Article

Grilling Meataphors: Impossible™ Foods and Posthumanism in the Meat Aisle

Paul Muhlhauser [1,*], Marie Drews [2] and Rachel Reitz [1]

[1] English Department, McDaniel College, Westminster, MD 21157, USA; rar011@mcdaniel.edu
[2] English Department, Luther College, Decorah, IA 52101, USA; drewsmar@luther.edu
* Correspondence: pmuhlhauser@mcdaniel.edu

Abstract: There has always been a posthuman aspect to the processing and consumption of animal-based meats, especially as cuts of meat are distanced from the animals supplying them, thus turning the animals themselves into information more so than bodies. Plant-based meat has doubled down on its employment of posthuman rhetoric, to become what the authors suggest are meataphors, or the articulation of meat as a pattern of information mapped onto a substrate in a way that is *not* exclusively linguistic. Impossible™ Foods's meats, in particular, can be considered meataphors that participate in a larger symbolic and capitalistic endeavor to stake a claim in the animal-based meat market using more traditional advertising strategies; however, Impossible™ Foods's meats are also, more implicitly, making posthuman moves in their persuasive efforts, rhetorically shifting both the meaning of meat and what it means to choose between animal-based and plant-based meats, in a way that parallels posthumanism's emphasis on information. Impossible™ Foods, through their persuasive practices, has generated a new narrative of what sustains bodies, beyond the spatially significant juxtapositions with animal-based meats. Impossible™ Foods takes on the story of meat and remediates it for audiences through their semiotic practices, thus showing how the company employs a posthumanist approach to meat production and consumption.

Keywords: meat; rhetoric; plant-based meat; posthumanism; sustainability; Impossible™ Foods; metaphor

1. Introduction

Posthumanism is pretty easy to locate in pop culture. A sustainable theme in the humanities, film and television narratives have regularly relied on posthumanism as a trope for the last three decades: *The Matrix, Avatar, Blade Runner 2049*, HBO's *Westworld*, and Netflix's *Black Mirror*, to name a few. In scholarship, look no further than Hassan (1977); Hayles (1999); Haraway (2003); Wolfe (2010), who have been theorizing posthumanism's meaning and ramifications, sustaining the theory and critically analyzing posthuman cultural shifts. As a through line, their works examine changing ideas about how we understand bodies and how information is the essential or privileged way to describe life: bodies are *just* substrates—they are meat in meatspace, to reference useful, late-20th-century lingo for the physical world (OED Online, 3d ed., s.v. "meatspace"; see also, Barlow 1995; see Gibson 1984 for reference to the body as "meat"), and bodies just happen to carry information for life (LaGrandeur 2014).

Imagine our surprise when we experienced this important facet of posthumanity in a very unlikely and *in-humanities* place: the Wegmans's Grocery Store meat aisle. There, among the chuck and the pre-formed patties, were packages of the plant-based meats almost masquerading as the real thing. Instead of being dichotomized from "authentic" animal-based meat and regulated to a separate, less conspicuous, side-facing aisle, Impossible™ Foods's plant-based ground meat was juxtaposed with *It's What's for Dinner* beef. Meats (both animal and plant-based) were coterminous, where animal meat alone was no

longer the exclusive fare with which to satiate carnivorous appetites. Rather, the dominant protein in American culture, of sustaining meatspace bodies, was being rhetorically challenged.

Wegmans's meat section implemented a posthuman rhetorical move indicating a significant shift in the animal-based and plant-based conflict. The spatial arrangement argues what meat can be: a substrate carrying information. As simply a substrate, meat need not be authentically animal-based. Here, meat may not be digitized, per se, but it has become something else, a packet of information that has made its way into popular culture eating habits. In our current techno-cultural moment, where remediation (Bolter and Grusin 1999) is ubiquitous (i.e., communication media from the past and present borrows, remixes, and re-fashions each other), the remediating of other, non-digital or cybernetic practices is often overlooked. Posthumanism in the meat aisle is a revealing turn in the narrative of meat, of sustainability in an animal-based meat-eating culture, and a challenge to the hegemonic humanism connected to one's caloric intake: to eating particular media (meatia). And, when considering how animal-based meat is becoming even more informational (e.g., the coming cell-based meat revolution), where meat comes in bits and bytes and is cultured and grown away from animal bodies, using posthuman and digital theoretical perspectives allows for interrogation of the semiotic constellations of current animal-based and plant-based meat narratives.

Explicitly, Impossible™ meats can be considered meataphors participating a larger capitalistic endeavor to stake a claim in the animal-based meat market using more traditional advertising strategies; however, Impossible™ meats are also, more implicitly, making posthuman moves in their persuasive efforts, rhetorically shifting the meaning of meat, a shift echoing posthumanism's informational emphasis. Impossible™ meats has generated a new narrative of what sustains bodies through their persuasive practices, beyond the spatially significant juxtapositions with animal-based meats. There has always been a posthuman aspect to animal-based meats, to distancing cuts of meat from the animals supplying them and turning them more into information than bodies; that posthuman idea, though, and its expression is being filtered into new places, like the meat aisle. Such a meataphorical move shifts how audiences experience meat—namely, what meat means—thus, making animal-based meat-eating a different kind of ethical choice. Impossible™ Foods, surprisingly, focuses almost exclusively on the ethics of sustainability rather than animal welfare, making it more difficult to continue practicing animal-based agricultural practices. In understanding Impossible™ Food's takes on the story of meat, remediating it for audiences through their semiotic practices, we can better see how posthumanism is mapped onto the food, cultivating it into a quasi-digital realm.

2. Ingesting Real Symbols and Digesting What's Been Said before

Plant-based meat is a uniquely real image; it is a metaphor in how it poses for something else and yet is at the same time something itself. Of course, all metaphors can be considered both real and symbolic simultaneously: words are real in the more denotative sense that they are uttered aloud—are physical sounds, sonic materials. Words are connotative in having more cultural meanings. Most often metaphors are observed in linguistic and visual texts: "Take the bull by the horns," or a visual image of one performing such an act, means take charge of a difficult situation. Metaphors, however, encompass a range of communication modes. They can be aural: think recordings of music. They can be tactile: think how vinyl stands for leather. Metaphors can also be olfactory and gustatory. They are related to the senses of smell and taste: think perfume for a rose, a jelly bean that tastes like popcorn. And, to use the term meataphor, as we do, rather than sign, is to focus on a key aspect of metaphors, what might be called the Lakoff-Johnson Key Concept: Metaphors offer individuals a way or ways to understand or perceive certain things because of the comparative way they know of or experience other things. Both conceptual and heuristic, metaphor is at the root of "the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 3). Metaphors operate by foregrounding certain facets

of a comparative concept or way of thinking, while simultaneously backgrounding other facets that appear "inconsistent" with the comparison the metaphor is being employed to achieve (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 10). And, for us, metaphors are too locked into being linguistic and/or virtual rather than "real" and in meatspace.

Of course, we are not the first to write critically about how metaphor has been a primary tool to translate non-animal-based meats to a meat-familiar public. Broad (2020), in an insightful analysis of the conceptual metaphors guiding how plant-based meat is *linguistically* constructed, provides important insight into such foregrounding and backgrounding. Broad argues that two dominant metaphors drive how audiences imagine non-animal-based meats: (1) Meat is made. (2) "The market" creates space for alternative meats. The former foregrounds processes of construction/manufacturing. The latter "places an emphasis on innovation, capital investment, and insights from behavioral economics and marketing as the primary agents for catalyzing food system change" (Broad 2020, p. 921). In her recent cultural history of the burger, Adams (2018, p. 212), too, is immediately struck by how the metaphors used in the discourse of meat alternatives "evoke the ambitious, aspirational, and transformational nature of plant-based meat technologies."

Plant-based meat, though, is a metaphorically complicated conceptual food in that it is visually, tactically, olfactory, and aurally like its antecedent: animal-based meat. Considering plant-based meats as multimodal, meatspace metaphors extends how they are being imagined and experienced as part of Broad's observations. For us, a meataphor is an appropriate term for plant-based meat as a dynamic and multifaceted metaphor and points towards a conceptual shift of meat into the posthuman realm, or into Castells's (Castells 2000) notion of a culture of "real virtuality." Castells writes: "by real virtuality I mean a system in which reality itself (that is, people's ma-terial/symbolic existence) is fully immersed in a virtual image setting, in the world of make believe, in which symbols are not just metaphors, but comprise the actual experience" (p. 373). For Castells, augmented and virtual reality systems turn into real virtual systems in which there is a cultural shift from seeing the virtual as "not real" or as an addition to experience into being fully acknowledged and embodied *as* experience. What's interesting where the meataphor is concerned is how real virtuality is being remediated in meatspace itself and how Impossible™ Foods is helping consumers understand this shift in consumption—between "real" and "virtual" meats. The rhetorical moves Impossible™ Foods makes in telling the story of meat creates what might be considered virtually real virtuality—nearly real virtuality.

The virtually real virtuality of meataphors is a useful posthuman position for exploring how posthuman experience privileges information over substance and questions about how much meat can be altered to become "meat" or a meataphor: "First, the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life" (Hayles 1999, pp. 2–3). Though an "accident," biological substrates still tug at the virtual, yet these tugs are also becoming informational. The tugs toward information in Impossible™'s storytelling set the stage for shifting consumer experiences with what it means to be authentically or "authentically" (as in almost or virtually) carnivorous.

Patrick Brown, founder of Impossible™ Foods, illustrates an emerging posthuman perspective, arguing that "meat" is an informational pattern, not some immutable substance that can only be ascribed to an animal-based material instantiation. Started in 2011, the company's initial task sought a solution to the primary dilemma that separated the carnivore and the herbivore: "Before Impossible™ Foods, there was meat and there were plants" (Impossible Foods n.d.). Through isolating the informational pattern that "makes meat taste like meat" (Impossible Foods n.d.), Impossible™ Foods could create a plant-based meat alternative that was not an alternative at all, but rather "comprise[d] the actual experience," to use Castells's words (Castells 2000, p. 373), of eating meat. In a 2018 blog post, six years into the company's Impossible™ project, Brown elaborates on the company's key assertion that "mammalian muscle" (Brown 2018b) does not meat make: "Not only are animals not the *only* way to produce [sic] world's favorite foods; they aren't

even the best way. Until today, the only technology we've known that can turn plants into meat has been animals. But cows, pigs, chicken and fish didn't evolve to be eaten. They're terribly inefficient at turning plants into meat, and there's no reason to think they've even come close to reaching the potential for deliciousness in meat" (Brown 2018a).

The key to Brown's emerging posthuman rhetoric is the idea that animals are technologies—they are, from an albeit anthropocentric posthuman perspective, systems of information to be manipulated. Though Brown does present a contradiction in arguing animals did not evolve to be eaten, he still emphasizes that non-human evolutionary agency did not design delicious information. Regardless of agency, Brown emphasizes that animal-based meats are designed, either through animal husbandry and the technologies surrounding the processes (e.g., breeding and feeding cows for a particular marbling in the meats) or through evolutionary shifts. Such conflation and emphasis on design blurs the lines between animal-based meat and meataphor, putting audiences in an uncanny digestive position about eating: to rethink what counts as meat or what has the capacity to be meat, especially if meat is always already "remeatiated" by some force, human or otherwise.

Brown (2018a), furthermore, repeatedly comments that Impossible™ Foods "will be able to transform natural ingredients from plants into meat that outperforms the best beef from a cow—not just in sustainability, cost and nutritional value, but in flavor, texture, craveability and even 'meatiness.'" Though there are "natural ingredients" from plants, in the context of the post, natural ingredients are part of an informational network of environmental, capitalistic, caloric, and multimodal information arguing for the inclusion of plant-based meats as "real" and "authentic" food, even if they are transformed (i.e., the "natural ingredients" are remediated and/or designed into meat).

As Brown's argument above suggests, the case for the Impossible™ burger is situated within the realm of persuasion. Impossible™ Foods can only gain traction if readers and eaters are persuaded that the meat they eat might originate from a different source. Casey Boyle's *Rhetoric as Posthuman Practice* (Boyle 2018) describes how such persuasive practices might be considered through a posthuman lens. Rather than consider rhetoric in an agential way—in that there is some kind of agency in an author or audience that enacts change—Boyle suggests an electric conception of posthuman rhetoric. Boyle asserts that "emphasizing capacity—and its etymological connections of potentials for taking hold—would connect practice with recent findings in distributed cognition . . . and work in ways not beholden to agency's muddle of volition, experience, and ability to enact change" (n.p.). In more words, meat as conceptual construct is a capacity that can be filled in any number of ways: as formed in meatspace through the more implicit narrative construction of molecules to make Impossible™ meats and, simultaneously, through the more explicit language surrounding the meat itself—the narrative construction of the meat in media and how authors and audience members experience the capacities of these constructions.

In summarizing posthuman rhetoric, Boyle describes this shift: "Rhetoric as a posthuman practice is, through and through, an empirical and pluralistic art of asking, over and over, 'which one?'" (n.p.). For Boyle, "Reorienting rhetorical practice from argument to information turns the activity of persuasion from convincing others with language and toward persuasion instead as a continuous activity that becomes in-formed across the material and semiotic, mind and body, form and content" (n.p.). Meat (animal-based *and* plant-based) is clearly formed across the semiotic, mind and body, form and content, and becomes part of an explicit paradigm for choosing a protein source. Options for creating the syntagm or narrative of a meal, of grilling say a steak, is not a choice in the cut of meat but of protein category. Which capacity for food does one go with?

Boyle's application of such rhetorical lenses comes with posthuman consequences of social distance and the power that is agency and considerations of identity, ones Carol J. Adams noted nearly three decades ago in *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (Adams [1990] 2016). Much of Adams's work can be considered a kind of proto-posthuman analysis in regards to meat. In particular, Adams's discussion on

the practices of naming meats and shifting the language of meat-eating clearly illustrates animal-based meat as an informational pattern rather than substance. "Language distances us further from animals by naming them as objects, as 'its.' Should we call a horse, a cow, dog or cat, or any animal 'it'? 'It' functions for nonhuman animals as 'he' supposedly functions for human beings, as a generic term whose meaning is deduced by context . . . [This] generic 'it' erases the living, breathing nature of the animals and reifies their object status" (p. 46). Adams extends the discussion of the mystification of meat through linguistic means, showing that the dissociation of the animal is what makes "meat" possible. Adams suggests: "Animals' lives precede and enable the existence of meat. If animals are alive they cannot be meat"; however, even after their post-mortem transformation into a body that can be butchered, "[a]nimals are made absent through language that renames dead bodies before consumers participate in eating them," a process that is amplified by the gustatory maneuvers of "gastronomic language, so we do not conjure dead, butchered animals, but cuisine" (p. 46). In this linguistic turn, Adams's logic-driven approach to thinking through the relationship between animals and meat sets up considerations of meat as a substrate, the same considerations that would fuel Impossible™ Foods's Patrick Brown decades later.

In a related though contrasting vein, Shareena Z. Hamzah (2018) wonders at how the popularity of veganism and shifting cultural understandings of food and meat in particular will change or "tenderise fictional language": "The increased awareness of vegan issues will filter through our consciousness to produce new modes of expression—after all, there's more than one way to peel a potato. At the same time, metaphors involving meat could gain an increased intensity if the killing of animals for food becomes less socially acceptable." Though Hamzah also notes the irony of plant-based meats and the consequences of being meataphoric, she continues: "It is interesting to note that a range of vegetarian burgers have been made to 'bleed' like real meat. Although the animal components of such foods are substituted, attempts are made to replicate the carnivorous experience. Beetroot blood suggests the symbolic power of meat may well carry into the age of veganism, in which case the idea of meat as power will also remain in literature for some time to come."

Examining Impossible™ Foods's meataphors and the posthuman rhetorical moves they utilize in promoting their products is important for understanding how metaphors are "real" in more ways than are usually considered and have significant impact on how "meat" is practiced and culturally imagined. Impossible™ Foods has harnessed Hamzah's notion of "meat as power" in their marketing of both their meat products and their corresponding sustainability agenda, but in posthuman practice, has moved to harness the informational pattern of "meat as power." Posthuman rhetoric, though it has the *capacity* to distance bodies from material conditions, also has the capacity to bring bodies closer to these conditions. Impossible™ Foods seems to be doing more of the former rather than the latter.

3. Characterizing Impossible™ Foods

Through their deployment of posthuman rhetorical tactics, which supplant the traditional hierarchy of the meat industry, Impossible™ Foods attempts a complicated maneuver of re-characterization, of what it means to be meat and a meat-eater. Their characterizations of meat and the audience that eats it present an unusual blend of science and morality. Meat is a scientific object and Impossible™ Foods's breakthrough in constructing a perfect meataphor works with the assumption that an audience appreciates that "breakthrough" in making food a pattern and later in the sustainability arguments logicked through the "breakthrough." Impossible™ Foods's semiotic maneuvers create a narrative shifting the meaning of meat into the posthuman, informational realm. The company's website is a vital aspect of this re-characterization, as it asks audiences to think in terms of the categories of information—animal-based or plant-based designs—rather than a focus primarily on the morality of their choices. Their moves show how even in meatspace, the material substance of reality is anything but authentic or natural.

3.1. Naming the Impossible™

"Impossible," as a name for a plant-based meat product, positions the company's products as less than ideal, as less than humanist, and thus characterizes its products in an unfamiliar and data-like way. Though the name is playfully ironic in being something that does not exist but is, simultaneously, in existence, "impossible" reflects the meataphorness of the product: the idea that this meat is explicitly an exercise in meat. In this sense, when compared to more "traditional" conceptions of meat, Impossible™ Foods's products are likened to what *is* possible and what already exists. Sinclair's (2016) complicated and insightful work using Adams's and Derrida's analyses connecting animal-based meat eating to masculinity and human privilege, provides a framework for understanding Impossible™ Foods's name as an ethos-based appeal and how it is deconstructed.

Like Adams [1990] (Adams [1990] 2016, pp. 22–23), who argus that animals become absent referents in discussion of meat eating, Sinclair "argue[s] that plant-based meats are never really free of the animal they intend to substitute, and they therefore reproduce certain frameworks of intelligibility that keep animals edible even if they are not eaten" (n.p.). Following Derrida's deconstructive path, Sinclair points out how plant-based meats are always haunted by the trace of animal-based meats: the absence, the animal and their flesh, is always present in language surrounding plant-based meats: "Their absence [of animal flesh] is what defines the presence of meat, but in this way, they are always still implied, present as spectral and implied figures in flesh" (Sinclair 2016, n.p.).

What is absent (animal-based meat) is present in impossibility—the notion that animal-based meats can be replaced is possible. Animal-based meats remain at the top of the protein hierarchy. Beef with a capital "B" is still never referred to as "Possible Burger." Absences and presences of concepts become confused when audiences and their perspectives of dominant discourses are considered: Animal-based meats might also be haunted by the trace of plant-based meats for Impossible™ Foods's audience members. After all, "Their absence [of plant flesh] is what defines the presence of plant-based meats, but in this way, they are always still implied, present as spectral and implied figures in flesh" (Sinclair 2016, n.p.).

In more words, it might be helpful to describe Impossible™ burger a little differently, as a metaphor that illustrates the ways audiences experience presence and absence: adianoeta—a trope that is "[a]n expression intended to be understood one way by part of the audience and in an opposing way by another part" (Wiktionary: The Free Online Dictionary n.d.). Thus, the word Impossible™ has capacities: It is a sophisticated way to point out the illusion—to highlight the data-driven aspect of the impossible and its "meatiness." And, if foods are being more rhetorically constructed in such ways, then it seems there is a shift coming in meat—one in which capacities are being made more explicit and a "Possible" burger may be what is referred to in the near future, where imagining what meat to eat shifts from content to style.

3.2. Creating the Impossible™

The Impossible™ Foods website, more so than the name itself, posits explicit posthuman arguments about metaphors. First and foremost, Impossible™ emphasizes their plant-based meat as a process in "Food Technology." In fact, they highlight an equation in their main products page: "Plants + Science = Food" (Impossible Foods n.d.). Their meats, in other words, are explicitly metaphors, a pattern of information which science manipulates to create meat.

On the "Science" page of the website, the use of equations continues as the header reads: "HEME + The Science Behind Impossible™." Heme, "most commonly recognized as components of hemoglobin" (Wikipedia 2020) gets "star-billing": "Tiny Molecule. Big Flavor" and is the key potion to the elixir making Impossible™ metaphors so much like animal-based meat (Impossible Foods n.d.). Impossible™ scientists have harnessed heme's power: "our plant-based heme is made via fermentation of genetically engineered yeast, and safety-verified by America's top food-safety experts and peer-reviewed academic

journals" (Impossible Foods n.d.). In a video detailing the process, viewers learn about the key to meataphoring: "Craving for meat" (Impossible Foods 2017). According to Impossible™ Food's CEO, Patrick O. Brown, such craving "is really a craving for HEME" (Impossible Foods 2017). As Brown makes this statement, the video transitions to footage of Impossible™ burgers being grilled in a restaurant kitchen. Then, piled high with toppings and dripping with condiments, the burgers are eaten, with expressions of pleasure, by three consumers.

What follows this signal that consumers have been provided with an authentic experience of burgerness, is a section of lab scientist b-roll. Here, not only is the Impossible™ Foods lab team seen working with raw meat, but one scientist in particular inspects a large vial of lab-engineered heme (1:14), which could not look more like a vial of actual blood. Per Castells, viewers are immediately "immersed in a virtual image setting" (Castells 2000, p. 373). This manufacturing of heme, what Rachel Fraser, a principal scientist interviewed in the video, suggests creates that "bloody" flavor consumers crave in animal-based meat, is at the center of a lab-based meat production line that is "scalable, sustainable, and safe" (Impossible Foods 2017). Yet, it is not until the second half of the video where viewers are shown how heme—this blood-like substance that is not blood—is engineered using soy leghemoglobin. Embracing the desire of the carnivorous eater and the "symbolic power of meat," as Hamzah (2018) notes, Impossible Foods seemingly flaunts the blood-like byproduct viewers might recognize from animal-based burgers. Aware of the power of the meataphor, Impossible™ delivers a like image. When the video concludes with another series of consumers eating impressively bedecked burgers, its position as a microcosm of Impossible™ Foods's rhetorical gymnastics is made complete: in the video, as in the company's strategy writ large, cravings for animal-based meat are reframed from something innate and/or natural into a pattern of information, something "R&D at Impossible™" manipulates, thus making virtually real virtuality possible.

3.3. Imagining an Impossible™ Future

Impossible™ Foods's reliance on the meataphor becomes more recognizable when their website is compared with that of another prominent beef campaign: *Beef. It's What's for Dinner*. Impossible™ Foods and *Beef. It's What's for Dinner* are two radically different meat industry companies, whose reliance on divergent linguistic and ethical tactics amplifies Impossible™ Foods's interest in a posthuman—or, shall we say, a post-animal-meat—future. While both companies employ the same visual tactics in their use of images of raw meat, that is where the similarities end, and from there on, each linguistic, visual, and ethical choice the companies make is grounded in their beliefs.

Beef. It's What's for Dinner makes explicit semiotic connections between animal-based meat and American national identity, whereby it is not simply the idea of animal-based meat but the meat itself that might be read as a national signifier. In one particular interactive element on their website, the company utilizes a thick slab of steak cut in the shape of the United States as their red, raw meat, welcoming their viewer with the words "United We Steak" (NCBA National Cattlemen's Beef Association). Viewers can scroll over each state to access meat stories unique to the state, including recipes and farmer profiles. Animal-based meat becomes a metonymic referent for a nation where "tastes can vary from sea to shining sea, but . . . unite[s] around steak," as the image's caption suggests. This simple visual and linguistic move, whereby animal-based steak is figured as the United States, aligns consumers with the company's nationalist beliefs, ensuring that, via their animal-meat consumption, consumers, too, are proud to be Americans, and all that being one means. With an abundance of images indicative of a nostalgia for the American West and Midwest, one of farming and cattle ranching, *Beef. It's What's for Dinner* cultivates an ethos reliant on the past—not only traditional tastes and consumption habits, but the assigning of values long rooted in an animal-meat-eating authentic American exceptionalism.

Impossible™ Foods is similarly conscious of showing their raw meataphor, especially in the section of their website that discusses their Impossible™ burger. "Meet Impossible™ Burger," the header suggests, dropping in the kind of meat pun that preponderates its promotional materials, superimposed over the image of a cast iron skillet full of raw ground meat in the process of being cooked (Impossible Foods n.d.). As opposed to *Beef. It's What's for Dinner* employing the meat-made United States as symbol, Impossible™ Foods harnesses the language of individual choice and selection, leaning into an American future of global taste. In the subsection section titled "Endless Impossibilities (just the way you like it)," the site allows viewers to scroll through images of ways in which Impossible™ burger can be used for ethnic foods—from meatballs, to bao, to empanadas—each dish bearing a small flag that reads "Impossible™." Impossible™ continues to greet viewers with additional raw meat, however instead of being displayed on a wooden cutting board like their animal-based opponent, they have neatly packaged their product. While the packaging displays their product name in free advertisement, the company employs the phrase "Impossible™ At Home," advising consumers of the adaptability of their meat products (the endless Impossible™) to any American home.

Whereas the *Beef. It's What's for Dinner* website has worked to visually capture the American spirit long remembered in its origin tune, the "Hoe-Down" from Aaron Copeland's "Rodeo," Impossible™ Foods reaches toward the future, likening their mission and values to an actual space mission—but not a mission to Mars, rather a mission to Earth. In a promotional advertisement from 2018 titled "The Return," once featured on the Impossible™ Foods' homepage, a Black man wearing a space suit explores a present-day neighborhood (Impossible Foods 2018a). He wanders through what appears to be a deserted urban landscape, surveying plants that are emerging through the cracks in the asphalt. But, in the next scene, it is clear that the urban space is not deserted: while the suited-man's helmet reflects bus stop full of people, he looks specifically at a praying mantis, a pigeon, and then a human baby riding on its dad's shoulders. As the space-man continues his walk, he moves into a more "natural" environment, where he surveys wildlife and examines the trees, even stopping to lay down and look to the sky. Just as the commercial's narrator references this natural space as "paradise," the spaceman opens his helmet and takes a deep breath. The closing words printed across the screen read: "We're on a mission. And, it's not to Mars." The advertisement provides no mention of meat; in fact, if someone did not know of Impossible™ Foods's signature products, the advertisement might seem one associated with environmental preservation. Yet, for the company to conceive of its mission as one that is beyond the meat itself extends even the informational pattern of the meat-as-product into a values-based world where sustainability will be key to enjoying Earth as a habitable space. For Impossible™ Foods, the future of meat is, ironically, beyond meat, beyond the damages to the environment incurred through individualism and manifest destiny. The astronaut here might be a posthumanist traveling to "discover" and appreciate the accidental biology of Earth. Earth then becomes a planet in need of understanding data and creating information, in need of balance. At the same time, however, this symbolism is confused. An astronaut can be considered a scientific kind of colonist—not necessarily involved in a culture or environment—distanced from it and separate. Bodies and material conditions are not necessarily being brought closer together but pushed farther apart.

The company's self-conscious reference to a space-travel-oriented "Mission Impossible™," is brought back to meat in another forum that could not deviate more from *Beef. It's What's for Dinner*'s 25th anniversary reprisal of the Aaron Copeland-inspired campaign (NCBA National Cattlemen's Beef Association). Leaning into the afrofuturist potential of "The Return's" casting of a Black actor to play the spaceman, Impossible™ Foods created a four-episode web series titled "Wu-Tang in Space Eating Impossible™ Sliders," in which group members RZA, GZA, and Ghostface Killah answer "existential questions" via Earth mail (Impossible Foods 2018b). The only appearance of meat in the series, aside from sliders being used on occasion as floating icons, takes place when GZA and Ghostface

Killah eat White Castle's Impossible™ sliders at some point in each three-minute episode. What is fascinating is that they do not talk at all about the sliders or the Impossible™ meat. The sliders are just there for the eating. Unlike the call line "meat is the message" of Ozeki (1999) fictional foray into global meat marketing, for Impossible™ Foods, the future (even if imagined via the throw-back aesthetic of the web-series) might be a place where meat is not the message at all, where plant-based meats are not coded any differently than animal-based meats. Impossible™ Foods is taking the "meat" out of the meataphor, in other words. As a posthuman form, as a capacity, Impossible™ Foods cuts through difference here and renders presence and absence in a different form: There is meat (be it animal-based or plant-based) present—and what is not meat—absent. All burgers that are meat and are "Possible."

3.4. Ethicking the Impossible™

Impossible™ Food's main argument for consuming their product is a salvo against animal-based meats, but it does not use the expected type of ammunition: the ways animals are mistreated in meat production and/or the problematic ethic of eating animals themselves. Unlike its primary competitor Beyond Meat, whose logo is a cow with a cape, Impossible™ argues for a more ecological approach to eating meat. Emotion and/or any feelings for animals in animal-based meat production is replaced with more logos-based concerns about the environmental impact of animal-based meat production versus Impossible™ Foods's plant-based meat production. For Impossible™, there is a shift from damaging animals to damaging a network, to damaging Nature through meat Cultures. Impossible™ Foods's call line "Eat meat. Save the Planet," reflects the company's awareness of exigent arguments on behalf of climate action (Moses 2019). Rather than creating a graphic that presents an anthropomorphized cow crusader, Impossible™ presents its audience with a comic of an Earth holding hands with an Impossible™ burger. Certainly, such an ecological argument is emotional in a generational sense (as in the ecological benefits might not be seen for generations) and may appear somewhat abstract and distanced from the immediacy of poor animal husbandry and/or their slaughter in animal-based meat production. Yet, perhaps because of the company's emphasis on creating a sustainable future, Impossible™ Foods's Head of Impact, Rebekah Moses, highlights the degree to which young people are fueling the movement—a movement open to vegetarians and carnivores alike. "Rather than expect people to give up meat, Impossible™ Foods is providing a more sustainable version that's as good or better than the animal version, competing on taste and nutrition," Moses writes, refusing to even identify Impossible™ burgers as "plant-based." Moses ends her discussion of Impossible ™'s commitment to "small actions for big change" by praising the "young, pissed off earthlings" driving the movement. Not only will the future of food entail Possible meats, but the future of food will be commandeered by the future inhabitants of a planet in need of protection.

Impossible™ Foods makes an important emotional appeal with their Ecological Footprint Calculator, an interactive digital tool that reveals the environmental impact of either selling or eating Impossible™ burgers instead of cow meat (Impossible Foods n.d.). Using the tool, a consumer can measure their impact with how many packs or single squares of Impossible™ Burgers they purchase compared to buying beef from a cow. The impact is measured in GHG emissions, trees, and water usage. Through dragging a cursor over how many packages or squares they would have purchased, consumers can see how much life and how many resources they save: one simple act of placing plant-based meats as the "x" to animal-based meats "not x," can reverse the hierarchical structure. Or, at least, that is what the calculator suggests. As the number of Impossible™ Burger packages increases, the pictorial environment around the calculator is populated with nature-based images. The first level is at zero packs and shows a wasteland of sorts, a dull and bleak desert. As the number of Impossible™ burgers consumed increases, the sky changes colors, clouds enter, birds begin to fly, trees and plants begin to bloom, and finally when you reach over 4600 twelve-ounce packages of Impossible™ burger, a bird appears. As one moves the handle of

the slider showing how much Impossible™ meat is being sold or ingested, users see how their greenhouse gas emissions lower, how habitat is impacted, and how a user's water use is reduced, and they can even download an infographic to advertise their own impact on social media. Impossible™ cleverly allows users a variety of options to understand impact. For instance, one can select from the land footprint (habitat) option to choose either "Trees in the Amazon," "Square Feet of Habitat," or, for those whose perception of space is situated primarily in terms of developed land, "Tennis Courts." Regardless of the type of calculation viewers select to understand their environmental impact, the background imagery is default and shifts from a virtual desolation into a virtual Amazon rainforest. If the shifting images failed to prove the company's point that their product saves the earth, they provide consumers with an Impossible truism: "[t]he best and fastest solution to help our planet? It's simple. Eat more meat from plants and less meat from animals" (Impossible Foods n.d.).

Considering that the USDA estimates an average person will eat 222 lbs of red meat and poultry per year in 2018 (Durisin and Singh 2018), Impossible™ Foods Impact Calculator makes it look a little easier to take a bite out of the animal-based meat industry than it truly might be. A meataphor eater can shift from desert wasteland to a more bucolic scene by only eating fifty-seven pounds of plant-based meat. Emotion, in other words, is turned into data—into a kind of reputation score for the environment. Yet, in their employment of such an impact calculator, Impossible™ Foods illustrates the dissonance at work in their employment of the meataphor. Such a default tactic forgets the other environments, environments that are more desert-like destroyed by animal grazing. Rather than see the regrowth of, say, sagebrush habitat and ecosystems associated with sagebrush, environmental rescue means saving moist, supple, pastel-colored environments imprinted in pop culture imaginations of sustainability. As Impossible™ pulls heartstrings connected to the mythic Amazon and forgets the more varied local environments impacted that are not "Amazon-like" in their mythos, they engineer what counts in American cultural imagination as a healthy and vibrant ecosystem, as something worth saving. The calculator assumes that land will not be used for something else if it is not being used for animal-based meat production and can actually return to a more idyllic state, glossing over more capitalistic and neoliberal issues of environmental justice and making an environmental difference.

Impossible™ Foods, furthermore, shifts discussion of its posthuman products but never denies the ingredients or tries to argue about the content of the ingredients. In other words, Impossible™ owns its constructedness. In February 2020, the Center for Consumer Freedom (CCF) aired a commercial during the Super Bowl meant to dissuade consumers from trying plant-based meats (CCF Center for Consumer Freedom). The CCF's PSA criticized the posthumanity—the data-driven and scientific constructedness—of Impossible™ burgers by recreating a spelling bee where child contestants are asked to spell the data or the ingredients in the Burgers (CCF Center for Consumer Freedom). The children were asked to spell "methylcellulose" and "propylene glycol," words, the spelling bee moderator suggests, which are used in "synthetic meat." The ad's narrator suggests that "you might need a Ph.D. to understand what is in fake meat," but the final word of the spelling bee, B-A-C-O-N, which closes out the ad, is easy to spell, and thereby easier to understand as an authentic, real meat.

Impossible™ Foods rescinded the CCF's assertion about its supposedly synthetic ingredients with their own PSA parody (Impossible Foods 2020). In a video that directly mirrors the CCF's, CEO Patrick Brown, as the spelling bee moderator, asks a child to spell "poop." Rather than explaining Impossible™ meat, Brown explains poop as a bacteria-laden substance present in the meat made from cows. Impossible™ Foods's response to the CCF's broadly-circulated ad negates any concern with plant-based meats' informational pattern by simply showing the embodied realities of relying on animal products as meat. P-O-O-P, the children spell, with a smile. While Impossible™ flashes a similar running list of hard-to-spell bacteria they suggest is found in animal-based meat, it is simply that

four-letter word they ask of their spelling bee participants. The Impossible™ PSA briefly references animal welfare, but primarily as a means to illustrate the process wherein animal meat becomes laced with fecal bacteria. P-O-O-P, Brown acknowledges, in a play on the CCF's reference to bacon, does not take a Ph.D. to understand.

It is not surprising that Impossible™ Foods avoids discussing the health benefits of their products. Gelsomin (2019), in an easily digestible blog post for Harvard's Medical School, observes that Impossible™ meat is "a good source of vitamins and minerals." Gelsomin notes that the fortified vitamins in Impossible™ burger benefits vegetarians "because these nutrients are typically harder to come by when relying solely on foods from the plant kingdom." However, Gelsomin also observes Impossible™ burger possesses "comparable amount[s] of saturated fat" to animal-based meat. And, furthermore, "Since diets higher in saturated fat are associated with increased rates of both heart disease and premature death, they may not be the type to opt for if your ambitions are purely health-related" (Gelsomin 2019). Additionally, as Purdy (2020) notes in his research on cellular meats, "A single Impossible™ Foods's burger patty, for instance, contains about 16 percent of a person's recommended daily value of sodium. A conventional lean-beef patty contains about 1 percent" (n.p.). Finally, it makes sense to shift the conversation away from conversations focused on health because, as current discussions about COVID-19 reflect and consider any diet fad in the last century, "facts" about health and what measures to take are, even when trusted institutions are in agreement, dismissed by audience members searching for support for their self-interests.

4. A Conclusion: Slaughtering the Meataphor

Impossible™ Foods's posthuman rhetorical moves pose significant challenges to animal-based meat eating. Their meataphor and the language they use to narrate and market its existence is reframing what counts as meat and has become "its own thang"—not just a substitute. The posthuman rhetoric Impossible™ Foods's employs has been so effective, Impossible™ Foods's meats might be considered more pataphoric than meataphoric. The concept of the pataphor, originally developed from pataphysics, clearly connects to posthumanism as it questions what counts as reality. As a posthuman rhetorical device, the pataphor extends a metaphor into a new layer of reality. More complexly put, "whereas a metaphor is the comparison of a real object or event with a seemingly unrelated subject in order to emphasize the similarities between the two, the 'pataphor [or pataphor] uses the newly created metaphoric similarity as a reality with which to base itself" (Lopez quoted in Hugill 2012, n.p.) For instance, consider this metaphor: *Ze made sure to bring home the bacon (i.e., earn a living)*. A pataphor would look like this: *Ze made sure to bring home the bacon, comfortable with zis finances, and because the bacon was lonely, not having been home in a long time. In fact, bacon thanked zim and started making dinner*. Impossible™ Foods's multimodal metaphor (our "meataphor") and the multimodal rhetoric undergirding the meataphor story has created a new context, a new reality, for considering what meat means, is, and the processes behind it. Thus, if Impossible™ meat was previously meat in the sense of being a metaphor—Impossible™ burger is "meat"—the meaning has changed pataphorically: Impossible™ burger is meat but it was never raised with the cattle it sits beside in the meat aisle.

Beef. It's What's for Dinner's responses to Impossible™ Foods only serves to support the fact that Impossible™ meats have indeed developed "thanginess" in and of themselves, thus reimagining what meat is. *Beef. It's What's for Dinner*'s website provides information on meat substitutes, communicating a posthuman perspective about their own animal-based products. The headline for the meat substitute page reads: "Nicely done, beef. Substituting your taste is beyond impossible" (NCBA National Cattlemen's Beef Association). Explicitly, the company suggests that there is no substitute for beef. At the same time, however, *Beef. It's What's for Dinner* implicitly references Beyond Meat and Impossible™ Foods, entering a dialogue that acknowledges substitution and capacity, very posthuman ideas about food. *Beef. It's What's for Dinner* even describes beef in posthuman terms: "What sets beef apart

is that it's a high-quality protein that is authentic, real and raised responsibly" (NCBA National Cattlemen's Beef Association). In other words, our information, our science and our technology, they seem to say, is virtually real virtuality. Meat can be "its own thang," so to speak, but audience members should choose animal-based because it is not inauthentic, unreal, and husbandry is not irresponsible. Doubling down, in its recipe page, *Beef. It's What's for Dinner* usurps the notion of meat substitutes altogether, suggesting that: "beef is the ultimate 'meat substitute' that makes every dish and meal better" (NCBA National Cattlemen's Beef Association).

Though Impossible™ Foods is creating a pataphor, a new context for their meats and meat reality in general, they are continually drawn into a system of capitalist representation that tries to frame Impossible™ products as a substitute to thereby maintain the animal-based meat status quo. Thus, there are dissonances between our rather abstract arguments about metaphors, pataphors, and lived reality. Meat space (i.e., the location of meats) in the grocery store is not really being its "own thang" in the sense of animal-based and plant-based equity—in the sense of providing audiences, consumers a helpful juxtaposition in understanding options and the competing forms of meat. At the point of selection, animal-based meats remain at the top of the hierarchy and privilege. Plant-based meat consumption is hidden in a small aisle and, furthermore, has no "butcher" or expert to help with selection and "cut" some meat.

And if/when animal-based meats are eclipsed by plant-based meats, what happens in such a posthuman culture of virtually real virtuality, where calories are gamified into an informational FitBit for a privileged few (i.e., those with access and the money for meataphors, since meataphors cost around twice as much as beef (Piper 2020)) into an ecological reputation score—an ecological Klout? Will meat-eating specifically be translated into an online challenge akin to Impossible™'s Ecological Impact Calculator where an app awards a person certificates and awards for impact on their FitBit: Meat Eat? Perhaps that future is closer than we might imagine. Impossible™ Foods has already created its own rewards/points system calls Taste Place where you can eat, earn swag, and then brag to your friends (Impossible Foods n.d.). What's next? Of course, such impact comes with a discount on meats for continuing to consume their products and make them money.

Impossible™ Foods meataphors rhetorically situate meat as a posthuman process and product, "sciencing" meat into a pattern of information that can be replicated, showing the virtually real virtuality of food, positioning tastes and bodies closer to all sorts of caloric engineered possibilities. Animals, in other words, do not need to be part of a meat-eater's equation: All that is needed is Technology. Impossible™ Foods, however, has trouble responding more fully to Adams's call to change eating habits and be critical of the arguments promoting animal-based meat culture. Adams hopes audiences will learn to "refuse to consume the images on their own terms but to look with resistance and recognize that images are anchored to referents, living beings, subjects, not objects, of our own lives" (Adams [1990] 2016, p. 176). And while meataphors like Impossible™ meats are real images for bodily consumption, for better or worse, Impossible™ Foods' rhetorical tactics often shield consumers away from any guilt about the privilege of humans in the hierarchy of food production and the socio-economics of access, instead using tropes of sustainability to manufacture a guilt-free meat-eating lifestyle.

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