it at our peril. Commerce is part of culture, and has thus always played a role in the creation of meaning. But when commerce becomes the primary maker (or re-maker) of meaning, its visions deserve to be examined as closely as art or literature. People might ignore or disbelieve ads, or even claim “ad immunity,” but they can seldom escape them. Because they are so pervasive and we take them for granted, we tend to ignore what Goldman refers to as the “deeper social assumptions” embedded in advertising (Goldman 1992, 1).

For example, part of the reason that Figure 1.1 is so refreshing is because it is so unlike other ads. Sure, it looks like an ad, but it is not selling anything—or rather, what it is selling is not a thing, it is a question, an attitude. It attaches different meanings to McDonald’s own slogan, thereby offering a vision of a different world, a world in which consumption itself is questionable, associated as it is with gluttony and over-consumption.

That consumption is good is a social assumption so prevalent in advertising that it goes unquestioned. Even if our choices of what to buy are not driven by advertising, we seldom question the constant message that buying in and of itself is good and necessary. I think of this kind of unquestioned attitude as a narrative, a storyline that provides an invisible foundation for an ad. Other narratives apparent in advertising involve nature, gender, otherness, and progress, to name only a few.

When I started this project, my aim was to see how nature was represented in food

advertising. Though both advertising and the idea of nature are ubiquitous in American culture, little work has been done to examine how the former constructs the latter. I chose food ads, rather than car or perfume ads, because as a direct product of the natural environment, food is inescapably linked to nature. In an essay on eating, Wendell Berry proposes that eating is an agricultural act, the final link in the chain that begins with tilling the soil and planting a seed in the dirt. Food is not just another product; it is essential to life, and our most intimate connection to the natural world. “Eaters...must understand that eating takes place inescapably in the world, that it is inescapably an agricultural act, and that how we eat determines, to a considerable extent, how the world is used” (Berry 1990, 149). Thus analyzing the meanings attached to food in advertising would reveal some of the deep societal attitudes toward nature and “how the world is used.”

Ads for foods do construct products for consumption, but those products are inherently natural, pieces of the natural world transformed for commerce. Rather than a narrative of consumption as good, ads for food contain the assumption that food is good, regardless of how it is produced. Whatever has been done to it is presented as an improvement upon the natural product, or nature itself. If the natural product is beneficial, it has been made even better. If it was problematic, it has been fixed. The foods are not just the real thing, they are better than the real thing, better than nature could make them, yet still natural.

Marketing food has its own particular advantages and disadvantages. One big advantage is that no one can choose not to eat. Food is essential; unlike many other

products, we cannot live without it. People do not have to be sold the idea of buying food, but they do have to be convinced to buy one kind of food or food product instead of another. Another advantage is that food is already replete with meanings that marketers can exploit. Both of these advantages have their flip sides, however; people must eat, but they can only eat so much, and the meanings contained in food often work against some of the revolutions in food production.

In the pages that follow, I explore the meanings constructed in food ads and the narratives that they entail, particularly that of nature. To do this, I analyzed ads from four different magazines: *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Women's Home Companion*, *The Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Good Housekeeping*. It is important to note that three of these magazines are directed at a primarily female audience, married women in particular. The exception is *The Saturday Evening Post*, chosen primarily for its ubiquity and long life. Its audience is more general, including both men and women.

The reason I chose to emphasize women's magazines is because women, as those responsible for buying and preparing food for their families, were the primary targets of food advertisers. This advertising, combined with articles in women's magazines, was an important conduit of information about food and nutrition. Because the magazines depended so heavily upon food advertising, articles largely supported nutritional claims made in the ads. Levenstein claims that by the 1930s, "the mass media had replaced family wisdom as the major source of culinary advice for American housewives" (Levenstein 2003a, 31). This trend in and of itself accentuates advertising's role in maintaining the status quo. Food is advertised to women because women are the ones

responsible for food decisions. That arrangement goes unquestioned, embedded as it is in the ads themselves and the periodicals chosen for their display.

The years I covered were from 1920-1975. I examined every issue of an entire year at an approximate interval of every five years. The years covered were chosen for the rather prosaic reason that those are the years for which the best coverage was available in terms of library resources. Before 1920, advertising is more dependent upon text and not yet such a pervasive element of magazines. After 1975, libraries stopped binding the original publications and microfilmed them instead. While one can still view ads on microfilm, the color and impact of the original is lost. However, the 55 years covered encompass the heart of food system changes in the United States during the twentieth century. These changes laid the groundwork for today's global food provisioning system, biotechnology, and increasing consolidation in the industry. These same changes also bred a reaction: the consistent growth of the organic sector, a resurgence of farmers' markets and local foods movements, and growing demands for more information about where foods come from, what is in them, and how they are produced.

The initial selection of ads was done largely by using rudimentary content analysis. I looked at thousands of ads, and the decision of which ones to include in my preliminary sorting was based on use of the word "nature" or "natural," images of the natural world, the substance of the text, and the overall combination of all these elements. Because I had originally intended a commodity-by-commodity approach, I also selected ads for the specific commodities I had in mind: soups, corn/vegetables, cereals, margarine, maple syrup, and pineapple/fruit. After selecting the ads, I saw that the commodity approach

would have to be altered, as several different techniques were employed in marketing, each using different themes. To avoid repetition, I decided to regroup the ads based on the recurring themes.

Thus each chapter explores an assortment of ads that revolve around a particular theme. This theme is evidenced in different ways, which led to a further grouping of the ads within the chapters themselves. Oftentimes ads overlap, exploiting more than one theme. Thus I grouped the ads based on the primary theme, and discuss any overlap in the individual ad analyses. Again, I used content analysis to sort the ads thematically; for each theme I used a set of code words and image types for sorting (see Appendix A for coding). I also looked at the total composition of the ad, which content analysis tends to miss, as it breaks visual texts into pieces.

The four themes that I explore are memory, place, health, and convenience/solution. I do not claim that these are the only themes used to advertise food in the twentieth century or that the public accepts them as the inherent meanings of various foods. But I do contend that these four themes remained as constants in ads for food in the twentieth century, and that their constancy reveals cultural ideas about nature.

Part of the problem of reading ads as text is that they rarely pound out a blatant message; ads require the reader or viewer to supply his or her own meanings and interpretations. Meaning depends on a process of negotiation; it is not a static message imposed by an omnipotent external force. As Goldman put it, “The frames and codes of advertisements are the starting point of interpretation, not the outcome” (Goldman 1992, 2). As the “reader” of the ads included in this analysis, I think it is important that I locate

myself in this study in terms of my own background and experiences. As a white, middle-class woman, I am a member of the target audience for these ads, but as one who was born late enough to take advantage of the women's movement, I have a heightened sensibility toward the depictions of gender and women's roles in advertising. As the following chapters show, I also have a family farm in my background, and despite a suburban upbringing I know the pleasures and difficulties of the agricultural life. These factors affected not only my readings of individual ads, but also my selections of which ads to read and the themes I perceived in them.

In spite of a degree of built-in subjectivity, however, I argue that by examining ads and the assumptions underlying them, we nonetheless gain insight into societal attitudes toward nature and the natural. This is especially true when analyzing the ads for a variety of food commodities over time. Some things, like meat or canned vegetables, might be considered more "natural" than foods like Velveeta, margarine, and canned soup. Ads for all of these are among those I analyzed, as well as pineapple, maple syrup, rice, cereals, and more.

With three of the four magazines examined being women's magazines, the role of gender must be considered as well. The primary audience for these ads was female, and many, if not all, of these ads contain a narrative that involves women and their domestic and maternal roles in society. As noted earlier, the mere fact that the majority of food advertising was directed at women reinforces the idea that buying and preparing food is a woman's responsibility. In addition, few ads appeal to the woman's own preferences in food. Pleasing and taking good care of her family via food are constant situations in these

ads, subtly confirming societal pressures to be a selfless caregiver. As might be expected, men are depicted in authority roles in many ads, while women are often shown as absorbed in home and hearth, with no life outside of caring for their families. Husbands and children are often manifested as problems for women; they are picky about food yet their health is her responsibility. Still other ads promote products as time and labor saving for the woman, but often on the grounds of preserving her beautiful hands or her reputation as a baker. The societal changes in women's status are reflected somewhat in advertising; later ads depict women much more sensuously and make reference to "the pill," pregnancy, and careers. Yet all the same responsibilities are there.

While representations of the changing status of women were not something I was looking for, I was curious about how the transformation of agricultural production was reflected in advertising for food. Analyzing food ads over time, I thought, would show some of the profound shifts in food production and supply. While some ads for canned vegetables tout a particular hybrid as the reason that one brand is better, changes in production were more often encased in a broader narrative of progress and scientific advances. In terms of health, there is emphasis on clean containers and processes that ensure the food is untouched by human hands. The shift in the societal view of science and technology as a good thing to being suspect is evident in some later ads, but overall I was surprised to find that the main themes of the ads were fairly consistent over a 55-year period. Memory, place, health, and convenience are still being used to market food. This is not to say that consumers have not changed; but that these themes reflect deep societal values that are easily adapted for new products and consumers.

Which brings me back to “chickienobs.” Atwood never says how they are finally advertised, but I think I can make a good guess. Something along the lines of “better for it, better for you,” “hormone free, just like grandma’s,” and “never have to cut up another chicken” all come to mind. Or how about just “ChickieNobs: it’s what’s for dinner.” Pull up a chair. Dinner is served.

Chapter 2: Background

Food and advertising are both plentiful in the US., and both often operate at subconscious levels. For many people, eating is a matter of habit, a thoughtless process of daily refueling, while advertising constitutes little more than an annoying background noise to daily life. While food is a subject acted upon by consumers, ad agencies, and food processors, advertising is an actor, a voice that constructs food and creates a mass market for products.

The modern food processing industry and the advertising industry came of age together, both the result of trends that transformed the United States in the twentieth century. These trends include the usual suspects: the Industrial Revolution, two world wars, irrigation, women's suffrage, food preservation technologies, transportation, and the growth of mass communications through magazines, radio, and television.

As far as food goes, the changes were profound. Small diverse farms gave way to large industrial operations that raise a single commodity, often for a specific manufacturer, who subsequently dictates the breed or variety. Forty percent of the American population lived on farms in 1900; only two percent of it does today (Nestle 2002, 11). Diets formerly based on homegrown, largely unprocessed foods changed to diets based on foods that are canned, frozen, or otherwise prepared, and shipped on average 1,300 miles before being eaten (Kimbrell 2002, 16). Global supply chains have made seasonality irrelevant, and forced unsubsidized farmers in the developing world to compete with subsidized farmers in the developed. The high levels of food production are dependent on a vast supply of cheap oil; irrigation, pesticides, fertilizers, machinery, and

transport all require millions of gallons of fuel. American agriculture burns approximately 400 gallons of fossil fuel per capita annually, which translates to over 100 billion gallons a year (Pimentel and Giampietro 1994).

Changes in nutritional knowledge were part and parcel of the industrial revolution. New preservation techniques and food hygiene directly impacted public health. The combination of those preservation techniques with new methods for long-distance shipping (railroads) gave rise to the first of the giant food processing companies, including Heinz, Borden's, Kellogg's, and Post. Advertising functioned as a means to promote mass consumption to match the new mass production. As the growing food processors turned out uniform products using similar technologies, advertising and the creation of brand names became increasingly important. Food historian Harvey Levenstein tracked the rise in food advertising through the accounts of N.W. Ayer, the largest advertising agency in the US in the late nineteenth century:

The accounts of the nation's largest advertising agency at the time, N.W. Ayer, reflect the growing importance of advertising in the changing food industry. In 1877 food advertisements accounted for less than 1 percent of the agency's business. By 1901, food accounted for almost 15 percent of the agency's business and remained the single most advertised class of commodity until the 1930s, when it was overtaken by automobiles. (Levenstein 2003b, 35)

Today, food advertising is a multi-billion dollar industry. In 1999 alone, food companies spent over \$33 billion to advertise and otherwise promote (via newspaper inserts, coupons, direct mailings, and other discounts) their products (Nestle 2002, 22). Food sales are healthy as well. In the US alone, trillions of dollars are spent every year on food, including alcoholic beverages. The entire food industry, including food services,

generates 13 percent of the American gross national product and employs 17 percent of its workforce.

Yet while food production has gotten more profitable, more industrial, and more high-tech, images and concepts of health, rural life, unspoiled nature, sunshine, wholesomeness, homemade, and natural goodness are used to sell the products of the industrial food system to consumers. Consumers know that pesticides and herbicides and hog farms exist, but they believe the government oversees such things to ensure safety in the food supply. David Goodman and Michael Redclift contend that:

Technological changes in agri-food production, now enhanced by biotechnology and genetic engineering, have manipulated biological processes, appropriating some and substituting others, redefining and refashioning nature as a source of profit and capital accumulation. As the food we consume has become more processed it has been presented as more 'natural' by the food industry. (Goodman and Redclift 1991, 250)

Media coverage of food has, in the past, consisted largely of restaurant reviews and recipes. Now food is part of the entertainment business, with cookbooks making the bestseller lists, celebrity chefs having shows on cable television, and newspapers putting more resources into the "food beat" (Brown 2004). There is, however, little continuing coverage of agriculture, food regulation, and food processing. The response of consumers to food scares indicates that people are concerned about the quality of the food they eat, but the mass media do little to satisfy that concern. Food is treated largely as a diversion, not an essential component of life. Food is supposed to be good regardless of how it is produced, and American consumers are cast in the role of being the fortunate

beneficiaries of a benevolent and productive industry, an industry that, we are told, “feeds the world.”

Yet people are often confused about nutritional advice and what to eat. Diets and diet books are reliable fads; there have been grapefruit diets, coffee and doughnut diets, banana diets, low carbohydrate diets, and low protein diets, many of them promoted by the relevant industries. It is almost a joke that what is reported as good for you one day will be reported as bad for you the next. As singer Joe Jackson (1989) wrote, “*There’s no cure, there’s no answer/Everything gives you cancer.*”

In *Food Politics*, Marion Nestle (2002) demonstrates how conflicting and ever-changing information about food and nutrition works to the advantage of the food industry. She points out that the advice to “eat your fruits and vegetables” is old news, too easy and boring to make anyone an extra dollar. Thus research monies and airtime go to studies that concentrate on the benefits of a single nutrient, ignoring a holistic perspective. The focus on single nutrients makes it easy for food processors to claim the benefits of that particular nutrient and ignore other factors. An example is low-carbohydrate foods that are high in fat.

Such confusion is good for advertisers. As Fernández-Armesto put it, “In a climate dominated by nonsense, each scientific discovery passed instantly into the hands of shysters” (Fernández-Armesto 2002, 50). He

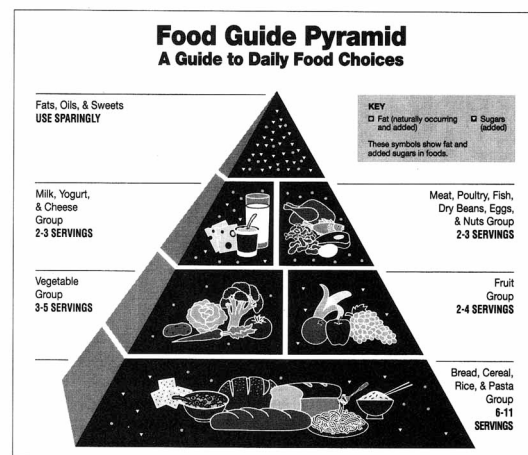


Figure 2.1: The 1992 USDA Food Guide Pyramid.

was referring to the early twentieth century, but his insight applies today. When people are confused about nutritional information and have the impression that it is ephemeral, they are easily swayed by the promises of food marketers. A recent survey found that 78% of the consumers surveyed trusted nutritional advice from food retailers,

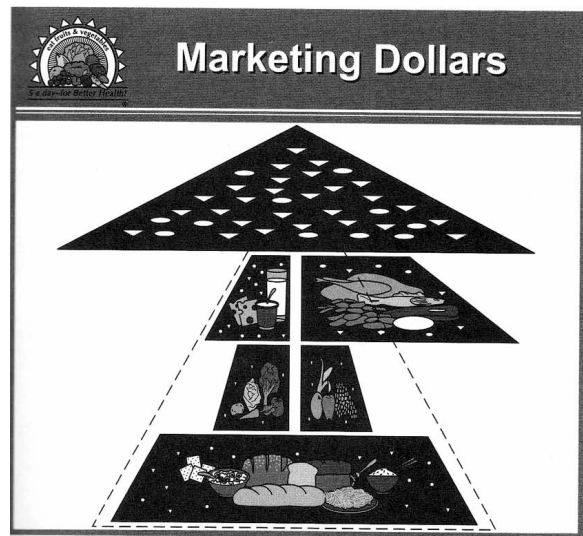


Figure 2.2: The food marketing pyramid, by the Produce for Better Health Foundation.

using package labels and in-store signs as their top sources of information (PRNewswire 2005). As noted above, the food industry spends billions annually on advertising its products; the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA, the source of the *Food Guide Pyramid*), on the other hand, has an annual budget of \$300 million for nutritional education (Nestle 2002, 22).

This disparity can be seen graphically in Figures 2.1 and 2.2. Figure 2.1, the USDA *Food Guide Pyramid*, provides the public with a guide to what to eat every day and how much of it. Each section of the pyramid represents a food group, and the size of the section is based on the ideal quantity one should eat. Figure 2.2, on the other hand, shows the same pyramid, but each section is sized based on how much money is spent by advertisers to market foods in that particular category. It is interesting to note that the top of the pyramid, the “use sparingly” category, is the group of foodstuffs that garners the most advertising dollars. Money spent in the meat category is also disproportionate to the

recommended amounts.

Compare these, then, with Figure 2.3, the actual consumption pyramid. This figure shows again the same pyramid, but this time with the sections sized based on the average number of servings of each group that the US population consumed daily in the mid-1990s. Again, the pyramid is top heavy, with the fats, oils, and sweets

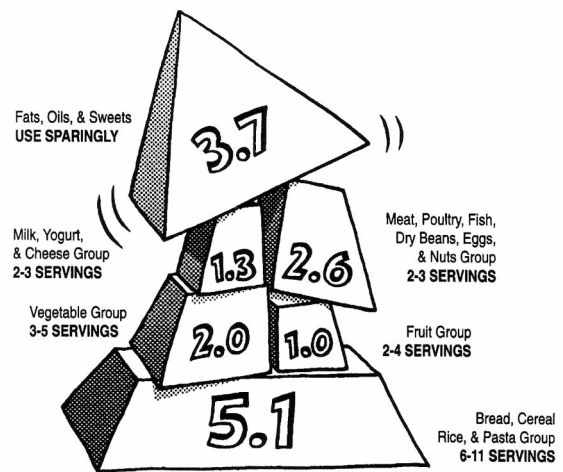


Figure 2.3: The food consumption pyramid created by National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

group coming in only second to the bread, cereal, rice, and pasta group. Even that is misleading though; the top group is actually in first place, it is the only group of which Americans consume more than enough; in every other group except for meat, consumption is below the USDA servings-per-day target.

I show these figures not to argue that advertising has an unequivocal effect on food consumption choices, but to indicate that leaving the responsibility for nutritional information in the hands of the private sector does not necessarily lead to better eating habits on the part of the American populace. The food industry puts the most money into marketing the products that bring in the highest profits. Whether those products are good for people or help promote federal dietary guidelines is not part of the equation. This is, of course, a return to the point I made in the introduction, that the meanings ads convey serve the needs of commerce, not necessarily society.

Federal responsibility is tenuous as well, as the food industry puts a lot of money into

lobbying and campaign contributions. Appointments to the relevant agencies like the USDA and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are often politically motivated, paybacks for campaign contributions. In what is referred to as “the revolving door,” people move from industry positions to regulatory positions to lobbying, and back again. Some examples of this include Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman’s (herself a former agribusiness lawyer) appointment of a lobbyist for the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association as her chief of staff, and former secretary Dan Glickman leaving government to work in a law firm that serves agriculture and food companies.

Meaning in the Mundane

In spite of the confusion about what exactly to eat, advertising seems innocuous, more of an annoyance than a threat. Like food, it is so much a part of our lives, so mundane, that we often ignore it. Goldman writes that “ads have become the trivia of daily life” (Goldman 1992, 1), and like trivia, people can recite the jingles and remember which celebrity is attached to particular products. Catch phrases like Nike’s “Just Do It” and Burger King’s “Have it your way” have become part of our daily language. Branding has become an important component of success in the global economy; McDonald’s spends more than any other international brand on marketing and advertising. As a result, the golden arches are better known than the Christian cross, and Ronald McDonald is second only to Santa Claus in recognition by American school kids (Schlosser 2001, 4).

Even as advertising techniques become increasingly sophisticated, however, the consumer becomes more sophisticated as well. Beyond the usual television commercials,

billboards, print ads, and radio spots, advertising nowadays also entails techniques like product placements in movies, stealthy word-of-mouth promoters placed strategically in crowded venues to talk up products, lesson plans that use particular products to teach, and ads that masquerade as editorial content. It is harder to reach consumers though; we are much better equipped to tune ads out, with mute buttons, recording devices that allow us to excise commercials, iPods, and a media environment that often allows us to tailor content to our own interests.

Yet advertising remains inescapable. Even when I am out riding my bicycle, I am surrounded by riders wearing jerseys advertising different community businesses and international companies. I once mistook a discarded glove on the road for a turtle with “Budweiser” painted on its shell; the mere fact that this could have entered my mind as a possibility testifies to the extension of advertising into previously untouched facets of our lives. Public schools, hospitals, and public transportation vehicles are all places that now sell advertising space.

As Jackson and Taylor point out, advertising is by nature a spatial practice, “playing a crucial role in an increasingly mediated world as part of the national and international expansion of markets; creating uneven patterns of demand across space; and striving for universality but constantly subject to local variations in meaning and interpretation” (Jackson and Taylor 1996, 356). In spite of this, geographical work on advertising is limited. Geographers have investigated place marketing in ads, in both individual studies (Burgess and Wood 1998, Goss 1993, Watson 1991) and collections (Ashworth and Voogd 1990, Kearns and Philo 1993). The advertising industry itself has been the subject

of geographical research (Clark and Bradford 1989, Leslie 1995, McHaffie 1996, Perry 1990), while other geographers have tackled representations of gender, class, and race in advertisements (Jackson 1994, Leslie 1993, Miller 1991).

My work informs geographical research in two ways. First, the narratives of nature in the ads I analyze fits into the geographical tradition of studying the relationship between nature and society. By reading the unquestioned assumptions that underlie the meanings given to foods in these ads, a window is opened into broader societal views of nature. Second, the meanings inserted into the foods within the ads are reflected in the American culture itself. In other words, they are important aspects of the culture, and food ads are one more embodiment of them.

Because my interest here is in how advertising *works*, I rely heavily on research carried out in media and cultural studies, as detailed below. Whether advertising convinces people to buy a particular product is not as interesting to me as the meanings created and perpetuated in advertisements. On the surface, advertising is a simple thing: a tool for selling products. Like the right of individuals to speak their minds, companies have the right to “commercial free speech,” making advertising a sanctioned byproduct of the capitalist system. The production of surplus goods necessitates ways to let people know about those goods and convince them to buy them.

Advertising has been accused of creating desire for unnecessary things and of wielding untold power and influence over our lives and our psyches (Galbraith 1958; Key 1973; Packard 1957), but others argue that it merely serves as a channel for pre-existing desires. “For advertising does not invent or satisfy desire. It expresses desire with the

hope of exploiting it. Over and over and over” (Twitchell 1996,14). Still others view advertising as a sphere of ideology, a key means of producing and reinforcing attitudes, assumptions, and social relations (Ewen 1976, 1982; Goldman 1992, Leiss, Kline, Jhally 1990; Williamson 2002 [1978]).

Twitchell, who is bullish on advertising yet takes an unsentimental view of it, argues that advertising, far from being propaganda handed down to us from on high, is both created and consumed by the culture it inhabits. The important thing is not that advertising tries to sell us things—“Believe it or not, if advertising really sold products, there would be even more,” he writes (1996, 3)—but how it works, what advertising is really *doing* in its attempts to express and channel the desires of its audience.

What advertising *does*, in fact, is create meaning, or, as Judith Williamson put it, “structures of meaning” (2002 [1978], 12): “Images, ideas or feelings, then, become attached to certain products, by being transferred from signs out of other systems (things or people with ‘images’) *to* the products, rather than originating in them” (Williamson 2002 [1978], 30). Advertising must somehow take the inherent properties of the goods to be sold and make them mean something to us. In this sense, advertising is often compared to religion (Jhally 1987; Twitchell 1996; Williamson 2002 [1978]):

I am hardly the first to recognize that advertising is the gospel of redemption in the fallen world of capitalism, that advertising has become the vulgate of the secular belief in the redemption of commerce. In a most profound sense advertising and religion are part of the same meaning-making process: they occur at the margin of human concern about the world around, and each attempts to breach the gap between us and objects by providing a systemic understanding. Whereas the Great Chain of Being organized the world of our ancestors, the marketplace of objects does it for us. They both promise

redemption: one through faith, the other through purchase. (Twitchell 1996, 30)

In its attempts to sell people often-identical products, advertising must give a product value beyond its function. Jhally puts it in terms of use value as opposed to exchange value: "...the system of capitalist production empties commodities of their real meaning and the role of advertising is to insert meaning in this hollow shell. In this way, use-value is subsumed by exchange-value" (Jhally 1987, 173). Klein traces the development of product branding to the machine age, noting that "within a context of manufactured sameness, image-based difference had to be manufactured along with the product" (Klein 1999, 6).

If ideology is, as Thompson writes, a "system of signification which facilitates the pursuit of particular interests" (as quoted in Johnston et al. 2000, 369), then advertising is an important part of that system. Advertising relies on signs and symbols, things we know, and associates those signs and symbols with objects to give those objects meaning. It absorbs these signs and symbols from the surrounding culture, transforms them, and feeds them back to us, a dialectic of signs and meaning. Advertising does not happen in a vacuum; it lives on the energy of society and culture, of which it is a part. "For what is carried in and with advertising is what we know, what we share, what we believe in. It is who we are. It is us" (Twitchell 1996, 4). This also means that advertising is reflexive; what an ad means depends upon who is looking at it. Thus advertisers strive to create and use *mass* meanings that resonate for the many, rather than the few.

For this reason, many critics of advertising (Ewen 1976; Goldman 1992; Leiss,

Kline, Jhally 1990; Williamson 2002 [1978]) analyze it as a vehicle for ideologies, particularly ideologies that maintain the status quo. Ewen argues that it served as a mechanism of cultural assimilation; by providing images of what it means to be and live in America, ads guided new immigrants in their efforts to adapt to a new country. Goldman goes even further: “Advertising is a key social and economic institution in producing and reproducing the material and ideological supremacy of commodity relations,” (Goldman 1992, 2). As a product of commerce, advertising provides one means of examining commercial interpretations of social relations.

Another common critique is that advertising encourages people to see themselves as consumers rather than producers. “The world of production is where the important decisions of society are made, yet advertising encourages us to leave this world to others and stresses instead consumption as the realm for decision making” (Leiss, Kline, Jhally 1990, 31). Defining ourselves through what we buy, rather than what we produce, obscures “the real structure of society by replacing class with the distinction made by the consumption of particular goods” (Williamson 2002 [1978], 13).

Roland Marchand described advertising as a distorted mirror, one that emphasizes what people want to be, rather than what they are. As an historian, Marchand was interested in using ads to learn about social values and popular attitudes at different times. He maintains that advertising uses ideas and images that “reinforce and intensify existing patterns and conceptions,” (Marchand 1985, xvii) and contribute to a community of discourse. “If metaphors, syntactical patterns, and verbal and visual ‘vocabularies’ of our common language establish our parameters of thought and cut the furrows along which

our ideas tend to flow, then advertising has played a significant role in establishing our frames of reference and perception” (Marchand 1985, xx).

Those frames of reference and perceptions rely on the narratives that underlie them. Marshall McLuhan noted that “if a fish could speak, water is the last thing it would identify as part of its environment” (as quoted in Adams 2003, 103). This is another way of saying that the narratives buried in advertisements go unquestioned because we already believe those assumptions about ourselves and the world around us. It also means that advertising plays a role in normalizing specific values. The ads included in this study exemplify advertising’s role in normalizing the values of white, middle-class America.

We are all active in the creation and maintenance of these narratives; this is especially true in advertising. The texts of advertising require us to fill the gap where the speaker should be; we do not know the people who create the ads that fill our lives. As Williamson notes, advertising “speaks to us in a language we can recognize but a voice we can never identify” (2002 [1978], 14). We have to provide the meanings for the signs that advertisements present to us, we have to make the connections between a product and the images, ideas, and feelings attached to it in an advertisement.

In her discussion of nature in advertising, Williamson applies Lévi-Strauss’s description of the cultural transformation of natural objects as the “raw and the cooked” to the transformation of nature in advertisements. Lévi-Strauss says that in society, nature, in the shape of raw material, is “cooked” to be acceptable. The cooking is a means of cultural differentiation, a systemic process of transforming “raw” nature.

“In just the same way,” Williamson writes, “images of nature are ‘cooked’ in culture

so that they may be used as part of a symbolic system” (Williamson 2002 [1978], 103).

The “raw” nature is removed from the natural product (for example, the sign of “pineapple” is, as Williamson puts it, “hollowed out”), and a transformed nature is added back in to show the product as embodying other attributes, “linking possible unattainable things with those that are attainable...” (Williamson 2002 [1978], 31, emphasis in original).

If, as Alexander Wilson (1992) wrote, nature is constantly being transformed and manufactured as a mass commodity for cultural consumption, we might ask what some of the shapes are that this commodity has taken. Food advertising is a particularly interesting area to investigate that question, because food itself embodies the transformation of nature into mass commodities for direct consumption. Even something as simple as a fresh pineapple is the product of centuries of selective breeding and propagation. As Braun and Castree (1998) point out, the multiplicities of nature make it impossible to tell of its transformations in a single story.

Reading Advertisements

The challenge in this sort of study is how to analyze, or read, the ads. There are numerous approaches to the analysis of visual data (Ball and Smith 1992, Goldman 1992, Jhally 1987, Rose 2001, Williamson 2002 [1978]). In her book on visual methods, geographer Gillian Rose gives the subject an exhaustive treatment, including thorough descriptions of compositional interpretation, content analysis, semiology, psychoanalysis, discourse analysis, and various combinations of different methods.

For advertising in particular, Leiss, Klein, and Jhally (1990) detail two primary methods, content analysis and semiology, and then go on to construct their own method based on a combination of the two. As Rose demonstrates, every method produces different readings, while the method chosen depends in large part upon which of three sites the researcher chooses to focus on: production, image, or audience. Each method also entails its own analytical assumptions and emphases. Advertising is only one source of visual materials one might analyze; others include paintings, photographs, films, maps, the internet, and the built landscape itself.

In her discussion of semiology, Rose notes that one of its difficulties as a method is that analysts often create their own vocabularies and structures of meaning. I would apply that critique to all of the methods used. None of them is the same in every study, and many studies, this one included, rely on a combination of methods. Even content analysis, considered the most quantitative, relies on subjective coding for analysis. This points up the fact that any analysis of visual materials is subjective in various degrees; interpretations are just that: interpretations, not unassailable truths.

In spite of these methodological challenges, studies employing the analysis of images and their effects have steadily increased. Researchers have analyzed ads for representations of family life (Brown 1981), gender (Goffman 1979, Hill 2002, Marks 2005, Shapiro 2004), the environment (Corbett 2002, Hope 2002, Howlett and Raglan 1992, Olsen 2002) and nature (Hansen 2002, Shanahan and McComas 1999), among other things. Food ads in particular have been studied for other-directedness (Sykes 2003), nutritional discourse (Arnaiz 2001), and gender (Adams 2003).

The leading method of image analysis, particularly in the social sciences, is content analysis (Ball and Smith 1992). As Rose (2001, 67) notes, content analysis was a method developed to be “scientific by being replicable and valid,” and has “clear methodological guidelines” to attain that. It consists of devising clearly defined coding categories that relate to a research question, counting the frequency of each category in the samples collected, and interpreting the results.

This method has been used in many studies of media bias (Herman and Chomsky 1988; Lutz and Collins 1993; Bendix and Liebler 1999; Priest 2001), photography (Lutz and Collins 1993), and advertisement analysis (Brown 1981; Cook 1992; Hansen 1999). Hansen’s study in particular is relevant to my work, as he specifically sought to find “how television advertising articulates and reworks deep-seated cultural categories and understandings of nature, the natural, and the environment” (Hansen 1999, 499). His findings guided my own coding categories and helped me define the narratives of nature each theme represents.

While content analysis is useful for working with a large number of images or texts in a consistent manner, it is limited in several ways, as Rose (2001, 66-68) enumerates. First, just because something shows up often does not necessarily mean it is important. What is left out may be important to an advertisement’s meaning, and content analysis does not address omissions. Second, there is no way to differentiate in the numbers between a strong or weak example of the same category. Both are coded the same; how exemplary a sample is cannot be discerned. Third, content analysis fragments images, making it impossible to express any interconnections within an image or the mood of an

image as a whole. Finally, Rose (2001, 67) also points out that content analysis cannot address the “broader issues in analyzing visual images,” as it assumes that different viewers see the same image in the same way.

As noted in Chapter 1, I used content analysis in the initial phase of my research, first to select which ads to include, and second to divide those ads further into thematic categories. Once that was done, I relied on semiology for further analysis of the ads I selected. I followed Judith Williamson’s (2002 [1978]) classic text, *Decoding Advertisements*, as a guide to how semiological analysis is actually done. While I employ semiotic concepts analytically in this work, I avoided the wholesale adoption of semiological techniques and jargon. Instead, I favored simple language and straightforward analysis to make my points, primarily because there is no single method. Nonetheless, I will give a brief description of the basics of semiology, and then discuss how I used it in this work.

Semiology means the study of signs, and the argument semiologists make is that anything with meaning can be analyzed in terms of the signs it contains and how those signs work in the creation of meaning. Each sign consists of a signifier and a signified; but these two separate ideas are only separate in theory. In practice, they exist in the same sign. The signified is the meaning, and the signifier is that which represents that meaning. For example, the Eiffel Tower is a common signifier of Paris, Frenchness, sophistication, and romance, among other things. Which meanings are attached to it depend in large part upon its context and the viewer. Some people, for example, consider the tower an eyesore, and how Americans view it is different from how the French themselves view it.

Thus a sign, a signifier, may contain multiple signifieds, or meanings, and those meanings vary depending upon the audience.

The first step, therefore, is to locate the signs that an image contains; these are the building blocks of any analysis using semiology. Once the signs and their meanings are identified, how they act upon each other is the next consideration. Both Williamson (2002 [1978]) and Goldman (1992) base their analyses of ads on the argument that advertisers attempt to transfer meaning from the signs onto the product. Goldman describes ads as consisting of four basic elements: a signifying image; an image of the product, often boxed; text, including headlines, captions, and copy; and graphic devices like line, color, and shapes that link or differentiate these elements (Goldman 1992, 39-40). Williamson emphasizes the spatial composition within ads, drawing attention to how the elements are framed, which ones are placed next to others, and how color is used to connect them and transfer meaning (Williamson 2002 [1978], 20-24).

At this point in the analysis, one must move beyond the specific to the general. In and of itself, it is fun to take an ad apart, but without a more in-depth analysis, that activity alone is superficial. Once an individual ad is unpacked, an attempt must be made to link it to broader systems of meaning. These broader systems have been given different definitions and are called by many names: mythologies (Barthes 1973), codes (Hall 1980), and referent systems (Williamson 2002 [1978]). The term I use is narrative, or story, which corresponds to what Hall calls “dominant codes”: social and cultural assumptions that are taken for granted and perpetuate existing social relations and differences. The signs located within an image refer to these extended systems of

meaning, allowing the analyst to access the ideologies at work in a particular society or among a specific audience.

Figure 2.4 offers an example. In this ad, a ship cruise line is equated with a solitaire diamond. The blue background is the sea for the ship, and blue velvet for the diamond. This setup borrows all the meanings inserted into diamonds by De Beers over the years: eternity, quality, wealth, rareness, true love, strength, and purity, with the additional

implication of a gift from a man to the woman he loves. Thus the both the diamond and the cruise line are encoded as unique and top quality gifts, the choice of people who are discerning and can afford the best. The narrative expressed is that men should buy extravagant gifts like diamonds and cruises for the women they love. Thus meanings are layered in ads, simultaneously referring to and reinforcing broader systems of meaning upon which they depend.

One of the weaknesses of semiology is that analysts tend to focus on a few samples to illustrate their points, and miss a broader or more systematic coverage. I have tried to avoid this in two ways: first, by selecting a wide variety of ads to illustrate each theme, and second, by selecting ads over a 55-year period. Ironically, some depth is nonetheless sacrificed because not every ad lends itself to an in-depth analysis; I include some ads

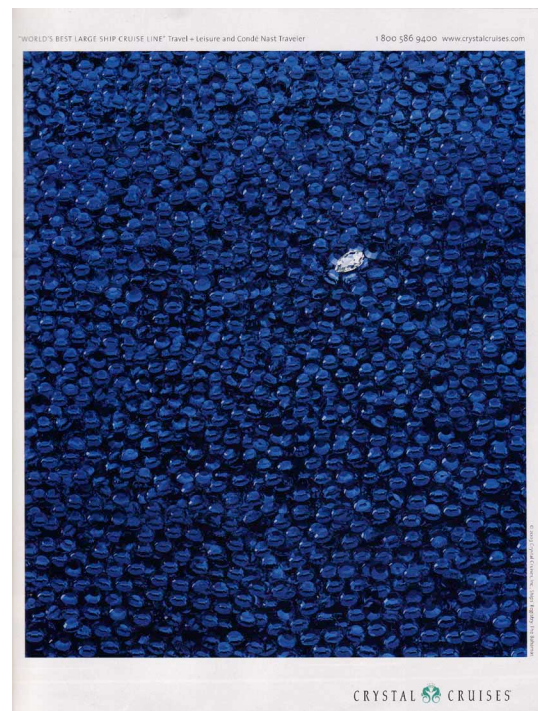


Figure 2.4: "Crystal Cruises," 2003.

primarily to show that the particular theme under discussion was broadly used, not just appearing in one or two ads. In addition, a 55-year span in and of itself poses difficulties. I cannot claim to have looked at every single magazine ad produced within that period. However, for my contention that the themes I discuss have persisted in food advertising throughout that period, I think the sampling is adequate and demonstrates the point.

All You Can Eat

The study of food and foodways within academia has been extremely broad, and I am not even going to try to cover it all here. It crosses disciplinary lines and ranges from the technical (health, nutrition, food science) to the commercial (catering, restaurant management, the food business) to the social, including history, anthropology, sociology, archaeology, psychology, women's studies, and economics.

Because agricultural geography was a province of economic geography until the 1960s (Page 2003), the literature on food within geography has tended to focus on production (i.e., agriculture) and trade (e.g., Le Heron and Roche 1996, Marsden 1998, Tarrant 1985, McMichael 1993). World patterns of food distribution (Grigg 1995) and the globalization of food (Goodman and Watts 1997) have also received attention. Food itself was limited to cultural studies (Arreola 1983, Bell and Valentine 1997, Shortridge and Shortridge 1998) that linked food with a region or place, or food and identity (Cook, Crang, and Thorpe 1999, May 1996).

For the most part, these are only half of the whole; geographies linking food production to its consumption provide the other half. Ross (1994: 1-2) linked them well

to each other and to other social conditions when he wrote: “As long as the true costs of production are externalized, consumer markets will continue to inflate the price of sustainable commerce while maintaining the depressed cost of the daily poison sold to lower-income consumers.”

Not only do studies of food and consumption complement agricultural geography, but they can also work within the many different subfields of geography and be used to inform the discussions of surrounding issues such as globalization, development, social processes, identity, environmental degradation, and risk. In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, David Harvey used the food market as an example of the “annihilation of space through time” (Harvey 1989, 299):

Kenyan haricot beans, Californian celery and avocados, North African potatoes, Canadian apples, and Chilean grapes all sit side by side in a British supermarket. This variety also makes for a proliferation of culinary styles, even among the relatively poor. Such styles have always migrated, of course, usually following the migration streams of different groups before diffusing slowly through urban cultures... culinary styles have moved faster than the immigration streams. It did not take a large French immigration to the United States to send the croissant rapidly spreading across America.... (Harvey 1989, 300)

Some of the other ways—but by no means all of them!—food studies are done in geography include work on consumption, food systems, the production of meaning in food, and the production of nature in food and agriculture.

Though at one time they were one and the same, the production and consumption of food are increasingly separate. Food is produced in a limited number of places, by an ever-smaller group of people, while consumption occurs wherever increasingly expanding populations of people are. This distancing is the result of a combination of

many factors, including the Industrial Revolution, the industrialization of agricultural processes, global trade and transportation networks, and the deification of efficiency. The agricultural geographer might ask questions about what is grown, where and how it is grown, or why it is grown in a particular place, but the food geographer might ask which foods are eaten, when and how they are eaten, the meanings associated with the food, and how eating habits differ between different populations.

Studying consumption can also clarify the links between appetites in one place and new patterns of land use and production in others. In the past ten years, new products made from exotic foods have appeared on the grocery shelves in the U.S.—blue corn tortilla chips, green tea, Portobello mushroom tortellini, and salsa from habañero peppers, to name a few. Where are all these things being grown? Looking at food consumption offers the chance to go backwards down the commodity chain and examine the effects of demand—and which socio-cultural processes created that demand—in one place and on production patterns somewhere else.

While consumption and food were traditionally the domain of economists (M. Harvey et. al. 2003) and sociologists (Fine 1996, 1998, 2002; Warde 1997), the cultural turn within the field of geography has brought consumption to the attention of geographers. Bell and Valentine (1997) use food to address space, identity, and multiple scales of consumption from the individual body to the global. Cook, Crang, and Thorpe focus on the connections, through food, of producers and consumers, of “the wide worlds of an increasingly internationalized food system into the intimate space of the home and the body” (Cook, Crang, and Thorpe 1998, 162), while Atkins and Bowler (2001) attempt

to cover every aspect of food production and consumption, in a broad volume that they aim both at food studies students and a wider audience.

Closely tied to consumption are studies of food systems. While directly related to the production-consumption relationship, the focus is on the actual networks, commodity chains, or food regimes that move food from the producer to the consumer. This particular area is not new, but studies have been highly fragmented (Fine et al. 1996, Goodman and Watts 1997, Tansey and Worsley 1995) and spread throughout different disciplines, and thus lack theoretical coherence. For example, the three references cited are respectively from sociology, food policy, and geography.

Fine et al. argue that the organic properties of food impose organizational and technical constraints that are lacking with other commodities, thus making it necessary to consider food as a different commodity in need of separate treatment. Accordingly, every food item embodies a different system of provision and should be looked at holistically, not as one of a group of commodities. Two other considerations make food different, and both involve the biology of the consumers at the end of the food chain: our absolute need for food to survive, and the fact that we can only eat and drink so much. Demand, while constant, is not unlimited.

Tansey and Worsley present a more descriptive view of the food system, going beyond commodity chains to larger food issues and the “power, influence and control by different actors within the system” (Tansey and Worsley 1995, 1). Thus they address distribution, environmental degradation, social justice, and political and economic policies affecting food. Their book is a guide to the system for consumers rather than a

theoretical exercise, but it is an excellent synthesis of the multitude of factors involved.

Goodman and Watts (1997) present an edited volume in which the collected chapters address global capitalism and its effects on the political economies of the agro-food system of the late twentieth century. The underlying premise, like Fine's, is that food and agriculture are different, but in this case the difference is based on an updating of what Kautsky (1988) called "the agrarian question." What was happening in European agriculture in the 1890s that made it politically important as its economic power waned? How did capital infiltrate agriculture, which relies so heavily on natural processes and self-exploitation by farmers? Goodman and Watts ask these questions about agriculture in the 1990s as a "Kautsky redux" (Goodman and Watts 1997, 7), bringing into play all the factors of globalization: the mobility of transnational capital, the integration of financial markets, free trade agreements, and the rise of newly industrialized countries.

Food systems research also lends itself to radical approaches that go for the bigger picture. Cook (2002), for example, took the approach of following a commodity (the papaya) to gain a window onto a much wider world—the material culture surrounding that commodity on its path from the tree to the table. Other geographers (e.g. Friedmann 1993, Marsden et al. 1996) have taken a political economy approach to food system analysis.

The socio-cultural processes involved in consumption bring me to my next topic, the production of meaning in food. Food has long been a bearer of meaning in rituals, taboos, and ceremonies, but since it has become a commodity, its consumption is intricately involved with identity. As Warren Belasco (2002, 2) put it, "if we are what we eat, we are

also what we don't eat." Where once there were only wine snobs, there are now food snobs, beer snobs, coffee snobs, and chocolate snobs.

Food in the U.S. has made something of a complete circle in terms of what is considered "good" food. When processed foods became ubiquitous after WWII, they were considered the best foods, enriched with vitamins, able (as the ad claimed) to "build strong bodies 12 different ways!" What was wrong with unprocessed food was not exactly clear, but the American love of technology transferred itself to food, and the more processed it was, the better it had to be (Belasco, 1993 [1989]). The wealthier you were, the more you could avail yourself of these wonder foods.

Ironically, now it's the organically grown, least processed foods that get top dollar. Non-organic, processed foods are now the provisions of the poor, especially the junk and fast foods that seem so inexpensive but take their toll on people's health. In a speech in Oklahoma City in 2003, Kurt Vonnegut said we should count our blessings; we live in a country where "even the poor people are fat." A new book points out that obesity is a condition that "disproportionately plagues the poor and the working poor" (Critser 2003), while Ross (1994, 17) noted that "Today, in the consumerist West, thinness is the sign of abundance, a luxury reserved for the wealthy and powerful; to be overweight is often a sign of poverty."

Food choices can tell us a lot about people. They can even be a means of resistance to larger trends in society. Food is loaded with meaning, but where does it come from? Who constructs it? How is it perpetuated? This perspective on food uses poststructural approaches of discourse analysis to study how meaning about food is produced. Popular

culture, texts, images, and the accounts of individuals are just a few of the diverse sites where research can be conducted.

Advertising, of course, is another. Food ads specifically have been studied for other-directedness (Sykes 2003), nutritional discourse (Arnaiz 2001), and gender (Adams 2003). Discourses about organic foods have also been traced in part through the use of advertising (Guthman 2002, James 1993). The specific combination of food ads and nature has, however, been neglected, though of course in other studies of the environment in ads or nature in ads, some food ads appeared. In Hansen's 2002 study, for example, ads for food products are one category out of eleven.

Other distinctions in any work that includes advertising include the medium the ads appear in, the time frame, and the area. Hansen's study, for example, involves British television ads in a period from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, while mine is limited to American magazine ads from 1920-1975. Thus advertising offers an enormous number of media, historical periods, and sites for analysis.

Because food is both mundane and essential, it offers researchers a unique point of entry into whatever it is they want to explore. Atkins and Bowler (2001: vii) have written that "the study of food is like a 'barium meal' for x-raying social, political, economic and cultural issues, a kind of marker dye for broad structures and processes." Combining food with advertising gives that "barium meal" further depth and insight into all of the above.

Chapter 3: Eating Memory

In a young new world, around rugged hospitable hearthstones, the America to come shaped its character, formed its customs and its tastes. Appetites sharpened by honest toil called for good foods of hearty substance. And then and there it was that chicken noodle soup won its abiding place in our family scene. ("Making History!" 1940)

Food has always had an association with memory, both individual and on larger scales, like regional and national. Some of my own strongest childhood memories involve food. I remember picking sweet corn on my uncle's farm in Wisconsin. We would pick in the cool of the morning, then load up the station wagon and head for Sheboygan or Milwaukee. There, my parents sent us door to door, cute, dirty, sweaty farm kids selling fresh sweet corn to urbanites. People loved us, and bought a lot of corn.

There was always plenty of corn, and on the farm we ate it daily, along with fresh tomatoes, cucumbers soaked in vinegar, and crunchy salted kohlrabies. At night there would be a bonfire, and the fresh corn was wrapped in foil and roasted in the coals. These bonfires are the first time I ever recall seeing adults drunk; my parents and aunts and uncles would drink, eat, tell stories, and sing songs. I, my siblings, and my cousins, stuffed with bratwurst and corn on the cob, fought to stay awake after the long day, but our exhaustion usually won out over our intense curiosity about this normally unseen side of the adult world.

Obviously, food memories evoke more than just food; they may evoke a time, a place, particular people, specific smells, sounds, and events. They are not always good memories; my nine-year-old niece still will not eat eggs because the first time she ever threw up, she threw up eggs, and the taste or mention of eggs brings back that unpleasant

memory. If anyone has ever given you bad news over food, you may have avoided that food for a long time afterwards.

This tendency to associate memories with foods must be the origin of what we call “comfort” foods. These are foods that for some reason of memory or attachment make us feel cared for, secure, and loved. These associations can have power. When a fellow student’s wife was ill and in the hospital for several months, he took her fu-fu, a favorite food from their home country, Nigeria. He believed that food from home would give her strength and heal her in ways that western medicine could not match. He still swears that it helped her make a full recovery.

One of my own comfort foods is pure maple syrup, another product of my uncle’s farm. I still remember the time some friends blindfolded me and gave me two spoonfuls of maple syrup to taste: one spoonful of pure, unadulterated syrup, the other the ubiquitous maple-flavored corn syrup. My friends did not believe I could taste a difference, and I could not believe they were unable to distinguish between the two. Thus the test. I had to prove to them that I had no difficulty telling them apart, even when blindfolded. I still wonder that there are people who are unable to taste that difference. Of course, I had an advantage. I was raised on pure maple syrup.

Diluting a product like maple syrup with an innocuous sweetener could just as easily be called adulteration. While other food adulterations, like chalk in milk or wood shavings in tea, inspired muckraking journalists and government regulation, others are marketed as improvements on many foods. They are adulterated, but the difference is that the adulterations are innocuous sweeteners or additives.

With maple syrup, imitation products are made which contain little or no maple syrup whatsoever, being instead a maple-flavored corn syrup. Such maple-flavored syrups were perhaps the first “fake foods.” Now several products—unadulterated maple syrup, diluted maple syrup, and the imitation maple-flavored corn syrup—co-exist, with some people so used to the sweeter flavored syrup that they do not even like the original product upon which it is based. The same thing can be seen with children who, familiar with a fruit-flavored candy, try the actual fruit and are disappointed when it does not taste like the candy.

In an article analyzing discourses of nature in television advertising, Hansen locates one narrative in which nature is viewed as “...unspoilt, genuine, authentic, spiritual, enchanted, and traditional. Traditional by extension often means rural as opposed to urban, a space, both geographically and historically; i.e., an idyllic, harmonious and tranquil ‘past,’ separate from and removed from the stress, pollution and alienating lifestyle of modern urban life” (Hansen 2002, 503). This story employs the cultural idea of nature as separate from negative human impact while at the same time celebrating a perceived time when human beings lived in harmony with the natural world.

In food advertising, this narrative manifests itself in several ways. It might focus on traditional methods of production, a cultural tradition and the foods involved therein, food like grandmother used to make, food that brings back memories of better days, or, as in the example above, the historical aspects of a food. In these ads, the story of nature is embodied in the contrast between the past and the present. The meaning of a product is in its tradition, its association with the past; the value added is the remembrance and

improvement upon things past.

Pepperidge Farm is a company whose entire image is built around traditional rural products. In the ad for stuffing in Figure 3.1, the copy below a big photograph of turkey, fruits, and a large bowl of stuffing reads:

“Remember the smell of old-fashioned stuffing—rich with parsley, sage, basil, and thyme? Pepperidge Farm remembers!” It goes on to ensure the reader that Pepperidge Farm makes its stuffing “the good old New England way,” and that by serving its stuffing, you can “serve your family an old-fashioned memory” (“Remember,” 1975).

There is a curious paradox in this association of foods with the past. On one hand, the foods are marketed based on authenticity, tradition, and nostalgia, but on the other, they are presented as better than the traditional, or just as good as the traditional, so there is no need to make your own or hold out for your grandmother’s. They are special foods, but not so special that the food industry cannot duplicate and improve them. It is “improved tradition,” with an addition to the product or new improved production methods making these products even better than those that preceded them. The product may also be presented as a natural addition to a cultural event, like Thanksgiving dinner.

Emphasizing the past and its traditions helped ease Americans into modernity. As

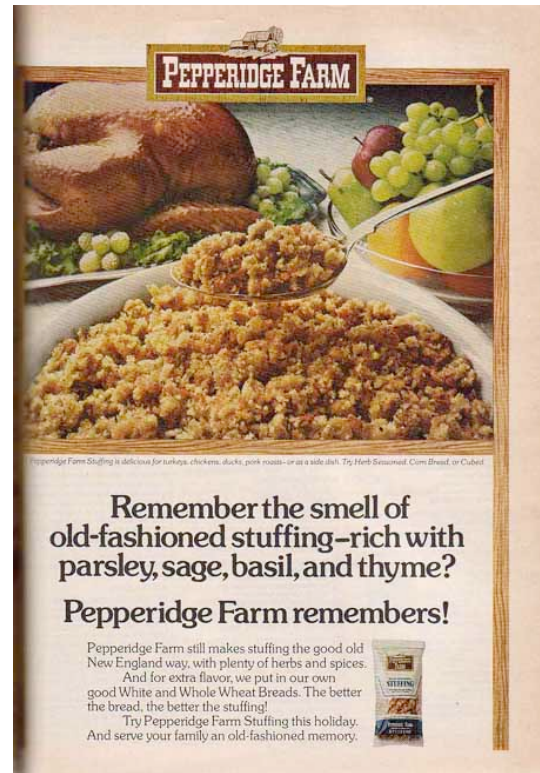


Figure 3.1: “Remember,” 1975.

Marchand put it, “What made advertising ‘modern’ was, ironically, the discovery by these ‘apostles of modernity’ of techniques for empathizing with the public’s imperfect acceptance of modernity, with its resistance to the perfect rationalization and bureaucratization of life” (Marchand 1985, 13). Diet, food preparation, and food marketing were all changing, especially following World War I. Americans were also becoming a more urbanized people, though for many, a link with the rural remained. Women, too, faced challenges. The growth of opportunities for immigrants led to a labor shortage for household help, with the result that more women had to assume tasks usually designated to servants, including food marketing, preparation, serving, and clean-up.

The creation of helpful commercial entities, like Betty Crocker, provided women with a personal connection to the large companies that were providing them the many innovations in appliances and foods. “Betty’s usefulness in the kitchen rose in tandem with the twentieth-century electrical and industrial innovations that would forever alter the time-honored traditions of home and hearth” (Marks 2005, 12). Those time-honored traditions are still a favored theme in food advertising. As the ads in this chapter show, they are most often romanticized, painted with the patina of nostalgia, sentiment, and home cooking. Several variations of this theme emerge: national memory, historical craft, childhood memory, taste memory, and cultural traditions.

National Memory

The illustration is evocative. A woman dressed in colonial costume leans toward a kettle hanging over a fire. A soup bowl is in one hand, while her other hand is on the ladle

in the kettle. A boy sits on a low stool before the fire; presumably, she is dishing up chicken noodle soup for him (Figure 3.2).

Following that image, there are several smaller illustrations, combining to offer a history lesson on chicken noodle soup. The first shows, via an open book with handwriting and cutouts pasted in it, that the tried and true recipe was supposedly passed down through the years, “from crowded old cookbooks to new ones just begun,” a family tradition in America.

Yet in spite of this wonderful old recipe, the next panel asserts that “it is Campbell’s Chicken Noodle Soup that wise women serve,” because Campbell’s chefs, pictured as men, stick to the old recipe and follow the same techniques as “patient, skillful, old-fashioned home cooks”—who were usually women (and are thus represented in the other illustrations). One of the chefs even appears to be studying that old recipe, and, in spite of the kettle over the fire being replaced by pots in a kitchen and the colonial woman being replaced by men in chef’s outfits, the result is purported as “true to the best home-kettle tradition.”

The next illustration exhorts consumers to trust the red-and-white label, familiarizing them with the Campbell’s brand. While the picture is of cans on a kitchen counter, as if



Figure 3.2: “Making History,” 1940.

just brought home from the grocery and unpacked, the copy is all about the soup and what exactly the home-kettle tradition consists of: a rich chicken broth, homemade egg noodles, and “tempting tidbits” of chicken combined into a delicious soup. The copy is equated with the red and white cans: the cans hold the tradition.

The next picture shows us that the tradition continues. A modern woman is carrying a large tureen of soup to the table where her husband waits. It “tastes like old times,” reads the text, and it goes on to tell us that because it is so good, it is making modern history in the growth of its popularity.

Finally, balancing the initial colonial image, there is a picture of a bowl of steaming soup in an elegant china dish on a table set with flowers, a full setting of silverware, and a table cloth—a setting quite a distance from the woman ladling soup out of kettle over an open fire. It is as if the soup has been civilized, tradition modernized, but it is the same good old soup: golden beads of fat float on its surface, and pieces of chicken and noodles are visible.

Five years later, Campbell’s used a similar strategy in another ad (Figure 3.3), but this time emphasized the historical context of war. Soldiers in 1945 are compared to those of 1776, both looking forward to coming home and eating chicken



Figure 3.3: “Truly American Soup,” 1945.

noodle soup. “Favorite then...and favorite now,” the headline says, and calls chicken noodle soup a “truly American soup.”

The big contrast is that in the pictures for 1776, we see the soldiers coming home in the top one, and underneath, the soldiers reposing in chairs in front of a fire, while the woman, on her feet, serves up soup from the kettle over the fire. In the 1945 picture, the top one depicts two soldiers at a family meal, talking about their adventures; the second one shows the woman at the grocer’s buying canned Campbell’s soups.

Another example of history being used is a series of ads run by Quaker Oats in the 1920s and 1930s. These were ads for their version of corn flakes, called Quaker Quakies. This series offers a romanticized history of colonial America, Native Americans, and the relationship between Quaker colonists and the Indians. It plays on the story of corn as an indigenous American crop introduced to the colonists by the Indians. In spite of the fact that the ads appeared in women’s magazines, each ad is written in the form of a letter to children, opening with “Dear boys and girls.” It is as if the ads are meant to be read to children like bedtime stories.

The top half the page is devoted to an artistic rendering of the story, a single image illustrating the central idea. Each illustration has a title; sometimes it is the title of the story, as in “The Three Good Spirits Greet You,” and “The Naming of the Three Good Spirits: a tale of Wawa-sa-mo, the legend-maker.” For ten cents and a box top of a Quakies package, a customer can get a reproduction of the original oil painting, “ready for framing.”

The ad I include here, Figure 3.4, bears the title “The Adventure of Two Little

Quaker Children at the Wigwam of Wawa-sa-mo, the legend-maker.” The illustration

depicts two small children, a boy and a girl, sitting on a blanket in rapt attention before an Indian brave. He is gesturing toward a large stretched deerskin behind him; you can just make out three figures and the sun drawn

rather crudely upon this canvas. Another Indian and a white man, presumably the children’s father, stand watching in the

background. You can see the tops of teepees, and there are pots and a basket. The colors are

warm and welcoming, making it a very comfortable image. The painting itself is bordered, as if it is also on deerskin or parchment.

It is worth quoting some of the text at length:

Dear Boys and Girls: We wish that every one of you could have the fun that little Ben and Laura Spencer had one day long ago.

That day their Quaker father took them to an Indian Village, back in Pennsylvania, and there they heard old Wawa-sa-mo, the Legend Maker, tell the story of the Three Good Spirits of Beautiful Youth and saw the pictures of these good spirits in Indian drawing on a tightly stretched deer skin.

They were the first white children to whom the story was ever told... There were Indians everywhere in those days, and Ben and Laura saw lots of them after they had landed from the ship and were journeying to their new home through the deep forests where there weren’t any houses or cities.



Figure 3.4: “Wigwam,” 1920.

And always the Indians were kind and good, for the Red Men liked the Quakers because the Quakers didn't try to shoot them and never carried "fire sticks"—as the Indians called guns.

That winter Ben and Laura came to know the Indians and to love them, for their father and all the other Quakers had not had time to plow the ground and grow any food, and there weren't any grocery stores. And when the cold winds blew, their stock of food got smaller and smaller and many of the Quaker children had not enough to eat.

Then the Indians came with great baskets of a food they had never seen before—baskets of golden corn. And the Indians told the Quakers that in the corn dwelt the Three Good Spirits of Beautiful Youth who would save their starving children and make them strong and brave and true.

And the Indians told the Quakers that if they would come to the Indian Village the next Spring they would show them how to plant the corn and call the Three Good Spirits into it. ("Wigwam" 1920)

The story continues in this vein, relating an Indian legend of the Great Spirit choosing three helpers to "cover the earth with growing trees, grass and fruits." These three spirits were, respectively, the spirits of strength, courage, and truth. They did such a good job helping that the Great Spirit, particularly pleased by corn, "...gave them the corn to dwell in and to be their special care..."

Thus Quakies corn flakes are no mere corn flakes; three Indian spirits actually inhabit them and impart strength, courage, and truth to all who partake of them. Corn is embodied with human characteristics through these "spirits," and they are transferred to the cereal. "For we have caught these Three Good Spirits for you in a fairy box of corn flakes called Quaker Quakies," reads the text, which is a little frightening. If I had read that as a child, I would have wanted to free the spirits, not eat them. It verges on being cannibalistic, as earlier in the text, these three spirits are named and given human traits.

In some ads, the three are pictured as three full-sized Indian braves coming out of a cornfield. In others, they are depicted as fat, cheerful little Quaker men climbing out of the cereal box. Cannibalism aside, these ads are all about imbuing corn flakes with select elements of American history. Food is thus constructed as a carrier of the past and its stories.

Historical Craft

Maple syrup is a quintessentially American product, made by Native Americans and adopted by their conquerors. The basic steps are to tap the trees, collect the sap, strain it, boil it (and boil it and boil it) down, and pour the resulting syrup into jars or tins.

Everything is dependent upon the weather; it has to be just warm enough for the sap to flow, but not so warm that it rises quickly.

Syrup time is usually a 5-6 week window in late February or early March. The process is fundamentally unchanged, impervious to the industrialization that has taken place in so many other segments of the agricultural sector.

Maple syrup and the ads for it are a good example of the linkage of foods to heritage, a way of doing things that has not changed over the years—a craft. Many of these ads,



Figure 3.5: “Vermont Maid,” 1950.

like Figure 3.5 for Vermont maple syrup, use illustrations of a romanticized snowy tree-tapping scene, complete with a sap house with smoke curling up out of the chimney. People are trudging around carrying pails, and there is an ox-drawn sleigh in the picture. The product is associated with traditional production methods, a specific place and season, and an “old-time” flavor. The ad looks like a Christmas card.

Yet the syrup being advertised is a maple syrup that is cut with cane sugar, and this ad makes no attempt to hide it. Instead, it is presented as having made the syrup “unusually full-flavored” and uniform, as if pure maple syrup is weak and inconsistent. In spite of the image of traditional production and the “old-time treat” referenced in the text, the product is not traditional—it is marketed as better than traditional, a kind of “traditional improved.”

Another syrup ad (Figure 3.6) proclaims the opportunity to “collect the spirit of America in glass.” The headline stating such is typeset in an old English typeface to make it look like a colonial proclamation might have looked; the edges resemble parchment, so the entire ad is like an unfurled scroll.

In this ad, the bicentennial is used to equate maple syrup with American history. Log Cabin, by virtue of its being “a part of America’s great heritage since 1887,” offers

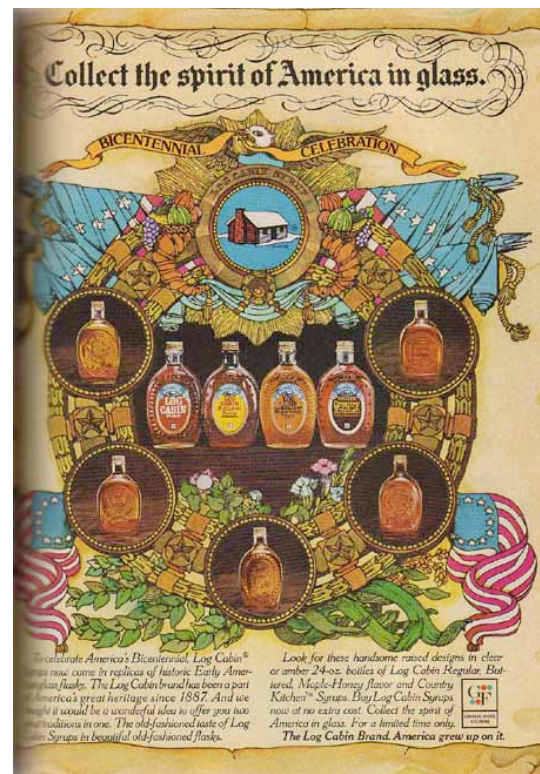


Figure 3.6: “Spirit of America,” 1975.

its maple syrup in special bicentennial flasks that are pictured around a patriotic wreath like ornaments. The wreath is flanked by American flags with a bald eagle above the Log Cabin logo. The logo itself has a cornucopia on either side, overflowing with fruits and vegetables. In the middle of the wreath are flowers.

Whether the American spirit referred to is in the syrup or the flasks is not clear, but then, it is probably not supposed to be. The syrup and the flasks are further equated in the phrase, “The old-fashioned taste of Log Cabin Syrups in beautiful old-fashioned flasks.” Both are old-fashioned, both contain the spirit of America. Log Cabin is a brand that “America grew up on.”

Another example of heritage is in the ads for Golden Guernsey milk, exemplified in Figure 3.7. This ad announces that “it has taken centuries to produce this special milk.”

The advertisers rely on the weight of centuries to differentiate this milk from all others. In every ad in the series, the same illustration appears: two monks watching over a small herd of dairy cows on what must be Guernsey Island. The monks have their backs to the reader, and we look out, as they must, over a peaceful, bucolic scene: grazing cows, the rooftops of a nearby village, trees, clouds, and the vast sea beyond, with a few sailboats playing in the wind. The monks are

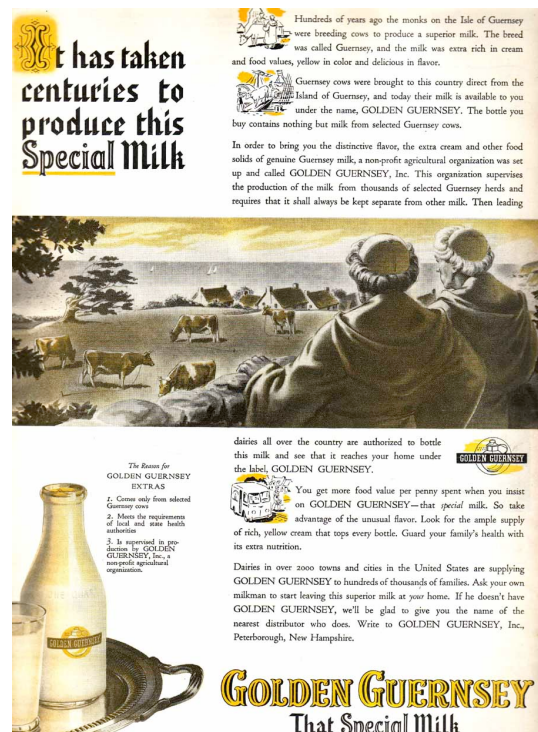


Figure 3.7: “This Special Milk,” 1947.

in robes, and you can see one's hand resting on a rough stone wall, further alluding to authenticity, strength, and long-lasting effort.

This milk has everything: a special breed of cow, especially bred by monks (is there anyone more trustworthy?) over hundreds of years. The cows are a European breed from an island, transferred to the new world, and they are by definition an old tried and true breed. The milk, claims the text, has a warm yellow color, indicating greater amounts of vitamin A, and richer cream. Production is supervised by a non-profit organization which assures that what is in the bottle is genuine Guernsey milk. Old knowledge, a breed bred by monks—it must be good!

Lacking a romantic history like that of Golden Guernsey milk, other advertisers rely on the more prosaic idea of family recipes passed down through generations of women. The idea is that whatever grandmother makes is the best, as if it takes an old woman to make truly old-fashioned food.

In an ad for Snider's Old Fashioned Chili Sauce, such a woman is pictured pouring Snider's into Mason jars with the caption, "Pa will never know the difference...Snider's Old Fashioned Chili Sauce Tastes Just as Good as Mine" (Figure 3.8). She is the picture of the classic granny: white hair in a bun, granny glasses, full-coverage apron, and dimpled elbows.

For such a brief ad, a lot is going on in it:



Figure 3.8: "Pa Will Never Know," 1941.

Pa's so crazy about my chili sauce, I wouldn't dare let him know I didn't make any this year...But this old Fashioned Chili Sauce the Snider people put up tastes so much like mine I declare I couldn't tell one from the other...Seems almost too good to be true—buying real country style chili sauce at stores! (“Pa Will Never Know,” 1941)

The text continues in the woman's voice, following up her assertion that she will fool her husband with the fear that he can never know that she did not actually make the sauce herself. Thus prepared foods are a weapon of the weak, a way for women to put one over on their husbands. Instead of just admitting she bought it, she has to pour it into her own jars and pretend she actually made it. There is also the reference to the “Snider people” and the use of the phrase “put up.” This gives a mass-produced chili sauce a link with home canning, where fresh produce is processed in a kitchen, in small batches. Instead of an assembly line, the image is of a home kitchen, personalized attention, and a long-standing process for old-fashioned flavor. This is further emphasized with the wording “real country style chili sauce.” Country style is never explained in any of these ads, but because the contrast in this one is between what she would make herself as opposed to what Snider's makes, we equate country style with a rural lifestyle and homemade sauces from grandmother's recipes, a family heritage through food.

Childhood Memories

Childhood supplies us all with vivid memories, and they often have to do with food. The ads in this section all rely on childhood memories, and the products advertised are promoted as the means of reliving those memories, utilizing them to tell a story, and creating memories for your own family.

All three of these elements show up in an ad for soup, Figure 3.9. It is interesting to contrast this ad with the Campbell's ads analyzed above, as it is for a nearly identical product—chicken soup—of a different brand, Heinz, of the same period. In a similar panel style but with more cartoonish renderings, a different history of this venerable soup emerges, one of individual, rather than national, memory.

Here, the reader is encouraged to image herself as a young boy (or her husband as that young boy) flung back through the years by the scent or taste of this particular country-style chicken soup. The first panel depicts “a farm kitchen you’ll never forget” with red gingham curtains and, as it transpires, a huge wood-burning stove. “Aunt Liza” is part of this kitchen, along with “a cuckoo clock on the wall, a rocker by the window.”

Aunt Liza embodies traditional knowledge, as the next panel depicts her whipping up the soup without the benefit of a recipe, or a “receet” as the copy phrases it. Her language reveals Aunt Liza as a denizen of rural America, while her white hair and granny glasses put her in the “wise old crone” category of womanhood. Sure enough, like a witch, she mysteriously adds a “bokay” of herbs and spices to the kettle. “You never knew what these spices were, but their blending is something your taste remembers all these years,” reads the text. Witchcraft, indeed (or maybe just a reflection of the attitude that boys do not need to know that stuff anyway).

The soup simmers on the stove for hours, while the boy makes excuses, like putting wood in the stove, to get close enough to smell it. Then—just as Aunt Liza is setting the table for dinner and satisfaction is imminent—he is sent on a mission, taking some of the fresh soup to a sick neighbor. This neighborly gesture further delays the gratification of

sitting down to a bowl of soup for dinner, but also harkens back to the rural value of neighbors looking after each other. In the final panel, dinner is served, soup “the like of which you never knew again until Heinz came along with its Country-style Chicken Soup.” The presumption here, unlike with Campbell’s, is that the knowledge for making this soup was never passed on, that Aunt Liza was the last repository of that knowledge, at least until Heinz came along.



Figure 3.9: “Farm Chicken Soup,” 1941.

Beyond the final panel, and set in place as if a sixth panel, is the obligatory photograph of the can of soup; in front of it is a steaming bowl of soup. To differentiate it from the rural product, it is in a nice china bowl on a plate; it is depicted in a photograph, rather than a cartoon drawing, to contrast again the present and the past.

An interesting note in the text links the soup to what the copywriters call “rural benefits”: “If you were a city child with none of the rural benefits, try it—and you won’t forget.” Thus, memory of a good soup is one of the rural benefits, and even if this soup is not a memory for you, it will be once you taste it. And as Hansen noted, tradition is also embodied in rural as opposed to urban.

The ad for Brer Rabbit molasses (Figure 3.10) is another example of an ad that tells a story about the past and promises that one taste of its product “takes you back to the joys

of childhood.” This time, the story is personalized. Rather than being encouraged to find herself or her husband in the main characters, the reader is introduced to the boyhoods of the men who started the molasses company.

These men are portrayed as heroes of a sort, having restored to the world “the lost art of a famous old-time delicacy.” The story tells us why they did this by relating bits of their childhoods in Louisiana, where their families made molasses on their own plantations. The boys still recalled the flavor of gingerbread and cookies made with that molasses as “more delicious than they had ever been able to get since.” But alas! Until these two came along, “old-fashioned home-made molasses” had almost “gone out of existence.” Because of these memories of the flavor and production of molasses, the boys grew up to be men who were “determined to put up for the women of America” molasses just like they remembered.

The ad is illustrated by black and white pencil sketches for an old-fashioned look; one depicts two boys in overalls watching as sugar cane is cut and boiled down into molasses. Another, the smallest, shows a rapt child watching as her mother pours molasses into a measuring cup to add it to a mixing bowl, presumably to make one of the many treats that contain molasses. The last has the look of the old south: a white family at dinner being served cake, maybe gingerbread, by a black manservant. This sketch illustrates the subhead in the ad asserting that Brer Rabbit molasses contains “the flavor of plantation days.” Even if your own memories lack a plantation, you can experience memories you have never had just by tasting this product.

Like most “old-fashioned” products, there is supposedly an “art” to making molasses

—but not so much of an art that it cannot be duplicated in mass production. It is also a “famous delicacy,” but not so famous that women do not need the free recipe book offered in the ad to learn what to do with it. The recipes all have southern names: New Orleans gingerbread, Old Mammy cookies, plantation cakes, Creole caramels, and Dixie bran bread, as if only southerners used molasses.

In ads for Gold Medal flour, the tag line for the flour is “memories are made of this.”

A pie is not just a pie; it embodies memories for yourself and your children. Not just any memories, either: the “happiest baking memories of all.” It plays on memories of baking with one’s mother, but as the ad targets women, it uses the memory to encourage them to create them for their own children by baking with them, as if baking with your children should be a family tradition.

In Figure 3.11, the picture tells the story, rather than the text. There is a close-up shot of a baking counter in a kitchen. In spite of the implication that home baking has recently taken place, the counter is suspiciously clean. There is no floury mess, and the flour bag, with its own “memories are made of this” inscription, is not even open. The cookbook, open to the page for Will & Billy Pumpkin Pies, is spotless, and there are no dirty bowls

DECEMBER 1920

Two Louisiana boys restore the lost art of a famous old-time delicacy

TWENTY-TWO years ago, two boys raised in Louisiana conceived an ideal worthy of that state's need for its wonderful cooking. They decided to restore to the world a famous old-fashioned delicacy that they had learned to love as children. In their childhood they had enjoyed gingerbread, cookies, and other goodies much more delicious than they had ever been able to get since. This flavor was due to old-fashioned home-made molasses, most almost gone out of existence.

The molasses that their families used in their boyhood had always been made right on their own plantation. Here and there they remembered the golden fragrance of fresh-baked sugar cane inhibited over hundreds of years! How well they remembered how the fragrance came on every house called to every boy on the plantation to have hungry about for a taste of this famous molasses!

No wonder the gingerbread and cookies of those days were beyond compare!

Spurred by the memory of this delicious taste those two young men determined to put up for the world of America molasses which would duplicate all this old-time aroma and flavor.

This molasses they named "Brer Rabbit," in honor of the hero in the plantation stories of their boyhood.

The moment the women of America used Brer Rabbit they recognized that here at last was the molasses for which they had been longing; molasses so fragrant, so full-flavored, so sweet and pure that one taste takes you back to the joys of childhood.

Today it is the most popular molasses in the world!

And today Patrick & Ford, who worked so long to fulfill their ideal of bringing to all the women of America the wonderful flavor of the old-time plantation molasses, have become the largest producers of molasses in the world.

Brer Rabbit Molasses is neither sugar nor molasses. It is a pure molasses, made from the best sugar cane in the world. It is a pure molasses, made from the best sugar cane in the world. It is a pure molasses, made from the best sugar cane in the world.

The flavor of plantation days

Get a can of Brer Rabbit Molasses today. The moment you taste it you will know why it makes you hungry. Taste it. How good it is! No wonder it makes such a wonderful gingerbread.

See how much lighter everything made with it bakes up. Your family will be quick to appreciate the rich, natural flavor it gives your gingerbread, cookies and dark cakes over dark breads of all kinds. What new richness of flavor it gives your bread!

Let your family enjoy the Brer Rabbit taste. They will choose for food cooked with it, every day.

You can get Brer Rabbit at your grocery—or either the light molasses (gold label) or the dark molasses (green label). Patrick & Ford, Ltd., New Orleans.

Free Recipe Book

Write today for the Brer Rabbit Recipe Book of Southern Dixie—New Orleans, Old Mammy Cookies, Plantation Cakes, Creole Caramels, Dixie Bran Bread, Old Fashioned Dixie Cookies—and other wanted recipes—old-fashioned, delicious, and pure. It is a free gift. Send no money. Write to Patrick & Ford, Ltd., New Orleans.

Have Brer Rabbit Gingerbread Tonight

1½ cups sugar 1 cup molasses
1½ cups flour 1 cup butter
1½ cups Brer Rabbit 1 cup eggs
1 cup milk 1 cup vanilla

Cream butter, add sugar and salt. Beat eggs, mix molasses and milk with it. Mix all of dry ingredients and combine them with the first mixture. Bake in a moderate oven.

Brer Rabbit Molasses

Figure 3.10: “Brer Rabbit,” 1920.

or utensils in evidence. Some pecans are scattered on the counter, but that is the extent of the mess, if it can be called that. The focus is on the cookbook and its handwritten recipe for pumpkin pie named after the men in the woman's life, and the pie that she serving. In the foreground, a small tart, a miniature of the larger pie, is held in a child's hands. To make the "memories" accessible to everyone, the only parts of the people pictured are their hands, the mother's bigger and with long, well-manicured nails; the child's smaller, cupping the tart.



Figure 3.11: "Memories," 1970.

The colors are warm and comforting, yellows and oranges, giving the ad a little patina of age while at the same time providing a golden glow. The pie and the tart are perfect; even the wedge she is taking out has no flaws.

It is interesting to contrast ads for flour with ads for cake mixes. While ads for cake mixes often present baking from scratch as uncertain, tedious, and much too time-consuming, flour advertisements romanticize home baking. In a series of ads for Gold Medal flour, the flour is promoted as giving the baker a "margin for error" so that "you'll create a luscious memory for your child, even if little things go wrong when you bake." The ads promote the flour as taking the uncertainty out of it baking and making it easier. Some ads also associate one product with another, listing both products in the recipe so

that the dutiful consumer will buy both to ensure that her results will equal those pictured in the ad.

Taste Memory

A very typical way of selling all kinds of foods is to emphasize their “fresh from the garden” flavors. This is a long-standing and still useful means of advertising, playing as it does on memories of home gardens and fresh produce. It also glorifies the rural experience as opposed to the urban, with the flavors of the rural winning out, as if the taste and memory of fresh ripe garden produce is embedded in the species memory of *Homo sapiens*.

This point was driven home to me recently when I was at a friend’s house for dinner, and noticed the copy on a bottle of ketchup. On the back of the bottle, big and bold text proclaimed the effectiveness of ketchup as a source of lycopene, a powerful antioxidant. Suddenly curious and fascinated by this unlikely emphasis on the nutritional value of a product whose biggest ingredients are corn syrup and sugar, I read on. When I got to the ingredients list, I was interested to note that instead of just saying “tomatoes,” the list instead read “red ripe tomatoes.” Even in listing ingredients, the manufacturer was eager to promote the product as using tomatoes picked at the peak of freshness and flavor.

Freshness, flavor, color, texture, and smell are all facets of food memories, especially when that food is fresh. My own food memories are filled with gardens and the tastes and smells of fresh fruits and vegetables. When people were making the transition from growing their own foods to buying them in cans or frozen, they had to be convinced that

prepared foods were just as good as what they could grow for themselves.

It also plays on a romantic ideal of the rural experience. Ads never say “all the goodness of a mono-cropped, heavily sprayed field,” which is the reality of mass production for food processors. Instead they employ the ideal of the garden, an individual undertaking lovingly cultivated and geared for family food production. While the family garden is a memory for many people, it is also a cultural ideal linked to ideas of a relationship with nature, self sufficiency, and peaceful rural life.

The Heinz ad in Figure 3.12, for example, under the heading of “That fresh from the garden taste,” fills half the page with an elaborate impressionistic watercolor of a woman picking tomatoes in a garden. In spite of the undoubted existence of heat and dirt, she looks cool and clean; she is even wearing high-heeled shoes under her long dress. A large hat shades her face, and the basket beside her is filled with ripe tomatoes from the prolific plants she continues to pick from. The tomatoes are the only distinguishable vegetable; the rest of the garden appears to be lush and colorful, but primarily flowers rather than food crops. The copy in the ad asserts that the fruits and vegetables used in Heinz’s products are grown all over the world, “wherever sun and soil combine to produce the best.” To preserve those fresh flavors, the processing kitchens are “nearby...insuring that ‘fresh from the garden’ flavor of every variety bearing the name Heinz.”

These are, however, better than what people can grow and prepare themselves, as they have the added benefits of growing wherever the best conditions exist, in addition to being “Planted by Heinz, from seed developed by Heinz—grown under Heinz supervision—and then prepared in kitchens that are the pride of the whole world....” The

woman in the painting, for example, is obviously not picking tomatoes for Heinz. Why is she in this ad at all then? She represents the past, the memory of picking and eating your own tomatoes, not the reality of current tomato production for Heinz. But by associating her with its products, Heinz is linking the two, making ketchup mean more than ketchup: it means summer, a productive garden, and a beautiful woman picking tomatoes.



Figure 3.12: “Fresh Garden Taste,” 1925.

Another typical technique is to equate a particular product with vivid images of fresh vegetables. One such ad is for the vegetable juice V-8. Figure 3.13 is one of a series, and exemplifies the type of ads all of them are. Under the heading of “A basket of garden goodness in every can of V-8” sits a big basket of fresh vegetables. It is no accident that this basket is an old-fashioned wicker basket, rather than any other kind of container. In the basket, the discerning eye can make out parsley, carrots, celery, tomatoes, beets, lettuce, spinach, and what looks like watercress—a total of eight different vegetables. According to an inset, those are the eight vegetables that provide the juice its name, and they are “combined to enrich natural flavors.”

In front of the basket, in the foreground, is an open can of V-8 being poured to fill up the “V” of a bold-face V-8 like a glass. Its position in front of the basket of vegetables

correlates the two objects; the can of V-8 is equal to the basket of vegetables. The reason why that is desirable, however, is because the flavor of all of these “garden-fresh” vegetables and the memories they evoke. Again, in the text, the mention is made of “fresh, sun-ripened” vegetables and their inherent wholesomeness and goodness because they are from the garden.



Figure 3.13: “Basket of Goodness,” 1941.

A later example of the same idea is Figure 3.14 for Lipton’s dried soup, the name of which alone evokes the country garden: country vegetable soup. Two-thirds of the ad is a picture of a boy, perhaps ten years old, in the back of a pickup truck, presumably on its way to a farmers’ market. He is surrounded by harvest baskets full of fresh vegetables: peppers, beans, squash, potatoes, corn, parsley, and onions. His clothing is “country”; he wears a bandana around his neck and a straw hat on his head. He has freckles, and one of his front teeth is chipped, giving him that rough-and-tumble, all-boy look.

It is a picture that again has nothing to do with vegetable production and everything to do with memory; combining childhood memories with memories of a garden and a vegetable market. The colors are sharp and crisp, and everything is set up to provide contrast. There is abundance, hinting that the soup mix contains an abundance of vegetables as fresh as those in the truck. The text asserts that Lipton’s gathers “the best

the good earth had to offer,” carefully selecting every vegetable that goes into their soup mix for freshness and flavor.

The headline claims that Lipton’s “keeps the fresh country vegetables tasting like fresh country vegetables,” emphasizing again the rural as opposed to the urban, and implying that of course everyone knows what fresh country vegetables actually taste like. In classic advertising tautology, the text asserts that because the soup is dried, it is the freshest possible, because Lipton does not actually make the soup, “we only get all the good things together.” It is up to you to boil water, pour the soup in, and simmer it five minutes, thus “making” the soup.

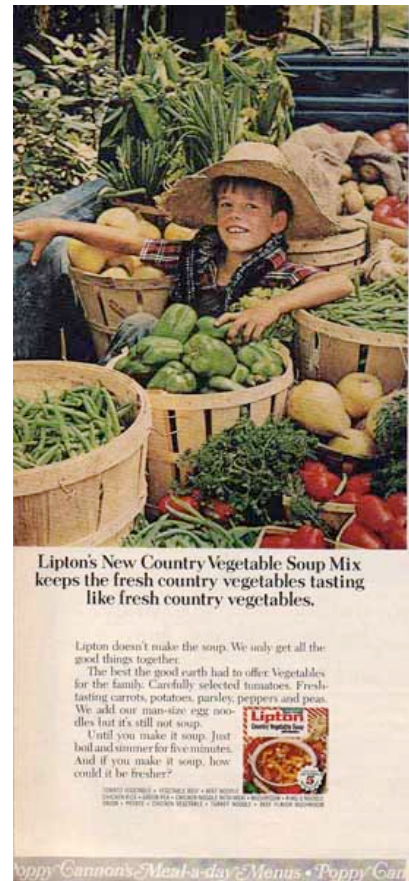


Figure 3.14: “Best of the Earth,” 1970.

Cultural Traditions

One of the more interesting groups of ads was those that attempt to convince the public to add a particular food or product to their daily diets. Often it was a new and mostly unfamiliar fruit or vegetable, and ads would include recipes to encourage cooks to use the product. Other products, however, were familiar and the struggle was to get people to eat or drink more of them. This was often attempted by running ads that made these products part of American cultural traditions, like Thanksgiving.

For example, to sell more oranges, Sunkist ran a campaign emphasizing “famous American breakfasts.” Each breakfast was lavishly illustrated with a table and food in the foreground and an appropriate background. A detailed menu was given, with the caveat that although everyone has a different idea of a favorite breakfast, we all include California orange juice.



Figure 3.15 is an example of one such ad. The famous breakfast in this case is a farm breakfast. On a red-checked tablecloth in the foreground of a picture taking up over half the page is the breakfast: eggs, toast, coffee, juice, sausage, and fried cornmeal mush (according to the menu). In the background are vast cornfields, a red barn, a windmill, silos, and a white frame farmhouse. The breakfast is a photograph; the background, an artistic rendering. The colors are bright and lively; the orange juice looks radioactive.

The text emphasizes the nutritional value of oranges, and makes certain to point out that as wonderful as the farm breakfast may be, without oranges it lacks vitamin C. There is also an offer for a free booklet of “Famous American Breakfasts.” The booklet offered belies the adjective “famous”; if these breakfasts are so famous, no one would need a booklet detailing them.

More elaborate was a campaign for beer run in the 1940s and 1950s by the United

States Brewers Foundations. The tag line for every ad in the series was “Beer belongs... enjoy it.” Coupled with that is the phrase, “America’s beverage of moderation.”

Artists were hired to paint a series of paintings on the theme “Home Life in America.” One painting adorns each ad, and reproductions are for sale, naturally. The paintings depict a variety of “typical” American scenes: a beach barbecue, a baseball game, skiing, a quail hunt, ocean

sailing, a barn raising, and of course, Thanksgiving dinner. The picture of the product, beer, is considerably smaller and below the painting; the painting is what captures the eye.

The text varies, based on the painting, but they all follow a similar pattern. The first paragraph elaborates on the painting and extends the idea of its association with American life, while the second one is essentially the same in every ad. This excerpt from Figure 3.16 demonstrates the pattern:

The tenth-inning frenzy of a big-league baseball crowd...the soft click of horseshoes around a barnyard stake...the chatter of a family picnic on a sun-bright beach—yes, all these are America, the land we love, the land that today we fight for.

In this America of tolerance and good humor, of neighborliness and pleasant living, perhaps no beverage more fittingly belongs than wholesome beer. And the right to enjoy this beverage of moderation...



Figure 3.16: “Beer and Baseball,” 1945.

this, too, is part of our own American heritage of personal freedom.
("Beer and Baseball," 1945)

Thus beer is not just beer; it is part of the American heritage and a symbol of personal freedom. The insinuation is that beer should be included in all aspects of American life, that it is an *American* beverage. The reference to moderation gives subtle permission to those who might still view alcohol as morally questionable.

A final example of this use of the past is Figure 3.17, one of a series by the Heinz Company. Again, half the page is taken up by a painting depicting an idealized American pastime. Each painting has a title directly underneath, and directly beneath the title is the subtitle, "an old American institution." To equate the company with American traditions, the company name at the end of the text is in the same typeface as the title of the painting, with the same subtitle.

In this painting of Thanksgiving, the activity within a big, high-ceiling kitchen is detailed. Women are preparing food—one is rolling out pie crust, another is pumping water, and another, undoubtedly the matriarch, is carrying the turkey in a pan. One man in outdoor clothes stands by the stove with an armful of wood, while an elderly man stands in a doorway watching the preparations. Through an archway you can just glimpse the dining room and another woman setting the table. A boy in the foreground is cracking nuts, and the text is written from his perspective.

It is a beautiful big old kitchen with a wood stove and a pump for water. The big wooden table is covered with colorful foods of all kinds, and the throw rugs lend warmth and more vivid color. A cat winds itself around the legs of the woman with the turkey; it

gazes longingly at the pan. The text begins with “Do you remember...” and continues to describe the preparations, foods, scents, and abundance of Thanksgiving. It is told almost like a story, but a story in which the reader is encouraged to put herself, to accept the memories and experiences described as her own. But they are specifically the memories of a child rather than an adult. One is



Figure 3.17: “Thanksgiving,” 1940.

watching the preparations, not making them, and the reference is to “visiting aunts,” rather than sisters or in-laws.

It also assumes a universal Thanksgiving experience, as if this is how it was for everyone, regardless of race, class, or religion. There is also a patriotic element, not unusual for the early 1940s, in which references to the American way of life and what is worth fighting for and protecting were common in ads: “Today in an America that is still our land of privilege and plenty, we can enjoy the same abundance of grand foods...”

Heinz inserts itself into this American tradition by styling itself as an integral part of it. “It is a matter of great pride to us that Heinz 57 Varieties have been bidden to the Thanksgiving tables of American families for over three generations—just like old family friends...” More cannibalism: old family friends that you eat!

Not only that, but the foods themselves are good because they’re made like they were made in the past, and they carry those flavors and memories: “...and if our foods evoke

the memory of some fleeting flavor of long ago—perhaps it is because we blend them with care, with skill—and with a fondness for days gone by.”



Our fondness for days gone by is an American paradox. At the same time that we eagerly cast aside the old and embrace the new, we revere the past. Our landscape is dotted with memorials to people, animals, and historical events. The preservation of land, or more accurately, particular uses of land, is a form of memorializing the past. When we preserve farmland, for instance, one of the things we are doing is memorializing our past as an agrarian society.

But while these manifestations of cultural history are publicly funded and agreed upon, those manifested in advertisements are private. They are, in fact, memory as whatever sells the product the best. The story of nature that these ads rely upon as a narrative is a nature that is the past, separate and apart from us, only attainable through the purchase of particular products. This past is represented as a simpler time when things were done the “natural” way, unspoiled by modernity, and generally harkening to rural life and spaces rather than urban. At a time when the mass production of goods was increasing, along with urbanization, pollution, stress, and, and artificiality, advertisers found the appeal of an unspoiled nature, both geographically (space) and historically (time), a useful means of framing particular foods.

Ads such as the ones in this chapter equate a food with some element of memory: history and tradition, an historical craft, childhood, taste, or cultural traditions. Whether chicken noodle soup, for example, is a traditional American dish is beside the point; ads

are never so much about reality than they are about creating meaning where none exists.

Food does have meaning, though, outside of the realm of advertising. With food advertising, the irony is that advertisers play on those meanings while simultaneously denigrating them. In the case of memory, if foods really mean so much, if tradition and memory are really so important, surely substitutes are unacceptable. A mass-produced food is the opposite of the homemade food of memory used to sell it. What it comes down to is that in these ads, who are we as Americans is whatever sells the soup.

Chapter 4: Eating the Place

Open a can of Sliced Hawaiian Pineapple! Pour out the delicate, golden slices, dripping with sun-sugared juice. Then taste one. Close your eyes. And, presto! Winter is forgotten in a vision of balmy ocean breezes, rustling palms and a lazy surf, washing coral shores. There is romance—and sunshine—in every bite of this “King of Fruits” from far-off Hawaii. And there is health—and menu-variety—and a flavor that never fails to strike a hearty appetite response. (“Golden Circlets” 1925)

Closely related to memory, and often intertwined with it, is place. The food memories I related in the previous chapter take me to my uncle’s farm, while eating fresh summer peaches takes me straight to my mother’s Oklahoma kitchen. The memories that food brings back are often related to a specific place, usually the place where the food is produced. Even if the association is not based on an actual individual experience, people associate food with the place it comes from.

For example, some places are known for particular foods—Maine for its lobsters, Georgia its peaches, France its wines, Switzerland its chocolate, Colombia its coffee. While an American buying a French wine may never have been to France, he or she is likely aware of France as a place famous for its wines. Foods from a place are often given as gifts; my grandparents in Florida always sent us boxes of citrus fruits every Christmas, and when we came back from Wisconsin, our car would be loaded with summer sausage, Johnsonville cheddar cheese, bratwurst, maple syrup, and string cheese. These associations often linger even when they are no longer valid. As I will show, pineapple was so relentlessly linked to Hawaii that even now, when only 5% of the world’s canned pineapple is grown there, many people still associate pineapple with Hawaii—not Thailand and the Philippines, currently the biggest producers.

A further extension of this association is the evolution of a traditional food into a national food, and a way of cooking into a national cuisine. A food may be presented as “all-American” or “genuinely Chinese.” Appeals to patriotism may be included, but the emphasis is on food as a national symbol, part of a national identity. Some specific dishes may be considered emblematic of a nation, like apple pie, sushi, borscht, pad thai, tamales, and curry. These foods are often connected to national holidays and celebrations.

Added to cultural associations is the fact that food often tastes of the place where it is grown. Corn-fed cattle taste different than grass-fed, and grass-fed flavor varies according to the grasses—which vary from place to place. Different soils impart different flavors to grapes (and thus, wines), vegetables, and milk. In the case of many foods, eating the food means eating elements of the natural environment of a place, and all the supposed benefits (or pollutants) of that place.

Place is also linked to quality, as in the Lea & Perrins ad for Worcestershire sauce in Figure 4.1. Illustrating the headline of “What’s in it for you,” are two bottles. One is filled with the sauce, and bears the Lea & Perrins label. The other, without a label, is filled with layers of ingredients of the sauce. To the left of this bottle is a series of short descriptions of each ingredient. In every case, this description uses a comparative adjective



Figure 4.1: “What’s In It,” 1970.

to embellish the ingredient and then tells where it is from: “Juicier red onions from the Finger Lakes” and “Sweeter tamarinds from the West Indies.” Exactly what this is in comparison to is not clear; the idea is only that this sauce is better because its ingredients come from someplace specific. Rather than being a simple collection of ingredients, it offers itself as a tour around the world.

Finally, the issue of place was important, as people wanted to know where their food was coming from. This knowledge is closely linked to a trust between the producer and consumer. In going from a time when people either produced most of their own food to a time when they produce very little of it, place was used in ads to establish a similar trust. First the manufacturer, and then the grocer as well, had to convince buyers that they were worthy of their trust by providing them with foods from trusted sources.

The ads in this chapter emphasize the place where the products originate. In some cases it is a specific and real place, like Florida, California, or Hawaii, and sometimes it is an idyllic generic Eden—a garden, a farm, a valley, or a ranch. Still others present a completely imaginary place, like “Raisinland” or “Brookside Farms.” The attempt is made to associate a product with a place and use the qualities of the place to add intangible values to the product. In other cases, a product is inserted into a place or region through its use in a recipe that reflects or is associated with a place—i.e., gumbo from Louisiana and how to use Heinz ketchup in the recipe. As I noted above, memory and tradition are often a part of these ads, just as patriotism and national identity are evident in some of the ads in the previous chapter.

The ads in this category rely on two different narratives of nature. The first is nature

as the garden, a pure paradise that produces pure products for consumers. It is both separate from human beings and producing for them; ideally, it is a nature that does everything itself and all the farmer has to do is harvest the crop. Production is ignored in favor of a connection to an idyllic place, however tenuous that connection may be. The second is a nature similar to that used in the ads in the previous chapter: nature as a simpler time and place. In this case, the emphasis is on a particular place and its traditional foods.

The story of nature as the garden is tied to the cultural dichotomy of nature as separate and pure, a law unto itself. This creates the impression of food produced as part of nature, with no manipulation of animals, plants, and ecosystems. If this is hard to conceptualize, try to imagine a food ad that showed a real place of production, like a confined animal feeding operation (CAFO) or a field of lettuce with a skull and crossbones sign indicating pesticide spraying. These images would work against marketing; thus this narrative of nature must be that of nice places and good things. It is easier to ignore the facts of migrant farm workers, habitat destruction, monocrops, pesticides, and animals that never see the light of day when you're shown Juan Valdez happily picking coffee, peaceful orchards with no signs of spraying, and personified animals acting like human beings in ads.

One of the paradoxes of using such idyllic places to market foods is that production in a particular place may destroy or degrade exactly the qualities advertised. It offers the false sense of security that we can have these places and eat them too. The dualistic view of nature as "out there" is applied to food production; it is "out there," so paving local

agricultural land and losing local food production capacity is acceptable.

Another paradox is that in most parts of the United States, sites of agricultural production are everywhere. Dairy farms, ranches, corn and wheat fields, orchards, gardens, grazing land, and hog and chicken farms are part of the landscape, and were even more pervasive earlier in the twentieth century. Yet even as the American agricultural heritage disappeared, advertisers (and the government) continued to present idyllic pictures of it and its landscapes as representative of the current agricultural system.

Ads that emphasize place are one of the major sites where the connection “between the farm and the dinner table” (Belasco 2002, 8) breaks down. Food production happens in real places, not imaginary ones, but those places are seldom, if ever, depicted in ads for food. When the real place is ignored, so are the real technologies involved in production. Ignorance of production realities, of course, lends itself to an industrial food system. The ideal consumer for agribusiness is, as Wendell Berry put it, an “industrial eater... who does not know that eating is an agricultural act, who no longer knows or imagines the connections between eating and the land, and who is therefore necessarily passive and uncritical” (Berry 1990, 146).

To help us remain passive, uncritical, and forgetful of the link between food and farm, the theme of place in advertising is one of fantasy and colorful stories about places. Several variations of this theme emerge: the product as the place, the product inserted into a place and its foods, the place as the brand, and imaginary places, gardens of eating that naturally produce food for people.

Product as Place

Place is very often used in ads to attribute the qualities of a place, whether actual or contrived, to a food. For example, an ad for Betty Crocker *wild* blueberry muffin mix makes a specific reference to “wild Maine blueberries” that supposedly give the muffins more blueberry flavor than presumably “tame” cultivated blueberries (“Blueberry Muffins,” 1970, not pictured). This type of construction is often a two-way street. In the case of pineapple, ads marketing the commodity were also used to market Hawaii as a destination, constructing Hawaii as an earthly paradise possessing all the romance, glamour, and exoticism of the South Seas. Although it is not native to the Hawaiian Islands, pineapple is nonetheless embedded in the American imagination as a symbol of Hawaii and a “product of paradise” (Suryanata 2000).

As one of two major agricultural exports of the islands, the story of pineapple is an integral part of the story of Hawaii in the twentieth century. Its cultivation transformed the landscape, and its marketing linked it irrevocably to the islands. Now, even though acreage devoted to pineapple production is down by more than three quarters (Suryanata 2002) from its peak in the mid-twentieth century, the pineapple is still an icon of Hawaii. Some of the ads for pineapple juice that helped establish this link are discussed below as a prime example of how place was used to impart romance and glamour to a fruit juice.

In Figure 4.2, for instance, Hawaii is personified as a native woman, complete in a grass skirt, leis, flowers in her hair, and no shirt. She stands on Hawaii, reaching out across the Pacific Ocean to pour a glass of Dole pineapple juice for a couple seated at their breakfast table in the United States. Everyone is smiling; the man at the table is

reaching with eagerness towards Hawaii and the glass of juice. The only textual link is the phrase “Glamorous Hawaii offers you her most refreshing gift...” All you have to do, it is clear, is take it. There is the contrast between the fully clothed, seated couple, at a table set with dishes and flowers, a picture of civilization, and, in opposition, the barefoot, half-naked, flower-bedecked young woman, with no material goods but the pineapple juice, which she is giving away to the “civilized” white people with a smile on her face.



Figure 4.2: “Glamorous Hawaii,” 1935.

Another ad, Figure 4.3, is reminiscent of a Gauguin painting. The illustration takes up three quarters of the page and could stand alone. The credits note that it was “painted especially for the Hawaiian Pineapple Co. Ltd.,” the early name of James Dole’s company. While there are no pineapples in the painting, there are several icons of paradise: a waterfall, flowers, lush foliage, and a scantily clad native woman, innocent in the garden, gazing away from the audience, a basket of flowers beside her. The textual link is the word “exotic,” scrawled large under the illustration and introducing the text block that ties exotic Hawaii with Dole’s pineapple juice, “nature’s most glamorous drink.” The linkage here is all in the text; there is no can of juice to mar the illustration’s likeness to a museum piece. The painting signifies the elusive qualities of glamour and

the exotic, and transfers it onto pineapple juice, which the consumer can purchase.

In Figure 4.4 there is a return to the civilized-wild dichotomy, but this time, rather than reaching toward each other as in Figure 4.2, they are side by side, ignoring each other. In the center, a Caucasian woman dressed in a bright floral muumuu sits atop an enormous globe, pouring pineapple juice into a glass held by a white-suit-jacketed, bow-tied man.

The two other men and women are similarly attired: the women have flowers in their hair or leis around their necks; the men all wear boutonnieres and ties. Behind them, beyond a bamboo railing, a waterfall plunges down out of towering mountains, and lush tropical foliage crowds close to their platform. We know it is warm because there are, once again, a couple of half-naked native women in the background either just going swimming or getting out from swimming. They are impossible to miss, framed as they are by the figures in the foreground, especially the woman's arm as she pours juice into a glass.

It is as if by opening the can of pineapple juice, this fun-loving group of friends involved in a game of charades actually opened a door to paradise, inviting it into the room with them. This sense is further reinforced by another contrast between the background and the foreground. While the group in the foreground is depicted in a

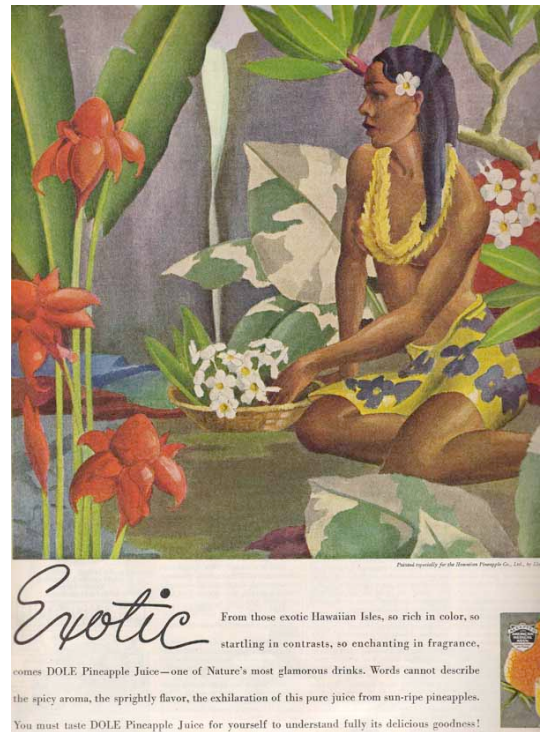


Figure 4.3: "Exotic," 1935.

photograph, the background scene is painted.

This lends a sharper contrast between the two, and gives the background an imaginary quality, more a sense of an atmosphere than a real presence. Photographs are considered more honest depictions of reality; a photograph with a painting behind it tells the viewer that the scene in the photograph is real, while the painting is not. Thus, the

“real” group in the foreground has opened a

can of pineapple juice, thereby bringing the

qualities of the painted background into their space, rather than it really being there. The idea is that you do not have to go to Hawaii to experience it; just drink some pineapple juice and paradise comes to you. This interpretation may explain why none of the people are paying their exotic visitors or the scene behind them the slightest attention. They are admiring their pineapple juice.

Oddly enough, the text for this ad emphasizes how good the juice makes you feel, and the health benefits of drinking it, with the headline “I’m sitting on top of the world!” That phrase, along with the woman’s position on top of the globe, further alludes to the dominance and conquest that are denied in the friendly tableau of Figure 4.2.

These depictions of romantic and glamorous islands ignore the destruction of the very things they celebrate. The connection between the creation of vast plantations of a



Figure 4.4: “On Top of the World,” 1941.

single crop, the importation of workers to work in the fields and canneries, the applications of fertilizers and pesticides, and the construction of infrastructure to support the industry, on the one hand, and the destruction of Hawaii as an independent kingdom, the dispossession of its people, and the transformation of its environment, on the other, is more than obscured; it is totally denied. The cultivation of pineapple is a factor in the obliteration of the very paradise used to add value to Hawaiian pineapple.

Another interesting usage of the South Seas motif is found in an ad for a salad dressing called “Tahitian Isle.” Though I am not familiar with the cuisine of Tahiti, I doubt that salad is a big part of it, so the name itself is uninformative in terms of any real connection to Tahitian food habits. In terms of image though, it is everything.

In the ad shown in Figure 4.5, a bottle of the dressing is nestled in tall grass like a lion might be. Subtitled on its label as “a spicy-sweet dressing,” the copy speaks directly to it, as if it is a person: “You’re a savage. And a delight. You’re a savage delight.” There are layers of meaning here, though; the copy appears to be addressed to the bottle of dressing, but it also addresses the reader, and via the bottle, Tahiti.

Because salad dressing, unlike pineapple, is a composite product mixed together in a plant, its association with a place is a



Figure 4.5: “Savage Delight,” 1965.

complete construction for marketing. Shoppers are asked to believe that this dressing somehow brings the flavors and atmosphere of Tahiti to their salad. After a listing of the basic ingredients—necessary, because without it, who would know what “Tahitian” dressing actually is?—it finishes with “You’ve got all the lure of the islands behind that exciting label...” This is a wilder type of romance and glamour; the lure of these islands is savagery rather than friendly beauty.

Another means of imparting glamour and romance to food is to equate the food with travel to a romantic and glamorous place. Lipton does this in its ads for dried onion soup, which by itself is a pretty boring commodity. The advertisers spice it up with the promise of a trip to Venice by the mere act of opening a packet of soup and adding it to a presumably Italian recipe printed in the ad (Figure 4.6). Under the headline “3 glorious nights,” we get the following copy:

Who needs a travel agent? Or a jet? Relax and let Lipton take you on a Venetian wing-ding. Steak San Marco. Asparagus Venetian. Spaghetti Bravissimo. All done an easy way... Tonight, do what the Venetians do. Divertitevi un pó.*

*Live a little. (“Live a Little,” 1970).

Not only is the food the place, it is an entire philosophy, and “the end of everyday dinners.” As an onion lover, I found this ad, and another one promising to turn an “everyday dinner into a South-of-the-Border spectacular” (“South of the Border,” 1970) very entertaining. The idea that the secret ingredient in every international cuisine is dried onion soup is the implication, and it demonstrates the disconnect between the romance and glamour of the place and a food purported to embody it. By adding this dried soup to steak, asparagus, and spaghetti sauce, the ad implies, you can eat like the Venetians, and

thereby absorb their life philosophy as well. The packaging of the soup itself confuses the issue with its text, which states “Onion Soup and for California Dip.” Italy, Mexico...and California, too!



Figure 4.6: “Live a Little,” 1970.

An interesting point about this particular ad is that there are not any pictures of Venice, one of the most picturesque cities in Italy. Instead, there is a rather clumsy drawing of a gondolier strumming a guitar, and another drawing of a bottle of wine, a guitar, and a wine glass (Figure 4.6). The only photographs are of a box of dried soup and a plate of spaghetti, presumably the spaghetti *bravissimo* for which there is a recipe. This further emphasizes the correlation of food with place—there is no need to go there; eating the food is enough, even if it is contrived.

Inserting the Product into the Place

In contrast to the ads above, these ads use place and the food of a place as hooks. The product does not pretend to take you there or add glamour and romance to your meals. Instead, you are shown how to use a product in the creation of certain regional specialties, or offered authentic regional specialties ready made. The ambiance of the place is important in drawing the reader into the ad and providing a background for the recipe, but it is not necessarily a feature of the product itself.

For example, a series of Rice-a-Roni ads, each a long narrow rectangle comprising a third of a page, consist of nothing but a photograph of a recognizable aspect of San

Francisco, a box of Rice-a-Roni, and a recipe. In one ad it is Telegraph Hill; in another, Chinatown; in yet another, cable cars. The recipe is usually given a San Francisco name, like Golden Gate Scampi, which oddly enough uses Spanish Rice-a-Roni (Figure 4.7). This juxtaposition associates the product with the place, and provides the reader with a recipe that supposedly emphasizes that connection.

Ads for Crisco took a different tack. Instead of associating it with one place in particular, ads used a friendly spokesperson to convince women that Crisco was better than butter or lard in various regional recipes—that “things made with Crisco taste so much better” (Figure 4.8), even tried and true regional recipes that have been around for years, apparently.

This spokesperson, one Winifred S. Carter, supposedly traveled throughout the country talking to women and testing recipes, and then wrote up the results like a friendly letter which ran in the ads for Crisco. Here is the opening to one such letter:

I’ve been loitering down through the Chesapeake Bay country which is as chock full of history as a cherry pie is of cherries, looking for interesting Crisco recipes for you. And I found marvelous recipes, with the flavor of by-gone days, quaintly phrased, calling for “yeast powder” instead of baking powder and speaking familiarly of “salteratus.” (“Johnny Cake Road,” 1930)

The appeal to tradition and history, in addition to place, is apparent from this beginning and the headline “From Johnny Cake Road to Accomac—good cooking all the



*Figure 4.7:
“Rice-a-
Roni,” 1970.*

way.” Visits to historic places are described throughout the text, with recipes worked into the travelogue. And always, Crisco:

Then to Annapolis where the loveliest woman showed me her great-grandmother’s handwritten cookbook with a recipe for Brown Betty entitled and misspelled in the most ladylike hand, “a fine recipe for a *frugel* housewife.” It called for unsalted butter! Not so frugal now!

I have given you this recipe, too, for Crisco costs so little in comparison that you can afford to be lavish with it. Yet it tastes for all the world just like freshly churned butter. (“Johnny Cake Road,” 1930)

The ads in this series have illustrations of the dishes Winifred encounters and learns to make on her travels, and stylized maps of the area explored in the background. The maps add verisimilitude, indicating the route followed in a particular adventure. Winifred herself is seldom pictured in the ads; unlike Betty Crocker, she was not used for brand identity. Her qualifications for her expertise on regional foods are never given; we know only that she supposedly works testing recipes in Crisco’s test kitchens, and that she escapes occasionally “to travel all over the country for talks with women about the food they cook in theirs [kitchens]” (Figure 4.9). She was strictly a saleswoman, and one with an address in Cincinnati, Ohio, where women could write to her with their questions and concerns about baking with Crisco.

In another adventure, Winifred relates a visit to New England to find out why “some



Figure 4.8: “Johnny Cake Road,” 1930.

cake was called pie—quaking pudding quaked—a pie was baked upside down” (“New England,” 1930). She relates the trials she endured trying to discover why Boston cream pie is called pie when it is actually a cake. No one, not even the Boston Public Library can tell her, until:

Finally, in a bus on my way to Salem, the chirpiest little gray-haired lady told me this—

Old fashioned housewives lived to please their husbands. And their husbands *had to have pie*—for breakfast even. But some times wives wanted cake. So they baked a layer cake in pie tins, filled it with cream, cut it in pie-shaped wedges and *called* it pie. That’s why Boston cream pie must be baked in round tins and cut in wedges. And, incidentally, the cooks I talked with said it was always made *best* with Crisco because Crisco perfectly preserves the *flavor* of skillfully blended ingredients. (“New England,” 1930, emphases in original)

I love this because it is so loaded. First, that “old fashioned housewives,” presumably in contrast to the modern housewife, “lived to please their husbands.” But in spite of this devotion, they were fine with the idea of tricking their husbands into eating a cake made to look like a pie. Modern housewives are given the recipe to continue the tradition, even though they no longer have the same need to dissemble about whether it is a cake or a pie. Then there is the question of whether this ploy would fool anyone. The need to trick men is a theme that shows up a lot in later ads. When not in the position of a chef or another authority figure, men are portrayed as rather infantile when it comes to food and cooking. They are another problem for the housewife, demanding and picky, but apparently (at least in this case) easily fooled.

Finally, there is the assertion that this traditional “pie” is made best with Crisco. The recipe given in the ad, using Crisco, of course, is even given the title of “the official

This ad is a double-page spread, with four recipes and endless reasons to use Crisco: it is creamy, it tastes good, it is economical, and it preserves flavor. There is even a plug for baked goods: “And by the way, the best bakers everywhere are using Crisco. Women



who are in a hurry never hesitate *now* to buy delicious cakes from the bakers and grocers” (“New England,” 1930). Thus the modern world intrudes on this fantasy of old New England and its favorite dishes; historical recipes are one thing, but Crisco is another. In whatever form, it trumps the very things used to promote it.

Another example of the friendly expert introducing the housewife to a regional dish can be seen in ads like Figure 4.10 for Heinz ketchup. Heinz’s home economist gets her title and authority in the first line: “‘Down in Louisiana,’ says Josephine Gibson, Director, Home Economics Department, H.J. Heinz Company, ‘old Monsieur Picot serves a delightful dish’” (“Louisiana Oysters,” 1930). The entire ad is written as if Josephine is talking to a reporter and being quoted, rather than speaking directly to the reader. This adds authority and gives the impression of a newspaper article, rather than a personal letter.

Josephine is also much more pretentious than Winifred. Note the language she uses in describing this dish:

It’s a brave sight to see old Monsieur bring in the long skewers—each containing a dozen oysters, separated one from the other by pieces of crisp bacon. And so fresh are the oysters from the flame that their edges still curl visibly, and small beads of fat contract and expand on their glistening sides. And, I assure you, when you plunge one of these oysters into the rich, red, piquant ketchup that only Heinz makes, and convey the whole delightful morsel to your mouth, you are in danger of being ecstatically shaken to the depths of your gastronomic soul. (“Louisiana Oysters,” 1930)

Such rhetoric could be classified as an early example of food pornography, perhaps. After enthusing about Heinz ketchup for the entire next paragraph, Josephine finally breaks down and gives the recipe for oysters en brochette. Even that is not

straightforward, though; the recipe itself is given as a story. It is also in a much smaller type size wedged below an illustration of the dish, held in a woman's hand as if she is serving it, and a bottle of Heinz ketchup.

An interesting feature of this ad is a corresponding notice for a radio program, "Enjoy these radio talks!" Radio shows were another method companies employed to introduce a friendly expert to housewives.

These shows were sponsored by the food manufacturer and hosted by a home economist, and they were often advertised in magazine ads. The home economist would report on her culinary adventures and how to use the food manufacturers' products in the recipes she discovered. This Heinz ad was probably based on the transcript of a radio talk.

Of course, the next step in all of this—as some of the Crisco ads hinted—was to stop giving recipes and provide these traditional regional specialties ready made. Campbell's soup did just that with its chicken gumbo soup, admittedly "adapted by Campbell's from a cherished old Creole recipe" ("Campbell's Gumbo," 1950).

The ad for this soup in Figure 4.11 plays on the same then-and-now contrast as the soup ads in the previous chapter. The headlines tell the reader that "They enjoyed it back in old New Orleans... You will welcome it today!" Place is again combined with tradition,

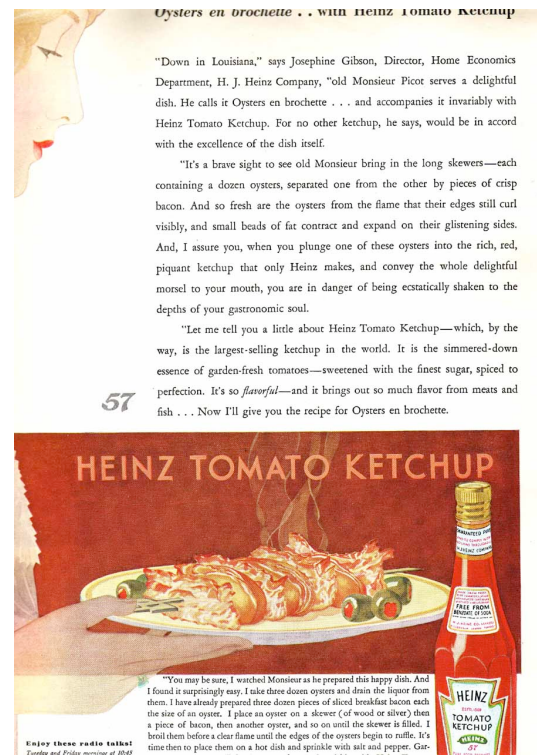


Figure 4.10: "Louisiana Oysters," 1930.

but the difference is that this tradition is based in a specific region and marketed by its association with that region.

Half the ad features a large painting “inspired by a typical New Orleans courtyard kitchen.” A woman in an old-fashioned long dress, an apron, and a shoulder scarf, sits before a fire in a huge brick hearth. She is doing something with her hands, maybe cutting vegetables, though we cannot see any beside her, above a bowl. Her face is dark,

Creole, and her dark hair is covered with a red bandana. A large iron pot hangs over the fire, and a basket of vegetables sits nearby (but opposite the woman).

The subtle assertion is that this is how Campbell’s soup is being made, with individual care and ethnic knowledge just like it always was. Below this painting is the ad copy, which is strangely silent about the painting above it. There is a picture of a bowl of soup, the finished product, and a picture of a can of Campbell’s chicken gumbo soup. There is also a bizarre little cartoon of the Campbell’s kid in a pink dress, with a poem about her being a belle of old New Orleans and her famous chicken gumbo soup.

The American west, with all its associations with wide-open spaces, hardy individualism, and manly pursuits, also lent itself as a place into which foods could be inserted. In another series of ads, this time for Austex chilies and stews, large paintings



Figure 4.11: “Campbell’s Gumbo,” 1950.

are again used to depict the place and associate the product with it. These ads present chili as a traditional southwestern dish, and use images of the Old West to market it, as shown in Figure 4.12. The vivid paintings depict cowboys riding herd in the starlight or under a big warm sky of cumulus clouds, and men heading homeward in a horse-drawn wagon, a dog running out ahead. Horizons are vast and empty, skies are big, sunsets are colorful, and it is a man's world.

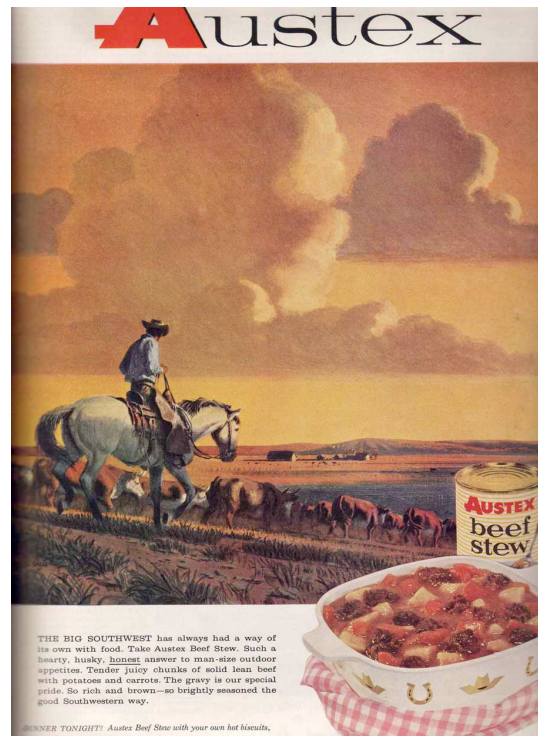


Figure 4.12: “Austex Beef Stew,” 1960.

No women are present in these scenes, though the ads are all in a women's magazine and the copy thus addresses women as those responsible for buying the food to feed a family:

This is where chili was born—in the wide and wonderful Southwest. And this is where Austex still makes real chili—the old-fashioned kind. Heavy on the good lean beef, seasoning mellow as a sunset, and slow, slow cooking. The Austex Chili recipe was born in a ranch kitchen, and its flavor sings of long ago. (“Austex Chili,” 1960)

The implication is that “real” chili is made only in the southwest, and that the real dish is a product of the history and tradition of this particular region. The name of the company itself is the combination of Austin and Texas, which grants it an instant association with another place packed full of meaning, Texas. A common popular phrase about Texas is that “everything is big in Texas”; in these ads, men's appetites are as big as the sky and the plains. Another ad refers to Austex beef stew as the “hearty, husky, honest

answer to man-sized outdoor appetites” (“Austex Beef Stew,” 1960). Thus men’s appetites are equated with the images accompanying the ads, with the assertion that only the Austex products, because they are just like traditional dishes, can satisfy such appetites, as they are products of these wide-open spaces.

Place as Brand

Place is often used as a guarantee of quality. This can manifest itself as an association with a craft and means of production inherent in a place, or it can be the correlation of a product with certain environmental characteristics of a particular place. In short, the place *is* the brand; the name of the place is part of the name of the product and is used relentlessly to market it.

Which brings me again to pineapple. Pineapple growers and packers made a concerted effort to associate the pineapple with Hawaii and to convince Americans to buy *Hawaiian* pineapple rather than Caribbean or Central American (Dole and Porteus 1996). They promoted the glamour and romance of Hawaii, as discussed above, but they also marketed pineapple as the perfect fruit of the Hawaiian paradise. If Hawaii is paradise, pineapple, that fruit of paradise, is nature’s perfect fruit. It thus finds its perfect home in the Hawaiian paradise. Dole’s catch phrase was “The finest pineapples come from Hawaii ...the finest Hawaiian pineapples are Dole-grown” (“From Hawaii to You,” 1930, not pictured); while Libby’s went with “Where foods grow finest...there Libby packs the best” (“Look to Libby’s,” 1945, Figure 4.14). Hawaii is a paradise not just for people from other places—like tourists—but for non-native pineapple as well.

Often, in spite of the perfection of the place, man's hand is needed to shape that perfection into a useful form. Even perfection requires some scientific intervention. There are frequent references to “help from man,” “flavor is our responsibility” and “model Hawaiian plantations.” In spite of the perfect conditions of paradise, pineapples must be pampered, allowed to reach the bursting point of “roly-poly ripeness” before heading off to the cannery. Superior varieties must be selected and nurtured. As Dole puts it, “To *can* perfect fruit we must first *grow* it in our fields” (“Perfectly,” 1928).



Figure 4.13: “Perfectly,” 1928.

In the ad illustrating that phrase (Figure 4.13), the same message is given in the graphics. There is a large “raw” pineapple in the background, the picture of the perfect fruit, and it is progressively transformed by man into the acceptable “cooked” product as the eye proceeds from top to bottom, background to foreground. Pineapple, canned pineapple, pineapple rings and crushed pineapple, ready for you to eat—unlike the “raw” product. The warm hues of paradise tie them all together: the raw pineapple glows a burnished reddish-gold, and the same hue is picked up in the label of the can and in the cooked fruit. Off to the right, a small plate holding some kind of salad including pineapple draws attention to a free recipe book, but also minimizes the necessity of doing

anything more with such a perfect fruit. It is perfect, so it is good enough to eat right out of the can.

The fruit itself takes center stage in the ad; no people are shown. The reader's role is to connect the main message: Pineapple = Dole—perfectly—Hawaiian. In the accompanying text, the reader is addressed as an understanding and interested consumer, and more details are given, but the message is the same:

It takes a lot of skillful farming to send you perfect pineapple. Nature needs a lot of help from man. And since so much depends on what happens in our gardens, we have made a science of raising pineapple...

Only fine soil can produce fine fruit. So we have acquired 38,000 rich and fertile acres—*nearly half* of all the prime pineapple lands in Hawaii.

Into that soil goes none but the choicest planting stock. Of the 30,000,000 young pineapple slips we set out a year, each is hand-trimmed—each hand-planted.

...Yes, we even taste the fruit to be certain *all* of its goodness is being imprisoned for you. Into our sunny cannery has gone everything science can contribute—everything money can buy. (“Perfectly,” 1928, emphases in the original.)

In another example shown in Figure 4.14, Libby's presents a similar equation: Pineapple = Libby's—perfection. Hawaii is only referenced once in the text with “pineapple as the Islanders know it”; however, Hawaii shows up on the can labels shown in the upper right.

In this ad, a smiling woman is shown holding a glass of pineapple juice. Though she is a Caucasian, with manicured nails and coiffed hair, she is surrounded by the icons of a Hawaiian paradise: hibiscus flowers, pineapples, and deep, green tropical foliage. In her hair is another tropical bloom that matches some of those in the garden surrounding her.

She is perfect, paradise is perfect, and, by extension, so is its product, the pineapple, supposedly picked at its “peak flavor ripeness” and containing its “full natural goodness.”

In color and design, the illustration is a bit like the fabric for so-called “Hawaiian” shirts: a black background with brightly colored flowers, fruits, and leaves arranged on it. “Raw” nature serves as the backdrop for the “cooked” products: pineapple juice and



Figure 4.14: “Look to Libby’s,” 1945.

canned pineapple, which, colored bright yellow, pop out of the surrounding garden. The two “cooked” products, both disembodied from the woman, loom large, overshadowing the Eden from which they came. The transitionary form, the actual canned product that a consumer would buy, is minimized, stressing the idea of freshness, straight from the garden into your hands.

Other advertisements connecting pineapple to Hawaii emphasize the sun and sunshine as important attributes of pineapple, granted it by its association with Hawaii and the tropics. The yellow flesh of the fruit made it an excellent candidate for such an equation. Fruit is described as sun-ripened, sun-glazed, sun-filled, sun-sugared, and sun-drenched; other adjectives, like luscious, juicy, dripping, and rich are also employed. Pineapple juice is “liquid sunshine,” sliced pineapple is (naturally) “sliced sunshine,” and

pineapple in general is portrayed as bursting with sunshine and its benefits.

While we cannot eat or drink the real sun, which is variously too far away, too hot, and too gaseous, we can eat and drink what the sun signifies to us. Sunshine makes life possible, wakes us in the morning, and warms and cheers us. In ads, it also functions as a code word for health, vitality, energy, youth, and freshness. Not only do you refresh yourself by eating sun-filled pineapple, you also refresh your menus and the dishes you cook. Pineapple is no longer pineapple; it has been hollowed out to become the carrier of sunshine.

In one ad, the opened can of sliced pineapple is set in the center, with rays coming off the can, a Del Monte sun rising above the plate of sliced pineapple. Even without the blatant “Hungry for sunshine? Have it sliced!” headline, the message is clear. In canning pineapple, the company has captured the sun itself and turned it into something you can eat. Del Monte also incorporated sunshine into mottos for its pineapple: “For the last word in sun-ripened goodness,” and “the bright spot in any meal” (“Hungry for Sunshine?” 1941, not pictured).

Ad designers could not have asked for a better color than pineapple’s bright yellow flesh and its round shape for the linkage to sunshine. The round yellow rings were irresistible; as another ad showed, these rings were also linked to wealth, “golden circlets” in a bowl gilded with gold. These circlets, however, are of “tropical goodness” rather than gold, and that goodness, as the text makes clear, is born of the sun (“Golden Circlets,” 1925, not pictured).

The color yellow is also an important feature in an ad (shown in Figure 4.15) that

shows pineapple juice turning night into day, driving away the “morning blues” in the shape of several not-so-terrible looking (but all in darkness) elves. Half the ad is illuminated by a glass of juice held aloft by a woman in the upper right of the image, exactly where the eye falls first. She is getting out of bed and the sun is rising behind a mountain; in the light from the duo of the sun and the juice (the color of the juice matches that of the sun exactly) there are palms, a beach, a bird, and the ocean. The woman is even beginning to glow with the yellow color, as if the juice were shedding light onto her like the sun. And the “blues” are running away from the light, into the darker corners of the ad.

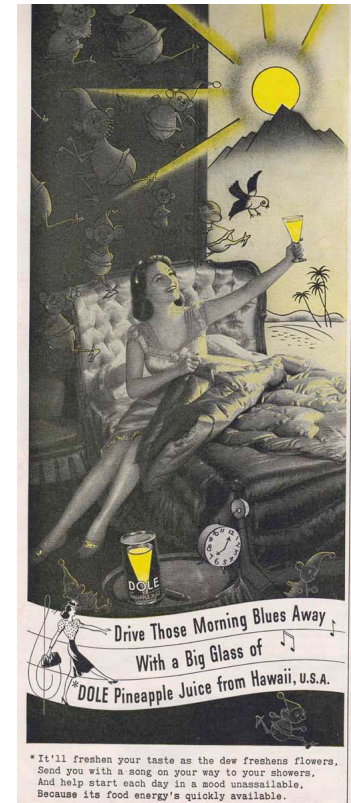


Figure 4.15: “Morning Blues,” 1941.

A can of pineapple juice, perched on a nightstand, is like a night light in the dark half of the ad; one elf is getting illuminated in spite of his attempts to flee—the blues cannot outrun or withstand the power of the sunshine in the juice.

California is another place that producers liked to associate their products with because of an abundance of sunshine. In contrast to pineapple’s almost exclusive link with Hawaii, however, many growers’ and packers’ organizations claimed the benefits of California sunshine for their products, which included cling peaches, raisins, prunes, citrus, apricots, nuts, and a variety of juices.

All of these products used the word “California” as a self-evident adjective; it is as if no further explanation is necessary. Whereas ads for Hawaiian pineapple had to construct

the place and the association, with California, it is as if the construction already existed, allowing the use of the name without any further definition or elaboration of the benefits of that association. California was already established as an agricultural paradise; if something was grown there, it had to be good. The word “California” was already a brand, a signifier of agricultural quality.

Thus there are ads (not pictured) for “California Sunkist world’s finest fresh lemons” (“Sunkist Lemons,” 1950); “...tree-ripe Valencias—the finest sweetest oranges produced in sunny California,” (“Real Gold,” 1947); Sunsweet prune juice “made from California Prunes, in California, by the growers themselves” (“Sunsweet,” 1935); “the California wonder-fruit” (“Wonder Fruit,” 1960); a “winter carnival of sunny California fruits,” (“Winter Carnival,” 1960); and “Cling peaches from California make such luscious quick desserts” (“Cling Peaches,” 1955).

In all of these ads there is very little or no copy about California as a place. One ad for “California ripe olives” gives an early indication of Californians as trend-setters by asserting that “In California, where everybody knows and uses ripe olives, they are an article of every-day diet, served on every possible occasion....” (“Ripe Olives,” 1920, not pictured). Such assertions, however, are more about the people than the place, more about the adoption of a new product than its inherent qualities from the place. Two of the ads above, “Winter Carnival” and “Sunsweet,” have illustrations of orchards, with the presumption that they are in California. But other than those two images, the word itself is the sole link to California. This struck me as odd, because California is such a beautiful state, agricultural lands included. If anything, the California ads illustrate the growing

trend of processors forming associations to advertise their products in an attempt to convince consumers to eat their particular commodity.

In Figure 4.16, the ad demonstrates an early version of the current battle over place names as a form of intellectual property. The Switzerland Cheese Association saw fit to run a series of ads attesting to the unique flavor of Switzerland cheese as opposed to “Swiss” or “Swiss-style cheeses.” The main thrust of

each ad is that “the outstanding feature of Switzerland cheese is flavor.” The real—and supposedly rare—cheese is made in Switzerland, and its flavor cannot be copied. In addition to “the sure, patient methods of a hundred years ago,” elements of the environment itself are considered ingredients of this cheese:

For that inimitable flavor is not the product of mere formula, but is the gift of nature itself. The subtle flavor of Switzerland cheese comes from the wine of Alpine air, the pure water of glacier-fed streams and the fragrance of succulent herbs and grasses of Alpine pastures. These unmatched ingredients place Switzerland cheese above all imitations. (“Flavor,” 1930)

The ad copy frames a large illustration of some savory concoction of gelatin with Swiss cheese decorating it; oddly enough, there is no recipe. Another illustration shows the branded rind of the cheese, which is stamped with the word “Switzerland” as an



Figure 4.16: “Flavor,” 1930.

assurance of authenticity for consumers.

There is an offer for a “beautiful booklet in color” about the cheese that promises advice on using and serving it.

Another ad (Figure 4.17) relies on the authority of cheese connoisseurs and epicures to support the assertion that there is no substitute for the “pastures and forage of Switzerland” in the making of “true Swiss Cheese” (“Mile High,” 1928). Though this is supposedly a given, how it actually happens is “a mystery of nature. It cannot be duplicated in the ‘Swiss Cheese’ made in other countries.” Thus the place where the cheese is made is a necessary ingredient for the flavor of the cheese. The color of the cheese and the size of the holes may vary, say the ads, but never the flavor.

In each corner of the page is a tiny sketch of the Swiss countryside, but the sketches are completely generic. Even the picture illustrating the caption “Here comes a Swiss milk wagon drawn by a dog” lacks distinction. I would have expected better illustrations of those “mile-high pastures...glacier fed streams” that the ad refers to, especially when so many other ads reproduce paintings. These ads rely more on the text than anything else to convince the reader. The good illustrations are of food and the cheese itself.

An interesting addition to this ad is that the copy recommends eating the cheese in

MEILENHÖCH GELIEGENE WEIDEN, BEWÄSSERT VON
REICHEN GLETSCHERWASSERN, GEBEN DEM SWITZERLAND CHEESE
DEN GESCHMACK DEN NICHT NACHGEMACHT WEIDEN KANN

*Mile-high pastures . . . glacier fed
streams give Switzerland Cheese the flavor
that can't be copied*

The cheese connoisseur will tell you this—in the making of the true Swiss Cheese there can be no substitute for the pastures and forage of Switzerland. The juicy grasses and scented hay, the spicy herbs, the pure water give Switzerland Cheese a flavor all its own. It is a mystery of nature. It cannot be duplicated in the “Swiss Cheese” made in other countries.

You must taste Switzerland Cheese to realize its superiority. Break off a portion and heat into it. The flavor is as rich and full-bodied as a nut. There is a subtle note that stimulates the desire for more. Try Switzerland Cheese in a sandwich and you get a new phase of this flavor. With fruit or vegetables in a salad you sense still another. It is marvelous how much better this *genuine* cheese from Switzerland blends or creates contrasts with the foods you like.

It is decidedly appropriate to serve Switzerland Cheese at any occasion when the savory, savory note is needed in the food. The buffet supper, the luncheon, the soup or salad course of the formal dinner offer unusual opportunities to introduce Switzerland Cheese.

It is served in hotels and restaurants everywhere and endorsed by famous chefs.

You will find that Switzerland Cheese is more enjoyable—brings more of its exquisite flavor to your taste if you eat portions cut from pound or half-pound pieces, instead of water-thin slices. This method of serving is recommended by the Swiss cheesemakers and endorsed by epicures.

Ask for Switzerland Cheese by name and look for the many imprints of the word “Switzerland” on the label. This exclusive identification mark protects you from getting so-called “Swiss Cheese” or that which is “Imputed” from countries other than Switzerland. The natural color of Switzerland Cheese varies from cream to butter-yellow. The size of the eyes also varies from large to medium large. But the rare, true flavor of Switzerland Cheese never varies. Switzerland Cheese Association, Berne, Switzerland. New York Office, 105 Madison Street.

SWITZERLAND CHEESE
Genuine Swiss Cheese from Switzerland

AT A GLANCE YOU CAN IDENTIFY SWITZERLAND CHEESE.
THE BRAND IS STAMPED WITH MANY IMPRINTS OF THE WORD “SWITZERLAND.”
NO OTHER CHEESE CAN BE THUS MARKED.

Here comes a Swiss milk wagon drawn by a dog
August 1928 Good Housekeeping

Figure 4.17: “Mile High,” 1928.

portions “cut from pound or half-pound pieces instead of wafer-thin slices.” Again, the authorities for this advice are “Swiss cheese-makers” and epicures. Thus the place is home not only to an environment that contributes to the cheese being what it is, but also to people who know how to make and appreciate it.

Gardens of Eating

Though one could certainly argue that all of the places depicted in ads are imaginary to some extent, some advertisers turn to the wholesale invention of a place with little or no relationship to reality. This may be done for several reasons: to conceal the fact that the product came from so many different sources that a single source had to be invented, to differentiate a product from its competitors, or perhaps to deflect attention from less-than-ideal conditions of production in the actual place of origin. Or it could be all of the above, of course.

These imaginary places represent the ideal conditions of production and harvesting devoid of anything messy. Because the places are imaginary, nothing has to be very real. Cows can wear aprons, raisins can grow on flowers, and cheerful elves can bake cookies in a hollow tree. When farms are pictured, they are generic, imaginary farms, the ideal of a farm, not the real place where a product is made. Most of these ads feature illustrations, rather than photographs, of the imaginary place, and the more unreal the place, the more like cartoons they are drawn. A good example of this contrast is a set of ads for Swift’s Brookfield butter. An early series for this brand focused on “Brooksie and her pals” and their lives on the Brookfield Dairy Farm. Here, everything is a cartoon. The typeface is

casual, the colors bright and cheerful, and the dairy cows are just like human moms feeding their brood. The weird thing is that the point of the ad is that human mothers should listen to the wisdom of the cows when it comes to feeding their children: “No one knows better than Brooksie that the little ones must be started out right—with plenty of vitamins” (Figure 4.18, “Brooksie and Pals,” 1935).

Brooksie is depicted as a Holstein cow walking on two legs, wearing an apron and a garland of flowers around her neck. She is feeding a young calf in a highchair with a spoon. No teats are on display here—her apron covers that up! From one of her horns there is a red loop that matches her apron; it almost looks like a halo. I’m not sure what it is supposed to be. She is surrounded by calves, many of them wearing clothes, and all of them drinking milk by means other than straight from their mother’s teats. Another cow, Blackie, is helping Brooksie, carrying a tray of bowls. She also wears an apron to cover her nether regions, and she has a cap on her head, making her look like a maid. She is a black cow to Brooksie’s white; and she is positioned behind Brooksie and is smaller in stature. Both she and Brooksie are grinning happily. Even the sun is smiling in this picture.

The calves are being like children: dumping milk over each other’s heads, feeding



Figure 4.18: “Brooksie and Pals,” 1935.

milk to flowers, and watching the baby be fed. Ad copy printed on top of the illustration, as part of the illustration, explains it. “Feeding Time on the Brookfield Dairy Farm” shows that Brooksie and Blackie are starting the calves out right so that when they are fully grown they will all produce rich cream for the butter that is being advertised. Farmers and people have nothing to do with it; it is natural for cow to produce this stuff on their own just for human consumption.



Figure 4.19: “Finest Butter,” 1947.

Set off from the illustration in a separate box is the serious copy that has nothing to do with the picture:

Fine rich cream is the big reason why Brookfield Butter is so delicious—of course! Rich cream that’s gathered from sunny farms in America’s fertile dairy lands and churned to butter in shining churns. Another reason you’ll find this famous butter so good—it’s delivered in all its country-sweetness to dealers by Swift’s own fresh food service. (“Brooksie and Pals,” 1935)

In contrast to the goofy picture, this copy wants to bring up real places, real processing, and speedy delivery as additional benefits of the product.

A later ad (Figure 4.19) for the same product moved on from the cartoon vision of a dairy farm to a more realistic, yet still imaginary farm as the source of its products. In this ad, the illustration functions as a backdrop rather than a main feature of the ad. Towering

stalks of deep blue and purple larkspur frame the image, topped with a box of butter from which butter slices drop like square golden coins. In the foreground is a plate with a popover on it; the butter squares lead to a piece of the popover. Behind the plate, through the larkspur, is a farm: a big white barn with a red roof, a white farmhouse, a herd of cows, green fields, and a river winding past the barn and through the picture into the foreground. This place, the images say, is where the butter comes from.

Beneath these images is the headline “Ah-h-h! ...where finest butter performs at its best” (“Finest Butter,” 1947). This is a bit confusing until you read on, and see that the “where” it refers to is baked goods, rather than the farm pictured above it. The copy goes on to say that when you use the butter on baked goods, “That’s when you appreciate what Swift has done in bringing you the choicest butter from America’s richest dairy lands...” The farm pictured is a symbol of those dairy lands, an imaginary ideal to represent a vague conglomeration of milk producers.

Another example of an ideal place representing a variety of sources is found in Figure 4.20, an ad for Musselman’s applesauce. Two-thirds of this ad consists of a large color photograph of an orchard in a valley. The picture seems to have been taken from within an apple tree, as the scene is framed by branches laden with ripe red apples covered with dew. The valley below is clear,



Figure 4.20: “Valley of the Apples,” 1965.

but the hills rise in misty layers in the background. It looks peaceful, idyllic, and devoid of human beings, except for the neat rows of trees. The headline below the picture states, “We’ve captured the Valley’s tingling freshness in our apple sauce.” The copy further explains:

At dawn the Valley of the Apples is the world’s most peaceful place.
But when these luscious, lazy apples reach juicy perfection,
Musselman speeds them to its kitchens to be cooked into superb apple
sauce *in just 45 hectic minutes*...that’s the *only* way to capture all the
tingling flavor of fresh apples. (“Valley of Apples,” 1965).

This text separates the valley from human control and influence. The valley belongs to nature via the apples; they are lazy and luscious, they dwell in this peaceful place, another edenic garden that exists to serve mankind. Only when the apples are ripe do the human beings invade with their hectic pace, speeding them away for their own ends. The use of the verb “capture” implies that these apples and their “tingling freshness” are wild and untamed, a natural resource. Like wild game, they are simply out there and available for harvest by humans.

The emphasis on laziness and ripeness, on the other hand, reminds me of the need to keep animals calm before slaughter, as stress and fear affect the taste of meat. In this case, it is insinuated that the apples are left alone in this peaceful valley to fatten up, then are whisked away once they are ready for processing. Nothing else really has to be done; no spraying, no irrigation, no pruning, no applications of fertilizer. The garden does it all, we just have to harvest the fruit.

A funny thing about this ad is that applesauce, like apple cider and apple juice, is usually made from the apples that do not look good enough to sell fresh, often fruits that

are partially rotted, partially eaten, or were blown down and picked up off the ground.

This ad, in contrast, implies that only the best apples go into the applesauce.



Place is important in food advertising both as a “where” and a “what.” It can be used to add value to a product in terms of where it comes from and/or in terms of what it is like or which tradition it may be part of. Place can also tie in with memory and history by being a either a general geographical space or a specific place represented by national dishes, regional specialties, or environmental qualities.

When place becomes a cultural construction for commercial purposes, however, what Jon Goss (1993) refers to as “alternative geographies” are created. Instead of real places and real food production, advertising often presents us with locales that embody qualities that are the opposite of industrial values like speed, efficiency, and uniformity. We end up with sexy fruit juice, lazy apples, and savage salad dressing, in addition to a tenuous grasp on the connection between food and the environment. Of course it is to be expected that advertising would emphasize the pleasant over the unpleasant, but it is interesting what advertisers select as the “pleasant” and what they omit. It seems contradictory to me that the American food system is supposed to be the greatest on earth, yet it is so “unpleasant” that consumers are spared actual images of it. Consider the miracle of our everyday food supply, with fresh foods available all year around from every corner of the earth. This is supposedly one of the benefits of free trade, yet those suppliers who benefit the most are the very ones who resist place of origin labeling. Again, it seems that rather than resisting such labeling, it should be a point of pride if, as the public is told, free trade

is a desirable benefit.

In 1924, Edward East wrote the following about how Americans are unaware of the complexity of foods they eat every day:

Today one sits down to breakfast, spreads out a napkin of Irish linen, opens the meal with a banana from Central America, follows with a cereal of Minnesota sweetened with the product of Cuban cane, and ends with a Montana lamb chop and cup of Brazilian coffee. Our daily life is a trip around the world, yet the wonder of it gives us not a single thrill. We are oblivious. (East 1924, 64)

In 2005, we remain largely oblivious, in spite of the fact that the trip around the world via food has become more convoluted and less straightforward. Advertising is one of the reasons that the general population remains ignorant. As long as the real spaces of food production are marginalized, the idea that nature and food production are “out there” at the fringes of our lives, unchanged and untouched by technology and pollution, can linger.

Chapter 5: Eating Health

“From no less an authority than Dr. Thomas Wood comes the alarming statement that no fewer than 5,000,000 of America’s school children are suffering from malnutrition. Dr. Wm. R. P. Emerson says the number undernourished is greater than that—one in every three!”

“...Sixteen natural food elements are needed to keep the normal human being strong and well and filled with that abundant vitality which provides for growth and the warding off of disease.” (“An Alarming Condition,” 1920)

Building on an association with place, but deserving of its own chapter, is the emphasis in advertising on the health-giving or health-preserving qualities of food. As noted in the last chapter, sunshine acts as a code word for health and vitality, and the sunshine of a place is often presented as embodied within the products of that place. While some ads for pineapple emphasized Hawaiian sunshine, ads for other fruits, particularly oranges, emphasized the healthful benefits of the fruit, with the place of origin taking a back seat to the nutritional benefits.

In the ads in this chapter, healthful qualities are presented in three ways: as an integral part of the food itself, as added to the food via fortification or enrichment, or attributed to new techniques of preservation and processing. These ads reflect the growth, changes, and new information in nutritional science, and the attitude that the health of the family was the woman’s responsibility. Children especially were to be watched and their growth measured; mothers were frequently admonished with doctors’ advice and threatened with the specter of frail, nervous, and lethargic children. Husbands had to be watched over as well; it was up to the woman to make sure that more than “half a husband” came home to her after a long day at work (“Half a Husband,” 1930, not

pictured). These ads also contain the narrative of nature as the source of good and healthful qualities in foods or, conversely, something threatening, a source of dirt, germs, and dangers in foods.

The link between food and health has undergone numberless iterations, but the fact of the importance of food to good health has remained a constant. As Mazzini writes:

In the ancient world, food science was a significant and all-encompassing branch of medicine because of a number of widely held convictions: the causal relationship between food and a balanced state of health; the fact that food and drink possessed both natural and artificial features; the links between food science in relation to health and the other branches of medical knowledge, and the absolute primacy of food for survival, in both the healthy and the sick. (Mazzini 1999, 142)

Theories of food and diet based on these convictions lasted well into the nineteenth century. The problem then, and perhaps even now, was lack of knowledge. Vitamins, minerals, fats, proteins, carbohydrates, calories, and any number of details we take for granted were unknown. Foods were also seen as open to manipulation; their natural qualities could be transformed, lessened, or strengthened through the method of preparation, the environment, seasonings, and the selection of which parts to eat, particularly when it came to meat. Once established, this kind of “knowledge” became embedded and was difficult to overcome. As Fernández-Armesto points out, traditional ideas about what to eat depended on arbitrary categories. “It is more readily understood as a kind of transformative magic similar to the magic of cannibalism: you acquire the qualities of what you eat” (Fernández-Armesto 2002, 35).

This view of food as a transformative agent combined easily with the idea of food as

medicine. Before the discovery of vitamins, there were several obvious instances of dietary deficiencies that were easily cured by eating a particular food. Scurvy is probably the most notorious example, but others include pellagra (lack of niacin), rickets (lack of vitamin D), and beri-beri (thiamin deficiency).

The first serious and systematic work on nutrition began in 1830, when Justus von Liebig classified the nutritional components of foods into carbohydrates, fats, and proteins (Levenstein 2003b, Tannahill 1988 [1973]). This work laid the groundwork for all future work on nutritional science, and also led in an attitude of reductionism towards food that plagues nutrition science to this day. The idea of balance shifted from that of “humours” to nutritional elements; rather than a holistic view, food could be eaten in bits and pieces to get the correct balance of carbohydrates, fats, and proteins. Liebig’s findings, and the subsequent discovery of bacteria in the 1880s, contributed to a new wave of food fads. As Levenstein remarks, “On both sides of the Atlantic, the decade that straddled the turn of the century constituted a veritable Golden Age of food faddism” (Levenstein 2003b, 86). Vegetarians of all stripes faced off against vociferous meat eaters, while Horace Fletcher’s regimen of chewing food until it was a tasteless liquid was gospel for a new low-protein dogma.

Though there was nothing new about diets and food fads, what had changed was the existence of a nutritional science to legitimize the claims of the proponents of the various diets, fads, and cures. When the first vitamin was discovered and isolated in 1911, a new wave of nutrition science exploded. Emphasis shifted from the idea of eating less food as a means of avoiding bacterial contaminants to the idea that illness could be avoided by

eating more varied foods. Vitamins, invisible, tasteless, and colorless as they are, were ideal for a food industry that was shifting into mass production and national competition. Several vitamins and minerals were isolated from 1915-1930, but the means of synthesizing them and putting them into pills had yet to be discovered. Thus they had to be eaten in foods. In addition, there was no good way to measure the amounts of vitamins or minerals in foods, so food manufacturers could advertise whatever quantity they desired. In the battle to distinguish one product from another, nutritional claims were potent ammunition.

Until, of course, vitamins could be synthesized, which began in the 1930s. Then the food industry had to compete with vitamin manufacturers, and did so by adding nutrients and “fortifying” their products with vitamins. What most manufacturers ignored in their ads was that food processing itself, especially milling and canning, deprived many foods of their vitamins and minerals. The effort went into making food processors appear to be on the forefront of nutritional research and constantly driven by the desire to improve the nutritional qualities of their foods, while the role they played in making such research necessary was ignored.

Others, however, played off that knowledge, advertising their products as whole and unrefined, and thus healthier. Vitamin manufacturers were naturally quick to exploit the need for vitamins, as this ad copy from Squibb shows. Titled “The interesting story of how man outwitted nature—and lost!,” this ad constructs a dilemma for Americans, and offers the solution:

This is another of those thrilling stories from the annals of modern science. Of how man, in his struggle to be civilized, became his own arch-enemy! How he unwittingly was enslaved by new tastes and appetites....

Nature, it seems, put an abundance of these indispensable factors into the coarse, plain foods she intended us to eat.

But as soon as we found ways to make these foods more appetizing, we cooked and refined out of them the very factors meant for our protection.

Today we are paying the penalty for this mistake. "Civilized ills" plague us—ills caused by an incomplete diet of highly refined foods and a consequent shortage of the protective vitamins....

How can we get enough of these indispensable factors? The first thought, of course, is to put back into our diet the natural vitamin-rich foods which we have discarded....

But not all of us like the idea of changing our diet or of watching what we eat three times a day!

Those of us who want to go on eating what we usually do without losing the life-giving vitamins may do so.

E.R. Squibb & Sons, a pioneer in the scientific work on vitamins, now offers rich sources of these factors which may be added to the regular diet. *Squibb Vitamin Products*, they are called. ("Interesting Story," 1930)

It is striking how similar some of this rhetoric is to later polemics against processed foods, and how much some of this copy sounds like today's weight-loss programs, with their promises of being able to eat whatever you want and still lose weight. It neatly encapsulates the paradox of people not wanting to actually change their eating habits but still wanting to be healthy, thin, and energetic. The theme of civilization as unhealthy, and of man's pyrrhic victory over nature as the seed of his own downfall, is also evident in this and later ads. The public also had to be convinced that new processed foods were safe, flavorful, and healthy. The change from an industry of small, localized producers

and retailers to large centralized manufacturers and grocery stores was not uncontested. Books by muckraking journalists about food adulteration, food additives, and slaughterhouse conditions inspired public outcry and government regulation early in the twentieth century. The U.S. Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906, followed by new and tougher laws for meat inspection. The laws were originally opposed by the large food processors, but that changed when companies realized that the government stamp of approval would help lessen fears about the safety of their products and also make it more difficult for smaller manufacturers to compete. The meat industry managed to make the government foot the bill for the inspection system, thus gaining government sanctioning of their products at little extra cost to themselves.

As if in reaction to the onslaught of processed and junk foods in the 1950s, the 1960s brought a new twist to the old story. Counterculture activists “put food at the center of an activist program based on an emerging ecological consciousness,” (Belasco 1993 [1989], 18); thus arguing that healthy food was better for the planet, as well as the individual. Not only did processing remove nutrients from foods, but industrial agriculture itself removed nutrients from the soil and added poisons from pesticides and fertilizers. The meat-centered diet of the U.S. deprived other people in the world of the grain they might eat to survive. Thus eating healthier came to be seen as a way to a healthier, less hungry, world. The growth in the organic food segment of the industry—20% percent annually for the last decade—is evidence that people still believe that food is a vital part of health, and that eating healthy food helps combat disease and aging, in addition to being better for the environment.

With this history, it is not surprising that there is a tradition of selling food based on its healthful properties. The ads in this section reflect this tradition and highlight some of the paradoxes. “Natural” is the gold standard on one hand, but on the other, it has to be improved upon in some way. It is an improved “natural,” transformed into something more easily ingested and used by human beings. These ads often rely on two opposing narratives of nature: one of nature as the source of health, and one of nature as a threat to health. Ignoring nature can lead to trouble, but at the same time, nature puts all these vitamins and good stuff into food. Yet only with the help of man can these foods reach their full potential for human sustenance and pleasure. The themes in this chapter include vitamins, perfect foods, food as medicine, energy and dieting, and hygiene.

There is also a strong dose of magic in these ads. People are supposed to be transformed by eating these foods. A recent ad for organic chocolate (Figure 5.1) demonstrates modern preoccupations with individual mental and spiritual health; this chocolate bar is all about relieving anxiety, stress, depression, and insomnia, so the nutrients added to it are tailor-made, not inherent in chocolate itself. These are our favorite ailments; in the early twentieth century it was digestion, acidosis, and irregularity. It makes one question whether any of it is real, or if the food industry just

IN intelligent nutrients
INNERCALM™
 Organic IN-fused chocolate™
 for peace of mind, pleasure + more
 above and beyond chocolate

Function:

- Anxiety, stress, depression, sleeplessness and attention deficit affect us all. Everyday nerve-racking experiences can become so familiar that we don't even realize it.
- Many people recommend Innercalm to help promote daily relaxation and a beautiful night's sleep.
- L-theanine, is an important amino acid found in green tea. Patented and manufactured in Japan, L-theanine has amazing functions.
- There are 150 mg. of L-theanine in every Innercalm bar. We recommend dividing the bar into 3 pieces to savor across the course of a day.
- Organic essential oils provide a flavor-aromatherapeutic benefit.

Intelligent Nutrition DELICIOUSLY DELIVERED THROUGH organic chocolate

BENEFIT: supplies amino acids (tyrosine and catechins), essential oils for aromatherapeutic benefit and L-theanine for clarity.

INTELLIGENT INGREDIENTS: organic dark chocolate, L-theanine (an amino acid found in green tea), essential oils: organic lavender, organic mandarin, organic chamomile, organic orange, Australian sustainable sandalwood.

USAGE: dissolve slowly in mouth for inner calmness.

ORGANIC

Net Wt. 2 oz | 56.7g

Bar \$5.00
Box of 12 Bars \$60.00

To order, call us at 1.800.311.5635 or visit us online @ www.intelligentnutrients.com

Mention Utne Magazine and receive 10% off a box of Innercalm IN-fused Chocolate!

When ordering online, look for the Box of Innercalm IN-fused Chocolate Utne Magazine Special!

Offer good from August 17, 2005 to October 31, 2005. Shipping not included.

Benefits:

- Innercalm chocolate is IN-fused with carefully selected calming nutrition, delightfully delivered.
- Innercalm ingredients provide an amazing supply of over 12,000 antioxidant ORAC units that help combat oxidative stress. This ORAC reading is equal to 8.8 lbs. of tomatoes, 2.2 lbs. of broccoli, 1.1 lbs. of spinach, or 2.4 lbs. of red grapes.
- Dark chocolate may also supply psychoactive constituents that contribute to a sense of well-being and may influence the physiological effects of serotonin, a neurotransmitter involved in the regulation of mood.
- Innercalm is also designed to help nurture women during their monthly cycles.
- Innercalm is the perfect healthy treat for children and adults.

Figure 5.1: “Magical Chocolate,” 2005.

concocts an ailment and the food to alleviate it at the same time. The chocolate bar is the “perfect healthy treat for children and adults” and is even “designed to help nurture women during their monthly cycles.” Nurture from chocolate, and an “aromatherapeutic” benefit to boot. At \$5 for two ounces, it may as well guarantee immortality.

Eat Your Vitamins

Health has been a constant theme in the advertising for oranges and citrus fruits in general. Associations of growers were among the first to exploit the new nutritional information to their advantage, and as knowledge expanded, their ads reflected new information. A 1925 Sunkist ad, for example (“Dessert in Ten Minutes,” 1925, not pictured), brags on the “dietetic value” and vitamins found in oranges, but is vague on specifics. The healthful qualities of oranges are promoted, but the main thrust of the ad is about how tasty the fruit is and what a quick dessert it makes.

By 1941, however, quick desserts were gone, and vitamins ruled. Ads for oranges touted that vitamins, A, B₁, C, and G (B₂) were all contained in the fruit. In Figure 5.2, a typical ad, this is communicated through a sketch of a woman reading a large chart labeled “Your Family’s Vitamins.” The chart is

Get your vitamins the natural way...from foods! Plan them into your meals with the help of delicious oranges.

Nature put all the vitamins in foods. So the best way to get them is to plan them into your family meals.

This way you obtain all the known vitamins, and discover others as yet undiscovered.

These healthful foods can also be delicious. Oranges will help you see to that.

An eight-ounce glass of the fresh juice provides all the vitamins your family needs each day.

are an excellent and natural source, and you eat or drink them fresh.

Oranges also supply valuable amounts of vitamins A, B₁, and C as well as calcium and other essential minerals. Additional amounts may be obtained from appreciating other fruits.

Set your family's health on a diet of oranges. Send for the free booklet of over 100 orange recipes. You'll find it a big help in planning vitamin-rich, delicious meals!

Sunkist
California Oranges
Best for Juice — and Every Use!

Dear "Healthful Family" Booklet:

Many C&S Booklets—615 P. 10c, 40c, 80c, 100c, 150c, 200c, 250c, 300c, 350c, 400c, 450c, 500c, 550c, 600c, 650c, 700c, 750c, 800c, 850c, 900c, 950c, 1000c.

Name _____
Street _____
City _____ State _____

Figure 5.2: “Your Family’s Vitamins,” 1941.

so large, in fact, that it dwarfs the woman, who stands directly in front of it, hands on hips, reading it. Looming behind the chart are various foods: fruits, vegetables, and, largest of all, a giant glass of orange juice. A large orange, partially peeled, and a cleanly sliced orange half, complete the picture. Thus we have the studious woman facing the chart, learning what she needs to know to keep her family healthy. Beside each vitamin is a description of what it does, how it is absorbed, and how often it should be taken.

Below this picture is the headline “Get your vitamins the *natural* way...from foods! Plan them into your meals with the help of delicious oranges.” The text below expands on this, asserting that an 8-ounce glass of orange juice supplies all the vitamin C one needs in a day. But vitamin C is a “difficult” vitamin that must be replenished daily; so the conscientious woman will give her family a glass every day—or its equivalent in oranges. Interspersed in the text are two drawings, one of a doctor, also dwarfed by a glass of juice and citrus fruit. He holds a pointer and is pointing it at a sign propped against the glass; it just says “C.” Another sketch outlines mom’s priorities: husband, child, and clock, with another glass of juice and a fruit in between. The position of the clock set at 7 (in the morning, I presume) and on the left, with the child and husband moving toward the clock from the right, and the fruit in the middle shows motion: this, to this, to this. For



Figure 5.3: “Startling Protopectins,” 1955.

them to be out of the house by seven, orange juice is the necessary midpoint. The color orange ties it all together to the brand name, Sunkist, which is in large orange letters that match the numerous glasses of juice and oranges.

Orange is again the dominant color in Figure 5.3, a later ad promoting navel oranges specifically. There are oranges sliced, peeled, and whole, plus the obligatory glass of juice. Women, specifically mothers, are once again targeted as those responsible for learning the information imparted in the ad. This time though, the old vitamins are ignored in favor of newer nutritional information about protopectins, bioflavinoids, inositol, and pro-vitamin A. Because of these new factors, drinking orange juice is not enough; mothers must make sure that their families also eat the “whole fresh fruit.” An open lunchbox symbolizes the family, along with the note “For health and pleasure, put a Sunkist Navel Orange in every lunch box” (“Startling Protopectins,” 1955).

Yet another twist is advertised in 1975 (Figure 5.4). This time, while including motherhood, it moves beyond it. The woman herself is the focus of the nutritional benefits, not her family. Two women stand back to back, both young and attractive, one obviously pregnant. Underneath the photograph is the headline: “On the pill...or pregnant. Two reasons to learn the pure facts about orange juice.”



**On the pill...or pregnant.
Two reasons to learn the pure facts about orange juice.**

When it comes to nutritional needs, women on the pill and women who are pregnant have something in common: they both have an increased need for a very important vitamin called folic acid.

What does folic acid do?
Folic acid plays a necessary role in the making of new cells. Since this also helps to the making of red blood cells, without sufficient folic acid, you can become anemic. If you're on the pill or pregnant, ask your doctor for more. Help insure against folic acid deficiency by knowing which foods contain high amounts of this essential vitamin. Examples are green, leafy vegetables, liver, and 100% pure orange juice.

Why is orange juice such a good source of folic acid?
Not only does orange juice supply a plentiful amount of folic acid, you drink it in its pure, natural state. That's important because in cooking, you can destroy up to 95% of the folic acid in foods.

Those are the pure facts. Isn't it nice to know that something so delicious can be so good for you?

100% PURE ORANGE JUICE FROM FLORIDA

Figure 5.4: “Pure Facts,” 1975.

about orange juice” (“Pure Facts,” 1975). This time it is folic acid that is the star of the show: “When it comes to nutritional needs, women on the pill and women who are pregnant have something in common. They both have an increased need for a very important vitamin known as folic acid.” While that statement is not supported by any details, the copy goes on to explain the role of folic acid in making red blood cells, and insinuates that anemia is just around the corner for women with a deficiency.

The adjective “pure” in the headline is duplicated in the text to describe both the juice (“100% pure orange juice”) and how folic acid is found in the juice—in a “pure, natural state.” This is important, we are told, because cooking “can destroy up to 95% of the folic acid in foods.” And those, we are told, are the “pure” facts. Pure facts, pure juice, and pure folic acid are what this orange juice is all about.

While Sunkist represented a cooperative of growers in the west, primarily California and Arizona, the Florida Citrus Commission marketed citrus fruits and juices from Florida. Florida is prominent in the ads as the place of origin, but the ads are nevertheless all about health. Many feature men and/or women in swimsuits playing in the ocean, with headlines like “It’s grand to feel like a million these cold-catching days of winter” (“Feel Like a Million,” 1950, not pictured) and “Fight colds and fatigue with the sunshine stored in Florida’s luscious grapefruit”



Figure 5.5: “Glowing Health,” 1950.

(“Florida Health,” 1950, not pictured). Florida’s year-around mild climate is encapsulated in its citrus products to combat the northern winter and the illnesses that come with it.

“Mother Nature,” reads another ad, has packed Florida’s oranges with “glowing health” (Figure 5.5). Rather than listing vitamins, these ads provide a list of eight benefits to the entire body: an “alkaline reserve,” liquid, vitamin C, other vitamins and minerals, energy, appetite, digestive juices, and a laxative. In contrast to the Sunkist ads, these ads are all about the individual rather than the family. An earlier campaign used the catch phrase “Helping Hand” to describe the utility of citrus juices—“In each refreshing glassful...you get a Helping Hand against that weary, wilted feeling” (“Helping Hand,” 1945, not pictured).

Vitamins Restored

While citrus fruits are naturally rich in vitamins, other products boast either “enrichment,” which is the restoration of vitamins lost in processing, or “fortification,” which means adding more nutrients than were in the food originally (Nestle 2002, 301). Flour and bread were among the first to be enriched, primarily because milling stripped wheat of its nutrients. The makers of Wonder Bread can only claim that it builds strong bodies because it is enriched.

Margarine is another good example of this. Once corn was hybridized and farmers produced massive surpluses, new ways to use it had to be found. High fructose corn syrup, corn oil, and livestock fattened on corn are all solutions to the surplus production subsidized by the federal government. As a substitute for butter, margarine lacked the

color, flavor, and vitamins of butter, which contains vitamins A and D. What began as a vegetable oil product for poor people to use instead of butter has become an accepted substitute for the middle and upper-middle classes as well. The ad in Figure 5.6 illustrates all the complexities of margarine. A woman stands at the grocer's counter, pointing at a sign on the wall behind the grocer that states, "Now! No federal tax on Durkee's own yellow margarine." The text goes on to tell us that the margarine is made from vegetable oils and milk, and that it is enriched with vitamin A. "Lucky housewives in 33 states can NOW buy Durkee's Own Grade AA Margarine—as established by our own research and



Figure 5.6: "No Federal Tax," 1950.

control laboratories—already colored yellow *at no extra cost*" ("No Federal Tax," 1950). Finally, we learn that Durkee's comes in three ways: white, white with a yellow dye capsule, and yellow.

All of these features tell parts of the story about what margarine producers were up against. The powerful dairy industry in the United States used government regulation to protect its monopoly on butter. In 1886, the Margarine Act was passed; it imposed a federal tax on margarine and required licenses for manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers. It also made "oleomargarine" the generic name and made it illegal to call it butter or even have the word butter in its name. This resistance to allowing margarine to resemble butter in any way extended to how it looked as well; yellow margarine was

heavily taxed, and some states went so far as to insist that all margarine be dyed pink. When those laws were overturned by the Supreme Court, states adopted other strategies to restrict margarine manufacture and sales: in 1932, 27 prohibited the manufacture or sale of colored margarine, 24 imposed some kind of consumer tax, and 26 required licenses or otherwise restricted margarine sales. The Army, Navy and other federal agencies were barred from using margarine for other than cooking purposes (Visser 1986, National Association of Margarine Manufacturers, 2005).

Yet in spite of all these obstacles, margarine sales continued to climb, and today it is a standard feature of the American diet. In addition to its economy, spreadability, and flavor, advertisers also promoted vitamin-enriched margarine, and later, the low cholesterol and polyunsaturated fats found in margarine. I will address the latter in the section on food as medicine; in this section, I just want to focus on vitamin-enriched margarine ads.

As with oranges, the health of one's children is the focus in Figure 5.7. Half the page is a photograph of a boy and girl, back to back, with father's hands coming in from the left with a book to measure how much more the boy needs to grow to catch up to the girl. In the background is a modern, rather bare kitchen, with mom standing at a table

62% of your children's daily needs of vitamins A and D—that's what they get from every two ounces of new enriched Nucoa!

Every helping of this modern margarine helps your youngsters to those vitamins so essential to healthy growth, keen vision, clear skin, strong teeth and bones.

To encourage growing young bodies, there's lots of sweet skim milk in Nucoa—it's as rich in milk minerals as the most expensive spread. And no spread could taste fresher—because only fresh-made salad oils go into Nucoa.

Above all, Nucoa is the only leading margarine that gets its color from nature—golden vitamin A of carrots.

How about serving your family Nucoa?

New enriched **NUCOA**® is so good it's digestible even for babies

Figure 5.7: "Enriched Nucoa," 1955.

spreading margarine on bread. She is all dressed up and wearing an apron over her nice dress; she smiles as she watches the measuring test. The boy holds a slice of bread in his hand; he seems to be eating his breakfast. Both kids look well fed and healthy.

Below the picture is the claim that “62% of your children’s daily needs of vitamins A and D—that’s what they get from every two ounces of new enriched Nucoa!”

(“Enriched Nucoa,” 1955). Listen to the rest of the copy:

Every helping of this modern margarine helps your youngsters to those vitamins so essential to healthy growth, keen vision, clear skin, strong teeth and bones.

To encourage growing young bodies, there’s lots of sweet skim milk in Nucoa—it’s as rich in milk minerals as the most expensive spread. And no spread could taste fresher—because only fresh-made salad oils go into Nucoa.

Above all, Nucoa is the only leading margarine that gets its color from nature—golden vitamin A of carrots. (“Enriched Nucoa,” 1955)

This copy takes on butter at every turn: Nucoa is modern, fresh, flavorful, nutritious, and “naturally” colored. The family portrayed is middle class and the picture of 1950s domestic life. Like the margarine, the kitchen is a bright, sunny yellow, not to mention clean and modern. The implication is that modern, happy families use this modern, healthy margarine.

Drink This!

Finally, the discovery and synthesis of vitamins led to the production of vitamin supplements. Ovaltine, “the Swiss food-drink,” was one such concoction, an early relative of today’s power drinks. In the semantic sleight-of-hand of “food-drink,” (“Swiss

Food-Drink,” 1930, not pictured) advertisers claimed that by drinking Ovaltine, one got all of one’s vitamins as doctors and nutritionists recommended: in food. To emphasize this concept, ads like that shown in Figure 5.8 surround the copy with images of real food: ice cream, steak, peas, tomato juice, butter, cheese, bread, spinach, and eggs. Of Ovaltine itself, there is no trace. Rather than seeing Ovaltine, we are shown a representation of what Ovaltine supplies. Without actually



Figure 5.8: “Get Them All in Food,” 1947.

eating all the food shown, we can get all the vitamins the food contains, as listed under the headline “Read what you get in 2 glasses of Ovaltine.”

This way of getting your vitamins is advertised as “the newer way for better results.”

Eating a balanced diet is presented as a difficult problem:

As you know, authorities agree that most people should get extra vitamins as a safeguard to good health. And authorities also agree, beyond question, that the best way to get vitamins would be in your everyday food. But that’s hard to do—

Because everyday foods vary considerably from day to day in vitamin and mineral values. And, besides, they lose a lot of their vitamins in shipping, storage, and cooking. (“Get Them All in Food,” 1947)

Ovaltine solves this by offering a scientific solution:

Ovaltine is standardized. Its content is scientifically controlled. It never varies. Each spoonful supplies the same generous amounts of vitamins and minerals. You know exactly what you’re getting. It’s a

supplementary food that makes up deficiencies in ordinary foods.
("Get Them All in Food," 1947, emphasis in original)

Yet the ad argues against itself. The foods pictured are supposed to be emblematic of what Ovaltine contains, yet at the same time, they are supposed to be problematic and unreliable sources of vitamins, thus necessitating the addition of Ovaltine to one's diet. Though it never says it outright, what the ad really communicates is that the food shown is way too much for one person to eat in a day, so it is better just to drink the nutritional equivalent of it and not worry about trying to eat all your vitamins.

Other ads for Ovaltine focus on children and the problem of the "nervous, underweight" child. Headlines like, "Sissy...they called him," led into ads that grimly described how a child could be scarred for life if he or she lags behind others ("Sissy," 1950, not pictured). Others used an image of a nurse next to the advice: "If your child is thin and lacks the 'urge' to eat—be sure to try giving the new, improved Ovaltine" ("New Improved," 1940, not pictured). Of course, the improvement is the addition of even more vitamins and minerals to an Ovaltine that "has always been a source of the precious Vitamins A, B and D—and the minerals Calcium, Phosphorus, and Iron." Ovaltine, with all these vitamins, transforms children into hale and hearty eaters with better attitudes overall.



Figure 5.9: "Nervous Nan," 1934.

My favorite in this vein is in the form of a comic strip titled “Nervous Nan: The Kids All Called Her ‘Skinny’” (Figure 5.9). At the beginning of the strip, we meet Nan, a fingernail-biting, fidgety, fussy, nervous, and frail girl. Her mother is chatting with a friend about her, and the friend recommends Ovaltine, pointing out an article in a *Ladies’ Home Journal* titled “How to Decrease a Child’s Nervousness 30% in Two Weeks.” This particular synchronism was not unusual; women’s magazines often ran articles that supported the claims made in food advertisements (Levenstein 2003a).

The mother, made hopeful, buys some Ovaltine, gives it to Nan, and *viola*, the child is transformed. A few evenings later, she is downing spinach at dinner as her parents exchange remarks about how much better she is. In the next frame, her mother is exclaiming that Nan has gained eight pounds, and the next thing you know, she is bringing home four “excellents” on her report card. It is reminiscent of the drugs that are given to children now for attention deficit disorder (ADD). The ad copy below the cartoon strip reinforces this impression, making it sound like there was a veritable epidemic of thin and nervous children in need of Ovaltine’s magical powers. As a “scientific food concentrate,” Ovaltine “acts to break up the ‘vicious circle’ that nervousness and underweight tend to create” (“Nervous Nan,” 1934). Food is the transformative agent, and Ovaltine is the magical potion that will turn a child with certain problematic characteristics into a docile, obedient, and agreeable child.

Nature’s Perfect Foods: Milk, Grain, and Meat

I grew up hearing that if I wanted to be strong, I needed to drink my milk. This was

not just the result of being the niece of a dairy farmer; milk producers were among the first to use the new nutritional information to their advantage. Often referred to as a “miracle food” (Levenstein 2003b, 154), milk came to be considered indispensable for the growth and strength of children. Getting children to drink their milk was the focus of many ads. Campbell’s advertised its cream soups as

“tempting ways to give your child more milk”

(“Tempting Ways,” 1940, not pictured), and

Ovaltine boasted that it “enables mothers to double a child’s milk ration” (“Twice the Milk,” 1930, not pictured).

Another popular supplement that linked itself with milk was Cocomalt. In Figure 5.10, a somber black and white photograph of a family dinner scene illustrates the headline “We once had to pay Tommy to drink his milk...” A worried-looking mother watches as her husband holds up a coin to the recalcitrant boy. His plate is clean, but his glass of milk is full, and he is twisting away from his father, as if rebellion is in full swing.

In the text below the photograph, the mother tells the story of how hard it was to get her son to drink his milk until she tried Cocomalt. Of course, Tommy was “thin and frail,” in need of milk’s nourishment:

We once had to pay Tommy to drink his milk...

Now he even begs for it and is growing strong and sturdy

“I KNEW it was wrong—but it was the only way we could get Tommy to touch the goodness known he needed it—was so thin and frail. We’d plead and beg but it didn’t do any good. Now Tommy actually begs for his milk, and he just loves the rich, creamy chocolate flavor. He drinks it eagerly every meal. It’s wonderful to see how Tommy is picking up these last few weeks. We’re not worried about it at all, any more. He’s getting to be a healthy youngster, thanks to Cocomalt.”

This mother’s experience is by no means unusual. In thousands of homes there are growing children who once detested milk, and now drink it eagerly. For Cocomalt wins over the fastest child with its creamy, chocolate flavor.

Almost doubles the value of milk
Cocomalt adds 70% more nourishment to milk—almost doubling the health-building elements of this splendid food.

If children fail to pick up as their little bodies take on height, it is a sure sign their systems are begging for more tissue-building protein, more carbohydrates, more minerals. Cocomalt supplies these three essentials in concentrated form. Yet it is a food, not a medicine. Children love it. And in addition, Cocomalt contains the valuable Vitamin D, **Vitamin D—*for sturdy bodies***

Vitamin D is the element which makes summer sunshine so beneficial. It helps to *build strong bones and sturdy bodies*. And Cocomalt also supplies such enzymes which help to digest the starches in other foods.

Special trial offer—send coupon
Cocomalt comes in powder form all ready to mix with milk, hot or cold. Three sizes: 1/2 lb., 1 lb., and the 5 pound family size. As high as Cocomalt is in food value, the cost is surprisingly low. At grocers and leading drug stores. Or mail this coupon and 10¢ for a generous trial package—enough for the whole family to judge what a delicious food drink Cocomalt is.

DELICIOUS HOT OR COLD
R. B. Davis Co., Dept. 25, Babylon, N. Y.
Enc. enclosing 10¢. Please send me a trial-size can of Cocomalt.

Name
Address
City State

Winner’s Home Companion September 1930

Figure 5.10: “Pay Tommy,” 1930.

We knew it was wrong—but it was the only way we could get Tommy to touch milk. And goodness knows he needed it—he was so thin and frail. We’d plead and plead, but it didn’t do any good. (“Pay Tommy,” 1930)

As with Ovaltine, the results of Cocomalt are magical. “In thousands of homes there are growing children who once detested milk, and now drink it eagerly,” the ad states. Beyond just getting children to drink their milk, the ad also touts all the strength-building properties and benefits found in Cocomalt itself:

If children fail to pick up as their little bodies take on height, it is a sure sign their systems are begging for *more* tissue-building proteins, *more* carbohydrates, *more* minerals.

Cocomalt supplies these three essential in concentrated form. Yet it is a food, not a medicine. Children love it. And in addition, Cocomalt contains the valuable Vitamin D. (“Pay Tommy,” 1930, emphases in original)

Another Cocomalt ad focuses only on one element. The ad simply shows three pictures, each with a separate caption. At top is a small girl, painting, with the caption, “When she grows up, will your little girl have lovely legs?” Below it is a picture of a woman in a knee-length skirt, staring pensively at paintings in a gallery. The caption here is “No girl can have lovely straight legs like these without strong bones.” Finally, the last picture shows the little girl again, her painting put aside, enjoying a glass of milk. The order of the pictures relies on the “if you want this, then do that” logic. “Cocomalt gives your child extra calcium so vital for strong bones” (“Extra Calcium,” 1947, not pictured). Again, it is up to the mother to ensure her child’s nutrition and lovely straight legs. Milk is not so much the miracle food as Cocomalt.

The National Dairy Products Corporation, however, promotes milk as “nature’s most

nearly *perfect* food” (“Stumbling Block,” 1947, emphasis in the original) without any mention of supplements. Like the supplement ads, though, they focus on children. In the ad shown in Figure 5.11, the half-page picture captioned “Can you spot the stumbling block?” depicts a boy struggling with an IQ test. The message of it and the text is that good nutrition, including dairy products, is necessary for brain power



Figure 5.11; “Stumbling Block,” 1947.

(“Stumbling Block,” 1947). In contrast to the little girl in the Cocomalt ad, the boy needs milk for brainpower; the girl needs it for pretty legs. Even when ads targeting boys focus on the body, it is about strength rather than beauty. In another milk ad, a boy in a muscle shirt mimics the pose of a muscle man on a poster on his wall. The caption is “How to make a muscle”—again, milk and good nutrition build strength (“Massive Massimo, 1947, not pictured).

In both ads, milk and dairy products are presented as cornerstones for muscle growth and IQ development, and the national association as a group wholeheartedly concerned with Americans getting the nutrition they need: “We’ve gathered together many of the country’s top specialists—and pooled their skills—to study milk’s properties, its processing, its ever-increasing possibilities as a chemical resource” (“Stumbling Block,” 1947). Calling milk a “chemical resource” points toward the growing emphasis

on science and technology to make food better for people, and effectively separates milk from cows, farms, and natural processes. It also underlines the idea that nature is not quite good enough; it needs help. Milk is only perfect after the intervention of man.

Grains

Wheat and other grains were also marketed as perfect foods. Cereals in particular focused on the health benefits of grains in their ads. One ad, beneath the headline “Man mills away in wheat vital elements of life,” goes on to explain in depth the “sixteen vital elements of nutrition” that are all found in whole wheat and are thus available in Pettijohn’s cereal. “In the whole wheat grain,” the copy claims, “Nature offers us these sixteen vital food elements in more nearly the proper proportion than in any other food, save possibly milk” (“Man Mills Away,” 1920, not pictured).

Wheatena is another example. In Figure 5.12, the headline “Nature’s perfect food = whole wheat!” crowns a large sheaf of ripe wheat. Set into that sheaf is a block of text; behind it is a background of a golden field dotted with smaller sheaves. Purple hills are in the distance, crossed by threads of green. In the foreground are the products of this raw nature: a box of Wheatena beside a bowl of



Figure 5.12: “Golden Years,” 1925.

steaming cereal. Underneath it all is the admonition “Eat whole wheat every day! Add golden years!” (“Golden Years,” 1925).

Gold is the theme: the wheat, the field, the cereal, even the large “Wheatena” is golden. Gold symbolizes wealth, and this ad is all about the wealth of wheat, its nutritional riches, and the harvest of longer life one may achieve by eating it. Underneath the box of cereal, and in the middle of the text block, is the exclamation: “Out of the wheatfield cometh strength!” Of course, that strength is available in your cereal dish:

Wheatena is whole wheat at its best. Only plump, golden grains of choicest winter wheat are selected, then roasted and toasted by the exclusive Wheatena method. *All* the flavor and nourishment are retained—the *real* golden heart of the wheat—the minerals—the carbohydrates—the proteins *and the bran*—nature’s safe regulator. All the elements you need to build bone, muscle, tissue, and to add golden years to your life. (“Golden Years,” 1925, emphases in the original)

It is pre-vitamin but post-Liebig. As usual, the ad copy also notes how much children love Wheatena and how economical it is for the housewife.

The Wheaties ad in Figure 5.13, on the other hand, relies on the form of the cereal to attract attention, only later emphasizing the nutritional qualities. Ads highlighted its wheat flakes as “a new and appetizing form instead of an ordinary cereal,” relegating all other cereals into the ‘ordinary’ category. The perfection of wheat as a food is taken for



Figure 5.13: “Alluring Flakes,” 1930.

granted, and the reader is assured that “All the elements of Whole Wheat, just as Nature grew it, are included, this new way” (“Alluring Flakes,” 1930).

To modern ears, the language in this ad is rather bizarre, from the headline “You’d Never believe it Whole Wheat So Alluring and Marvelous a Dish as this!” to the two smaller subheads: “Whole wheat with the gaiety of a French confection! Whole wheat that children adore and eat every day!” It makes it sound that perfect though it may be, wheat is not at all appetizing. But with the wheat flakes, the best of both worlds is available:

They’ve [the millers of Gold Medal flour] taken nothing out. The bran is there, the minerals are there, the carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins, all the elements that form the world-admitted *Staff of Life*.

They’ve expertly made carefully selected sun-ripened whole wheat into a gloriously enticing dish...flaked it and crisped it till it’s light as a snow flake, as gay as a French confection...a dish children will eat 365 days a year! (“Alluring Flakes,” 1930, emphases in original)

Unlike the Wheatena ad, this one shows no “raw” wheat whatsoever. In fact, the illustrations are an odd combination of the usual box of cereal, bowl of cereal, and then a strange drawing of children. Maybe this drawing is supposed to be French, to allude to the idea of French confections, but it does not seem to contribute to the ad that much. Two children stand in what seems to be an orchard, but there is one huge palm tree that juts up from all the rest of the trees. Butterflies fly about whimsically, crossing the boundaries of the illustration out into the rest of the ad. The children carry toys and seem to be watching a butterfly, but are also turned toward the bowl of cereal. The borders on the top and bottom of the illustration—a pink criss-cross—match the borders to the top and bottom of the picture of a box of Wheaties. In between the two, like a connector, is

the bowl of Wheaties ready to eat, spoon included. The point, perhaps, is that children will be as charmed by Wheaties as they are by butterflies.

Meat

Last but not least, meat has also been promoted as a perfect source of protein. As with the National Dairy Products Corporation, the American Meat Institute undertook a series of ads assuring the public that “Meat measures up to every protein need,” (“Meat Measures Up,” 1945, not pictured) and that “You’re right in liking Meat” (“You’re Right,” 1947, not pictured). Many of the ads ran during the Second World War, and emphasized the role of meat in winning the war and healing convalescing soldiers. The child card was also played; mothers were encouraged to ask themselves whether they were feeding their children enough meat and to learn how meat could fill the protein needs of their children.

One such typical ad is Figure 5.14. Against a bright red background is the headline, “Are you feeding them enough meat?” Directly below is a large black and white photo of a smiling girl, and a chart that purports to show the increase in children’s daily protein needs as they get older. Opposite



Figure 5.14: “Feeding Them Enough,” 1947.

the girl's mouth is a color picture of a blue plate with a hot dog on a bun, French fries, an apple, and a glass of milk. Above that is the ad copy:

The basic building material of every human body is protein. And mothers are rapidly learning from doctors and other sources about the protein and the high digestibility of *all* meat. Meat protein, you know, contains *all* of the amino acids considered essential to growth and well-being.

When you make meat the center of the eating plan for your youngsters, isn't it good to know that it's a food they like and can eat often without tiring of it? ("Are You Feeding Them Enough," 1947)

Once again, similar points come up: new scientific information, attached to an authority figure like a doctor. Built upon that is the assurance that meat contains all the protein and amino acids discovered by science. The chart demonstrates, in a presumably scientific way, that children need protein. Finally, there is the reassurance that children will never tire of meat. Big girls, like mother herself, do not really count in the reckoning.

For the wounded soldier in Figure 5.15, a somewhat different tack is taken. There is the same red background, but this time the headline, in a double entendre, states: "Meat the Convalescent Fighter." Below is a wooden cutting board covered with various cuts of meat, and below that, the recovering soldier reclining against a pillow, eating meat. The copy tells us that all the meat on



Figure 5.15: "Convalescent," 1945.

the board is one man's weekly supply of meat served at an Army hospital; each man is served meat three times a day. The main text tells us why:

Our men in convalescent hospitals are being rebuilt to health with a speed never known before....

One way the recovery of these men is hastened is by feeding them generous quantities of meat containing the protein substances (amino acids) to make up for the protein they have lost.

When the body loses protein excessively...or when the diet does not provide enough protein...the body literally "eats itself."

Meat proteins contain all ten of the essential amino acids needed to maintain and rebuild the body.

This emphasizes anew the rightness of our age-old liking for meat. ("Convalescent Fighter," 1945)

This time, the Army hospital is the authority, and the "age-old liking" for meat is appealed to as well, a secondary authority akin to human nature, implying that liking meat is an innate characteristic of human beings. Instead of learning about protein itself, the reader learns about what happens to a body when it loses protein, with the rather horrifying image of the body eating itself. Even if a woman is not nursing a convalescent soldier, such an image is enough to ensure that she buys meat for her family so that their bodies do not eat themselves! Such dire descriptions of nutritional lack are popular selling techniques for many of the ads that focus on health.

Food as Medicine

Cereal is one of the most health-oriented products, perhaps due to its historical involvement with food fads and cures like those offered by John Harvey Kellogg at his Michigan sanatorium. Post was another one of the first cereal companies, and Grape Nuts

one of its earliest products. Instead of emphasizing strength, protein, or the nutritional qualities of wheat, however, many ads for Grape Nuts emphasized youthfulness, longevity, and oddly enough, dental health. These ads rely on a “problem/solution” format in which a dire condition is described or illustrated, and the solution introduced that dovetails perfectly with the problem.

The following ad copy from Figure 5.16 is fairly typical of the problem set-up:

Your three meals a day may be a warning of disaster—or a prophecy of happiness. Seeing health and beauty vanish, many a woman has bitterly blamed her fate who should have blamed her food. Fate and Food. Food—and Fate! Sometime it’s hard to tell them apart.

Wrong food can crash to disaster the health and beauty of any woman. Right food can help her hold these treasures throughout life. *Heavy, heavy, what hangs over you?* (“Heavy, Heavy,” 1925)

The illustration above this text depicts a young man and woman breakfasting in a rather grim mood. In spite of apparent luxury—they have a maid, and there is plenty of food on their table—the woman looks depressed and the man looks concerned yet frustrated. A black cloud rises behind the maid like an evil genie; written over the cloud is the question, “Heavy..Heavy..what hangs over?” The implication is that in spite of their youth and fortune, absence of good food is causing them grief.

Heavy.. Heavy.. what hangs over?

YOUR three meals a day may be a warning of disaster—or a prophecy of happiness. Seeing health and beauty vanish, many a woman has bitterly blamed her fate who should have blamed her food. Fate and Food. Food—and Fate! Sometime it's hard to tell them apart. Wrong food can crash to disaster the health and beauty of any woman. Right food can help her hold these treasures throughout life. *Heavy, heavy, what hangs over you?*

Delicious, easily digested, supplying varied nourishment

When all is said and done, you can't get any more than this—your body's future depends on the food you eat. If you don't eat right, you can't make the most of the food you eat. And that's the trouble with the average modern diet—it seldom gives you all of these vital elements in balanced quantities and in correct proportions.

Just for this reason, a man who knows all about food—about nutrition—Grape-Nuts. He designed it especially to supply the body with these essential elements of nutrition: 1. Dextrin, indigestible and other carbohydrates for heat and energy. 2. Iron for the blood. 3. Phosphorus for teeth and bones. 4. Protein for muscle and bodybuilding. 5. The essential vitamins, a builder of the appetite.

Cooking Grape-Nuts with milk or cream, and you have an almost perfectly balanced ration—a food of the highest possible value.

In the small crisp kernels of Grape-Nuts, wheat and malted barley are combined. By special rolling and baking processes, the original goodness of these two healthful grains is retained, and the delicious nut-like flavor is brought out to the utmost. Millions of people consider Grape-Nuts the most delicious breakfast food they have ever eaten.

Give Grape-Nuts a place in your daily diet. You will find it as satisfying as a warm—and a single serving with cream contains more varied nourishment than many a heavy meal. Moreover, Grape-Nuts is particularly easy to digest, and it keeps going over your teeth and gums the exercise needed to preserve mouth health. Buy a package of Grape-Nuts from your grocer today, or accept the following offer.

A series of health benefits—with two servings of Grape-Nuts food

Mail the coupon below and we will send you two individual packages of Grape-Nuts food—enough for one breakfast. We will also send you "A Book of Better Nutrition," containing advice on the correct dieting habits to keep your body in a better physical condition. Limited number. Supply only as known in America's foremost authorities of men and women. Please show coupon and time for best of health benefits.

FREE—MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

Please send me two individual packages of Grape-Nuts food, together with "A Book of Better Nutrition," by mail.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

By Mail Order, Dept. of Food Products, Inc., Ltd., 100 E. Franklin St., Evanston, Illinois

In counterpoint to the grim question in the *Figure 5.16: “Heavy, Heavy,” 1925.*

black cloud, the headline below the picture introduces the solution: “Delicious, easily digested, supplying varied nourishment a food like this safeguards your body’s future.”

The follow-up text lays the blame on the inadequacies of the modern diet: “And that’s the trouble with the average modern diet—it seldom gives you all of these vital elements in sufficient quantities and in correct proportions.” The vital elements, of course, are all found in Grape Nuts in more quantity:

Just for this reason, a man who knew all about food-values originated Grape-Nuts. He designed it expressly to supply the body with these essential elements of nutrition: 1. Dextrins, maltose and other carbohydrates for heat and energy. 2. Iron for the blood. 3. Phosphorus for teeth and bones. 4. Protein for muscle and body-building. 5. The essential vitamin-B, a builder of the appetite. (“Heavy, Heavy,” 1925)

Another Grape Nuts ad (not pictured) paints a grim situation for the dental health of modern man. Under a black and white sketch of a primitive man carrying a dead buck on his back is the headline, “You can’t say ‘no’ to Nature and get away with it!” The text goes on to explain:

When Nature equipped mankind with teeth, she designed those teeth for hard work—and plenty of it. And for hundreds of centuries, while primitive man was taking his food pretty much as he found it, nothing went wrong with Nature’s plan. Teeth stayed with their owners—giving no trouble at all—until their owners finally had no further use for them.

How different today, when increasing civilization and luxury have led to the excessive use of over-milled, over-refined and over-cooked foods! Teeth have ceased to work. Man is consistently disobeying Nature’s law—and he is paying a bitter penalty! You *can’t* say “no” to Nature and get away with it. (“Can’t Say No,” 1928)

Not only is nature the authority here, but an authority who extracts a high price for disobedience. The ad continues with dire warnings from another authority, dentists, who

warn that “the penalty for lazy teeth must *always* be paid.” Of course, the solution to this problem is as close as the grocery store and recommended by those same dentists: Grape Nuts. In addition to all the nutritional value inherent in the cereal, the reader is also assured that Grape Nuts “makes you *want* to chew,” which is an important part of healthy teeth, apparently. The reader could also mail in a coupon for two free servings of Grape Nuts and an “authoritative booklet” titled, “Civilized Teeth and How to Prevent Them.” Again, there is the theme that civilization is unhealthy, and that to combat its effects, you must rely on nature’s intentions.

Another problem that cereals purported to solve was irregularity. This was particularly true with bran flakes. An ad for bran flakes (not pictured) uses a lighter touch than the Grape Nuts ads, but still relies on the format of setting up a problem and offering a solution. The cartoon depicts a riotous square dance scene, with the dancing couples having a great time. In the foreground sits “Droopy Dora.” In front of her, a smiling man is holding out his arms, entreating her to dance. She is slumped and her eyes are heavy; she responds, “No thanks, Wilbur...I’m so all-in I could sleep on a cactus plant—” The caption suggests, “Maybe it’s something she didn’t eat!” The text below the caption goes on to explain:

Poor Droopy Dora! Maybe that dull, logy feeling comes from irregularity due to lack of bulk in her diet. Someone ought to tell her about the “ounce of prevention” in every serving of Post’s 40% Bran Flakes...the cereal that gives you the *three* extra keep-fit benefits.... (“Droopy Dora,” 1950)

It goes on to list those three benefits, which include regularity, the B vitamins, and minerals. The last paragraph assures readers that they will “start the day with a smile” if

they eat Post's bran flakes at breakfast. In contrast to Grape Nuts, this ad implies a bit of uncertainty about what is really bothering Dora. The “maybe,” in addition to the rather vague symptoms, is quite clever; together, these open up the possibility that the solution might work for whatever ails the reader as well. The very vagueness makes it more universal. Then there is the implication that everyone else knows about that “ounce of prevention.” The authority figures are other people, not doctors or dentists. Finally, at the bottom is a sketch of a happier Dora, dancing and singing “Life is swell when you keep well,” showing the undoubted results of changing her eating habits.

If advertising is any guide, indigestion was another major preoccupation for Americans. Margarine, cereals, milk, and any number of other foods are described as “digestible” in ads. The ones that intrigued me, however, were the ads for Velveeta, a substitute food if there ever was one. I always thought it was primarily a convenience food, and it is true that even the early ads tout how well it melts and spreads. But early ads emphasized its wholesomeness and digestibility, calling it “cheese food” and stressing that it is a pure milk product.

One such ad, shown in Figure 5.17, bears the headline: “Now this new cheese treat—so wholesome everyone can eat it freely” (“New Cheese Treat,” 1930). Right below it, in a separate box, is the phrase, “Digestible as milk



Figure 5.17: “New Cheese Treat,” 1930.

itself.” The accompanying illustration depicts a woman standing at a table where three other women are seated. It looks like a ladies’ tea, and they are eating finger sandwiches made with Velveeta. Beneath the illustration is the caption, “For all your entertaining, or for the family meals, Velveeta adds new enjoyment.” At the bottom of the page is the name alone: “Kraft Velveeta—the delicious new cheese food.” The difference between cheese and cheese food is explained in the text somewhat, primarily through the language of science:

Tempting cheese flavor...rich and mellow. Creamy texture, velvet smooth. And along with these qualities, Kraft-Phenix, master cheese makers of the world, now give you assurance of *perfect digestibility*.

...The secret process by which Velveeta is made is patented, belonging only to Kraft-Phenix. To the blended Cheddar cheese is returned the precious milk sugar, the calcium, phosphorus and other milk minerals. *All* the milk vitamins are present.

...Velveeta, the delicious new cheese food, is a product built up as the result of scientific research. This research was carried out in the laboratories of Rutgers University, Newark, New Jersey, in the College of Pharmacy.... (“New Cheese Food,” 1930, emphases in original)

So while cheese itself is a product of traditional and time-honored methods of production, Velveeta is a child of laboratory science. Instead of belonging to a place and a craft, as the earlier ads for Swiss cheese emphasized, Velveeta belongs to the brave new world of patents, secret processes, and research carried out in university laboratories.

In later ads for Velveeta, the absence of such explanatory text demonstrates the acceptance of the product. It is no longer a “new cheese treat”; now it is “*Kraft’s* famous cheese food” (“What Fun,” 1950, emphasis in the original). Digestibility and nutritional values are still promoted, however, as Figure 5.18 shows. Here, the headline declares,

“What fun you can have with versatile Velveeta!” There is a picture of dad’s specialty, along with the recipe, and then a picture of a dip the sister makes for her “Saturday night parties”—recipe included. Versatility is highlighted, but two of the four benefits are nutritional:

O.K. anytime because

- Everybody likes its mild cheddar cheese flavor
- So easy! Velveeta always spreads, slices, toasts, melts perfectly!
- Rich in milk nutrients the whole family needs
- Digestible as milk itself (“What Fun,” 1950)

All of these factors combine to make Velveeta “just the thing” for the average American family of the 1950s, a time Levenstein refers to as “the golden age of food processing” (Levenstein 2003a, 101).

As the earlier discussion of margarine noted, established monopolies protected themselves against competition from substitute products. A similar situation occurred with cooking oils. Vegetable oils were promoted as healthier and “purer” than lard and other animal fats used for frying. Crisco was an early substitute; another was Mazola corn oil. The various vegetable oils also competed against each other.

A 1925 ad for Mazola (Figure 5.19) emphasizes the purity of the oil and the fact that it is made from corn—an “edible”



Figure 5.18: “What Fun,” 1950.

source, presumably opposed to cottonseed oil or canola oil. The Mazola mascot is interesting: a corncob personified as an Indian maiden. Her body is the ripe cob of corn, husks splitting open to reveal the golden kernels. A red headband adorns her dark hair, her face is painted with red stripes on her cheeks, and she props a red bow against one foot. Feathers are in her hair and on the bow, and her feet are encased in



Figure 5.19: “Pleasant Thought,” 1925.

moccasins. She is a miniature, no taller than the can of Mazola corn oil she stands beside. She has no name, and no mention of her is made in the text, but she appears on the can as well, and in other ads. She is perhaps a symbol of purity and wholesomeness; like the corn, she is indigenous to North America, and like the rest of the Indians, she has been “civilized.” Both she and the corn have been transformed into an industrial product. Yet there is the ambivalence, the tension between emerging modernity and the pre-modern. It is as if the indigenous nature of both the corn and the natives are a guarantee of goodness.

The text is set in a block with the headline “A Pleasant Thought.” A giant cob of ripe corn floats in the background, while a plateful of fried eggs and potatoes occupies the foreground—another manifestation of the raw and the cooked. The pleasant thought referred to seems to be the thought that Mazola tastes as good as corn on the cob. The ad

plays first on purity:

This is why Mazola is known as *the absolutely pure vegetable oil*—from an *edible* source (Corn). And it is made right in the heart of the big corn belt of the United States, in sanitary, modern plants. Every can is sealed tight—and you, the consumer, are the first person to handle its contents. (“A Pleasant Thought,” 1925, emphases in the original)

Health is the next emphasis, in addition to cleanliness; customers are assured that Mazola is not grease, but a “wholesome, easily digested fat.” Foods fried in it are easy to digest and not greasy, and it does not smoke up the kitchen. A final note caters to the concern about children’s health: “Many mothers, realizing the health and food value of Mazola, give a spoonful or two to their growing children regularly.”

Contrast this to a 1970 ad for the same product (Figure 5.20). Under a big headline of “Katie McLean has started Polyunsaturating the girls,” three women are seated at a nicely set table. A fourth woman, presumably Katie, is serving them what the text tells us is a chef salad dressed with Mazola. Her friends all look delighted and interested in learning what Katie has to say about Mazola. None of the women look like they are in need of a diet, however; all are slender, well-dressed, and well-groomed. The text tells us that Katie has a “total health program” of which Mazola is a part, and that she pays attention to medical



Figure 5.20: “Katie McLean,” 1970.

authorities and their opinions about the American diet. Katie is set up as the expert for her friends and, by extension, the reader.

Children are out of it; this sort of nutrition is a woman-to-woman, individual thing. There is the admission that Mazola costs a “few extra pennies,” but that it is obviously worth it because it is the highest in polyunsaturates and 100% corn oil. The Indian maiden is gone, replaced by a stylized drawing of a cob of ripe corn, with one husk trailing off to underline the word Mazola. Into its leaf, the words “corn oil” are printed, effectively linking the graphic to the brand name.

Another ad in the same vein bears the headline, “Bill Warner’s new bride promised to love, honor and Polyunsaturate with a big assist from Mazola” (“New Bride,” 1970, not pictured). Instead of taking care of her girlfriends, the “new Mrs. Warner” (she is never given a first name) is assigned the task of assuring her husband’s health and watching his fat intake. The tone in both ads is chatty, like friendly, informative advice instead of a hard sell. Rather than competing against non-vegetable shortenings, the competition now is against other vegetable shortenings, but the health benefits are still emphasized.

Energy and Diets

Although there are any number of foods created specifically for weight loss, this section focuses on ordinary foods that are nonetheless advertised on the basis of their efficacy in diets. Changes in the ideal body shape and weight, especially for women, started in the early twentieth century and continued throughout. Levenstein writes that “The slim ideal was becoming rooted in more than mere fashion—it was based on health

concerns as well” (Levenstein 2003a, 10).

Thus being slender began to be associated with being healthy.

I have always associated grapefruit with dieting, so I was not surprised to find ads for grapefruit that emphasized it as a diet food. These ads were also run by the Florida Citrus Commission, and again, the place of origin is included, but not central. Dieting, however, is. “Whenever you’ve found

you’ve added a pound...have grapefruit

instead” (“Have Grapefruit,” 1955, not

pictured). This particular ad promotes grapefruit as a dessert that is low in calories but chock full of vitamins: “Vitamins crowded in...calories crowded out!” Beyond the low calories, the story of citrus is still a story of natural vitamins.

Not so for sugar, however. With the advent of artificial sweeteners in the 1960s, sugar producers went on the offensive, running a series of ads promoting sugar as a source of energy and an appetite suppressant for dieters. The ad in Figure 5.21 illustrates a return to the technique of predicting dire results for children whose mothers deprive them of sugar:

Exhaustion may be dangerous—especially to children who haven’t learned to avoid it by pacing themselves. Exhaustion opens the door a little wider to the bugs and ailments that are always lying in wait.



Mary got to school early for Student Council. Her team won in gym. After play rehearsal, she'll Watusi with the gang.

She needs sugar in her life. For energy. She needs energyless, artificially sweetened foods and beverages like a turtle needs a seat belt. Sugar swings. Serve some.

Sugar's got what it takes ...18 calories per teaspoon and it's all energy

Note to Mothers:
Exhaustion may be dangerous—especially to children who haven't learned to avoid it by pacing themselves. Exhaustion opens the door a little wider to the bugs and ailments that are always lying in wait. Sugar puts back energy fast—offsets exhaustion. Synthetic sweeteners put back nothing. Energy is the first requirement of life. Play safe with your young ones—make sure they get sugar every day.

Sugar Information, Inc.

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For sweetness with energy, get beet or cane sugar.

Figure 5.21: “Sugar Swings,” 1965.

Sugar puts back energy fast—offsets exhaustion. Synthetic sweeteners put back nothing. Energy is the first requirement of life. Play safe with your young ones—make sure they get sugar every day. (“Sugar Swings,” 1965)

To illustrate this note, there is a photograph of a teenaged girl—Mary—tossing her head and swaying as if she is dancing. The text, written in a hip, “swinging” manner, describes her busy school life of student council, athletics, play rehearsal, and going out to “Watusi with the gang” (I guess homework does not require energy, because it is not listed). But because Mary is so active,

She needs sugar in her life. For energy. She needs energyless, artificially sweetened foods and beverages like a turtle needs a seat belt. Sugar swings. Serve some. Sugar’s got what it takes...18 calories per teaspoon and it’s all energy. (“Sugar Swings,” 1965)

Another ad in the same series presents sugar primarily as a diet aid. Under a picture of a sad woman holding a stalk of celery to her mouth is the headline “How to diet without self-pity” (Figure 5.22). The copy goes on to assure the reader that sugar will help a woman diet:

No other food satisfies hunger so fast, with so few calories.

No other food supplies energy so fast, with so few calories.

At only 18 calories per teaspoon, sugar helps you reduce by keeping your vitality up, and your appetite down.

Psychological Warfare bonus: Sugar’s natural sweetness lifts your spirits just enough to keep you from feeling sorry for yourself.

Give your will power a fighting chance. With sugar. (“Diet With Sugar,” 1965)

The same theme is repeated in later ads, but this time under the guise of a diet tip. One ad recommends that women “nibble” on a cookie about an hour before lunch

(“Nibble,” 1970, not pictured), while another recommends having a soft drink before “your main meal” (“Curb Your Appetite,” 1970, not pictured). Another invented something called “the fat time of day,” announcing it with the headline, “Get ready for the ‘fat time of day’” (“Fat Time,” 1970, not pictured). A photograph of a smiling woman holding a drink with the caption, “The sugar in a soft drink now can save me a lot of calories later,” illustrates the same recommendations as the other ads:

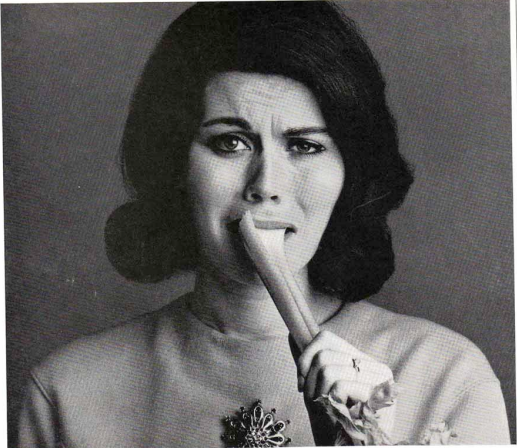
Anytime you allow yourself to get ravenous, you’re in trouble. That’s the “fat time of day” when your appetat* is turned up and you’re likely to overeat.

By snacking on something sweet shortly before mealtime, you turn your appetat down.

The sugar in a couple of cookies or a small dish of ice cream can turn it down almost immediately.

You’re able to get past the “fat time of day” because your appetite’s down and your energy’s up. (“Fat Time,” 1970)

This ad relies once again on a language of science for authority; “appetat” is starred with an asterisk and a footnote describes it as “A neural center in the hypothalamus believed to regulate appetite.” Thus the “fat time of day” is given something of a medical sanction simply by the virtue of terminology, despite the fact that the definition is



How to diet without self-pity
 Keep some sugar in your life. It won't hurt.
 As a matter of fact, it'll help your diet.
 No other food satisfies hunger so fast,
 with so few calories.
 No other food supplies energy so fast,
 with so few calories.
 At only 18 calories per teaspoon, sugar helps
 you reduce by keeping your vitality
 up, and your appetite down.
 Psychological Warfare bonus: Sugar's
 natural sweetness lifts your spirits just enough
 to keep you from feeling sorry for yourself.
 Give your will power a fighting
 chance. With sugar.

Diet with sugar: for the fun of it
 ... 18 calories per teaspoon—and it's all energy

Artificial Sweeteners?
 "There is no clear justification for the
 use of artificial sweeteners by the gen-
 eral public as a weight-reducing
 procedure..." (Food and Nutrition
 Board of the National Academy of
 Sciences—National Research Council).

Sugar Information, Inc. P.O. Box 1016, Grand Central Station, New York, N.Y. 10017

For sweetness with energy, get best of cake sugar

Figure 5.22: “Diet With Sugar,” 1965.

attributed to Webster's dictionary.

The Wheat Flour Institute employed a similar strategy in Figure 5.23, promoting bread as a diet and energy food. Beside the headline "Do you think you should cut out Bread when you're reducing?" is a photograph of a slender woman, dressed to go out, evaluating her image in the mirror. Intruding into the photograph at the bottom is a slice of bread with six "flags" stuck in it.

On each of five of the six flags is a different nutrient and what it does (niacin, thiamine, protein, riboflavin, and iron); on the sixth is simply "Food Energy to maintain proper weight and vitality." A reference to the approval of an American Medical Association council is used to give the ad extra authority, the flavor of a health warning instead of a promotional tool. Rather than claiming bread as a low-calorie food, the ad cautions women to "reduce safely" and to not neglect the nutrition they need:

If you're dieting to lose weight, remember that calories are what you want to cut, not essential vitamins and mineral nutrients. The thiamine, niacin, riboflavin and iron in enriched bread and flour help you keep fit while you're reducing. ("Cut Out Bread," 1950)

Women are admonished to remember the nutritional information on the flags so they will keep in mind that bread and everything else made from enriched flour are

Figure 5.23: "Cut Out Bread," 1950.

inexpensive daily sources of all these nutrients. An interesting part of this ad is the paragraph that states, “Now that white bread and flour are enriched with vitamins and food iron, many diet lists are out-of-date.” In that phrase is the implicit admission that white bread and flour, if not enriched, are nutritionally lacking. The headline at the bottom that, with the upper headline, frames the rest of the ad copy, is “You get 6-way nourishment in enriched bread and flour.” The stress is on *enriched* flour and its products.

Hygiene

While enriching, fortifying, and vitamizing foods were all based on scientific advances, they were not the only ways to improve the health of foods. Ever since the discovery of bacteria in the 1880s, people have been aware of the hazards of food preservation. As with vitamins, processors used the new knowledge to claim more benefits for their products. Processors advertised foods as made in spotless laboratories, pure, and untouched by human hands. One brand touted a “gold lining” in its cans for better preservation and flavor. Nowhere, however, was the battle of preservation techniques more obvious than between the manufacturers of cans and glass jars. Each promoted its particular container in ads run by “institutes” and associations

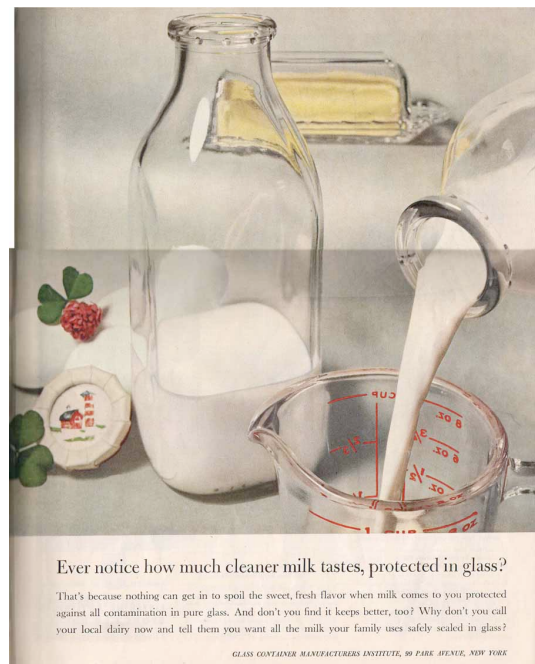


Figure 5.24, “Cleaner Milk,” 1955.

dedicated to the respective processes, and each claimed that their containers yielded the healthier and tastier product.

The Glass Container Association of America chose the slogan “See what you buy, buy in glass” (“Glassed Products,” 1930, not pictured), always in tandem with an illustration of a variety of products in glass containers. The association’s ads stressed the transparency of glass as an assurance of quality; buyers could see exactly what they were buying. If that were not enough, male authority was also invoked:

In the homes of husbands whose preferences are respected, you are apt to find a pantry stocked with glass-packed products...For products that are packed in glass can be nothing short of the best. (“Glassed Products,” 1930)

The “goodness” of these “superior foods” is also preserved, and visible to the human eye for inspection:

Buyers will always inspect them *before* they’re purchased, and packers must put only their choicest and most superior foods in such containers ...containers which will also protect and preserve all the delicious goodness of their *original* flavors. (“Glassed Products,” 1930, emphases in the original)

Another ad (Figure 5.24, pg. 151) by the Glass Container Manufacturers Institute asks the rather rhetorical question, “Ever notice how much cleaner milk tastes, protected in glass?” Above the question is a very clean, white, three-quarter page photo of a glass milk bottle with milk in it, a glass butter dish with a yellow stick of butter, and a glass measuring cup, into which another bottle of milk is pouring milk into. There are a few white eggs, the cap from one of the milk bottles, and a couple sprigs of red clover. It is a strong image of wholesomeness and purity, complete with an image of a red barn on the

bottle cap.

The text below responds to the question with agreement and elaboration:

That's because nothing can get in to spoil the sweet, fresh flavor when milk comes to you protected against all contamination in pure glass. And don't you find it keeps better, too? Why don't you call your local dairy now and tell them you want all the milk your family uses safely sealed in glass? ("Cleaner Milk," 1955)

The Heinz Company ran ads claiming that "crystal jets of pure water" were used to clean every corner of the jars and bottles it used for its products. In an impressive illustration (Figure 5.25, pg. 154), a glass bottle is suspended in the center of a pale blue circle against a darker blue background. White jets of water are spraying the bottle from all sides and one even straight up into the mouth of the bottle. The pale blue ring carries the words, "perfectly clean containers for pure foods"; it is decorated like a wreath, with a clump of tomatoes, wheat, and citrus at the bottom, and a smaller clump at the upper right, with the "Heinz 57" insignia set into it. Water pours off the bottle amid sparkles of glass and water.

Below this illustration is the headline "Jets of Crystal," and explanatory ad copy that ties in clean bottles with overall hygiene:

Crystal jets of pure water are played from every angle on every glass jar and bottle in which a Heinz Variety is to be put up, and each piece of glassware emerges as clean and sparkling as the row of tumblers on your dresser.

This ingenious machine symbolizes a very practical way the spirit of cleanliness that prevails everywhere in the Heinz Kitchens. There are no "neglected corners". Every process is characterized by a cleanliness that equals if not exceeds the care of the proudest housewife. ("Jets of Crystal," 1925)

While glass manufacturers bragged on transparency, “truthfulness” (“It Tells All,” 1945, not pictured), and the idea of using filled glass containers for “decorating with colorful fruits and vegetables in glass” (“Decorating,” 1945, not pictured), can manufacturers responded with the theme, “It’s what you can’t see that counts!” (Figure 5.26, pg. 155). They emphasized that foods



Figure 5.25: “Jets of Crystal,” 1925.

could look good but still might not be healthy, as vitamins and nutrients are invisible. No one mentions that botulism and other pathogens are invisible too, the flip side of what you cannot see. Instead, the idea that foods are “cooked right in the can” was promoted as a surefire way preserve flavor and nutrition:

You can see for yourself when a meal *looks* good. But you *can't* see flavors or vitamins and other nutrients.

...Well, don't worry! Instead, depend* on modern *canned* foods. They're cooked right in the can—and each can is really a miniature “pressure cooker” that captures and holds flavors as well as nutritive values.

**For scientific facts on vitamins in canned foods, see October, 1946 issue of “Journal of Nutrition.” (“What You Can't See,” 1947, emphases in original)*

Beside a photograph of an abundantly appointed dinner table are a series of three sketches, each one illustrating another benefit of canned foods. The first shows that “Steel

—and tin—keep goodness in,” reminding women that cans are the “ideal food container,” because they do not crack, break, or tear. The second claims that canned foods give women “a boost for your pride,” noting that the housewife should be proud to feed her family such nutritious food, and that the variety of things available means she never has to rely on seasonal foods again. The last sketch illustrates a recipe for “Hallelujah Ham,” presumably also depicted in the



Figure 5.26, “What You Can’t See, 1947.

photograph. It starts out with “Remove a whole boned ham from its can . . .,” showing that even can manufacturers relied on the technique of giving out recipes using ingredients encased in their product.

At the bottom of the ad is a simple tin can; instead of a food label, it bears a label claiming “No other container protects like the can!” The label breaks it down point by point:

Foods you buy in cans are
SAFE from dirt, germs, odors.
SAFE from air, light, moisture.
SAFE even after a can is opened—because, in the canning process, both the can and its contents are sterilized. Simply cover the top and place in the refrigerator. (“What You Can’t See,” 1947)

Other ads for canned products used the lure of children’s health. In one, a baby is

shown eating in a height chair, with the headline, “Excuse me if I seem to lick the spoon” (“Lick the Spoon,” 1935, not pictured). Another one, with a picture of an older boy, bears the headline, “As the twig is bent, the tree’s inclined” (Figure 5.27, “As the Twig,” 1935). The boy is raising a glass of juice as he starts in on a huge meal of salad, bread, two sausages, potatoes, and corn. Superimposed on top of his food is a ghostly tin can, giving the impression that his entire meal was brought to him through the benefit of cans.



Figure 5.27: “As the Twig,” 1935.

Women are warned that for children to grow up strong and healthy, they must eat good foods when they are young:

And the right foods today include plenty of canned foods, because the can is a perfect storehouse for nature’s precious vitamins and mineral salts...The cooking is done right in the sealed can, and so the vitamins and mineral salts are retained virtually intact. (“As the Twig,” 1935)

The text goes on to explain that perishable fresh foods are sealed in cans “within a matter of hours after picking—at the peak of their natural goodness and flavor.” In the redefinition typical of the food industry, this is called “freshness.” The large type at the bottom of the text block states “Health and Freshness/Sealed in Cans” (“As the Twig,” 1935). Health and freshness could also refer to the boy; he looks healthy, fresh,

and rosy-cheeked; the correlation between his looks and eating canned foods is what the ad wants to convey.



Health has always been closely associated with food, and modern diets and food fads are the continuation of a long line of eating advice. The ads in this chapter often present a health problem and offer a food as a solution. There is also a reliance on the concern that a mother feels for her children and her desire to assure their nutrition. A lot of foods claim to be “perfect foods,” and other ads emphasize cleanliness, especially in relation to technologies like canning and preserving foods in glass containers.

The narratives about nature in these ads are that it is a source of both good and evil in food. Products of the natural world are pretty good, and nature is a great source of them, but it takes man to perfect them. It also takes man’s science to keep food safe, to protect consumers from the dangers inherent in nature. These ads embody a story of nature as an authority/source and a danger. Lack of vitamins, weakness, irregularity, indigestion, lack of energy, and germs are all problems to which particular foods are posed as solutions.

Health is still used to sell food, in advertising as well as in the creation of new “functional” foods that up the ante on enrichment and fortification by claiming new foods as treatments for chronic illnesses. New genetic engineering trials have been held to test plants that will “grow” common prescription medicines like birth control, while others focus on adding particular vitamins to crops that do not usually contain them. One example is “golden rice,” touted for its high beta-carotene content that would supposedly alleviate the Vitamin A deficiencies of children in developing countries. These trends are

inseparable from the fact that health is big business overall. Any added nutritional benefits are further value added to a product, which ups its salability. Diet, health, and nutrition books top bestseller lists, and health clubs, spas, and gyms are found in communities of all sizes. Vitamins and herbal supplements continue strong sales, and the weight-loss industry alone, including books, food products, and programs, is a multi-million dollar business—all predicated on people not actually losing weight, of course.

In contrast to some of the ads in this chapter which brag about new food processing technologies and their benefits, more recent ads leave out new technologies like food irradiation, genetic engineering, and cloning. Rather than using them as selling points, the technologies are ignored, their products unlabeled and unadvertised as such. Instead of science and technology being viewed as protection against the risks in food, they are now suspected as the creators of new risks. Again, civilization and its products are unhealthy, and nature and the natural are turned to for guidance and the source of health.

At the same time, threats from nature, like the increased bacterial contamination of meat, is the flip side of “good” nature. Depending upon who is looking at it, though, this “bad” nature either necessitates new technologies or is the result of an over-dependence upon technologies, a “revenge of nature.” Thus the narratives of nature as both a source of healthy raw materials and unhealthy dangers continues to frame the theme of health in food advertising.

Chapter 6: Eating Convenience

“Whenever you talk about a family picnic there’s always somebody that says, ‘Now, let’s not bother much about food or go to any trouble. Let’s just have sandwiches.’ And that ‘somebody’ is always a man.

“But the women are different. They know that sandwiches don’t grow ready-made on trees. Perhaps there just happens to be a piece of cold meat in the ice-box. Perhaps not. Or there may be some other odds and ends of suitable sandwich filling. Fortunate, if true; but it takes a surprising lot of sandwiches to crown a picnic with success these glorious days when the whole world is young and hungry.

“Let’s not make our picnics a burden! Too much advance preparation spoils everything. It’s nine o’clock now; let’s start at ten. Open that jar of Beech-Nut Peanut Butter—nut-brown and golden-brown—and spread every last sandwich in two shakes!

“A medium-sized jar will spread 26 ordinary slices of bread! Just think of it!” (“Sandwich Problem,” 1925)

In contrast to health, the ads in this chapter appeal to practicality, convenience, and solutions for urban lives whose rhythms are dictated by a job, not a farm and the seasons. Even more so than the ads in the previous chapter, these ads rely on offering products as solutions to problems. Not just solutions, but the complete absence of having to think about choices. It reminds me of a scene in one of the popular Harry Potter children’s books in which one of the characters admonishes his daughter with the words: “Never trust anything that can think for itself *if you can’t see where it keeps its brain!* ...A suspicious object like that, it was *clearly* full of Dark Magic—” (Rowling 1999, emphasis in original). His point was that if you do not know how something works or who created it, you cannot necessarily trust that it is operating in your best interests.

Wendell Berry makes a similar point in his 1984 essay titled “Whose Head is the Farmer Using? Whose Head is Using the Farmer?” In this discussion of industrial agricultural production, Berry points out that working with nature as a farmer requires an understanding of nature that the industrial economy is all too ready to marginalize. The

industrial economy, he writes, offers generalized, expensive, and technological solutions—like pesticides, fertilizers, biotechnology, and precision farming—over individual knowledge of a place, individual judgment based on experience, and effort.

The effect of this substitution is, as Berry puts it, that “it comes between the mind and its work” (Berry 1984: 24). The challenges of working within a natural system are left to the experts; all the farmer has to do is to pay for, and apply, the suggested solutions. Nature is paradoxically framed as a homogenous system amenable to simple solutions, yet, at the same time, better left to the experts. In this process of taking the brains out of work, Berry concludes that “The last head they [agricultural industrialists] want the farmer to use is his own. They want to do his thinking for him, because it is enormously profitable to them to do so” (Berry 1984: 24).

In much the same way, the food industry wants to do the housewife’s, or the food buyer’s, thinking for her (or him)—and it is in doing so that its profits are increased and value added. People these days do not have to grow their own food, nor do they have to select, prepare, and cook it. Why waste your time planning menus or limiting yourself to what is in season? With canned or frozen foods, global markets and transportation, you do not have to get your hands wet or dirty, you do not have to select meats or produce, you do not have to prepare them. In some cases, you do not even have to get plates dirty. You do not have to think about balance or nutritional requirements, because the manufacturer will take care of all that. Want to go on a low-carbohydrate diet? Just buy low-carbohydrate products and do not think about it.

Whereas the ads in the last chapter viewed foods as transformative substances and

nature as the authentic model to be emulated, the ads in this section assume that food and eating are problems to be solved. Nature is framed more as a lifestyle problem, a hassle that a busy, modern American woman really should not have to concern herself with. Convenience is king here: one-stop grocery shopping, foods that require little or no preparation, speed, disposable plates and containers, consistency, no surprises, guaranteed to please the husband and the children. Just as with Berry's agricultural experts, the housewife should trust the experts in the food industry. These companies claim to use "French chefs" to prepare their soups, knowledgeable buyers to get the best ingredients, and the best in science and technology to produce foods that are as good as, if not better than, anything homemade.

The individual's own knowledge of food, of the natural, especially locally grown, endemic, and seasonal foods, is marginalized, as are her tastes, preferences, and abilities as a cook and a shopper. Generalized solutions are applied to what are highly individualized regions, tastes, cultures, and what Kloppenburg (1996) calls "foodsheds."

What does a cook need to know? She needs to know foods—which vegetables and fruits are which, what they look like and smell like when they are fresh and ripe, how to use different cuts of meat, how to de-bone a chicken, and again, what meat looks like when it is fresh or spoiled. She needs to know how to cook, which spices to use with which other ingredients, the differences between dried spices and fresh, the different kinds of dried beans and what they're used for. She has to know how long it takes to cook different things, at different altitudes, especially if she is baking. She has to know how things need to be cooked to kill dangerous bacteria. She has to know which foods have

which vitamins and minerals in them, and she has to know which foods contain protein, which fats, which carbohydrates. Ingredients are only one aspect; she also has to know where to obtain the best supplies, which producers, butchers, bakers, and grocers she can trust. Finally, she has to know what her family will and will not eat.

As many a newly married woman has found out, cooking is harder than it looks. As many a newly married man has learned, women are not automatically great cooks, no more than men are automatically expert auto mechanics.

This group of ads engages in a discourse of nature as a *pain in the ass*, a problem in a modern lifestyle. Nature is dirt, work, and uncertainty. To solve this problem, the food industry offers three primary solutions embodied in its products: speed, ease, and consistency. Some of the trends reflected in this section include the desire for easy and quick meals, consistency in baking, foods to please a man, and branding as a means of distinguishing similar products.

Some of the keys in these ads are modernity, taste, sophistication, homemade goodness, “husband pleasing,” “zest,” and a redefinition of freshness. Advertisers had to convince consumers that the food industry could provide better food than a woman—A&P says its eggs are better than those you raise yourself (because they hire men to select them), Stokely’s says its buyers are “as picky as women,” and Campbell’s “French chef” (a man, of course) makes better soups than the average housewife. The husband is often depicted as yet another problem, the primary arbiter of taste and the one who must be pleased, with children coming in second. What the wife likes does not matter; her job is pleasing the family, not herself. If the wife is focused upon, it is to tell her not to risk

cutting her hands (let Del Monte peel and cut the fruit) or waste her time baking when she could be doing other things. She can trust her grocer and particular brands to have the products that add zest, tang, and taste to her meals.

If we look at what the grocery store has evolved into today, we can see that this trend continues. We can go to the grocery store and also pick up our prescriptions, order a birthday cake, buy a bouquet of flowers or a houseplant, pay our electric bill, take care of banking business, drop off film for processing, buy gourmet coffee, and get ready-to-eat sushi or deli sandwiches. Outside, we can tank up the car.

If agriculture is the original sin, with God telling Adam and Eve that they had to earn their keep by the sweat of their brow when he cast them out of the Garden of Eden, then many foods attempt to offer salvation to the consumer, especially the women. As Laura Shapiro (2004) pointed out, cooking was framed as drudgery, and the food industry was ready to step in and offer women freedom from marketing, preparation, cooking, and even cleaning up, not to mention the uncertainty of cooking. Prepared products guaranteed consistency, convenience, and success, especially in the uncertain realm of baking.

Several factors contributed to an increase in the appeal of convenience foods, but this was matched by the creation of technologies in wartime for which manufacturers sought peacetime markets. These technologies included canning, freezing, and chemical warfare that translated into herbicides and pesticides for agriculture (Russell 2001). Sophistication in using chemicals also contributed to the growth of chemical preservatives and flavorings used in processed foods.

In addition, the number of people living on farms declined steadily throughout the twentieth century, leading to a greatly expanded urban market for food. With the exception of victory gardens during WWII, the number of people growing their own food has fallen to its lowest number. During the war, women entered the workforce; after the war, women left the workforce, and then in the 1960s, began working again. The branding of products, the work of distinguishing one can of corn from another, was also on the rise, and often the brand was touted as another major convenience.

These are ads that frame nature as a lifestyle problem more than anything else. Women should not have to wash, peel, and chop fruits and vegetables: they might cut their hands, and besides, it takes a lot of time. It encompasses not only convenience in terms of time and preparation, but in terms of cooking. Women are assured of healthy and flavorful meals for their husbands and children without taking the risk of actually cooking themselves. Beyond menu planning, they no longer have to think very much about food and its preparation; food manufacturers will do it for them.

Speedy and Easy

“Your time and energy are priceless,” states the headline. “Why waste them in the kitchen?” (“Time and Energy,” 1925, not pictured). Making life easier for the cook has long been a selling point for processed foods. Convenience is the catchall phrase, kind of the mother of all solutions. In this case, I define it as fast and easy. Ads that sell foods that allow a cook to get a meal on the table in 15 minutes with a minimum of fuss are the idea here. This ad sums it up:

Summer is the time to get out-of-doors.

Every hour—needlessly spent in the kitchen means more than just an hour of drudgery.

It means that you are robbing yourself of something that can never be recalled—the glorious opportunity for rest and recreation that only comes in the open air!

Why not decide—this summer—to spend less time in the kitchen? You can do it so easily—and still serve the same delightful and economical meals—if you will just let Del Monte do some of the hot work for you. (“Time and Energy,” 1925)

Drudgery, hot work, irretrievable opportunities—the former avoided and the latter won through the simple purchase of canned fruits and vegetables. Each can is undoubtedly “instantly ready to serve—no peeling, cutting, or paring—no hazards to lovely hands” (“Count ‘Em,” 1941, not pictured), and “you don’t even have to bother to pick them!” (“Fruit Cocktail Tree,” 1941, not pictured). The offer to let someone else do it is ubiquitous in these ads, as is an emphasis on the time saved.

Ads for Campbell’s canned soup evolved from selling soup as soup to selling soup as soup, gravy, sauce, the basis for one-dish suppers, and an important ingredient in various casseroles. Including recipes in the ads went a long way in this effort, and Campbell’s was not the only company to employ this ruse. It just seems to have been the most successful; no tuna casserole is



Figure 6.1: “Perfect Gravy,” 1960.

complete without a can of condensed mushroom soup in it. A typical ad asked the question, “Why make your own sauce when Campbell’s Soups make such good ones!” (Sauce,” 1955, not pictured). Another one, with a nod to magic, announced, “Campbell’s Instant Saucery,” giving the recipes for three “delicious soup sauces that make plain foods fancy” (“Instant Saucery,” 1965, not pictured).



Figure 6.2: “Busiest Tomatoes,” 1960.

Gravy was also promoted as another use for Campbell’s soups. Figure 6.1 (pg. 165) demonstrates the “quick, easy way to make a perfect gravy—add creamy Campbell’s Soup to the rich, brown drippings!” The ad copy continues where the headline leaves off:

No flour to add—no lumps—no fuss! Just the quickest, easiest, best-tasting gravy ever! That’s because Campbell’s Soups are so smooth, so creamy, so full of flavor they turn ’most any drippings into perfect, hostess-be-proud gravy! (“Perfect Gravy,” 1960)

Below the rather small type is an enormous plate with chicken, potatoes, and green beans. Gravy pours from a gravy boat onto and over the chicken. Below the plate is the gravy recipe, such as it is. Two smaller plates are below, with different meals dripping with different gravies, complete with recipes; a mushroom gravy for hamburgers and celery gravy for chops. All of them are made just as the headline says: by adding a can of

soup to meat drippings and water. As the ad claims, “creamy delicious and so very easy!”

Ease is also the emphasis in an ad for using soups as the base for skillet suppers. This ad (“Skillet Suppers,” 1955, not pictured) bears the authority of Anne Marshall, the director of home economics for Campbell’s. A drawing of her is set into the ad copy so it reads as if she is saying it directly to the reader:

Here are 4 quick ways to cook delicious meals and make your busy life a little easier. Skillet suppers practically make themselves—and take only one pan in the doing!

The basic idea’s so simple, you scarcely need a recipe. Just take one of Campbell’s Cream Soups—blend it with what you have—cooked macaroni and cheese, or a can of tuna, or shrimp, or chopped meat. Heat in a skillet for a few minutes. Before you know it, you’ve a delightful meal ready to put before your family. (“Skillet Suppers,” 1955)

In case that is not easy enough, the ad gives the four recipes complete with illustrations of the finished products: quick chili con carne, skillet macaroni, tuna treat, and shrimp Creole. In later ads, the company’s trademark “that’s what Campbell’s Soups are, M’m! M’m! good!” was also used as “Campbell’s makes your cooking M’m! M’m! Good!” (“Chicken Recipes,” 1975, not pictured). If women could be convinced to make canned soup an integral part of their cooking, the usage of Campbell’s soup products would be unlimited.



Figure 6.3: “Quick as Toast,” 1930.

Manufacturers of canned vegetables also employed the strategy of supplying recipes that used the product. In an ad with the headline “Quick Stunts with Hunt’s Tomato Sauce” (“Quick Stunts,” 1955, not pictured), Hunt’s presented a recipe for “15-Minute Meat Loaf” that uses half the tomato sauce as a gravy for the meatloaf. The fact that these products were competing with Campbell’s soup is evident:

Be sure to use Hunt’s Tomato Sauce when you make it. For Hunt’s brings you true tomato goodness seasoned just right. No starchy fillers, no “soupy” flavor. The beautiful color tells you that it’s all tomato. (“Quick Stunts,” 1955)

Del Monte, in Figure 6.2 (pg. 166), the busiest ad in town, called its stewed tomatoes “the busiest tomatoes in town!”. Because the stewed tomatoes are already “seasoned with onion, celery, green pepper,” they make “dozens of dishes quicker and easier.” The ad shows pictures of seven different dishes made with stewed tomatoes, and every caption includes phrases like, “save time and work,” “in minutes,” “four of your ingredients in one can,” and “shortcut.” Combined with the photographs, sketches of flying tomatoes elaborate the “busy tomatoes” and the theme of speed.

Cans were not just for fruits and vegetables though. Canned meats, one of those wartime inventions looking for a home in peacetime, were also marketed on the basis

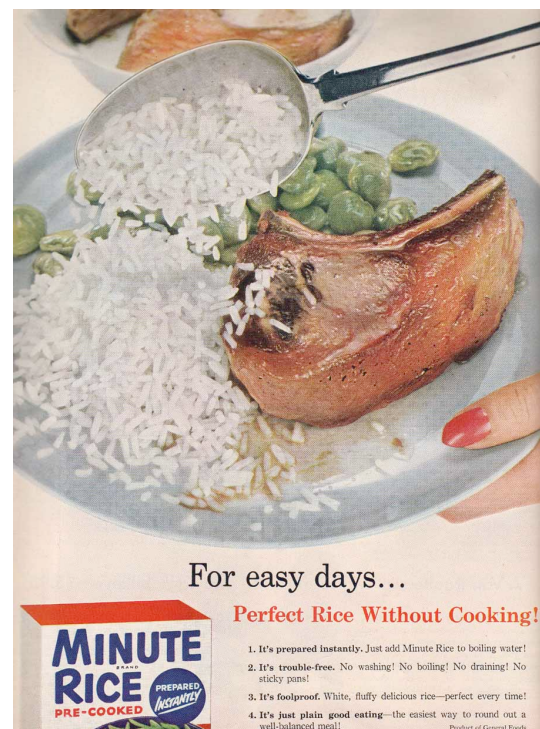


Figure 6.4: “Easy Days,” 1955.

of speed and ease. For example, Figure 6.3 (pg. 167) advertises using a whole canned chicken to get “Fried Chicken Quick as Toast.” Beside a platter of chicken, peas, and potatoes is a Hormel canned chicken, “milk fed” and “flavor sealed.” Underneath the platter is the subhead, “5 Minutes—from Package—to Pan—to Platter.” The ad positions the platter in the top center, with the canned product smaller and to the right, directly where your eye goes when reading the ad. The two are equated in their positioning, but there is no image of an actual chicken, in spite of references in the text to plucking and cleaning a real bird. The copy goes on to explain just what makes a canned chicken so easy:

No plucking. No cleaning for you to do. Just warm the can to melt the juices. Pour them off. Finish opening the can. Cut the chicken apart, or just in halves. Brown in hot fat. Then it is ready to serve. (“Quick as Toast,” 1930)

Below the ad copy is a block of text offering four different “Quick Ways” to serve the chicken: cold, fried, broiled, and roasted. The juices are recommended for use in sauces and gravies. Speed and ease are not the only selling points; the ad also emphasizes the quality of the chicken to buttress the idea that a canned chicken is just as delicious as a fresh one—maybe even better (and cleaner):

Every Hormel chicken is selected, milk fed, plucked and cleaned to perfection. *Then* inspected and certified to be healthy, wholesome and clean by U.S. Government Inspectors. *Then* each whole or half chicken is sealed in its own package and immediately cooked. Protected from all contamination—its superb juicy flavor insured by Flavor-Sealing. (“Quick as Toast,” 1930, emphasizes in original)

Instant rice is another product whose major asset was speed. In this ad for Minute Rice (Figure 6.4, pg. 168), simplicity is the key. A woman’s hand holds a plate; her nail is

polished—easy rice saves her hands, obviously. She is putting rice onto a plate with a pork chop and lima beans. This plate takes up most of the page. Underneath it is a box of Minute Rice, and the headline, “For easy days...Perfect Rice Without Cooking.” Four points are listed below the headline that explain why this rice is special; two of them are all about speed and ease: instant preparation and trouble-free. The other selling points are consistency and “just plain good eating.”



Figure 6.5: “Quick as Coffee,” 1955.

Uncle Ben’s rice chose the phrase “converted” to describe its instant rice. Its assets were described in much the same way as Minute Rice: “No rinsing. No draining. No steaming” (“Comes Into Its Own,” 1950, not pictured). A space at the bottom of this ad is devoted to the introduction of an even newer kind of rice—instant rice in a can:

Uncle Ben’s Instant Rice comes ready-cooked in the can. Just dip it in boiling water for 30 seconds and serve. Use it anywhere you use rice... any time you want to save time! Serve it as a vegetable...in desserts... as a cereal. It’s unbelievably easy—unbelievably fine. (“Comes Into Its Own,” 1950)

Unbelievable is right. While the idea of canned rice being anything other than a viscous blob is hard for me to imagine, the point is that such a product was only possible because of the value put on convenience. Another product that went the way of rice to become “instant” was oatmeal (fortunately, I do not think they ever canned cooked

oatmeal). The Quaker ad in Figure 6.5 (pg. 170) boasts that the new oatmeal “cooks completely in just one minute,” and tastes “smoother” and “creamier.” A series of photographs illustrate all the good points that the text describes: quick cooking, quick cleaning, appealing to children, and useful in weight control. The black and white photos and text make it look very scientific, as befits “today’s new oatmeal.”

Frozen dinners are one product that exists solely because of their convenience. Like many convenience foods, they came into their own in the 1950s and 60s with the advent of television and home freezers. By the 1970s, more upscale versions were available. A typical example is the ad in Figure 6.6, for Stouffer’s: “Stouffer’s introduces fancy cooking for when you don’t fancy cooking.” Note how the headline absolves the buyer from any guilt about not wanting to cook, even as it associates its products with the best of cooking. Two plates hold the two different meals that are suggested, scallops and shrimp mariner and beef stroganoff. The text flows around the plates, describing the dishes and their ingredients, as if the dishes were made individually, especially for you. It is a pre-microwave ad; putting the frozen packet in boiling water for fifteen minutes does the cooking. At the very bottom, in the lower right corner, is a small picture of the actual frozen food packets, as if the advertiser

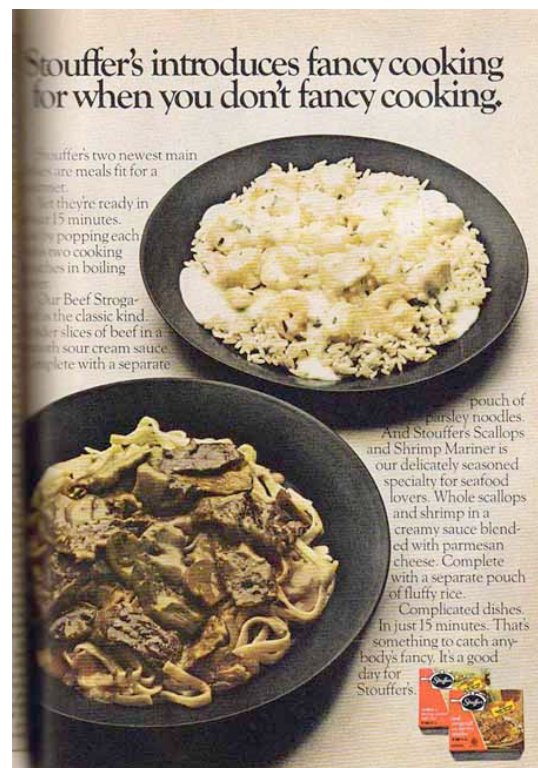


Figure 6.6: “Fancy Cooking,” 1975.

wanted that to be as small as possible.

The whole ad consists of nothing but the two plates of food and the ad copy; there is no reference to feeding a family. Its very simplicity lends further refinement to the food; it also presents a meal more suited for a couple without children, neither one wanting to cook after a day at work. The food itself is more sophisticated, dishes that children would probably not like. The text of the ad further assures the buyer that even though the dinners are frozen, they are “fit for a gourmet”:

Stouffer’s two newest main dishes are meals fit for a gourmet.

Yet they’re ready in a mere 15 minutes...

Complicated dishes. In just 15 minutes. That’s enough to catch anybody’s fancy. It’s a good day for Stouffer’s. (“Fancy Cooking,” 1975)

In spite of the gourmet spin though, speed and ease are paramount.

Baking as a Problem

Another aspect of convenience is consistency, the surefire method, and the foolproof recipe. Nowhere was this as obvious as in ads for baked goods. Before the day of the reliable electric oven, baking was a real challenge. A cake that did not fall was the mark of a woman’s skill as a cook, and before ready-to-use staples were available, it was the work of at least an entire day (Shapiro 2004).

Flour was often marketed for its consistency in baking. In Figure 6.7 (“Dependable,” 1925), Gold Medal claimed that “millions of housewives” used its flour because they knew that it is “always good.” Under the headline of “Dependable,” the ad

described the dilemma of the housewife who bakes:

The serene confidence with which the capable housewife approaches the kitchen oven is due to her skill in baking, her confidence in her recipe, and her dependence on the uniform quality of the flour she uses.

She knows that if she should use a different kind of flour each time she bakes, or if she should use a kind of flour that is not always the same, sack after sack—both her skill and the recipe might be questioned.

Then where would be her pride in her well-known chocolate cake!
("Dependable," 1925)

Consistent flour, or flour with consistent results, was thus depicted as a crucial ingredient for baking success. This same ad claims that only Gold Medal has mills located to "pick and choose from every nook and corner where the right wheat for Gold Medal grows best." Underneath the copy is a drawing of a perfect three-layer cake that the copy promises as a result of using Gold Medal flour.

To convince women of the efficacy of a particular brand, science and modernity were again used as key words to describe the flour. Gold Medal boasted "the most perfect, thorough and exact machinery, chemical laboratories, model kitchens..." ("Costs No More," 1925, not pictured), while Pillsbury claimed "sixteen different types of the finest wheats...scientifically balanced for successful baking" ("Balance," 1940, not



Figure 6.7: "Dependable," 1925.

pictured). Perfection was guaranteed; another Gold Medal flour ad states:

If it is not the best flour that you have ever tried and if it does not produce the most uniformly good results, you may at any time return the unused portion of your sack of flour to your grocer. He will pay you back your full purchase price. We will repay him. (“Kitchen Tested,” 1925, not pictured)

Manufacturers also claimed to test their flours in both laboratories and “a kitchen just like yours” (“Kitchen Tested,” 1925, not pictured). One ad bears the headline, “Of 268

women trying this recipe, not one failed to get perfect results first time” (“Perfect Results,” 1930, not pictured). As shown in Figure 6.8, readers were encouraged to make their own tests with different flours and compare the results:

If you’ve never tried Pillsbury’s Best Flour, here’s a splendid opportunity to do so. First, make this delicious “As-You-Cut-It” Cake with the flour you now have in your pantry. Then, the next time you buy flour, get a bag of Pillsbury’s Best and bake this cake again.

Compare the flavor, texture, appearance—and we believe the results will tell you better than we can why Pillsbury’s Best has been a favorite with good cooks for more than four generations...

Twice proved before you get it, in laboratory and home-type baking tests, Pillsbury’s Best Flour is guaranteed to give you complete satisfaction in everything you bake—every time you bake—or we’ll cheerfully refund the cost of the flour. You take no chances in trying it! (“Make This Test,” 1940)

Of course the ad features a picture of the cake and the recipe for it; the authority of



Figure 6.8: “Make This Test,” 1940.

the recipe calls for Pillsbury's flour.

Another ingredient marketed to improve baking was shortening, particularly the new all-vegetable shortenings like Crisco. In addition to lighter and tastier cakes, Crisco was billed as the shortening that “ends pie crust failure” (Figure 6.9). The illustration alone is a triumph of fantasy, a chocolate pie floating without a pan, the crust firm with no filling leaking out, even though a hefty slice of pie has been



Figure 6.9: “Pie Crust Failure,” 1955.

removed. Instead of a flaky crust, it looks bulletproof. Pictures show how easy Crisco is to use and how it solves “common pastry problems” like “wet sticky dough” and “fear of re-rolling.” Under this pie in the sky is the subhead, “Look, you’ll get flaky, tender pastry just like this...every time!” The ad copy elaborates on that and promotes the idea that anyone can make a perfect pie crust with Crisco:

Once upon a time it took a special knack to make a flaky pie shell like the one above. But not today! With pure, all-vegetable Crisco and the pastry recipe on Crisco’s label, even a *beginner* can make perfect pie crust every time.

What if little things go wrong! You can trust Crisco to turn out tender. For shortening is the most important ingredient in flaky pie crust—and Crisco is the finest shortening made! Treat your family to a scrumptious pie, *tonight!* With Crisco, it’s *so* easy. (“Pie Crust Failure,” 1955, *emphases in original*)

In this case, convenience lies not only in consistency, but also in the apparent resilience of Crisco to errors. The ad claims that Crisco is idiot-proof, and that it solves the common pastry problems noted above. In the cake world, Crisco followed the example of flour manufacturers by creating “Crisco Success Cake” recipes and including them in ads. Figure 6.10 shows one such typical ad.



Figure 6.10: “I Got Kissed,” 1947.

At the top is a large illustration of a man and a woman. They stand at opposite ends of a table, leaning forward for a kiss, the ultimate reward, presumably, for a great cake. Behind the woman, however, a ghostly outline of herself is angrily winding up a kick in the behind for her. On the tablecloth is the woman’s thoughts: “I got kissed for this lighter cake but I could have kicked myself.” It is a good hook, because to find out why she is angry, one must go on reading:

Jim simply raved about that cake I baked—and no wonder. It was as light as a cloud—moist and tender—and o-o-oh so deliciously rich! And all because I’d learned a bit of baking magic.

Such easy magic, too. I just used Crisco and a new Crisco Success Cake recipe. The combination’s unbeatable! Why, you get better cakes on every count—richer, tenderer, moister....

...I sure could have kicked myself! Imagine my not having tried Crisco for cakes long ago. Why, I’ve always used it for frying...And I’ll depend on it for everything now—cakes, pies and fried foods—Crisco improves all 3. (“I Got Kissed,” 1947)

These revelations are all accompanied by sketches to illustrate the process of the woman discovering the secret, rushing to embrace an animated can of Crisco (with arms and legs), and holding a sign repeating how good Crisco makes everything taste. A photograph of a perfect cake takes up the other side of the page, along with the recipe for it. The oddest note in this ad is the tiny print under the main text block that states: “Don’t waste food—millions are hungry. Save and re-use every ounce of fat.” Perhaps this was to assuage post-war guilt for the abundance of the United States while Europeans starved. Americans refused to cut back in meat or sugar consumption, even to feed starving people overseas (Levenstein 2003a).

The next step in making baking easier was the creation of the cake mix. Getting women to buy them was an interesting battle, an educational one for advertisers. Early mixes had everything in them; all a woman had to add was water or milk. When sales were slow, manufacturers sponsored research to find out why women were not buying them. They found out that it was *too* easy, that women felt that a cake needed more of a contribution from them than simply adding liquid. Making something from scratch, especially a cake, carried more weight in terms of authenticity and emotion. Some cake mix manufacturers took the dried eggs out of their mixes and had cooks add fresh eggs,



Figure 6.11: “Reputation,” 1950.

which did, in fact, make a better cake (Shapiro 2004, 76). Others stuck with the “just add milk” tag. Women used cake mixes, but not without some guilt, which actually dissipated as women became more accustomed to using mixes and generations came of age for whom baking was no longer a learned skill. I can remember my own home economics classes in junior high where we learned to bake cakes with mixes, not from scratch.

Like ads for flour and shortening, ads for cake mixes promised excellent results every time, no matter what the level of skill. Ads were illustrated with photographs of luscious cakes that readers were guaranteed to be able to make without buying any additional “expensive” ingredients or putting in any extra time. “How’s your reputation?” asked one ad (Figure 6.11, pg. 177), then went on to elaborate:

If your whole neighborhood now thinks of you as a cake baker extraordinary the Pillsbury Cake Mixes will preserve that reputation. If you are facing your very first cake, the Pillsbury Cake Mixes will build you a reputation. Just look at the cake you see here. One just as fine, just as glamorous, can be made by either a gifted cake artist or a raw recruit. Everything save the milk (which you add) is in the neat blue and white Pillsbury package. Preserve a reputation. Or build a reputation. Your own. (“Reputation,” 1950)

The mix boxes mimic the Pillsbury flour packaging, and instead of a recipe, there is a picture of the boxes of cake mix set into the picture of the cake. Cakes are personified as glamorous, luscious, eye filling, sumptuous and “come hither,” while cooks are told that anyone can make such cakes. Every Pillsbury ad emphasizes that milk is all a cook has to add; introducing an orange cake mix, an ad points out that, “crystals made from real oranges are right in the mix...you don’t have to grate a single rind or squeeze a single orange” (“Orange Cake Mix,” 1955, not pictured).

Betty Crocker went so far as to guarantee “a perfect* cake every time you bake— cake...after cake...after cake” (“Perfect Cake,” 1955, not pictured). The asterisk beside “perfect” refers to an assurance that “we do mean perfect. If a cake you bake with a Betty Crocker Cake Mix is less than perfect, mail the box top to...and General Mills will send your money back.” Betty’s ads also promoted a “4th Meal” of dessert “for friends and fun,” where cake was the ideal thing to serve:

The 4th meal’s easy...and the 4th meal’s fun...when you ask the people you like best. And serve the good things they like best. ’Specially good things like these quick and easy surprises you make with our good Betty Crocker Cake Mixes. (“Fourth Meal,” 1955, not pictured)

The final step in baking convenience is for people not to have to bake at all. Bakeries, both in and outside of grocery stores, marketed their wares as modern and timesaving, as well as tasty. The American Bakers Association ran a series of ads in 1950 directed toward housewives who still baked their own cakes and pies.

The format was the same in every ad: at the top, a sketch of a woman baking. From the side comes a dialogue balloon with some advice in it directed at her, from someone offstage, not pictured. This presence is most likely masculine, as the form of address is in the genre of, “Whoa there, lady! Be modern...buy it baked!” (“Baker’s Pie,” 1950, not pictured) or “P-s-s-t! A smart little girl like you ought to buy ’em baked!” (Figure 6.12, “Baker’s Cupcakes,” 1950). Each ad



Figure 6.12: “Baker’s Cupcakes,” 1950.

exhorts women to go enjoy themselves while someone else does their baking for them:

Think of the time it would save you! Think of all the things you'd
rather do than stay home baking cup cakes!

*...modern bakers use the same high quality ingredients you would use;
bake fresh daily with the same care you would take...let your baker do
your baking while you enjoy yourself!* ("Baker's Cupcakes," 1950,
emphases in the original)

Each ad strives to assuage any guilt a woman might feel about buying something ready-made instead of making it herself, while at the same time insinuating that to bake it yourself is rather old-fashioned and a waste of time, as something just as good is available. There is also the odd combination of patronizing forms of address like "little girl" and "lady" coupled with "smart" and "modern." In spite of the woman's smarts or modernity, though, she is still represented as a housewife whose job is her family.

It's a Man Trap

The way to a man's heart may be through his stomach, but keeping his stomach happy once she has won his heart is another problem that advertisers offered women their solutions for. In these ads the food itself is not the inconvenience; the man is. He is picky, stubborn, and conservative, and he has to be forced to eat balanced meals. Yet his approval is the ultimate goal. "Bowl him over, Little Bride," gushes one ad. "...he'll brag about you forever after" ("Bowl Him Over," 1950, not pictured). "Pretend he's company again," exhorts another ("Company," 1970, not pictured), warning women not to get too complacent in their cooking. "Girls, it's a Man Trap" ("Man Trap," 1945, not pictured), announces another ad, confidently promoting ready-to-serve food as "the short cut to a

man's heart."

One ad for canned peas offers a "quick way to make a man's lips smack twice" ("Smack Twice," 1941, not pictured)—once from eating the peas and once from kissing the cook. Pleasing a man is easy if you just open the right can.

An ad for Green Giant corn uses a different tactic (Figure 6.13, "Problem Child," 1941). It poses the question, "is the man in your life a problem child at mealtime?" in a headline next to a sketch of a woman standing with her hands on her hips, watching her husband eat. Beneath him, the copy continues:

Put a man at the table with a napkin on his lap—and often he's quite a problem. What he likes, he likes as often as you give it to him. What he doesn't—he wants never!

If you have this problem, try these two never-miss vegetables on the male animal. ("Problem Child," 1941, emphases in the original)

The man is not only problematic, but it is to be expected; he is a "male animal." His very nature creates the problem. The ad offers three recipes using canned corn, all shown in color photographs. All are guaranteed to be hearty and delicious, sure to please because the corn is "an exclusive breed (D-138)...harvested at the 'fleeting moment' of perfect flavor and tenderness."

In an ad for canned spinach, Del Monte plays on the responsibility women have for



Figure 6.13: "Problem Child," 1941.

man in your life a problem child at mealtime?" in a headline next to a sketch of a woman standing with her hands on her hips, watching her husband eat. Beneath him, the copy continues:

their husbands' health, and how unable men are to take care of themselves:

If you could see most husbands' lunches—you'd realize, more fully than ever, the need for this healthful green in their diet at night!

Crowded restaurants—slow service—heavy foods! Too much talk about business—too little thought of what to eat! The clatter of dishes—the rush of getting back to work! How many men, for lunch at least, consistently get the foods they need? ("Husbands' Lunches," 1930, not pictured)

Thus the wife must feed her husband canned spinach at night, to ensure he gets the "light, fresh diet elements that Nature demands." In addition to being a "health vegetable," Del Monte claims that its canned spinach is "a saver of work," already cooked and ready to serve:

It relieves you of all the tedious bother of washing and preparation—yet brings you all the goodness of the finest fresh spinach at truly economical cost. ("Husbands' Lunches," 1930)

Another ad in a similar vein bears the headline "Meat...and the battle of life" (Figure 6.14). Beneath the headline is a drawing of a woman, eyes raised as if to a higher calling, standing beside, yet one step behind, a man. All we see of him is his shoulder, half an arm, and part of his face and neck. The emphasis is on her and her duty:

There is a woman behind most every man in the Battle of Life. She sends him off in the morning with a pat on his back and welcomes him home each night with a smile on her face.

But more than that she keeps her man in repair. She feeds him. Largely it's up to the woman in his life whether a man feels fit for the Battle of Life. ("Battle of Life," 1940)

Ouch! What a heavy responsibility! But never fear, because meat is just the thing for the job. The ad tells women that men need meat not only for nourishment, but also for the fun of eating "three times a day...the food they like—which is meat." Again, all men are

lumped into one category with an intractable, given nature. The nature of the “male animal” is that he likes meat and has fun eating it, so women must oblige their men by feeding them meat at every meal.

Campbell’s “Manhandler” soups also played on the theme that men are naturally different than women and need heartier foods with more meat in them. Its ads used queries like, “How do you handle a seafood man?”

The manhandlers” (“Seafood Man,” 1970, not

pictured). The same idea was used much earlier though, just to ensure women that men would like canned soup just as much as homemade:

Describing Campbell’s Vegetable-Beef Soup as a “natural” for men is just another way of saying that it is a soup for hale and hearty appetites ...the real old-fashioned vegetable soup with hunger-quelling pieces of meat among its nourishing vegetables...a meal in itself... (“When a Man Says,” 1935, not pictured)

This below a drawing of a distinguished-looking man, smiling as he eats a bowl of soup, with the headline, “When a man says it’s good...it *is* good.” He might be unable to cook it himself, but by golly, he is the authority as to whether it is any good!

Ads for rice also used men’s presumed preference for hearty meals as a foil for their product. One ad for Uncle Ben’s declared that it was “The modern rice...one change any meat-and-gravy man will like” (“One Change,” 1955, not pictured). The ad copy



Figure 6.14: “Battle of Life,” 1940.

commiserates with the woman's dilemma of feeding such a man:

In your heart you know it. You married a meat-and-gravy man who likes substantial meals and cooking. (And your children take after him.)

...How are you going to ring in a change now and then? How are you going to keep him slim and trim without his howling that you're starving him to death? ("One Change," 1955).

Not only is the converted rice "modern," but those who eat it have the distinction of being part of "this new slim, trim generation." A later series of ads for rice run by the Rice Council of America used sexual innuendos and attractive women to sell the idea of rice as versatile, easy, and a nice switch from potatoes. One woman is "ready for anything" ("Ready for Anything," 1970, not pictured); another admits that the "first time" scared her (Figure 6.15). In the latter, the woman gives the camera a confessional look, her fingernail artfully between her teeth, her lips parted. Below her is the headline: "The first time it kind of scared me. Now rice is the thing I do best." The rest of the copy—much smaller—is a chatty discussion of how cooking rice "seems to scare young homemakers." It is as if the woman pictured is a big sister instructing her younger sister about what to expect on her wedding night, except it is about how to cook rice.

In another ad in the series (not pictured), the woman peers provocatively over her shoulder, smiling invitingly.

The headline below her says, "Why not give him a little rice



Figure 6.15: "First Time," 1970.

tonight, instead.” The theme this time is variety:

Sure, he likes potatoes. But not every night. The rice will do him good. It’s more than a change. It’s a hundred changes all in one little carton or package. It’s a chance to freshen up your weekly menu. There are so many ways to cook rice, you could serve it every day for a year and not repeat yourself. Your husband will appreciate that. (“Give Him a Little,” 1970)

The ads equate rice with sex, and the implication is that the things that keep sex interesting could keep food interesting as well—confidence, variety, and anytime-anywhere. If a woman pleases her husband with food, she will also please him in bed. The women in these ads are all represented as savvy, so there is the additional implication that women in the know about cuisine and sex do as they do. Yet another responsibility for the happy homemaker.

Some ads for convenient, man-pleasing food even alluded to the idea that using such foods, easy though it may be, was also a form of cheating. Like the ad for Snider’s in Chapter 3 (Figure 3.8), fooling a man can fit right in with pleasing him, and the food manufacturer, of course, guarantees that you will not get caught. Indeed, the practice of using ready-made foods or a packaged mix without owning up to *not* having made it from scratch was encouraged by manufacturers, as Figure 6.16 shows. In this



Figure 6.16: “Why Bother,” 1970.

ad, a woman stands before her husband in their kitchen as he eats a piece of cake. Behind her back is the box for a Betty Crocker frosting mix; she is looking back over her shoulder a bit guiltily, but also seems to be smirking just a bit. A couple of fingers cover her mouth as if to say “don’t ask, don’t tell.” The copy in the ad is minimal:

When he compliments you on your homemade frosting, why bother him with unnecessary details?

Betty Crocker Frosting Mix has good taste and creamy texture like the best homemade. It’s the mix that doesn’t taste like a mix. And that’s all that’s necessary. (“Why Bother,” 1970)

Even as it implicitly acknowledges the superiority of homemade frostings, the ad tries to convince the reader that a mix can fool a man into thinking it is homemade. The implied deception is belied by the depiction of the woman as a child: the girlish bow in her hair, her yellow gingham dress, and her frilly apron. It is portrayed as a game, and the woman as a mischievous child seeing how much she can get away with.

A Good Brand is Hard to Find

The mother of all convenience is the brand. The Brand Names Foundation, in an ad promoting branded foods declared that, “If it weren’t for brand names, you’d have to be a home economist to choose the food you want” (Figure 6.17, “Good Brand,” 1955). Here the housewife is depicted like a little girl, sitting cross-legged on the floor in a grocery store. Around her are scattered various opened cans, and she is in the process of tasting the contents of the can in her hand. Her lips are pursed as if she is a connoisseur about to make a serious pronouncement about the product. The ad copy explains what is at stake:

You do 70% of your grocery shopping “sight unseen.” The products you buy are in packages, with only the label outside to guide you.

How is it that you don’t have to look inside each package? What makes you so sure you’re getting the quality and flavor you pay for? In fact, what makes you sure about *anything* you buy?

... You know you can depend on a good brand. And so, when you pick one you know you’re *right*. (“Good Brand,” 1955, emphasizes in the original)

Here again is the offer to let someone else do your thinking for you; in this case, leave it to the maker of a brand to select and prepare the best foods. “A good brand is your best guarantee,” the ad assures, exhorting women to “cut down on buying mistakes, get more for your shopping money” by getting to know brands “in the pages of this magazine,” as if all the ads for various brands are true.

While more than canned goods are sold as brands, I am going to cover only canned items in this section. This is because canned products were among the first to be branded, and also because much of canned food consists of fruits and vegetables, products simple and relatively unadorned. The interesting thing about them is that since so many of the brands offer the same thing, the ads attempt to differentiate them by which is the most fresh, natural, flavorful, and firm—in other words, which product is closest to the fresh product. Ads are full of pictures of lush red tomatoes, peas like green pearls, and crisp kernels of yellow corn. The emphasis is on how carefully the crop is grown and tended,



If it weren't for brand names
You'd have to be a
home economist to choose
the food you want

You do 70% of your grocery shopping “sight unseen.” The products you buy are in packages, with only the label outside to guide you.

How is it that you don't have to look inside each package? What makes you so sure you're getting the quality and flavor you pay for? In fact, what makes you sure about *anything* you buy?

Isn't the answer simply that you've learned the basic rule of safe and sound buying:

A good brand
is your best guarantee

No matter what you want to buy, you know manufacturers stand back of good brands because they have so much at stake. You know you can depend on a good brand. And so, when you pick one you know you're right.

The more good brands you know, the surer you are. Get to know them in the pages of this magazine. They can help you cut down on buying mistakes, get more for your shopping money.

BRAND NAMES FOUNDATION
A Non-Profit Educational Foundation
37 West 57th St., New York 19, N. Y.

A GOOD BRAND IS YOUR BEST GUARANTEE

Figure 6.17: “Good Brand,” 1955.

when it is harvested (at the “peak of flavor,” of course), and that the crops are specially bred for the ultimate product. There is the attempt to convince buyers that the canned product is equivalent to or better than the fresh, that the manufacturer is doing something special to make it so. Convenience is important, but it is not paramount; every canned product offers the same convenience. The paradox inherent is that fresh fruits and vegetables are held up as the standard toward which the canners strive, yet at the same time it is denigrated by the application of the word “fresh” to canned products.



Figure 6.18: “Finest Corn,” 1950.

For example, Stokely’s used the word “finest” on all its labels, and its ads described a company whose products were exactly what “you’d choose if you did the picking” (“Finest Peaches,” 1950, not pictured). In a series run in 1950, various canned fruits and vegetables were marketed in a similar format. Against a background of the fresh product, the open can is set to make the correlation clear. In Figure 6.18 (“Finest Corn,” 1950), the headline above it all is, “Those Stokely folks are as ‘choosey’ as a woman,” a kind of back-handed compliment, as the text continues:

Only the finest will do. Only the very tenderest corn...with every gold kernel plump and sweet. That’s what you’d choose....

It’s really *fresh*, too! For Stokely rushes it from field to can like real corn lovers rush it from garden to kitchen. You get the finest of corn... at its very finest. (“Finest Corn,” 1950)

The note of authority comes from a “well known” corn grower who is pictured below

the text. He says he has been growing corn for 40 years and that every year, “the finest corn I grow goes to Stokely.” If that is not enough, another headline at the bottom of the ad claims that “the best cooks use Stokely’s finest foods.”

In keeping with the “freshest” and “finest” theme, later ads for Stokely’s equated color with flavor. “Color is nature’s way of saying flavor/Stokely is your way of getting it” (“Peak Flavor,” 1965, not pictured), says one ad. “So good you can taste it with your eyes” (“So Good,” 1970, not pictured), declaims another.

The grand finale, however, is a four-page spread, three pages of which are various canned fruits and vegetables drawn in the foreground of an idyllic depiction of an American family farm (Figure 6.19, “Taste the Difference,” 1965). Each can has the fresh equivalent of its contents perched on top of it, drops of dew still glistening on them to indicate their freshness. “Taste the difference perfect color makes!” shouts the headline on the opening page.

The drawing is saturated with a golden glow, as if the sun is just rising on this peaceful scene. The juxtaposition of the cans in front of the freshly plowed field of rich dark earth, a field of tall, tassled corn, and the prosperous-looking white farmstead in the background encourages the consumer to associate the food with the scene, and believe that this is where the food in those cans comes from. Behind the farmstead rise gentle hills, the outlines of contoured rows of crops just visible upon them; in the hollows are more farmhouses. The copy in this ad is minimal; the picture says it all.

Green Giant took a slightly different tack, inventing the “land of the Green Giant” and emphasizing its “exclusive” varieties that were “packed at the fleeting moment of

Look for Stokely's fruits and vegetables in these bright new Color-Guide Labels.



STOKELY'S PEAK FLAVOR VALUES

Taste the difference perfect color makes!

Stokely picks and packs the finest fruits and vegetables at their peak of color—to make sure you enjoy peak flavor every time.




Figure 6.19, "Taste the Difference," 1965.

Color is Nature's way of saying flavor. Stokely is your way of getting it.

perfect flavor” (“Without the Cob,” 1950, Figure 6.20). With corn, its main theme was the “fresh-shucked flavor, color, and nourishment” (“Fresh Shucked,” 1960, not pictured) minus any of the work:

We’ve grown the corn, done the work, taken away the cobs and left for you just a big, sweet canful of “corn-on-the-cob without the cob.

Not just corn, either, but the Green Giant’s famous variety grown from exclusive kind of seed (our own D-138), picked at the fleeting moment of perfect flavor, then sealed in vacuum to hold that field-fresh flavor till you open, heat, serve and eat. (“Tender Kernels,” 1947)

Figure 6.20 illustrates this with the faces of two wholesome-looking boys, one eating corn on the cob, the other, a forkful of kernels. They are almost the same boy, except one is wearing a simple plaid shirt and his hair is dry; the other wears a suit and tie, and his hair is slicked down and shiny. Of course, the plaid shirt has the corn on the cob, while the suit has the fork. The image of the boy in the suit is brighter, as if the other boy is the shadow of his former self, as the corn on the cob is the shadow of its new canned self.

Above their heads is the headline, “Corn on the cob...without the cob!” The ad copy is much the same as that above, except that now it also emphasizes that seasonality is no longer important “to bring you roastin’-ear goodness in corn-off-the-cob any time of year.” Rather than emphasizing a weight or measurement, small sketch below the copy



Figure 6.20: “Without the Cob,” 1950.

shows that one can of corn is equal to four ears of fresh corn.

With peas, sweetness and freshness are again the keys, with another “unique breed (S-537)” referred to (Figure 6.21). In a 1935 ad, details of the “entirely new breed—a new super-variety, not just another brand” (“De Luxe,” 1935, not pictured) are offered:

...here's the outstanding difference between Green Giants and “just peas”—they grow big—young. In other words, though they're tender, sweet babies in age, they're big juicy, succulent fellows in size. They don't just happen to grow that way. They are scientifically developed that way. By combining all the best features of the finest pea strains of England, France, Belgium, Holland, and New Zealand, they became an entirely new breed—bigger, sweeter, more distinctive in flavor. (“De Luxe,” 1935)

There are once again shades of cannibalism in the personification of the peas as “babies” and “fellows.” In another ad, however, (Figure 6.21), Green Giant peas are equated with jewels beneath the headline “If pearls came in pods they would be Green Giant peas.” The large photograph shows a woman's hands, one hand holding a necklace of pearls, the other, two pea pods bursting with ripe peas. A couple peas are even dropping into the bowl below, which is full of peas looking for all the world like green pearls. It gives the sense that these are the finest peas, worthy of the choosiest diner, and the headline in a text box confirms that



Figure 6.21: “Pearls,” 1940.

notion: “Grown for America’s best tables.” Glamour and jewels are referenced again, when the copy compares the peas to a Hollywood star. The text elaborates further, and reassures those who may not be able to afford pearls:

Here are peas for people who appreciate the finer things of life—whether it’s pearls or peas or motor cars—*yet they cost very little more than ordinary peas.*

The unique breed (S-537), from which Green Giant Brand Peas are packed, was a discovery—almost like a Hollywood star.

Among various other breeds in our experimental gardens, we found this unheard of variety which grew to larger size while still very young and deliciously tender. (“Pearls,” 1940)

These peas are glamorous stars, something any family would want to have to dinner!

Green Giant ads for peas also played on the seasonal flavor all year around theme with phrases like “serve them tonight—and dream you’re knee-deep in June” (Midsummer Dream,” 1950, not pictured).

Instead of discussing particular varieties or special breeds, Del Monte’s ads speak of “over 10,000 hybrids” in the search for the best strains of vegetables. Figure 6.22 is a typical example; one text box has the headline “we put extra care here,” with a finger pointing at a row of raw corn on the cob, while the other text box has the headline, “you get extra flavor here,” with fingers pointing to plates of food that include corn.



Figure 6.22: “Extra Care,” 1947.

The extra care is all about “breeding a distinct and different character of kernel into Del Monte Brand Corn.” The copy sets up the brand:

...this search for a better product never ends. *Flavor is our responsibility*—to you and to our brand. We know every bit of extra care we take means greater enjoyment for you. (“Extra Care,” 1947, emphasis in the original)

Later ads refer to the corn simply as “born to be better corn...grown from special seed we developed ourselves to give you sweeter flavor and extra-tender kernels” (“Born to be Better,” 1955, not pictured). Rather than saying that they’re all looking for the varieties that hold their shape and flavor the best through the canning process, the breeding process is masked as a search for flavor. It is really a search for flavor and texture within the pressures and constraints of the canning process.

Del Monte used the same “extra care/extra flavor” combination with its ads for peas (see Figure 6.23), but contrary to Green Giant’s emphasis on the consistent sizes of its peas, Del Monte chose to claim mixed sizes as the key to natural-tasting peas. To the left of the headline, “How come these peas taste so natural?” a wife serves her husband at dinner. Beneath a picture of a big bowl of peas, the copy continues:

Why shouldn’t they?—with that subtle blending of flavors you get only from mixed sizes—just the way you pick peas fresh from the garden!

...Look at the *size* of these peas. No little tasteless immature ones. No big starchy ones, either. But *all* the rest of them—all the other in-between sizes—packed together. The very peas you’d select if you had a pea-patch of your own to pick from.

As for *flavor*—isn’t it just common sense that peas packed the way they grow, different sizes combined, will taste more *natural*? Notice how the sweetness and delicacy of the smaller sizes balances the more mature character of the others.

And if you think you can taste morning dew, credit that to Del Monte's quick packing! ("Taste so Natural," 1940, emphases in the original)

There are a couple things that are interesting about this copy. First, the flattering (to readers) assumption that they know how peas grow, have a discriminating sense of the right size of peas, and would pick the best if they had their own garden. Second, the emphasis on "natural" as the gold standard in flavor, and the nod to nature as the best designer of how peas should grow for the best flavor. Yet somehow it is all right to breed the seed to be better for Del Monte's purposes; nature is not the master there, as another ad indicates:

Del Monte peas are peas at their finest—the best peas it is possible to grow or pack. Even the seed is specially selected—grown from our own strains on our own experimental farms. ("Serve Them Often," 1930, not pictured)

Del Monte also used cartoon strips to promote its brands; in Figure 6.23, the woman is given a name, Sarah, and interacts with her mother and her grocer in a cartoon, all in the quest to assure that her grocer will carry Del Monte canned goods. Her mother tells her that the secret to smart shopping is finding a brand she can depend on, and then "making sure you get it." The grocer says it is a pleasure to sell Del Monte, because he does not have to carry other brands: "That saves both of us time and money," he tells her.



Figure 6.23: "Taste so Natural," 1940.

In Figure 6.24, Minute Maid employed a more direct tactic in its ads that introduced its new frozen orange juice in 1965. Under a bold headline stating, “The Minute Maid company humbly announces we’ve improved on the orange,” there is a picture of an orange, and a picture of a can of Minute Maid orange juice. Beneath the orange is a list of its characteristics:

The old form. No fruit can touch it for nutrition and flavor. But it does squash easily, won’t keep forever, and frankly, it tends to roll.
 (“Improved Orange,” 1965)

Under the can of juice is a much longer list, beginning with, “The new form. New Minute Maid... doesn’t squash, keeps beautifully.” The rolling problem is not addressed; the rest of the copy describes how much more of the “essence of fresh orange flavor” is captured in the new concentrate. Minute Maid’s “secret new process” gives customers “up to 91% of the natural flavor.” Again, the “natural” flavor is the goal, but the natural form is imperfect. Rather than relying on the orange to get the essence of the orange, we should rely on Minute Maid’s “improvement.”

Another transformation of perfect natural goodness into a canned and branded improvement, the classic transition from the raw to the cooked, is found in Campbell’s soup ads, especially those for tomato and



Figure 6.24: “Improved Orange,” 1965.

other vegetable soups. A mass of fresh vegetables often served as a background, as in Figure 6.25, where fresh peas surround a bowl of green pea soup. The copy evokes the season and the taste of fresh peas:

Every delicious sip speaks of June gardens basking under the sun...of green vines heavy with full-to-bursting pods...of peas young and tender and fairly begging to be eaten. You'll enjoy the taste of peas like these... ("Better Than Ever," 1947)

I might be wrong, but I think most pea soups are made from dried split green peas; fresh peas are too good to waste on soup! The reason pea soup exists is as a way to use the dried peas. This is consistent with other ads, though; none of them show the vegetables that actually get canned, they all show the finest specimens possible to give the impression that these are the ones that go into the can.

Another example of this is Figure 6.26 (pg. 198), my favorite ad for tomato soup. The background is an agricultural valley with rows of tomato plants. People are picking in the vines and a truck loaded with tomatoes is on the road. Winding its way up out of the fields is a plume of beautiful fresh tomatoes, starting small and culminating in the enormous open half of a juicy and perfect tomato. From its center emerges the triumphant red and white can of Campbell's tomato soup, the red matching that of the



Figure 6.25: "Better Than Ever," 1947.

tomatoes, and the round shape of the can duplicating the roundness of the open half of the tomato. The illusion that the fine tomatoes are even bigger than the can of soup, big enough to give birth to it, as it were, makes the association that this soup comes right from the heart of the tomatoes. The tomatoes have been cooked, transformed by culture into “the soup you want most often.” The soup is the tomato and the tomato is the soup.

The ad copy further the equation by emphasizing the color:

Here’s Nature’s own challenge to your eye and your appetite. What brave and brilliant color! What a promise of refreshing flavor! All of this rich tomato goodness is in Campbell’s Tomato Soup—that sparkling blend of the pure tomato juices and luscious tomato “meat,” enriched with golden creamery butter. It’s simply irresistible. (“Nature’s Challenge,” 1930)

In the beginning, it is not clear whether the copy is discussing the tomato or the can of soup, which is exactly the intention. The two are equated as one and the same, and the consumer is spared having to consider which tomato soup is best.



The ads in this chapter have followed the trend of applying the terms of industrial production to food: efficiency, speed, and consistency. As in the other chapters, no one



Figure 6.26: “Nature’s Challenge,” 1930.

really wants to say that though, regardless of how wonderful the public is told these qualities are in manufacturing things like cars. Thus advertisers frame these qualities as ways for a woman to keep her hands prettier, have more free time, maintain a reputation, keep her husband and children happy, and take a load off her mind in thinking about food choices. As such, the narrative of nature that underlies them is that of nature as a lifestyle problem, a hassle better left to food manufacturers to confront.

The dangers inherent in food preparation can be ignored because we are assured that ours is the safest food supply in the world. Science and technology will produce the best and safest food, so the consumer can enjoy personal freedom, a release from the drudgery of having to buy and prepare food. The “built-in maid,” of convenience is what people deserve; we are worth it, and our needs, as defined by others, take precedence. All of these products offer endless improvements upon raw nature, which is, after all, a pain in the ass to deal with. It can, however, be reduced to an easily solved problem that no longer requires thought or energy on the part of the consumer.

Convenience has made its mark in other ways related to food. Disposable dishes and packaging, microwavable soups and cereals, and pre-seasoned and pre-marinated meats are all common products now. In tandem with branded staples rose chain grocery stores, themselves “branded.” From small general stores where staples such as flour and sugar were purchased and a grocer behind a counter waited on customers, stores slowly grew bigger and their inventory more varied. The grocer disappeared and was replaced with a manager, a shopping cart, and a self-service environment.

The services offered at grocery stores are ever-increasing, all in the name of

convenience. Today it is not uncommon for a grocery store to include a bank, a deli, a drugstore, a floral shop, a bakery, a butcher shop, a coffee shop, and a film processing counter. At the same time, customers have taken on more duties. They must push a cart through miles of aisles in search of the products they desire, dodging displays and other shoppers. At the photo counter, they feed a disk into a machine and make their prints on the spot, adjusting the color and cropping themselves. The latest trend is the self-service checkout, also billed as a convenience. One person's convenience is another's drudgery.

Beyond the supermarket, the god of convenience is evident all over the American landscape. Automobiles, fast food restaurants, drive-through banks and liquor stores, and abundant roadside trash, Everyman's means of being a capitalist (socialize your costs, individualize your profits), are emblematic of its status. It is irresistible, and will be used to sell food, as well as many other things, in the foreseeable future.

Chapter 7: Shadows on the Wall

In one of his most famous passages in *The Republic*, Plato depicts mankind as prisoners in a cave, sitting entranced by the play of light and shadow on the wall in front of them. Behind them is a fire and a stage of sorts, where others move objects in and out of the firelight, creating the shadowed display on the wall in front. Further beyond that is the actual cave opening and the bright light of the world above, the “world of the mind” to which the soul may ascend. Yet this ascension is seldom made; the bright light of reality hurts the eyes of those accustomed to shadows, and confusion is the result of any encounter with the external world. After describing the scenario, Plato tells Glaucon: “If so...such persons would certainly believe that there were no realities except those shadows of handmade things” (Rouse 1956, 312-13).

I relate this allegory because this dissertation has told a story about advertising, a handmade thing that offers us its own shadows to construe as reality. In today’s world, advertising provides much of the dance of light and shadows on the wall of our cave. It captures our attention and draws us away from specific realities, especially the social, political, and environmental realities behind the products advertised. Those who create ads are largely invisible to us, yet their products, the ads, are ubiquitous, appearing in more and more spaces, both public and private.

This work also entails a story of food, another ubiquitous element in our lives. Rather than a creator of shadows, however, food is a reality that lends itself to construction by the shadow-makers. Food is seldom just food; it has throughout human history embodied religious, social, and cultural meanings. It is perhaps our closest link to the natural world;

every time we eat, a part of the natural world becomes part of our very being. Thus food and what food means straddles the borderline between nature and society, opening a window into how society views nature and the concept of the natural.

Because of that positioning, I started this project with the aim of seeing which meanings are constructed in food advertising and how nature was represented through those meanings. What I found were four consistent themes over a 55-year period—memory, place, health, and convenience—though these are not by any means the only themes in food advertising. Each of these themes embodies different narratives of nature. These narratives include nature as an idyllic past, nature as a paradise or pastoral setting, fresh and untouched, nature as both a good raw material and a dangerous threat, and nature as a lifestyle problem.

I have also tried to show how these themes, and their corresponding narratives of nature, are also replicated in the larger American culture. My point is that they are not isolated in advertising, but exist within the larger culture, which gives them the resonance that makes them attractive advertising themes in the first place. This resonance has continued even as the dissonance between the world of food portrayed in advertising and the realities of the contemporary industrial food system has increased. It is almost as if the further we move away from that world, the more idyllic representations of it are used to sell industrial goods.

The ads I studied that use memory seem quaint in the face of today's nostalgia for industrial products. In an age of "overnight classics," it no longer takes centuries for foods to claim a place in mass memory. We have "classic" cola, "old-fashioned" potato

chips and hamburgers, and “traditional” fast food pizza. The “all-American” meal has been redefined by McDonald’s as burgers and fries, and making a cake from “scratch” means using a mix, rather than buying one ready made. Applebee’s, a national restaurant chain, advertises itself as a “neighborhood” place (even though it is often located on interstate access roads), while more and more restaurants offer to do what used to be done at home or in church: children’s birthday parties, wedding receptions, and Thanksgiving or Christmas dinners. Tradition itself is being outsourced.

Even on the production end, genetic engineering is defended as the continuation of “traditional” crop breeding methods, no different from hybridization. Industrial methods of farming are considered tried and true, while organic farming is suspect, considered “alternative” and unproven. The traditional, or “natural,” is often given greater weight and authority by virtue of its supposed longevity and inevitability.

Place is still a theme in food marketing, but it has become important for different reasons. With the rampant food scares today, the geographical place of origin has become a code word for safety or danger. US beef was, for a long time, considered free of bovine spongiform encephalitis (BSE), while British beef still bears the stigma of Great Britain’s BSE crisis of the late 1990s. *E coli* bacteria have turned up on green onions and lettuce from Mexico, as producers in California are quick to point out. Many Europeans do not want anything to do with US genetically modified soy beans or corn.

In this global food system, the trust between producers and consumers is fragile. In the US, food travels an average of 1,300 miles before it reaches an American plate. Although the US has been the top food producer in the world for decades, the USDA

predicts that it will become a net importer of food by 2010, and Brazil will assume the role as the major food producer (Mark 2005). The lack of knowledge about where food is grown, the conditions under which it was produced, and the desire to support American farmers have all stimulated consumer interest in “country of origin” labeling. The 2002 Farm Bill requires the USDA to identify where all imported food comes from, but like many such initiatives, agribusiness interests have fought it, managing to delay implementation by trying to make the requirement voluntary.

An emphasis on place has also become a way to preserve regional or national identity in a globalizing world. The creation of national cuisines, regional specialty foods, and the growth of local farmer’s markets are all manifestations of the desires of a growing number of consumers to support local economies and food production which contribute to a sense of identity with a particular place. It is also representative of widespread interest and concern in food and its production.

Health is a big part of that concern. As more and more people have learned the realities of industrial food production, sales of organic foods have increased annually, while conventional sales have stagnated. When creating the national organic standard in the late 1990s, the USDA was deluged with protests from citizens when its initial draft allowed organically grown genetically engineered crops to be certified as organic.

This protest is indicative of another shift in consumer priorities. Science and technology were, at one time, what kept food safe. Now the concerns operate from the other perspective, with science and its resulting technologies being suspect, as well as the companies that manufacture foods using them. Somewhere along the way, the equation

changed from “manmade, good; nature, bad” to “nature, good; manmade, bad.” Instead of facing these concerns head-on, the food industry has relied on its lobbying power to avoid telling consumers where food came from or whether it is genetically engineered. I have always thought that if things like genetic engineering or food irradiation are so wonderful, the food industry ought to promote the products thereby produced on that basis, instead of fighting against labeling laws.

Health has become such an important marketing tool that even fast food restaurants are making claims as to the healthfulness of their offerings, and many candies bear labels advertising the lack of fat or carbohydrates in the candy. There is continued evidence of new nutritional knowledge, like the existence of antioxidants and trans-fats, being employed to market foods, while new “favorite” ailments like stress and cancer have replaced nervousness and digestion as the problems that a food eases or prevents. The old standbys like fatigue, vitality, and obesity are also still in use.

Health is big business overall, yet it is considered an individual issue, which makes it perfect for food advertising. The concept of public health is ignored altogether; health and wellness are seen as choices people make. Thus gyms, spas, dieting groups, and books on health proliferate even as the government scales back the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act, citizens vote down proposals for bike trails, pedestrian malls, and public transit, and we continue to rely on a food system that dumps tons of pesticides, herbicides, and synthetic fertilizers into our air, water, and food every year. We Americans seem to believe that the individual will to health can triumph over living in a society that does not value the health of its citizenry if it interferes with making money. In fact, many

enterprises depend entirely on an unhealthy populace to continue making a profit, including the medical establishment, health insurance and pharmaceutical companies, and the entire dieting industry. Health is another commodity largely available only to those who can afford to pay for it.

Like health, convenience is a theme that incorporates new knowledge, in this case, technological. Things like microwave ovens and better preservatives have contributed to foods that keep longer and can be prepared more quickly. Health and convenience are also often combined; the new category of functional foods is a case in point. These foods are created to act as edible multi-vitamins or even as prescription drugs. To me it represents the concession of the food industry to the unwillingness of consumers to give up the pleasures of eating. Instead of futuristic tablets that supply everything, the food industry is creating individual foods that do the same.

Yet the real growth in the convenience realm has been in consumers eating food outside of the home. Today, nearly half of all national food expenditures are spent on meals prepared in restaurants and other institutions (Nestle 2003). According to Eric Schlosser (2001), Americans spent more than \$110 billion on fast food alone in 2000. This is an indication that even the poorest members of society are eating out; one of the appeals of fast food is that it is cheap. But even the more affluent, who can afford organic produce and free-range meat, are eating out more often. I remember reading a recent article about the trend of building houses without kitchens, because so many people no longer do any actual cooking at home. Which brings us back, ironically, to memory, and the idea of “home cooking” that is used to advertise food and restaurants. The food

industry wants to sell us home cooking, but it does not want us to actually do it.

Thus the four advertising themes I discussed still resonate today. Advertising reflects larger cultural trends, and constitutes a largely untapped wealth of materials for cultural studies. There are many challenges facing the researcher who chooses to analyze ads, including a bit of a prejudice against the idea of advertising as a meaningful area of study. Even as I myself was intrigued by the ads I selected, there was part of me that said, “they are just ads.” It is difficult to overcome dueling thoughts; I would look at the ads and be certain that there was plenty to unpack from them, yet it all seemed so obvious. Of course ads paint pretty pictures. Of course they do not show farm workers being sprayed with pesticides or have a scratch ‘n’ sniff smell for a hog farm. Of course advertisers try to appeal to things that make people feel good.

It is when you consider those very obvious things, however, that it gets interesting. Ads show us just how commercial interests view people and what makes them feel good, and, by extension, social relations and cultural meanings. By analyzing ads, by paying attention to what we often ignore, we can notice what exactly is put in, what is left out, and how it is arranged. We can interpret the meanings in the ad that lie beneath the transparent goal of selling us something.

Nothing as pervasive as advertising should go unexamined. I hope that this study will inspire others to take advertising seriously and do their own studies into the meanings and messages advertising reinforces and perpetuates.

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Appendix A

Content Analysis Coding

Theme/Codes	<i>Total Scanned</i>	<i>Initial Selection</i>	<i>Final Selection</i>
<i>Memory:</i>	202	104	51
Ages		7	2
America/n		63	20
Centuries/years		21	7
Childhood/children		49	15
Country/rural		43	12
Days gone by		1	1
Elderly people		11	6
Family		7	4
Farms		23	6
Feasts		10	4
Fires		2	2
Fresh produce		25	8
Garden(s)		15	4
Grandmother		15	4
Heritage		27	11
History/historical		12	7
Homemade/home		35	17
Memory		12	3
Native American		9	5
Natural		22	13

Theme/Codes	<i>Total Scanned</i>	<i>Initial Selection</i>	<i>Final Selection</i>
Old-fashioned		31	12
Remember		10	3
Spirit		5	5
Taste		1	1
Traditional		18	8
Treasured		7	3
<i>Place:</i>	168	127	67
California		25	18
Cityscapes		12	5
Exotic		6	2
Farms		16	10
Glamorous		13	3
Hawaii		21	9
Historical place		15	10
Islands		10	7
Landscapes		17	10
Maps		13	6
Nature		15	8
Orchards		3	2
Place adjectives		19	5
Place names		52	36
Physical features		18	10
Regional foods		31	21
Rivers		7	4

Theme/Codes	<i>Total Scanned</i>	<i>Initial Selection</i>	<i>Final Selection</i>
Romance		8	3
Soils		7	5
Sunshine		37	20
Tropics		9	3
Valley		5	4
World		4	4
<i>Health:</i>	406	230	101
Add years		5	2
Beneficial		9	3
Body building		36	21
Carbohydrates		37	17
Children		49	26
Clean		13	6
Colds		21	6
Constipation		16	5
Diet		15	10
Digestible		30	19
Elements		29	16
Energy, vigor		47	24
Enriched		16	6
Family		21	9
Fatigue		28	12
Fortified		21	9
Germes		14	5

Theme/Codes	<i>Total Scanned</i>	<i>Initial Selection</i>	<i>Final Selection</i>
Health		25	16
Ills		11	2
Iron		13	12
Minerals		31	21
Mothers		24	13
Natural		27	12
Nature's own...		21	10
Nervousness		15	5
Nourishment		14	9
Nutrition		20	14
Protection		21	15
Protein		33	20
Pure		6	4
Safe		15	11
Strength		10	8
Vitamins		67	41
<i>Convenience:</i>	456	235	105
Brand		71	38
Breed, bred		34	16
Choosey		8	5
Consistent		21	13
Convenient		6	2
Clock(s)		2	1
Colorful		7	7

Theme/Codes	<i>Total Scanned</i>	<i>Initial Selection</i>	<i>Final Selection</i>
Dependable		17	11
Drudgery		3	1
Easy		57	30
Family		9	2
Fast		34	19
Flavor		41	26
Fresh		43	29
Guarantee		4	2
Instant		9	2
Kitchen tested		12	2
Man, husband		21	18
Mess		5	3
Minutes		10	7
Modern		30	22
Natural		25	22
New		10	8
Problem		13	8
Relax		7	5
Special variety		12	5
Tempting		10	8
Time/work saver		39	27
<i>Other Themes</i>	169	26	2
Economical			
Fun, thrills			

Theme/Codes	<i>Total Scanned</i>	<i>Initial Selection</i>	<i>Final Selection</i>
Lenten foods			
Status			
War shortages			