"Difference in the Mouth": Alimentality, Matter and Meaning in Foodways.

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“Difference in the mouth”:
Alimentality, matter, and meaning in foodways.

by Gretchen Lang
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This thesis entitled
“Difference in the mouth”:
Alimentality, matter, and meaning in foodways.

written by Gretchen Lang

has been approved for the Department of Geography

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
Abstract:

This thesis explores the corporeal and affective presence and experience of food as it interacts with social and political agendas. How do matter and meaning interact in foodways? How does the affect/intensity of food experiences influence, and potentially alter, the social and political pressures differentially exerted on some bodies? How is food, at the scale of the (human and non-human) body, a fulcrum for regional, national and international maneuvering, and how does this corporeality interact with market logics? With the goal of addressing these overarching questions, I examine two cases: the prevalent discursive connection between pleasure and deservingness in the United States, as it is played out around legislation of and social response to SNAP (the Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program); and Vladimir Putin’s destruction of food supplied by sanctioning countries, enacted on the world stage, but notable for its impact on individual and group response in Russia. Both cases revolve around the ways in which biopower works on the matter and meaning associated with food practices. I have explored them in two distinct but related articles. In both pieces, I interrogate the ways in which the embodied and affective qualities of food inform and are leveraged for the biopolitical and sovereign management of different groups of people, and simultaneously serve the imperatives of capital in place-specific ways. I conclude that sensory and affective pleasure in food, and the matter of food-things themselves, while contested and manipulated in the service of dominant regimes, are sites of potential political action for food justice and equity.
Methodologically, in both inquiries I perform a discourse analysis on popular and social media representation of, and response to, state actions on food access and practices. The materials I analyze include reportage, on-line text and imagery, archival policy documents, and consumer narratives and dialogue. To do this, I draw on the work of an array of theorists from three bodies of literature. Rather than looking solely to Foucauldian biopolitics, or to feminist studies of materialism and affect, I work to put them in conversation here, in order to arrive at more nuanced insights into what motivates these politicized practices.

To encompass this theoretical conjuncture for the study of foodways, I have coined the word *alimentality*, a reference to the concepts of governmentality and environmentality, as conceived by Michel Foucault and Arun Agrawal, respectively. The word aliment refers to food or nourishment, but the prefix “ali,” from “alia,” means “other.” Thus “alimentality” is not only a play on the art of government that informs current public food dialogue, and on the bodily entanglements of food production and consumption; it also designates a mentality of otherness, the alienation that fragments, and differently legitimizes, the lived realities of foodways. To turn Judith Butler’s seminal phrase on its head, food is *matter that bodies* – matter that becomes human corporeality – and as such, it is ripe for exploitation as tool, weapon, and fetish in the categorization and biopolitical management of human and non-human bodies. Likewise, it is not just good to think with, but is invaluable as a lens in the service of social and political change – a lens that, when light flashes through it, can spark a conflagration.
Dedicated to my daughters, JY and EM ~
los quiero.
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1. Introduction – on the matter of meaning:

...to be material means to materialize, where the principle of that materialization is precisely what “matters” about that body, its very intelligibility. In this sense, to know the significance of something is to know how and why it matters, where “to matter” means at once “to materialize” and “to mean.”

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Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter, 1993

We begin as sensing bodies, whose experience of everything not-us is physical, corporeal – material. Touch, taste, scent, sound, warmth and cold, hunger and satiety: this is how the world begins to matter to us. My earliest memory is of my first taste of ice cream – vanilla, in a Howard Johnson’s booth, before I was two years old. Perhaps the jolt of this experience, and its reverberations, created a sort of ur-moment of bodily existence that set me on a path to a lifelong exploration of people’s interactions with food. Such experiences mark our consciousness – I identify myself as a person for whom ice cream was a formative food experience – but the embodied experience of sensory pleasure or pain associated with food can establish neural connections at a pre-cognitive level, that shape our bodily and affective lived realities. Our senses are a language of communication between our bodies and the world that surrounds them, penetrates them, is absorbed by and becomes part of them, is shed or rejected by them; they mediate between our “meaty bodies” (Nast & Pile 1998) and the carnal, material things and beings that interact with them. We are, first, inside of another’s body – we are interior to someone else – and the matter of that body moves through our own, nourishing and making us. Once born, our first experience of something entering our own bodies – becoming interior to us – is that of food, matter that moves through us, nourishing and making us. These mirrored experiences establish the porosity and fungibility, the exchange, of matter, which characterizes
bodily existence. This intimacy is not ethereal. It is messy, smelly, intractable, tangled, earthbound, characterized by appetite, desire, fear, and pleasure. Food is “good to think with” (Levi-Strauss 1962) and compelling to think about because it forces conjunctural analysis. That is, it requires us to confront entanglements, articulations, things and bodies that transform and become other things and other bodies; and to analyze the ways in which these relationships are recruited or exploited to reinforce “common sense” narratives – as well as the ways in which they can disrupt such narratives. These intersections, and the affective intensities born from them, become fertile ground for political and ideological influences (Leys 2011) that, in turn, shape our foodscapes, beliefs, and practices – for what Stuart Hall called a “complex field of power and consent, and… its different levels of expression – political, ideological, cultural and economic… deployed in the form of power which ‘hegemony’ describes. (Hall 2010, 65).

Therefore, taking the materiality of food seriously requires us to give as much weight to the physicality of food itself as to the abstract meaning that people attach to it. It is, in fact, the materiality, the embodied stuff of food, which is recruited in the service of making meaning. This physicality also demands that we attend to sensory experience as closely as we do to the health, nutrition, and survival conferred – or not – by food. To construe sensory and affective experience as peripheral, frivolous, luxurious or mindless is to disconnect the relational and sensing body from the social and political, to eviscerate (pun intended) the embodied connections to and interplay with the world that is both outside and inside the body. It is to disregard what Anna Tsing calls “pleasures amidst the terrors of indeterminacy” (2015, 1), the physical being-in-the-world that anchors us when we begin to drift out into the weightless, lightless realm of existential fear and unpredictable change. The two inquiries that follow work together to foreground food as
matter, to construe as central the bodied ways in which people interact emotionally and politically with that matter, to examine the ways in which the food itself alters these interactions, and to expose the social and geopolitical work that foodstuffs are asked to do.

This work is inextricable from the imperatives of capital – that is, from Marxian materialism, in the sense of the political economies of food. Rather than looking to theories of materiality or materialism for insight into politicized food practices – in other words, pitting new materialisms against dialectic/historical materialisms – I suggest that we apply a biopolitical lens to food as a node that connects matter and affect with capital, in order to arrive at more nuanced insights into what motivates these practices. To encompass this theoretical conjuncture for the study of foodways, I have coined the word *alimentality*, a reference to the concepts of governmentality and environmentality, as conceived by Michel Foucault and Arun Agrawal, respectively: the conditions and discursive structures of an administrative regime that reinforces self-discipline, and enforces the discipline of others, to fit a hegemonic norm (2007, 2005). It also echoes a semantic structure that Bal Sokhi-Bulley makes explicit: “The word ‘govern/mentality’ refers to both the processes of governing and a mentality of government – i.e. thinking about how the governing happens. It is thus both an art (a practice) and a rationality (a way of thinking about) government” (2014). The word aliment refers to food or nourishment, encompassing the encounters and mattered exchanges between human and non-human bodies; but the prefix “ali,” from “alia,” also means “other.” Thus “alimentality” is not only a play on the technologies of government that use food sustenance to manage populations, and to distract from and/or leverage food’s affective and material dimensions; but also designates the political utility of ideas of
otherness in the context of bodily exchanges: the alienation that fragments and fetishizes the lived realities of foodways.

I use alienation here both to denote the separation of people from the impetus and process of production, and also in the sense of the distancing of humans and non-humans from themselves and each other – the breach of both inter- and intra-subjectivity. Tsing says “Alienation obviates living-space entanglement” (2015, 5). Similarly, and more viscerally, it obviates foodways entanglement – foodways that shape and define, and are shaped and defined by, living- and other spaces. In *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Karl Marx describes the bodily, material experience of alienation as rupturing “the relation to the sensuous external world, to the objects of nature, [making them] an alien world inimically opposed to [man] (sic)” (Estranged Labor 30-31). From this alienation of the human from the non-human, Marx goes on to elaborate alienation as also between human and human, and as internal within each person – as the estrangement from self.

The concept of alimentality joins this multi-faceted fragmentation to the technologies of government that are deployed to manage a population by administering life and death: that is, with biopower (Foucault 1990). In *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* Michel Foucault famously describes a somatic split that echoes Marx: “For millennia, man [sic] remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question” (1990, 143). So alimentality denotes the exercise of surveillance over the choice and consumption of food through both state and social structures, and the use of both sovereignty and biopolitics to
categorize and manage bodies through foodways. I depart from Foucault and Marx, though, in contending that neither capital, nor discipline and surveillance, can totally alienate material beings from their corporeal exuberance. Desire, although it can be diverted to the fetish, is fundamentally the appetite of the body to experience its materiality, and that of others. To explore the significance – the mattering – of foodways, geographies of food need to move into, as well as around, human and non-human bodies. These affective encounters can create purchase for technologies of government – but they can also be sites of disruption and possibility.

In the first of the two papers that comprise this thesis, titled “Possessing Pleasure”, I ask why and how sensory pleasure in foodways is differently legitimized for subaltern groups in the United States, and what subversive possibilities lie in claiming this sensory experience as a need and a right. I define sensory pleasure first as the corporeal experience that engages people not only with the taste of food, but with any one, or any combination, of the constellation of sensate responses that includes smell, sound, touch and sight, among others. However, these bodily responses are always already imbricated with the broader affective experience. Organoleptic pleasure cannot be disengaged from the emotive, the associative, the aesthetic; and I suggest that a shortcoming of much writing about it is its assignment solely to one or another of these spheres. Sara Ahmed captures the complexity of the affective response in her discussion of the politics of happiness: pleasure both responds to objects, and creates them; pleasure attaches to things, but also to their contextual field (2010, 33). Therefore, an exploration of the bodily pleasures of food necessarily contests the idea that this aspect of interactions with food can be somehow detached from others. In this paper, phrases like “sensory pleasure” and “organoleptic
pleasure” will often function as shorthand for a particular angle of approach to the affective experience of producing, provisioning and consuming in foodways.

In the second of the two papers, “Killing Food”, I examine the case of the Russian government’s 2015 destruction of hundreds of tons of grey-market food, and its use of YouTube videos as tools of interpellation and intimidation in an act of domestic and geopolitical theater. I also inquire into the role of the materiality and agency of the food itself. I seek to illuminate the Kremlin’s use of that materiality to create nationalist subjectivities, to articulate differential valuation of some bodies with market logics, and to consolidate and display spatialized state power. I also ask how the substantial presence of the foodstuffs interacts with and alters these articulations in unexpected ways.

How do these two seemingly disparate interrogations work together? Both examine a fetishization of food that, in masking it with ideologies, distracts from the materiality and agency both of the eaters and of the food itself. Both inquiries suggest that the embodied and sensory qualities of food, which have been peripheralized in much food scholarship, are in fact of central importance, and interact with discursive messages about which bodies and which lives matter. The notion of alimentality establishes a frame and an entry point for examining the ways in which the matter and mattering of food, in its interactions with geopolitical power, is leveraged for biopolitical management of these bodies and lives. The scripting of sensory pleasure as a luxury, with its attendant narrative of who should eat what, and the discourse of purity as a basis for territorialized nationalism, both offer openings for new ways of examining matter and meaning.
2. Literature:

As I’ve suggested, dispensing with bodily pleasures has sidelined a way of thinking about the body, of acknowledging its effects. We are assured that many things can take its place: for instance, our relations to others.

Doris McIlwain 2007, 539

[Foucault’s] concept of a “government of things” stresses the materiality of politics by articulating the link between the matter of government and the government of matter. It makes it possible to enlarge political analysis by including artifacts and objects produced by science and technology, but also environmental facts and medical issues.

Thomas Lemke, 2014, 11

I draw on three strands of scholarship to examine the questions in this thesis: those of biopolitics, materialism, and affect. Despite, or perhaps because of, the applicability of these rich literatures to my argument, I am particularly interested in their apparent dearth of analyses of food’s sensory and material properties as they interact with the administration of differently categorized lives. Much of the literature that bears on bodies and biopower argues for the supremacy of Foucauldian post-structuralism or theories of new materialism and affect. For the purposes of theorizing alimentality, all are crucial, and, I argue, work together to fill each other’s perceived voids. I will begin here with a brief introduction to each body of literature, and subsequently will weave them together to create an integrated context for my case studies.

The enduring importance of the biopolitical frame reflects, in part, its multidimensional treatment of power. Foucault’s concept of biopolitics, generally described as the management of
a population through its constituents’ biological life, by making live and letting die (1990), is typically set against a sovereign model of power that governs by letting live or making die (1995). This characterization, although useful in its economy and memorability, does not capture the nuance of Foucault’s theories, or their development over time. The notion of a state apparatus that enhances, rather than creates, certain networks of power complicates, but does not replace, the action of sovereign power within these networks. (In both Parts I and II of this thesis, administrative biopolitics interfaces with, but does not preclude, sovereign— that is, legislative and juridical— acts.) Early on, Foucault introduces the corollary of strategic state genocide as part of biopolitics “because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race” (1990, 137). This is consistent with a current understanding of race as the categorization of people according to group belonging or difference (Slocum and Saldanha 2013). It is also compatible with Achille Mbembe’s description of necropolitics: “the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations” (2003, 14, emphasis in original), although Mbembe, arguing that contemporary state sovereignty “makes the murder of the enemy its primary and absolute objective” (ibid, 12), distinguishes populations as “those who must live and who must die” (ibid, emphasis added). As Julie Guthman and Sandy Brown put it “biopolitical sorting… securing the lives of ‘the population’ [as] those deserving of protection, has consistently entailed demarcating others as less worthy” (2015). The power to make/let live or die, whether governmental or sovereign, is predicated on belonging, or not.

Foucault began to explore the idea of diffuse, capillary power expressed and manipulated through the site of the body in the first installment of the three-part *History of Sexuality* (1990),
and in his examination of the politics of race in Society Must be Defended (2003). These were followed by the series of lectures collected in the volumes Security, Territory, Population and The Birth of Biopolitics (2007, 2008), in which Foucault developed the notion of governmentality: the concept that the state relies on the self-policing of its citizenry, enhanced through technologies of government – what Lois McNay calls “active self-fashioning” (1992). The idea that this form of power is exercised over bodies, both at the level of the individual and of the population, helps to define biopolitics: the administration of a group of people defined as a collective political entity, in the name of the preservation and enhancement of the lives of those bodies. Foucault sought to distinguish this multi-nodal power, as a networked expression of the management of the lives of subjects, from the notion of juridical power exercised by a singular sovereign entity or ruler. Biopolitics relies on regimes of truth – on discursive notions of, for example, health, or rights, as they intersect with bodies. These socially promulgated “truths” facilitate not only the administration of bodies, but also administration through bodies – bodies that themselves become both the justification for and the means of domination. Particularly for the purpose of my investigation, a key feature of biopolitics is the investment of certain individuals and institutions with the authority to shape and instrumentalize these truths. Such discourses in turn reinforce subjectivities that perpetuate capitalist models of labor and accumulation. In their insightful 2006 article “Biopower Today”, Rabinow and Rose note that as the science of health interventions changes rapidly in the 21st century, so do emerging truths about the “vital” character of human beings – that is, the ways in which we define and conceive of, for example, what “health” means – are shifting (197). This illustrates the mutable nature of the concept of biopolitics – it is not a static model, but rather a flexible frame for thinking about the relationships between human lives and bodies, and “the ways in which biopolitics plays out
in relation to biocapital and bioeconomics, in circuits in which health and vitality become key stakes in market relations and shareholder value” (ibid, 211).

As Foucault famously states, “the coupling of a set of practices and a regime of truth form an apparatus (dispositif) of knowledge-power that effectively marks out in reality that which does not exist” (2008, 19). Although Foucault was certainly concerned with and focused on the human and social effects of this apparatus, the notion of the apparatus itself as a changing network of articulated things, meanings, bodies and morals has, as Thomas Lemke notes, much in common with the assemblages and entanglements that are explored in much new materialist scholarship (2014). In addition, Foucault’s productive power prefigures Judith Butler’s concept of performativity as an iterative self-making. Thus, for the purposes of this investigation, building on Foucault’s oeuvre through feminist studies of affect and new materialist thought helps to create a conceptual field in which the notion of alimentality can be productively put to work.

New materialism seeks to disrupt the binary thinking that is exemplified by a number of famous theoretical pairings: nature and culture, structure and agency, matter and meaning, body and mind, among others. It is an ontology that flattens hierarchies of being, and that foregrounds affect and relationality. This plural perspective breaks down assumptions about the primacy of any species, gender, race, or way of being, and redirects the goal of “bringing together” dualisms like those listed above by noting that they are always already enmeshed with each other, making and altering each other. Things and beings emerge, happen, become, through interaction and relationship. Karen Barad characterizes new materialism as ethico-onto-epistemological: ways of knowing and being are not only mutually constitutive, but are inseparable from “the good” (Van
der Tuin and Dolphijn 2010, 166). This exemplifies Barad’s concept of (multiple, porous) “intra-action” as distinct from (dualist and bounded) “interaction” (2007).

The series of moves that encompass dialectical materialism, historical materialism, and new materialisms were responses to several philosophical concerns. Thinkers questioned dialectical materialism’s dualist conception of oppositional contradictions; the notion of passive matter acted upon by discrete categories of human beings (proletariat, bourgeoisie, elite); the hierarchical, linear, causative understanding of material relationships; and the dominance of rational and cognitive mind over mute and inert matter. Historical materialism applied dialectical theory to the study of social, cultural and historical phenomena – and, vice versa, trained a socio-cultural and historical lens on Marx’s labor theory of value; but further challenges emerged from its privileging of language and sign as the keys to meaning-making, and from feminist resistance to the construal of being and agency as static, fixed, determined and locatable. New materialisms emphasize the emergent nature of becoming, rather than being; of porosity rather than bounded impenetrability; of agency as a vitality that escapes shackling to the human, and further, to the organic (see Deleuze, Latour, Braidotti, DeLanda, Coole, Bennett, and Barad, among many). Iris van der Tuin and Rick Dolphijn define new materialist thought as transversal: it cuts across and through disciplines, theories, and territorialized ontologies, seeking new paradigms (2010). In its refusal to follow linear, progressive models; its insistence on reconceptualizing binary relationships as not just plural, but multiple/dimensional/networked (assemblages, entanglements, conglomerations, meshes); and its reorientation from the transcendental to the immanent and generative, this field demands that we reexamine and disrupt the humanist epistemologies that inform both “modern natural science and postmodern cultural theory”
Like the agents, experiences and emotions it is concerned with, new materialism is continually coalescing. Exploding the confines of the textual and linguistic cultural turn, new materialism seeks to keep ideas from solidifying into prescriptive answers and explanations. Seeking a fluidity of concept, new materialism pushes back against the assumed stability of matter as the “real” – bodies, physical phenomena, substance. This emergent approach, which continually challenges attempts to define the boundaries of the tangible and the abstract, also characterizes much scholarship of affect.

Much of the impetus for the affective turn in cultural studies is typically largely credited to the work of the late Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a ground-breaking scholar of queer theory. Sedgwick and Canadian communications scholar Brian Massumi both published hugely influential mid-1990’s works that built on and pushed beyond psychobiological explorations of affect as an innate motivator of bodily drives (e.g. Sigmund Freud, Silvan Tomkins); and as immanent to the relationships and interactions that arise from human and non-human assemblages (e.g. Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze). Melissa Gregg and Greg Seigworth, in the introduction to their 2010 compilation of seminal essays on affect, identify eight strands of thought in affect studies that may weave together or overlap. This thesis engages primarily with the strand that Gregg and Seigworth call “politically engaged work… that attends to the hard and fast materiality, as well as the fleeting and flowing ephemera, of the daily and the workaday… [of collective experience] where persistent, repetitious practices of power… provide… collectivized bodies with predicaments and potentials… within [and beyond] the boundaries of the norm” (ibid, 7).
Cultural and social theories of affect intersect with, deepen and challenge the work of new materialisms: emotion and feeling, bodily memories, non-cognitive lived experience, and ongoing becomingness suffuse the human and non-human entanglements and assemblages that new materialism seeks to explore.

A comprehensive genealogy of new materialism and affect studies is beyond the scope of this paper, but a salient feature of both bodies of literature are their relative lack of engagement with foodways, despite the fact that this seems an ideal point of intervention. The investigations that begin to interrogate materiality and affect in food practices throw out gleams of possibility that invite us to go further. In her essay on “Edible Matter” (2007) and subsequent chapter in her book *Vibrant Matter* (2010), Jane Bennett opens a new materialist discussion of the topic that I will address below. Ben Highmore, in his essay “Bitter After Taste: Affect, Food and Social Aesthetics”, links food matter and affect to argue that, rather than a theoretical unsnarling of their “sticky entanglements… [and] murky connections” what is required of scholars is a willingness to inhabit and explore that jungle (2010, 119).

Highmore explicitly inquires into the term “aesthetics”, and asks how a philosophical concept that was meant encompass the sensate and affective encounters between body and world has come to be “a specialized discourse about fine art… beauty and the sublime” (ibid, 122), and, in turn, to be implicated with class distinction and moral improvement. This question captures the essence of my concern with the categorization of organoleptic pleasure in food as solely or even primarily aesthetic – it both restricts discussion to a Bourdieusian field of “taste”, and simultaneously ignores or denies the messiness and affective range of such experiences.
Similarly, as noted above, the insistence on relegating such bodily pleasures to the arena of “hedonism”, with its connotations of self-indulgence, extravagance and profligacy, plays into both a puritanical association of asceticism with virtue, and also a raced and classed notion of what constitutes necessity and luxury. The hierarchical aesthetic/hedonistic frame also dismisses the quotidian as either lower order or innately dull, or both. So how can the notion of alimentality help us to challenge the sidelining of the sensory? I will demonstrate that biopolitics, new materialism, and affect studies together create a multi-dimensional model for politicizing this field of matter and meaning in geographies of food.

Despite the rich literature in which feminist and new materialist scholars draw and build on his work, Foucault is often castigated for giving minimal attention to race, or to spaces and places beyond his Euro-American-centric Western milieu. Post-structuralist thought in general, and Foucault as a standard-bearer, are critiqued as relativistic, anthropocentric, masculinized, and dismissive of agency (Lemke 2014, Braun 2008, Barad 2007, Rutherford 1999, among many). Karen Barad, for example, claims that these theories restrict agency to the human, and that they ignore the agential action of the non-human upon both the human and other non-humans. It is worth noting here that the thinker who could articulate a philosophy that encompasses every possible perspective, concern, facet and application of a theory would essentially end scholarly discussion. Critique should be able to add to and enrich seminal ideas without claiming that they are deficient. I read Foucault as applying to his own social, political and economic questions a concept that can be usefully extended to other interrogations, such as those of the non-human. Biopower extends to anything that one would consider as having a life – in the Greek etymology, _bios_ is “one's life, course or way of living, lifetime.” Barad would have a stronger point if
Foucault had defined a zoopolitics (zoe is “animal life, organic life”). The government of things, Foucault tells us, takes place within a milieu that includes the natural environment, the artificial (or technological), and the human (2007, 21).

New materialisms, meanwhile, come under fire for assigning an anthropomorphic subjectivity to the non-human (Zizek 2014), and for attributing agency to non-human things where their influence would more appropriately be termed causal (Krause 2011). New materialist thinkers are even accused of eliding and “ideologically concealing” class – in effect, of colluding with regimes of capital under a banner of “romantic ‘otherness’ ” (Cotter 2016, 180). This sort of critique is (in a much more thoughtful and nuanced exploration) debunked by Diana Coole, who argues for a “capacious historical materialism” that “does not call for the abandonment of constructivist investigations and critiques of power but seeks to contextualize them more broadly… tracing politico-economic, geopolitical and biophysical circuits, conduits and networks through which matter passes as it is transformed, given surplus value, degraded, rerouted, hoarded and so on.” (2013, 455-6). Coole thus provides an elegant bridge that spans the perceived chasm between economically contextualized historical materialism, and agentially expansive new materialisms.

Similarly, foundational theorists of affect such as Eve Sedgwick and Nigel Thrift are critiqued for propounding what Ruth Leys calls “the Basic Emotions paradigm” – a reductive and essentialist approach to “feeling” – and for constructing affect-driven response as disconnected from cognition and intentionality (Leys 2011, Gross 2006, Nussbaum 2001, among others). I suggest that such critiques are an impetus, not to plump for one favored analytical frame, but to
engage them with each other. These three frames all seek to move away from dualistic and hierarchical thinking, and likewise to reject a linear formulation of history and progress. All conceive of power and relationships as networked, as a web of being in which agents affect and alter each other. Much innovative scholarship takes advantage of these commonalities to synthesize key concepts and examine how they work together, particularly to redefine the “bio” in biopower, and to think through politics of difference (Chen 2012, Hannah 2011, Adey 2009).

For example, Feminist sociologist Lone Bertelsen, and media and affect scholar Andrew Murphie, while they do not engage directly with Foucault, deploy a Guattarian understanding of affect as a site of continual passage, transition, plurality – as creating liminal spaces of dissensus (Ranciere 2010) that resist the fixity of territorialization. They lay out a micropolitics of affect as a field of possibility for the disruption of discursive norms that reinforce biopolitical administration (Bertelsen and Murphie 2010). (Importantly, the authors do not conceive of this affective field as some pure and separate state of transgressive goodness. Rather, they describe the echoes or ripples of affect-intensity as also setting up the potentiality for xenophobic and racist moves.) In this spirit of the dialogic potential, for my argument, of biopolitics with modes of analysis that foreground matter, bodies, and senses, I offer here brief notes from just two out of many possible examples: Thomas Lemke’s 2014 article “New Materialisms: Foucault and the ‘Government of Things’”, and Sara Ahmed’s 2010 “Happy Objects”.

New materialist thought is particularly attentive to the ethical questions that arise when the human is privileged over the non-human, a focus that some see as incompatible with the linguistic (and thus anthropocentric) bent of Foucauldian post-structuralism. Lemke proposes an elegant and useful scaffolding for placing Foucault’s relational “government of things” in
conversation with new materialist concepts such as Karen Barad’s “agential realism” (Barad 2007) and Jane Bennett’s “thing-power” (Bennett 2010). These two neologisms are both designed to convey what Diana Coole calls “materialization that contains its own energies and forces of transformation… [that is] self-organising, *sui generis*… [without being fixed in] a distinctive type of being, especially inasmuch as this is defined as human” (2013, 453). To make a case for the conceptual dialogue between biopolitics and this generative agency of the beyond-organic, Lemke develops his thesis by tracing the evolution of Foucault’s thought from sovereign power, with its reliance on law (Foucault 1978), through the “intrication of men and things” (Foucault 2007, 97), to the notion of tactical governmentality (Foucault 2008), and eventually the technologies and care of the self (Foucault 1988). Lemke posits that Foucault is expanding his idea of biopolitics beyond the biological, that Foucault has come to conceive of life as transactional – as “a distinctive domain of practice and thought… a dynamic ensemble of matter and meaning” that encompasses “things” like morals (Lemke 2014, p. 14). This is closely related to Sara Ahmed’s concept of the affective field that blooms around corporeal and discursive objects (2010, see below). Lemke is articulating a governmentality that makes and is made by matter as both political object and agential actant: he is prefiguring alimentality. In the process, Lemke elucidates Foucault’s state ship metaphor as a ‘“floating…placeless space’ ” in which humans and things are arranged (Lemke 2014, quoting Foucault 2007). This metaphor is, I believe, particularly applicable to the study of the materiality of food, and its attendant relational politics, in a global but simultaneously spatialized and territorialized market. Lemke convincingly shows how the biopolitical government of things can be productively synthesized with new materialist approaches that have grown out of feminist scholarship’s challenges to humanism. (I will return to Lemke below, in the discussion of my project’s intervention.)
As a self-described “killjoy”, one of feminist scholar Sara Ahmed’s projects is to reveal and disrupt the ways in which joy is tethered to normative roles, things, and moral economies. Although it may initially seem counterintuitive, it is exactly this untethering that I suggest the liberation of food pleasure can potentiate. I argue that the claiming of pleasure as detached from assigned roles or emplacements is in itself a subversive act. Ahmed’s theorization of the ways in which normed and possessed pleasures interact with racism and capitalism is invaluable to this process. In her essay “Happy Objects”, Ahmed names those who do not reproduce a dominant social line in the service of happiness as “affect aliens” (2010, 30), and she asks us to interrogate the array of embodied and bodiless “whats” – social and capital goods – around which we create these fixed orbits. These “possessions” can be mattered objects that we consume, or morals and values to which we subscribe, but they function biopolitically: “the promise of happiness thus directs life in some ways rather than others” (ibid, 41, emphasis mine). Ahmed calls attention to John Locke’s use of the experience of eating grapes to illustrate the fact that objects, delight, and the love that links them, while all intimate and interactive encounters, are separable and intentional, and in fact are emblematic of the inevitability of otherness. She then makes this remarkable sleeper of a statement: “Locke locates difference in the mouth” (ibid, 34, emphasis mine). She goes on to make the powerful argument that when our pleasures are transgressive – when they do not cleave to the hegemonic discursive line – we are alien, alienated, alienating.

This is the otherness in alimentality that suffuses notions of what pleasures are correct, and which may be possessed by whom; it is also the moment in which bodies that step out of place initiate political struggle (ibid, 39). But Ahmed misses a subversive opportunity, in the end. After
reminding us that delight, happiness, and objects, while sticky, are not permanently attached to one another (grapes are not sensorily delightful in and of themselves – delight, or lack of it, is in the different mouth) she characterizes happiness, rather than pleasure, as affirmation. Ahmed is responding to a statement by Rosi Braidotti that she “[yearns] for a more joyful and empowering concept of desire and for a political economy that foregrounds positivity” (ibid, 50). A political economy suffused with joy and desire that refuses to be biopolitically managed and discursively assigned – that jumps the tracks of alimentality and forges new paths and connections – is one where the messiness of materiality, the intimacies and extimacies of corporeal being-in-the-world and their embodied pleasures, can remake relationships between matter and meaning.

3. The intervention:

...it is perhaps worthy of note that racial difference too has often been reduced to sites of the body where there is an open intersection between inside and outside... As breaches in the body’s surfaces – points of vulnerability for us all – such sites, in their evident or supposed difference, mark an uncertainty about the putatively self-contained human being.

Margrit Shildrick 2002, 52

Shildrick here directs our attention to one of the reasons that so much intensity (in the Massumian sense of pre-ideological affect, Leys 2011) mediates currents of public sentiment about food rights. Food, like sex, directs attention to the porosity of bodies, in ways that activate deeply raced fears of the comingling of self and other. People seek in turn to connect the affective response with an ideological expression of meaning. Thus material food objects, in
their intersection with human bodies, become vectors for meaning and political action, but also escape and exceed both affect and signification in unpredictable ways. The rich possibilities for exploration opened by these conjunctures make it all the more surprising that neither new materialism nor affect theory have been fully exploited to examine the political implications of sensory response to food; nor have they been put in conversation with biopolitics on this subject.

The emphasis on embodied experience, pre-cognitive feeling, and contagion in the literature of affect give rise to claims that “‘political decision is itself produced by a series of inhuman or pre-subjective forces and intensities’” (Thrift and Spink quoted by Leys 2011, 435). Likewise, new materialism’s insistence on distributive agency, focus on entangled conglomerations, and attention to the corporeal recommend it as central. These corpuses are important not only to geographers’ studies of food in general, but particularly, here, to my interrogations of organoleptic experience and the ways that foods themselves interact with people and politics. However, neither affect studies, new materialism, nor biopolitics fully addresses the intersection of the political, economic, social, affective, and corporeal in the sensory experience of food. This is an historical theoretical void.

I suggest that this gap has its roots in traditional political economy – in the work of Smith, Malthus, and Ricardo, which ignores the pleasure component in food and recognizes only its functional role in sustaining life. This assumption perseveres through interpretations of Marxian materialism as well. Despite the fact that Karl Marx repeatedly mentions the bodily satisfaction of laboring to fulfill one’s own needs, rather than those of capitalism, sensory pleasure was effectively dropped out of subsequent discussions of dialectical/historical materialism, and has
not been foregrounded in any of the ensuing theoretical turns (even the affective turn has not sufficiently explored the organoleptic). In choosing to engage with sensory experience in foodways, one of my central questions is how people experience, perceive, respond to and value pleasure in food. Why has the sensing body been so peripheralized in food studies literature, especially when the perceived right to pleasure is so clearly raced, classed and gendered? Because pleasure has historically been feminized, a feminist lens is useful in resituating it in the discussion of foodways. However, even feminist scholarship is cleaving to this historical construction of pleasure in food as tangential, and has predominantly focused studies of pleasure on sexual desire (see, for example, the marvelous collection of essays in Elizabeth Grosz’s and Elspeth Probyn’s 1995 *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*, among many). Food pleasure tends to be categorized as aesthetic – in the academy, when I mention my interest in sensory pleasure, Aesthetics as a branch of Cultural Studies is often invoked – and yet claiming that organoleptic pleasure in sex is aesthetic would be almost certainly be considered dismissive. The academy is accustomed to dignifying sexual desire and pleasure with an import and gravity that gives ontological weight to its experience.

Scholars of food have celebrated the centrality of sustenance, environment, labor, health, and justice without giving sensory pleasure this kind of ontological weight, although it is imbricated with all of these issues. This quote, from an exploration of the influence of heritage on creativity, neatly encapsulates the typical trope: “[the demand for] taste industries… derives not from the logic of needs and necessity, but from the logic of pleasures, tastes, ethic [sic] preferences and hedonism” (Barrère 2013, abstract). Cammie Sublette is even more direct: “we eat what tastes good to us, what gives us pleasure. Hedonism is thus our guiding principle” (2016, 172). Earlier
in the passage, she characterizes this hedonism as “childish” (ibid). If we consider other types of bodily and affective fulfillment personally and politically central, why is desire for food beyond hunger satiation portrayed as luxury or hedonism rather than as an important component of agency, health, and interconnectedness (Sublette 2016, Trapp 2016, Sato 2015, Bacon 2014, Jallinoja et al 2010)? There is something oddly puritanical about the refusal to center this fundamental experience in discussions of food justice. Even nuanced looks at pleasure and privilege, such as Josée Johnson and Michelle Szabo’s look at Whole Foods Market shoppers’ reflexivity (2011), or Kate Soper’s “Alternative Hedonism” (2008), frame the issue as a redefinition of food pleasure (the moral satisfaction of ethical consumerism), rather than a new contextualization of existing sensory enjoyment. In the two investigations that follow, I suggest that discursive constructions of purity, privilege, and belonging play a role in this dynamic.

Here I want to return to Lemke to suggest just such a productive confluence. In his investigation of new directions in conceptualizing biopolitics, Lemke describes the shift from what he characterizes as Foucault’s “notion of an integral body” to that of the transformable body – not just a molecular biopolitics (Dillon & Reid 2001, Flower & Heath 1993, Braun 2008) or a cyborg biopolitics (Haraway 1991), but that of a biomedicalized body as made up of “human material” that lives on beyond the integral body itself, and is transferrable to the bodies of others (Lemke 2011, 95; Clarke et al 2003). Would not this independent and transplantable life of human and non-human corporeal material create demand for a degree of bodily purity previously contained within the individual body’s boundaries? In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, the revelation that blood transfusions and dental work could transmit HIV/AIDS triggered a round of high-profile protests on behalf of infected “innocents” such as Ryan White and Kimberly
Bergalis, whose morally and physically untainted bodies (both were sexual virgins) were destroyed by the introduction of material from corrupt bodies (Barusch 2006). Although public response centered on the responsibility of medical practitioners and laboratory administrators to screen such materials, ultimately the message is that maintaining the health and purity of one’s body is not only a civic duty (as evidenced by the designation of fat people as a threat to national security because they are unfit for military service, Cawley and Maclean 2011 e.g.), but also reflects the individual body’s new status as a potential parts resource (Lemke 2011, 95).

Particularly in light of recent evidence that the life expectancy gap widens with the income gap, even in a highly developed society (Bosworth et al 2016), this shifts the burden of body-as-spare-parts disproportionately to the less privileged. Since notions of food pleasure are often linked with indulgence in rich or sweet treats, and since marginalized consumers are discursively drawn as ignorant of, or resistant to, healthful eating practices, the net result can be a move to restrict or control their foodways.

Its corollary can be the flouting of classed food conventions (organic, healthy, natural, etc.) by marginalized people, in favor of the pursuit of sensory pleasure as representative of liberation from dominant constraints. In alimentality, freedom to eat as one wishes is earned or deserved through bodily discipline, dominant status, and attainment of privilege. In a 2015 study, Priscila de Morais Sato et al compiled thirty-eight peer-reviewed papers on foodways that use Bourdieu’s foundational *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* as central to their analysis. Sato et al’s literature review looked for patterns in definitions of luxury and necessity – where freedom of choice is aligned with luxury. Among their many fascinating findings, the authors discovered a study that demonstrated that, in the still-strong link between class and certain
definable food practices, women of high social class tend to focus on health in their choices – but men in corresponding strata focus on pleasure (Sato et al 2015, 176). Despite the fact that the foodscapes of luxury are ever-shifting in terms of what individual items are identified as desirable (note, for example, the recent elite fascination with organ meats, offal and “butcher’s cuts” like oxtails and hanger steak, and the attendant soaring prices of these items), the notion of who is socially – not just economically – constrained, and who gets to choose is consistently aligned with class. One notable exception in Sato et al calls attention to the revolutionary potential of food pleasure: in a regional study of consumption of manioc – a food emblematic of poverty in that area – not only was the sensory experience of manioc desired by the poor, but its use was symbolic of “opposition toward domination”; and in Italy, where the Slow Food movement was born, people prioritized pleasure across class boundaries (ibid, 181, 179). However, the correlation between freedom of choice in foodways and socioeconomic privilege remains remarkably consistent.

The restrictions placed on other bodies curtail choices that are assumed, and flaunted, not just as privileges, but as differential rights and freedoms, by the powerful. The fact that these restrictions are often advocated within narratives about health becomes additionally suspect when one considers, for example, that no allowance for heart-protective red wine is made in SNAP regulations; or that seafood as a source of lean protein or essential fatty acids is a point of controversy. It is certainly thoroughly documented that much food and drink is harmful in excess, and that the health risks of extensively human-modified foods are often poorly understood until they materialize in bodies; but these effects are so complex and multiply qualified that it seems disingenuous to claim that regulating the eating habits of the poor is “for
their own good”. In her brief and funny essay “Choosing How to Live”, Faith Fitzgerald notes that “admonitions that correct behavior will save one’s immortal soul [have shifted] to similar propositions that correct behavior will save one’s mortal body” (1996, 183). She continues that “few overtly recognize the division of so-called ‘self-abuse’ into socially approved and socially disapproved categories” (ibid). The image of the pure and correct body is, of course, nothing new in food scholarship; but for the two inquiries I pursue here, it interacts with both the politics of privilege and those of nationalism in ways that geographies of food have not examined.

4. Methodology:

An obvious entanglement for human social actors occurs routinely between embodied states and the semiotic. Why, then, is there so little dialogue between affect scholars and discourse research?

Margaret Wetherell 2013, 352

Methodologically, this thesis uses these theoretical lenses to analyze online and media content, as well as policy documents and white papers, in an attempt to illuminate discursive constructions of difference, worth, geopolitical positioning, and nationalism around and within foodways. Starting from the premise that public policy and state mandates are both constitutive of and responsive to popular and media narratives, I conduct a discourse analysis of these materials as they pertain to two specific cases. These examinations help me to think through the ways in which the concepts in literature and theory that I have studied are evidenced – or not – in the social and political interactions that shape current foodways. In this way, the two theoretical studies lay the groundwork for the empirical qualitative research that I have planned for my PhD
studies. They suggest questions for both privileged and marginalized people about what pleasure in food means to them, how they realize it or not, what importance they assign to it, and what social, political and economic pressures bear on it. How do people understand the valorization and pursuit of sensory food experiences together with their dismissal as central to need, health and justice?

The other line of inquiry established here concerns the materiality of the foodstuffs themselves. How do these things exert agency upon and within human bodies? How does the action of these substances participate in, influence, and potentially subvert alimentality as a form of biopower? Gaston Gordillo describes Foucault’s characterization of subversion as a “capillary, oscillating move” that is uneven, unstable (2014, 230). The next stage of this project will probe this shifting, networked response for insight into the ways in which the materiality of food-things alters behavior, choices, environments, and biopolitical regimes.

As discussed by Wetherell in her 2013 argument for a rapprochement of affect and discourse in research methodology, my goal throughout this project is to maintain the entanglement of affect and matter, bodies and senses, feelings and desires, with the discursive media and social messages through which we can examine political maneuvers and possibilities. As Wetherell puts it “The broad aim of affect theory is to deliver the tools for lively, textured research on embodied social action” (350). Although this characterization of affect studies may be oversimplified, the notion that the discursive and the affective are not antithetical, and can enrich each other in research, is important. To Wetherell’s argument, I would add the (related, but still
new materialisms that further productively complicate the two exercises in discourse analysis that are the heart of this thesis.

Additionally, I want to make the case that non-academic thinkers like Jon Stewart, whose televised piece on food stamp discrimination inspired my investigation into differently legitimized sensory pleasure, and popular media fora such as the YouTube videos that motivated me to inquire into the Russian government’s destruction of sanctioned foodstuffs, offer not only important openings for scholarly intervention but also lines of penetration into vernacular knowledge. If academia is to be a relevant source of effective activism – a motivation that is central to my own work – we must break down entrenched expectations of what sources are valid, and whose insights should be privileged. There is no substitute for empirical observation on the ground, but media studies and discourse analysis are important tools, and non-academics such as Stewart can be innovative social theorists. Shattering elitism throughout society depends in part on shattering it in the academy. This is a form of collaborative research, and a way of extending rigor to encompass different knowledges.

Finally, particularly in Chapters 5a-5j of this work, I have also included some of the images that informed these inquiries. They not only illustrate the text, but also contribute a dimension of the social and political context – and a hint of the embodied assemblages of the people and food-things that they depict – that verbiage does not capture.
5. Possessing pleasure: Embodied difference in the sensory experience of food.

What’s the right mixture of quality and class-based shame poor people should aim for in their meal planning? ... [if they are allowed to buy any foods they want], how will we be able to tell the Dickensian street urchins from the normals – other than of course by their pockets bursting with government-provided crab legs?

Jon Stewart, What Not To Eat, The Daily Show, March 2014

On March 4th, 2014, in the wake of the passage of the Farm Bill, Jon Stewart delivered a brilliant and biting exposé of the class-based politics of pleasure. Noting that the bill cuts 8.6 billion dollars from the food stamp (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – SNAP) program over the next decade, Stewart showed a number of mainstream news clips decrying so-called food stamp fraud: the use of SNAP to purchase incorrect or inappropriate items. Among the outrages cited were soda, “junk food,” and, with remarkable frequency, seafood. Stewart built a layered collage of video clips and quotes (“down at the organic market in the East Village, you can get organic [sic] wild salmon [with SNAP] – it’s insanity!”), finally working his way to several commentators who argued that SNAP prevented the government from achieving the
moral goal enshrined in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century proverb that advocates teaching a man \textit{sic} to fish so that he may eat for a lifetime. Here Stewart pounced, following this claim immediately with a clip in which low-income shoppers were castigated for using SNAP to purchase bait “so they can go out and bass-fish.” The intensity attached to the idea of seafood as a luxury unearned by the poor – as, in Stewart’s tart phrase, “the Mercedes of food” – is matched by the notion of bass fishing as an elite leisure activity.

When Stewart mined the news media for suggestions of what poor people ought to be buying with SNAP, one commentator cited “staples” which he defined as flour and meat. There is a triple paradoxical implication here: 1) that recipients of food aid, while expected to adhere to normative health guidelines (no “junk food” or soda), are to consume meat (popularly construed as less healthful than seafood) and eschew organic food; 2) that they are expected to have the temporal and financial wherewithal to turn raw ingredients into food; and 3) that what may give them gustatory or recreational pleasure is not only not important, but is punitively withheld.

Acceptable provisions for SNAP recipients. Source: Comedy Central/The Daily Show
These discursive messages are echoed and reinforced by the USDA’s web page on what SNAP recipients may legally redeem (fns.usda.gov/snap/eligible-food-items 2014). Although the site notes that “junk food,” soda and candy are allowable, it also prominently states that the only reason these and other unhealthful foods are included is because there is insufficient administrative infrastructure to enforce their prohibition. In the same vein, the site concedes that “seafood, steak and bakery cakes” are eligible for redemption because they are, in fact, food (there’s apparently no getting around it). “Hot foods” and prepared foods are not allowed; nor are foods to be eaten in the establishment where they are purchased, a disciplinary regime that conveys the message that the relaxation, pleasure and time-saving features of service food must be earned through successful participation in a market economy. The USDA’s stalemate on the issue notwithstanding, bills have been proposed and passed in multiple state legislatures restricting SNAP purchases, including seafood (Washington Post 2015), and in Maryland there is a move to withhold SNAP from people in the “thug community” who take part in political protests (Baltimore Sun 2015). It is evident that the construction of sensory pleasure in food as an elite privilege articulates capitalist logics with embodied narratives of raced, classed and gendered otherness. So why is this facet of affective interaction between people and food almost never part of scholarly or activist discussion? New materialist examinations of the dance between the human and non-human in food production and consumption afford us fresh perspectives on these embodied ontologies.

SNAP users portrayed as people of color, USDA.gov
as do affect scholars who consider the ways in which bodies and emotions register multimodal encounters. They are, however, incomplete for the purposes of social change, until they are put in conversation with the biopolitical – with alimentality.

5a. Questions and argument:

*Issues of food choice and its differential ability seem to have been erased from some of the early vital food work with its overt focus on the agency of food things. Ontological agency should not begin to overtake that of food’s political agency nor its practical agency to effect the changes needed to abolish the austere and unequal foodscapes of the moment… more needs to be made of the cultural and media grammars that articulate what is appropriate or not to eat, especially in the context of austerity-conditioned economic access.*

*Michael K. Goodman, 2015, 7-8*

Goodman here points to an important imbalance in studies of food vitality and materiality. What he refers to as “the agency of food things” (a topic further addressed in Chapter 6 of this thesis) cannot be abstracted from the social and political activity that they also generate. Goodman asks us to consider how the “practical agency” of the things humans categorize as food can interact productively with moves to change the raced, classed and gendered inequities that characterize current food systems. Considering the affective intersections in foodways can both facilitate analysis of these inequities, and also, I contend, offer a fulcrum for fresh kinds of activism in response. To those ends, this essay asks why the organoleptic pleasure of food is rarely part of the conversation about food justice, health, or rights. I suggest that sensory pleasure in food is construed as a luxury, a privilege, and a reward; and that discursive constructions of race, class, belonging, and deservingness are bound up with concepts of exclusivity based on
“correct” knowledge and behavior. Systems and narratives around food aid, in particular, are tied to punitive notions of austerity based on successful participation in regimes of capital. (Interestingly, other sensory experiences have not become as embroiled with subjecthood and class, or at least have more readily transgressed boundaries – sexual pleasure, music, and the wearing of perfume come to mind.) The USDA’s Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and recent public response to it, provides a particularly interesting case study for these questions and claims.

The Stewart piece crystallizes the discursive cultural bounding of food experiences that are to be reserved for elite consumption, in which not just types of food, but also, in particular, sensory experiences are tied to coded norms of class acceptability (Bourdieu 1984). Giving appropriate weight to bodily experiences of food, rather than narrowly focusing on bodily effects, requires that the materiality of foodways assemblages remain substantively connected to, although not eclipsed by, the politics of alimentality. Following Goodman, an exploration of the vitality and agency of food is inextricable from issues of human agency and the politics of production and consumption. Why and how have the sensory pleasure and satisfaction derived from food come to be constituted as luxuries, and how is pleasure differentially legitimized for different populations? What work is done by these discourses? What understandings of food, and the different bodies sustained by food, inform this narrative, and how does the materiality of food itself interact with these discursive constructions? I seek in this paper to explore these different ways of understanding the bodily experience of eating, and I will demonstrate how these discourses alter the everyday landscape of possibility for sensory pleasure among different classes.
In this essay, I will investigate the bodily experience of pleasure in food, and how this experience is materially and discursively made or unmade for people who are poor or otherwise marginalized. Materialism, in the sense of the political economy of food, and materiality in the sense of embodied sensory experience, interact in revealing ways here. Geography, like most disciplines that examine the politics of food, has given minimal attention to questions of corporeal pleasure. Where these do appear, they frequently indirectly reinforce the phenomenon seminally critiqued by Julie Guthman: the argument that “if they only knew” subaltern people would discover a world of good health and attendant deliciousness associated with correct food production and consumption practices (2008). I argue that state and non-state institutions condition people to create food-related subjectivities that fit categories of acceptability; that sensory pleasure is not part of the equation for those in poverty; and that constructions of knowing/non-knowing and embodied deservingness are co-extensive with political economies of taste.

5b. Theoretical frame:

*This return to the livingness of the world shifts the register of materiality from the indifferent stuff of a world “out there,” articulated through notions of “land,” “nature” or “environment,” to the intimate fabric of corporeality that includes and redistributes the “in here” of human being.*

*Sarah Whatmore, 2006, 602*

I seek to explore these questions through a combination of analytics that encompass new materialisms; feminist theories of embodiment and affect, including visceral politics (Probyn,
2000; Longhurst et al 2009; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008, 2009, 2011); and Foucauldian biopolitics (1990, 2007, 2008). In doing so, I want to challenge what we mean when we discuss taste, pleasure and sensory satisfaction in the context of food, and how these meanings have become imbricated with beliefs about difference, belonging, worth, time, and spatial emplacement.

Food penetrates and mingles with the body, carrying the materiality of the world into the body and making it part of the body (Lupton 1996); and in turn the porous body sends parts of itself materially out into the world in the forms of energy (light and heat), scent, sound, touch, CO2, excretions, sloughed skin and hair, bacteria, and new human beings. These exchanges and bodily interactions with the material that becomes food alter embodied non-human things and beings, which in turn alter humans, corporeally and otherwise. Food is more corporeally boundary-breaking even than sex, making it a powerful site for external hegemonic controls that become internalized – but also recommending it as a site of social connection, political action and common cause (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008, Sutton 2010, Goodman 2015). Critiques of universalism notwithstanding, people must engage with food in some way daily. Even in the absence of food, people engage with it through hunger, longing, pursuit, imaginings. Most people value some sort of sensory engagement with food practices, and pleasure in food is often characterized as having a power comparable only to that of sex (Coveney 2006). Moreover, without food we die, and thus the material and discursive controls exerted by state and society over foodways cannot be other than biopolitical (and in some cases necropolitical, Mbembe 2003).
Judith Butler has critiqued Foucault’s suggestion that bodies and pleasures can be a “rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality” – that is, a nexus for resistance to the exercise of law and governmentality over sexualities deemed deviant (Butler 1999, Foucault 1990). Butler makes an observation that I suggest points to an opening for fresh intervention: that in separating sex-desire from bodies and pleasures, thus creating a field of “nameless” bodies and “diffuse” pleasures, we compromise the opportunity to “understand how pleasures are staged through the workings of a desire that is the desire of a subject” (20) and how that subject’s desires interact with power, transforming and being transformed by it. What if we employed this framework – of named bodies and particular pleasures as revelatory of subject-formation – in the examination of the desires and pleasures of food? Can we challenge the idea that desire is reductive (ibid, 11), and claim that defining sensory pleasure as a core need, even a human right, is not universalizing but is, rather, a way to liberate difference? And can we do this in the context of an historical moment where claiming gustatory pleasure is discursively tied to knowledge, deservingness, and bodily norms – norms that enforce definitions of which bodies are correct, and also of how and where those bodies sense their interactions with food?

5c. Taste:

The ideology of natural taste owes its plausibility and its efficacy to the fact that, like all the ideological strategies generated in the everyday class struggle, it naturalizes real differences, converting differences in the mode of acquisition of culture into differences of nature; it only recognizes as legitimate the relation to culture... [that] manifests by its ease and naturalness that true culture is nature – a new mystery of immaculate conception.

Pierre Bourdieu, 1984, 68, emphasis in original
Scholarly work on food and the senses typically engages primarily with taste, so despite the fact that I posit this as one limitation of much of the corpus, it is useful to begin with taste as it is defined by Raymond Williams in *Keywords* (1976). Williams gives us the etymology of taste as rooted in a meaning closer to what we now think of as touch (two senses in one), and as having evolved into another doubled role: taste as a “passive” physical experience and as an “active” metaphorical expression of discernment (ibid, 313-314 – Williams digs deeper into the active/passive binary in *Problems of Materialism*, 1980, of which more below). This duality informs the work of Pierre Bourdieu, although he is less concerned with sensory taste than with taste as distinction (1984). Bourdieu’s theories are important, because they were ground breaking in their synthesis of class and taste, but his lack of engagement with the sensations and experiences of the body, with the matter of the bodies and food whose relationship interested him, is a significant lacuna. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore has stated, capital is a metaphor; therefore, social capital or cultural capital are metaphors of a metaphor (2007). This takes us quite a distance from embodied, lived experience and visceral politics, and my goal here is to move closer to those things.

Alison and Jessica Hayes-Conroy make an important intervention in the politics of taste in their exploration of the visceral experience of food as both feeling and thinking the world through the body (2008). In a field-notes excerpt, they briefly mention what I contend should be a central problem of embodied food studies: the recognition that gustatory sensory pleasure is legitimate and important no matter what food experience it attaches to. Thus enjoyment of foods that are negatively associated with discourses of health and sustainability is discounted, construed as reflecting a lack of training, knowledge, exposure and, ultimately, worth (ibid, see
also Guthman 2008). In other words, the material foodstuff that prompts sensory pleasure, and how that sensation is valued and validated, is differentially mapped onto bodies as a biopolitical project, resulting in what David Nally calls “a regime of human classification that disaggregates populations according to their conduct and perceived threat to the social order” (2010, 40, emphasis in original).

In challenging what is allowed as pleasurable, and investigating the articulation of this discourse with the “privatization of desire” (Graeber 2011, 498) and consequent social stratification of eating experience, it is important to break the tyranny of taste as the medium and measure of gratification. The corporeal sensation of pleasure associated with food extends not only to the rest of the senses (as conceived by Western science) but also to affective, emotional, social, temporal and spatial context. This constellation of experience is ruled, defined, and valued or devalued through raced categorization of bodies.

5d. Racialized, spatialized pleasure:

Health checks... within the [state disciplinary] context... enable... corporealities that assess, measure, and judge bodies – what they do, what they consume and what they are capable or incapable of – and construct economies of pleasure and unpleasure.  

Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel and Dierdre Tedmanson, 2013, 236

In two essays that examine the governmentality of pleasure economies as it relates to indigenous people in the Northern Territories, Australian scholars Tedmanson and Wadiwel consider the ways in which biopolitics and sovereign power operate together to exert control over raced bodies. The authors point to the dichotomy of pleasure and un-pleasure that ensues:
pleasure is enhanced and legitimized for the dominant, controlled and stigmatized for the
colonized. Although the practices in question are sexual rather than alimentary, this frame is
analogous to the concept of alimentality as it relates to food pleasure: the combination of
biopolitical and sovereign power to both sustain and discipline bodies construed as “other”. Also
analogous is the prurient, voyeuristic consumption by the dominant of images of pleasure-
seeking practices that reflect the restrictions and/or pain of oppression and marginalization. In
food discourse, narratives of healthism are often driven by raced, classed and gendered
representations of obesity and poor diet that, like the post-colonial regime in Australia, cast
children as the victims of adults who are either ignorant or outright abusive. Fat becomes a
physical manifestation of pleasure out of control – of ungoverned desire for sensory satisfaction
– and health as defined in alimentality becomes a moral virtue made visible in the thin, muscular
(privileged) body, both pleasurable in itself, and also the justification for subsequent pleasurable
organoleptic indulgence.

Food and race remain as imbricated as food and class (Slocum 2008, 2010, 2013; Longhurst et
al 2008, 2009; Guthman 2008; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2011), but the denial of racism
in food systems is much more pervasive. Jon Stewart continued his Farm Bill piece with several
media clips proclaiming the end of racism in the U.S., and then followed his correspondent
Jessica Williams through interviews on the topic. When Williams googled “why do black
people…” on screen, the first hit was “…like fried chicken” (The Daily Show 2014). However,
raced hierarchies, Slocum and Saldanha note, are not defined by color and ethnicity, by
phenotype or genetic inheritance. Rather, “race names the process of attempting to stabilize
continuous populational differences that are entirely contingent on colonial capitalism…
segregation and categorization… a proliferating reality, variously producing the capacities of bodies according to the spatiotemporal configurations in which they move… Race exceeds racism” (2013, 3-4). As such, it includes and is imbricated with size, gender, sexuality, and of course, class. In the shifting discursive production of bodily difference, as Slocum and Saldanha so clearly point out, materialism and materiality interact – nowhere more pervasively than in foodways – and as prevalent as discursive demonizing is discursive erasure (Pine and de Souza 2013), including the erasure of the precarious and the hungry as bodies that crave more than survival.

Stuart Hall, in his essay on the centrality of culture (1997), asks us to consider the ways in which culture articulates with power. Central to this question is the concept of different sources and methods of regulation and that fact that “de-regulation in one sphere requires and is complemented by re-regulation in others” (ibid 230). What Hall characterizes as “contradictions between the discourses of ‘freedom and choice’ and of ‘discipline and restraint’ [producing] serious and glaring disjunctions in cultural life” (ibid 231) exemplify a process of de-regulation and re-regulation that is taking place around foodways in the United States. Where growing freedom of choice in foodstuffs and culinary expressions bumps up against proliferating narratives of corporeal discipline, and where these complexities in turn interact with the securitization of bodies and widening income disparity, there is a tendency to displace discipline onto “other” bodies. What Hall refers to as flashpoints of “collective anxiety” (ibid) become fulcrums for government by culture. Several factors come together around the discourse of food and pleasure. In an environment where time, financial resources, and, importantly, a sense of physical safety in quotidian social spaces and activities, are constantly reduced for all but the
extremely wealthy, convivial preparing and sharing of what are perceived as high-quality foods are increasingly markers of protected social and economic status (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2009; Schultz 2012; and Sassatelli and Davolio 2010). Similarly, in the context of bombardment with messages about food safety, healthism and bodily discipline (Guthman 2011), foodstuffs associated with elite lifestyle, and also eating experiences construed as indulgent, become protected categories that define “proper” subjecthood and belonging.

Possessing pleasure is thus part of being a regulated and included subject who can, in turn, define norms of regulation for excluded others. Pleasure is the reward for adhering to difficult disciplinary regimes associated with materialism and materiality – for embrace of market logics, and for being born into, and cultivating, a correct body. Pleasure is an earned privilege, and the withholding of pleasure is a state and social regulatory strategy for bounding categories of people and for interpellating the proper subject. Additionally, as stated by Wadiwel and Tedmanson in their exploration of the bio- and necropolitical dimensions of bodily pleasure, the sovereign right to pleasure “cannot be sovereign if the pleasures that are its province of victory are openly shared by others… control of pleasure [includes] a right to preclude and manipulate the pleasures and pains experienced by others” (2013, 239). Likewise, David Sutton signals the linking of power and pleasure in the work of Cowan and others (2010, 214). “Luxury” foods that are available to, and enjoyed by, outsiders blur boundaries of belonging for elite eaters. As Sutton writes “bad tastes are used as a marker or as a refusal of social intimacy” (ibid, 213, emphasis mine). Thus the autonomous taking of sensory fulfillment by subaltern people becomes a transgression, and, among the marginalized, the claim to a (universal) right to pleasure is potentially a political act of subversion, liberation and social change. It forces an unwanted intimacy upon the hegemonic
subject. This intimacy begins to move in the direction of contagion (Shildrick 2001): if food becomes us, then the assimilation of elite foods could transform bodies to an elite status, blurring the boundaries of difference that are defined by inclusion and exclusion. Clichés abound that deploy the intimacy of sharing food in the sense of breaking bread together; but no similar platitudes approach the intimacy of the act of taking the same food into our bodies. In its echoes of two people sharing a lover, and of the same matter making the matter of different bodies, such an explicit reference is too corporeally – racially – boundary-breaking.

And it is not just bodily boundaries that are socially protected. Seafood, in the Stewart piece, is a placeholder for a cultural hierarchy of sensory entitlement that is also spatialized: “the organic market in the East Village,” for example. A number of scholars have written about the raced and classed spaces of farmers’ and other alternative food markets (Guthman 2008, Slocum 2008, Alkon and McCullen 2011, Alkon 2012), but of particular interest here is Eckstein and Conley’s 2012 essay. Linking sensation with retroactively experienced emotion, the authors describe Brian Massumi’s concept of “microperception” as an unconsciously registered moment of bodily awareness (177) that generates both physical and affective pleasure. The multi-sensory impact of food spaces – markets, restaurants, tourist farms and production facilities, cafés – are part of the chaotic, messy, visceral pleasure of food, even when the food itself is not being consumed.

Just as emphasis in food studies is placed on taste, so it is also placed on consumption. Williams explicitly associates the two in Keywords (1976, 314). David Graeber trenchantly critiques pervasive insistence on consumption as the defining food-related act (2011). The
constitution of organoleptic satisfaction in food involves spatial and temporal parameters associated with production, provisioning, congregating, spectating, and preparing. Importantly, physical presence is not always necessary to the sensory pleasure people experience, but place still plays a role in perception of factors that make food more sensorially enjoyable (Allen et al 2008, Plassmann et al 2007, Bratanova et al 2005, Sörqvist et al 2013, among many). It is crucial to make a distinction that many of these studies contradict or omit: sensory pleasure is genuine whether or not the perceived material reasons for it are empirically verified. If food tastes, smells, feels better because of a remembered or imaginary connection, the bodily experience is no less real for being predicated on an invented, even erroneous perception. This is exemplified in the well-studied phenomenon of eaters experiencing foods they identify as organically or locally produced as more delicious (ibid). The point is that not just eating and taste, but multisensory and networked social factors all play into this bodily enjoyment – including, of course, race, class, ethnicity, gender, and other markers of inclusion, exclusion, worth, and deservingness.

5e. Deservingness:

The primary objective of many humanitarian projects is to save lives that have been deemed worthy of salvation... Sensory pleasure, or a focus on the taste of food provisions, often remains obscured by conditions of scarcity, the caloric demands of aid, and the imperative to provide adequate nutrition and sustain precarious lives. In the biopolitical domain... food is a site of gustatory discipline.

Micah Trapp 2016

Federal and state policies, and the discourse that interacts with them, serve to map deservingness and pleasure coterminously and mutually onto bodies and spaces. The language of
marketing is laden with such tropes: “you deserve a break today” and “because you’re worth it” are just two of the best known. In a 2014 study, market researcher Lisa Cavanaugh found that “willingness to make indulgent choices is explained through a process of perceived deservingness” (227). Although economic class is the socio-political context in which much of today’s debate takes place, strong racial currents run just under its surface.

The right-leaning news coverage that is the centerpiece of Stewart’s critique has its roots in a remarkable 1976 campaign speech by Ronald Reagan. Legal scholar Ian Haney-López describes Reagan’s racist evocation of food stamp benefit abuse as a “dog whistle”: coded language tuned to the frequency of particular ears (2014). The enduring effectiveness of such signals is evident in the four-decade durability of Reagan’s message, and its current offspring. In the original speech, Reagan first invoked the well-publicized account of Linda Taylor, an Illinois woman who did, in fact, drive a Cadillac, wear furs and jewelry, and game the system for government entitlements. Notably absent from Taylor’s legacy in the public eye are the facts that she was also accused of theft, homicide, and human trafficking, among other crimes (Levin, 2013); her profile as a “welfare queen” (the Chicago Tribune’s phrase) was what took hold, and was subsequently mapped onto a whole class of people, despite the fact that she was, effectively, an n of one. After identifying her, Reagan asked if “you” have had the experience of standing in the grocery line waiting to buy hamburger, behind a “strapping young buck” buying t-bone steak with food stamps (Bill Moyers 2014). The “you” to whom Reagan addressed himself was the white, working, lower- to middle-class American taxpayer, and the policy he was selling was, of course, the tax cuts that benefited wealthy citizenry far more than those targeted by the “dog whistle”. But the subtext carries considerably beyond the issues of taxation or entitlements: it
ignites a xenophobic fear that the “other” is moving into a position of power or dominance that displaces the discursive “we”. This is a flexible pivot point from which to launch political moves ranging from Reagan’s tax initiatives to current proposed immigration restrictions. What is particularly interesting for the purposes of this inquiry is the use of food as the affective trigger.

Representative Louis Gohmert (R TX) launched the crab leg version of the story in a June, 2013 congressional session considering the proposed farm bill (in which the SNAP program is couched):

I've heard this story so many times from people who are brokenhearted… standing in line at a grocery store behind people with a food stamp card, and they look in their basket – as one individual said, I love crab legs, you know, the big king crab legs. I love those. But we haven't been able to have them in our house since who knows when. But I'm standing behind a guy who has those in his basket and I'm looking longingly, like, When can I ever make enough again where our family can have something like that, and then sees the food stamp card pulled out and provided. He looks at the king crab legs and looks at his ground meat and realizes, because he does pay income tax, he doesn't get more back than he pays in, he is actually helping pay for the king crab legs when he can't pay for them for himself.

Although the subsequent media coverage, including Stewart’s piece, focused on the SNAP issue, Gohmert used the crab legs pitch to launch, in the following order, diatribes against higher education that no longer “[prepares students] to live a life in total submission to their savior Jesus Christ”; the subsidization of “out-of-wedlock” single mothers; and, ultimately, immigration. Gohmert used an iteration of Reagan’s food-centric dog whistle to ignite affective response based on notions of who deserves food pleasure – and then stitched that affect first to the “other” within, and thence to the fear of an even more threatening invading “other”. His concluding
sentence was an argument for closed U.S. borders (Congressional Record, 113th Congress, 1st session).

Versions of the steak and crab legs story have, in fact, driven SNAP policy moves at the state level. Missouri state representative Rick Brattin invoked it in 2015 when he proposed a bill that would prohibit the use of SNAP for cookies, chips, energy and soft drinks, and, unsurprisingly, seafood and steak. Challenged by the Washington Post to explain why a food considered healthful (fish) was included, Brattin explained that he did not intend to include canned tuna and frozen fish sticks in the ban. Although Brattin’s initiative was defeated, similar measures have been proposed in Wisconsin, Maine, Illinois, Minnesota, California, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Vermont, New York, and Texas. In some cases, the laws either failed to pass or were subsequently struck down; but their message, along with existing USDA SNAP policy, is clear: people who accept food assistance forfeit the right to eat what they want. Although such messages tend to be framed as health-motivated, they are peppered with exceptions, or directly contradicted by other attendant legislation (such as Kansas’s law that prevents welfare recipients from using money to access swimming pools – spaces where bodies are intimately exposed to each other in the membrane-permeable medium of water). Considering the prevalence of such efforts in light of the results of this month’s presidential election, implementation of punitive racist restrictions on food and other freedoms seem likely to proliferate rather than diminish.

More nuanced policy documents do exist, particularly at the federal level. One such USDA report from 2007 goes so far as to question definitions of “healthy” food, noting that SNAP users are no more likely than middle- or high-income people to make bad dietary choices, and pointing
out the stigmatizing nature of the EBT system (USDA.gov, “Implications Of Restricting The Use Of Food Stamp Benefits – Summary”). There has also been some pushback against biopolitical legislation addressing SNAP regulations (such as SNAP’s Healthy Incentives Program, which offers financial incentives for purchase of “targeted” fruits and vegetables, USDA 2013). When the “Enhancing Retailer Standards” rule of 2016 passed, requiring retailers who accept SNAP to carry mandated quantities of foods defined as healthful, a bipartisan coalition of forty-seven senators signed a letter urging its revision. The group, which included Bernie Sanders and Marco Rubio, among others, expressed concern that the requirements would be likely to simply put small grocers – including the convenience stores often relied on by shoppers unable to access supermarkets – out of business, reducing food options in these areas even further. This thinking, however, despite its promise, is still subsistence-based. Sensory pleasure in not part of the equation.

In the context of hunger and poverty, the bodily and affective experience of pleasure in food is dismissed as a luxury, as is selectivity in what to eat, and often when, where, and how as well. When people apply for food aid, they are expected to check their selective autonomy, along with their sensory preferences, at the door. When faced with starvation, the survival imperative trumps enjoyment; but in highly developed and industrialized societies, hunger, despite its very real health impacts, is rarely starvation. In her book Sweet Charity, Janet Poppendieck’s central thesis is that in attempting to mitigate hunger, well-meaning people and agencies not only perpetuate but actually increase it, by creating a “moral safety valve” that obviates the perceived need for structural change (1998). In a similar way, defining the right to food as simply a right to survival removes any impetus to give central weight to the right to pleasure, to the importance of
the bodied experience of provisioning and eating, and to the ways in which those corporeal minglings alter social networks, emotional/affective being, and the constitution of the body itself. Poppendieck’s text calls into question the depoliticizing nature of much food aid, while acknowledging that most of the people involved with these systems act from an intention of genuine care (ibid). The author also points to the binaries of activity/passivity (food aid constructs aid systems as active caregivers, poor people as passive recipients); confinement/freedom (poor people are restricted spatially as well as discursively, standing in lines and eating in designated spaces); and giving/receiving (donors and volunteers experience the pleasure of giving more, while recipients experience the peculiarly Western shame of asking for and accepting help).

This last point raises the question of the role of deservingness as an integral part of food aid practices. Here the ethos of *quid pro quo* must be distinguished from the notion of reciprocity. Poppendieck follows Marcel Mauss, Marilyn Strathern and others in citing anthropological studies as having demonstrated that people naturally require that reciprocity be part of any gift (1990, 1988). But this reciprocity – and its attendant affective pleasure – is conflated with the idea of earning/deserving in the discourse of food rights. Of food donations, Poppendieck notes “Clients who help are establishing moral and social rights to draw upon the resources of the community. Clients who do not help are unable to establish such rights… most are left in the passive and dependent role that is so characteristic of charity” (1998, 253). But the ethos of *helping* – of communal interdependence and exchange – has shifted in entitlements policy to an economic one of *earning*, closely tied to a moral one of *deserving*. 

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There is a category of people designated as ABAWDs (Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents) who are only eligible for SNAP benefits for three months out of twelve (USDA.gov 2016). While the ethos of earning is explicitly attached to labor and wages, deservingness is defined by adherence to normative social performance that is, unsurprisingly, gendered, raced and classed. Participation in roles that define these norms – heterosexual marriage, two-parent child-rearing, meeting “good provider” expectations, bodies recognized as disabled – confers, if not immediate benefits, less public censure. Additionally, definitions like ABAWD place the onus for earning and deserving on individual bodies, and do not consider geography or spatial emplacement – for example, the prevalence of available work in a given area, or differential means to migration. They are also aligned with pleasure – that is, one may be considered “deserving” of subsistence-level aid (the ground beef and flour in Stewart’s piece) – but even the presence of dependent children does not mitigate the violence to those who are seen as enjoying unearned affective and sensory pleasure. In a 2013 poll of 1000 adults, 45% of respondents agreed that it is acceptable to purchase junk food with SNAP, rising to 63% if shoppers used “their own” money; in contrast, only 32% felt that recipients should be allowed to purchase expensive luxury foods. More than a quarter of respondents agreed that SNAP recipients should not be allowed to purchase such items with their own wages (Huffington Post/YouGov poll). So-called junk foods are heavily targeted by legislators, as exemplified by extensive, ongoing measures to restrict or tax soda purchases, four of which passed in the November 2016 elections (NPR 2016); citizenry actively police pleasure. On line forums, blogs, and reportage offer a rich vein of self-ethnographies and witness accounts. The following first- and second-person narratives are from the Straight Dope Message Board’s thread “Ask the person on food stamps”, and from a series of interviews in the Huffington Post (2013):
[The grocery store manager] finally just said, “Okay, just give it to her.” I said, “See, I told you it was covered by food stamps,” and he said, “Excuse me for working for a living and not relying on food stamps!”…I turned around and saw everyone beyond me and I just burst into tears. Resident of Georgia, 2012

“I can’t believe she’s buying that big-ass cake with food stamps,” the woman said… [the SNAP user], 19, had just used a government-issued debit card to pay for most of her groceries, which included a cake for her son that said “Happy First Birthday [child’s name]” in a theme from the movie Cars. Resident of Pennsylvania, 2013

I felt like [SNAP] was a taxpayer-supported program aimed at helping my children do as well as they could in life [so] I focused on buying fresh fruits, vegetables, whole-grain bread… The food is all tallied up, I pull out the food stamp card, which is very difficult to disguise. In Florida at the time it was a big American flag. The woman [behind me] remarked, “I wish I could eat so well. Maybe I should go on food stamps so I could eat that well.” Resident of Florida, 2013

SNAP users’ observations often show notable reflexivity and awareness of the social dynamics that play into their experiences:

When you get that money, you feel like you can breathe… I can understand why people would buy things that people think are outrageous. When it comes, you feel like “I can buy whatever food I want right now.” You never can buy whatever you want. My clothes are hand-me-down, furniture second-hand. The food is new and mine. Resident of Tennessee, 2013

Prior to getting [SNAP] I was budgeting only $280/month for food for us… now, when I bake muffins I can afford to add nuts to them… last time I went shopping I skipped the apples (a little tired of them) and bought two grapefruit, a pomegranate, several bananas, and a starfruit. I bought radishes [and] I did indulge in a 4 ounce piece of smoked salmon, outrageous, I know (I love smoked salmon)… I bought some bacon – we haven’t had bacon for about seven months… [however] I have a fully equipped kitchen and… the time to cook from scratch… I have had people wish me a better year next year, and comment that a LOT more people are winding up on the system. On the other hand, I'm a slender white woman in her 40’s without multiple kids in tow… When I was on the Census crew some of the black women did speak of getting harassed for being “welfare queens” so I really think prejudice can be a huge factor in how someone is treated. Resident of Indiana, 2009

On July 2nd or 3rd one year, a woman came through my line with hot dogs, ground beef, rolls, potato chips, pretzels... and she paid for them with food stamps. The woman behind her started snarling about her tax dollars going for junk food like that. The
customer with the food stamps lost her temper and said she'd been careful all through May and June so she'd have extra stamps to give her kids a Fourth of July picnic just like all the other kids. *Resident of Pennsylvania, undated*

The stratifying freight of food assistance accords with Mauss’s exposure of the gift as both present and poison, echoed by thinkers like Emily Yeh, who offers another portrait of generosity’s intrinsic potential for violence in her book *Taming Tibet* (2013). The expectation of exchange – the exchange of habits of consumption and behavior for the *quid pro quo* of sustenance – is based on an aggregated concept of populations. Statistically insignificant things that may be hugely significant in quotidian lives are not captured in the crude calculus of calories and nutrients. While reciprocity in food sharing can be an important part of bodily pleasure (consider the numerous cinematic cultural reference points of people sybaritically feeding each other), the earning/deserving principle instantiated in food entitlements reinforces neoliberal messages of self-responsibility, and devalues communal interdependence. And ultimately, Poppendieck’s excellent book, although it considers race, class, and gender, does not mention the uneven attitude toward the sensory experience of food. Once again, this is an omission that is common to much of the foodways corpus: even activist texts tend to gloss or elide the question of embodied pleasure in foodways. *Sweet Charity* does, however, attend to the rights of those who are “to poor to pursue happiness” (ibid, 315), and, crucially, the author emphasizes the importance of moving beyond simply providing sufficient food energy to people who are hungry.

5f. Need or desire:

“*One must eat well*” [means] learning and giving to eat, learning-to-give-the-other-to eat. *One never eats entirely on one’s own: this constitutes the rule underlying the*
statement, “One must eat well” ... And in all differences, ruptures[,] and wars... “eating well” is at stake... This evokes a law of need or desire... orexis, hunger, and thirst...

Jacques Derrida, 1991

What do people “need” from food, and how is need characterized for the purposes of rights and entitlements? Is sensory pleasure a need or a desire, or both? In identifying the rift between need and desire as a rupture in the interdependence that characterizes eating well, Derrida gestures toward a fundamental assumption in food justice work. The idea that distributive alimentary injustice can be addressed using a simple equation of calories and nutrients in is woefully pervasive (Nally 2010). It has certainly been critiqued, with a number of scholars calling for attention to the importance of “culturally appropriate” food for the hungry (Goodman 2015, Johnston and Goodman 2015, e.g.). Also challenged are reified notions of culture tied to place, with a corresponding call to attend to the processual nature of both place-making and culture-making (Sampson and Wills 2013; Massey 1994). Still, the tendency to prescribe the most efficient calorie-delivery system remains widely in force.

In a forthcoming article, “Human Need as a Justification for Communication Rights,” media scholar Andrew Calabrese examines the ways in which people define need as opposed to want, and how rights may or may not be constituted around such contested understandings. He asks this key question: “How do we connect human need not simply to human survival, but to human flourishing, that is, to the idea of a good life?” (in press, 16). Calabrese’s lucid review of the philosophical discussion in which he intervenes includes reference to Erich Fromm’s notion of “freedom to” versus “freedom from” as the key to an autonomy and spontaneity that must underwrite both social cohesion and dignity (ibid, 20). This concept could productively be
applied to the question of food choice, as could Calabrese’s interpretation of Nancy Fraser’s inquiry into social rights as fundamental to self-determination (ibid, 33). However, the passages that bear directly on alimentality are Calabrese’s ruminations on Karl Marx’s theories of need as articulated in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Calabrese includes a quote from these that juxtaposes personal affective pleasure with the moral economies of asceticism.

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Marx identifies explicitly the denial of pleasure as central to alienation:

> The science of the marvelous industry is simultaneously the science of *asceticism*, and its true ideal is the *ascetic* but *extortionate* miser and the *ascetic* but *productive* slave…

Thus political economy – despite its worldly and wanton appearance – is a true moral science, the most moral of all the sciences. Self-denial, the denial of life and of all human needs, is its cardinal doctrine. The less you eat, drink and read books; the less you go to the theatre, the dance hall, the public-house; the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you *save*… the less you express your own life, the greater is your *alienated* life – the greater is the store of your estranged being (ibid, 17-18).

What is fascinating about this brief excerpt is that Marx names two very different (although interdependent) class positions in this political economy of self-denial – that of the wealthy miser, and that of the deprived slave. Alimentality works across populations: if pleasure is not a need or a right for the marginalized, neither is it for the privileged. In the case of wealth, it is a luxury in which to indulge, or not; and asceticism by choice is, today, less a calculus of accumulation than an affirmation of self-identity and a measure of proper subjection.

In 2012, a young white electrical engineer named Rob Rhinehart devised a powdered “over-all food substitute” which he called Soylent, in a tongue-in-cheek nod to the 1973 science fiction movie *Soylent Green* (New Yorker 2014). The irony of this naming is that it tacitly encompasses
and promotes the idea of people living off the bodies of other people, while offering a means of sustenance that removes all sensory experience of food except “grit, dull, cardboard, boring” “there’s no way any normal person would really want to drink that” “it takes all of the pleasure and the variety and everything that’s interesting about food, away” (New York Times 2014). In the next breath, the person who made the last comment remarked that Soylent could be “a boon for humanity” because it could be shipped around the world to “people in need” (ibid), echoing founder Rhinehart’s stated goal to end world hunger by feeding the global poor Soylent. Interestingly, the producers of Soylent currently do not accept SNAP, which may be because USDA guidelines do not allow SNAP to be used for nutritional drinks (not-food), despite the emphasis in its own acronym (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).

Good intentions or not, this plan advocates managing populations like industrial livestock, and takes the idea of delegitimizing sensory pleasure for poor or otherwise marginalized people to an arguably unprecedented extreme. On December 17th of this year, the New York state legislature took so-called “disciplinary loaf,” an enforced all-in-one baked mash of flour, potatoes, carrots, milk, sugar, salt and margarine, off its prison solitary confinement regimen, because it is considered cruel and unusual punishment (New York Times 2015). “With a bottle of Soylent on your desk, time stretches
before you, featureless and… sad,” writes Lizzie Widdicombe in The New Yorker (2014). Sort of like prison – for which Soylent is frequently suggested as a cost-effective dietary solution.

These findings are consistent with the implicit and explicit message in alimentality that sensory pleasure, while desirable, does not constitute a need or a right. The story of Soylent is evidence for my primary argument in its expression of the notion that survival is all that the wealthy owe to the poor (or the powerful to those stripped of power). It reiterates the concept that bodily delights may be claimed or voluntarily foregone by some, but will be actively and punitively withheld from others. Interestingly, through the voice of Widdicombe, it conveys the bleakness of a life where the aroma, texture, flavor, appearance and otherwise multidimensional corporeal joys of provisioning, preparing and eating food have vanished… a bleakness foreshadowed in the dystopian, foodless world of the movie for which it was named (Soylent Green, Thacher et al 1973).

Soylent represents an extreme expression of the alimentality of food entitlements in the United States, but echoes of its values abound in the policies and attitudes surrounding SNAP and other forms of domestic food aid, as well as the ways in which science and constructions of knowledge map onto choice and pleasure.

5g. Choice and knowledge:

I define cultural politics as the relationship between signifying practices and power ... In this vein, I argue that rhetoric such as “if they only knew” is illustrative of the color-blind mentalities and universalizing impulses often associated with whiteness. Moreover, much alternative food discourse hails a white subject to these spaces of alternative food
practice and thus codes them as white. Insofar as this has a chilling effect on people of color, it not only works as an exclusionary practice, but it also colors the character of food politics more broadly.

Julie Guthman, 2008, 388

Choosing to use a psuedofood like Soylent, which some privileged consumers do, is profoundly different from rationalizing its prescription based on its attributes as a stable, flexible and inexpensive way to move sufficient calories through precarious or disciplined bodies. Who gets to make choices about the degree and type of sensory reward expected from food? Problematizing the ways in which choice is presented in the context of pleasure and food returns us to the discussion of privilege, privileged knowledge, and healthism.

Media and popular discussion cast people in poverty and people of color as generally more obese and less healthful (by U.S. government-defined standards) in their eating choices and habits. There are statistical data that play into these perceptions, but they are complicated by less-understood variables, such as the fact that obesity is commonly still measured by the deeply flawed Body Mass Index (BMI) system (Centers for Disease Control 2016). Since participation in federal and state entitlement programs entails surveillance, statistics gathered on SNAP participants are readily available, and are interpreted within these documents as choice- and knowledge-based. However, the foods tracked hew much closer to access, cost and time profiles than to a consistent picture of pleasure-based preference. For example, SNAP participants consume lower quantities of whole grains, whole fruits and 100% fruit juice, legumes, and raw vegetables – particularly dark green or orange vegetables. Data reflect consumption of these foods as discrete items – that is, not consumed as ingredients in canned, frozen or boxed meals,
e.g. These are all foods that require some or all of the following conditions: supermarket access, more frequent shopping, controlled storage conditions, cooking space and implements, and more time to prepare than common alternatives (USDA SNAP Participant Diet Quality Survey 2007-2010). Beverage (other than milk and 100% fruit juice) and meat consumption were identical, but higher-income participants consumed more diet soda. Higher income participants consumed more fats and oils, desserts, and salty snacks – all items that are often costly, and are widely considered treats or indulgences, and, as such, are monitored in surveillance programs (ibid). Increased consumption of both desserts, and added oils and fats, are also correlated with restaurant and prepared foods dining (USDA Factbook Chapter 2: Profiling Food Consumption in America). Across the board, SNAP participant consumed less shellfish, in any form – including crab legs. Dietary differences were interpreted in the report as reflecting knowledge of, or willingness to adhere to, government-defined healthy eating patterns, particularly as represented by the USDA’s healthy eating education program for beneficiaries, SNAP-ED (USDA SNAP Participant Diet Quality Survey 2007-2010).

The fact that food discourse is predominantly inflected with disciplinary messages about health is not news. The discursive narrative is both constituted by and constitutive of the hegemonic subjectivity that dominates Euro-American societies – the Western neoliberal habitus that responsibilizes bodies for adherence to normative eating behaviors and an appearance that is assigned to success in following this regime (Bourdieu 1984, Hall 1997, Goodman 2015). As famously stated by Julie Guthman (2008), the neoliberal recipe for proper food subjects is a one-step process: add knowledge and stir. Guthman also proposes that “some of the central contradictions of capitalism are literally embodied” and that the market fix is to simultaneously
vilify and encourage obesity (2005), calling our attention to the ways in which some bodies are recruited as the constitutive outside that solidifies boundaries of belonging (Butler 1993). The alternative food movement has been thoroughly critiqued for its valorization of certain kinds of knowledge (Goodman 2015, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008), primarily those associated with so-called food quality and health. So endemic is this story of correct education that it has even attached itself to the bodily experience of food. In a 2006 article that explores the important concept of intercorporeality, Emma Roe writes “Organic food consumers were selected to take part in the fieldwork because they can be said to take a particular interest in the materiality of their foodstuff [since] they eat organic foods” (105, emphasis mine). This fetishizes not just the food but also the consumer herself. Despite its questionable methodological premise, Roe’s piece importantly asks us to consider how human and non-human bodies interact in foodways, a key move in establishing a corporeal, sensory and affective materiality of foodways that will be revisited below.

The story that the market and both mainstream and alternative consumers tell about knowledge and choice is also inflected by Judeo-Christian morality. It constructs the proper subject as one who has internalized a biopolitical self-discipline (Foucault 2004, Nally 2010), based on her willingness to use her knowledge of correct foodways to make and maintain a body that is valuable to both the market and the state. This is a choice, the story goes, that not only improves the body and the environment, but also makes food more sensorily pleasurable: the “right” foods will taste and feel better. One of the reasons this works is that a corollary to daily discipline is that, as in the Catholic church, the faithful practitioner can earn indulgences: get-out-of-jail-free cards for sweets, fats, sodas and “junk food.” In another of his many forays into
food politics, Jon Stewart has noted wryly that the sodas New York’s Mayor Bloomberg wanted to outlaw are no larger or more sugary than the Starbucks concoctions beloved of the health-disciplined bourgeoisie (2012). In this way alimentality both strengthens and supports agro-capitalism, and also produces an “other” against which the proper subject defines itself as a successful (deserving) participant in agro-capitalism. Notwithstanding the harms that certain foods do to certain bodies (harms which arguably are often generalized to the point that they become bugbears), the sensory and affective pleasures that almost every human seeks from food experiences are tied to this alimentality as being possessed by some and withheld from others.

This raises the question of how these constructions, and people’s responses to them, interact with the agency of the foods themselves in human bodies – and with what “science” writ large prescribes and proscribes for those bodies. Writing about Hans Driesch’s theory of entelechy in an essay in New Materialisms (2010), I propose that Jane Bennett sheds more light on the agency of food than she does in her chapter on food in Vital Matter: “…the ‘directing’ action of entelechy [is] the power to allow one of the many formative possibilities inside the emergent organism to become actual” (2010, 52). In each person, food potentiates some among many possible responses, processes, and outcomes. But, as Bennett notes, the indeterminacy of these outcomes is “freedom” (ibid, 53). That is, “it answers innovatively and perspicuously… the materiality that it must inhabit” (ibid, 55). Although this is closely related to the point that Anna Tsing makes about indeterminacy (2015), there is a crucial distinction that Bennett adds here. She is describing an aleatory relationship of cause and effect that, if we apply it to the interaction of food with the body, is revealing, and, to many people, possibly alarming. If the action of food in and on the body is less predictable than science assumes, the orderly construction of a proper
corporeality, and its ready distinction from other, less privileged bodies is called into question. An inordinate amount of time, attention, energy and resources go into trying to predict the ways in which specific foods will express their potential in human bodies. Unfortunately, the intersectional complexity of assemblages of people, environment, and food is such that teasing out cause and effect is more challenging than it might at first appear. The Gordian knots formed by these conjunctions make it extraordinarily difficult to trace what health outcomes are associated with what consumption (although there is consistent evidence that sensory pleasure does positively influence satiety triggers, energy use and nutrient uptake, Calvo et al 2015, Jallinoja et al 2010, Esch and Stefano 2004, Tufts Health & Nutrition Letter 2000, among many).

Recent health studies problematize not only how different bodies metabolize and tolerate food, but also how additional factors, such as the ways that environments and bodies alter each other, change the expression of these effects. Writing about the emerging science of epigenetics in 2012, Becky Mansfield and Julie Guthman have convincingly argued that examining factors such as stress, toxicity, and nutrition separately from each other can significantly obscure understanding of health outcomes such as obesity. Cellular, biophysical, and social environments and circumstances can combine to alter genetic expression in unexpected ways, and these outcomes in turn interact with normative constructions of whether bodily changes are positive, negative or simply different.

Like the environment, the body remains ontologized as a setting, albeit one that must signal its subjects to communicate their sense of health, pleasure, or disease. While biophysical processes are occasionally acknowledged, neither the mechanisms of that signaling nor the very conditions that give rise to affective responses are addressed. Oddly, then, efforts to deal with the materiality of the body tend to maintain a dualism between the felt body and the known body. (Guthman and Mansfield 2012, 489)
Most of the understanding of what foods are “good” or “bad” for which populations is built around relatively simplistic understandings of ingredients and activity, extended indiscriminately to people who have a huge range of environmental, biophysical, material and affective circumstances. However, the way our senses interact with food is, in itself, an agency: one that urges, prompts, directs, entices, guides, fulfills and rewards. It is an agency – or a constellation of agencies – that must be attended to, since it is the most immediate and intimate mediation we have with which to evaluate and select food intake. Decentering and obscuring organoleptic response deprives people of crucial tools with which to navigate an exponentially proliferating network of mutually altering elements.

The late psychology and affect scholar Doris McIlwain suggested in 2007 that the integration of affect with bodily desires, pleasures, and satisfactions is a crucial basis of healthy intersubjectivity. Noting that “the pleasures of the body that does the attaching, the uncolonized, extra-linguistic body, is somewhere out of the theoretical picture” (530), McIlwain explores the relational costs of decoupling pleasure from affect and emotion, particularly through sociocultural mechanisms that shame desires. McIlwain’s claim that such decoupling can “[limit] the capacity to experience and honor others as others in their own right” (ibid, 556) – that it can, in fact, inhibit the development of empathy – raises troubling questions about the societal costs of withholding or proscribing pleasure in food, particularly for young children. On the other hand, it supports the activist potential of foregrounding pleasure as a need and a right for both personal and interpersonal health. McIlwain’s exhortation that we attend to the sensuality of eating as distinct from hunger satiation, and as deeply connected with individual experience of
power and agency (535), also sheds light on the response of urgently hungry people to the “gift” of food that leaves them sensorily deprived.

In his award-winning series of 2013 Washington Post articles on SNAP recipients and legislation, journalist Eli Saslow records the responses and actions of children who discard foods that don’t please them even when they are hungry and malnourished (in one case, a two-year-old threw his donated fruit cup out the window with a defiant laugh, prompting his desperate mother to a disproportionate punishment). Saslow also describes the many adult SNAP recipients who, exhausted beyond tolerance by the impossible equation of doing an entire month’s food shopping with inadequate benefits, give themselves and their children the relief and pleasure of dinner at a fast-food hamburger joint (recall that SNAP cannot be used to purchase hot or prepared foods). This is the popular portrait of the unknowing/uncaring parent that has given rise to so many state-based restrictions on sodas, candy, “junk” food, and, paradoxically, seafood – and yet one of the legislators in Saslow’s report (Steve Southerland, R-FL) while advocating for a bill that restricts access to SNAP for people who work less than 20 hours per week, takes his daughter out for a burger and a milkshake when he is stressed and exhausted, and smokes tobacco in the haven of his SUV. Meanwhile, one of the SNAP recipients profiled says she is happiest when cooking, and is described in her kitchen chopping and sautéing fragrant, sizzling food for her family, as her daughter videotapes her and music plays in the background – a multi-sensory portrait of bodily engagement. The same woman describes one of her most powerful food memories as her only trip to a sushi restaurant, “where the colors of the fish seemed more art than food” (The Washington Post December 2013): an environment that is emblematic of seafood, in particular, as privilege.
The action of food on sensory and affective response is a central component in the decisions people make about what and how to eat. In his essay *The Bliss Point and Pleasure*, Australian scholar Robert McBride claims that “sensory pleasure is the prime motivator of food selection, not nutritional status” (in Warburton and Sherwood 1996, 148); and Carlo Petrini, founder of Slow Food, says “‘Our choice of food… is the most powerful communicative tool that we possess. Our decision about what to buy and consume, in a world where everything is geared to profit, it is the first significant political act we make in our lives’” (Schultz 2012, 232).

Unfortunately, Slow Food has wedded neoliberal “voting with one’s dollar” to a notion of embodied pleasure that, disarticulated from its assumption of privilege and in a different context, could be truly subversive. The way in which Slow Food has framed its temporal imperative is once again based on knowledge and “training” – it assumes an elite subject with time to get “educated,” garden, shop, cook and savor almost anything that the world of food has to offer (Sassatelli and Davolio 2010, Mintz 2006). Like many of the food providers in Poppendieck’s account who offer or advocate reciprocity based on available free time for volunteerism, Petrini’s vision of slowness is positioned in a rarified sphere where not just time and choice, but also the correctness of hegemonic knowledge, are taken for granted.

5h. The desiring body and the right to pleasure:

... the senses and enjoyment of other men have become my own appropriation.

*Karl Marx, The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*
The substitution of habituated indifference with a spreading pleasure might open up a wedge into an alternative ethics of living, or not.

Lauren Berlant 2011, 36

In this passage from Cruel Optimism, Berlant considers the liberating potential of stepping, for a moment, out of the rhythms of capital and into an undefined zone – a place of being lost, but also of being suspended in a moment of intimacy established by a wordless affective sharing. Berlant is using a musical metaphor here, but I would like to apply the idea to the experience of organoleptic pleasure in food, and the intimacy both between and within bodies and things that can dwell there. I also want to push linguistically against Berlant’s use of the word desire, and try to create a conceptual space in which desire is not always attached to possession and the accumulative drive of capital (Berlant also uses the word “drive”, which works well in this context). Embodied desires – intensities of longing for the brief and transient moments of sensory intimacy that characterize sex, music, art, athleticism, food – can be the means of breaking with drives and establishing spaces of possibility, however brief. Guattari says that affect adheres to subjectivity in both empathy and desire (Bertelsen and Murphie 2010, 155). If so, and if we accept both that “class distinctions intensify at moments of close proximity” (Highmore 2010, 127) and that “strong affect radically disturbs relations of proximity” (Probyn 2010, 86), can the subversive potential of the right to pleasure be reclaimed?

In many ways, the Slow Food movement is emblematic of Pierre Bourdieu’s distinction of taste – the upper-class habitus that is a subjectivity so thoroughly lived, so performatively reinforced, that it is internalized as natural and essential (Bourdieu 1984, Butler 1993), and comes to be understood as the realization of what human beings universally desire and
appreciate. Is there a universal desire that can be discerned in a world of foodways? A number of scholars have interrogated this movement (among them Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2009; Schultz 2012; Sassatelli and Davolio 2010, Mintz 2006), but few note how transgressive the original intent of the movement was. Like many ideas that have been co-opted by the market, Slow Food represents the Western milieu in which it was born, with all the discursive freight that entails: Slow Food, and the people who originated it as well as those who have taken up its banner, embody the culture that they represent.

This is the missed revolutionary moment in the idea of Slow Food – a rebellion against the biopolitical administration of life, against sovereign rule over the body, against discursive constructions of who possesses pleasure. That missed moment reveals the central flaw that made Slow Food so easy to hijack: its white, privileged, Euro-American pedigree. But we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater – the idea that the sensory pleasure of food deserves as much attention as its nutritional profile, that there is, in fact, a right to pleasure (Sassatelli and Davolio 2010) could be revolutionary. Slowness in provisioning, cooking, and eating may be a luxury, but there are other ways to slow down foodways – for example, insisting on breaks and shorter hours for laborers and unpaid (usually female) domestic care workers (Precarias a la Deriva 2006) – as well as alternative ways to materialize culture. I want to argue for a concept of embodying culture that shifts the emphasis of the phrase – that seeks to do so by imbuing it with bodily, corporeal, sensorial meaning, and moves to populate it with feeling, sensing, emoting bodies of every shape, size, color, gender, sex, ethnicity, habit, and taste – all of whom want the experience of sensory pleasure, however that may be defined. Can desire, as “the imagination of
an appetite” be productively reunited with bodily conatus in defiance of market logics, rather than in their service (Graeber 2011, 493-494)?

I suggest that desire as imagination is inseparable from bodied urges, and is prior to a capitalist imperative of consumption. Consider the following excerpt from Diane Ackerman’s *A Natural History of the Senses* (1990, 144):

> Among the wealthy… pleasure glistened as a good in itself, a positive achievement, nothing to repent. Epicurus spoke for a whole society [sic] when he asked “Is man [sic] then meant to spurn the gifts of nature? Has he been born but to pluck the bitterest fruits? For whom do these flowers grow, that the gods make flourish at mere mortals feet? …It is a way of pleasing Providence to give ourselves up to the various delights which she suggests to us; our very needs spring from her laws, and our desires from her inspirations.”

This passage is noteworthy for several reasons. It highlights the attachment of wealth to pleasure, even pre-capitalism; it makes the mistake of conflating the privileged elite with the rest of society; and it advances an argument, on the part of Epicurus, that in the sensory appreciation of food is a lush dimension of bodily presence, and a physical bond with the non-human, that is not to missed and that connects people directly with the simultaneously embodied and affective experience of being alive. The universal in the experience is this fundamentally hybrid and highly individuated jumble of the corporeal and the emotional or spiritual, the * minded-body* (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008).

Different bodies desire different things from a sensory experience of food. There has long been a prescribed hierarchy of the senses, and sight has, for millennia, been the privileged sense. The arrangement is vertical and embodied: eyes, ears, nostrils, tongue, hands – historically, only
touch has been ranked lower than the sense of taste (Kambaskovic and Wolfe 2014). And yet for some bodies the pleasure of food is textural. For some it is social, an affective connection that is experienced at a sensory level as well – the people who say that food tastes better when it is shared. For others, synesthesia offers tastes that are heard, smells that have colors (Sutton 2010). Pleasure might be the sensation of how one’s body processes food, or of food as a part of sex, or of food as art (ibid) – but I propose that the minded-body’s imagined appetites are essential to it.

An embodied approach to foodways also connects the desiring, sensing body with foodstuffs (not just bodies that become food) as actants in material and political assemblages. Jane Bennett begins to explore these relationships in Vibrant Matter (2010), but in the context of this book she gives food rather short shrift, and misses an opportunity to explore how the radical relationality and intercorporeality of people and food can potentially alter the social, cultural and environmental landscape (Roe 2006). She touches on some of these possibilities in the following passage: “the effectivity of the ‘same’ food in the ‘same’ body will vary over time as actants enter and leave the scene… Any science of diet, then, would have to take account not only of foods acting in confederation with other bodies such as digestive liquids or microorganisms, but also foods coacting with the intensities often described as perception, belief, and memory” (2010, 44-45). In discussing the efficacy of fat, she begins to push beyond the assumption that there is a consistent, predictable and linear relationship between fat intake and health, and, importantly, she introduces Deleuze and Guattari’s “operator” as an “assemblage converter,” comparing it to Michael Serres’s “thermal exciter” (ibid, 42). Serres’s marvelous verbiage gives us new ways to consider agency – a thermal exciter “inclines, irritates, inflames” (ibid), all descriptors that we would use to describe the active effect of one human being upon another.
However, Bennett also perpetuates the tired trope that processing renders food “more passive, less vital, and more predictable” (ibid, 47), undermining her own point that these assemblages and relationships are too indeterminate to encapsulate neatly (fermentation, anyone?). Anna Tsing, for whom indeterminacy is a central theme in *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, does a more effective job of exploding our expectations of biochemical and sensory boundaries in her discussion of the more-than-human agency of aroma. Pointing out that tree roots, soil bacteria and slugs respond to the pungent smell of *matsutake* mushrooms at least as dynamically as people, she also observes that exposure to a smell can change the nose that takes it up, and that the shifting response of its surroundings to the mushroom will, in turn, change the mushroom itself (2015).

David Sutton, too, directs attention to this participatory dynamic, quoting Anne Meneley’s (2007) point that the “‘sensuous qualities of the olive oil itself… lend themselves to participate in larger schemes of value… olive oil is a hybrid, sharing qualisigns of preservation that resonate in both the gustatory and spiritual realm’ ” and Sutton himself records these qualities: “luminosity, immiscibility, liquidity, permeability, cleansing, and warming properties” – a beautiful evocation of sensory pleasure beyond taste (2012, 218). I posit that such engagement requires disarticulating the imaginative desire of materiality (which is part and parcel of bodily pleasure) from the materialist desire for consumption, and reappropriating corporeal longing as a precursor to and condition of pleasure. To acknowledge the potential of such relationships and interactions is not, however, to evade the delegitimizing or erasure of this experience for people
who are provisionally let or made to live in conditions that are patchy and liminal. The biopolitics of food still targets “refractory people [as the] racialised Other” (Nally 2010, 43).

5i. Summary:

These rhizomatic geographies of food and bodies are constituted... in ways that offer affective and relational possibilities of what bodies can do, rather than what bodies are.
Robyn Longhurst and Lynda Johnston 2013, 201

I have worked here to lay the groundwork for the idea that what human bodies can do in relation to other bodies and objects – sense, feel, experience pleasure – could offer a new way to think food rights. What this paper does not do is explore the impact of what and how we eat, on non-human bodies and things. This ethics of human/non-human interaction in foodways is a crucial piece of the larger dialogue around food justice, which exceeds the scope of this paper but demands consideration. For now, given what we know about how SNAP works, and the alimentality and strongly Euro-American and Judeo-Christian ethos that inform it, what happens when we ask these questions? Analyzing the prevalent discursive “truths” that proliferate around food practices and rights reveals the simplistic nature of policy guidelines, and the punitive class- and race-based bias of their restrictions. It demonstrates how these “truths” are mapped onto certain bodies and behaviors, and invites us to explore the landscapes of affect and matter that contextualize them, in the service of a radical recentering of sensory pleasure in foodways.

This work in turn demands a willingness to take apart and reassemble what we mean by health; whose knowledge is given the status of truth; and what the right to food encompasses. It requires an interrogation of the ways in which narratives of discipline and market imperatives
together define a set of subjectivities that are mutually constitutive, and that come to be seen as an inevitable expression of the human relationship to food, writ large.

Theoretically, I have used Foucault’s concept of biopolitics, in conversation with affect studies and new materialism, to elucidate the discursive construction of mutually reinforcing subjectivities, and to illuminate the patchy, but not bare, lives of those whose experience of food is devalued and discounted. Using Jon Stewart’s exposé of prescriptive popular media portrayals of what people in poverty should and should not eat, I have interrogated the motivations behind the hegemonic discourse that informs stories of deservingness.

Finally, I have suggested that engaging with feminist analytics of embodiment, corporeality and affect can help to explode and reconfigure concretized notions of people’s relationship with food and foodways, resulting in a restructured notion of embodied culture as “collective and corporeal knowledge, that breaks with the securitary logic and thus opens cracks in the walls of fear and precarization” (Precarias a la Deriva 2006, 41). I have tried to direct attention to the universal but not universalizing experience of bodily desire for and organoleptic delight in food, as a site of potential for a transgressive and transformative politics of pleasure that is neither hedonism nor epicureanism, but rather breaks down gustatory habitus and embraces the multiplicity of imagination and fulfillment. By remaining engaged with sensing, feeling bodies in studies of food politics, I hope that we can privilege pleasure, instead of making pleasure a privilege.

Edible material is an agent inside and alongside intention-forming, morality-(dis)obeying, language-using, reflexivity-wielding, culture-making human beings. Food is an active inducer-producer of salient, public effects, rather than a passive resource at the disposal of consumers.

Jane Bennett 2007, 134

In early August of 2015, Russian bureaucrats destroyed hundreds of tons of food from western countries that had imposed sanctions on Russia in response to its actions in Ukraine (Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, New Yorker, NPR 2015), videotaped the actions, and posted them on YouTube. Truckloads of pork were incinerated. Piles of cheese and apples were pulverized by heavy equipment. Perhaps most dramatic, although smallest in scale, was what appeared to be the mock trial and execution of three frozen geese, which were ceremoniously bulldozed next to the shop that had displayed them. In response to the domestic and international public outcry over food waste in a country where memories of Soviet and post-Soviet era hunger are fresh, the government declared that mislabeled grey market food could not be deemed safe for consumption (ibid). The state deployed a narrative of securitization and protection: in order to keep the citizenry from harm, it was removing potentially contaminated food from circulation.

Conspicuous display of waste is an enactment of social hierarchy and power (Gidwani 2012). Some of the foods destroyed in Russia in the name of sanctions are considered luxuries by state or humanitarian agencies – a discursive theme that links sensory pleasure with privilege. However, the majority of the food declared “contraband” and potentially tainted consisted of fresh staples: vegetables, fruit, meat, cheese and milk. Further complicating the message, certain
indulgent items were selected as exceptions to the sanctions – wine, chocolate, and expensive olive oil, among others (Financial Times). In fact, a closer look reveals numerous contradictions, paradoxes and intricacies in this display. Why would the secretive Putin, who refused to acknowledge whether or not Russian soldiers were even present in Ukraine, order the functionaries who carried out the demolition of the food to record and post to the internet acts that were met with outrage and derision? Why would a newly capitalist regime voluntarily return its people, almost 23 million (16% of whom live below the poverty line), to conditions of scarcity and Cold War foodways (Foreign Policy, Food & City, New Yorker, Leksika 2015)? Why and how were particular methods of obliteration selected? I seek to illuminate the Russian government’s use of the materiality of food to create nationalist subjectivities, and to consolidate and display state power. This is a different and targeted form of waste, which articulates differential valuation of some bodies with market logics of waste and value (Gidwani 2012, 2013), in the service of a hybrid form of post-Soviet capitalism.

The violence in this Punch and Judy show communicates a real threat. Embodiment, affect and sustenance are exploited here for a performance of intimidation. Food is wielded as a form of biopower – in the words of Michael Watts, it is “a resource central to the life of populations and to the management of populations” (2012, 439), that is pivotal to the formation and biological regulation of subjects (Foucault 2008). But the geese are also more than food in this set piece. Non-human bodies stand in for human bodies, and the act of ravaging what is already dead parodies the layers of physical and psychic violence that a regime can perpetrate at home and abroad. Therefore, necropolitics must also be part of the analytic – in fact, as Achille Mbembe writes, necropolitics are inseparable from biopolitics (2003). I will put Foucault and Mbembe’s
theories in conversation with feminist geographers’ work on embodiment and corporeality to elucidate why food, in particular, is recruited for this spectacular geopolitical play. What work is food being asked to do here? What does the materiality of a mountain of mutilated cheese, animal flesh burning in ovens, and avian bodies crushed under the treads of a bulldozer, represent at the geopolitical scale, and at the scale of the human and non-human body? What agency does the food itself exercise in this entangled landscape of the human, the non-human, the political and the social? In creating a staged performance of destroying foodstuffs, the Russian bureaucracy marshaled parts of the food’s agency, arguably with some success. But what escaped the plan to later exceed it in messy and complex ways?

6a. The dynamism of discards

*Assemblages coalesce, change, and dissolve: this is the story.*
*Anna Tsing 2015, 158*

In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett quotes Robert Sullivan on the vitality of garbage, the teeming activity that persists in an agglomeration of discards: biological, physical, chemical, visual, aromatic, toxic, atmospheric, conceptual, *productivity* (2010, 6). There is a human message in the Kremlin’s genocidal enactments, but Bennett reminds us that “a vital materiality can never really be thrown ‘away’” (ibid) – in their new role as refuse, as something that people are attempting to refuse, these collections of foodstuffs are still doing, being, making and acting upon the soil that surrounds them, the organisms that feed on them, the air that carries their odors, and the perceptions and responses of their human audience. In making and posting these videos, Putin’s government is directing attention to the materiality of the food itself, and attempting to leverage it for political ends. The material of the food, meanwhile, is acting in
ways that are, as Anna Tsing says, indeterminate (2015): that is, it will combine with its environment, with human perception, with human and non-human bodies, in ways that have consequences that we cannot predict. Waste, in other words, is never inert, superfluous, or meek, and it is never gone. What we throw “away” moves toward others; and, in addition, it often moves back toward those of us who do the initial throwing. What we attempt to waste, in Bennett’s words as she defines Bruno Latour’s notion of an actant, “makes things happen” (2010, 9). Or, to borrow Tsing’s terminology, waste returns to both haunt and liberate its human and non-human neighbors (2015).

6b. History and context:

Source: Andrew Korybko
Food was an abiding theme of Soviet political history, permeating every nook and cranny of our collective unconscious... food... defined how Russians endured the present, imagined the future, and connected to their past.

Anya Von Bremzen 2013, 4

In order to contextualize the actions of Putin’s deputies, it is necessary to consider some of the pertinent recent history. Russia’s relationship with food throughout the last century is fraught and variable. Beginning in 1917 and continuing through the Cold War and into the post-Soviet transition, cycles of extreme famine and scarcity decimated the region (Caldwell 2002, 2009; Von Bremzen 2013, Gessen 2015). Almost nine million people starved to death during the socialist collectivization of food production, and even after the worst of the hunger crisis, breadlines and empty grocery shelves were emblematic images of Soviet Russia (Caldwell 2009). Elizabeth Dunn notes that the extensive but imperfect state industrialization of agriculture and processing resulted both in tethering people to the system, and also in the subversion of the system through the grey market (Dunn 2009). Socialist food production shifted people to a diet heavily reliant on stable canned and processed foods, and also gave rise to state production of daily luxuries like chocolate and alcoholic beverages. The food regime was simultaneously rigid and porous, and, as Dunn remarks, was “a primary nexus through which state policy and state power were translated into... people’s bodies. Food was the medium through which differential relationships to the state... were most commonly articulated... the socialist ‘parent state’... built its relationship to its citizen-children as many parents do: by feeding them” (ibid, 213). And as many children do, the citizenry created clandestine channels of insubordination through the patchy fabric of the state program. This history of regulation and furtive resistance, of autocratic
paternalism larded with token indulgence, of patriotic conformity underwritten by subversion and corruption, is readily apparent in Russia’s current vistas of food production and consumption under state capitalism.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Soviet food shortages were an emblematic Western image of the failure of communism. The state’s inability to keep its people fed, the contrast of Soviet scarcity with Western abundance, the portrayal of Eastern European food as unpleasant, unpalatable, unhealthful, and unavailable – all were part of the narrative of the triumph of the free-market American state (Caldwell 2009). This history surely informs the current Russian framing of its food sanctions as justified by the two-pronged argument of the insufficiently exploited bounty of Russian agriculture, and the threats to health and safety posed by imported Euro-American foods. The possibility of contamination is invoked in the public commentary of government officials: “On August 19, Russia’s Federal Customs Service published a draft of a bill that would label banned food as ‘strategically important.’ The Moscow Times reports that it
would put items like cheese and salmon into the same category as ‘radioactive materials, poison, armaments and explosives.’ ” (Food & City 2015). Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov cited protection of the health and safety of its citizenry as the primary motivation for the destruction of the food, and agricultural agents referred to lack of accurate food documentation as a security threat (Reuters, 2015). Accompanying the narrative of securitization is the evocation of Russia as a bastion of traditional, fresh, homegrown and healthful foods, juxtaposed with that of Euro-American eating habits as toxic and industrialized. This comment in response to a blog post on the recent destruction of sanctioned Western food is typical of the nationalistic reframing of Russian foodways:

They [the Russian government] destroyed NOT EDIBLE, TOXIC, AMERICAN JUNK FOOD. Russian people eat healthy, simple, traditional food, they do not want to be americanized [sic]. If they are poor living on farms, country side, they GROW THEIR OWN FOOD, they are allowed to grow food, not just like in USA, where Monsanto runs the show. Most of food produced in USA/Canada is not food, but toxic substance. Just look how sick and obese is majority of North American population. (H. Kreowska, iquestioneverything 2015, emphasis in original)

This hailing of Russia as an authentic land-based breadbasket of small-holder agriculture and natural, healthful eating habits is tied not only to nationalistic fervor, but also to the reinforcement of a bounded, territorialized spatial entity, where belonging is defined by exclusion, and where violating borders breaches the integrity of a protective haven. It is an affective story of safety, purity, independence and self-sufficiency, and its moral stance also distinguishes state control over food supply from its violent manipulation of other resources, such as the interruption of oil and gas supplies to Ukraine.
6c. Why food?

By incorporating a food into one’s body, that food is made to become self.

Deborah Lupton 1996

The line between food and human bodies is a blurry one. Food becomes our bodies, and our bodies are constantly under threat of becoming food – food for bacteria and parasites, food for predators in less urbanized spaces, food, ultimately, for soil and its denizens. Food carries bodily and affective intention from one person to another. I feed you – I vivify you. I nourish you – I sustain you. I share a sybaritic meal – I seduce you. I contaminate your food – I poison you. I withhold your food – I control you. I remove your food – I starve you. Food, like humans, is corporeal. Unlike water or air, it is bodied stuff that makes other bodies. As such, it is readily fetishized – that is, it is imbued with social and political meaning that masks and/or alters its character, and either obscures or leverages its materiality in the service of a message of meaning. Therefore, affect attaches to the materiality of fetishized foods. As stated by Marx, “the fantasy of the appetites tricks the fetish worshipper into believing that an 'inanimate object' will give up its natural character to gratify his desires. The crude appetite of the fetish worshipper therefore smashes the fetish when the latter ceases to be its most devoted servant” (1842, 2008). Nowhere is the creation and subsequent demolition of fetishized objects more pervasive than in the realm of food. This renders that realm extremely attractive to those who wish to exploit materiality in the service of a discursive project. Likewise, performance and performativity (the bounded theatrical act and the recursive, iterative process of hegemonic normalization, Butler 1993) readily attach to foodstuffs and foodways in the service of ideological claims. To paraphrase Foucault, the materiality of food is a potential vector of power (1995), and the process of its
constant resignification allows it to articulate variously within a social fabric. Jane Bennett echoes this theme in her chapter on the agency of food in *Vibrant Matter*, quoting Deleuze and Guattari’s characterization of “a particularly efficacious element [in an assemblage] … ‘an operator, a vector… an *assemblage converter*’ ” (2010, 42, emphasis in original).

Food, in short, is a flexible vehicle for embodied meaning – in this case, for staged acts of obliteration, the theater of the killing of food. But we still need to ask, why this food? The selection of which foods to sanction and destroy is notable. Initial response often posited the choice of Western luxury foods to represent the Kremlin’s symbolic rejection of the inequities of wealth and privilege, but the profile of the annihilated foodstuffs hews much closer to a return to Soviet Cold War foodways, including the retention of “common luxuries,” a phrase of Gronow’s cited by Dunn in Caldwell 2009. Quotidian pleasures of the middle class, like chocolate and alcoholic beverages, were protected even if they originated in sanctioning and sanctioned countries, as were canned foods – a staple of collectivized industrial foodways. These distinctions interact with the nationalistic theme of a boost for Russian and other non-Euro-American agricultural production, a dynamic further explored below.

**6d. Proxy bodies:**

*The corporeal represents a site politically laden with signifiers for orchestrating and manipulating identity politics.*

*Jennifer Fluri 2011, 531*
In her 2011 paper, Jennifer Fluri discusses the use of some bodies (in this case, Chinese sex workers in Afghanistan) as safe proxies for other more legitimized and protected bodies. These women “provided a proxy corporeal space for international sexual desires that did not disrupt the discursive geopolitical placement of Afghan women as ‘saved and protected’ by the US-led coalition” (530). Despite the remove, and the discursive construction of some women as inviolable and “pure,” there is an element of threat in the displacement upon “other” non-human bodies of any act considered aggressive, destructive or defiling.

Here I want to put Fluri’s concept to work on non-human bodies, hypothesizing that a different geopolitical confluence gives rise to another substitution of surrogates for bodies “saved and protected” by a state regime that is both biopolitical (securitized) and disciplinary (enforced). I suggest that animal bodies, and even the material “bodies” of fruit or wheels of cheese, can become safe proxies for the enactment of violence designed to preserve, through surveillance and intimidation, social and political norms.

The imagery circulated by the functionaries carrying out the food destruction in Russia seems scripted for evocation of violated human bodies. Round, rosy peaches sweat in the sun. The waxy skin of wheels of cheese is torn open, and the soft tissue inside is shredded. Whitish-pink pork fat folds under a boot. The bodies of the geese crumple and deform under caterpillar treads.

“A broken head of cheese” Source: Reuters (emphasis added)
Likewise, the methods chosen to destroy the food all echo warlike, even genocidal atrocities perpetrated on human bodies: bodies sprinkled with lime, shoveled into mass pits and buried; hacked to pieces; crushed and mangled by bulldozers used as weapons (Mbembe 2003); and perhaps most notably, incinerated in ovens actually referred to as crematoria (Reuters, New Yorker, Wall Street Journal, LA Times 2015).

Sources: themoscowtimes.com, stratfor.com, alamy.com, bbc.com, cnn.com

There is nothing subtle about these visuals; but the fact that they are enacted on food also imparts a dimension of ridicule. Internet memes proliferated in the wake of the videos, particularly memes riffing on the destruction of the three frozen geese.
The goose incident took place in Apastovo, an otherwise low-profile village in Tatarstan’s Sviyaga river valley (Wall Street Journal, Guardian 2015). Government officials solemnly read the charge that the geese were undocumented and therefore had illegally breached Russia’s borders, and condemned them to execution. The three bodies were placed in a row on the ground, and in the grainy YouTube video, a bulldozer repeatedly runs back and forth across them while the Russian national anthem plays in the background. Amidst the public outcry over the waste of huge volumes of food, this act, particularly, was more an object of ridicule than distress. One wit proclaimed the imminent formation of “Gusy Riot” (gus is the Russian word for goose).

On the world stage, depriving dissidents like the women of Pussy Riot of their freedom elicits a global protest, but bulldozed frozen geese have an element of slapstick: they become an object of derision rather than outrage, a Janus mask disguising ritual murder. The violence that is thinly veiled by this absurdity is both corporeal and spatial. As Gaston Gordillo emphasizes in Rubble, bulldozers themselves destroy and remake environments by obliterating bodily forms and “[smoothing] out space” (2014, 269). These machines, like tanks, have a massive, robotic
presence and movement that seems to exceed their human drivers, making a cyborg in which the person is tacked onto the machine, rather than having mechanical parts added to an original fleshly organism. In the Russian videos, the bulldozers not only crush the food – they also bury and smooth over the wreckage, leaving the mechanical fingerprint of treads on the soil like a signature.

There is precedent in Russia, both historic and contemporary, for the prosecution of dead and/or non-animate bodies. In 2013, the trial of whistle-blowing attorney Sergei Magnitsky, who had accused Russian officials of multi-million-dollar tax fraud, proceeded despite the fact that Magnitsky had already died in prison, after medical care following his alleged torture was withheld. This incident elicited acidic press references to Ivan the Terrible’s 16th century trial for treason of a church bell that was used to summon citizens to insurrection. The bell’s clapper was removed, and it was exiled to Siberia and placed in solitary confinement. The parodic nature of
the story notwithstanding, these incidents highlight the agency of the beyond-human and the non-animate – an agency so potent that it can incite revolution (New York Times 2013; Humphrey 1989).

6e. Alimentality and sovereignty:

...the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption.

Jane Bennett 2010, ix

The administrative filming and posting of videos raises the question of whose gaze is being directed at what – and away from what. Notably, in the 2015 theater of food destruction, the state did not film the euthanizing of 50 Ukrainian ducklings. Arguably not even yet food, the live ducklings, confiscated at the border, again “[without] any accompanying documents” according to the local agricultural watchdog agency (Moscow Times 2015), were killed and then burned. The fact that this act was not videotaped and posted, despite the decree, demonstrates a canny awareness on the part of Putin’s government: actual killing does not leave space for the threat to interact uneasily with the absurd. What gives the menace of indirect acts its power, however, is the parallel presence of the repeated episodes of deadly violence against political dissidents that have been attributed to Putin’s administration. Beyond the imprisonment of people like the women of Pussy Riot, political organizer Alexey Navalny, and opposition backer Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the fact that the Kremlin is widely considered the author of the murders of activists Boris Nemtsov, Alexander Litvenenko, Anna Politkovskaya, Natalya Estemirova, Boris Berezovsky, Anastasia Baburova and Stanislav Markelov, among others, forms a chilling backdrop to the parodic food incidents (Guardian, CNN, Vice News 2015). Particularly notable
is the fact that poisoned food is a weapon of choice for Russian political killings, to the point that, in a throwback to tyrannical sovereign rulers, Putin employs a taster as a human shield (Independent, 2014). Litvenenko was famously assassinated when radioactive polonium was added to his green tea, and Politkovskaya survived poisoning two years before being shot to death. The fact that the contamination of food, in these cases, originated within the state rather than being introduced through imports, arguably amplifies rather than mitigates the fear associated with contamination. Considering the prevalence of poison as a political weapon in Russia, Masha Gessen describes “the bizarre sense of normalcy that has a way of going hand in hand with the mortal danger that has become a fact of everyday life” (New Yorker 2015).

Non-human bodies, in the form of food, disturb obliquely but powerfully. These are the bodies by which human bodies are sustained, the matter that makes our matter. Achille Mbembe asks us to consider what power bodies claim in death and after death, and how manipulation of bodies expresses sovereignty, but he does not extend his inquiry to the non-human. He is concerned with direct violence enacted on people, but I contend that his thesis is still eminently applicable to the events in Russia. The materiality of food here is held in tension between biopolitics and necropolitics, and food itself is wielded as a power over life and death. Mbembe describes the ways in which “technologies of destruction have become more tactile, more anatomical and sensorial, in a context in which the choice is between life and death” (34, 2003), and refers to the sovereign move to “attribute rational objectives to the very act of killing” (ibid, 23). The Kremlin’s choice to simultaneously exercise biopolitical control over its population, and stage a geopolitical performance of intimidation, waste, and excess, while rendering the necropolitical threat as a theater of the absurd, enacts both of these shifts. Ruth Wilson Gilmore has pointed to
the imbrication of industry, discipline and death in the military and prison industrial complexes (Lloyd et al 2012); I suggest that we could productively add the agricultural industrial complex to this constellation.

6f. Waste:

[We must adequately attend] to the material properties of waste and the different associations (social, political, physical, and corporeal) – stretched variably in space – that emerge around the different forms of waste.

*Vinay Gidwani 2012, 284*

It is particularly interesting that global response to the actions of Putin’s government focused on waste and hunger. There is an important discursive distinction between waste as abandonment (leaving the material to be reappropriated and reconfigured) and waste as destruction, rhetorically captured in the slang for killing: he wasted his opponent. I suggest that the waste enacted in Russia’s destruction of grey-market food is, in fact, something significantly more than its characterization in the popular media. There is a multiple message in these performances. The state claims that it is rich enough to waste (discard value), violent enough to waste (kill), and productive enough to waste (squander). It does this ostensibly in a display of paternalism and protectionism, by claiming that it will decide what is safe and appropriate for its population to eat, and that it will secure lives by withholding sustenance. But in fact what this theater demonstrates is the nexus of biopolitics and necropolitics: the power over the life and death of the citizenry, and the willingness to determine which bodies will be preserved and which will be abandoned or destroyed.
Vinay Gidwani suggests that in the dialectic of waste and value, there is always a “‘positive’ that acquires its valence against the background of the ‘abortive’ and ‘retrograde’” (2012, 275). Certainly that dynamic is at work here, but with a twist. The wasted food in the Russian bureaucrats’ videos is killed, annihilated. The wasting is purposeful: it is not the conversion of “the pointless, the misdirected, the futile”; rather, it is the obliteration of the other, of “matter out of place” (ibid, 277). In *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking*, Anya Von Bremzen describes the prevalent narrative of racial contamination that attaches to Moscow’s millions of non-white migrant workers (reportedly up to a quarter of its population) from the former Soviet Central Asian republics. This xenophobia goes hand-in-hand with a virulent nationalism that claims nostalgia for socialism and even fascism, but embraces market capitalism and aspires to a globalized luxury lifestyle (2013). Von Bremzen cites an almost 50% *current* approval rating for Stalin, as evidenced by an interviewee: “Bless him for leading Russia to victory,” (275).

On December 3rd, 2015, Putin announced that by 2020, Russia would be self-sufficient in food production, and would become the world’s largest supplier of organic and GMO-free foodstuffs – what he referred to as “ecologically clean and high-quality food” (Chow, EcoWatch 2015). In
his speech on Russia as the world’s sustainable bread-basket, Putin commented repeatedly on the amount of Russian arable land lying fallow, and suggested that these waste-lands be confiscated by the state and sold to entrepreneurs willing to farm them (ibid). This echoes the development projects, tied to racial dominance, that Gidwani describes as “bio-political stewardship,” and also the move from waste as frontier to waste as capital’s internal limit. “Valuable lives, wasted lives, and mapped onto these, valuable spaces and spaces designated as wasteful” (2012, 285).

![Image: Russsia's Food Imports](image.jpg)

*What Russia will have to eliminate to become self-sufficient by 2020. Source: CNN*

Thus the understanding of the obliterated Euro-American foods as wasteful, although accurate in the sense that edible food was destroyed, misses the Kremlin’s point. In the name of turning “wasted” land to the project of globalized capitalism within an autarchic, securitized and purified nation-state, some bodies will be made to live, and others will be made to die: they will be wasted.
6g. Theater, spectacle, image:

Guy Debord’s “spectacle” is Marx’s notion of fetishism writ large. Rather than social relations primarily mediated by mystified things (i.e. commodities), as Marx would have it, Debord sees that social relations between people have become deeply mediated by images and representations.

Teo Ballvé 2011

The performances captured in the videotapes of food destruction are the acts of an administration that both internally disciplines its subjects and also turns outward with a display of geopolitical power. Henri Lefebvre describes dramatic action as constitutive of “representational space, mediated yet directly experienced” (1974, 188). The role of repetitive imagery in subject formation is to reinforce rules and habitus, the division between belonging and otherness (Hall 1997). These images visually and viscerally consolidate the state’s power over life and death and the consequences of disobedience, while placing the acts on the stage of a theater that is simultaneously threatening and ridiculous. The message is that this power can kill you or preserve you. Despite its absurdity, it instills both fear and an insular nationalism at the same time. Putin’s administration does an expert job of reflecting this kind of mixed message in his macho cult of personality – a version of Weber’s charismatic leadership (Strong and Killingsworth 2011). In his heavily media-hyped combination of menace with paternalistic care, Putin is representative of the regime, of Russia’s apparatus of power. Hannah Arendt, writing about Hitler’s charisma, captures the phenomenon: “modern society in its desperate inability to form judgments will take every individual for what he considers himself and professes himself to be ... Extraordinary self-confidence and displays of self-confidence therefore inspire confidence
in others; pretensions to genius waken the conviction in others that they are indeed dealing with a genius” (Arendt, cited in Eatwell 2006, 141-142).

The patchy nature of the Kremlin’s food sanctions and the choice of which acts of food destruction to publicize is, I suggest, part of the orchestrated theater and imagery of this extended set piece. In setting aside luxuries that middle- and upper-class Russians expect to have access to, and that Russia would be hard-pressed to produce (chocolate, olive oil, wine) and the canned staples that evoke nostalgic identity stories of socialist collectivism, the state hails an ideal subject who embraces a global market lifestyle while accepting an autocratic territorial
sovereignty. The fact that in urban Moscow celebratory spectacles like Victory Day and Young Pioneer Day take place next to opulent multi-level malls that feature exorbitantly expensive “farmers market” food courts is a further embodiment of this hybrid subject of a hybrid regime (Von Bremzen 2013).

6h. The internal limit meets the constitutive outside:

This phenomenon... exclusive ethnic nationalism... has been realized through purification efforts to rid Russia of potentially polluting foreign elements, including commodities, ideologies, and even people... [this] highlights a Russian consumer culture that refashions practices more typically associated with market capitalism to preserve values that are more recognizably socialist... a more collective, singular sense of Russianness.

Melissa Caldwell, 2002, 297 (emphasis added)
It is not my project here to comprehensively evaluate the current and future response to the Kremlin’s destruction of banned food, but it is worth opening the question: what are the geopolitical and domestic effects of these acts? Internationally, following a brief media flurry and then a three-month lull, Italy and Luxembourg called into question the continuation of EU sanctions against Russia, and the Committee of the Permanent Representatives of the Governments of the Member States to the European Union (COREPER) appeared to be reconsidering what had originally been assumed to be an automatic extension of the sanctions (RBTH December 2015).

Brian Whitmore, writing in *The Atlantic*, proposes that we consider the annihilation of banned foods as part of the concept of “fortress Russia” as the Kremlin’s larger project (2015). Whitmore describes what he calls “food snitches and food vigilantes,” quoting private citizens as well as a Cossack who plans to make regular raids on local businesses. Putin’s Customs Department has proposed that grey-market food be treated as a threat to national security on a par with the smuggling of weapons, and punished accordingly, with up to seven years in prison (Reuters, Moscow Times 2015). The invocation of documentation as proof of legitimacy echoes the securitization of human bodies. Noting that what superficially appears to be a temper tantrum may actually be a canny and calculated move on the part of the Putin administration, Whitmore also quotes economist Vladislav Inozemtsev, director of the Moscow-based Center for Post-Industrial Studies, as commenting that many of the state’s actions seem designed to return Russia to a Soviet-style autarky.
The state is cultivating nationalism in fertile ground. Melissa Caldwell observes that the overwhelming embrace by Russian citizenry of notions of quality food as homegrown, traditional, authentic and local is expressed in the common signifiers applied to food – *nash* and *ne nash*, ours and not-ours (2002, 309). In addition to discursive reinforcement of who and what belongs in Russia – is “ours” – the killing of foreign food that has transgressed borders without proper documentation solidifies and reifies territorial boundaries, linking food and people to their spatial origins and underlining alien presence as an invasive threat. The enactment of belonging as alimentality is explicit: citizens apply pressure and surveillance to themselves and each other. Corps of young (white, privileged) “Eat Russian” activists have descended on supermarkets to sticker suspect foods with “sanctioned product” labels.

Internally, the nationalistic fervor generated in Russia has thus far seemed to outweigh protests, but hunger can vanquish nationalism. The following excerpt from an interview with a homeless Muscovite illustrates the juxtaposition:

I never respected Mr. Putin until he brought back Crimea, and then I realized he is a genius… And you know what? Even we tramps are prepared to do our bit. I’d be happy to tighten my belt and go hungry if it means we have Crimea… But I really struggle to

*Sources: bbc.com, telegraph.co.uk*
understand why he decided to do this… We’re really hungry here. Maybe he just doesn’t understand. (S. Dmitriev, interviewed by Business Insider 2015)

A necropolitics of food could construe precarious others within Russia, including the homeless and hungry, as outside the biopolitical nurturance of the state – as among those who are let to die, the constitutive excess of the population. Despite the fact that they are captured in the calculus of security that is used to justify the destruction, rather than donation, of the sanctioned foods, I posit that Russia’s hungry are simply not part of the Kremlin’s equation here – they are collateral damage. They may, however, become a source of what Butler calls “subversive promise”: the possibility of “reinstalling the abject at the site of… opposition [and rethinking] the terms that establish and sustain bodies that matter” (1993, 184). The risk in choosing embodied, corporeal, affective food as a means to wield threat and consolidate power is that it calls attention to bodied materiality, an experience, along with that of eating, that is common to every human being. This commonality, the visceral politics of food (Hayes-Conroy 2008) holds enormous potential for collective action for change. What will precarious people and threatened bodies in Russia do in response to the killing of food?

Source: themoscowtimes.com
6i. Counter-moves:

... one must begin to identify with the other, who is to be assimilated, interiorized... I don't know, at this point, who is “who,” no more than I know what “sacrifice” means; to determine what this last word means, I would retain this clue: need, desire, authorization, the justification of putting to death, putting to death as denegation of murder. The putting to death of the animal, says this denegation, is not a murder. I would link this denegation to the violent institution of the “who” as subject.

Jacques Derrida, 1991

Genocidal actions on proxy bodies, combined with the biopolitical surveillance of alimentality, are designed to establish a social taboo associated with the consumption of sanctioning countries’ grey-market foods. If killing food is meant to evoke killing people, it could even be argued that there is a subtext of cannibalism implied in the execution of food bodies – that is, that part of the taboo against the consumption of these foods is the indirect suggestion that one would be eating human bodies. But here again, the sinister sits cheek by jowl with the farcical. The message that consuming grey-market foods is unpatriotic has succeeded in galvanizing some citizenry to apply pressure and surveillance to each other. Corps of young “Eat Russian” activists have descended on supermarkets to sticker suspect foods with “sanctioned product” labels depicting a roaring bear vanquishing an American flag (BBC, 2015). Sanction us, and we’ll sanction you right back. The snitches and vigilantes referenced above report their neighbors for preparing contraband meals, adding a new twist to the aphorism “her goose is cooked:”

The police report said roughly, “At 9:21 p.m., on August 16, 2015, a phone call was received [from] a Vladivostok resident… claiming that, at the address of 16 Ovchinnikov Street, a woman is eating [Polish] goose meat, according to the caller, and other
neighbors are smoking Dutch tobacco.” According to the caller… he discovered the wrapper of goose meat in the trash outside his building. It was written in Polish, he says, and he recognized it from the now viral video of Tatarstan's police bulldozing three confiscated geese into a landfill… (Meduza 2015)

But the materiality of food itself does not adhere to political agendas. In the town of Smolensk, 360 kilometers west of Moscow, officials bulldozed truckloads of peaches. After the bulldozers departed, residents combed through the debris and collected intact peaches to make moonshine (USA Today 2015). The smell of ripe, crushed peaches is a powerful attractant, and the use of the fruit to make home-still liquor – contraband food becoming contraband intoxicants – has a devil-may-care defiance that recalls Gaston Gordillo’s account of the “appropriation of a trace of state terror that [becomes] a festive expression” (2014, 27).

The images themselves are performative and iterative. Repeatedly displaying footage originally posted by Putin’s functionaries alters the message in unpredictable ways. Videos that circulate on the internet don’t have the same effect over and over – they change with events,
context, perceptions. They gaze they attract may not be the one originally invited. The Kremlin contributed to the creation of new assemblages, and assemblages have a life of their own. Visually, as well as aromatically, the destroyed foodstuffs exert the force of their presence. Mangled and shredded food-things are objects that become, in Gordillo’s words, “bright matter with the power to disturb [by making] transparent the violence congealed in them” (ibid, 225).

Sources: en.censor.net, rt.com
6j. Summary:

_One of the biggest challenges for new materialism is to develop a media theory of things – and yet not only thing-powers, but process-power._

_Jussi Parrika 2011, 98 (emphasis in original)_

I have argued that the theatrical acts of food destruction by Putin’s government in the wake of Euro-American sanctions, although widely cast as a straightforward issue of food waste, articulate in complex ways with discursive geopolitical and nationalistic consolidations of power to create a new hybrid subject and a purified, territorialized state capitalism. I have suggested that the apparent buffoonery of some of these acts thinly veils a real threat of bodily harm to those who are “out of place,” who transgress the Kremlin’s sovereignty, or who attempt to compromise its power over the lives of its people. Using the analytics of bio- and necropolitics, and theories of the materiality and embodiment of food, I have demonstrated that food, because of its material and affective productivity as a Deleuzian “operator,” is both a potent tool in the state political arsenal, and also a potentially transformative site for mobilizing collective action for change. Because, as Gidwani and Reddy wrote in 2011, “the things, places and lives that are cast outside the pale of ‘value’… as superfluity, excess, or detritus… return at times in unexpected ways,” killing food is an unstable and risky form of embodied hegemonic control.
7. Conclusion – laying the groundwork for empirical research:

And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?

_Walt Whitman, I Sing The Body Electric, 1855_

My claim is that the bodies of people and foodstuffs are not containers for a separate essence of meaning. Meaning and matter are not a binary pairing that we seek to bring into dialogue with each other – they are mutually made components of human and non-human being. Resisting alimental administration entails treating issues of food health, access, production, and pleasure as inseparable. Fetishizing food obscures the real power of assemblages behind assigned roles that reify social and political constructions; de-fetishizing it unveils its gloriously sensuous, messy, fleshy materiality. Bennett, channeling Lupton, notes “Food, as a self-altering, dissipative materiality, is also a player. It enters into what we become” (2010). And we enter into what it becomes – not just by cultivating or cooking it, not just by purposely altering its genetic material, but also by making its meaning.

Why write these two papers as a prelude to my PhD research? How does the Kremlin’s destruction of sanctioned food, or Fox News pundits’ kerfuffle over seafood and SNAP, bear on the foodways of migrant communities in Colorado? As Heidi Nast and Steve Pile remind us, bodies and places are made through relations of power – they “become relational, territorialized in specific ways” that are neither universal nor completely unique (1998, 4). I have worked here to lay the groundwork for empirical research in and near my community by first identifying a gap in the geographic scholarship of food: the failure to ask why the sensory experience of food has been peripheralized for some people. In positioning myself to explore this question with a
specific group of people in a specific place, I have created a new analytical frame for the investigation: the concept of alimentality. This analytic puts differential biopolitical management of the food practices of different populations in conversation with the materiality of human and non-human bodies. Using alimentality as a lens reveals the connections between food discourse, technologies of government, and the raced and classed categorization of people through foodways. Further, it exposes the ways in which the materiality of food is recruited in the service of these divisions, and demands that food geographers also explore the agential capacity of the food itself as a potent and active factor in these mutually made relationships. Also crucial to this project is considering the materialism of food (the pressures exerted by the market on daily experiences and practices) as distinct from, but entangled with, its physicality. Putting all these pieces in place opens a space for the investigation of how people and foodstuffs alter networks of power through their response to these biopolitical moves.

This is the next step in the intervention. Having put together and thought through a theoretical frame, and placed the project in the context of discursive national and geopolitical constructions, I want to learn how these interactions of matter, meaning and power are lived in my community. What assemblages interact, and how, in the lived reality of foodways among Colorado’s migrant residents? At the intersection of food production labor, food consumption practices, and discursive constructions in this particular place and time, how does the materiality of food matter?
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