Environmental sociology and environment social science sub-disciplines more generally have been developing steadily over the last 30 years. Touching on environmental social movements and grassroots activism; environmental citizenship and green consumerism; sustainable development; the social construction of environmental risk and environmental harm; the environment in the media; ecotourism; and climate change, environmental sociology is a very broad and inclusive subject. This new series, edited by Michael Redclift and Graham Woodgate, is international, cross-disciplinary and designed to produce the leading edge publications in their field.

Mediating Climate Change

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negative manner, heightening violence through image and text and delegitimising civil society action in favour of science and policy action.

The Times and the Daily Mail choose to dismiss the global premise of a climate deal, instead gently mocking the attempts by the world’s politicians to forge an agreement (The Times), or inverting power relations by casting developed countries as unjustly treated by developing countries (Daily Mail). The mocking tone deployed by The Times, which works as a form of distancing, is extended to civil society groups who are viewed as ineffectual and unthreatening. While the Daily Mail routinely excludes civil society groups from its coverage, it frames protest as violent and deviant, conversely blaming environmentalists for the conference’s failure as a result of acting too politically. Explicit boundaries between politics, science and the public are thus advocated, yet the Daily Mail’s coverage of the conference fails to assign responsibility for any of these actors, thereby legitimating inaction.

Of concern for public understanding is the systematic denial or undermining of climate change and climate science by the Daily Mail and, though to a lesser extent, The Times, which represent a significant majority of the UK daily newspaper circulation. The silencing of a legitimate voice for civil society in these newspapers simultaneously places responsibility on politicians and scientists. At the same time, the efficacy of these actors is undermined in newspaper coverage of climate change politics. As such, democratic participation is eroded by the simultaneous denigration of all three actors as variously inept or illegitimate.

This exploration of newspaper coverage suggests implications for public understanding of climate science and the assigning of responsibilities for action. Given the context of ‘Climategate’ and the Copenhagen conference, it is understandable that liberal newspapers would seek to reassert climate science by reasserting certainty, particularly given the historical difficulties in communicating the scientific consensus on human induced climate change within mass media. However, an opportunity was missed to properly explain the uncertainties which underpin climate science, but which do not themselves negate the consensus of climate science. A discussion of the meanings of the language used by climate scientists and the IPCC in relation to terms such as ‘likely’ or ‘highly likely’, and the percentages of certainty these represent, could have generated better public understanding of the notion of certainty and uncertainty as used in climate science (Shackley and Wynne 1996; Budescu et al. 2009).

Chapter 6
Sustainable Consumption?: Reframing Meat and Dairy Consumption in the Politics of Climate Change

[S]uccess is likely to come from persuading mainstream consumers that in adopting lower-carbon lifestyles they can save money, have control, look good, do the right thing without being an environmentalist and still be themselves (IPPR 2009, 3).

Preventing the collapse of human civilisation requires nothing less than a wholesale transformation of dominant cultural patterns. This transformation would reject consumerism – the cultural orientation that leads people to find meaning, contentment and acceptance through what they consume – as taboo and establish its place a new cultural framework based on sustainability (Assadourian 2010, 3).

As profligate users of cheap fossil fuels and natural resources, capitalist consumer societies have been the primary cause of global increases in greenhouse gas emissions over the last 150 years, and the last 50 years in particular (nef 2009a). High-income, middle-class lifestyles contribute the most to global greenhouse gas emissions, with 7 percent of the world’s population responsible for 50 percent of the world’s emissions, while ‘the poorest 50 percent of the global population...are responsible for just 7 percent of global emissions’ (nef 2009a, 3; WorldWatch Institute 2010). Such inequities are further revealed by calculations based upon current rates of consumption which posit that if the world’s population consumed at the same rate as Europeans, then three planets’ worth of resources would be needed, and five planets at the rate of North Americans (WWF International 2008; nef 2009a). Consumption practices include the direct consumption of food, water, energy and construction materials, as well as indirect consumption through ‘extraction, production, disposal and transportation of goods’ (Wilk 2002, 5). In order to mitigate climate change, consumption levels in developed countries need to be drastically reduced (WWF-UK 2008b; nef 2009a; WorldWatch Institute 2010).

As the opening quotes to this chapter demonstrate, however, there are conflicting views as to how to reduce the carbon intensity of consumption practices; ranging from an outright rejection of consumerism, to a revisioning of consumer...
lifestyles to encourage the adoption of lower carbon practices which do not disrupt an individual’s sense of self. Such approaches can be distinguished as an ‘ethics of consumption’, which is largely critical of consumer society and seeks to reduce levels of consumption, as opposed to ‘ethical consumption’, where consumption is seen as ‘a medium for moral and political action’ through ‘consumer boycotts’, ‘fair-trade campaigns’ or purchasing products deemed less environmentally damaging (Barnett et al. 2004, 21).

Theorists of contemporary consumer societies have shown that consumption plays a major role in the construction of identity, and has become the primary means through which social relations are formed (Miller 1998; Bauman 2007; Soper 2008; Gilbert 2008; Littler 2009). This chapter explores the role of consumption in the production of consumerist lifestyles as contested sets of practices integral to the politics of climate change. More specifically, it examines the role of food consumption, in the specific form of meat and dairy products, as an important site for the mitigation of climate change. Through an analysis of recent public communication campaigns from civil society groups and individuals, including Paul McCartney’s Meat Free Monday (UK), Peta2’s Meat’s Not Green (USA) and Friends of the Earth UK’s The Food Chain Campaign, this chapter examines how meat and dairy’s contribution to climate change is made visible through the campaigns, the discursive tactics used to address the consumer/citizen, who is being made responsible for changing consumption practices, and how the social norms of food consumption are being questioned.

While there have been some analyses of climate campaigns focusing upon reducing household energy consumption, particularly Government campaigns (Slocum 2004), the promotion of public campaigns which focus upon the role of industrial meat and dairy production and consumption in the mitigation of climate change has received far less attention. Given the impact that the livestock sector has on global greenhouse gas emissions, contributing 18 percent of global emissions according to the UN (FAO 2006), this is a significant oversight. It illustrates how forms of consumption are embedded within existing socio-cultural practices, where meat and dairy consumption is largely conceived as a ‘natural’ practice within western, and middle-class, societies (Heinz and Lee 1998). Governments have been disinclined to promote the reduction or elimination of meat and dairy because they are generally ‘reluctant to tackle questions of personal choice and consumption’, instead focusing their climate campaigning efforts upon household energy consumption (Robins and Roberts 2006, 39). Altering consumer practices, particularly those that are experienced as both ‘natural’ and aspirational – as meat consumption rises in middle-class societies – therefore requires acknowledging the symbolic dimensions of food consumption, as well as the social, economic and political systems which support food ‘choices’.

In the context of consumer culture, meat and dairy products are commodities: a set of resources to be used by humans, which ‘corresponds to the commodification of nature’ (Plumwood 2002, 144). Campaigning efforts that identify the relationship between climate change and industrial meat and dairy production – and the consumption of its commodities – are important as a means of revealing its significant contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions. They also help us to question practices of commodification which view nature as a set of resources to be used and exploited – both of which demand a reconceptualisation of meat and dairy production/consumption as unsustainable and unethical. The ways, and extent to which, the campaigns analysed here contribute to this reconceptualisation of industrial meat and dairy production/consumption, within the context of unsustainable consumer culture and climate change mitigation, is the focus of this chapter.

While an overall reduction in consumption is required to address climate change, promoting an ‘ethics of sustainable consumption’ (Michaelis 2006, 335) necessitates both revealing and changing the energy-intensive and unethical/unjust processes of many contemporary consumer practices undertaken routinely. What makes the campaigns of interest for an ethics of sustainable consumption is that they represent a rejection and revisioning of certain consumer practices, utilising, to varying degrees, both an ‘ethics of consumption’ and ‘ethical consumption’ within their campaign strategies (Barnett et al. 2004, 21). Given the highly symbolic nature of meat (Adams 1990; Lupton 1996; Heinz and Lee 1998; Allen and Baines 2002) and dairy consumption, alongside its key role in mitigating climate change, exploring both the possibilities and limitations of the various approaches to changing meat and dairy consumption practices is of real importance to the goal of reducing consumption levels within developed countries (WWF-UK 2008a, 2008b; nef 2009a; WorldWatch Institute 2010), as well as making our consumption practices more equitable and sustainable. Before analysing the campaigns, this chapter first engages with academic literature on (sustainable) consumption drawn from cultural and media studies, cultural geography and the social sciences, in order to frame the analysis within the context of debates on the role of consumption and consumerism within the politics of climate change.

**Consumer societies and the concept of sustainable consumption**

Unlike consumption, primarily a trait and occupation of individual human beings, consumerism is an attribute of society (Bauman 2007, 28).

In seeking to distinguish consumption from consumerism, Bauman foregrounds the ideology of contemporary consumer societies. While consumption is an individual act, which involves the acquisition of goods and services, consumerism is ‘a type of social arrangement that results from recycling mundane, permanent and so to speak “regime-neutral” human wants, desires and longings into the principal operating force of society’ (Bauman 2007, 28). Consumerism is an ideology which structures both individual and social relations, where human desires, experienced as needs, are expressed through practices of consumption. Although capitalist consumer societies produce more goods than are materially needed, the notion of human need is central to a consumer society, where basic material needs, such
as food, warmth and shelter become entwined with the concept of human well-being and identity that gets equated with material consumption (Michaelis 2006). Human needs and human wants/desires become increasingly difficult to distinguish because ‘material consumption is a major route to belonging to a community and achieving status within that community’ (ibid, 330). As such, consumption cannot be extricated from consumerism, but rather, acts of consumption are reified to become the primary basis through which social relations are lived and experienced. Bauman argues that ‘the secret of all successful “socialization” is making individuals wish to do what is needed to enable the system to reproduce itself’ (2007, 68). Consumerism is thus both an economic and social activity through which an individual’s sense of self and community is embedded.

The ideology of consumerism promotes the notion of individual consumer rights, where ‘individual freedom to own property and to consume is taken to be a fundamental right of all human beings’ (Michaelis 2006, 330; Gilbert 2008). As Andrew Szasz observes, ‘individualism in a mode of experiencing and as a mode of action, is at the core of our culture. Consumption is too. Consuming occupies much of our time, attention, enthusiasm — passion, even’ (Szass 2007, 7). The production of goods and services requires the use of energy and resources for their manufacture, distribution, consumption and disposal. Yet, modern consumer society renders invisible the energy (or carbon) intensive and profligate system which sustains it. The social legitimacy of the desire (or ‘need’) for products and services supersedes the reality of unsustainable amounts of energy and resources used for the production, distribution and consumption of consumer goods (including food products). The space-time distanciation between the manufacturing of goods and their consumption contributes to the fetishisation of commodities (Marx 1867; 1990) by concealing the commodity chains, or the labour, involved in the production and distribution of goods. Furthermore, the obsolescence built into material goods, where products are designed to last only a couple of years, creates the material conditions through which consumer desire is perpetually stimulated and reinforced (Chapman 2005).

Cultural theorists have identified and explored a range of ‘alternative’, ‘ethical’ or ‘radical’ forms of consumption (Bryant and Goodman 2004; Harrison et al. 2005; Litter 2009). These include changing unethical economic practices through fair trade (Bryant and Goodman 2004); promoting green consumption via the production/consumption of environmentally less damaging products such as organics or recycled clothing (Fox 2009); boycotting corporate brands (Klein 2001) or specific products that are environmentally harmful (Greenpeace International 2010); seeking to change consumer practices through buying local produce (Guthman 2008) or the Slow Food Movement (Slow Food 2010); or via ‘anti-consumer activism’ such as ‘Buy Nothing Day’ and Bill Taren’s ‘The Church of Stop Shopping’ (Litter 2009, 70, 80). In the context of climate change, efforts have been made to introduce systems of quantification which identify the amount of greenhouse gas emissions generated by food produce (often referred to as food miles), although this is notoriously difficult to quantify given the complexity of food production, packaging, transport and modes of consumption (Hertwich and Peters 2009).

Many alternative forms of consumption target affluent, middle-class consumers, reinforcing the economic and social logic of consumer culture (Szass 2007). Rather than dismissing such consumer practices as inherently classed, however, Kate Soper draws upon and utilises class distinctions to advocate a new anti-consumerism called ‘alternative hedonism’ (Soper 2008, 567). Arguing that consumption by the affluent elite is ‘unlikely to be checked in the absence of a seductive alternative’, Soper calls for a ‘new erotics of consumption’ (ibid, 571) based upon the pleasures of not consuming. Both altruistic and self-interested, such alternative hedonism would advocate the pleasures of ‘less tangible goods such as more free time, less stress, more personal contacts, a slower pace of life’ (ibid, 576). Such a vision is certainly enticing given the fact that it is the global affluent on middle to high incomes who contribute the most to greenhouse gas emissions (nef 2009a; WorldWatch Institute 2010), and who must be the target of campaigns to promote less consumption. The focus upon pleasure rather than displeasure is also welcome given the failure of existing climate campaigns, based upon generating fear, to engage citizens productively (O’Neill and Nicholson-Cole 2009). Soper’s proposition, however, reinforces class distinctions by placing power with an elite group of consumers who already have the material and symbolic means to create distinctions through a politics of taste (Bourdieu 1984). Locating power in the choices of the affluent consumer perpetuates the individualist premise of consumerism.

Engaging with the notion of sustainable consumption, rather than green or ethical consumption, may prove more productive for thinking about the embeddedness of human actions within the environment. There is much debate, however, over what the term means (Elliott 2006; Robins and Roberts 2006). First defined by WCED as part of the Brundtland Report of 1987, sustainable development is ‘economic and social development that meets human needs now without compromising future generations’ ability to meet their needs’ (Hobson 2006, 305). In this definition, sustainable consumption means taking into account the environmental impacts of consumption, whilst also meeting the needs of individuals in providing a better quality of life. But as Kerst Hobson observes, this approach represents ‘the “rationalization” of lifestyle practices’ (Hobson 2006, 305), also known as ecological modernisation (Hajer 1995), where science, technology and efficiency are invested with the power to address environmental problems, and the practice of consumption is not threatened. Structural changes are not sought, but instead new preferences are incorporated ‘without imposing upon individual’s (supposedly) sacred and deeply entrenched lifestyles’ (Hobson 2006, 307). Part of this approach is the assumption that as more information is given to individuals about the environmental impacts of certain products, then ‘individuals will change their consumption behaviour’ (ibid, 306). In figuring the individual as rational, such an approach ignores the social and habitual nature of consumption practices which can be difficult to change (Clarke 2008). Furthermore, in placing emphasis upon ‘individual consumption practices’ that remain ‘positioned within contexts and infrastructures not conducive to living sustainably’ (Hobson 2006, 311), the conditions and incentives for policy regulation are left unaddressed (Robins and Roberts 2006).
The sustainable consumption of food, goods, resources and energy must be a goal, which takes into account the current inequities of global consumption through a radical reduction of consumption in wealthy countries (Rees 2008; Seyfang and Paavola 2008). To change consumer practices within wealthy societies, cultural and social norms need to be altered meaningfully to reveal the ecological unsustainability of many of the behavioural and consumer practices undertaken on a daily basis. Researchers have already revealed that increased consumption does not lead to a proportional increase in happiness (nef 2009b; Rees 2008; Jackson 2008). At the same time, we also need to acknowledge how our daily practices are embedded in social networks which may make it difficult to change certain behaviours (Hobson 2003). Whilst in agreement with WWF’s assertion that the ‘ultimate imperative for society [is] to consume less rather than differently’ (WWF-UK 2008a, 36), I contend that consuming differently also has an important role to play in addressing climate change, because it facilitates a questioning of social and cultural norms about consumption, as well as making climate more culturally meaningful by relating it to our sense of self – our identity – through our routinised daily practices.

This chapter now moves on to examine consumer/citizen based climate action through an analysis of civil society campaigns focusing upon meat and dairy consumption: Paul McCartney’s Meat Free Monday (UK), Peta2’s Meat’s Not Green campaign (USA) and FoE UK’s The Food Chain Campaign. All of these campaigns endeavour to link meat and dairy consumption to the production of global greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. Each campaign focuses its message upon different aspects of livestock production and consumption, revealing various processes implicated in the meat/dairy commodity chain, and addressing audiences in diverse ways. Food consumption is more intimately linked to subjectivity and identity (Lupton 1996) than other external forms of energy consumption through behavioural activities such as driving, cooking, lighting and powering electrical appliances. Given the criticisms already discussed regarding the focus upon the individual consumer at the expense of collective and policy action, this chapter examines how the campaigns locate an individual’s food consumption practices in the context of wider structural conditions. At the same time, it examines the extent to which the promotion of behavioural change through meat and dairy consumption invites small or more radical ethical changes through its appeal to a sense of identity and community, and its questioning of processes of commodification in the context of climate change.

Reframing vegetarianism and veganism – the climate politics of meat and dairy consumption

Go vegan, fight climate change – Animal Aid campaign slogan, 2006

According to the UN the global livestock sector ‘is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gases and one of the leading causal factors in the loss of biodiversity’ (FAO 2006, 267). Emissions are predominantly produced in the use of land for livestock pastures and for animal feed crops, both of which lead to significant deforestation which is a leading contributor to climate change (ibid). The digestive fermentation of plant proteins by livestock produces methane via animal effluence, and animal waste produces nitrous oxide: both methane and nitrous oxide are significantly higher contributors to climate change than carbon dioxide. Furthermore, as irrigation is required for feed crops grown for animal feed, ‘Rearing animals for food uses large areas of agricultural land, vast quantities of water and significant amounts of energy’ (FoE UK 2008, 6). Soybeans are the main crop grown for animal feed, and ‘97 per cent of the soymeal produced worldwide is used for animal feed’ (ibid), with the USA the largest producer, followed by Brazil. Intensive livestock farming for meat and dairy production illustrates the interconnectedness and complexity of the global food chain and the role of food production and consumption in greenhouse gas emissions.

Global production of meat and dairy is set to rise significantly ‘over the coming decades’ (FAO 2006, 275), leading to ‘further conversion of natural habitats into cropland’ and increasing ‘livestock’s contribution to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions’ (276). Meat consumption rises in middle to high-income level consumers in the developed world, but increasingly now in developing countries. Many civil society organisations have called for a reduction in meat consumption in the developed world (FOA 2006; FoE UK 2008; Compassion in World Farming and Friends of the Earth 2009), with a move away from intensive farming to a more humane, equitable and sustainable system of food production. For Compassion in World Farming and Friends of the Earth UK, this would be based upon the adoption of a ‘fair, less meat’ diet, where meat consumption in ‘North America, Western Europe and Oceania’ decreases and increases in ‘Northern Africa, Western Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa for nutritional reasons as current consumption of animal products is relatively very low’ (Compassion in World Farming and Friends of the Earth 2009, 12).

The message from the UN’s 2006 report into the livestock sector’s contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions has been slow to translate into public communication campaigns. Indeed, the report comments that ‘civil society seems to have an inadequate understanding of the scope of the problem’ (FAO 2006, 282). This inadequacy has been partially addressed in the last couple of years, as a number of civil society campaigns to reduce or eliminate meat consumption as a means of addressing climate change have been launched across the globe. The highest profile campaigns have been those focused upon the reduction of meat consumption rather than elimination, mainly through the global ‘meatless’ or ‘meat free’ Monday campaign (Meatless Monday 2010). Campaigns focusing upon the elimination of meat (and to some extent, dairy) have tended to be adopted by already established animal rights organisations, such as PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) (USA) and Animal Aid (UK), who have been moreexplicit about promoting vegetarianism and veganism – the elimination of meat and dairy products from a person’s diet – to help mitigate climate change. Indeed, it is only very recently that one of the international environmental NGO’s, Friends of the
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Earth UK, has produced a specific climate campaign targeting the meat and dairy industry, called The Food Chain Campaign.

The Food Chain Campaign focuses upon changing production processes rather than consumer practices. Its explicit claim that it is 'not about being vegetarian' (FoE UK 2009) reveals some of the problems involved in campaigns aimed at changing people's food consumption more broadly, but meat and dairy consumption more specifically. Such problems point to the symbolic nature of food and its intimate linking with identity and social status, as this is experienced through the body (Lupton 1996).

Meat, in particular, is associated with masculinity and higher-income, middle-class groups (Adams 1990; Lupton 1996; Allen and Baines 2002). As Allen and Baines point out ‘...red and white meat have come to symbolise masculinity, high SES [socio-economic status], strength, and human domination over nature’ (2002, 119).

At the same time, however, the discourse of healthiness emergent in consumer culture of the 1980s, and promoted by western governments in the 1990s, has categorised red meat as unhealthy. The purportedly high fat diets of lower socio-economic groups have been the target of healthy eating campaigns, in which a discourse of the neoliberal consumerist subject is deployed to assign blame to individuals, rather than addressing the social and economic structures which guide and constrain our food 'choices'. Attempts to change people’s eating practices thus generate a diverse, contested and changing set of meanings.

Consumer research by Allen and Baines shows that people's attitudes to meat consumption are influenced by an individual’s set of values or ‘self-concepts’, where the symbolic meaning of meat is evaluated ‘against the values that they endorse’ (Allen and Baines 2002, 127, 119). When meat was associated with ‘dominance and hierarchy within human-to-human relationships’ (ibid, 120), consumers in the focus group who did not identify with those particular values subsequently altered their dietary choices, consuming less meat. Campaigns aimed at changing people’s levels of meat and dairy consumption as a means of addressing climate change, must navigate existing symbolic meanings of meat and dairy in order to change them. As Carol Adams has argued, the very concept of meat is reliant upon living animals becoming ‘the absent referent’, because ‘animals in name and body are made absent for meat to exist... If animals are alive, they cannot be meat’ (Adams 1990, 40). To what extent can the concept of meat as a commodity – reliant upon the commodification of nature and the maintenance of reductionist human/nature distinctions (Plumwood 2002) – be questioned through the linking of climate change to meat and dairy production/consumption?

Changing individual consumer behaviour through education – Meat Free Monday campaign

The global Meatless/Meat free Monday campaign specifically links meat consumption to climate change and is targeted at changing the consumption practices of individuals, communities, schools, businesses, public institutions and governments. Originally launched in 2003 as a public health awareness campaign by the John Hopkins School of Public Health (USA), Meatless Monday focused upon the human and environmental health benefits of reducing meat consumption for one day of the week (Meatless Monday 2010). In the last couple of years, nine other countries have supported the meat less or meat free Monday message, including the UK, Canada, Taiwan, Brazil, Holland, Croatia, Norway, Japan and Australia (ibid). The focus upon reducing meat consumption rather than promoting vegetarianism marks the campaign out as a ‘small and painless’ step (WWF-UK 2008a, 5), which does not promote bigger changes to lifestyle or consumption practices. By quantifying changes to consumption practices for one day a week, the climate change message is made tangible through calendar/clock time, realised through consumer practices. It places responsibility on the individual, and as such, puts the site of the consumer at the centre of climate politics. Conversely, however, the terms ‘meatless’ and ‘meat free’ linguistically and discursively work upon the assumption that meat is a normative constituent of meals (Heinz and Lee 1998), and as such, do not critique the commodification of animals as food.

Receiving a high level of UK media coverage, Meat Free Monday (MFM) was launched in the UK on 15 June 2009 by the singer-songwriter and ex-Beatles member, Paul McCartney, and his two daughters, Stella (fashion designer) and Mary (celebrity/fashion photographer). As high profile celebrities in the creative industries, their fronting of the campaign represents 'celebrity environmentalism' (Brockington 2008, 553). However, as instigators of the campaign, and as lifelong vegetarians and committed animal activists, they provide a more credible ownership of the campaign than simply lending their names as an endorsement, showing their difference from celebrities who are associated with less controversial conservationist projects (ibid). As patron of The Vegetarian Society since 1995, as well as campaigning for PETA, Paul McCartney has a long career in animal rights activism. His late wife Linda established the Linda McCartney vegetarian foods brand in 1994; a legacy and business maintained by Paul since her death in 1998 (Paul McCartney 2010). Fashion designer Stella McCartney does not use any leather or fur in her clothing collections, includes environmental ‘tips’ on her website, and funds a range of environmental and animal rights charities (Stella McCartney 2010), while photographer Mary McCartney has undertaken photographic shoots for PETA (Mary McCartney 2010). Established in their respective fields of music, fashion and photography, their credibility as creative practitioners, as well as celebrities (particularly Paul and Stella), does, however, bring a set of significations to the campaign that draw upon their cultural capital in the field of entertainment and as animal rights activists.

Their professional credibility is capitalised upon when they come together as the collective McCartney family in the campaign. Presented as lifelong vegetarians, the family narrative is visualised on the dedicated website for the MFM campaign, featuring a family portrait-style photograph of Paul, Stella and Mary, accompanied by the MFM logo. The logo is a reworking of the original brand logo for Linda McCartney’s meat free food range, using the heart shaped smiley face from the food brand logo as the Meat Free Monday logo. The McCartney family
brand is thus established through visual signifiers which figure the family as credible and knowledgeable representatives of the campaign by virtue of their long term involvement with animal rights and vegetarianism.

The website is a key information and communication tool for the campaign. The relative lack of imagery and large amount of text included indicates that the campaign is interested in presenting the information about the contribution of meat consumption to climate change, rather than through campaign slogans or imagery. The McCartneys' vegetarian activism is downplayed as the MFM campaign is characterised as 'an environmental campaign to raise awareness of the climate-changing impact of meat production and consumption' (MFM 2010a). The viewer is addressed positively as someone who 'cares about what you eat and what’s happening to our climate' (ibid), thus linking food consumption to climate change. A discourse of health positions the individual as a predominantly middle-class consumer who cares about ‘what you eat’ (ibid). With no reference to vegetarianism on the home page, meat production and consumption is framed discursively through climate change: the individual is encouraged to 'pledge to do your bit' (ibid), downplaying discourses of animal rights (Singer 1995) and emotion, usually 'central to the vegetarian position' (Lupton 1996, 124). The commodification of animals involved in the production of meat as food is not questioned, and the 'basic assumption that cooking with meat is the norm' (Heinz and Lee 1998, 91) is conversely reinforced through the identification of one day a week as being meat free.

This 'meat free', rather than vegetarian message (which would more radically question the social norms of meat consumption) is reinforced through the meat free recipes offered on the website by Linda McCartney, the Vegetarian Society and a range of celebrity chefs from top British restaurants. Radical changes to existing lifestyles are not advocated. Instead, giving up meat for a day is offered as an easy option that purportedly fits in with existing lifestyles choices. Recipes produced by Linda McCartney offer basic foods like shepherd’s pie, pizza and meatless bolognese sauce. Accessing these recipes redirects the viewer to the Linda McCartney Food website, which also acts as an advertisement for her ready-made vegetarian frozen foods; implying that Linda’s meat free recipes can also be replaced by her ready-made products. The celebrity chefs offer more luxurious and complex recipes: ‘beetroot ravioli with cashew-chive boursin cheese’ from Chad Sarno, chef for Saf vegetarian and vegan restaurant in London; or ‘ricotta stuffed courgette flower zucchini salad’ from Francesco Mazzei from L’Anima Italian restaurant in London. The ‘simple and painless steps’ discourse encouraged by the campaign is cut through with a middle-class, aspirational discourse, where the celebrityisation of restaurant chefs, and the types of foods they use in their recipes, appeal to middle-class tastes. At the same time, the recipes function as advertisements for the restaurants (many of which are not vegetarian).

The viewer is addressed as a consumer citizen through the information given under the main heading 'How can I help the planet?'. Presented in descending order as 'less pollution', 'making a political statement', 'alleviating world hunger', 'better health' and 'protecting animal rights', the reduction of meat consumption draws upon discourses of environment, politics, health, human ethics and animal welfare to produce an ethics of care through consumption. Consumer action is presented as a form of politicised citizenship, which takes emphasis away from policy changes:

Politicians follow. They don’t lead. And because of meat’s association with affluence and the fear that asking people to eat less meat might make them unpopular, most politicians shy away from this issue... So the best hope for change lies in average people becoming more aware of the true costs of industrial meat production and taking action themselves (MFM 2010b).

Each piece of information presents a rational overview of the impact of meat consumption on the climate, human health and, to a lesser extent, animal welfare. The rationalisation of these reasons positions the viewer as an individual consumer able to make appropriate choices through information; criticised by many as failing to take into account the symbolic dimensions of people’s consumption practices (Hobson 2006; Clarke 2008). An appeal to the self is made without referencing or activating more politicised identity categories such as vegetarian or vegan. Overall, reducing meat consumption is presented as an ethically informed rational choice, which individuals can sign up to supporting, and can donate money, following reasoned consideration of this environmental issue.

The linking of meat consumption to climate change decreases the time-space distanciation between commodity meat production and its climate impact, by linking food production and everyday consumption to greenhouse gas emissions. Through a positive appeal to the efficacy of individual action, everyday actions are linked to global effects. Yet, at the same time, the relationship between food consumption and climate change is abstracted by making an environmentalist appeal to ‘the planet’: ‘By making a simple change in the way you eat, you are taking part in a world changing campaign where what’s good for you is also good for the planet’ (MFM 2010b). Although the linking of the self to the planet positively localises responses to mitigate global climate change, the consumer actions taken in the present are figured as part of an abstract future: ‘The scale of the problems we face can make many of us feel helpless, and yet each of us has the power to make changes in our lives that can have a meaningful impact on the future’ (ibid: Help the planet page). Climate change is rendered a distant event, even as it is linked to everyday food practices.

The campaign makes an important contribution to the climate message by linking meat production and consumption to climate change, as well as mainstreaming climate action through the promotion of one 'meat free' day of the week. The quantification of meat consumption in relation to calendar time makes the individual action meaningful to a potentially large number of people, because eliminating meat one day a week is linked to the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions. Using the slogan ‘Support Meat Free Monday’, the campaign
employs positive rhetoric. The campaign, however, also reproduces an approach criticised for assuming a rational individual who changes behaviour as a result of information, leaving (middle-class) lifestyle practices unchanged. Furthermore, while making visible the role of meat consumption in the production of greenhouse gases works to foreground human actions as part of the environment, the failure to question the concept of meat as a commodity reinforces human/nature distinctions through the commodification of animals for human consumption.

To what extent does the campaign question consumerism itself? The McCartney family represent a brand whose name is not only used to promote highly processed and freezer-dependent (thus highly energy profligate) vegetarian food through the Linda McCartney frozen food range, but whose occupations promote an aspirational consumerist lifestyle through the production of luxury goods by Stella McCartney and the celebrity/fashion photography of Mary McCartney. The McCartney brand and its links to celebrity are reinforced through the list of celebrity names and celebrity chefs (and their restaurants) who support the campaign via a presence on the website. Although kept to a minimum, photographs of the McCartneys are present in the form of a family portrait on the homepage, a photograph of Paul McCartney standing in a field of organic spelt which he owns, and a snapshot of Linda McCartney on the recipe page. Furthermore, the use of quantitative clock/calendar time to help change consumer actions, alongside the discourse of environment which partially positions ‘the planet’ as separate from humans, downplay the urgency of addressing climate change through major lifestyle changes, rendering climate change a future event, rather than a present reality.

As one of only a few high profile public campaigns linking meat to climate change, MFM does represent an important start to the mainstreaming of climate action through meat (although not dairy) consumption. Furthermore, it enables the message to be promoted by other organisations and groups. The UK animal rights organisation, Animal Aid, is working with local councils to make schools commit to a Meat Free Monday, simultaneously promoting a more explicit vegetarian and vegan message (Animal Aid 2010). PETA has been promoting Meat Free Monday in primary and secondary schools in the UK, linked in to promoting an animal welfare and vegan message. Globally, the ‘meat free’ Monday campaign has been adopted by numerous schools and cities, including Bremen in Germany and San Francisco in the USA (ibid). While the UK MFM campaign may downplay more radical lifestyle changes, such as the adoption of a vegetarian or vegan diet, in place of a more mainstream individualist appeal, its message has the potential to transform community and institutional practices through the networks of campaigning groups it facilitates.

2 My thanks to Suzanne Barnard, Education Manager, at PETA foundation UK for providing this information.

Activating an ethical individualist self—Peta2’s Meat’s Not Green campaign

Launched online in August 2008, Meat’s Not Green is a campaign by Peta2, the youth division of PETA (USA). Initially, its aim was to petition the USA Food and Drug Administration for legislation that all meat products have a warning label stating that meat is the number one cause of global warming. This aim was eventually changed to encourage individuals to pledge to go vegan for 7 days. Like MFM, Meat’s Not Green explicitly links meat consumption to climate change (although the term global warming is used in the campaign), but includes the role of dairy consumption in the production of greenhouse gases. In contrast to MFM, this campaign aims to eliminate meat and dairy produce from people’s diets, rather than simply reducing meat consumption. The slogan, ‘Meat’s Not Green’ is a negative proposition that assertively draws upon the discourses of animal rights and environmentalism to present its message. These discourses are made more explicit in the tagline – ‘Save the planet – Go vegetarian’, reinforced by the slogan’s logo. Here, the image of a calf between the words ‘Not’ and ‘Green’ visually reinforces the animal rights message, while the inclusion of a recycling logo in the ‘o’ of ‘Not’ utilises a sign from environmentalist discourse. The inclusion of the calf acts as a sign for the meat and dairy industry, whose production processes are based upon the removal of calves from dairy cows for the veal industry, as well as to access the cow’s milk for human consumption. The inclusion of a recycling logo indicates an audience more familiar with animal rights/ welfare issues than environmentalism, given the incongruous inclusion of a recycling sign to signify the environment.

With significantly less text than the MFM website, this website is more closely linked to the discourses and rhetorical strategies of animal rights and environmental activism, with a campaigning style tone deployed: ‘What’s the number one cause of global warming? Cars? No. Factories? No. Planes? No. According to the United Nations, raising animals for food generates more greenhouse-gas emissions than all the cars, planes, ships, trucks, and trains in the world combined’ (Peta2 2010). As an existing animal rights organisation, the pledge to go vegan for seven days is potentially aimed at existing vegetarians, explicitly incorporating the discourses of animal rights with those of the environmentalism: ‘I want to help save the planet and to stop supporting cruelty to chickens, pigs, cows, and other animals who are raised for food. By signing my name, I pledge to try going vegan for a week’ (ibid). Although it uses days as a means of quantifying behavioural changes into manageable actions, unlike MFM the emphasis here is upon a more explicit assertion of the self, where the ‘I’ activates an identity politics that is reflected in the pledge itself, to go vegan. The act of giving up meat and dairy products is named as an identity, placing this kind of pledge within the identity politics of animal rights. Furthermore, to pledge means to solemnly promise, whereas

3 My thanks to Abi Izzard at Peta2 for supplying me with information about the campaign via email.
to support (as in MFM) connotes a less involved form of behavioural change that does not alter, or call into question, a sense of self. Identity politics are reinforced further through the activities offered on the website which include creating your own slogan to go on a warning label for meat (the original aim of the campaign) and posting the individually sloganised image up on your Facebook or MySpace page. An application, in the shape of an ipod, that calculates how green your diet is, can also be copied to your Facebook and MySpace pages, thus linking the activist self to a community through social media.

In the promotional campaign video, dominant (and normative) visual tropes of climate change – such as satellite images of planet earth and hurricanes, as well as images of droughts, melting glaciers and flooding – are reproduced and recontextualised in discursive relation to animal activism to promote a new discourse of climate change in relation to meat and dairy consumption. Images of climate impacts to visible landscapes are accompanied by the female voiceover who states, ‘We know you’re concerned about the planet and its inhabitants. You wanna help stop global warming. But what can you do to make a difference besides changing some lightbulbs?’ (ibid). Existing visual discourses of climate impacts to a visible nature help give meaning to a new climate discourse. Yet existing discourses of climate mitigation are undermined through the posing of rhetorical questions that humorously devalue the efficacy of certain individualist behavioural changes, such as changing light bulbs. The voiceover asks us, ‘What really is the number one cause of global warming?’ (ibid): Failure to recycle, and the use of cars and planes are the different visual suggestions, each of which is followed by a cross imposed upon the image to signify ‘no’. An image of a piece of steak on a plate then appears, overlaid by the spoken question, ‘What about that steak on your plate?’ The voiceover then reiterates the written message of the pledge. ‘According to the United Nations, raising animals for food causes more greenhouse gas emissions than all the cars, planes, ships and trains in the world combined’ (ibid). The voiceover is visually reinforced though a set of images associated with animal rights and climate change: video images of livestock crammed together and satellite images of hurricanes, flood water and a polar bear.

The choice of animal images showing suffering encountered in factory farming makes a visual and discursive link between animal cruelty – thus revealing ‘the absent referent’ (Adams 1990, 40) – and the causes of climate change. Throughout the video, spoken references to animals are visually reinforced through images of animals suffering in cramped living conditions. As such, two messages are communicated simultaneously through visual/verbal signs: that the production of animals for human consumption contributes to climate change through greenhouse gas emissions involved in rearing animals and in the destruction of rainforests for meat production; and that the production of animals as commodities for human consumption is cruel and inhumane. The absent referent in meat and dairy production is revealed through the images of animal suffering; familiar strategies for the campaigning tactics of animal rights organisations such as PETA, but used here to also make visible the contribution of meat and dairy production to climate change.

The greenhouse gas emissions of everyday practices in the form of meat, dairy and egg consumption are made tangible and explicit through spoken and visual text. Yet, the images of climate change used to convey impacts to uninhabited land reproduce dominant visual imagery of climate change as separate from humans through reference to an objectified visible nature. Instead, humans are included in the video as both perpetrators of destruction (involved in animal rearing and as consumers of meat/dairy) and as agents of individual change. ‘You can help’ is accompanied by a speeded up video montage of factory farm scenes, communicating the message that eating meat is cruel. The individual is then asked to sign Peta2’s petition ‘for all meat packages to be labelled with a clear warning that meat is the number one cause of global warming’ (ibid). While the petition is aimed at achieving policy changes through the USA Food and Drug Administration, positioning the individual as a citizen, the video ends with the assertion that ‘the consumer has the right to know’, thus utilising consumerist discourses. The campaign both questions and reinforces nature/culture and human/animal distinctions in its efforts to make visible the role of industrial meat and dairy production/consumption in the creation of climatically changing greenhouse gas emissions. While the campaign importantly reveals this relationship through commodity meat/dairy production and consumption, thus critiquing the commodification of animals and environment, it does so by visually and textually presenting the animals and a climatically changing environment as separate from humans, even as it extends the right to life, to animals.

Compelling in its affirmation of action, the individualist discourse of the climate actions proposed – ‘I pledge to go vegan’ – is indicative of what Plumwood calls ‘excessive individualism’ in the context of an animal rights framework (Plumwood 2002, 152). Excessive individualism turns attention away from the structural origins of the atrocities committed against animals in the factory farm and the commodity framework to the question of the virtue of individual consumers who makes a choice of eating animal food, no matter how obtained (ibid, 153).

For Plumwood, this approach limits the integration of ‘animal justice concerns with those of environmental and human justice movements’ (ibid). I agree with Plumwood that justice movements need to involve animals, environment and humans as unseparated, and therefore I recognise the individualist limitations of the campaign. However, I also want to acknowledge the important contribution of Peta2’s campaign to a developing discourse of climate change by making visible the link between industrial meat and dairy production/consumption and global greenhouse gas emissions, and offering more radical behavioural changes than MFM. The question of the structural origins of factory farming, and its relationship to climate change, not focused upon in this campaign, is specifically addressed by FoE UK’s The Food Chain Campaign.
Regulating unsustainable food farming practices – Friends of the Earth UK’s The Food Chain Campaign

In contrast to both the MFM and Meat’s Not Green campaigns, FoE UK’s The Food Chain Campaign does not encourage individual behavioural change through reducing or eliminating meat and dairy products from a person’s diet. Instead, the campaign focuses upon the production processes involved in the meat and dairy industries, mainly the industrial production of soy used for animal feed in factory farming and the role of the UK Government in supporting these unsustainable food practices. Like the MFM and Meat’s Not Green campaigns, the link between soy production for animal feed and climate change is foregrounded: ‘Vast areas of land have to be cleared to grow the soy, causing deforestation; greenhouse gas emissions; [and] the loss of valuable wildlife habitat’ (FoE UK 2009). Rather than targeting the individual consumer to change their eating habits at the point of consumption, FoE focuses attention upon UK Government subsidies for intensive factory farming, which, it argues, supports the large-scale production of soy, and subsequent deforestation in South America. The aim of the campaign is to divert government subsidies away from unsustainable farming and to encourage local, ‘planet-friendly farming’ (ibid). As such, the climate impacts of intensive factory farming are communicated through highlighting the economic unsustainability of these practices, with policy regulation of livestock farming the key message of the campaign.

The campaign reveals the set of commodity chains involved in meat and dairy production, and the environmental, social and economic consequences of large scale, intensive factory farming. While the MFM and Meat’s Not Green campaigns also foreground the climate impacts of land clearance for soy production used in livestock rearing, FoE’s campaign is more explicitly focused upon changing these processes rather than eliminating or reducing the final commodity in the form of meat and dairy produce. Fronted by FoE’s Senior Food Campaigner Clare Oxborrow, the campaign video, ‘Fix the Food Chain’, begins by presenting the economic case against factory farming: ‘At the moment £700 million pounds of taxpayer’s money is spent propping up factory farming of livestock in England and billions of public money is invested every year in providing meat and dairy for schools, hospitals and care homes without a thought of how it is produced’ (FoE UK 2009). The economic profligacy of factory farming is then linked to the environmental and social impacts of soy production for animal feed in South America, which involves destroying rainforests and ‘forcing out communities off their land’ (ibid). The social impacts of soy production upon communities is highlighted by neither of the other two campaigns, although they all use the same statistics from the UN; that ‘meat and dairy production causes 18 percent of the world’s climate-changing emissions. More than all of the planes, cars and lorries on the planet’ (ibid).

The video images accompanying the audio messages function as visual evidence of the processes involved in meat and dairy production and those who are affected: land, humans and animals. FoE’s campaign seeks to link animal, environmental and human justice issues together. Significantly there are no images of climate impact to land or humans; instead there are images of cleared (deforested) swathes of land, a group of South American people sitting in a communal area and going about their daily routines, such as washing clothes in a river, South Americans marching in protest, and a series of images of animals in factory farms. These images function as a way of bringing a broader set of understandings about the contribution of meat and dairy production to climate change, and the economic and social impacts of livestock rearing on communities, foregrounding issues of social and, to a lesser extent, animal justice. Interjecting the video images and spoken text are a series of cartoon cut-outs of a chicken, pig, cow, sack of soy feed, chainsaw and logs, and a balloon with CO2 written on it. Each image functions as a representative and visible sign within the chain of commodity food production, which includes the effects of meat and dairy production through the creation of carbon dioxide as a result of deforestation and from the growing of soy for animal feed. In doing so, the images function to defetishise the commodity production of meat and dairy by calling attention to some of the processes involved in these industries, which are also dependent upon other commodities, such as soy and land, to produce the final products. Using similar style cut-outs, other images (see Figure 4.1) are less visually explicit about the links between the commodity carbon chain, instead communicating that animal farming should be free-range to ensure ‘planet-friendly farming’ (FoE UK 2009).

Figure 6.1 The Food Chain Campaign from Friends of the Earth UK
What makes FoE’s campaign different from the previous two is that it focuses upon government regulation, rather than individualised consumer action, assigning responsibility to the economic and policy structures of the UK Government which support the global meat and dairy industry through financial subsidies for intensive livestock farming. The wider regulatory system involved in food production is the focus of attention, rather than consumption of the end product, in this global food chain. Activism does not involve ‘getting people to go vegetarian, though it won’t hurt to less and better meat and dairy’ (ibid). Instead, the consumer is framed as a citizen, urged ‘to put pressure on politicians to change the system and change the deal behind our meals’ (ibid). Here, the action moves away from individual choices about consumption of meat and dairy, to the wider economic and regulatory systems which support intensive and, by inference, inhumane farming. Rather than an individualised campaign which utilises identity politics to promote the reduction or elimination of meat and dairy consumption, FoE’s campaign explicitly distances itself from such individualised strategies, instead targeting the UK Government to ‘support small-scale farming and develop home-grown animal feed’ (ibid). Thus, ‘The Food Chain Campaign isn’t about getting rid of meat and dairy farming – it’s about getting government to revolutionise it’ (ibid). In downplaying the role of the consumer, the campaign importantly draws attention to the wider systems which support intensive farming, identifying the individual as a rational citizen whom ‘is the strongest link in the food chain’ (ibid) by virtue of their political voice, while drawing attention to the global commodity chains involved in meat and dairy production. While global meat and dairy production is defetishised through the identification of commodity carbon relations, the social norms of meat (Heinz and Lee 1998) and dairy consumption are left unaddressed. As such, animals remain commodified as food products.

Discussion – negotiating appeals to individualist action and policy regulation

Reproducing the statistics produced by the UN’s 2006 report into the livestock sector, all three campaigns explicitly link meat (and to a lesser extent dairy) consumption to climate change, revealing the role of soy production for global animal feed which involves the clearance of vast swathes of forest and land for crops and for livestock rearing. Yet where MFM and Meat’s Not Green focus upon the role of consumption in the commodity food chain, targeting the individual as the site of consumer action, FoE UK foreground the production processes in livestock farming to argue for localised and small-scale farming achievable through political action via pressure on politicians. Of the three campaigns, Peta2’s Meat’s Not Green campaign explicitly appeals to an identity politics, addressing the individual as a vegetarian or vegan through an emotional appeal to animal rights to communicate the climate message. In contrast, MFM avoids reference to vegetarianism or veganism, to offer a rationalised approach to reducing meat consumption through an environmentalist and ethical appeal to the well-being of the individual and ‘the planet’. Avoiding identity categories in its rhetorical appeal, MFM dismisses the role of politics in addressing climate change, instead advocating a politicised consumer position, who in reducing meat consumption, also alters consumer practices. FoE’s Food Chain Campaign similarly avoids identity categories, but in contrast to the other campaigns does not explicitly advocate the reduction or elimination of meat and dairy products, placing emphasis upon the economic, environmental and social unsustainability of global meat and dairy production in order to advocate local farming, as a more sustainable, and thus rational, development.

To some extent, all three campaigns rely upon existing discourses of climate change to reframe meat and dairy production and consumption as contributors to global greenhouse gas emissions. MFM assumes a more knowledgeable (middle-class) audience, utilising an environmental discourse of climate change as affecting ‘the planet’, whilst also drawing upon discourses of health to position the viewer as someone who cares about the health of themselves and the environment. Meat’s Not Green deploys video images of climate impacts to land (devoid of humans) alongside those of animal suffering, to establish a point of emotional equivalence between the two. While figuring the individual as able to contribute to climate change mitigation through the elimination of meat and dairy from their diet, the discourse of animal rights alongside the images of climate impacts work concurrently to remove the human from the environment. An environmental justice organisation, FoE UK’s long history of campaigning for climate change is illustrated in its deployment of discourses which may not be so readily associated with climate change, foregrounding an economic and sustainability discourse that highlights the complex role of food production in the politics of climate change.

In defetishising the commodity relations involved in meat and dairy production, all three campaigns offer significant contributions to cultural understanding of climate change, by making it meaningful at the level of everyday food consumption. For any changes to consumer behaviours to take place, the social and symbolic relevance of consumption practices needs to be acknowledged. In this context, MFM and Meat’s Not Green offer the more explicit engagement with consumer habits by advocating changes to consumer practices that can be understood in the context of a weekly calendar, while Meat’s Not Green also reveals the suffering involved in factory farming through photographic and video images. However, this also constitutes the limitations of these campaigns. For MFM, the simple and painless steps approach (which include accessing recipes on the website) does not really question an existing sense of self, thus it may not translate into more radical behavioural changes, particularly in relation to a middle-class consumerist lifestyle. For Meat’s Not Green, there is no sense of understanding why people may eat meat or dairy, despite being aware of the cruelty issue. For FoE’s Food Chain Campaign, there is no discussion of consumer habits, nor of the symbolic nature of food, because it does not advocate changes to consumer behaviour but rather policy regulation. Promoting an ethics of sustainable consumption, however, involves changing people’s consumer practices through education and moral/ethical appeals, as well as providing government laws and incentives (Gardner and
Stern 1996, 27 cited in Jackson 2004, 1040). Taken together, the three campaigns activate all of these strategies.

**Conclusion – towards an ethics of sustainable and just consumption**

As consumerist cultures increase across the globe (WorldWatch Institute 2010), the consumption of foods, goods, services and energy rises, putting further pressure on the planet’s resources, already unsustainable at European and North American rates of consumption (WWF International 2008; nef 2009a). The energy and carbon intensive practices of consumerist societies, and the commodity chains which mask these processes, thus need to be made more visible, and actively reduced, by individuals, societies, businesses and governments. This chapter has argued that consumerism, as a way of life, needs to be critiqued (Gilbert 2008), and that those of us living in consumer societies need to consume both less and differently. This does not entail simply buying ‘green’ or ‘ethical’ products in place of others, but rather being conscious of the energy required for the production, transportation, consumption and disposal of all goods, as well as services, and changing our consumer habits/practices. Yet, information about the carbon intensity of consumption practices is not sufficient to alter people’s behaviour (Hobson 2006; Clarke 2008). We need also to be attentive to the symbolic and cultural meanings associated with particular commodities and acts of consumption, which contribute to our sense of self and social status. In doing so, the symbolic saliency – or fetishisation (Marx 1867 1990) – of certain commodities/consumption practices can be changed (Heinz and Lee 1998; Allen and Baines 2002). At the same time, acts of consumption need to be understood in the context of the structural systems which support and constrain consumer practices: activating sustainable consumption requires government legislation.

This chapter has analysed three public communication campaigns which seek to make visible the role of meat and dairy industries in the production of greenhouse gas emissions and resultant climate change. One of the aims of this book has been to argue that climate change needs to be made culturally meaningful and relevant to people’s everyday lives. The linking of food consumption to climate change is an important way of achieving this. Peta2’s Meat’s Not Green campaign utilises established moral discourses of animal rights to set up an equivalent discourse of a climatically destroyed environment as a result of meat and dairy consumption. It focuses upon individual action at the point of consumption, advocating a vegetarian or vegan position through the explicit activation of identity consumerist politics. In contrast, MFM does not utilise identity politics in the form of a vegetarian or vegan identity, instead promoting ‘small and painless steps’ to reducing meat (but not dairy) consumption one day of the week. It links both meat production and consumption to a wide range of issues, including health and animal rights, but more explicitly utilises an environmentalist discourse to encourage the reduction of meat consumption. Unlike Meat’s Not Green, and FoE’s campaign, it explicitly undermines the role of governments in changing consumption practices, articulating an individual consumerist position for action. Both MFM and Meat’s Not Green, I would argue, endorse people’s existing values, in order to promote a meat free or ‘meatless’ position. Meat’s Not Green utilises an animal rights and identity politics framework to encourage the elimination of meat and dairy consumption, while MFM utilises an environmental discourse, familiar to a middle-class audience, to encourage the reduction of meat consumption.

In contrast to these campaigns, FoE UK’s The Food Chain Campaign focuses upon changing government policies which economically subsidise industrial factory farming. As such, the commodification of animals as food products is not viewed as problematic, but rather the economically and ecologically unsustainable practices of factory farming. Individuals are targeted as citizens who should campaign to change government laws to promote local and sustainable farming, rather than activating change at the point of consumption through the elimination or reduction of meat and dairy consumption. The Food Chain Campaign more explicitly reveals the globalised and unjust nature of industrialised commodity meat and dairy production, to include the unjust treatment of animals, humans and land, as part of the environment. Of the three campaigns, FoE’s provides a more cohesive overview of the commodity chains involved in the factory farming of meat and dairy, including the social and environmental effects of its production. As such, FoE more explicitly attempts to link an ethics and sustainability agenda of animals, humans and environment as interconnected and unseparated (Plumwood 2002).

It could be argued that FoE’s campaign is more successful in revealing the relational links between meat and dairy production and climate change, in presenting a more complex understanding of global meat/dairy production as unsustainable and unjust, and for advocating more structural, rather than individual changes. Yet, in choosing to ignore meat and dairy consumption, the campaign, I would argue, continues to figure animals as consumer products, failing to question the commodification of nature (Plumwood 2002, Adam 1998a). The campaign employs a rationalist approach which denies any emotional engagement with these issues, and in doing so, ignores an important dimension of people’s capacity to engage with climate change. Any campaign which attempts to change people’s diets is always at risk of being accused of preaching, by questioning a person’s ‘individual right’ to consume what they like; particularly for commodities like meat and dairy that are regarded as both natural and aspirational in western consumer societies (Heinz and Lee 1998). This should not lead, however, to a rationalist – or emotionally disengaged – approach to understanding the role of particular forms of consumption in contributing to climate change, as this devalues affective responses to climate change, reinforcing binary distinctions which present humans as rational and masculine, and nature as feminine and irrational (see Chapter 1 for a more in-depth discussion of these distinctions). An ethics of sustainable consumption must appeal to our emotions, our ethics, our values and our rational selves in an attempt to change social norms about consumption.
While all three campaigns analysed offer important contributions to the communication and making meaningful of climate change in our everyday lives, I would argue that the commodification of animals necessary for the production of meat and dairy products – ‘the absent referent’ (Adams 1990, 40) – needs to be made more visible and explicitly critiqued in the context of climate change. Firstly, such a process of commodification reinforces nature/culture distinctions, which have contributed to a separation of humans from the environment (and thus an understanding of climate change); and secondly, in the context of energy-intensive consumer societies, such commodification erases the processes involved in commodity production which imbue products with symbolic meaning. In the context of climate change, the contribution of industrial meat and dairy production to global greenhouse gas emissions; the unjust treatment of animals; human and environment within these industries; and the reproduction of commodity processes as part of a consumerist culture, means that meat and dairy consumption within western societies must be radically reduced or eliminated. In seeking an ethics of sustainable consumption, I agree with Plumwood’s call for a ‘critical, contextual and ecological form of vegetarianism that is... inclusionary’ (Plumwood 2002, 154) rather than exclusionary. I would go further than Plumwood to advocate a vegan diet, given that dairy cows are a significant component in the global livestock sector. Within western societies, the choice to not eat meat or dairy represents both a reduction in particular forms of consumption as well as a decision to consume differently. As part of an ethics of sustainable consumption, a vegan position, however, must acknowledge the contextual nature of such a ‘choice’ within a western context, and must be supported by government legislation and incentives which promote sustainable consumption, where an ethics of human, animal and environmental justice are intertwined.

Chapter 7
Imaginative Engagements: Critical Reflections on Visual Arts and Climate Change

We can register what is happening with satellites and scientific instruments, but can we register it in our imaginations, the most sensitive of all devices? (McKibben 2005).

Since Bill McKibben made his appeal to artists to help make climate change culturally meaningful through creative practice, arts engagement with climate change has grown considerably. Large scale projects like Cape Farewell (UK), which brings together artists, scientists and communicators to ‘stimulate the production of art founded in scientific research’ (Cape Farewell 2010a), co-exist with the more explicitly activist work of organisations such as PLATFORM (UK) who utilise art to campaign on issues of ecological justice. The current surge of art and climate change projects was further demonstrated at the Copenhagen conference, where the National Gallery of Denmark’s visual arts exhibition, RETHINK: Contemporary Art and Climate Change, took place alongside a range of smaller climate arts projects/installations by individuals, civil society groups and NGOs. In the UK, the Royal Academy of Arts also staged its Earth: Art of a changing world exhibition in December 2009 to coincide with the conference. Bringing together existing artwork not originally inspired by climate change, alongside new artwork specifically commissioned to address this issue, the exhibition illustrated the ways in which art can intentionally engage with climate change, or be actively reinterpreted through the lens of climate change. As such, cultural and creative engagements with climate change do not fix meaning, but present the possibility for multiple ways of perceiving, engaging and understanding.

Historically, the visual communication of climate change in popular media culture has tended to focus upon, and prioritise, photographic and film documentation of climate impacts, which have been criticised for their disempowering and disengaging effects (Doyle 2007; O’Neill and Nicholson-Cole 2009). Existing visual icons of climate change – the polar bear, melted glaciers, flooded urban areas, polar ice – have become so ubiquitous that they do little to foster a more active or embodied engagement with this issue. Furthermore, western culture’s privileging of vision as a primary sense constructs (scientific) knowledge as objective and rational, through which the environment gets figured as a visible nature to be ‘seen’ and henceforth understood (Adam 1988a; Plumwood 2002; Macnaughten and Urry 1998). Such figurations can lead to sense of disconnect from
of climate change and in making it culturally meaningful and personally relevant in order to promote action.

Mediating Climate Change has explored the problems climate change has posed for knowledge, communication and action. Temporally complex and not always visible, climate change presents difficulties for the scientific knowledge systems and the representational practices called upon to identify, communicate and make it meaningful. Central to these difficulties are the interrelated conceptions of nature, vision and time, as they are constructed through and by science, which have figured the environment as a visible, objective and commodified nature (Beck 1992; Adam 1988a, 1988b; Plumwood 2002). Such conceptions have been historically reinforced through mainstream environmentalism and mediated communication, which have conversely served to present humans as separate and disconnected from the environment, through the prioritisation of a visual aesthetics which subscribes to a visible present/past. As such, this book has called for a reconception of the environment, and of climate change, as the imbricated and mutually interdependent relationship between humans and ecosystems.

Through an analysis of contemporary mediated communication on climate change, including an emerging climate movement, print news media, civil society groups and visual artists, this book has also explored how climate change is being made culturally meaningful through a range of discursive and social practices. It found that climate change is variously framed through appeals to discourses of justice, faith, scientific certainty, ethics, emotion and morality to engage people on climate change and promote positive action. At the same time, discourses of scientific uncertainty, neoliberalism, (ir)rationality, individualism and anti-environmentalism have been used to promote inaction. There is not one way to communicate climate change more effectively, nor one form of action to be undertaken. However, communication on climate change needs to be compelling and convey the urgency of this issue (Moser and Dilling 2004; Risbey 2007). In doing so, it needs to explain the temporal, invisible and incremental nature of climate change, as well as the uncertainties of climate science in relation to its magnitude, rapidity of change and geographical specificity, as a basis for action in the present. Communication needs to engage people in ways that are meaningful to them, and to encourage the efficacy of different modes of self and collective action. In letting go of nature, as it has come to be constructed through western knowledge systems, we can hope to connect and engage with climate change in a way that acknowledges its embeddedness in our everyday lives, encouraging a change in our perceptions and our actions.

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