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Meanings of Meat in Videogames

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In the multiplayer strategy game *DomiNations* (Big Huge Games/Nexon, 2015-), players must advance their chosen nation through successive historical periods, from the dawn of civilization to the stone, bronze and iron ages, and beyond. The game's economy comprises two core resources, gold and food, which provide the means to improve your city and an incentive to raid those of other players (a third resource, oil, is discovered in the Enlightenment). Gold is generated in the first instance by mines, caravans and your road network, and by the pelts procured from rabbits, foxes and bears, and its accumulation is indicated by a running total at the top of the screen. Food, meanwhile, is amassed by hunting, gathering and farming: your citizens track down deer and boar, and pick fruit, and your farms produce crops and livestock, all depicted in the game's colourful, isometric animations. Having been collected, this varied fare is added to the city's stockpile of food, listed, like gold, as a simple numeric quantity, and represented by an icon depicting a leg of meat, three red apples and a sprig of some unspecified garnish, all arranged atop a gleaming white platter.

In its treatment of food, *DomiNations* illustrates well three key meanings of the term *meat*, as we find them delineated in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. When hunted, those game animals are speared by the nation's industrious citizens and fall dead to the ground, the graphic changing from a lively creature trotting nonchalantly around the perimeter of the city to an inert carcass: the animal becomes flesh to be eaten ('Meat, N.' 2017, II.4.a.). But that generic cache of different kinds of food to which the animal is added, comprising not just flesh, but fruit, vegetables and grain too, can equally be called "meat" in the oldest sense of the word, employed since Anglo-Saxon times to refer to *any* kind of solid food ('Meat, N.' 2017, I.1.a.). Finally, the icon used to represent this undifferentiated mass of foodstuffs evokes a third meaning of "meat" which derives figuratively from the first: that which is important or of substance, or alternatively the main part or gist of some matter. The "meat" of an argument, for example, would be its

most significant ideas, whilst a substantial role in a performance might be described as "meaty" ('Meat, N.' 2017, III.11; 'Meaty, Adj.' 2017, 2). That gargantuan hunk of meat, dominating the meagre fruit and vegetable matter beneath, leaves us in no doubt as to the principal part of this meal.

These dictionary definitions record only the barest, most literal meanings of the word "meat," however. The term unavoidably connotes far more. Asked about a "deeper meaning" behind the name of his group, Meat Beat Manifesto, frontman Jack Dangers once replied:

> No, it's just a bunch of words strung together to form a name, much like the Butthole Surfers. What does that mean? Does that mean they surf on butt holes? After a while, the name doesn't really say anything. It's a moniker. Throbbing Gristle. It's good to have a memorable name. Tortoise, what does that mean? Where did you get your name from? 'Well, I have a pet tortoise'. Who knows? (Dangers 2005)

It is indeed absurd, as Dangers says, to imagine rather literally that Butthole Surfers are so called because the members of the band surf on (their) butt holes, but nonetheless the name itself is not without meaning. It conjures, at the very least, something of the irreverent humour for which the band are known, just as Throbbing Gristle carries associations of some kind of meaty pulse, and Tortoise, perhaps, an easy, ambling pace. Dangers' protestations aside, the rhyming, alliterative words strung together to make up "Meat Beat Manifesto" evoke a determined, forward-looking declaration, a statement of principle and call for change which is at once rhythmic, poetic and visceral.

In fact, as the cultural anthropologist Nick Fiddes has observed, "meat is a medium particularly rich in social meaning" (Fiddes 1991, 5, 41–43). Around the world, for instance, "animal flesh has long and widely been seen as embodying strength and vigour more than any other food" (Fiddes 1991, 178). Meat seems to contain a particular power (Twigg 1983, 22), as if consuming an animal allows us, literally, to incorporate their might (Adams 2010, 56; Fiddes 1991, 67). Writing on steak, the quintessence of meat, the cultural critic Roland Barthes observes that "whoever partakes of it assimilates a bull-like strength" (Barthes 1993, 62). As such, meat is frequently the most highly regarded

kind of food. It has an unrivalled status, representing prestige and primacy, which far exceeds its nutritional value (Fiddes 1991, 15–16, 45). Writing on traditional British culture, the sociologist Julia Twigg draws up a perceived "hierarchy of foods," which meat dominates at the top, red above white, followed by fish, after which come other animal products such as eggs and then cheese, followed, finally, by fruit, vegetables and cereals, the lowliest of victuals (Twigg 1981, ch.3, 1983, 21). Meat, then, is king over the vegetable vassals (Adams 2010, 55–57), and always takes the starring role at meals (Fiddes 1991, 15). In fact, meat's traditional image is not just as the best kind of food, but as "essential, vital nutrition" (Fiddes 1991, 232): no meal can really be complete without its meat. It is commonly considered indispensable and irreplaceable, synonymous, even, with food (Fiddes 1991, 14–15). "Meat is the most highly prized of food. It is the centre around which a meal is arranged. It stands in a sense for the very idea of food itself… our meat and drink" (Twigg 1983, 21–22).

These meanings amount to the suggestion "that meat alone can endow us with its unique vitality" (Fiddes 1991, 67). Indeed, meat connotes what is *vital* in two complementary senses of the word: that which is absolutely essential, and that which is life-giving. This faith in the vitality of meat frequently manifests in the representation and operation of food within videogames. Food plays a variety of roles across different games and genres. In *Far Cry 4* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2014), for instance, it can be used as bait, to lure wild animals, either for the purpose of hunting or to disrupt and distract enemies. In the *Farming Simulator* series (Giants Software, 2008+) many different types of crop and livestock can be carefully grown and harvested for sale. *Cooking Mama* (Office Create, 2006) requires players to prepare and present different meals, whilst *Diner Dash* (Gamelab, 2004) sets them the task of waiting tables and delivering dishes to demanding customers. Finally, *Bubble Bobble* (Taito, 1986) has players collect a huge range of different food types which are converted into points toward their score. Animal flesh can be produced, distributed or exchanged as an element of play in each of these games, as it can in many others, but it is when food is consumed by a player's avatar or agents that we encounter in its most conspicuous form meat's enduring meaning as the most vital of

foods. We can identify, for this purpose, four different functions of food within videogames.

In a relatively small number of games, food provides bare *sustenance*, serving simply to stave off hunger. Such is the case, for instance, in the life simulation series *The Sims* (EA Maxis, 2000+), in which a wide range of ingredients, snacks and full meals can be obtained with relative ease; in the wilderness survival game *Don't Starve* (Klei Entertainment, 2013), in which food is scarce and must be scavenged and hoarded; and in the enormously popular sandbox building game *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2011). Whilst exploring, gathering resources and battling monsters, players of *Minecraft* must keep an eye on their avatar's hunger. This is represented in the head-up display by a "food bar," which takes the form of ten stylized "drumsticks," i.e. birds' legs. These markers deplete as time goes by, especially if the player engages in strenuous activity, and after a certain point penalties ensue. The food bar can be replenished by eating any of the game's thirty-six varieties of food, of which more than half comprise some kind of animal flesh. Supernatural foods aside, the most nourishing items, alongside salmon, are all cooked red meats: mutton, pork chop, and of course steak. Most of the vegetables appear on the tier below, whilst fruit sits yet further down the hierarchy, alongside raw meats and just one step up from cakes and cookies, raw fish and rotten flesh ('Food' 2017). Iconographically, then, in *Minecraft* meat represents the very idea of food itself, whilst the game's mechanics cast animal flesh as the most significant form of food, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

More common than its use as a means merely of sustaining individuals, food is employed in many games as a *restorative*. A character's health is often represented as a numeric value indicating a quantity of "health points" or "hit points." Starting initially on full health, hit points will be lost when the character is injured, typically during combat. Points can be restored or regenerated, up to the character's maximum, by means of medicine, potions, and, very often, food. Croissants, bean croquettes and beef jerky, along with a wide range of other comestibles, have this effect in the role-playing game *EarthBound* (Ape Inc., HAL Laboratory, 1994), as does the simpler combination of bread

and salami in the first-person shooter *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* (Gray Matter Interactive, 2001). The same mechanic is at work in the text-based role-playing game *A Dark Room* (Doublespeak Games, 2013). Here, players can build up a village, employing those who move in as trappers, hunters, miners, and in other roles. The simple text-button combat system allows you simultaneously to "stab," "swing" and "slash" at opponents with different weapons, and to scoff provisions to restore lost hit points. In fact, cured meat, prepared by your charcutiers or scavenged on your excursions outside the village, is the only source of food in the game, and thus indispensable to your survival. The original browser version of *A Dark Room* permitted players simply to "eat meat" during combat, whereas the ports to mobile devices changed the button to indicate instead, alongside the number of hit points that would be restored, the quantity of "food" remaining, implicitly marking the synonymity of meat and food within the game.

Beyond restoration, food is used in a number of games as a means of *enhancement*. Rather than simply replenish points that have been lost, "power ups" and "stat buffs" can temporarily increase maximum values for health and other attributes, improve proficiency with skills and abilities, and otherwise heighten a character's capabilities. Using a mushroom in the *Mario Kart* series (Nintendo et al., 1992+), for instance, provides a speed boost, whilst quaffing Colovian Brandy in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2011) makes bartering more successful. In this context, the role-playing game *Monster Hunter 3 Ultimate* (Capcom Production Studio 1, 2011) might appropriately be described, after Pope, as carnivoracious (Pope 1824, 18 April 1730). Your first task in the game is to kill an Aptonoth, a placid herbivore described as a "vegan brute," and cut chunks of raw meat from the carcass. These, you soon learn, can be spit-roasted in a mini-game to create steaks, which, when eaten, raise your maximum stamina for a time. A little later in the game you can visit a Canteen, where meals are prepared to order. Each category of food provides a different enhancement: any kind of meat will make your attacks more successful; grains help with defense; fish extend the time you can swim underwater; and so on. Meat is here the most potent of the available foods, enhancing prowess in combat and always bestowing its benefits first,

overriding those that might have been gained from lesser ingredients in the meal. Meat in *Monster Hunter 3 Ultimate*, then, embodies strength and vigour, and tops the hierarchy of foods.

Finally, most lasting of all the advantages that food affords, it functions in certain games as a *resource*. When expended, food here provides not just a temporary enhancement, but permanent improvements and upgrades. In the real-time strategy series *Age of Empires* (Ensemble Studios, 1997+), food is used to produce citizens and soldiers, and to research the new technologies that advance your empire, whilst in the roguelike *Dungeon of the Endless* (Amplitude Studios, 2014) it is the means by which your four heroes level up, increasing their effectiveness in combat and conferring new skills. As we saw earlier, food is one of the key resources in *DomiNations*. It is used to train troops and acquire tactics for use in battle, to research military and economic advances in the library and university, to improve caravans and your town's road network, to construct and develop buildings such as markets and barracks, and even to erect Wonders like the Hanging Gardens, Pyramids and Colosseum, which benefit your nation in a variety of different ways. In effect, food operates as a kind of currency, alongside gold, to be spent on obtaining and upgrading the very elements of play. This power-enhancing food, it will be remembered, is represented throughout the game by that bullishly carnocentric icon dominated by a gigantic leg of meat. Visually, at least, when it comes to the food in *DomiNations* meat takes the starring role, is the centre around which the meal is arranged, and is king over the vegetable vassals.

Thus, we can identify four functions of food when it is consumed within videogames: as a means of sustenance to keep characters alive, as a restorative to replenish fading health, as a means of temporarily enhancing an avatar's capabilities, and as a resource which can be spent on permanently improving the game's units. And, as we saw, across all four functions, meat frequently bestows strength and vigour, operates as the very best kind of food, and even stands for the idea of food itself. It is routinely life-giving and essential. Meat, in short, connotes vitality. There is another, contrasting meaning to meat, however, which is worth exploring.

Discussing the paintings of Francis Bacon, the philosopher Gilles Deleuze reflects on the techniques of rubbing and brushing and local scrubbing in the bleak triptychs and raw, fleshy portraits. These asignifying traits (*traits asignifiants*) can take on a particular meaning: they become, Deleuze suggests, marks or traits of animality (*traits d'animalité*) (Deleuze 2003, 21; see also p.5). A human head is replaced by a spiraling black bird; a dog appears as the shadow of her master; a man's shadow assumes an autonomous if indeterminate animal existence. These traits evoke, Deleuze says, a commonality that is not a matter simply of resemblance between man and beast but of deep identity (Deleuze 2003, 21, 25). Deleuze locates this "common fact of man and animal," this "zone of indiscernibility" in the body in so far as the body is flesh or meat (Deleuze 2003, 21–22). As Bacon himself put it: "Of course, we are meat, we are potential carcasses. If I go into a butcher's shop I always think it's surprising that I wasn't there instead of the animal" (Bacon 1993, 46, quoted in; Deleuze 2003, 24). And so, "Pity the meat!" Deleuze declares. "Meat," he claims, "is undoubtedly the chief object of Bacon's pity," manifesting "such convulsive pain and vulnerability." It is, he says, the common zone of man and beast, a state where the painter identifies with the objects of his horror and his compassion (p.23). Thus, Bacon's paintings, and particularly Deleuze's examination of them, underscore a further meaning of meat beside the usual connotations of strength and vitality, which is to say the profound weakness and *vulnerability* of exposed flesh (see Pick 2019).

The philosopher Matthew Calarco suggests that Deleuze's account of Bacon's work constitutes an attempt to consider a radical *indistinction*, in which the traditional, supposedly insuperable differences between human and animal are levelled (Calarco 2012). Thought and practice which operates within such a space of indistinction, Calarco argues, sets out to displace humanity from its customary, exalted position far above the nonhuman world by reducing it downward to an essentially inhuman zone. Confronting Bacon's uncompromising paintings, the viewer is required to appreciate their own exposed, fragile, vulnerable embodiment, the brute fact of their existence as flesh, and hence their potential existence as no more than a carcass. The paintings allow us a

glimpse of the reality that human bodies, too, in common with those of other animals, are fundamentally and essentially meat (Calarco 2012, 56–57, 2015, 58–59). "By placing viewers within a zone of indistinction," Calarco argues, "Bacon encourages us to learn to see human bodies as edible," and, simultaneously, "to catch a glimpse of the existence of those animal…bodies that have been relegated by the established order to the status of being nothing more than edible, nothing more than mere meat" (Calarco 2012, 57). But, at the same time, recognition of this indistinction between human and animal prompts an awareness, Calarco suggests, that although we are all mere meat, we are also *more* than mere meat: flesh is or was part of an entire body caught up in passions, desires and relations that far exceed its existence as food for another (Calarco 2012, 57, 2014, 427–28, 2015, 59, 61). Starting from a consideration of indistinction thus opens up new possibilities for thought and action (Calarco 2012, 58–59, 2014, 426–28, 2015, 56–57), and reorients us to alternative modes of living, relating and being with others (Calarco 2012, 54, 58–59, 2015, 67–69). Managing to acknowledge and accept this displacement of humanity from its time-honored exceptional status is, however, "no doubt one of the most difficult facts for thought to bear and sustain" (Calarco 2014, 425).

Meat, then, can connote not just power and vitality, but also exposure and vulnerability. This latter meaning of meat is exemplified by the game *Super Meat Boy* (Team Meat, 2010), in which the avatar does not consume meat, but is made of meat. Players control the blood-red, cube-shaped Meat Boy, whose love, Bandage Girl, has been kidnapped by the nefarious Dr Foetus. Meat Boy must run and jump his way through dozens of levels, navigating past buzz saws, crumbling blocks, homing missiles, rotating razor blades, spinning fans, roaming adversaries, bosses, lava, lasers, syringes, spikes, salt, and other hazards, to reach Bandage Girl. The game, described by its developers, Edmund McMillen and Tommy Refenes, as "tough as nails" (Ashcraft 2010), is notoriously difficult, requiring split-second timing and the patience to keep replaying complex sequences of jumps. There are no hit points here to be whittled down by successive injuries and restored with conveniently-placed food items: a single mistake results in instant death and a return to the beginning of the level. As Meat Boy, you are unprotected and completely exposed to the dangers and threats you encounter. Even as

you run and slide across floors and walls, you leave a bloody residue on every surface you touch. As McMillen has said:

> So Meat Boy is a boy made of meat. But when designing him it wasn't a thought of "he's made of steak or whatever else." It was more: "He doesn't have skin." He's a boy without skin. So that's why they call him Meat Boy. So he's exposed to the elements. Maybe he's always in pain, but he just deals with it. But he has to be very careful with everything because anything could kill him. Like the smallest little thing, like salt, or whatever could totally destroy him (Edmund McMillen in Swirsky and Pajot 2012, 00:45:55)

Figure 1. ***Super Meat Boy*** **(Team Meat, 2010)**. Copyright Nycrama LLC DBA Team Meat, 2008-2017

The meat of *Super Meat Boy*, then, in the form of this boy without skin, signifies not vitality but profound vulnerability. As such, Meat Boy is the embodiment Calarco's notion of indistinction. McMillen is keen to emphasise that Meat Boy is not made of animal flesh, "steak or whatever else," but that nonetheless, as a boy who does not have skin, he is made of meat. Meat Boy's exposed, fragile, vulnerable flesh is of a kind with the exposed, fragile, vulnerable flesh of other animals. Furthermore, the game's unremitting dangers, its brutal difficulty, and the repeated, gory deaths that result, bring home to players the ease with which one's fleshy body can quickly become a carcass. This remains the case despite the fact that the game's protagonist is caught up in diverse passions, desires and relations, which is to say that Meat Boy is, of course, far more than mere meat. Calarco suggested, however, that thinking in terms of indistinction and an equation of human and animal at the level of embodied flesh, and in particular accepting the displacement of humanity from its customary, exalted position above the nonhuman world, is one of the most difficult thoughts to sustain. Such proved to be the case regarding the radical challenge to conventional understandings of meat that *Super Meat Boy* represents.

The provocative animal rights organisation People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) responded within months of the release of *Super Meat Boy* by producing a game of their own. Always keen to capitalize on trends in contemporary culture, and to court publicity-rich controversy, PETA have produced many games over the years, including the parodies *Cooking Mama: Mama Kills Animals* (This Is Pop, 2008), in which you enact the gruesome preparation of a "thanksgiving feast"; *Super Tanooki Skin 2D* (This Is Pop, 2011) in which, as a flayed raccoon dog, you must "save your skin" which has been stolen by Mario; and *Pokemon Black & Blue* (This Is Pop, 2012) in which you help Pikachu and friends escape their abusive trainers (Joel Bartlett 2013; Evans-Thirlwell 2015). In *Super Tofu Boy* (MCM Net, 2010), having realized that animal flesh was not for her, Bandage Girl has forsaken Meat Boy for sexy, badass Tofu Boy. Now you must steer Tofu Boy through a series of levels set in a slaughter house, the Golden Arches, and a bacon factory, to rescue Bandage Girl from a jealous, vengeful Meat Boy. Like the macho backstory, gameplay is similar to *Super Meat Boy*, with hazards including more spinning blades, as well as gas burners and meat pounders. The levels are interspersed with helpful "tips" such as "cows are pumped full of drugs to make them grow abnormally large" and "red meat can lead to impotence, obesity, and loss of girlfriend." At game's end, Meat Boy meets a final, bloody death, and Tofu Boy and Bandage Girl are reunited once and for all.

Figure 2. ***Super Tofu Boy*** **(MCM Net, 2010)**.

Team Meat provided in turn a two-pronged rejoinder. In a post on the developers' site, McMillen claimed that PETA had played right into his hands. "I actually repeatedly made fake user names in PETA's forum pushing the game at them in hopes something like this would happen," he wrote. Describing *Super Tofu Boy* as a major personal high point, he thanked PETA for the flattering, helpful parody, and for making themselves look foolish in the process: "see (as mentioned in countless interviews) Meat Boy isn't made of animal meat, he's simply a boy without skin whose name is Meat Boy" (Dutton 2010). At the same time, Team Meat added Tofu Boy as a playable character to the Steam release of *Super Meat Boy*. (A Tofu Boy had, in fact, already featured in a

promotional comic, before the game's release (McMillen and Refenes 2009; Crecente 2010)). This Tofu Boy is no badass, though. According to McMillen, he has an "inflated ego," and is "not actually as effective as he thinks he is." Tofu Boy is the slowest of the game's playable characters, and his ability to jump is so poor that it is actually impossible to complete most of the game's levels using him. "Patch is now live on Steam. Play as Tofu Boy by typing in 'petaphile' at the character select screen. ENJOY YOUR IRON DEFICIENCY!!!!," Team Meat announced on Twitter (Team Meat 2010).

Despite the core premise and radical promise of a character who is defined by his pain and vulnerability, *Super Meat Boy* ultimately returns, then, to a very traditional meaning of meat, as that which represents and endows vigour and vitality. Meat Boy may, as McMillen says, have to be careful navigating his environment, but nonetheless he can run much faster and jump much farther than his feeble vegetable-based counterpart. Further, with their tweet making reference to "iron deficiency," Team Meat characterize tofu as an inadequate, substitute food: only animal flesh, it is implied, is necessary and life-giving. Meat reigns supreme once more, and any sense of a shared vulnerability is cut short. *Super Meat Boy* thus exemplifies both the indistinction between human and animal flesh depicted by Bacon and discussed by Deleuze and Calarco, and the difficulty of holding fast to the thought of this disquieting equation, which poses such a threat to humanity's time-honoured exceptional status. Additionally, however, the game and the disputatious publicity surrounding it also demonstrate the difficulty of sustaining a *distinction* between human and animal meat.

During the creation and promotion of *Super Meat Boy*, the developers were in fact equivocal regarding Meat Boy's composition. Despite their repeated assertion that he is simply a boy without skin, they also frequently suggested or implied otherwise. McMillen's tactical trolling of PETA was clearly intended to persuade forum readers that Meat Boy is made of animal flesh, and in many blog posts and interviews published during the development process, McMillen or Refenes made reference to meat in different ways: they joked about being covered in meat (McMillen 2009a), about wearing blood stained aprons (McMillen 2009b), and that Meat Boy is "like SpongeBob for

carnivorous sadists" (Meer 2009). When asked "Why meat?," McMillen explained that he always thought it would be cool to have a character that left a trail, and added "Also, we choose meat because we aren't communists" (Graft and Remo 2010). In the announcement video for the PlayStation 4 and PS Vita version of the game, Refenes flings handfuls of meat, including ground beef and cuts of steak, at a makeshift target (Tommunism 2015). Team Meat ran a competition for followers of the development blog to create "an image of yourself with something meat related" (McMillen 2009d), stated in the comic that you play as "an animated cube of meat," (McMillen and Refenes 2009; Crecente 2010), and explained in interview that Meat Boy is "made of raw meat" (Hatfield 2009). In the comic, Meat Boy appears alongside Bacon Boy, Burger Boy, Pork Chop Boy, KFC Boy, Veal Boy, and several other boys made out of animal meat (McMillen and Refenes 2009; Crecente 2010). In the game's first advertisement, the iconic silhouette of a cow is broken up with dotted lines indicating traditional cuts of beef: brisket, rib, sirloin, rump, et al. Close to the rear, outlined in red, we see a more-or-less square cut labelled "Meat Boy" (McMillen 2009c). And similarly, in a doctored version of a vintage advertisement from the American Meat Institute, which proclaims emphatically "Nourishing Meat …a complete protein food," Meat Boy can be seen, bounded by lines of fat, as an integral part of a huge slab of meat (McMillen and Refenes 2009; Crecente 2010).

Figure 3. First *Super Meat Boy* advertisement (McMillen 2009c).

So what *is* Meat Boy made of? Is this squat oddity simply a human boy with his skin removed? Or is he a compressed cube of raw ground beef, a select cut of steak, or some other kind of animal flesh? Is Meat Boy made of the kind of meat we could eat? Is Meat Boy *edible*? Are his strength and vigour, his vitality, something we could consume? Were we to partake of him, might we assimilate Meat Boy's bull-like iron reserves? (Tofu, in fact, contains at least as much iron as steak and often more (USDA 2016a, 2016b), though, were we to eat Tofu Boy, a glass of vitamin C-rich orange juice would help with its absorption (Norris and Messina 2011, 61–67).) Ultimately, it remains

unclear what kind of meat Meat Boy is made of: human or another kind of animal. But, as Calarco argues, we need to concede that, either way, Meat Boy is edible. Recognising the indistinction between human and animal is, in part, a matter of learning to appreciate that the flesh of a human youth, with or without skin, or that of a Calarco or a Deleuze or a Bacon, just like that of a cow, a pig, a rabbit, a sheep, a turkey, a boar, a deer, a dog, a raccoon dog, a fox, a bear, a black bird, a tortoise, or even a vegan brute like an Aptonoth, is, as a matter of fact, edible (see Fudge 2010, 156–60). But it is also a matter of learning to see that, although we are all mere meat, a nourishing, complete protein food for others, we are also *more* than mere meat. Meat Boy, like the other creatures with whom he shares a carnate, embodied existence, is caught up in all manner of passions, desires and relations which go far beyond his bare existence as meat and throbbing gristle. Meat Boy, as the ambiguous embodiment of indistinction, helps to remind us that the vital body and the vulnerable body are one and the same, opens up new possibilities for thought and action, and, with his companion Tofu Boy, reorients us to alternative modes of living, relating and being with others.

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