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**Wrapping and Stuffing Food Relationally: Pleasure, Place,
Production and Power**

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Wrapping and Stuffing Food Relationally: Pleasure, Place, Production and Power

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Food is not food. Food is literally and figuratively wrapped and unwrapped, stuffed and unstuffed with all manner of *relationships*. Food is full of relationships: The stuffed goose, the wheel of cheese, the chicken Kiev is a container of sorts for the relations that go into the making and unmaking of these particular foods. But so too does food work to create sets of relationships, whether those be between and amongst those eating and making the stuffed goose, wheel of cheese or chicken Kiev, the wider ecologies and micro-biologies of growing, transforming and preparing these foods or the sets of cultures, economies and politics that go into defining these foods as things and these things as food. The eating of food, as we know, is one of the most intimate of relationships we, as corporeal beings and bodies, can have with the world, with others, with nature. As Elspeth Probyn (2001; 9) in her book *Carnal Appetites* puts it “eating [is] a visceral reminder of how we variously inhabit the axes of economics, gender, sexuality, history, ethnicity and class”. Food’s *relationalities* contain as well as make what, after Appadurai (1986; see also Lind and Barham, 2004), might be called the ‘social life’ of food and foodways as they simultaneously contain and make the ‘material life’ of food and foodways. For Emma Roe (2006; 109), getting at these relationalities of food involves a “tracing” of food’s “liveliness”, whereby this “liveliness ... set[s] up two forms of connections with humans. On the one hand, to trace food through a network is in fact to trace energies through a metabolic network, and on the other hand it is to trace meaning-making enacted through how foodstuff is handled”. Through eating and the metabolisation of food, then, the outside becomes the inside the inside (eventually) becomes the outside, all the while the socio-material relationships embedded in and created by food literally and figuratively become who, what and how we are, suspending us, transforming us and making and unmaking us.

But much like the critic and analyst Raj Patel (2007) who writes about our *Stuffed and Starved* world, I feel that some of the relationships that food contains and creates are more prescient than others. In this, there are four relationalities of food that I want to briefly highlight—all of which resonate across the papers by West, Abbotts and Coles—and suggest that they are worthy of much more sustained empirical and theoretical engagement across contemporary *foodscapes*.

The first set of relationships I want to highlight, then, are those of *pleasure*. Amongst other things this is about the pleasure of being stuffed and full for the hungry or the pleasure of being unstuffed for the anorexic or dieter. This is about the pleasure of the conviviality of eating together on a birthday or holiday or the pleasure of eating an instant soup from Aldi on one's own, at one's desk to be able to continue to work and finish one's paper for this volume. In general then, what I am talking about are the feelings and affects associated, created and produced by food, those gut feelings of pleasure we feel way deep down inside to those feelings of joy laughing over a shared meal. Of course, the flip side of all of this involves those feelings of disgust we might feel in our relationship to food or particular foods, or even the people we have to share a meal with. These tensions of pleasure and disgust can even be played out in one single food item like the deep-fried Mars bar which, while truly a health 'disaster', tastes damn good! This, then involves what, in drawing on Probyn, Alison and Jessica Hayes-Conroy (2008, 2010; see also Goodman, 2011; Carolan, 2011) describe as the *visceral* aspects of food: the ways it feels good/bad to us and those around us, the ways it tastes good/bad to us and those around us and, especially important for these authors, the ways that this viscosity connects us up to a multi-scaled politics, from the personal all the way to the global.

One of the most interesting sets of relationships embedded in pleasurable foods are those of *authenticity*. Am I eating a 'real' New York steak, English Breakfast, German Schweinhaxen or American Hotdog? Debates over authenticity rage, my favourite at the moment being that over the San Francisco burrito (Wikipedia, 2012; Chowhound, 2012). Does it have rice or not? Does having the rice *make* a burrito a San Francisco burrito? And, who really cares? I certainly don't because if I am

eating one, full of rice or not, it means I am back in San Francisco, eating something scrumptious and most likely sitting across from my brother-in-law talking about the Giants; thankfully, I can now also get—to my extreme delight—a relatively good simulacra of a San Francisco burrito in London as they have recently begun to spread across the city's foodscapes. For me, anyway, the visceralities of taste reign supreme here, rather than any kind of overt authenticity, bringing me both the pleasures of taste as much as the pleasures of the memories of places, people and relationships; in a way, then, pleasure and authenticity easily slip in and out of each other, are in tension or in agreement in fascinating and important ways in the context of food's relational wrappings and stuffings.

The second set of relationships embedded and created by food are those of *place*. In this, we eat in place, out of place and literally and figuratively eat places in their cultural, economic and material constitution (DeLind, 2006; Feagan, 2007; Goodman et al, 2010). And food place can travel: we talk more and more about the McDonaldization and Coca-colonisation of the world's cuisines (e.g. Ritzer, 1996) and coffee, cheese and wine varietals move the world over. One of the things we are literally obsessed with now is the making visible of the relationships we have with food, its production and its travel. From organic, fair trade and PDO/*terroir* food labelling (Rangneker and Wilkinson, 2011; Goodman et al, 2012), to the ability to use smartphones and QR codes to find out the origins and provenance of your tomato (Harvestmark, 2012), figuring out your relationship to your food's place involves yet another set of relationships to supply chains, accounting practices, technologies and visual representations. And, for Coles and Crang (2011: 88-89), in their exploration of the 'place' of Borough Farmers Market in London, it is the 'ethical consumption' of food that is particularly coincident in the constructions and development of food(s') place. As they put it, "... the dynamics of place and place-making play a central role in ... 'alternative' forms of consumption" through the ways that (ethical) consumption is a placed activity, the ways it creates 'better' food consumption places *vis a vis* the supermarket, and the ways that it works to connect the places of production and consumption through the commodity form of food.

The third set of relationalities in food are those of *production*, but here I want to talk about, specifically, the visual, spectacular and image-drenched production of food through the various media and mediums that it is so now thoroughly wrapped and stuffed in and with. From the obvious of celebrity chefs, to cook books, to television networks, to advertisements and marketing, to magazines, to radio programmes, to major motion pictures, to online discussion groups, social media and recipe blogs, food has colonized and been colonized by literally every form of media available making it serious big business and an everyday, 'spectacularised' engagement (Bell and Hollows, 2011; Hollows and Jones, 2010a, b; Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012; Rousseau, 2012a, b). Indeed, along with the tatty old recipe folders and slips from my mother and grandmother, Google is now my recipe book for whenever I cook at home. More than anything, this has led me to ask a series of questions about the relationalities created and embedded in this mediatised food: Is food part of the realm of the 'real' anymore or is it just simply one more spectacular image flashing across our collective eyes and tongues in the pursuit of the next best selling cookbook, food expose, or new celebrity chef personality? Where do we find real food or is this spectacular food the new 'real'? What relationalities do these food spectacles produce, with whom and why? How do new technologies make food even more mobile, social and, perhaps, edible and relate-able? And, how might we find all of this out?

The final set of relationalities wrapped and stuffed in and through food are those of *power*, which, by definition are imbued with inequalities in one form or another (McMichael, 2000; Guthman, 2008a, b). Here the power of supermarkets in the UK—with just four having 75% of the total market for food (Grocerynews.com, 2012), two of these having over 50% of the market for organic foods (Soil Association, 2012)—is about the ability *to set* relationships with eaters, buyers, shoppers, suppliers, regulators, politicians, ecologies and the environment and, or course, farmers. This is not without resistance as the group known as Tescopoly attests to (Tescopoly, 2012). Yet there is also a new set of power players here in the form of the aforementioned celebrity chef and their abilities to increasingly define for us what 'good food' is and should be (Goodman et al, 2010).

The cultural and economic power of, for example, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall to get us to buy sustainable fish (see Fish Fight, 2012) or Jamie Oliver to get us to better supply kid's school meals (see Slocum et al, 2011; Hollows and Jones, 2010a) should not be underestimated. But even in these 'good food' networks, inequalities abound: Those strawberries used in the strawberry tart made by the multi-millionaire celebrity chefs of today are grown by particular people, under particular conditions and embedded in particular supply chains that often reek of the inequalities of power. Thus, to ask a strong yet continually important question: How and in what ways is that tasty strawberry tart flavoured with the sweat and, dare I say, exploitation that often defines the contemporary food networks created and maintained by celebrity chefs?

I want to end where I started: food is not food, but rather it is wrapped and stuffed and stuffed and wrapped in and by relationships of pleasure, place, production and power; it is these crucial relationalities of food that are not only worth a further and much longer chewing over, but it is these relationships that are key in defining our relationships to ourselves, each other and the contemporary (food) worlds that we inhabit.

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