For a low-income community, finding an apple or banana nearby may not be such a simple task. These neighborhoods, known as food deserts, are often located in the midst of convenience stores and fast-food “restaurants” – primarily selling cheap, processed foods and offering few healthy options. Studies demonstrate that the physical environment in which one resides – with limited access to grocery stores – influences the level of consumption of vegetables and fruit, which consequently plays a role in one’s well-being.

Though I reference three works from class (Adey’s “Mediations,” Yamashita’s “Through the Arc of the Rainforest,” and Geyhalter’s “Our Daily Bread”) I aim to look more closely at how one’s space, and the media that accompanies it, sends messages about the type of food one should eat. I use the documentary “Hungry for Change” as an initial platform and lens at which to look at how people perceive nutritious food through mass media.

Before moving on to a discussion of this film, however, it’s important to understand why accessibility to nutritious food is crucial in the first place. After all, a lot of college students don’t exactly eat “healthy.” Yet the consequences of eating unhealthy are well-known and clear. Limited consumption of healthy food is generally tied with diet-related diseases like obesity and diabetes. As grocery stores disappear from neighborhood communities, rates of such diseases rise. I argue that with an absence of grocery stores and other fresh food retailers, neighborhood communities become deprived of the information base that accompanies these entities – namely, information on the importance of eating healthy and the benefits that surround a nutritious diet – and instead are submerged in the mediascape of consumerism, featuring high-fat, high-sugar items.

Though similar in some respects to “Our Daily Bread,” the film “Hungry for Change” claims to “expose the shocking secrets the diet, weight loss and food industry don’t want you to know about.” Though it does depict the unnecessary amount of processed food people consume, the film itself at times, ironically, acts as an advertisement to try to sell its own solutions. Although it appears well-intended, “Hungry for Change” parallels the mass-mediated fast food stores, such as McDonalds and Taco Bell, through this method of promotion. Interestingly, this film seems to target only an audience of middle- and upper-class communities.

Either way, the media can affect, manipulate, and transform our understanding of the food production system. After the film concluded, many viewers expressed optimism and joy for being exposed to the behind-the-scenes of processed food, charged as a “multi-billion dollar industry” that is the “dark side of the food industry’s marketing plan.” Now newly educated, these viewers can knowledgeably “navigate” the supermarket. However, those who reside in lower-income neighborhood locales are not exposed to this form of media – so, how are they to be informed?
In “Mediations” of Mobility, Adey writes that auto- and aeromoility enable social practices, remarking they are “conduits that connect places together” (180). In neighborhood locales that lack availability or accessibility of mobile transportation – mediums of their own – consumption of healthy food is lower. Indeed, inadequate transportation methods can be a major challenge for rural residents, given the long distance to stores (Treuhaft 10). In addition, Adey finds that “mediating mobilities have the capacity to modulate and preselect the people that use them almost as much as the landscapes they alter” (184). While this is true, grocery stores and other fresh food retailers have the power to overcome this: They can educate their visitors on the importance of eating fresh produce and upholding adequate nutrition while still cater to a globalized audience. Thus, grocery stores can surface and propagate bioregionalism, essentially connecting the local and the global.

Though the ideas Yamashita presents in “Through the Arc of the Rainforest” apply in quite a few areas, her depiction of the field of plastic – nearing the end of the novel – best illustrates the food desert. The plastic continued to pile up, consisting of “plastic, polyurethane, and styrofoam,” and formed “enormous landfills of nonbiodegradable material buried under virtually every populated part of the Earth,” essentially at the core of the rain forest (Yamashita 202). This occurred primarily as a result of greed – after all, the “miracle plastic… the Matacao plastic” had been mined for days after days (Yamashita 112). Similarly, the location of a food desert parallels the location of the field of plastic: Though the land overall is not heavily permeated with fast-food stores (but rather dispersed throughout), one or few areas exude this result of consumerism. Ultimately, in “Through the Arc,” the result was a field “strewn with candle wax, black chicken feathers and those eternally dead flowers, discarded jugs of cane brandy, the dirt pounded smooth by hundreds” (Yamashita 212). Given this, neighborhood locales with little to no access to healthy food deserve closer proximity to grocery stores. In fact, a grocery store can serve as a reminder of maintaining vitality and not succumbing to what Yamashita’s field became victim to.

Arguably, media in a food desert is a microcosm of the mediascape of consumerism. However, what is not arguable is that one’s neighborhood locale is a direct link to the quality of food one consumes. The presence of a grocery store will not only increase mobility but will also engender knowledge about eating healthy. Without grocery stores, the residents of neighborhood locales remain uninformed. In fact, grocery stores do not solely serve as sites for nutritious food. Rather, they act as the crucial medium of providing information and knowledge on how to best lead a fruitful lifestyle.
References (includes texts and images)


In hundreds of neighborhoods across the country, nutritious, affordable, and high quality food is out of reach, particularly low-income neighborhoods, communities of color, and rural areas.