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ABSTRACT

Exploring the idea that urban culture has changed food sharing practices and, in effect, produced a cultural "advertisement" in the marketing and selling of the fast food franchise, this paper discusses the commercial replication of community and the communion of food sharing in this new fast food culture. Following an introduction that addresses the concerns and alarms raised in much popular literature and by some academic researchers on the changing American culture, the paper explores the notion of "eating as communication," and how family patterns created a market for fast food. The paper then examines changes in urban food use patterns that began with the threat of urban decentralization, growing out of the hegemony of the automobile and the opening up of the interstate highway system in the late 1950s. The paper also considers fast food demographics and presents company officials' descriptions of several fast food chains, along with special techniques or themes that appear in their advertising to convince the whole family to eat together in their restaurants. The fact that fast food establishments have frequently been the focus of urban crime and violence, despite their open, clean, and safe image, is then explored, followed by some thoughts on the future of the fast food culture in American life. The paper closes with a brief thematic summary, emphasizing that to study both the messages of advertisements and the medium of fast food yields more about communication and community than would a separate study of either. (Six pages of footnotes are appended.) (NKA)

Abstract

CULTURE AS ADVERTISEMENT: A SYNOPTIC SURVEY OF FAST FOOD AND FAMILY COMMUNICATION

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Research and popular literature on communication, urban life, families and fast food consumption suggest that urban culture has changed food sharing practices and in effect produced an "advertisement" for the marketing and selling of the fast food franchise.

This synopsis discusses eating as communication, changes in urban food use patterns, fast food demographics, the disintegration of family life, the overlap of personal, communal and mass communication, and the future of fast food marketing.

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Introduction

Relationships between communication and culinary activity are more apt to appear in popular culture and folklore than in communication studies, since any connections between mastication and mass communication might seem preposterous, but there are signs that the urban culture surrounding changes in family communication and eating patterns has created a cultural "advertisement" for marketing the consumption of fast food.

A variety of concerns have been expressed. Some say the country is "turning into a nation of nothing but lawyers, consultants and fast-food drive-ins"[1], which are "one of the very few businesses left where entrepeneurs can start with very little and create huge fortunes."[2] Some complain that family eating is being destroyed by neon-lighted franchises that "specialize in styrofoam hamburgers and fiberboard French fries,"[3] and that "People don't have meals together anymore--they watch TV at dinner time."[4] It has been noted that the shared civility of formal meals is being replaced by food snacks and "grazing" which has "killed the ceremony of traditional communal eating," and made alienated teenagers prone to suicide "in a society where both parents of a family often work and the family meal is a forgotten ritual."[5]

In response to such alarms and allegations, it would seem useful to develop a synopsis of data on food and communication, fast food marketing practices, urban separation of work and residence, social and physical auto-mobility, new freedom for youth and women, and the decline in food sharing in a cooperative, communal, communicative central place.

Eating as Communication

"The dinner table is the center for the teaching and practicing not just of table manners, but consideration, conversation, tolerance, current events, family feeling, and just about all the other accomplishments of polite society.[6] Food sharing has been part of human evolution.[7] Food offerings are a special language and communication with the gods in some cultures,[8] and the ritual of the table remains in modern urban settings.[9]

Food has meaning in "the context of interaction and communication" and "Virtually nothing else we do in our daily lives speaks so loudly of our sense of art, aesthetics, creativity, symbolism, communication, social propriety, and celebration as do our food habits and eating behavior."[10] Food sharing is a familial and communicative act and "eating is rarely the sole purpose of a gathering" as it "can embody roles, expectations, and identities; and the behavior which accompanies the service may be interpreted as an expression of the feelings, attitudes and sensitivities of the participants."[11] Food allocation involves "social negotiations" and "the division of portions is often a serious endeavor with significant implications of social relationships. . . . (and) . . is almost always embellished with questions of etiquette, perceptions of social hierarchy and rules of conduct. . ."[12]

"Food and eating are central to human life, and the ability to share and cooperate in this realm helps us achieve parallel success in other aspects of life", according to one observation on levels of commitment in cooperative households.[13] In such situations, "foodways seem to be a microcosm of the whole house" and involve investment, communion and transcendance. Discontinuity and dissolution "may occur when the delicate balance between sharing and self interest is upset."[14]

Eating patterns in the U.S. are increasingly individualistic rather than communal.[15] People eat at random on sidewalks and streets; "slot machine snacking" is now a major form of food intake; and the separate, individually-marketed servings reduce the need to share and compromise in a family unit, as everyone gets what they want when they want it.[16] Breakfast is all but disappearing; the sit-down family meal takes place less and less. Such patterns "are doing more to destroy the family structure than most people realize", says Harvard nutritionist Jean Mayer.[17] Nathan Smith, University of Washington pediatrician, says "Food is such an enhancer of communications that I don't know what can replace the family meal as a forum,"[18] as eating during TV watching and refrigerator raids become practiced and promoted in TV commercials. There is also the tendency to abandon cooking as a family activity, and the synthetic-food industry leads toward the "industrialization and depersonalization of food supply--a further reduction in the parental bond".[19]

Urban Food Patterns Change

These conditions provide an ideal climate for commercial marketers of food consumption, described more than a decade ago by one of them:[20]

> Social reinforcements to well-organized eating will continue to decline and our food and meal patterns will become more diffused. With our permissive society and our search for individuality and variety, food choices will become more a personal matter. . . .Attitudes toward the home and family are changing and will change further. Today's family is more mobile, freer and outward, less dependent on the home itself as the center of activity. Tomorrow's family will be even more so. As marketers of the basic food products consumed by this society we must be quick to spot the changes and interpret them into meaningful products and services and then communicate in the new ways their message that will evoke positive responses."

The family has been shocked by changes in the city's communications and transportation patterns. "In this scheme of things, there

is no longer room for the forum, the agora, the piazza, the corso. . . The only thing there is room for is the drive-in and the fast-food outlet . . .the social intercourse which used to be the city's main function has now entirely vanished. The city is either crowded with the traffic of people and cars in a hurry or it is totally empty. . . And when a couple or a family leave the house to do something that cannot be done at home, they go in a mobile extension of the house, namely the car. As the ark permitted Noah to survive the Flood, so the car permits its owners to pass through the hostile and dangerous world outside the front door."[21]

As a crucial urban agent of the fast-food business, the auto's role in "American Culture at The Breaking Point" is described by Philip Slater:[22]

> "The automobile . . .did more than anything else to destroy community life in America. It segmented the various parts of the community and scattered them about so that they became unfamiliar with one another. It isolated travelers and decoordinated the movement of people from one place to another.It isolated and shrank living units to the point where the skills involved in informal cooperation among large groups of people atropied and were lost. As the community became a less and less satisfying place to be, people more and more took to their automobiles as an escape from it."

As cities were threatened with urban decentralization, the fast-food chains thrived. Urban change was one of the keys to the success of McDonald's: the interstate highway system of the late 1950s opening up the U.S. move to the suburbs and the Southwest (Sunbelt); regional shopping patterns and new open land, in contrast to the declining central cities with lingering leases and obsolete buildings.[23] A generation grew up with the drive-in, TV-dinners, and white sugar. "The more revolting the food, the more of it we craved. We were the wild beasts of the suburbs", recollects a "fast-food brat"

years later.[24] But as the suburbs have filled up, choice highway sites got scarce, and fuel shortages cut traffic. Fast-food franchises in the decade began moving into the old central cities where businessmen, secretaries, and older people could walk rather than drive like the mobile suburban youths.[25] Downtown fast-food places are prospering near high pedestrian traffic and office buildings,[26] despite costly real estate, shorter selling hours, more physical dangers, and resistance by residential city neighborhoods opposed to litter, auto traffic, loiterers & fast-food architecture.[27]

The marketing of the fast-food franchise in the fragmented urban setting involves a complex group of factors which include sociology, media, and social psychology. No single variable seems crucial to a variety of causal relationships, but the possible role of the family as a fading reality projected as fantasy is worth exploration. Much market research focuses on attributes of products rather than their meaning, and "Business people are uncomfortable with the study of food as a symbol, because it seems to take them into the murky realms of the psyche and the social group."[28]

The study of foodways remains somewhat primitive, especially the relationship to families in the urban context.It has been found that specialized marketing of food has grown with urbanization,[29] and the relationship of kitchens to cities,[30] foodways and auto tourism,[31] and the social history of restaurant architecture[32] have been studied. One scholar suggests that "the task of describing the ways in which foods reach consumers calls for powers of evocation and observation more frequently exercised by journalists and food critics than anthropologists or nutritionists."[33] In comparing growing cities to popular food, one apologetic journalist wrote "Condos and office buildings aren't

the only high rises reaching for the sky. High rise pancakes are also heaven-bound".[34]

Fast-Food Demographics

It appears that "little research has been conducted examining the determinants" of eating fast-food and "The overall evidence concerning the role of habit in predicting (fast food) behavior is still unresolved. . ."[35] There have been studies on TV food commercials and nutrition in children's snacks,[36] and mother-child interactions in family grocery shopping,[37] snack selection in vending machines.[38] Also, research has found that "a serious ad for good nutrition will be more effective than a humorous one",[39] and there is some support for the theory that dark-eyed people eat more fast food.[40]

Beyond these more microscopic studies, are indications that social dimensions are important as "children are not passive recipients of food messages, rather they actively process the information and engage in decision-making".[41] Often this takes place in the communications environment in the family at home where conflict may be resolved over selection of TV programs.[42]

Although generalizations should be suspect, the demographics of fast food consumption do reveal considerable empirical data about families, regardless of the reasons or motives for their actions.[43] Expenditures for eating out show little relationship to income levels or age, although larger families spend less, but eat out less frequently. More women in the work force, two-income families and related discretionary money tend to encourage eating out.

As for fast-food/drive-in/carry-out patronage, there seems to be "little relationship between the percentage of meals eaten out at fast food restaurants and income levels."[44] As for age, 62% of the meals eaten out by those under age 25 are fast-food, while only 31% for those

over 55. As for family size, "All families without children tend to eat less frequently at fast food units than do families with children," with the younger preferring hamburgers to fish and pizza, and parents liking coffee-shop and family-type settings. Income appears to play a very little part in selection of the kind of food.[45]

The advertising appeals made to attract the family are often interwoven with the food products. "Howard Johnson's Loves You" was one appeal that firm made promoting itself as a "warm, friendly-type place".[46] "At Shakey's We Love You", advertised that pizza parlor giving a cash certificate free on a family-size pizza.[47] Burger King went after the children with the freedom to "Have It Your Way" in ordering their own condiments and correcting slow service, while seeking older family members with adult-oriented seating decor of natural wood surroundings and hanging plants.[48] When Burger King was involved in its advertising "Battle of the Burgers", one commercial showed a family (named McDonald) with clown noses, false spectacles and mustaches telling why they had switched restaurants.[49]

The use of entertainment for the family to attract customers has been used with mixed success. In addition to Show Biz Pizza Place, Family Showtime Theaters opened in mid-1983, but Pizza Time Theater filed for bankruptcy in March 1984 after the collapse of the market in video games, which they had offered in an amusement center of rides and robots.[50]

Somewhat in contrast, Wendy's sought the older, more affluent customers with lamps and carpets, and with the aged Clara Peller's coarse, competitive call "Where's The Beef ?",[51] but some of the appeal to mobility was included, when founder R. David Thomas said "The seats aren't too comfortable though--We don't want customers to stay forever."[52]

Fast-Food Ads for Families

In a survey of 50 of the 144 fast-food restaurants listed in the 1984 Standard Directory of Advertisers, marketing and public relations officers of firms were asked to describe any special themes or techniques used in advertising media to convince the whole family to eat together in their fast food restaurants. A summary of those responding follows:

Kentucky Fried Chicken: Family dining in TV network commercials but not on local basis because many of the older stores offer take-outs. KFC is to embark on a massive world-wide campaign to have large stores with dining rooms, condiment bars, comfortable seats, meals served on plates, attractive decor, landscaping.
(Gregg M. Reynolds, Vice President, Public Affairs, Louisville)

White Castle: Continues strong tradition in East and Mid-West cities, followed baby boom to suburbs, but not migration to West and Sunbelt by youth, but now uses "Hamburgers to Fly" sent via air and hotlines to children by parents on birthdays, holidays, anniversaries. Oldest fast-food chain (1921-Wichita) refused franchise route, still founding family-owned; Emphasis on warm, inviting interiors, seats, coupon ads for reduced prices to attract families; White is for pure and clean; castle for strong, stable, permanent, like model of Chicago Water Tower, survived 1871 Great Fire.
(Bob Goldberg, Assistant Director for Advertising/Public Relations, Columbus, OH)

International Dairy Queen: Family unit is important; Market target media emphasize ages 24-49 and kids ages 6-11 secondarily; TV is primary vehicle, with over 90 per cent of $26 million in 1985 budget allocated to TV; Market theme is "We Treat You Right".
(Gary See, Vice President, Marketing, Minneapolis)

Arthur Treacher's Fish & Chips: Seeks to satisfy children under 12 to attract entire family as a dining unit with child portions and reduced prices such as batter-dipped, deep fried, hot dog on stick ("Krunch Pup"); Promotional give-aways include coloring books, crayons, frisbees, tops and toys; TV commercials feature entire families dining together at the restaurant.
(James Cataland, President, Dayton, OH)

Burger King: First to offer dining rooms; emphasizes natural wood, brick, unglazed tile, roof shingles, landscape; smiling employees; salad bars; minority (Black) workers, contractors, suppliers welcomed; Black ad agency hired; Pillsbury bought it as at-home consumption declined; TV commercials "an incomparable boost to Burger King's fortunes."
(Burger King Annual Report, Miami, FL)

Duff's Smorgasbord: House/home architecture; hostess, self-serving U-shaped and circular lines;party and conference rooms; smoking & non-smoking;bridges gap between fast food outlets and "white tablecloth restaurants";150 units in 32 states.
(Duff's Enterprises, Fairfield,OH)

Denny's: Focus is on quality and value of food, not on media ads on whole family eating together. Ads show food preparation and price. No people shown in ads as a rule; Restaurants rely on each individual in family to decide what they want; Children menus can be made into masks, decorated bibs etc.
(Barry Krantz, Sr. Vice President,
Marketing/Concept Development, La Mirada, CA)

Shoney's: Sees itself as "America's Dinner Table", a theme used in ads; Not "fast-food" but sit-down, full-service, family-oriented; emphasize food price and quality in confortable setting;No tugging at emotion or comparing selves with competition in ads; Instead focus on "inside--out"; Have used some generic and slice of life ads;Food quality is key.
(Ty Hasty, Director of Marketing
Nashville, TN)

Frisch's: Promotes quality food in clean surroundings, at a value and price to customers. Uses a marketing mix of media. Has found reduced car service, and increase in patronage by singles and couples.
(Karen F. Maier, Vice President-Marketing,
Cincinnati, OH)

Eat 'N Park: Innovative children's menus which promote parent-child interaction at the table.(Eat 'N Play fold-outs with animal and other themes, plus free coupon to Pittsburgh Zoo); Provide 6-person booths for families; Ads allow "Kids Eat Free When They Bring Mom and Dad", order as much as they want, and after it's over $3. those under 12 can splurge on children's menu free.
(Basil Cox, Vice President, Marketing,
Pittsburgh)

Hungry Tiger: Chain of 27 California dinnerhouse restaurants originally opened in 1962 by some of original World War II Flying Tiger pilots as a part of their camaraderie and mutual trust; One of three restaurant divisions--The Breakers Seafood Co--is for families in a casual, light-hearted atmosphere below a dinnerhouse but above a coffee shop; One ad says "You Deserve a Breakers Today". All Breakers have a full service bar. Senior citizens are a big part of customers.
(Tom Amberger, Director of Advertising,
Van Nuys, CA)

Arby's: TV-radio spots show child telling parents advantage of Arby's meals;children's menu and toy prizes added to attract families;Family Nights,Amusement Park tie-ins;comic strip characters with moral messages for parents' use;child identification program in Denver area.
(Thomas Whitley, Vice President
of Marketing, Atlanta, GA)

The promotional and advertising appeals of fast-food restaurants frequently court families to experience nostalgia and fantasy. As with hard, objective media news, the textual and visual commercial invitations "are stitched into dramatically improvides scenes. . . artistic, interpretative, organized portrayals of social reality."[53] In many ways, "The way the food establishments look and the way they cater to the preferences of the patrons create a vehicle for the assumption of social identity."[54] Often the actual world is distorted by the media world of artificial interaction with others as reverie, dreams and memories may substitute for reality which is represented.[55]

Consider one analysis of the Roy Rogers Family Restaurants,[56] which allow a "21st century urbanized Eastern man (to) walk into the fake old west" in a "fear-free adventure for the American middle class on happy trails". He would "rather be conned quietly than openly demoralized" as he is provided with three things: "an excuse for a cheap meal in the name of nostalgia or of pleasing the children; a chance to appear fully grown in a context to smugly mock childhood; and childhood itself, a brief adventure backwards."[57] This is done in an atmosphere of "imitation fences, handhewn beams, pegs, barrels, wagon wheels and brick. . . an imitation Kentucky rifle on the wall (for protection), next to the imitation Confederate dollar" while being served a hamburger in which is planted a tiny American flag.

Such criticism contends that fast-food spots have "plundered every major suburb" and that the weathered and antique architecture assumes that "we only trust old things if they were stapled together yesterday".[58] The argument goes that "the word 'family' is affixed to the franchise"(as in family TV programs where the family members are pictured as "fictional bumpkin and "stupid and stupider in aggregate

than any single member.") That critic says further that the atmosphere "makes a fool of you in the name of the institution it purports to celebrate" as the childhood ambience is "actually a place for grown-ups who think of themselves as family oriented."[59]

There is the sharp contrast between the smiles of the Roy Rogers cowgirls and the fast-food clerks in TV commercials and"the grim monotony of American facial expressions--hard,surly, and bitter--and the aura of deprivation that informs them." The contraditions are acute:[60]

> ". . .the contrast between the faces of real people and the vision of happiness television offers: men and women running through fields, strolling on beaches, dancing and singing. Smiling faces with chronically open mouths express their gratification with the manifold bounties offered by the culture. One begins to feel there is a severe gap between the fantasies Americans live by and the realities they live in. Americans know from an early age how they are supposed to look when happy and what they are supposed to do or buy to be happy. But for some reason their fantasies are unrealizable and leave them disappointed and embittered."

The media reality has the appearance of truth as real community is more myth than fact and the therapeutic self-deceptions of consumption hold society together. "The triumph of mass media as the purveyors of secondary reality reflects the refusal of the people of the West to accept the implications of the collapse of community. The fragmentation of society is a reality, but the priceless distraction of erotic fantasy products and services conceals it."[61] In that sense, life is a hamburger.[62] In such a media-ted world, "The private citizen is now able to survive the rootless, terrorized environment in which he li[illegible] in direct proportion to his or her ability to renounce any feelings of responsibility or concern for others."[63]

One symbol of stability and roots in America has been the franchises which are "basically marketing trust" in the "national home town", those "friendly little places we once knew locally" which are

consistent, uniform, always open, highly visible, and "easily seen from a speeding car . . .when everything else is a blur through the windshield. . ."[64] The assurance of the same food, same service, same uniforms across homogenized America is marketed by those in the "Care Business" and their trademark and brand name are "the franchisor's most priceless possession."[65]

Families and Urban Violence

Despite the open, clean and safe image of the fast-food and other convenience establishments, they have frequently been the focus of urban crime and violence.Yet note the apparent ease with which the once-nearly-assassinated President Reagan casually stopped at a McDonald's in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, during the 1984 presidential campaign to eat a burger and fries, while on a Southern tour.[66] Former Presidents Nixon and Carter have also dined at fast-food spots in publicized visits, despite the fact that armed robbery is frequent in many convenience firms because of close proximity to major transportation routes, light amounts of street traffic, vacant or residential land nearby, and little surrounding commercial activity.[67]

For examples, in Shreveport, Louisiana, in 1984, a man was abducted in Wendy's drive-through lane and stabbed to death after he ordered a milkshake; A New Orleans woman was shot and killed in crossfire between robbers of a Pizza Hut; An Oakland, California, employee of Church's Fried Chicken was shot in the head by a robber. Fast-food chains are being sued by customers and are improving security with more lights, floor safes, and cash registers visible to the street.[68] They are vulnerable because of 24-hour service, with money being handled constantly, and lack of other places for public congregation and confrontation in cities.

A San Antonio, Texas, motorist angry at his wife because she had

left him, crashed his car into McDonald's where she worked, and caused half the roof to collapse, while he shouted "I love you. . . I did it for you."[69] In Melbourne, Australia, a man robbed a McDonalds of $1,400 to pay for a lung transplant operation for his 5-year-old daughter.[70]

As part of its concern for the family, since 1974, McDonald's has provided 200,000 families with a home-away-from-home in 75 Ronald McDonald Houses in the U.S., Canada, Holland and Australia through houses built as temporary residences for parents of critically ill children brought in from a distant city for treatment.[71] (Arby's Restaurant has conducted and supported a fingerprint identification program for lost children.)

In addition to its image of service to families and children, McDonald's has emphasized its safety, cleanliness and open-ness as among its keys to success since it opened its first store in Des Plaines, Illinois, in 1955. "The attention that the company has devoted since the early days to maintenance of a clean, safe place, with no loitering permitted, has also been instrumental in making it a place where families, particularly mothers with small children, could feel comfortable."[72] Founder Ray Kroc insisted that "no McDonald's have even a pay phone in it, much less a cigarette or a gum machine" and resisted the "short-run profitable deal for the sake of maintaining the place free from hangers-on . ."[73] The sense of order and openness was symbolized in the stainless steel (to show both dirt and cleanliness), and the visible kitchen showing employees preparing food.

Thus, it was ironic that the mass murder of 21 customers and employees should have occurred at McDonalds in San Ysidro, California, in July 1984, committed by a man from a disintegrating family.[74] After

a heated family dispute, the unemployed James Huberty, father of two daughters and reported to be "fond of children", told his wife he was going "hunting for humans", and took his pistol, rifle and shotgun in his car for a ride of a block to McDonald's and began to shoot. Five of the 21 were under 11 years of age, one an 8-months-old baby in its mother's arms. One was a bride of two months. Another a 62-year-old truck driver ready to retire in two days. Another waited for apple pie. Most were Mexican-Americans, five citizens of nearby Mexico.

Huberty had been abandoned by his mother as a child, came from a divorced family, believed his only true friend was his dog "Shep", and was an isolated loner, high strung, and lacked social networks. Reared in Mid-America Ohio, he and his wife were both graduates of a liberal arts Christian college, hosted Tupperware parties, and had nice furniture, press reports indicated. He had majored in sociology, and had been a mortician, welder and security guard. He was fascinated with guns.

An autopsy revealed no alcohol or drugs. He and his family had eaten breakfast that day at another McDonald's near the San Diego zoo where they had gone earlier. Huberty had with him an AM-FM transistor radio to monitor reports of his shootings. Police SWAT teams were late in arriving, partly because of freeway traffic. After Huberty and the others were dead, the McDonald flags flew at half staff. The blood was cleaned up and there were plans for re-opening after the funerals, but after family and community pressure, plans changed, the press reported. Surviving McDonald employees met across the street at the Yum Yum donut shop to talk. One surviving customer took his family to another McDonald's

Beyond the "Burger Wars", relatives of victims held candlelight services demonstrating for a memorial on the restaurant site. One co-

mmunity leader said "In our kind of extended family culture. . . .it becomes a family feeling of what's been done has been done to all of us." They were upset when the former editor of the Saturday Review, Norman Cousins gave $2,500 to McDonald's , $1,000 of it for Huberty's widow, who planned to sell publication rights for his story. She and her family shortly left town for Ohio.

McDonald's donated $1.15 million to aid the stricken families. Although this best known and most heavily advertised brand name in fast foods had no drop in business elsewhere, it immediately suspended temporarily all national TV and radio advertisements, just nine days before the opening of the Olympics in Los Angeles. McDonald's was a major games sponsor and in 1983 had spent $423 million on advertisements for the whole company.[75]

McDonald's got more than 200 calls from people expressing sorrow for what had happened. Burger King also suspended its advertisements as a courtesy. Said one media director of one of the McDonald advertising agencies, "This is the type of PR no company wants, and McDonald's shouldn't be tooting their own horn during the aftermath of a tragedy such as this." Time magazine remarked that "The slayings seemed particularly horrifying because many of the dead were children, and many of the murder sites (including other U.S. slayings) were islands of customary safety: a family-style fast-food restaurant, an idyllic mountain resort and . . a child's own home".[76]

McDonald's authorities were disturbed by such generalizations in the press, and especially by the alliterative journalism on the "McDonald's Massacre". The Golden Arches were taken down and the building later demolished, and no long term negative impact on the company was expected, although a year later, the traumatic memory remained.

Huberty's widow criticized police for not returning her husband's other guns to her, and someone broke her cat's jaw and pulled her dog's teeth. Local community survivors held an anniversary candlelight vigil and stopped a TV mini-series on the massacre, and got a local blackout of an HBO documentary on the shootings. His widow also filed a $5 million lawsuit claiming the rampage was caused by fast-food additives.[77]

Images of violence at fast-food outlets continue. In 1986, two gunmen threatened fast food customers in Oaklahoma City(incluidng a couple named McDonald) but then killed themselves. Earlier, a Pizza Hut TV commercial on a criminal eating a pizza before dying in the electric chair was cancelled in South Carolina. Such a man in that state had indeed ordered pizza as his last meal January 11, but it was made by a local family-owned restaurant, not by Pizza Hut. In the fictional commercial, the man was pardoned at the last minute, but di not want to give up his pizza.[78]

The future seems bright for the fast-food business however as more and more people are eating on the run and away from home, especially middle-aged 45-55 groups. And McDonald's alone was to add 500 more restaurants in 1984 to make 8,200, and move toward a "McStop" pattern of a motel, gas station and convenience store type operation[80] similar to the potential "community" atmosphere of future convenience stores with banking, mail, and eats.[81] The McDonald's trade name, the so frequently advertised brand in the U.S.,and the world's largest restaurant may indeed smile like the Menudo Rock group "Say Cheese Burger" in its TV commercial. McDonald's produces its 50th billion burger, opens its fast-food museum in suburban Des Plaines, and develops new architecture for "Hamburger Heaven".[82]

As the product becomes the same as the firm name(like kleenex, kodak and xerox), the convenience and economy of fast food become the emotional experience of eating. Already, two-thirds of McDonald's sales

alone are from customers on trips for other reasons (i.e. shopping and jobs). Not even another oil embargo may dent drive-in traffic, and the next stop--after the suburbs and central cities--is the Third World,[83] and what's left of small town America. There, local and regional tastes linger before being engulfed by standardized ethnic dishes and salad bars. Advertising "wars" with jokes, jabs, rude speech, noise, color and music may create new "products" in themselves while reinforcing the culture of fast-food--a term disliked by the industry, but which may move even faster with the ultimate objective of a "fast-food delivery system that will not require us to stop or even slow down". Such a "Big Smack" would hit a car windshield at 65 mph. Another possibility is a barbecue rack on the engine manifold for the tailgater. Futuristic food writers are anticipating the next foodways.[84]

Even a robot is being planned as a high tech humanoid "hamburger helper" which would prepare meals, make change, sweep floors and clean tables--and smile! It would eliminate some of the problems of vandalism and armed robberies and last seven years @ 24-hours a day. It would cook meat as requested, sing Christmas carols, the national anthem on July 4th, and the advertising jingles for whatever fast food chain. Research is underway to determine if its plastic face and synthesized voice should be male or female, and black and white versions are being explored.[85]

Fast-Food and the Future

Is fast-food the best ration for the republic or digestion for the democracy? The debate is underway. Columnist George Will notes that "The poet Coleridge, for example, preferred eating honeydew and drinking the milk of paradise. But that is not fit food for a Republic. The cuisine of the common man is a cracker called Ritz, covered with

peanut butter and jelly. Or a Big Mac".[86] Beyond the jests of clowns and journalists, there is a need for scholars to study more about food habits. Such questions include: the meaning and social functions of food sharing beyond nutrition; the correlations between childhood feeding experiences and adult interpersonal relations; the symbolic significance of various food substances; and factors in changing food habits such as the dynamics of commercialization and urbanization.[87]

There is also the need to seriously consider how the franchises are becoming new "community centers" (replicas and in some cases) and realities of small towns in other situations. The areas of motels, news stands, public phones, drug stores, "Dairy Queens", "Jack in the Boxes", the malls, "7-11's", and other "hang-outs" such as laundromats are some of the few places open much of the time, where people can communicate in an unguarded manner, meet strangers, flirt, court, explore, and gather community gossip like Biblical women at the well.

Laundromats are a growing example of such community space, now with coke machines, bulletin boards, jukeboxes, lounge chairs, fireplaces, libraries, buffets, and fast-food cafes! As one writer of popular culture puts it, laundromats seem "less threatening space than other public mixing points. It's just hard to seem dangerous with a box of Tide in your hands. . . . (they are). . .one of the few public places where people usually come for a respectable reason--even a revealing one. A group of people sharing their dirty underwear have revealed a little something to each other, have built a trust."[88] If one can believe in Buicks and burgers, can belief in bras and blue jeans be far behind. Meet me at the laundromat. We'll have it our way!

Clearly, the fast food tradition is a popular culture extending industrial and commercial culture into the previously private family area of life.[89] It is now marketed into small towns, changing eating, nutritional, social, psychological, and traffic patterns, making the local scene more like urban America.[90] Even the newer Western U.S. nurtures the romantic White Castles of earlier industrial Eastern cities as "cult centerpieces".[91] The international headlines tell us "Soviet Girl Samples Taste of America at McDonald's",[92] and one anthropologist tells us that roots and seeds were fast foods for man 20 million years ago,[93] but a communications development group warns that eating quickly at fast food outlets and in front of TV sets, continues to aid the decline in manners and civility.[94]

The convenient throw-away, cash and carry community on the run thrives among the grease and glue of the "Burger Wars" as consumers are promised "We Do It All For You", "Freedom's Waiting For You" at your lucky "7-11", so "Have It Your Way" in what urban sociologist Scott Greer has called the decentralized and rather rootless "community of limited liability".[95] The once private visceral realities of food are out of the cave and cupboard and into the public booth (like sex into the porno shop and show), where the crackle and crunch (and the grunts and groans) are openly merchandised for the "Now Generation" seeking instant gratification.

Studies indicate that food preferences are related to orality,[96] and that eating behavior is related to an ideology of food.[97] It has also been suggested that food is an index of others' conception of who one is, and we often eat what others think we are.[98] Families not only affect food attitudes,[99] but a marketing system can be more in-

fluential on food behavior than the internal "moral economy" was during the English food riots as far back as the 1700s.[100] It is not always easy to show connections between food consumption and biological needs and wants because of the intervening variables and mediation between the eater and the eaten.[101]

In a modern mediated society, "Our signals for eating do not come from within, but from without. . .The roots of conspicuous consumption begin with oral man,"[102] from whom many metaphors of speech transfer to eating, so that food became power, people, money, order....something more than biological satisfaction. Food as an object and symbol was used in 18th century literary fiction,[103] and in modern TV food commercials, "it is how the television communicates which trains us how and therefore what to communicate into our mouths".[104] Light and fast food is advertised to be entertaining and never to satisfy for long as the eye is taught to respond rather than the whole body, as in primitive man. Similarly, the un-mediated cave man suffered the food disease of starvation, while the modern TV viewer suffers from the excesses of choice: bulimia or anorexia.[105]

The mediation of food on film , as in TV commercials or movies, has implications for culinary, commercialized communion. Historically, "film develops the self-destructive potential of human appetite through its use of the diner as a pivotal focus " as "the film industry fashions the very images of our appetites and habits of consumption".[106] Furthermore, once "taken out of the normal locale of the home, the meal and its consumption invariably lose much of their ritualistic and community-affirming properties; instead, they take on the coloring of an automatic, in some instances even desperate, effort simply to sustain life."[107]

That latter film quality seems reflected in the typical TV commercial for fast food, but it is risky to suggest any over-all connection between such a mass medium, the widespread patronage of fast food outlets, and the previously mentioned urban fracture and disintegration. Also, any direct relationship between the McDonald's tragedy and the dissolution of community and family is probably more coincidental than causal. While some argue that fast food culture exploits the fragmented society, such firms also respond to family and other human needs, and probably mirror and reflect social forces as much or more than they influence them.

These 60,000 fast food outlets representing more than 340 chains deploying their standardized architectural images and culinary menus from coast to coast have "shaped the character of America's roadside landscape" and "act as a barometer of the public mood".[108] They have responded to public sentiment for communion and communication.

Initially, Ray Kroc of McDonald's, for example, made "attempts to eliminate social contact" by "making its design and furnishings relatively antisocial" so as "to prevent adolescents and others from turning his restaurants into social institutions, as opposed to mere feeding stations."[109] He was "leery of making his outlets too comfortable. He wanted to attract people, but didn't want them to stay for more than a few minutes." With no phone booths, no pinballs, no jukeboxes, no machines for candy or cigarettes, and no newspaper boxes, he hoped such an austere setting would "keep the transactions quick and limited."[110]

The lack of services other than "inexpensive food and clean lavatories" still appealed to youth and others who, despite their ceaseless mobility (essential to fast food success), found the outlets a place

in a rapidly place-less urban society. Rowdy gatherings in parking lots and related hang-out behavior, plus some public criticism of the architectural cosmetics of "form faking function" coinciced with moves toward more private enclosures, upgraded interiors (from drive-in to dining areas) and the atmosphere more like homes, with hanging plants, padded seats and booths, cork ceilings, earth tones, and recessed and ornamental lighting.[111]

Appropriately, communications firms and consultants now provide advice to fast food outlets, as there is renewed interest by both academics and amateurs in food history,[112] and the culinary cultural experience. With more food to pinch, poke and probe,[113] and more service-oriented institutions in the post-industrial era of a rather dis-placed society, the futuristic McDonald's arches provide "a feeling of skyward momentum symbolic of an aerospace age in which man could hurdle himself into the heavens,"[114] where, as in Biblical metaphor, the oral culture begins again with food and words magically united as "In the beginning was The Word" and "The Word was made flesh."[115]

As a sense of space replaces a sense of place in the era of electronic media,[116] temporary situations like fast food spots may retain and contain the essence of culture and advertise it. The White Castle hamburger of the American East and Midwest has been exported to the West as a "nostalgia cult".[117] Japan has imported the pastoral American lifestyle into its urban fast food franchises with home-delivery, and no seating for families who are not sold American "AIDS or robberies".[118] In Pakistan, video arcade centers are mixed with the lifestyle of fast food,[119] and foreign visitors to America are introduced to the Western doctrine of fast food, whether they be Soviet school girls or shipwrecked Soviet sailors hosted in The Rose Garden and at McDonald's.[120]

Summary

Fast food outlets thrive in the urban culture as they are re-shaped by new residential and transportation patterns, which preserve the biological functions of food consumption, yet reproduce the fantasy of the traditional family setting in a commercialized place. Community and the communion of food sharing are replicated in this new food culture, which serves as a cultural advertisement.

Just as communication is more than messages, food is more than a natural substance. Both involve sociological interaction in a personal and mass communication setting. To study both the messages of advertisements and the medium of the fast food place tells us more about communication and community than a separate study of either. Culture becomes a form of advertising.

When basic oral-food communication is altered by change, it reappears in some new formats, but restoration and recreation of past rural or pre-industrial symbols may not re-create the old community. Conflicts between the old and the new may be related to violence growing out of old, pastoral expectations in new, urban situations. The fast-food family may be more a mediated symbol than a community reality. Appealing marketing practices alone cannot be expected to produce a community structure.

Food consumption and food sharing are a communicative and social act, and advertisers incorporate that idea into marketing and public relations techniques. While critics may call them exploitative, they could also be considered efforts to preserve the family and culinary communication in an urban environment which forces many institutions to adapt old concepts to new realities.

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