IF IT FEEDS, IT LEADS: EATING, MEDIA, IDENTITY, AND ECOFEMINIST FOOD JOURNALISM

A Dissertation presented to (in reverse alphabetical order):
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at the University of Missouri

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

IF IT FEEDS, IT LEADS: EATING, MEDIA, IDENTITY, AND ECOFEMINIST FOOD JOURNALISM

presented by Joseph Paul Jones, a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy of journalism, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

To all the feeders, eaters, and dreamers.

And to, for, and because of my Katie, the co-author of my life.

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Glossary of Terms

Aestheticization of everyday life: when design and aesthetics—a concern for beauty or art—are applied to new areas, and even the most mundane forms of consumption are made expressive, playful, or symbolically loaded

Americanization of cuisine: the adaptation of previously foreign food cultures to the broadly defined "American" palette, where spice is reduced, protein (including meats and cheeses) is increased, more sweets are offered (or invented), and anything objectionable is eliminated (e.g., bones, blood, unfamiliar meats, vegetables, or ingredients deviating from a socially defined idea of normalcy). The *Americanization* of food often results in a widely standardized product for mass consumption.

Articulate/articulation: expressing, associating, or arranging elements into a meaningful whole; refers to fact that signs are given meaning in *relation* to other signs. To articulate is to express and thus bring into existence.

Attention economy: resulting from the commercialization of news and intensified by digital forms of surveillance and commodifying user data, an economic system where attracting users/audiences is of primary value, either to sell to advertisers, marketing firms, technology companies, or other aggregators of data. In media, this was originally known as the *audience commodity* (Smythe, 2001) where a media outlets two products were content to attract an audience, and the selling of that audience's attention to advertisers. In the digital age, social media, entertainment content, and other forms of "audience engagement" compete for individuals in an intensified attention economy, further feeding behavioral data into algorithms and machine learning for predictability, control, and the capture of future attention.

Beat reporting: a specialized reporting where journalists cover one specific topic, institution, issue, or the like such as music, food, religion, Wall Street, sports, science, the White House, fashion, etc. Beat reporting allows journalists to specialize and build expertise and know-how about a subject, using such knowledge to (ideally) deliver quality coverage. On the other hand, beat reporters are sometimes accused of building too intimate a relationship with those they cover, challenging journalistic independence and reproducing the most dominant voices and views.

Becoming with: while some philosophers argued there was no simple "being" in the world as existence was more aptly described as constant "becoming," critical ecologists further argued there was no becoming as an isolated individual, only *becoming with*. This refers to the fact that individuals are constituted by their interactions, co-shaped by what are traditionally termed "others." Individuals are not self-contained; they do not pre-exist their constitutive interactions. Individuals are thus co-constituted and made by their relationships. Feminist political theory also uses this idea to fruitfully argue for a deliberative, care-based democracy. Such politics, instead of competing for power, would seek transformation through collaboration.

the **Bright side of life**: a specific request of advertisers in the 19th century asking newspapers to focus on the positive as critical, depressed, or overly thoughtful readers made bad customers. It remains a defining feature of American consumer culture and much of lifestyle journalism where there is an exclusive focus on individualized understandings of private pleasure.

Capital: an abstract form of value used to generate more value. There at least six forms:

1. economic – value having a monetary or exchange-value and/or also a production value when used to pursue economic ends, e.g., cash, stocks, bonds, factories, land, buildings, or any means of economically viable production
2. social – the potential resources and benefits derived from one's network of institutional and personal relationships
3. cultural – the embodied traits and social assets that mark distinction and signal social status (e.g., education, taste, specialist knowledge); the credentials that signify one's authority, legitimacy, and accomplishment
4. symbolic – the recognition and legitimation of all other forms of capital manifesting in authority or prestige; one's social standing after the conversion of all other forms of capital
5. culinary – one's authority and social legitimacy as a cook or food expert
6. natural – the form of value that underlies all possibility of value in terms of the primary, environmental resources and hosting ecosystem(s). The *original* "goods" and "services" of sunlight and our blue dot, Earth.

Capitalism: a political economic order based on the private ownership of the means of production for profit. It relies on wage-labor, the production and exchange of commodities, and the use of money. It is also characterized by competition and a compulsion to grow one's productive and surplus-generating capacities. Surplus value under capitalism is achieved though exploiting labor and buyers, not paying the full costs of one's production or fully considering the consequences of one's actions (externalities), and appropriating value created in other realms such as the environment, domestic labor, or non-capitalist forms of production (expropriation).

Citizen-consumer: civic-minded community members that happened to be consumers as a result of historical circumstance. As such, consumerism could be harnessed for the public good and the rights of all consumers could be protected. Social reformers at the end of the 19th century and Progressive women of the early 20th, for example, advocated for truth-in-advertising, pure food regulation, child labor laws, and worker protections. Black Americans during the Great Depression could assert their citizen status through "Don't Work Where You Can't Buy Campaigns" and the consumer movements of the 1960s and 1970s sought government action to protect the rights of citizens. While there are definitive limits to such forms of citizenship (e.g., racial equality is not achieved through consumer rights), this political identity is more inclusive than the *consumer-citizen* who views all collective action as a limitation on personal autonomy.

Clickbait: internet content that uses specific strategies to attract, shock, entice, and otherwise garner attention, resulting in a user clicking on a link to read, watch, listen, or engage with some other media content. Clickbait is characterized as being sensationalistic, misleading, and deceptive, often manipulating the psychological tendencies of human curiosity.

Co-constitution (co-constitute): as theorized in the works of Alaimo, Haraway, Tsing, Tallbear, and other eco/feminist theorists, the idea that individuals—whether people, non-human animals, ideas, categories, material structures, or what have you—do not pre-exist their relationships. Individuals are not self-contained but are constituted by their interactions, positioning, and contaminations. Attune to this interdependence of identity work and constant becoming, we can thus reorient fetishized and egocentric thinking/being/doing into more useful and caring relational forms, practices, and values.

Command and flatter: advertising, marketing, and lifestyle media technique that uses sensationalism or celebrity to garner attention while using informal address, promises of getting ahead, and psychological appeals to pander to audiences. Such communication thus commands attention and flatters the ego of viewers.

Commodity: anything bought and sold in a market; commodities are not produced/grown/gathered for self-use but for exchange; the exchange-value of a commodity is crucial for a capitalist as they seek to realize surplus value and accumulate capital through obtaining a higher exchange-value than the cost of production (i.e., make profit)

Commoditized/commodify: something previously not a commodity taking on the attributes of a commodity; or to think about something as primarily a commodity (something to be bought for a "good" price) over anything else (i.e., to place the exchange value of something above any other values)

Commodity fetishism when economic value is mistakenly seen as inherent in a commodity, instead of as arising from the social relationships and human agency that enabled its production; when the final form of the commodity or its relations to the purchaser is taken as its only value, purpose, or effect (i.e., the part is mistaken for the whole)

Conspicuous cooking: food preparation as cultural capital and display, a means to perform and earn distinction by showcasing impressive, novel, or "perfect" foods. Approaching food preparation as a competition, such displays can help individuals "win" at social events.

Consumerism: the belief that individuals should acquire commodities to order and give meaning to their lives

Consumer-citizen: in contrast to citizen-consumer, considers identity as consumer first, seeing civic issues through the lens of a customer. In this view, the consumer is the highest sovereign, and all social institutions and functions should foremost serve self-interested shoppers.

Consumer Culture: a way of life where identity, social status, meaning, and values are derived from commodities

Consumer Society: consumer culture widely practiced, reaching a critical point to re-orient individuals, social structures, values, and goals around commodity production, exchange, and use. When social relations are characterized by consumer culture *in toto*.

When:

> human wants, desires, and longings [are] the *principal propelling and operating force of society*…[coordinating] systemic reproduction, social integration, social stratification, and the formation of human individuals, as well as playing a major role in the process of individual and group self-identification and in the selection and pursuit of individual life policies (Bauman, 2007, p. 28).

Contingency: chance, circumstance, and the absence of necessity, i.e., the fact of being so without necessarily being so. For history, critical theory, and CDA, a recognition that things did not have to necessarily to be so but that chance and interrelating factors resulted in such; a basic recognition that things could always be otherwise or different and are context-dependent.

Cuisine: a relatively stable, long-term food tradition which has proven itself capable of sustaining multiple generations through time. While cuisines are adaptable, they are characterized by fairly consistent ingredients, preparation methods, flavors, dishes, and eating practices or conventions (Crowther, 2018).

Cultural capital: knowledge, behaviors, dispositions, skills, and other markers of social distinction and worth that promote social mobility or status; can be embodied (e.g., education, playing the piano, having taste), material (owning art), or institutional (credentials, qualifications, and associations).

Cultural intermediary: like journalism, a shifting field, but primarily defined as "market actors who construct value by mediating how goods (or services, practices, people) are perceived and engaged with by others…[they are] defined by their expert orientation and market context" (Maguire & Matthews, 2014, p. 2).

Culture: Used in various ways with context indicating particular use.

- Learned behaviors, beliefs, rituals, routines, worldviews, and mental scripts

- The symbols, customs, and systems of meaning that regulate social life and set the limits of the individual
- Art, aesthetics, human-created beauty, all the best that humans are capable of: so-called high art.
- Shared ways of living, thinking, doing, and being
- A social group's aggregate meanings and meaning-making processes
- A people, period, or group (defined at various sociological levels) that shares any of the above: e.g., American culture, 1920s culture, suburban culture, newsroom culture, farm culture, consumer culture, the culture of Mizzou

So "culture" refers either to a group identity (the last bullet, e.g., being German, Haitian, Jewish, or Bengali) or the shared practices, processes, and meanings that constitute phenomena (e.g., restaurant culture, vegetarian culture, the culture of fine dining). An important point to keep in mind is that culture is always created (i.e., human made) and not just something that "naturally" exists. Much of this cultural creation occurs in discourse.

Raymond Williams (1977) further argued that cultural groups are composed of 3 parts: residual, emergent, and dominant properties where residual was the influence of past cultural practices and beliefs on current society and emergent were new practices and beliefs (which themselves can be dominant, alternative, or oppositional). Dominant culture required no explanation as it was the accepted, taken-for granted beliefs and practices that constituted daily living.

Culture Industry: social institution where human creativity, desire, and drives for amusement are organized and employed to accumulate capital; economic pursuit based on media and art (e.g., film, music, radio, literature, etc.) that utilizes shared symbolic resources and sensibilities

Dematerialization: in general, to become free of physical substance; sociologically to produce surplus value (profit) outside of physical production and the concomitant corporate form that has resulted; digitization is also an example of dematerialization (although the digital world still relies on energy use and physical systems to exist)

Dialectic (dialectical, dialectically): an active, co-constitutive process where agents shaped by structures relate and interact to act back and shape those structures resulting in a constant interplay of active agents, dynamic cultural systems, and (sometimes) relatively stable social institutions. This ontological and epistemological characterization of the material world and society holds that people, ideas, social institutions, food, etc. and indeed reality itself does not consist of ready-made things or concepts but that everything exists in a relational process of development, a state of becoming defined by its relationships, inherent contradictions, external tensions, limitations, and larger context.

Unlike Hegel's dialectic that results in a synthesis of a higher form, or Marx's dialectic that viewed the dialectic of history as moving towards socioeconomic progress, the

current use of dialectic eschews telos or ultimate ends, focusing instead on the developmental processes that constitute society, reality, material things, and ideas.

Digitized/digital – the affordances and limitations of binary code, computer technology, and mediated connective systems like the internet. This includes smart phone apps, social media, on-demand video-music-text, 24-hour personal access via phone text, email, or chosen suite of "teams organizing" software; discussion boards, state websites, online shopping, sponsored content, and the necessary technologies for on-demand work. Digital thus also refers to webs of relationships and assemblages that are not easily discernable without effort.

The use of assemblage is intentional and refers to the co-constitutive nature of digital technology use. On a mushroom assemblage, for example, different sections have different DNA but are part of "the same" mushroom, their survival depending on mutually beneficial relationships with other organisms like trees and other mushroom assemblages. This complicates notions of what is "self" and what is "other."

Thinking of digital assemblages of entangled individuals can help dispel the self vs. society, human vs. environment, us vs. them binaries. Such assemblages can also be organized along lines of surveillance, algorithmic discipline, and the same relationships of power, insecurity, and independence that have existed in previous analog systems of communication, governance, and social reproduction. The digitized Culture Industry, for example, can thus use behavioral information made into "data" through collection, organization, and algorithmic processing and generate surplus value via the attention economy, commercial marketing, and self-expression. With social media this all happens simultaneously. Digital is thus not just a form of technology but is also a form of relating and performing identity work.

Discourse: a particular way of positioning, understanding, and talking about a topic or subject thus prioritizing certain practices, values, and truths. A process, not a thing, discourses require agents and work and are continuously contested, maintained, reinforced, transformed, or surpassed. Not just a descriptive word for a language that reflects reality, discourses have material consequences and help constitute and shape reality.

2. A genre, domain, theme, or logic that attempts a closure of meaning, fixing specific beliefs and excluding the possibilities of alternative views (i.e., the tool or performance of ideological work)

3. a specific form of justification or legitimation for a particular point of view and its concomitant practices (e.g., a nutritional discourse, a discourse of racial hierarchy)

4. any of the above but referring to a single instance or unit (e.g., the discourse of a particular text or institution)

Discursive: subject to the iterative performance requirements, articulations, radical contingencies, and reductive closures of meaning as a discourse; discursive systems are patterned processes of material-semiotic worldmaking

Discursive practice: the strategies, logics, phrasings, methods, and modes employed to create specific meanings and meaning systems

Ecofeminist: originally a school of thought that saw the oppression of women and the domination of nature as interrelated, advocating for a gender and eco-conscious egalitarianism. Building on that tradition, this project is a specific form of ecofeminism that combines care ethics, the epistemology of feminist democratic theory, and the work of eco-minded science and technology studies (STS) scholars who all happen to be women. This brand of ecofeminism is not essentialist

Ecofeminist food journalism (EFJ): utilizing an ethics of care, feminist political theory, and the ontology-epistemology of ecological thinking

Entrepreneurial self/commodified self: late modern, post-Fordist social expectation that individuals should be ambitious and enterprising, always shaping themselves and constantly looking to improve their "marketability." This applies not only to one's job but to all aspects of the social realm, including one's general orientation towards living and "life projects." Individuals signal their social/market value through consumer goods, aesthetic pursuits, leisure activities, exclusive practices, and the curated world of social media.

Episteme: a historical period's dominant epistemology or "truth regime" determining how knowledge is made, legitimated, and understood in that specific context. An episteme is:

"the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within…a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false" (Foucault, 1980, p. 172).

or

"something like a worldview, a slice of history common to all branches of knowledge, which imposes on each one the same norms and postulates, a general stage of reason, a certain structure of thought that the men of a particular period cannot escape" (Foucault, 1972, p. 191).

It is thus the condition of possibility or set of rules of any discourse at a given time and represents the limits of how a discourse functions and what can be claimed as true.

Externality: a cost not paid by the capitalist or producer of a commodity that thus enables profit to be made; while industrial and commercial activity have consequences

outside its benefactors, externalities are costs that are paid by someone else, enabling profit and capital by transferring (externalizing) those costs to someone else

Fetishize: to mistake the part for the whole, especially to consider something *exclusively* in relation to oneself; to misunderstand by excessively focusing on a single aspect, thereby decontextualizing and imbuing something with "magical" properties

Food as commons: characterized by a non-instrumental relation to nature, a logic opposed to food as commodity by redefining the production, distribution, and consumption of food away from individual competition and towards collaboration, solidarity, and mutual help. Recognizes interdependence, co-constitution, and ecological embeddedness of food systems. Simply put, food is a common good and self-governance should replace the rules of the market.

the Food Establishment: coined by Nora Ephron in the 1960s referring to self-referential world of celebrity chefs, cultural tastemakers, and the gastronomical elite; the Culture Industry of high-end restaurants, investors, taste arbiters, and food media

Food sovereignty: "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally-appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations." Declaration of Nyéléni, the first global forum on food sovereignty, Mali, 2007.

In this work, also the notion that consumers who are already dependent on a concentrated food system are less free when they are kept ignorant of supply chains, marketing practices, ecological systems, cultural histories, and the social relationships that enable them to eat. Food sovereignty is thus built on responsible knowledge and the ability to take control of one's diet through comprehensively reflecting on one's embeddedness in ecology and the food system.

Food system: a complex network of practices, processes, and relationships involving ecological processes and the production, processing, transport, distribution, and consumption of food. The food system refers both to the material-physical aspects enabling eating and also the ideational components that determine how and what food ends up in your possession.

Foodie: an individual who spends a disproportionate amount of time thinking, writing, talking about, and pursuing food. Perpetually chasing edible pleasure, they are open to trying new things while also cultivating a refined sense of taste. Often dismissive of the elite snobbism of past gastronomes, today's foodies negotiate the edible dimensions and fine margins of democracy versus distinction (Johnston & Baumann, 2007).

Foodscape: totality of spaces and locations people acquire, transform, eat, learn about, deliberate, or otherwise deal with food (e.g., physical locations, media, interpersonal relationships); a person's known food universe

Fordism: a socioeconomic order built on mass production, mass consumption, and an exchange of workplace discipline and scientific social management for reliable employment and a "livable" wage that enabled access to consumer goods. Also, a specific period of postwar growth defined by such an order from 1948-1973. Under this arrangement, the state addresses some of capitalism's externalities and provides some support for those excluded from the accumulation of capital (e.g., labor and safety laws, food inspection, social security, and Medicaid).

Gastronomy/gastronome: originating in 18th century France, the art and science of choosing, preparing, and eating good food. Originally the purview of the elite, this was food as high culture and combined history, style, and technique to discern quality eating and appreciate the embodied joy of taste. Arguing good food could nourish the soul, gastronomes treated food as one of the highest forms of human expression and valued the contemplative process of the omnivore's dilemma.

Habitus: internalized habits, skills, behaviors, and dispositions learned from experience and shared with people of a similar background; largely subconscious (socialized) patterns of living that are a result of one's social position, resulting in an embodied "disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170).

Hard news: the seemingly most important information of the day as defined by timeliness, impact, and subject matter (i.e., politics, business, war) and standing in stark contrast to so-called soft news, lifestyle journalism, or entertainment

Hedging: in discourse studies, tempering language that reduces one's commitment to what they have said and believe (e.g., "this *might* be true" or "some people say"). Hedging involves a strategic distancing or ambiguity where the speaker can say something, but not be held responsible or accountable for it (e.g., I think we should all drive electric cars, but it is *probably not reasonable,* and I am *no expert*).

Hegemony (hegemonic): rule through consent. Especially when dominant group has convinced subordinates that dominant group's interests are everyone's interests or subordinates accept their position, seeing the situation as natural, necessary, or preferable; a hegemonic idea is something widely accepted, relatively unquestioned, and considered "common sense." Not inherently meant as a negative critique, hegemony is necessary for social stability, shared culture, and civil interaction. Consent is the key concept as more than an ideology imposed from the outside, hegemony is embodied, felt, and lived, providing the very means of negotiating everyday life.

Human-interest story: an oft-used format in lifestyle journalism, infotainment, and soft news that focuses on a specific individual and characterized by emotional content that

discusses a person's struggles, achievements, or concerns in a manner meant to garner sympathy, motivation, or curiosity.

Ideal reader: the intended audience, with the correct member resources, of media communications. The ideal reader would find the message intelligible and roughly understand what the producer meant. Similar to Hall's (1980) preferred reading, where media originator encodes messages in a communication and media receiver actively decodes messages. While opportunity for misreading, alternative reading, and multiplicitous decoding is always present, media originator encodes a message with a preferred reading that a receiver must meaningfully de-code.

Identity (as) work: *who one is* should be more aptly described as *who one constantly becomes* as identity is iterative and constantly negotiated. Referring to both individual or group identity that is enabled by cultural systems, symbolic representation, and discursively, this process is necessary, daily, involves agency and effort, often goes unrewarded, and is most noticeable when something is awry or deviates from expectations. Individuals and groups are relationally defined: narrated, signified, articulated, and situated within a specific context, environment, and set of relationships. These are all contingent, however, and individuals and groups constantly realize, resist, appropriate, reinforce, or otherwise perform and *work out* these issues in the course of everyday life.

Ideological squaring: the discursive practice of creating an ingroup/outgroup (or "us" versus "them") specifically by highlighting the negative aspects of the outgroup and downplaying anything positive and vice versa for the ingroup. This leads to essentializing where differences between groups are exaggerated, similarities between groups are ignored, and differences between members of the same group are overlooked.

Ideology (ideological work): the necessary reduction and closure of meaning to build a worldview and function in the lived world of constant sense-data, diversity, and flux. Because it is necessary, however, does not mean it is without consequences or free from questioning and critique, e.g., see:

2. common sense in the service of power

Imagined culinary community: per Benedict Anderson (1983), the notion that national identity exists conceptually in people's minds as a feeling of unity and kindred affinity with strangers they will never meet. An *imagined culinary community* is thus an identity of shared affinity amongst strangers based on cooking, eating, and a shared cuisine, but one no longer limited to ethnic or national identity (though it can exist on these levels as well).

Individualization (individualizing/individualized): the detachment of individuals from obligations or institutions in which they were previously embedded (Warde, 1997); the reduction of social problems or relationships to individual considerations

2. in media, addressing a large audience as if they were individuals (i.e., synthetic personalization (Fairclough, 2015) such as "see *you* after the break" or "the only spaghetti recipe *you'll* ever need"). This is used to build a simulated friendship between an audience and media maker.

3. in digital realm, tailoring content for a specific individual, such as personalizing search results based on previous searches and surveilled data, or customizing a digital feed based on an individual's previously monitored and collected behaviors

Informalization (informalized): in social theory, the notion that strict social rules, conventions, civilizing behaviors like manners, and social codes like taste or being "in style" are relaxed.

2. in discourse theory, characterizes a non-paternalistic form of authority and legitimation that does not operate by an explicit hierarchy, strict rules, or set pattern of elite justification. An informalized discourse is friendly, loose, and otherwise unofficial, sounding more conversational, casual, open, and egalitarian.

Infotainment: blending the words information and entertainment, a term that encompasses multiple genres of media content recognizing that news is becoming more entertaining while entertainment increasingly addresses political or more informative issues. It is thus considered a "soft" form of political communication and an example of how media outlets pursue commercial viability by addressing audiences as "consumers who *want* to be entertained rather than (or in addition to) citizens who *should* be informed" (Boukes, 2019).

Instrumental rationality/reason/logic/use: determining the best or most efficient means to an end; the use of others or objects to achieve a desired goal (crucially, instrumental reason does not consider the value of those ends and can be used to pursue harmful or evil goals. Also, and perhaps more commonly, a focus on instrumental reason means the value of ends is not even considered)

Interpellation (interpellated): the constitutive process where individuals are ideologically hailed and thus recognize themselves as subjects; the enabling social invitation (to which one responds) to specific roles, logics, values, systems of meaning and discipline, i.e., subjecthood; ideological reductions that invite individuals into specific subject positions

Intimate public (sphere): coined by Lauren Berlant, a juxtapolitical public sphere where strangers share a worldview and emotional knowledge based on shared historical experiences and gender-based interpellations. According to Berlant, the intimate public is a continuously renewed achievement, sustained by consumer culture, existing as an affective space of attachment to manage disappointment and seek relief from the political. Such an affective space made food an intimately moral issue, and women could negotiate cooking and eating as a simultaneously public, private, and common concern.

Latent commons: as devised by Anna Tsing (2015), a broadened consideration of "the commons"—something affecting or belonging to the whole community—it was defined in the negative so it would not be easily co-opted. Unnoticed and underdeveloped, the latent commons do not only include humans, are not the "common good," are not easily institutionalized, and cannot save or redeem humanity. In this project, cultivating the latent commons is also a process of identity work that invites a different, more care-engendering subject position than the neoliberal sovereign consumer.

Lifestyle: as opposed to a *way of life* which everyone shares (e.g., commodity capitalism), a particular aesthetic manner, mode, and appearance to carry out one's living. It is constructed through an integrated web of consumer goods, practices, services, and media. In post-traditional society, seen as voluntary and expressive with informal ties to the individual who, with proper resources, is seemingly able to change lifestyles at will. It is thus a particular aesthetic mode (or style) to carry out and perform an individual's way of living and, today, is supposedly a matter of choice and sampling.

in Marketing: category to target and organize particular consumer groups; differentiating individuals through goods and service

Lifestyle journalism: journalistic field characterized by entertainment and a consumer focus, providing interest stories, guidance, reviews, and advice in amusing or generally pleasing ways; addresses the expressive values and practices involved in identity work

2. More directly considered in relation to consumerism, lifestyle journalism: "primarily focuses on audiences as consumers, providing them with factual information and advice, often in entertaining ways, about goods and services they can use in their daily lives" (Hanusch, 2012a, p. 2).

Lifeworld/ the lived world: the world as it exists to a situated, embedded subject; one filled with embodied experiences and sensations, imaginative possibilities, and active desires, not just the objective world as-it-is.

Liquid modernity: coined by Zygmunt Bauman, in this work, liquid modernity is synonymous with *late modernity* and highlights the ephemeral, flexible relationships, identities, institutions, organizations, flows of capital, meanings, and loyalties that characterize it. Liquid modernity is also juxtaposed with the more solid state of Fordist modernity where things like job security, clearly defined nation states, and "proper" gender roles were more permanent fixtures of a social contract

Master signifier: in discourse studies, a nodal point of identity orienting a subject. Identity means "identifying with" something, like the master signifier of "American" or being a "man." Different discourses then fill the master signifier with meaning, articulating specific values and traits to the term and of which the individual identifies (and thus thinks and behaves). A master signifier and its concomitant discourse(s) thus provide guiding instructions or an orientation for an individual that considers themselves a "real" man or American.

Material-semiotic: an epistemology, approach, and general fact of existence that sees all human experience, understanding, being, and becoming occurring through relationships and processes of the physical, material world made meaningful through a symbolic, ideational, and otherwise cultural system, set of practices, and logics. For humans (and utilizers of language) the material world is made meaningful. Not a matter of one causing the other (e.g., prioritizing a base-superstructure), this is a dialectical process of co-constitution negotiated by active human agents. All human agency and phenomenon, however, are guided by how specifically a material world of bodies, plants, animals, and all manner of tangible entities are used and shaped by particular co-constituting individuals in specific cultural, ecological, and otherwise relational contexts. In other words, the material world is made meaningful from a particular view, which then acts in the material world, which then shapes that situated view, and so on. Human existence is characterized by the negotiation of a material world made meaningful.

Media: technological extension of the human senses capable of transcending space and/or time that also acts as a socializing agent, allowing individual to vicariously experience something (e.g., communication, event, idea) otherwise would not, while also providing member resources communicating what is good, valuable, true, and expected.

Member resources: socially acquired cognitive tools and schemata to interpret and understand the world; publicly available symbolic systems and necessary understandings enabling cultural literacy and intelligibility. Member resources thus allow individuals to be part of a cultural group as they are the common understandings and logics that constitute group membership. On a more modest scale, member resources can also apply to media outlets and how they address audiences about a particular topic. If an outlet assumes low member resources, it may take more time to explain certain aspects while presupposing high member resources means an outlet could address more complex issues without rehashing more basic ideas.

Nodal point: in discourse studies, a privileged sign around which other signs are situated and ordered (e.g., in medical discourse, "the body" is a nodal point)

Objective reporting: otherwise known as "just the facts" news, objectivity in journalism became a dominate news value around the turn of the twentieth century and is characterized by positivist language communicating the who-what-where-and-when of a news "story." An oft-contested claim, much legacy media prided (prides) itself on objective reporting also understood as a limitation of "bias" in news coverage. Ultimately naïve about how language and communication operate discursively (i.e., through selection, exclusion, arbitrary association, ideological reduction, purposeful articulation, etc.), it is

the Omnivore's dilemma: if people do not have a biological imperative to eat something specific, can eat just about anything, and may in fact need a varied diet for optimal nutrition, then what, how, when, and with whom should they eat?

Othering/othered: the social and psychological practices of declaring someone irredeemably "Other," thereby denigrating, marginalizing, or excluding them. Defining oneself against someone identified as dissimilar especially through stereotypes and ideological squaring.

Performance (performing identity): carrying out and thus fulfilling; bringing into existence through a specific iteration or manifestation.

Drawing on Judith Butler, German philosophy's dialectic, and poststructuralism's linguistic theory, performance and performing identity means the world does not existence as a static, independent, or path-dependent entity but that identities must be constantly brought *to* life and established through repetition. Each moment is a new opportunity for life to be different and it takes the constant performance of identities, ideals, rules, structures, phenomena, etc. to make the world what it is and constantly becomes.

Personalization/to personalize: 1. the catering of media and/or consumer goods to the individual, both to their supposed preferences and as if personally inviting them specifically 2. In marketing, branding, and public relations, the use of a either a "real" person or mascot, to represent a client, corporation, organization, or other interest. Personalization thus characterizes the action of industrial food companies (e.g., boxed cereal brands, canned good manufacturers, pre-made or semi-prepared food makers, grocery stores, etc.), the restaurant industry (e.g., celebrity chefs, known investors, and branding), and food media companies (e.g., *TVFN* celebrity chefs and presenters or *NYT* journalists, recipe relayers, and poetic fellow eaters)

POC: while normally referring to "person or people of color," it here means "people of culture": those marked as distinct or idiosyncratic in terms of food practices and traditions

Post-cuisine: a culture-blind approach to food that disregards history, tradition, geographic origin, individual background, and any factors relating to the symbolic context or meaning of eating. Instead, food is treated as a blank slate that has always existed and purely a matter of personal choice.

Post-Fordism: as opposed to a neo-Fordism that reworked the original social contract, post-Fordism eschewed long term contracts in exchange for more flexible accumulation. Instead of a set and relatively stable factory system based on mass production and economies of scale, post-Fordism has just-in-time supply chains and aims to specialize and target specific markets with economies of scope. It also characterized by a move towards dematerialization or generating surplus value beyond physical production and is reliant on financialization and the availability of credit. With the quick shifts and adjustments demanded for flexible accumulation, workers themselves must also be entrepreneurial, constantly changing and conforming to the current needs of the market. This sharply contrasts with the specialized assembly line worker with the single skill and adds another level of precarity to labor in late modern capitalism.

Postmodern: a characterization and periodization that sees the current moment in history as one surpassing the "modern" because individuals are now supposedly free from the institutions and limits of the past and able to play, negotiate, and appropriate the world as they see fit. This contrasts with the *late modern* moniker which holds that such agency is exaggerated as traditional, modern institutions still very much hold power and sway.

Productive silence: in discourse and identity studies, how something or someone is defined by what they exclude or leave out; a constitutive absence

Public sphere: as originally conceived (Habermas, 1962/1989), a space independent of the market and state where individuals could ignore ("bracket") their inequalities and freely deliberate issues to then influence policy. Feminists and critical race theorists have shown how such a space has never historically existed and that public spheres are built on exclusion. To varying degrees, it remains an ideal for journalism, something to continually strive for and to use for understanding journalism's limitations. A more comprehensive understanding of "the political," again by feminist theorists, further argues that a public sphere does not exist to only influence policy but can influence and inform the politics of everyday life (i.e., the context the co-constituting individuals).

Race: a social construct that gives meaning to one's physical features, confusing biology, culture, history, individual temperament, and destiny

Radical contingency: in critical philosophy, a recognition that things could be different, that *what is* depends on a specific context and combination of possible outcomes and could therefore change or be made otherwise. In critical discourse studies, the view that a discourse attempts to fix meaning, to tame polysemy, and make permanent connections between certain ideas and concepts. While not arbitrary, this reduction of possible meaning is also not necessary, that is, it is not inevitable, required, or the exclusively only way. The contrary is possible and specific discourses are created by active agents making choices, they do not arise of their own volition. A discourse is thus radically contingent: contestable and subject to challenge, change, transformation, and iterative performance.

Rationalization/rationalizing/rationalize: in sociology or modernization theory, the attempt to make ad hoc processes more efficient through predictability and control; or the professionalization or bureaucratization of a social role or process to organize or replace traditions, values, and emotions for rational ends (such as governing or accumulating capital).

2. in psychology, a defense mechanism to explain and justify one's behavior

3. critical discourse studies uses both forms of rationalization to show how attempts to implement control come with their own legitimations and limitations. Attempts at legitimacy are necessarily built on a reductive logic of exclusion and can take the form of ideological squaring or othering.

Reason-why marketing, advertising, and sales technique providing an explicit but often psychologically subtle motivation for purchasing a particular commodity; giving a rational reason-why someone should buy/pay attention/engage/value something, ideally in an effective manner which pre-empts any concerns, provides positive associations, and still appeals to the psychological, social, and emotional sides of an individual.

Reify/reification: to make something abstract more concrete and real; to give material form to an idea and thus to articulate, shape, and make more permanent

Selective tradition: per Raymond Williams (2005), a process where a dominant culture purposefully picks and chooses certain practices, meanings, and interpretations of the past and posits them as *the* tradition, a monolithic and all-encompassing entity without dispute, nuance, or recognition of its exclusions and appropriations.

Service journalism: as originally devised (Eide & Knight, 1999), so-called "news you can use" where content addressed audiences as customers and clients, blending marketing and instruction to provide advice and guidance for the negotiation of everyday life. Akin to lifestyle journalism, the current study argues that service journalism addresses audiences primarily as consumers and thus services the neoliberal status quo.

Social imaginary: imagination as a social practice (Appadurai, 1996) capable of building communities, engendering common purpose and action, and otherwise resulting in worldmaking. The social imaginary also comes with its own logics and forms of legitimization (Taylor, 2004), and is a key component in the social construction of reality. The *imagination* is thus not mere fantasy or escape, but has material consequences for how society is structured and how individuals can dialectically negotiate their realities of everyday life.

(the) Sovereign consumer: the foundational subject position of neoliberal thinking that subjugates all decisions—social, cultural, political, emotional, individual—to the undifferentiated desires of those able to pay. Individualizing all agency to the level of consumption, the realm of politics is depoliticized with market logic while the market itself is exalted as the highest form of political freedom. This invitation to identity can provide tangible, embodied satisfaction, prioritizes the individual to the point of fetish, and benefits owners and those already resourced with capital.

Standfirst: in newspaper/magazine/digital layout, the introductory teaser of text after the headline and typographically distinct from the rest of the article. In the digital realm, this is particularly important as it supplements and can prove more compelling than the headline (with the added possibility it was read instead of the headline). A media outlet's discursive strategy in the standfirst is thus telling, as its author use an attention-grabbing shortcut format, succinctly providing their invitations and interpellations towards specific subject-positions for readers.

Strategic essentialism: per Gayatri Spivak (1988), an understanding of identity that recognizes difference and nuance within groups but also holds that it can be socially and

politically necessary to mobilize around an “essentialized” shared identity to achieve certain goals (e.g., recognizing “womanhood” to address the gender wage gap or uniting around being “Black” in the long struggle for civil rights)

Stereotype: a widely disseminated, relatively fixed, and simplified idea of a person or thing (the term is derived from a printing technology, a solid metal plate that served as a more durable template to mass produce copies). Stereotypes are often formed and employed in processes of othering and ideological squaring. It is also a key component of institutional racism.

Subject position: another term for identity stressing how individuals are invited to occupy a particular point of view and set of relationships; identity is identification-with, from a particular way of approaching and considering a matter, from a specific situated location (i.e., context) and reduced-for-comprehension logic

Tabloid: appearing with the commercialization of news, a media product characterized by its popular appeal utilizing attention-grabbing headlines, a large amount of imagery, sensationalist stories, and gossip.

Trans-corporeality: the interconnection of organic beings and the maintaining of bodies through material flows, contamination, and co-constitution. Coined by Alaimo, she argued humans are inseparable from something called the natural world and it was more accurate to say that human bodies are an expression of the environment.

Worldmaking: there being different views and versions of the world, the idea that human understanding of the world must be made as is done by artists, scientists, and philosophers (Goodman, 1978). We can add journalists who ideally embody all three.

IF IT FEEDS, IT LEADS: EATING, MEDIA, IDENTITY, AND ECOFEMINIST FOOD JOURNALISM

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ABSTRACT

This project explored contemporary food journalism and placed it in the larger context of American history, asking how such media made eating a matter of public concern. In other words, it asked: how does food journalism invite us to our eating identities and what are the ethical obligations of food journalists? I used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine three contemporary media outlets, each originating at a different point in food journalism's history: *The New York Times* Food section, TV Food Network, and Vox Media's Eater. I historically contextualized these outlets and their content, further using them to make a larger critique of the current social order. Incorporating the history of food, media, consumerism, and the political economic institutions of the U.S., I also investigated how the active negotiation of civic/eating/consumer identities transformed into ethically compromised positions of hyperindividualism. This occurred within a context of a *neoliberal consensus* where market fundamentalism dominates the political conversations of worldmaking. Individuals are now expected to be isolated entrepreneurs, conforming to the needs of 'the market.' I thus argue that food media is *neoliberalized* and food journalists must match the logic of this worldview or face exclusion from a commercialized attention economy built on surveillance, predictability, and control. Taking the long view, I delineate how the liberalism that created modern journalism transformed into neoliberal media. Keeping residual elements of liberalism's once progressive project, I deconstruct

the misguided presuppositions of neo/liberalism and offer a counterhegemonic approach to journalism and food media. Establishing a position of *ecofeminist food journalism*, I then explore how such media invites new, more caring citizens and better feeds the social and ecological connections necessary for democratic, human, and multi-species flourishing.

Introduction

In 2009, The New School hosted a panel titled *Craig Claiborne and the Invention of Food Journalism*. Claiborne was the first male food editor of the *New York Times,* appointed in 1957. Panelists described Claiborne's role in changing American's taste—even giving them a sense of one. He was credited with making food "newsworthy" and convincing a Puritan nation that food could be pleasurable. Women, however, had been doing the serious work of food journalism well before Claiborne (Voss, 2014). Molly O'Neill (2003), herself on the panel, described how the term "food writer" was first applied to Claiborne's predecessor, Jane Nickerson, *Times* food editor from 1942-1957. Nickerson, she argued, was the first to apply "news-side ethics to the food report" (p. 40). In fact, women since the late 19th century had written about food in the so-called women's pages. Covering the "four F's"—food, family, fashion, and furnishings—women could thus enter the wage-earning workforce but only in-line with their traditional homemaker role (Matthaei, 1982). Despite gendered limitations, these educated women were journalists and professionals. Claiborne may have brought a new sense of aesthetic flair to American food journalism, but he certainly did not invent the genre. Giving him credit reveals more about the aestheticized, individualizing state of late modern food media than it does about the history of food journalism's development. This paper explains how so-called women's work was commodified, and food journalism in the United States has evolved from gendered practical advice to a stylistic convention that treats food as a social marker of distinction, integrates eating into a lifestyle-driven attention economy, and encourages consumerism.

Problem Statement

Food journalism in the United States was born during the commercialization of news and foodstuffs in the 19th century and changed with the rapid social, economic, and cultural transformations of the 20th and 21st centuries. Before the endless offerings of the internet, women food writers created a public sphere around all things edible. They helped audiences negotiate new technologies, practices, ingredients, cuisines, and products, as the 20th century saw the introduction of many phenomenon now taken for granted: refrigeration, electric stoves, grocery stores, blenders, frozen dinners, canned soups, sliced bread, avocado, the list goes on. What began as the "women's pages" transitioned into the "lifestyle" section, and by the 1970s food media was and is primarily the purview of lifestyle journalism (Harp, 2006). Such journalism fundamentally addresses its audience as consumers, and scholars have largely ignored this cultural field as it does not meet the normative ideals of "serious" journalism (Hanusch, 2012a; Zelizer, 2011). Despite its relegation, lifestyle media is a key component of our contemporary digital attention economy and constitutes a significant part of the social imaginary (Appadurai, 1996; Taylor, 2004) and public discourse. It thus demands serious consideration.

The proliferation of lifestyle journalism in the United States roughly coincided with what some scholars have identified as the second food regime, a period of global U.S. hegemony (Friedman & McMichael, 1989). As the U.S. asserted its dominance in the postwar global agroeconomic order, its citizens tasted the various "ethnic" foods the increasingly connected world had to offer (Ray, 2016). Scholars have thus argued that mid-century women food journalists could serve as "culinary anthropologists" by guiding

readers through a culturally diverse foodscape (Voss, 2012). These food sections could make the world's cuisines less intimidating and helped inform their readers about exotic ingredients or contextualize unknown global culinary influences. They could embolden readers and encourage experimentation, assuaging audience hesitations with the assurances of a sanctioned culinary authority. Food media's considerations of foreign cuisines has only proliferated and is a regular feature in our multicultural, globalized world. Some sociologists even argue that knowledge of "ethnic" foods is one of the primary driving factors guiding food choice and social distinction (Johnston & Bauman, 2007). These celebratory narratives are undertheorized, however, and require a closer investigation of political-economic power and the social construction of identity and difference.

Statement of Purpose

This project examines and contextualizes contemporary food media and how specific outlets and actors establish their authority, make food newsworthy, and otherwise invite audiences into the public sphere of eating. Using a historical lens, it also shows how particular outlets create representations and systems of meaning around those deemed *other*. If journalism scholars consider food journalists anthropologists, postcolonial studies has also documented the various ways anthropologists created knowledge about "indigenous" peoples to advance European colonization and nationalism (Said, 1978; Zimmerman 2001). The fact that food journalists discuss "foreign" food does not automatically equate to social acceptance or cross-cultural understanding and can just as easily result in reductive stereotypes and domination (Herzfeld, 2019). Today, food journalism peddles in both stereotypes and intricate

cultural investigations as race-based thinking persists in new, emergent forms. Colorblind and "model minority" racism permeate the public discourse as do celebratory narratives venerating certain cuisines. Previously marginalized *people of color* (the original POC) are embraced as desirable *people of culture* (an emergent POC), valued for an ability to provide consumers the grounding, "added value," and mark of distinction characterized by history, tradition, and a connection to authenticity. Such thinking decontextualizes cultural identity and creates racial hierarchies according to an American palate, even as it presents itself as a post-racial meritocracy of the delicious. Understanding food journalism as an institution, set of practices, and field with discursive limits thus reveals the priorities, values, principles, ethical orientations, worldviews, and power relations at play in the creation, maintenance, and transformation of society, both materially and symbolically. Such a view allows an opportunity to pose alternatives and pursue a more democratic form of journalistic excellence, one defined by an ability to invite informed citizens into more just and caring relationships.

To this end, I purposefully sample three different food media outlets operating in the U.S. American context. The U.S. has been an epicenter of industrial agriculture, commercial media, professional journalistic development, and the social transformations engendered by a total consumer society. This project thus focused on the U.S. while also providing a platform for future cross-cultural comparisons. Each outlet here examined originated at a different point in the history of food journalism and each maintains a strong digital presence today: 1) legacy media outlet *The New York Times* (*NYT)* 2) the originally news-based and now entertainment-driven TV Food Network (TVFN) and 3) digital first outlet Eater (owned by conglomerate Vox Media). After characterizing and

analyzing the content and routines of each outlet, I contextualize contemporary U.S. American food media. I show how these are the products of a longer historical development of American liberalism, racism, commercialized media, journalistic ideals, and consumerism, all captured by the specifically defined term, *neoliberalism*. I then offer an alternative ethical and epistemological orientation for food journalism in the form of what I call *ecofeminist food journalism* (EFJ).

Research Questions

To understand how food media discursively operate to establish authority, legitimacy, and meaning, a number of abstract questions are posed while answers remain historically specific and intricately tied to context. Firstly, how do these media outlets interpellate (Althusser, 2001) or invite individuals to consider food, eating, and the material systems that enable consumption? That is, how do the discursive practices of specific outlets create a subject position (Hall, 1997) for individuals to occupy and make sense of how and what they eat? Furthermore, what are the potential material and social consequences for this process of subjectification (Goodman, et al., 2017)? Second, how do these outlets invite audiences to imagine the relationship between food, culture, and identity? Is eating inherently a cultural act tied to tradition and place or is it decontextualized and considered a matter of personal choice and private experience? When food is associated with a particular cultural group, how is this connection made and what are the most salient aspects of this characterization? Considering its multicultural history, do these outlets evoke a distinctly "American" cuisine? These two sets of questions thus address each outlets' general approach to food as well as specific details regarding their logics and strategies when positioning subjects and engendering

identity work (i.e., inviting audiences to identify with specific relationships, processes, and socially derived meanings).

Because we are concerned with food *journalism*, however, and media's social role serving the public, a third set of questions guides this inquiry. These questions build on the previous ones as journalism is considered a unique institution with certain social functions, standards, and principles. Recognizing the importance of communication to society, it simply asks, what is media feeding us? Is it a worthy spread that ensures a comprehensive vision of global society and ecology? Does it engender care for those vital systems that nourish and connect us? Is it a healthy diet of images and representations that help citizens of the world feed themselves, their communities, and the relationships that bind them? To tweak one moral imperative of the Hutchins Commission's recommendation for *A Free and Responsible Press* (1947), does it provide a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent accounts of the day's *food* news in a context which gives it meaning? In other words, do the ways our media invite us to think about food feed the social connections necessary to empower democratic actors?

Overview of Methodology

To answer these questions, I engage Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is a broad label and should be considered an approach rather than a method. While it is an extremely rigorous approach to language use as social practice, it is also flexible and customizable. A defining feature of CDA, however is its end purpose. CDA does not solely analyze media texts; it is an analysis to critique the social order (Fairclough, 2015). This is achieved by contextualizing media outlets and their activities as well as comprehensively considering relationships of power—especially those deemed

illegitimate, unjust, or harmful. CDA is further explicated in the Methodology Chapter, but it is here necessary to mention the interdisciplinary nature of my particular approach.

Because CDA is concerned with context and examinations of power, this project requires historical analysis as well as political and ethical theory. The term "discourse" refers to the way a certain topic or idea is positioned and discussed, resulting in specific material consequences and possibilities. Discourses are not spontaneous but develop over time (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). This project thus incorporates the history of food writing and journalism as well as larger political, social, and cultural histories to better understand why contemporary food media looks the way it does. This includes a historical consideration of consumer culture and its concomitant lifestyle journalism. Closely related, I also utilize literature on liberalism, neoliberalism, and critical theory to theorize power and the potential consequences of these historical transformations on individual subjectivity and social relationships. Ethics—especially as it obtains to media practices and journalism's social role for democracy—further allows me to complete the final stage of CDA and critique the social order and its institutional understandings of reality. Based on previous research, I argue the ethics of care best serves this end.

As social phenomena, however, the complexities of food and media demands further interdisciplinary interventions, and I also draw on anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies. Anthropology illuminates both the systems of meaning that deem certain items edible and also the networks of material relations and practices that enable a specific cuisine. Rural sociology is especially adept at tracing the history of our modern material relations and characterizing its current state. Sociology offers competing theories of the late modern self and society while also specifically addressing food choices and the

different social structures and processes that shape our relationship with what we eat. Cultural studies adds further analytical refinement as it zooms in and focuses on particular eating rituals, routines, practices, and identities/identification within certain relationships of power and meaning. Together, these approaches and histories show how the production of both food and media enables the idiosyncrasies of their consumption. It also allows us to question the entangled material and symbolic webs that determine what, how, when, and why we eat and ultimately ask if these nourish our communities.

To answer questions about food, culture, and identity, I utilize postcolonial studies, feminist theory, and critical race theory (CRT). Postcolonial studies provides a lens to understand the process of *othering* and the power dynamics of global culture and exoticism (Ashworth, et al., 1998; Fanon, 1952; Said, 1978; Welsh, 2018). More than any other field, feminist theory has challenged traditional notions of identity as static, monolithic, and unified. Instead, identity is seen as something continuously performed and brought into existence (Butler, 1990) as well as fluctuating with the complexities of intersectionality and context (Davis, 1981). Such thinking is especially appropriate given the gendered nature of food practices and food journalism history. Along related lines, CRT is primarily concerned with the "social construction" of race and what it calls "racial formations" (Omi & Winant, 2004). It is interactions between humans and not any sort of natural difference that creates "race" (Haney López, 1994). A person's race is thus the result of historical contingency and specific circumstances. While a person's appearance may be tied to ancestry and other contingent factors outside of their control, it is a particular society that gives such an appearance a specific meaning. Race, therefore, does not emanate from within, but is (re)created in everyday circumstances within a

specific context. Food media is a popular arena for racial formations, and this project shows that race is not merely negotiated at the level of politics or theory but also manifests in the negotiation and dialectics of everyday life.

Significance

This project is thus not just about food, though we all eat, nor can it be reduced to understanding media, though we all participate in those systems as well. In today's media environment, food journalism may even appear just another niche interest (Jones & Taylor, 2012). Food discourse, however, and its various genres, domains, themes, logics, tropes, and values has real material consequences and reveals deep-seated insecurities and inequalities (Flannery & Mincyte, 2010). Approaching what we eat as a discursive construction means appreciating how the physical, material world is *made* to mean, how specific objects and practices are made meaningful. A sociologist might describe this as the social construction of meaning (Berger & Luckman, 1966) while anthropologists would ask us to question the "social life" of our everyday objects (Appadurai, 1986). Such an approach means delineating how active agents, institutions, and discourses co-constitute one another. This project presupposes that ways of knowing, doing, and being are inseparably entangled and directly impact our ideas and potentials of living a good life. In other words, ethics are always situated within an epistemology and ontology, and it is our collective responsibility to understand this relationship and ensure it is bent towards justice and care.

As food writing moved into food journalism and became part of a public sphere, the material realities of food production, distribution, packaging, retail, storage, preparation, and consumption were also dramatically changing. The global political and

economic order—including the time-space compression of worldwide commodity and media systems—was also taking shape (Harvey, 1989). Food discourses illustrate the role of power and privilege in these transformations, but so too do they engender the possibilities of accountability, responsibility, and justice. Eating is the act of incorporating some part of the external world into our bodies; the external is made internal and literally becomes part of who we are. How this relationship is deliberated in the public sphere can show us how we constitute ourselves by the way we eat with others. Furthermore, we can ask if ours is an inclusive communal table attune to the complexities, nuances, and joys of the examined life.

Organization of Study

Chapter 1 reviews relevant literature on the social and gendered aspects of food and food writing. It also defines key concepts used throughout the study such as lifestyle, cuisine, culinary capital, and the omnivore's dilemma. While popular knowledge holds taste in food as a matter of individual preference, this literature shows that eating practices are the result of socialization and is enabled by a host of social, cultural, and material factors. The origins of food writing are also discussed as food media facilitated "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983) and made taste a matter of public concern (Ferguson, 2014). Contemporary food media practices display residual cultural elements with this history, while also exhibiting emergent cultural forms engendered by our current context.

The social origins and manifestations of food and food writing, however, are not isolated phenomena and require additional contextualization. As an approach, CDA requires supplemental theories and histories to understand the circumstances and "non-

discursive" elements that co-constitute the meanings and social practices of language use. Chapter 2 thus addresses the relevant histories of food, media, and U.S. American society including the foundations of modernity and the late modern context including: the transition from classical liberalism to neoliberalism, modern vs. postmodern conceptions of identity, the ideal role of journalism in a democracy, industrialized farming and the changing definitions of food, and the evolution of consumer culture—including the commercialization of both food and media.

This history explains how food media evolved from liberal ideas about individual sovereignty, the use of markets, and the potentials of media as an institution of accountability to a *neoliberalized* space of individualized consumers, informal authority, the micro-ethics of shopping, and the compulsions of ever-increasing profit. It also identifies the key social transformations that reoriented society from Fordist producers to individualized neoliberal consumers with every institution and aspect of social life geared towards the circulation and accumulation of capital. Far from an inevitability, these developments were the result of specific decisions and strategic alliances. Also not a matter of individual choice, however, food journalists and media makers faced compulsions to conform to a neoliberal worldview or face exclusion from a highly commercialized public sphere. Exacerbated by a digital attention economy predicated on surveillance and algorithm-driven predictability and control, food media are geared towards commanding attention and "engagement" not necessarily inducing deliberation, comprehensive understanding, or empathy. The latter are foundational to democracy, and this history explains how the current state of food journalism is not merely the product of professionally made decisions or individual choices. On the contrary, it delineates how

both society and media have been *neoliberalized*, making individuals less sovereign and subject to a racist, sexist, and irrational market fundamentalism. This process also engenders specific forms of resistance, protest, and challenge, and food media outlets show varying degrees of countering or supporting the status quo and the path-dependency of capitalist accumulation.

Chapter 3 lays out my method and approach, broadly considered as critical discourse analysis (CDA). It also situates the study squarely within the critical-cultural paradigm, one that takes a dialectical and social constructivist approach. The purpose of such scholarship is not to merely describe or analyze social phenomena, but to offer a constructive social critique. After describing the specific parameters of the empirical "data" gathered for this study, the second part of Chapter 3 posits how such data is applied to critique, theorizing the relationship between communication and society, as well as media and individual identity work. In short, society is formed *through* the act of communication and individuals must constantly identify (or not) with the social invitations on offer. Social critique thus comes from contemplating how individual subjects and group identities are positioned and the material, ethical, and epistemological consequences of such an arrangement.

Equipped with the proper conceptual and historical understandings of food, media, and society, Chapter 4 delineates the findings of an empirical investigation of three contemporary food media outlets (TVFN, *NYT* Food, and Eater). This chapter compares and contrasts the stated goals, content, and discursive practices of these outlets and asks how they invite audiences to consider food, its material-semiotic relationships, and everything involved in the socio-ecologically enabled act of eating. While each outlet

had its own idiom and target audience, there was also significant overlap in terms of treating cuisine and tradition as a form of novelty, offering consumer “solutions” for the ambivalent pleasures of eating, and using food and cooking as a form of cultural capital and social display.

Chapter 4 also delineates the empirical findings of each outlet’s construction of cuisine and food as cultural identity. TVFN, contrary to past practices, primarily employed a post-cuisine or culture-blind approach and avoided issues of appropriation, authority, or cultural ownership by ignoring the history, migrations, and social issues surrounding food. This mimics the so-called “color-blind” racism of those that consider themselves and the current social order as post-racial, apparently “not seeing race” as a relevant contemporary issue (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). *NYT* and Eater, on the other hand, embraced cultural difference and celebrated a range of cuisines. These outlets nuanced what had previously been essentialized identities and showed how culture and cuisine could change in new contexts, negotiated as they were by situated individuals embedded in specific circumstances. Cultural definitions of food were thus fluid and flexible while knowledge about cuisines could be a form of social distinction. Indicating shared history, the moorings of tradition, and an adaptable authenticity, cultural markers of food were thus a desirable spice and tool for differentiation in a foodscape where eating one thing was just as good as eating the next.

Chapter 5 then contextualizes these findings within the larger narrative of food, media, and identity in U.S. America. Shaped by history, each outlet constructed the meaning of food in related by idiosyncratic ways, and the minute differences between each outlet reveals just as much as the commonalities. All three outlets individualized

audiences as consumers, exercised an informal authority that deferred to consumer choice, and further promoted the aestheticization of everyday life, cultivating the renewable consumer potential of every mundane moment. Each outlet, however, offered its own range of embracing, reluctantly accepting, or cynically criticizing this process, and audiences were free to choose how rebellious they wanted to feel. Still encompassed by the logic of consumerism and neoliberal market fundamentalism, food media could thus commodify its own resistance, neutralize the proliferation of counternarratives, and legitimize its own practices by providing restrained criticisms incapable of alternative thought.

Chapter 5 also provides a more robust analysis of each outlet's approach to culture and cuisine, placing these discursive strategies within the context of neoliberal logic. TVFN most aligned with the colorblind racism of neoliberalism, the residual stereotypes of colonial thinking now being employed without the benefit of recognition and by actively eliminating people from consideration. *NYT* and Eater, while exploratory and nuanced in their approach to culture, could recreate the "model minority" or "good immigrant" narrative in their celebratory mode. Furthermore, cultural aspects of food were isolated from political-economic understandings of eating, and food was reduced to just another commodity, eating identity just a matter of choice. All three outlets thus used cultures and cuisines with varying degrees of recognition, and commodified them as markers of distinction, a matter of choice, and a form of individualized pleasure. This thin understanding of culture maps onto a neoliberal episteme that reduces human agency to an unconnected series of choices from the already given. While not intentionally nefarious, such thinking limits cross-cultural understanding, ignores political-economic

power dynamics, and hinders any chance at comprehensively understanding the socioecological enabling of eating. This eliminates the people and processes that make eating possible from the minds of consumers and ultimately harms each eater's individual sovereignty.

The final section of Chapter 5 proposes a counterhegemonic alternative to neoliberalized media. Drawing on three forms of feminist theory—care ethics, critical ecology, and feminist political theory—this section speaks back to liberal and neoliberal presuppositions, offering an outline of what I call *ecofeminist food journalism* (EFJ). EFJ is better equipped to serve an entangled eating public of co-constituting citizens and nourishes the process of democracy by emphasizing the embedded, embodied, and relational facts of eating. The individual is not the start or end point of eating, as food exists in a constantly negotiated system of material and semiotic construction. Food journalism is a thus a difficult beat, and EFJ provides the ontology, epistemology, and ethical orientation necessary to cultivate care and reclaim food sovereignty.

Chapter 6 concludes by placing the entire study in a larger context and contemplating the potentials and future of food media and late modern consumer culture. Taking the long view, I recommend a reevaluation of value and offer a reminder that there can be no final answers to the ethical implications of eating, media, and identity. Each is constantly articulated, negotiated, and performed into existence, and the best we can do is manage the tensions of an entangled world. Food media must thus be adequately funded outside the commercial logic of profit, and the value created by such communications should primarily be under nonprofit community control. I further question a neoliberal, capitalist social order that impedes the democratic realization of

adequate care and make suggestions for EFJ moving forward. Recognizing the limitations of media for engendering a better world, the work concludes with an appeal to a caring citizenry who need only answer their hunger for change.

Chapter 1: Establishing Edibility and Creating Cuisine

Because of their digestive systems, biological endowments, and immediate environments, rabbits eat primarily grass, spiders feed on insects, and koala bears mainly munch on eucalyptus leaves. Humans, on the other hand, have a less pronounced biological imperative that determines what we eat. Our evolution and physiology do not substantially limit our dietary choices, and there is no universal human diet. So, if we can eat just about anything, what should we eat? This question has become known as the omnivore's dilemma (Rozin, 1976), and its answer changes drastically across time and space.

Food practices are one of the earliest forms of socialization and what one considers edible and proper to eat is determined from an early age. As one scholar puts it, "food is everyone's first language" (Manton, 1999, p. 1). While individuals have personal preferences and tastes can change, these proclivities are embedded and cultivated within a larger social and historical context. The cultural frames of one's diet are the culmination of social organization, food-getting strategies, environmental factors, histories of migration and cultural encounter, the division of labor, underlying ideologies, and larger political-economic relationships (Crowther, 2018). Archaeologists, anthropologists, and some historians have even defined historical eras or delineated ethnic or cultural groups based on their food practices. In this way, they compared hunters and gathers, to pastoralists, to horticulturists, to those that practiced agriculture. With no biological mandate, immense geographical diversity, and the limitless imaginations of humans living in groups, people around the world have developed a diverse array of choosing, procuring, preparing, serving, and eating food. What is even

considered “food” varies, as one woman’s weed is another man’s herb. Not all cultures, for example, eat rosemary and some see it akin to chewing on a pine tree. One culture’s delicacy—like Sardinian maggot cheese, Japanese pufferfish, fried tarantulas in Cambodia, or the ubiquitous chili cheese fries of the United States—can illicit hesitation or an intense negative reaction in a person from a cultural group with a different diet (Rozin, 1999). A person from the Midwestern United States raised on a beef and potato diet, for example, might gag when trying any number of gourmet seafood dishes enjoyed by an individual from Myanmar. Likewise, this Burmese person may have even worse reactions to their first bite of corn dog or Cheesecake Factory entrée. When, why, how, and what people have come to eat is not arbitrary but is shaped by the contingencies of history, culture, and the ecological systems in which people are embedded.

As omnivores, humans are capable of eating a diverse diet, and as social creatures, this diet is not left for each individual to learn anew. Knowledge about what was poisonous or harmful to eat was shared, and over time—based on human ingenuity and the idiosyncrasies of history, geography, and circumstance—distinct cuisines began to emerge in different parts of the world (Counihan & van Esterik, 1997). A cuisine is a relatively stable, long-term food tradition which has proven itself capable of sustaining multiple generations through time. While cuisines are adaptable, they are characterized by fairly consistent ingredients, preparation methods, flavors, dishes, and eating practices or conventions (Crowther, 2018). While individuals have particular preferences and tastes, cuisines show that these individual tastes are structured by larger social forces and cultural understandings. Having a shared cuisine helps people determine what things are

appropriate to eat, when and with whom to eat them, on what occasions and for what reasons some things are eaten, and how and by whose labor this is all to be achieved.

Cuisines are also a form of enculturation that set expectations for what constitutes a proper meal. An American dinner guest, for example, might feel unsatisfied if they were served cereal or peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. One study found that no matter how much of some other food a Japanese man ate, he did not feel satisfied and full unless his meal included rice (Ichijo & Ranta, 2016). Participating in a familiar cuisine can also create a sense of emotional connection. Immigrants can experience nostalgia for previous lands or unite in new locations around a shared meal (Coe, 2009). Industrial or institutional food such as those served by hospitals, prisons, and schools, are sometimes accused of lacking a certain care or emotional value. This sense of what's edible, what's proper, and what's satisfying provided by cuisines shows that food is more than just physical or biological satisfaction.

Eating is not just about obtaining the proper nutrients or energy to maintain one's body, it is also about emotional and psychological nourishment that comes from participating in a shared cuisine (Bell & Valentine, 1997). Eating cannot be reduced to signaling group belonging or a biological need (though these are part of the process). It can provide a deep sense of visceral satisfaction that also fulfills our need to express and perform our humanity. This performance is not for display but is rather an enactment of what it means to be alive, situated, and embodied. Food—made meaningful through the socialization, memories, rituals, and routines associated with cuisine—feeds our desires for personal comfort, social fulfillment, and completion far beyond the physical realm.

Cuisines are thus social practices built on material-semiotic relationships. This means the specific people that create a particular cuisine constantly negotiate relationships that are simultaneously material (physical and empirical) and semiotic (ideational, symbolic, and conceptual) (Haraway, 1991). Specific plants, animals, fungi, bacteria, or minerals are made meaningful through the appropriately learned practices of selection, procurement, preparation, combination, presentation, and ingesting. Humans need the material substances of something deemed "food" to survive, while what is considered food and how it is handled requires that material substances *mean* something to someone. A person never eats a generic category of something called "food"; they eat specific things deemed edible and produced, obtained, prepared, presented, and consumed in the appropriate manners of one's gastronomic culture or cuisine.

When we decide edibility, the external physical world comes to mean something in our minds. The subject's eating imaginary, her mental resources to decide what and how to eat, is grounded in the material and thus very real. Specific ingredients are made meaningful through certain material practices of procurement, preparation, serving, and ingesting. These in-turn reaffirm relationships, mark distinction, serve as a source of emotional satisfaction, influence how food is procured in the future, and otherwise enable humans to perform or enact their identity, express their humanity, and maintain their physical, emotional, spiritual, and meaning-filled lives (Bourdieu, 1984; Coveney, 2006; Kaplan, 2012; Klein & Watson, 2016). It is also necessary for continued survival and baseline existence. Humans, surviving and thriving by making eating meaningful through cuisine, do not invent new diets from scratch but draw on the shared knowledge of social groups. And just as Anderson (1983) held that "print capitalism" and newspapers helped

create the “imagined community” of the nation state, so did Appadurai (1988) see cookbooks as creating a “national cuisine.” Food practices are learned and food discourse, mediated through various communication channels, is a shared experience that regulates social belonging.

Cuisines can thus facilitate identity work. Identity being “work” refers to the fact that in the modern age, who one is and what one does is less driven by unfiltered tradition and more a process of negotiation and social performance (Butler, 1990; Giddens, 1991; Goffman, 1956; Taylor, 1989). This identity work can happen at multiple levels: one’s individual body, the household, community, city, region, nation, or globally (Bell & Valentine, 1997). Besides group identities, eating can also communicate one’s own preferences and sense of taste, the cultural capital one has developed capable of marking distinction and social status (Bourdieu, 1984; Johnston & Bauman, 2007; Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007). Food is thus also symbolic and an embodiment of value at multiple sociological levels. And even though individuals have unique preferences and feel as if they make their own choices, these idiosyncrasies are socially structured through larger institutions, practices, processes of signification, and cultural understandings. Individuals—as with food, cuisines, and social groups—do not preexist their relationships.

Consuming Cuisine

In our late modern era, sociologists in particular have concerned themselves with the individual’s relation to the group. Bourdieu (1984), for example, uses the term “habitus” to describe the internalization of socialized behaviors, dispositions, and tastes that result from our place in the social order. How one lives amongst “the universe of

lifestyles" is learned, largely subconsciously through one's social position, resulting in an embodied "disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170). According to this view, if one's way of living, carrying oneself, and taste are greatly determined by social positioning then a person's consumption practices are a way to display their "cultural capital" and signal their distinction. Lifestyle and taste are thus learned, internalized, embodied, and performative.

The embodied-ness of lifestyle and taste can make these feel natural, but they are always embedded in specific environments, social relationships, and power dynamics. A person's taste, for example, feels so normal to them that when asked to justify it, individuals often talk of disgust and revulsion to other's tastes. This is "because each taste feels itself to be natural—and so it is, being a habitus—which amounts to rejecting others as unnatural and therefore vicious" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 49). The potential to set one's own lifestyle, taste, and self as a standard to weigh others is clear and could even be encouraged under certain social arrangements. Considering foreign food bizarre, disgusting, or abnormal, for example, is a sometimes gut, visceral reaction. Appreciating the omnivore's dilemma and understanding cuisine as an embedded habitus, however, helps us see the socially, ecologically, and historically contingent nature of our food habits.

Beyond regional notions of cuisine, however, sociologists are also interested in the relationship between social positioning, taste, and class. Primarily using survey data from the 1960s, Bourdieu (1984) argued that taste was created and embodied along class lines and social classes often pathologized the tastes of other classes. One way he explained different class diets was based on how each class saw the body. Amongst the

French working classes, for example, fish and fruit (the banana excepted) were unfit for men as they were not filling, involved delicate practices, and involved restraint. The professional class, on the other hand, embraced such food as it was healthy, light, and low in fat. Not without their gendered preferences, middle-class hors d'oeuvres were categorized according to sex: charcuterie (meat) and strong cheese for the men, raw vegetable crudités for the women. With numerous examples, Bourdieu showed how food preferences and taste were formulated and circulated along class and gender lines, sometimes acting as cultural capital or identity work expressing one's social standing. Class tastes were formed in distinction from other classes so that the working class rejected the formality, constraint, and pretensions of bourgeoisie dining, while the latter looked down upon the simplicity and perceived vulgarity of the working-class diet. The embodiment of food preferences, practices, and knowledge are socially distributed along class and gender lines, perform and cement particular kinds of relationships, and are sometimes negotiated or employed in instances of social competition or distinction. Food is not merely an expression of one's social standing, it constituted and helped (re)produce one's identity and social position.

Some sociologists found the class-diet connection dated and specific to 1960s France. They offered a different characterization of modern food practices and culture. By the 1990s, they argued, the Western foodscape was defined by increasing diversity and novelty and this weakened the relationship between class and food culture (Grunow, 1997). Over time, one sees "diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties in food habits and culinary tastes" (Mennell, 1996, p. 322) between social classes resulting in a "culinary pluralism" and "loss of a single dominant style" (p. 329). Devault (1991),

tracing the gendered nature of food labor, countered Bourdieu's analysis and showed how some women used food to engender care, not just cultivate social or cultural capital (see also Inness, 2000, 2001). These could be accumulated in other settings, however, and the modern woman—one reliant on media more than tradition—used cookbooks and magazines to learn the proper culinary codes. These arguments do not negate Bourdieu's earlier arguments, but supplement and help update his ideas for the late modern age. He would challenge the notion that a demand for newness led to an erosion of class routines as novelty could lead to more nuanced forms of class distinction. Indeed, the 1960s saw an increase in a service sector middle class more willing to spend their money on leisure and gourmet foodstuffs. While diet and food practices cannot be strictly reduced to class, neither can social positioning, economic status, or the habitus formed from one's material upbringing be discounted or ignored.

With more recent data, sociological food scholars continue to keep class as an organizing category in their work, but complicate, nuance, and supplement its relation to food. Some like Lupton (1996), recognize class but prioritize more comprehensive understandings of embodied subjectivity like food's relation to childhood experiences and family, the gendered division of food labor, or the various discourses on health and nutrition guiding eating habits. Brown and Musell (1984), nuanced understandings of class with ethnic identity. Warde (1997), holding that postmodern cultural theorists exaggerated individual autonomy, showed that social embeddedness and normative regulation remained central to eating practices and identity.

Analyzing media representations, economic data, and consumer surveys, Warde (1997) found that the surface of food consumption may have changed over the last thirty

years (1960s to 1990s) but that underlying structures of food meaning and situational logics remained largely consistent. There may be more diversity in the foodscape but this, according to Warde, was more due to the pressures on production to accumulate capital than any kind of demand from consumers. Commodity culture produces the appearance of rapid change, but individuals are not suddenly arbitrarily making food choices and changing eating practices. Individuals are still socialized in a specific way and processes of enculturation and social relationships are key in the production of individual meanings, interpretations, and choices.

Specifically when it came to media, Warde (1997) observed four underlying tensions or antimonies when food was discussed. Each antinomy consisted of two opposing poles and together constituted the range of social appeals or "principles of recommendation" given to late modern individuals about the meaning of their food (p. 59). These were novelty-tradition, health-indulgence, extravagance-economy, and convenience-care. These larger structures of meaning remained consistent for the period investigated (1968-1992), with the dominant emphasis on either end changing with the zeitgeist and particular discursive site.

After survey and field research suggested changes in food practices had been exaggerated, Warde (1997) observed these persistent antimonies and structures of meaning in women's magazines and self-narrated consumer choices. He argued they were part of the underlying "ambivalence of modernity" (p. 67). As individuals were freed from traditional forms of social control, and consumer culture became the ultimate legitimizing narrative, the sovereign consumer was left with no criteria on what to choose. Seeking both individual freedom and collective security, the modern individual

lacked a larger value system upon which to appeal. Food media helped articulate and structure these modern stresses as the magazines were a "discursive institutionalization of anxiety" (p. 177). Because there were no ultimate grounds for choice, magazines and particular authors could strategically choose one pole of the antinomy to support, thereby appearing as expert system to guide the individual. Considered collectively, however, such food media shows the rationalized ways of addressing the structural anxieties arising from modern food choice.

Women's magazines thus created meaning around what one should eat and legitimized their authority by offering justifications for food in line with the tensions engendered by larger social change. Something could be deemed worth eating because it was either novel or traditional, healthy or indulgent, economic or extravagant, convenient or care providing. While an article might pull from multiple pairings, never did it argue both sides of each set. And although this specific study examined women's magazines, the author makes clear that these logics can be applied to any of the inconsistent dietary advice we may receive from the government, health experts, other media sources, or our personal relationships. These antimonies even apply to other institutions and social practices as they constitute the "structural anxieties" of our age (Warde, 1997, p. 55).

Each side of the "structural anxiety" appears justified because of the changes wrought by modernity (read: science, liberal democracy, commercial capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, secularization). The economy demands mass consumption and overworked individuals seem to crave novelty, but so too did people need tradition to anchor themselves in a rapidly changing world. Baudrillard (1998) observed that the modern citizen had a duty to find new pleasures. Novelty in food showed how

contemporary social life attached positive value to the new, interesting, exotic, creative, and different. Variety seemed to be an end in-itself. Food as tradition, on the other hand, was valued for its emotional impact and ability to cement group belonging or revere tried and true practices. Food considered authentic, old-fashioned, or regional acts in the same way. There is no final determining factor on whether a person should eat novel or traditional foods and the magazines from the 1968 to the 1992 found equally good reasons to support either side.

Perhaps less ambivalent is the contradiction between health and indulgence. There is a never-ending parade of voices telling us what is good for us to eat. Nutritionism is a powerful legitimizing discourse used by states, experts, policy makers, commercial interests, and those that would otherwise discipline the body. In an age of personal responsibility, it also appears common sense. To live longer one should eat healthy, and indeed body image and standards of beauty and fitness are new tools of social discipline through self-surveillance (Foucault, 1998; Warde, 1997). But modern living brings a host of stresses and pressures, and food is one arena to seek comfort. Food discourses of indulgence thus focus on the pleasure of eating and recommend giving in to one's desires, spoiling oneself, or partaking in luxury. A driving contradiction of a self-discipline obsessed consumer culture, conversations around healthy eating or gratifying one's pleasures are ubiquitous, salient, and seemingly pressing.

Food practices can also be justified based on cost or resources and whether one should be economic or extravagant. Being economic or frugal is sometimes recommended because it is the economically responsible thing to do. Feeding a household often involves keeping costs in mind as the commodification of food and

obtaining it through the market makes it a matter of budget. Like indulgence, on the other hand, extravagance involves spending more money because you or your family needs a treat or personal comfort. Along similar lines, time is also a scarce resource in the modern era and there is a question of choosing convenience or care. Because everyone is time poor, recipes or foods are recommended because they are quick, easy, and involve little effort. Food as care, on the other hand, involves homemade efforts by a loved one. This labor of love means there are personal and emotional connections that permeate the food and enhance its quality. Modern eating thus involves negotiating a world of limited resources and finding the proper moments to employ those resources for self-maintenance, providing care, and social well-being.

While these structural anxieties of modernity manifest in food discourse, they also provide meaning for people no longer reliant on tradition for dietary guidance. Warde (1997) observed that magazine authors of the 1960s were confident food authorities whose tone was that of a teacher. By the 1990s this tone had shifted, and food writers resembled salespeople who couldn't tell you to buy one thing over another. The more prominent food principles were eating novel things, being healthy and disciplined, watching one's budget, and taking advantage of convenience. The 1990s seemed to further lack a sense of adventure as the commonplace acceptance of ethnic variety led to a "routinization of the exotic" (p. 61). Foreign recipes were introduced without much discussion. Perhaps, Warde argued, people had accepted the consumer dictum to try everything and no longer needed to be coaxed into trying exotic foods like the 1960s. There were also more magazines in the 1990s meaning more food content and more competition. With the proliferation of consumer culture and less definitive answers on

what to eat, Warde further identified four social forces influencing modern consumption: individualization, communification, informalization, and stylization. These tendencies further influenced the form and content of food discourses and practices.

If modern anxieties structure how food is discussed, then modern social processes, according to Warde (1997), further refine how food is understood and consumed. Individualization refers to the detachment of individuals from obligations or institutions in which they were previously embedded. The decline of tradition and the family, for example, would leave individuals free to choose what and how to eat. Individuals are thus interpellated or encouraged to think of themselves not as part of a collective but as lone individuals, free to pursue their "own" tastes. There is not, however, empirical evidence of "individualized" diets where individuals produce all of their own food and preferences. Communification is the opposite. In this phenomenon, individuals having lost their traditions and rootedness aspire to build new communities. Rapid change and authoritative dictates from above also drive people to find some kind of tradition. In food this takes the form of yearning for a culinary community, a shared cuisine. Even if individuals have their own preferences, there is still a social origin to taste. Stylization is a trend ubiquitous in consumer culture but difficult to define. Essentially, it is the codes and rules for behaviors and performance of particular style groups or Maffesoli's (1996) neo-tribes. Stylization is thus a mark of distinction while extending beyond the visual to encompass specific values and behaviors as well. These often come to appear as common sense to group members or hegemonic. And if stylization is about codes and rules, informalization is about social rules and conventions

being relaxed. This challenges tradition and hierarchy and can lead to increased diversity and skepticism.

These social tendencies can be considered when determining influence on food media and eating practices. Along with larger structural anxieties resulting from modern social change, they are useful counters to certain scholars or special interests who dogmatically talk of free individuals, the sovereign consumer, or the heroic consumer that guides the invisible hand. Although there is a strong discourse and belief about choice, individual choice is still socially structured. Warde (1997) argues that producers know this and use it as a strategy. Because industry cannot know exactly what consumers want, one answer is to increase variety. Since overall demand cannot increase much, capitalist firms must find novel ways to make surplus value. One way is to obtain cheap ingredients, use industrial processes to transform them, and significantly mark up the purchase price for profit. Another way is to produce new products and have marketing departments convince people they are necessary. Both strategies involve an intensification of commodification where previously un-commodified forms, such as domestic labor, are replaced by market exchange. Profit is then considered over communal or household needs and variety intensifies. This variety, however, is predominantly quantitative rather than qualitative differentiation. Like Habermas's (1985) argument about the spread of instrumental reason into new social realms, Warde believes the commodity form continues to colonize the lifeworld in less than helpful ways. Individual choice, when romanticized as completely free and undetermined, should be understood within the larger strategies and contexts that he delineates.

Contemporary Culinary Capital

As anthropologists laid out the cultural beginnings of edibility and cuisine, sociologists showed that individual preferences and choice are socially structured. Food practices are an early form of socialization and enculturation internalized as a habitus. Besides one's immediate cultural group, gender and class greatly influenced what, how, when, and with whom one ate. But even as history and society organized the limits of one's foodscape, so did the social construction of diet enable a certain amount of freedom, negotiation, and play (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). For individuals in relatively secure social positions, the construction of meaning in the modern foodscape is an opportunity for identity work related to social standing. It is a potential site to improve their social status, create distinction, and accumulate cultural capital. An individual or organization can also try to establish itself as a food and cooking authority, thus accumulating culinary capital. Shortly after the turn of the millennium, sociologists identified a new kind of eater, the foodie, an omnivore seeking pleasure and distinction with their own animating antinomy (Ambrozas, 2003; Johnston & Baumann, 2007).

Foodies emerged from post-industrial societies, a largely middle-or-above class movement concerned with the quality and appropriateness of what they ate. Qualification as a foodie is not dependent on class, however, making it an accessible and flexible identity. More than taking an interest in food, a foodie takes a discerning look at their foodscape and actively delineates what is "best" to eat. Foodies spend a disproportionate amount of time thinking, writing, talking about, and pursuing food. Perpetually chasing edible pleasure, they are open to trying new things while also cultivating a refined sense of taste. Scholars differentiated the foodie from past versions of the gastronome, epicure,

or gourmet. Operating in the late modern context (and often examined in the United States), the foodie's interest lacks the overt elitism or snobbery inherent in these earlier forms of food connoisseurship. Perhaps since the countercultures of the late 1960s, U.S. society in general has seen an increasing aversion to explicit elitism and a growing resentment toward expert knowledge (Bauman & Johnston, 2014; Beck, 1992; Dane, 2004; Schudson, 1978). With the arrival of the internet, some celebrated this trend as a positive move towards egalitarianism and waited for what they claimed was the inevitable democratization of all things (e.g., Friedman, 1999). While the material realities of access and equality remain beyond reach, the current success of populist movements in the U.S. and around the world provide testament to the continued acceptance of anti-elitism. The U.S. has long seen itself as a classless society, with the American dream supposedly open to all those willing to work hard. Today's foodies, even as they pursue aesthetic pleasures in growing levels of refinement, are steeped in a democratic ethos that values the humblest of origins.

Being a foodie, however, means being a cultural critic, and cultural critics require criteria to draw exclusionary lines of distinction and taste. And although foodies may overtly reject the snobbism traditionally associated with haute cuisine, they still need a means to legitimate their food choices. Foodies thus negotiate another modern antinomy and tension, that of democracy and distinction. To achieve this paradoxical goal of unostentatious differentiation and status, foodies construct a discursive realm of exoticism and authenticity (Johnston & Baumann, 2007). The definition of "good" food is expanded beyond French kitchens, and indeed, the world and its various cuisines appear to offer both novelty and some sense of pre-industrial authenticity. One can now

achieve status by being a cultural omnivore, with knowledge of various “traditional” and “ethnic” eating practices and dishes. A person’s taste can also be considered “earned” as they exhibit the skill to discern truly “authentic” food from mere imitation. This further feeds the democratic narrative as food legitimacy is seemingly tied to merit over arbitrary social positioning. Postmodern commentators have long announced the erosion of boundaries between high and low culture, and foodies reaffirm such views as they exalt everyday “peasant” dishes and pay high prices to match. Such an approach to eating appears more democratically inclusive of other cultures and tastes (even if it proves exclusive in terms of price and affordability). It also enables privileged individuals to accumulate cultural capital and exercise their authority on taste through democratic and humble appeals (Heldke, 2012; Johnston & Baumann, 2007). The power to arbitrate taste, economically determine food “winners,” and influence food practices is far from democratic, however, and foodies partly legitimate their status by judging the relative value of other cultures and claiming authority over the traditions of others.

Working within the inequities between the Global North and Global South, foodie preferences—to say nothing of state and corporate influence—can have far-reaching consequences. Quinoa (pronounced keen-wah) is an Andean plant and was first cultivated by the pre-Columbian peoples of Bolivia and Peru over 5,000 years ago (Civitello, 2011). This staple food for the Incas and the generations that followed was identified by foodies and nutritionists in the mid-2000s as a desirable “superfood.” Demand for quinoa spiked and some Andean farmers made an unprecedented amount of money. The demand to export quinoa, however, also priced locals out of the market, making the staple unaffordable. Even if some farmers could afford substitutes, this wasn’t a viable option

for many, and malnutrition in quinoa growing regions began to rise (Romero& Shahriari, 2011). Furthermore, as with all commodity booms, the inevitable bust proved devasting. What looked initially promising proved elusive as large-scale farms outside the Andean region also entered the market. Prices came crashing down and the neglection to grow other, less-profitable crops further undermined local diet and tradition (McDonell, 2018). The commercialization of quinoa as a "superfood" initially enriched some Andean farmers, but ultimately it harmed local communities as it challenged their food sovereignty. Small-scale farmers could not compete with larger economies of scale and global operations with more technology, capital, credit, market access, and policy influence. Farmers and indeed entire populations of the Global South lack institutional protections from such unequal cultural-cum-economic relationships. Attempts at restoring equity such as fair trade or minimum global social standards are set by the powerful, further co-opted by elites, and ultimately benefit those who least need it (Jaffee & Howard, 2010; Nelson & Tallontire, 2014). This case and these issues are only the tip of the iceberg lettuce as our global food system entangles far-flung people, places, and ways of life.

Dining on Discourse

The meaning of food—what is valued, how it is obtained, where authority lies—directly impacts who has access, whose labor is valued, and who is deemed worthy enough to participate and ultimately, eat. The symbolic values of cuisine and the cultural capital of taste determine material livelihoods, transform landscapes, and dictate the terms of social relationships. These are contested processes, however, and active, situated agents constantly generate, challenge, reinforce, resist, appropriate, circulate, and

transform such meanings. A material-semiotic approach to eating allows us to delineate the consequences of our food practices and value systems. This awareness of how specific physical relationships are given legitimacy and made meaningful enables us to actively negotiate an unbalanced and overdetermined foodscape. The first step towards food sovereignty, we could then imagine—in a comprehensive way—the relationship between the good life and our global communal table.

Our current geo/politics of eating and this proposed study is not just about food and media. It is about the constitutive (not repressive) nature of power and its relationship to identity and communication. Power flows through social institutions and is re/produced in everyday life. It does not always emanate from a center or top down but circulates, manifesting in concrete interactions, contexts, and moments. Like late modern identities, power is not something fixed. Neither is it something someone simply has. It is recreated, performed, and hashed out in each instance, negotiated anew in every manifestation (Foucault, 1981). This negotiation, however, is not arbitrary as social, institutional, and historical context limits its terms and possibilities (Gramsci, 2000; Fairclough, 2015). Not everyone has the equal ability to wield power, and such exclusions constitute its very function. The power to establish the meaning of what constitutes "food" and how it is obtained, prepared, served, and consumed is thus ideological work. Such generative and consequential processes require us to critically analyze the many discourses of food.[1]

A discourse is a particular way of positioning and understanding a subject and thus prioritizing certain practices, actions, and truths. Foucault (1978) described this as a

[1] In other words, the politics of eating makes understanding food a moral compulsion for anyone who eats.

knowledge-power nexus, where the understanding of a subject gave someone certain power, not just over the subject but to constitute what was important to begin with. Food, for example, can be considered a commodity, a part of nature, or something cultural (Jacobsen, 2004; Meigs, 1997). The different understandings of food evoke competing logics, priorities, themes, and questions. Food as a commodity prioritizes production, distribution, questions of scale and price, while food as nature considers plants, animals, ecology, and nutrition. Food as culture utilizes notions of history, cuisine, tradition, and exchange. Different discourses legitimate certain values and courses of action. Communication and language use thus exercise the power to constitute the knowledge of an object and one's subject positioning (or identity) related to that object.

Of course, it is human subjects that create discourses on food to begin with. Food is one of the first ways we are socialized, and what we eat soon becomes internalized as common sense. Individuals thus do not invent a food discourse from scratch but draw on their own positionalities, cultural resources, and context. There is no such thing as a purely objective discourse on some neutral, independently existing thing called "food." Certain items—through active agents utilizing social, cultural, and discursive processes—are made edible; they are constructed as food. A discourse is thus not a mere representation or reflection of social reality or how the world is. Instead, a discourse constitutes and mediates our understandings of social reality, society, and the larger material world. A discourse is expressed, circulated, interpreted, and otherwise negotiated by active agents (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). These agents can then reflect or filter that discourse through their own positionality and engagement, acting back and potentially challenging and changing the discourse. This changed discourse, if it

manages to speak to others, then shapes society and the dialectic continues as such, with the world a place of constant becoming: discourses, active agents, and institutions mutually limiting, constituting, and transforming one other.

To understand this social construction of food historically, we can thus contemplate active agents structured by context creating and negotiating their various food-related discourses and institutions. Critically analyzing food media and its various discursive practices over time shows us how power, identity, meaning, labor, and material processes are entangled and enabled by different ways of considering the what, why, how, when, where, and with whom we eat. The history of food media begins with a history of food writing. And while food writing arguably dates back to Sumerians tracking their grain (or perhaps Neolithic animal paintings), this project starts with the most relevant food writings of Modern Europe. As we will see, the history of food writing (and subsequently food media) is often split between gender and class lines, with regional and national identity also finding expression and orienting food discourse (Ashley, et al., 2004; Belasco & Scranton, 2002). When food writing was institutionalized into the magazines and newspapers of the United States, it also took on the social functions (and thus normative obligations) of the press for democracy. Beyond Foucault's knowledge-power nexus, a public sphere that deliberated eating shows how ways of knowing structure social relationships, material expectations, and our moral imaginations.

Writing Food, Reifying Identity

The contingencies of history mixed with the active agency of cultural creation, adaptation, and transmission, resulting in distinct cuisines and diets around the world.

Different people deemed diverse things and specific combinations of things edible and satisfying. We can thus see how "man (sic) is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). Our material-semiotic approach further allows us to observe that "man feeds not only on proteins, fats, carbohydrates, but also on symbols, myths, fantasies" (Fischler, 1980, p. 937). The history of food writing is one where fats are made into fantasies and webs of significance are woven with a narration of noodles, the reticent rhetoric of recipes, or contemplating the existence of cod.

The advent of food writing, like the transition from an oral to written culture, also meant a shift in authority as power flowed through the relative permanence of social institutions and their written texts (Innis, 1973). From the outset, food writing defined itself against the drudgery of everyday "women's work" and invited more distinguished and wealthy men to consider the merit of meals (Ferguson, 1998). This gendered and class-based nature of food writing continued as the transformation of modernity further split and amplified gender, class, and eventually nationalist divisions. Up until the 19th century we can broadly speak of two distinct forms of food writing: cookbooks and gastronomic literature.

The first forms of sustained food writing were cookbooks made for the servants of the wealthy. Yale University's Babylonian collection has culinary tablets dating from 1700 BCE. Ancient Rome, 10th century Arabia, and the Yuan dynasty all boast their own cookbooks as well. These instructions for the selection, preparation, and serving of food enabled the cultural transmission of cooking and eating traditions beyond interpersonal relationships. They also reify and give shape, lending a sense of prescriptive authority to

particular recipes, methods, and dishes. Cookbooks are a written performance of specific eating practices, giving them a sense of reality and making them relatively permanent. Such books were among the first works off Gutenberg's press. And just as scholars have argued the printing press engendered national "imagined communities" and helped create a "public sphere," so did cookbooks cement national identities and create a "community of cooks" (Appadurai, 1988; Mennell, 1996, p. 67). Initially, these culinary communities consisted primarily of servants negotiating how best to serve their wealthy masters.

Modernity and industrialization brought dramatic changes to households including the decreasing use of servants and increasing market dependency for household provisioning (Cowan, 1976). Cookbooks evolved into two distinct types, each with their own sphere of influence: instructional books directed at women for domestic cooking and recipe collections for male, professional chefs cooking for wealthy clients or the middle-class public (the modern restaurant originated in mid-eighteenth-century France but was mostly inaccessible to non-elites until the 20th century). Cookbooks, social norms, and institutional practices made it perfectly clear: women were cooks and men were chefs (Ashley, et al., 2004). When a woman cooked, so the social narrative went, they did so out of familial obligation and maternal love. Women cooked things that were practical, mundane, and functional. Men, on the other hand, were allowed to be free individuals that cultivated their own talents. A man was a creative genius that cooked for a higher purpose; professional yet artistic he earned the title "chef." Structured into the first discourses on food and especially relevant here is the long narrative arc of "men as chefs, women as cooks in American culture" (Vester, 2015, p. 74).

The second form of food writing, gastronomic literature, is more aesthetic than practical and was thus initially only the purview of men. For our purposes, we can point to 18th century Europe, primarily England and France, as the place modern men first penned philosophic about their palates (Mennell, 1996). In these writings, food and eating was about more than satisfying one's physical hunger; it was about feeding one's soul with the good, the beautiful, and the true. Eating is high culture, and it is a potentially spiritual experience that takes a certain refinement for proper appreciation. Gastronomy approaches eating and the omnivore's dilemma with a confident curiosity, delighting in the world's variety but critically examining history, style, and technique to discern what is best to eat (Ferguson, 1998). While this may sound romantic, the material-biological nature of food and the symbolic contingencies of cuisine means a full understanding of eating requires a more systematic, rational approach. For gastronomes or gourmets there is a science to good eating (see below). The wordsmith gourmet writes like a sociologist, historian, and chemist as often as they sound like a philosopher, novelist, or poet. While individuals may have their own preferences, the gastronome believes that personal taste can be developed and evolve. There is then a hierarchy or at least a level of distinction between certain choices, and taste can be cultivated through skill, knowledge, maturity, and something intangibly human (often interpreted as the bourgeois virtue of self-discipline). Gastronomy is an imaginative but rigorous epistemology, a blended scientific romanticism that contemplates the truth of an ultimately subjective experience. That subjective experience, however, is enabled by the material and social world. Gastronomy is thus the science of feeding the soul.

An exemplar of early gastronomy is Jean Brillat-Savarin (1825/1949) who once wrote, “tell me what you eat, and I shall tell you what you are” (p. 15). More than today’s boiled down version of “you are what you eat,” Brillat-Savarin connected food with human nature. He spoke of a “physiology of taste,” something scientific and biological but also a thing socially constructed and historically conditioned. Starting with empiricism and a meditation on the senses, he then develops a philosophy on taste, appetite, frying, being a connoisseur, and food quality. While he waxed philosophic about the great gourmands of history and the cultural achievements of French cuisine, his analysis was grounded in the material and scientific. Food itself was defined as any substance digested by the stomach to “repair the losses which the human body suffers through the wear and tear of life…Thus the distinctive quality of food is its capability to be assimilated by the animal” (p. 41). Potentially, Brillat-Savarin argues, food is delicious. Good food nourishes our souls as it is an expression of the highest form of human culture, like art. It is an art that we eat, an edible aesthetic. Ultimately, however, we are animals. And animals must survive the constant potential of death by assimilating part of the outside world, by making something external and other part of the body and self. Driven by appetite and faced with the omnivore’s dilemma, we scour the foodscape constantly incorporating something “other.” Gastronomic food writers like Brillat-Savarin insist that we make this a contemplative and informed process, slowing down to consider the merits of eating this versus that. Initially, this was strictly the realm of men and those of a certain class or means.

As others in the early 19th century criticized literature, poetry, or drama, gastronomic writers applied the art critic’s sensibilities to food. Individual preference was

clearly tied to the social, and Brillat-Savarin's nuanced views on food and eating arguably make him the first food sociologist (writing in a time before sociology itself existed as an institutionalized discipline). He was also a nutritionist and potentially a marketing agent ahead of his time. He argued that women were naturally inclined to appreciate gastronomy as a diet based on the science of food could keep a woman looking ten years younger than her peers. We can contextualize his sexism, but/and in the larger narrative, Brillat-Savarin channeled larger social issues and substantially expanded the conversation and legitimacy of talking food. A man of his times—since men were the only ones yet "allowed" to participate in public life—he and other gastronomic food writers helped transform and discursively institutionalize culinary practices into a socially significant and widespread cultural field (Ferguson, 1998).

A cultural field regulates social life by orienting active agents within an interrelated context and providing institutions, discourses, values, norms, routines, and rules to constitute, transmit, and negotiate meaning (Bourdieu, 1993). A cultural field has a certain amount of independence from other domains as it is deemed important in its own right and sometimes influences other areas of social life. A cultural field can also appropriate or translate the external world into its own terms. A central feature of any field is thus its relationship to the other spheres and institutions of social life. For food, this is especially pronounced in our late modern age of celebrity chefs, social media, conspicuous consumption, and global capitalism. Early French food writers legitimated food as a field by redefining food as something cultural, belonging to a specific group of people and tied it to their newly fomenting national identity (Ferguson, 1998; Ory, 1997). Their manner of intellectualizing eating moved "good" food from the realm of strictly

elitist or aristocratic concern, to modern notions of being French. Taste was made a matter of widespread public concern, and food writing provided a sense of permanence to a commonly held and nationally defined food tradition. This gastronomic literature fed the body politic, providing substance to orient identity and regulate social belonging.

In the United States—not counting Thomas Jefferson's recipe for ice cream—food writing and the edible invitation to nationhood was primarily the work of women. In 1796 the nation's first cookbook, *American Cookery* by Amelia Simmons, immediately facilitated identity work and invited its readers to consider themselves American. Not only did she use American ingredients and provide the relative textual permanence so vital to circulate modern tradition, she also substituted American words for British terms, like using "molasses" instead of "treacle" or "cookies" instead of "biscuits." Food writing received its biggest boost with the 19th century commercialization of news and the advent of the so-called women's pages. The growing popularity of magazine culture in the United States also provided a fruitful avenue for constituting a public sphere of eaters.

Food was considered the domain of women, however, and such content was dismissed as "soft" news or fluff (Voss, 2018). Unlike the serious and significant "hard" news on the front page—where men dwelled in the public and political spheres—women's pages often contained practical everyday advice. From its inception, the institutionalized food writing in the United States and its concomitant public sphere was built on female servitude in the private realm of everyday life.

Excluded from male-dominated spaces of social debate and decision making on the front page, this arena operated closer to a feminist ethic of care (Fraser, 1990; Manning, 1992). As Berlant (2008) showed, modern American women were interpellated

by mass media and consumer culture into an “intimate public” of sentimentality. Marginalized and subordinated in the political arena, American women were offered relief in a realm that promised to make complex modern pressures simple through love, affect, emotional relationships, and commercial exchange. Here they could create an imagined community with strangers based on emotional knowledge, common historical experiences, and in shared service to their family and communities. Recipes, for example, required a shared literacy and collective understanding of certain traditions, especially around holidays. Those with the required literacy were enabled to feed others as recipes, in the eyes of anthropologists, were a means to transform words and the raw state of nature into a nourishing and necessary embodiment of culture (Levi-Strauss, 1969). The women’s pages thus enabled women and even brought some women into the public realm of employment. It did so, however, in a manner that reinforced women’s domestic allotment and subjugation. As society and media continually told women they were secondary to men, food media also provided tools that gave women a sense of authority and the partial means to cope with that predicament.

Many food and journalism historians have rejected the idea that women did not contribute to the larger, traditionally male public sphere (Marzolf, 1977; Shapiro, 2004; Voss, 2012; Voss & Speere, 2016). Voss (2014) documented how some women food editors—like Peggy Daum, Helen Dollaghan, and Ann Criswell—considered themselves journalists first and food writers second (if at all). They had journalism degrees and experience. They were trained in news values like verification and timeliness. They reported “hard” news on food safety, policy issues, public health, and commodity pricing. Some wrote critical articles that angered advertisers. Even if relegated to the women’s

pages, these editors were a fourth estate on all things food. We should perhaps temper overly celebratory accounts with a comprehensive consideration of context. Still, it is clear women food journalists investigated behind the scenes, encouraged accountability, initiated political conversations, and informed the public on the important news of the day. In other words, they were journalists facilitating democracy and serving its citizens.

From the first literary gastronomes in 19th century France to the recent adventure and expressive works of Anthony Bourdain, men are considered artists and not mere practitioners when it comes to food and food writing. A former *Washington Post* food editor observed this in the 1980s saying that:

> even in the field of food writing, I found a gender split. When food served home and family, it was considered the realm of women. When it involved sophistication and money, men were the writers. Women wrote about cooks; men wrote about chefs (Richman, 2013).

This rather unsatisfactorily explains our opening vignette and why Craig Claiborne was given credit for inventing food journalism (his 1946 BA from the Missouri School of Journalism aside). Mary Frances Kennedy or M.F.K. Fisher was writing witty and memorable gastronomy when Claiborne was still a teenager, and to this day her 1949 translation of Brillat-Savarin's *Physiology of Taste* remains the definitive English version. The persistence of gender and the manner in which media reinforces stereotypes even as it offers a level of empowerment is a crucial component in understanding our contemporary foodscape.

Food writers and journalists make taste a matter of public concern and facilitate a public sphere around seemingly private concerns. They institutionalize local, regional, ethnic, or national cuisines, performing and reifying these identities by giving them a material form. In the United States, this discursive relationship between food and society

was established in a highly commercialized, secular, scientific, and in other words, modern context. Understanding how today's food media invite audiences into specific subject positions means understanding this history along with our current late modern context. We can ask how our present media create a sense of American cuisine and how such an understanding compares to the past. We can question how our food media imagine the culinary public sphere and whether it is built primarily on aesthetic, scientific, or practical values and content. Furthermore, with a solid foundation of journalism theory and ethics, we can hold our current food media accountable and posit its relationship to other people, institutions, and fields.

Chapter 2: Mediated Invitations to Eat

If cultural systems and discourses are an invitation to perform identity work, then what kind of invitations has the modern era offered? This project seeks to characterize contemporary culture by using history and answering axiological questions. As such, it requires theorizing historical transformations, identity, and ethics not as an exercise in abstract thinking but to develop an approach to concrete media texts. CDA approaches media texts as a social practice to interpret, not as an object from which to merely gather "data." Understanding these practices requires conceptualizing the historical foundations of our current institutions and their concomitant ways of doing, being, thinking, and valuing. This chapter thus examines journalism as a product of a liberal Modern Era and its subsequent commercialization. It then delineates the emergent field of lifestyle journalism as a product of a larger consumer culture that, by the 1980s, was entrenched as a complete consumer society. Our current age and mediascape has been characterized as "neoliberal" (Phelan, 2014; Meyers, 2019), and this chapter further investigates what such a label means not for policy and politics but for notions of subjectivity and identity. History can contextualize largescale socioeconomic transformations, but so too can it show how these larger changes result in new forms of self-experience. As who or what was considered "American" was being contested, food media negotiated contemporary conversations and drew on perceived or ideal member resources to co-constitute an audience. Such media allowed privileged "target markets" the ability to order, institutionalize, and rationalize their material and symbolic preferences. This communication system provided more opportunities for identity work. It could also feed the ego, however, by amplifying its own discursive logic, selfishly generating legitimacy

by ignoring or instrumentally using others. It is thus imperative we understand late modern food media as embedded in a larger social and historical context. This more comprehensive understanding shows how media forge new relationships and invite individuals into new subject positions from which to experience, understand, and evaluate their world.

These new subject positions, or identities, are fed by cultural systems of history and meaning (as anthropologists have shown) and must actively feed to reproduce themselves, their relationships, their lifestyles, and their hierarchies of distinction (as sociologists describe). People's relation to what they eat has been completely revolutionized during the modern era as for nearly all of human history, and until 1900 in the United States, most people were directly involved in the production or cultivation of raw foodstuffs. Today, less than 1.5% of the U.S. population is employed in farming and ranching, and these workers still purchase food from other sources (USDA, 2020). Larger socioeconomic changes meant Americans were put in a different relationship with their food, one increasingly mediated by other people's labor, the mechanisms of the market, and an array of communication systems. These communications involved coordination amongst producers and distributors, the proposals of policy makers, and the findings of scientists. Equally important, they also invited the everyday eater into new imaginaries with product packaging, advertisements, the recipe format, and a plethora of food media including content from newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and blogs. Historical change meant a new, mediated relationship to food and identity. How then, have Americans been invited to eat?

Modernity and Media

Before the specifics of invitations to consider food, we need to characterize the changing nature of invitations engendered by modernity. As a concept, "modernity" is highly contested and seems to take as many forms as there are authors. Sometimes the term "modern" refers to social life and institutions while other times it characterizes individual attitudes and worldviews. There is further debate about whether our current age should be considered late modern or postmodern. Scholars also argue over modernity's defining features whether it be instrumental rationality (Weber, 1921/2013) reflexivity (Giddens, 1990), alienation (Marx, 1844/2007), time-space compression (Harvey, 1989), simulation (Baudrillard, 1994), or a public sphere (Habermas, 1962/1989). Conversations about modernity have thus primarily come from sociology, a discipline founded on the very idea of the "modern" era being completely new and unlike anything before. This discipline, like anthropology, is founded on Eurocentric ideals and narratives of world history. Sociology thus cannot provide a comprehensive view of modernity, but it can provide the necessary foundations for an immanent critique. While this is not the place to decide once and for all what modernity is, looking at the beliefs, values, and practices that define a supposedly modern society can inform our understanding of modern subjects and the media that seek (or construct) their attention. While the beginning of the modern era is up for debate, for our purposes we will identify the post-World War II period as the transition into a late modern era, with the 1980s a backlash against modern liberalism, the 1990s a cementing neoliberal consensus, and our own digital age the latest iteration of a flexible or liquid modernity triumphant (Bauman, 2000, 2005).

As a distinct time period, there can be no exact starting point of the modern era. Some scholars consider media and its ability to transcend space and time to deliver information as a clear enough break to usher in modernity (Thompson, 1995). Others, including many historians, see modernity rising from the European explorations of the 15th century and consider modernity's global nature a defining characteristic (Wallerstein, 2004). Either of these starting points puts the modern era at over 500 years old. While Gutenberg's cookbooks of the 1440s or the so-called Columbian exchange that saw tomatoes make their way into Italian cuisine in the 16th century would make a strong food-related narrative, we are not concerned with the start of the modern era but what it means and how it has progressed into late modernity. Historians have identified some of modernity's central traits: representative government, a market economy, a prioritizing of science and secularization, a belief in social progress, and eventually industrialization, urbanization, professionalization, capitalism, and the concomitant acceleration of economic exchange (Berman, 2010; Foucault, 1977; Palmer & Colton, 1991). But modernity is more than a series of traits or a periodization that needs defining. It is a holistic historical context of interwoven demands, mental scripts, and patterns of behavior engendered by individuals negotiating the various institutions of contemporary living. When a person or society called themselves modern, it was a conscious recognition that one's way of life was better and new, that one's predecessors had been surpassed. The actual time period considered modern can thus constantly change, especially as each generation aspires to progress and build on the last. But even this idea of progress is a product of modern thinking. When modernity first occurs is much less

important than how it changes social patterns, individual behavior, and orientation in the world.

Contrasting with an immediate predecessor, the modern era and modernity as a way of being are set against feudalism and the so-called "Dark Ages." Italian Renaissance historian Leonardo Bruni (1442) was the first to call the period between the fall of Rome and his own city-based life the "Middle Ages." This set the trend for the larger periodization still evident in history departments today of ancient, medieval, and modern. Modern historians and scholars then selected, exaggerated, and used specific traits of this so-called middle period to define the supposedly unique modern. 17th & 18th century thinkers such as John Locke, Jean Jacque Rousseau, and Montesquieu built political philosophies opposing the "divine right of kings" and claimed sovereignty originated in the people or individuals being ruled. This political liberalism would greatly influence the American Declaration of Independence and subsequent United States Constitution. The revolutionaries of the Declaration did not read political economist Adam Smith (*Wealth of Nations* was published the same year in 1776), but their position as a colony meant commercial sovereignty was also on the agenda.

The American Revolution—like the Dutch Revolt, English Civil War, French Revolution and Haitian Revolution—challenged the old order of royal and aristocratic political-economic privilege. Modern republicanism dictated that political legitimacy was derived from the people being ruled, not divine decree or tradition. Who was defined as "the people," however, was largely dependent on the existing socioeconomic order. Initially, voting rights were limited to either white males that owned land or paid taxes. A semantic technicality in the New Jersey Constitution enfranchising "all inhabitants"

that owned a certain amount of property was amended in 1807 and clarified that only tax-paying white *men* could vote.

The United States Constitution was an intellectual product of the so-called Age of Enlightenment, an epistemology that prioritized science and empiricism, rational thinking, and the rights of the individual (Kramnick, 1995). This philosophical movement dominated Europe and its settler colonies from the 17th to the 19th century, revolutionizing the dominant worldview and still influencing the current world order today (transformed and amplified into neoliberalism). Enlightenment thinkers argued all men—at least "civilized," white men, were capable of using reason and rational thinking to make their own decisions and realize their potential. This contrasted to feudalism and what scholars have called the "Great Chain of Being" where the social order was set and made immutable by divine law (Lovejoy, 1936). Instead, Enlightenment philosophers described a "natural law" that a ruler could potentially violate. If the social order failed to protect an individual's "natural rights" to "life, liberty, and property" then it could be justifiably overthrown. This natural law could still be set by divine design, but it was discoverable by human reason and rational thinking. Knowledge through divine revelation or tradition was thus displaced by modern science, the systematic study of the physical world through empirical observation and experimentation. Such systematic study, the founders and Enlightenment thinkers believed, could also be applied to society as a political science or political economy. Adam Smith was thus seeking the natural laws of economics when he described the ideal 18th century market economy as behaving like an "invisible hand."[2] The founding of a constitutional republic that utilized a limited

[2] Marcal (2015) has rightfully questioned whether invisible hands cooked Adam Smith's dinner.

representative democracy sublimated earlier forms of legitimacy (e.g., divine decree, hereditary aristocracy, tradition) into more modern, self-justifying forms of rational thinking, expert knowledge, and the "natural laws" of science.

While the Constitution created a strong federal government mainly responsive to white, property-owning men, its ratification in 1788 was only ensured once a supplement for individuals was added, the Bill of Rights. These first ten amendments to the Constitution guaranteed individual liberties, such as the First Amendment's dictum that Congress cannot pass laws curtailing free speech or a free press. Like the Declaration of Independence's use of "all men" being created equal having caveats about who was considered "all men," the Bill of Rights did not equally apply to all people. As a form of political and social justification, however, it laid bare the epistemological foundations of modern liberalism.

The (proper) individual was thus the radiating center of the modern worldview. He (sic) was the only source of political legitimacy as all social organization was now said to protect his rights and property. All entities not individuals—society, communities, the group—were associated with arbitrary tradition or superstition. It was only the individual who exercised reason and rational thinking. And as a first act of modern reasoning, the individual needed to assert his authority and wrest his rights and entitlements away from the irrational group. Tradition, according to this view, was holding the individual back and sociologists have often considered the modern era as "post-traditional" (Giddens, 1990). This emboldened (certain) individuals as previous authorities like monarchy and aristocracy were challenged. The Great Chain of Being was dismantled and people could improve their lot in life. Instead of deferring to

superiors and focusing on salvation, social progress could be made in this world on earth. Science promised universal answers regardless of one's social context. The systematic, empirical tools of science were not monopolized by any one power but were accessible by the properly dispositioned individual. Enlightenment thinking was progressive and the modern, liberal order empowered the individual. This order, however, also made him dependent on other institutions, most noticeably the market and the media.

Liberalism and American Journalism

In a post-traditional order where political legitimacy is derived from (select) individuals, how are individuals to learn of the world? The answer has become cliché in journalism studies, and rightfully so, that modern media systems have a social obligation to inform citizens (Christians, et al., 2009; Dahlgren, 2000; Dahlgren & Sparks, 1991). Journalists are tasked with gathering, organizing, editing, and evaluating raw information, then presenting it in a meaningful and credible way. This journalistic process helps create *news*, important or noteworthy information. Journalists can thus organize the flux of information in the world and communicate newsworthy events to citizens. As democracy is self-government, an informed citizenry is essential to the process of democracy.

But the United States was not founded a democracy, it was a constitutional republic defined by representative government and limited voting rights. Those deciding what was news or noteworthy was further limited by media access. Over time, women, American Indians, African Americans, and other activists have made the United States more democratic (Kessler, 1984). This progressive struggle was co-constituted by larger communication systems as media outlets proved themselves capable of reinforcing or challenging dominant social views.

Media itself is seen as prototypically modern as large-scale communication systems enabled individuals to transcend the immediacy of their surroundings and make sense of the world beyond local authority, community, and context (Thompson, 1995). Media messages provide symbols to contemplate one's selfhood and others, and in appropriating such messages, individuals are involved in the implicit process of identity work. Journalism is a particular type of media based on active processes of gathering and presenting factual and significant information. Ideally, this is achieved through careful verification and with relative independence, accountable first and foremost to the public (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). In an era characterized by liberal notions of self-government, the role of journalism is paramount. It can even be, "considered the primary sense-making practice of modernity" (Hartley, 1996, p. 12). Journalism is thus both a set of practices that influences social understanding and also a social institution with particular roles for a democratic republic.

In complex modern societies, journalism creates a public space for debate and deliberation, enabling more people to participate in the affairs of self-government (McQuail, 2013). Journalism thus facilitates a *public sphere*. Habermas (1962/1989) was the first to theorize the modern public sphere, describing it as a space where free individuals ignored their inequalities and came together to discuss social issues and influence policy. It was a deliberative realm, independent of the state and the market where public opinion could be formed free of the corrupting influence or power. It existed in both physical spaces, like the taverns and coffeeshops of Europe, but also through media, where newspapers could carry views and information of common concern. Through literal conversations or deliberative reasoning in their heads,

individuals could then exchange ideas, contemplate the common good, and engage in social dialogue. Such a space—with communications guided by journalism's values of verification, independence, and accountability—is invaluable for a robust, functioning democracy.

Democracy itself, however, is a contested concept and different versions or theories of democracy hold different implications for what journalism should look like and do. Allen and Hindman (2014) described journalism's ideal relationship to three conceptions of democracy: elitist, discourse, and communitarian democracy. Elitist democracy recognized the complexities of largescale, modern society and tasked journalists with understanding and explaining it. Akin to sociologist Max Weber, social organization was understood in terms of efficiency and expertise. The division of labor and rationalization of political and economic processes meant society was run by technology-wielding experts. Power was siloed and the drive for scientific management and predictability resulted in bureaucracies that were not democratic. Society, according to Weber's metaphor, became an iron cage where humans were trapped by their own technologies and social structures. People were no longer in control as they simply obeyed the logics of their expert systems. Echoing journalist Walter Lippman, most people did not care about politics or how society was run anyhow. This combination of specialized labor, scientific expertise, and a mostly apathetic public meant journalism should help citizens find the truth. Journalists could even rationalize their own routines into an expert system. Such journalism would play watchdog on society's dominant institutions. At the same time, it would legitimate and thus reinforce those dominant institutions. As specialists and forces outside the individual's purview ran the show,

journalists could investigate these relationships, seek out any potential corruption, and otherwise encourage social responsibility.

Discourse democracy, on the other hand, saw democracy as a process not an end goal. Its adherents did not want to replace active citizens with an institution, but instead wanted journalism to create the conditions where discourse and deliberation could flourish. Such thinking was inspired by American pragmatists like John Dewey and Charles Peirce, while also being championed by Habermas and communication-as-culture scholar, James Carey. In these views, communication and conversation constitute society, as actionable "reality" was little more than what a community agreed to at a particular moment. Through deliberation and engagement, an individual could find self-realization through becoming responsible, that is, by responding to someone else's needs. Debate and participation could build trust between an individual and community. Communication, in this view, was not practiced to persuade or win an argument, it was a way of reaching an understanding. The ideal journalism, according to discourse democracy, would thus promote active citizens (not just informed ones) by generating meaningful social conversations. Such conversation would not be dominated by objective facts but would have plenty of context to promote discussion. This journalism would listen to its audience and crowdsource ideas. It would also remain opened to new ideas, never falling into hyper-partisanship or the language of absolutes that so quickly ends conversation. By approaching democracy as a process of deliberation and not an end goal, such journalism would bring an ethic of understanding and could encourage empathy.

Another approach, communitarian democracy emphasizes relationships, social responsibility, and the shared nature of individual and group interests. Drawing from John Dewey and the most socially minded Enlightenment philosopher, Jean Jacque Rousseau, this view holds that individuals have a responsibility to the group that sustains them. Humans are interdependent and must thus serve each other. Personal responsibility extends beyond the self, as one has the responsibility to be a good citizen. Journalism under this view of democracy would dedicate itself to both local communities and larger society. It would focus on interconnections and social processes. It would promote shared social values while also holding those values accountable, tracing their consequences and how they affected others. Fostering community, it would hold citizens accountable and criticize in a respectful manner. Such journalism would thus support a community without mindlessly promoting it. Its morality would be built with verifiable facts, not gossip. Journalists, by contextualizing and analyzing community-constituting relationships, would articulate and perform social values into common existence, engendering accountability, conversations, and ethical scripts.

These three different theories of democracy thus have concomitant forms of ideal journalism. And there is no need to limit democracy, Allen and Hindman (2014) conclude, as journalists play a variety of social roles. Modern self-government is complex, requiring diverse media outlets to both legitimate and challenge institutions and also to facilitate conversations and articulate community values and desires. Elitist conceptions of democracy have the news media lead the public while discourse and communitarian democracy has media provide a space for deliberation, understanding, and advocating for shared values. Allen and Hindman (2014) have thus shown that journalism

is not just about individual practices or preferences but can play pivotal social roles in the realization of democracy. In a system of "self-government," journalism can:

- inform
- investigate
- analyze, contextualize, clarify, and explain
- foster accountability
- engender social conversation
- facilitate empathy
- articulate and reify shared values

These roles, however, are abstract ideals. Without substantive guidance, media systems could do just the opposite. Thus, in a system of self-government, journalism can also:

- misinform
- blindly accept
- obfuscate, assume, misinterpret, and confuse
- misdirect blame and muddle responsibility
- stifle or stop social conversation
- generate hatred and fear
- articulate and reify egocentrism or destructive values

As a profession, journalism has attempted to mitigate the potential usurpation of its "helpful" role (Thomas, 2019). Journalists Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) devised a list of fundamental principles to guide practitioners and the journalistic expectations of the public. These principles were fundamentally centered on verification, journalistic

independence, accountability to the public, and comprehensiveness. While these principles and idea roles need further clarification in concrete contexts and situations, they offer a good starting point to evaluate liberal theory and "actually existing" journalism. Integrating social roles for democracy with foundational principles for practice, journalists should:

- inform (everyone, comprehensively considering public needs and verifiable facts)
- investigate (employing scientific, verifiable methods)
- analyze, contextualize, clarify, and explain (exhaustively considering facts to obtain best approximation of truth)
- foster accountability (of everyone in society to each other, but proportionate to power)
- engender social conversation (that is thoughtful and worth having)
- facilitate empathy (inclusively, independent of power or special interest)
- articulate and reify shared values (using verifiable facts and accountable to a comprehensively considered public)

Looking at history, however, there has never been a so-called golden age of media where these roles and values were consistently realized. Media historians—especially feminist, race, and other critical scholars—have shown that journalism has taken many forms in American history, much of it built on active exclusions (e.g., Kessler, 1984; Mislán, 2013; Volz & Len-Rios, 2016; van Zoonen, 1994). Even the idealized public sphere never existed (Fraser, 1990; Gitlin 1998). Habermas (1962/1989) had described the public sphere as a space where free individuals ignored or "bracketed" their

inequalities and came together to discuss social issues and influence policy. This liberal public sphere claimed to be *the* public but, Fraser (1990) argued, it was created through gender, race, and class exclusions. Its practitioners separated the "private" from the "public" and used their own notions of the "common good" to establish hegemonic domination. There was also a strict separation between civil society and the state. This meant public opinion lacked decision making power and could not hold the state directly accountable. Historically, the bracketing of power and inequality never occurred; Calling something equal did not make it so (Fraser, 1990). This assumption of equality actually favored the dominant, as "common" deliberation was framed in specific ways to their advantage. The public sphere was not neutral as liberal theory wrongly assumed a fair and equal discourse democracy could exist alongside socioeconomic inequality.

Because the ideals of a public sphere or perfect public-serving press have never existed, some scholars call for a "decoupling" of journalism and democracy (Josephi, 2013). These scholars identify the existence of journalism outside "western" democracy and rightfully question hegemonic understandings of journalism emanating from the United States and Europe (Zelizer, 2013). In other cultural contexts, like China (Volz, 2011) or Latin America (Waisbord, 2010) for example, journalistic forms are different than the U.S., dependent as they are on contrasting social conceptions of the state, market, and civil society. As a discipline, journalism studies should humble itself and recognize the diversity of journalistic conceptions and practices in local contexts around the world. As Zelizer (2013) holds, too often, "the centrality of democracy has generated undemocratic journalism scholarship" (p. 469). This does not mean, however, that we need abandon the ideals of journalism and democracy.

When considering global definitions or journalism's manifestation in history, conceptions of democracy can be broadened and reimagined. This allows journalism the flexibility to fit different contexts while also keeping it a privileged form of communication with normative value. Democracy need not be limited to Western notions of modern liberalism. The exact political ideology or formal structures of a place are less important than broad notions of service to a *demos* or collective of common people. Alternative notions of the populace or public and what it means to be a citizen can also be reconsidered, and feminist notions of democracy will be explored in Chapter 5. Just because they have never been a sustained reality does not mean we abandon our ideals; it means we reassess and make ourselves more accountable. Even if journalism did meet its social obligation, the process that is democracy demand these obligations need daily renewal. Far from discarding it, positive aspects of democracy can be rescued with immanent critique. We could use liberalism's limitations to reimagine the public and rethink democracy, reinvigorating both as meaningful concepts capable of orienting journalism.

The Commercialization (and Routinization) of News

At the nation's founding and throughout much of the 19th century, American newspapers were primarily funded by political parties, subscriptions, government contracts, and subsidies (Humphrey, 1996). Over the course of the 19th century, political parties became less reliant on newspapers, the "spoils" system of government contracts was replaced by contracts for the lowest bidder, and there was an overall decline in public interest in politics. Entrepreneurs picked up where political parties left off, and newspapers shifted from a primarily political to a commercial role. Instead of advocacy,

the press aimed to entertain. By the centuries end, advertising provided the majority of newspaper funding, and industrialization, urbanization, and a growing market economy meant profit-seeking newspapers and commercial interests were often aligned. Ideals of public service were realigned to maximize private gain.

This commercialization of news had profound effects on media content and the relationship of media outlet to audience. Newspapers became increasingly "cheap…bright and loud," mostly avoiding politics and attempting wide appeal with exciting "scoops" and leisure-based content (Baldasty, 1992, p. 46). By the 1880s, publishers attempted to have "something for everyone" in order to boost circulation and attract advertisers. Certain papers became notorious for their self-promotion, constantly reminding readers about how much news they produced, how fast they were, or how important the newspaper was to the community. Publishers also aimed to produce a predictable product, appeasing advertisers that complained a "slow" news day meant less exposure for their ads. This meant the introduction of the first regularly occurring columns, by-lines for reporters to develop a following, the creation of news categories, and "small" news or content based on special interests (including food). Approaching news as a commercial enterprise resulted in business strategies and new journalistic routines to increase circulation and continuously engage a growing audience.

The purpose of increased circulation and audience engagement was not merely to inform more people but to increase a newspaper's advertising revenue. As production and distribution costs continued to increase, the commercial press became increasingly reliant on advertisers to generate profit. This meant the commercialization of news saw the creation of two products: the news itself was commercialized, but so too was the

audience "commodified" and sold to advertisers (Smythe, 2001). Newspapers were no longer creating content to attract an audience for subscription revenue or as voters. This was a dual product model. Newspapers now created content to attract an audience whose attention and engagement could then be sold to advertisers. Readers were thus treated as consumers (less citizens) as newspaper publishers' loyalties were now split between serving the public and serving its commercial patrons. Some advertisers demanded a newspaper's loyalty, expecting product placement in news stories or "reading notices," what we today call "native advertising" or "sponsored content" where advertising is formatted to look like editorial content. Commercial sponsors also complained that newspapers contained too much "bad" news and asked them not to be so negative. Advertisers in 1895 wanted newspapers to promote "the bright side of life" as happy readers made better shoppers (Baldasty, p. 78). While newspapers often resisted such demands, their new relationship to audiences changed the format of news, and the needs of marketing agents gained permanent consideration in the commercialized public sphere.

It was the 1880s that witnessed the first sustained newspaper food coverage and birth of the women's pages (Voss, 2014). Excluded from participation when newspapers were primarily political, women were invited into commercial newspapers, valued as their household's primary consumer (Marchand, 1985; Peiss, 1998). If modernity was supposedly post-traditional then women in this instance were re-traditionalized, tied to domestic duties and cemented as fundamentally a caregiver (Glenn, 2002). Women were also tasked as the sociable and style-oriented sex. They were thus expected to stay abreast on society news and the latest trends and fashions. A woman, according to these pages, should know who in the local community was engaged, what big social events were

happening, and otherwise manage her family's social calendar. She was also on the frontline of the aestheticization of everyday life (Featherstone, 1991), as not only did she need to keep herself beautiful, but the household and husband should also be kept "in style." Over the 20th century, these pressures intensified (Golia, 2016). The American woman—at least those actively courted by advertisers and editors—negotiated a unique ambivalence as she bore the brunt of particularly modern tensions. She was required to play the traditional role of homemaker, cultivating the private world of the home. But she was supposed to do this in a public facing manner, maintaining the latest social knowledge to accumulate her family's cultural capital. She brought the world of fashion and better living through consumption into the home and onto her family's bodies. She was thus expected to be both a guardian of care and tradition and also a modernizing agent. Subjugated by tradition, modernity did not set her free. It recruited her to manage the world it was destroying and discipline those in her charge—her loved ones—into modernity's logic. For the supposedly fairer sex, the modern era entrenched its own invented tradition with additional expectations and no pay.

While dismissed by contemporary critics as frivolous or commercially compromised, some scholars see the women's pages as a historically undervalued public sphere (Berlant, 2008; Golia, 2016; Voss, 2012, 2018). While it was capable of influencing politics and public policy (Voss, 2014), this alternative public sphere was not primarily concerned with deliberations to influence the state. Instead, such journalism built an imagined community around more "private" concerns like feeding one's family, proper etiquette, and homemaking. This public sphere was primarily built on white, middle-class ideals that prioritized individual experience and content deemed appropriate

for “the feminine mind” (Golia, 2016, p. 627). While it limited women to traditional fields and roles, it also empowered them within these areas. Women were an authority in these cultural fields, relegated but able to construct a shared space of empathy, social connection, and care.

Before we romanticize individual empowerment or ignore the consequences of inequality and cultural populism, one material fact needs recognition. Profit and capital accumulation under capitalism (i.e., liberal economics) are enabled and built on unremunerated female servitude. Women’s labor learning about, procuring, storing, preparing, serving, and cleaning up food—not to mention the necessary work of making a purchased commodity usable—is not calculated in the Gross Domestic Product. Decisions based on cost-benefit analysis or the math of corporate balance sheets do not consider the cost of health care, psychological counseling, or emotional subsidies provided by women, let alone the childcare, educational instruction, or cultural know-how. This gender-specific labor is an externality, a cost not reflected in the final price as it does not cost the producer. Instead women—an entire sex burdened with gender expectations—pay the cost, enabling capital accumulation with unpaid labor (Manton, 1999; Raworth, 2017).

At the behest of activists and offering a more inclusive consumer culture, by the 1970s women’s pages were rebranded as “lifestyle” sections (Harp, 2007). Critics of the women’s pages argued that women were unfairly relegated to one section of the paper, and one that was given little respect. Supporters of the women’s pages, however, wanted to protect women’s interests and shield it from compassion fatigue or overexposure to emotionally demanding issues. One journalist asked how much “relevance” a woman

could take. She argued that a woman needed her own section of solace and could read other sections of the newspaper for more “serious” news (Roesgen, 1972). Publishers could appease both views using empty signifiers like the “Style” section.

The women’s pages thus morphed into today’s lifestyle journalism, a journalistic field characterized by entertainment, a consumer focus, and all the traits of so-called soft news (Kristensen & From, 2012). Some scholars have celebrated such content as “news you can use” or “service journalism” (Eide & Knight, 1999). Lifestyle journalism, like recipes or food articles, could be explicitly helpful, immediately applicable to one’s everyday life. As commercialized media targeting women, however, it was also a commodification of everyday life as women were asked to shoulder the burden of providing daily sustenance. Such content thus became a necessary guide but also disposable and replaceable, in constant need of renewal (Lewis, 2013). Nearly 100 years later, such journalism continued the dual product model of commercialized news. Everyday life was commodified meaning daily survival involved correctly spending money. Lifestyle sections could deemphasize politics, present the “bright side of life,” and sell audience engagement to willing bidders. As with the unmet ideals of media, this apparent decoupling of journalism and democracy does not mean democracy should be abandoned. On the contrary, commercialized communications should be constantly scrutinized and held accountable to the standards of informed, self-government.

While the commercialization of news, media, and society culminate in today’s lifestyle journalism, this process was not a matter of economic determinism. Active agents negotiated these circumstances, and some editors and journalists showed greater loyalty to the public than the bottom line. Some commercial media outlets were thus able

to serve the public interest and perform media's ideal roles for a democracy. Besides individual agency, historical context and sociological factors also played a role. In the early 20th century, for example, the most investigative, critical, and consequential journalism thrived in nationally circulated magazines, not newspapers. Lincoln Steffens, a contemporary "muckraking" (investigative) journalist of the time, theorized why. Newspapers, he argued, were geographically based, and their commercial nature hindered their independence. They relied on local official sources and their funding increasingly relied on local advertising. Their reporters were thus less apt to investigate local corruption or hold local elites accountable. Even when newspapers did report on local issues, he continued, the amount of information in a newspaper potentially tempered the impact of such news. Magazines, on the other hand, faced no such limitations. With national advertisers and circulation, they were not limited by local dependency and could more freely question and investigate. Without the daily deadline and able to use long-form journalism, magazines could more comprehensively address issues and provide more of an impact to generate social progress. We could add the fact that magazine readers are potentially more engaged as an audience with particular, unique interests. Unlike newspapers whose choice is determined by geographic location, magazine readers seek out specific publications based on other preferences such as topic, style, and shared worldview. Today, publishers call this specialized readership a "target market" and thus make explicit the dual product model of commercialized media. These shared interests can create a more tight-knit imagined community than general interest newspapers. This makes magazine readers potentially more political but also more valuable to specific advertisers.

Like the women's pages, some of the earliest commercial magazines were aimed at women. Akin to the gender-specific section, magazines invited women to see themselves in a particular way, filled with topics like fashion, hygiene, social etiquette, and child rearing. And akin to women food journalists who wrote pieces critical of sponsors, some magazines prioritized public service over advertising revenue. In 1904, *Ladies Home Journal* was one of the first magazines to ban patent medicine ads. Patent medicines were some of the biggest advertisers of the time, but despite the name, products rarely had any medicinal value. Some were actively harmful. *Ladies Home* even urged readers to boycott other publications that still carried such ads, putting the public interest before media funding needs (while admittedly signaling their own virtue). Some editors and journalists were thus able to serve citizens while staying fiscally solvent. The ideals of liberalism could thus counter commercialization, as long as it proved profitable to do so.

The Commercialization and Rationalization of Food

The first sustained appearance of food media in the early 1880s women's pages immediately followed the first phase of American industrialized farming (Winson, 2013). This meant factory methods of production were applied to agriculture. In addition to farming and husbandry, this also meant the mass marketing of foodstuffs. Product packaging, advertising, and willing consumers helped make brand name, prepackaged food a regular part of the American foodscape. While the majority of the country still farmed, urbanization and a growing wage economy spurred demand for food grown by somebody else. Seeking to bypass the power of distributors, food manufacturers began using brand names. To earn the trust of people who so recently knew their food's origin,

some personified their brand, using friendly human mascots like Aunt Jemima or the Quaker Oats man.

The generic Quaker was a symbol of trust and held a bill that read "pure." As the logo developed over the 20th century, it focused on the head and face, with a strong jaw and a friendly smirk. Aunt Jemima played on a stereotype of happy Black servitude, associating a pancake mix with the idealized racial hierarchy of plantation life. In 1893, the brand hired Nancy Green, a former slave, to attend the Chicago World's Fair and sing songs, cook pancakes, and romanticize the Old South. Billboards across the country soon pictured the "Old mammy" with the slogan introduced at the exposition: "I'se in Town Honey!" Over the 20th century, campaigns featured a beaming Aunt Jemima, gleefully ensuring white people had breakfast.

Before brand names, a person wanting oats (or flour, crackers, etc.) would go to a general store, ask for oats, and have generic oats scooped out of a barrel. Wholesalers held power over producers as producers bid against each other to provide the commodity at the cheapest price. With brand names, manufacturers appealed directly to consumers who would then ask for the product by name. Customers learned to associate trust and quality with a symbol/name and marketing campaigns could help socialize eaters into the modern food system. The first million-dollar ad campaign, for example, came from the National Biscuit Company (now Nabisco). In 1899, marketers devised a catchy name, provided a "reason why" to buy, and reminded customers they were blessed by modernity. So, when you did not want loose crackers scented with other foods, Uneeda Biscuit. One ad described the boring olden days when people ate "common crackers" now Uneeda Biscuit comes in a "wondrous package" that allows quality crackers like

“those old folks never knew.” The American Sugar Refining Company, a trust controlling 98% of U.S. sugar processing by 1907, ran a campaign that helped changed the American public’s sugar preferences. The company claimed that potentially harmful microbes existed in brown sugar, and that more “refined” and “pure” white sugar was preferable. At the turn of the 20th century, socioeconomic factors put people in a new material relationship with food and mass marketing invited them into a new symbolic order.

Other media also shaped this symbolic order, sometimes revealing more than producers ever intended. Upton Sinclair, a socialist concerned with worker’s rights, worked in the meatpacking yards of Chicago. Intending to alert the public over poor working conditions, Sinclair published a series of articles (later made a book) in a socialist magazine. What caught people’s attention, however, was Sinclair’s colorful and disturbing descriptions of how the sausage was made. His vivid portrayals of industrialized meat processing caused a public out roar, leading to the 1906 Meat Inspection Act, the Pure Food and Drug Act, and the founding of the Food and Drug Administration. Failing to help workers, Sinclair famously lamented, "I aimed at the public's heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach.” The public, however, was reminded that they did not know where their food came from, and that the commercial relationship to food involved risk. Since the 1880s, citizens such as journalists, women activists, and scientists advocated for food safety as manufacturers embraced industrial chemistry. In pursuit of profit, some companies knowingly peddled harmful products like meat preserved with cleaning agents or milk laced with embalming fluid (Blum, 2018). As product packaging and marketing courted consumer trust and the women’s pages

provided guidance and discipline, magazines and “more serious” sections of the newspaper could reveal the potential harms of modern eating.

The robust government response to reformers and muckrakers came during the Progressive Era, an age infused with Enlightenment ideals. Adamant about the possibility of social improvement, Progressives implemented the scientific management of society. This meant the widespread use of statistics, assigning experts to rationalized bureaucracies, and systematically applying “best practices” to all spheres: government, schools, hospitals, and the home. Spurred by socioeconomic transformations like urbanization, industrialization, and increasing market dependency, attempts were made to professionalize the cooking and sewing instructions of the 19th century into a scientific home economics (Levenstein, 2003a). This “domestic science”—institutionalized in vocational education— would “rationalize housework” (Elias, 2006, p. 66). According to this view, serving one’s family was the ideal way to serve one’s community, and expert knowledge could guide women in correct living.

Home economics drew on the recent scientization of food, including exact measurements in recipes and the intricacies of nutritionism. In 1896, Fannie Merritt Farmer published her watershed *Boston Cooking-School Cook Book*, a work of “scientific cookery” that was the first to use exact measurements like “teaspoons” and “cups.” This was a distinctly modern discourse as the recipe now had a “scientific ethos” being “rational and highly reproducible” (Cognard-Black, 2017, p. 67). Instead of a narrative longform, recipes took on their familiar format of exact ingredient list and steps. Taking over from oral traditions, local conditions, and ad hoc adjustments, the recipe was an empirical promise: do this, get that. While scientific in format, recipes could still have a

subjective, human element with features such as titles, authors, or narrative elements offering culturally specific explanations.

The omnivore's dilemma was further scientized, rationalized, and otherwise hierarchized for predictability and control in the discourse of nutrition, a new master signifier that reordered the "proper" relationship to food. In 1860, as *Ladies Home Magazine* discussed the proper weight of food a person should consume (36 ounces for a prizefighter, 20 ounces for a woman) or the supposed health benefits of apples, American scientists were building on the work of German chemists. Food was broken down into its constituent parts and macronutrients like proteins, fats, and carbohydrates were identified. Proteins were particularly revered. New concepts like the decontextualized "calorie" could serve as a discursive nodal point, an organizing logic of energy exchange that could guide policy decisions, dietary advice, household management, and individual choice. By the 1920s, the importance, authority, and legitimizing value of nutrition was further enhanced with the discovery of vitamins. Nutrition experts could thus claim certain foods were "protective" (Scrinis, 2013). Nutritionism—in its various, interrelated, and sometimes contradictory manifestations—has and continues to serve as an organizing and legitimating logic in local decision making and in the workings of the global political-economic order (Dixon, 2009).

Eating, as organized by science—and articulated through land grant universities—quantified food as an energy-for-money exchange. Home economics and rational consideration meant basic units of cost-per-use. Nutrition scientists, policy makers, home economists, higher education, women's pages, cookbooks, and the food industry's marketing and public relations apparatus could authoritatively advise the working classes

to eat more cheap meats and fats. Animals were identified as the ultimate protein. Stews, once dismissed as lowly "foreign-mixtures," were now promoted as energy-dense fuel, capable of sustaining laborers without need for a pay raise (Veit, 2013, p. 128). Government subsidies, chicken-in-every-pot American dreams, and the meat-masculinity complex ensured many Americans prioritized their menus around animal flesh. Like money's role as an abstract unit to compare and measure value, nutrition provided an abstract medium of exchange to compare completely different foods, to measure the value of apples to oranges. Such modern legitimations provided control and authority to those that originated them. They were employed in national projects of social or personal "improvement," as a tool of global political-economic power, and to persuade everyday Americans, especially women, into a specific, rationalized relationship with food.

The scientific, commercial, and social expectations and discursive logics surrounding food could devalue women's labor, even as it supposedly empowered them with knowledge, convenience, and a domain of relative expertise and importance. Food manufacturers, reformers, and domestic scientists continually told women they were doing it wrong, in need of expert guidance and labor-saving commodities. When it came to nourishing their families, women were not to trust tradition, their own skills, instincts, or abilities. They should instead buy canned and processed foods and consider the universal and decontextualized advice of nutritionists, policy makers, package designers, and marketers (Shapiro, 1986). The commercial introduction of baby formula and 140 plus years of ad campaigns, free samples at hospitals, and appeals to "scientific parenting," have further undermined a woman's sovereignty, challenging her individual authority and body autonomy.

Marketers learned to adroitly combine the scientization and commercialization of food, appropriating limited aspects of science to differentiate their products and persuade (sometimes threaten) women. With the discovery of vitamins and "protective" foods, a 1920s ad for the breakfast cereal Grape-Nuts could problematize eating and ask audiences, "Are you feeding your children properly?" It offered a warning: "It is possible to give children all the food they can possibly eat—and still their little bodies can be under-nourished." Grape-Nuts had the solution as it contained "*iron, phosphorus,* and *other mineral elements* that are taken right up by the body as vital food by the millions of cells in the body" (Levenstein, 2003b, p. 153). Cereals were not the only foods making health claims and playing on the insecurities of women. Morton's Salt, Welch's Grape Juice, Fleischman's Yeast, and Sunkist also warned of malnutrition and touted the health-giving benefits of their products. A woman, it seemed, should not trust her own knowledge and abilities but should depend on corporate America to process then fortify her family's food.

As eating increasingly relied on technology, markets, and the labor of others, this also resulted in a consumer deskilling, with women again at the forefront of disciplining discourses and the expectations of personal responsibility (Jaffe & Gertler, 2006). Over the course of the late 19th and 20th century, a larger proportion of American eaters purchased packaged, processed, and prepared foodstuffs. Even as such goods provided convenience in a hectic modern era, some eaters eventually lost the knowledge and skills associated with more autonomous food practices. This reduced eaters to mere consumers, as the food industry—collaborating with nutritionists and the state—asserted their power to define what constituted healthy food and what information was absolutely necessary

for food consumers to know. Understandings of food production were divorced from consumption as food was increasingly defined by nutritional content, convenience, the aesthetics of packaging, and its use as a status symbol. Through marketing, product packaging, dietary guidelines, and various channels of lifestyle media, people's ignorance of food was overwhelmed with a deluge of information dictated by narrow interests.

If social messages surrounding food could devalue women and the food industry could facilitate women's deskilling, so could that same industry offer women a synthetic guide and authority. Betty Crocker was a fictional character invented in 1921 by a Minneapolis flour company that is today part of General Mills. She was the most successful example of food corporations utilizing a "live trademark" to personify and humanize their products (Shapiro, 2004, p. 178). Companies like Quaker Oats, Kellogg, Pillsbury, and Dole hired home economists to persuade and help educate the public on the proper use of their products. Companies soon found that these home economists could have a more appealing authority when filtered through a fictional character. So while Gold Medal flour hired home economist Marjorie Child Husted to foster relationships with consumers, it was the figure of Betty Crocker who would become a household name in the 1940s and 1950s. What started as a gimmick to sell flour blossomed into an American homemaking empire, incorporating food products, television, radio, newspaper columns, books, pamphlets, and kitchen appliances. Marjorie Husted and the team behind Betty Crocker took a home economics approach to food and rationalized cooking. Recipes needed to be reliable, impervious to the inevitable mistakes of home cooks. General Mills instigated a strict testing process and reduced recipes to their simplest elements. Cooking was not an intuitive or embodied experience as audiences were invited

to simply follow steps, a spectator in their own meal preparation. Modernity had changed eating habits, limiting a household's food sovereignty by deskilling eaters and increasing their dependency on external sources. Commercial industry presented such transformations as inevitable and desirable, and eating was reduced to simply making the correct rational choice.

For the first time in history, nutritionists, marketers, policy makers, moralists, and the cultural intermediaries of media could form a composite voice telling the public there was a wrong way to eat. One could end up malnourished or even "overweight," a term coined in 1899. The state amplified the conversation when the United States entered World War I in 1917. This was a so-called total war, meaning all of society, civilians included, were mobilized in the war effort. Food shortages amongst European allies and feeding the troops meant American citizens were expected to forgo their normal portions of meat, wheat, butter, and sugar for the greater good. Food rationing, however, remained voluntary and exercising self-discipline as a sign of maturity and superiority was a familiar trope amongst liberal Progressives. Recognizing the difficulties of foregoing the pleasure and cultural meaning of eating, the government ran a "victory over ourselves" campaign, politicizing food and advocating self-control (Veit, 2013, p. 8). Eating became a moral question and exercising self-control was a sign of one's fitness for democracy and self-government.

And although women could not participate in the official institutions of federal government until 1920, they were at the forefront of food and questions of morality, sacrifice, and sovereignty. Tasked with household food management by a patriarchal modernity attempting to rationalize relations between the sexes, women directly

answered questions about eating and enabled self-government, even as they were denied its practice. Women also faced the changing ideals of the feminine. Spurred by nutrition science, Progressive ascetism, and the war effort, new value was given to being thin. A 1915 headline from the *Washington Post* claimed, “Number of Fat Women is Appalling!” and the idealized Gibson Girl of the 1920s was notably slender. For women, food was an intimately moral issue, not just for correctly nourishing their families, but for disciplining their own bodies and maintaining a sense of worth.

The era of rationalized food also saw more Americans open their tastes and preferences to what had previously been considered foreign foods. In 1910, dishes like chili and chicken noodle soup were considered obviously foreign, yet by the 1930s, these same dishes were considered quintessentially American. At the close of the 19th century, white, middle-class reformists sought to Americanize immigrants and advocated they change their diets to match the simple tastes of native-born Americans. Of course, there was no unified American diet, but in the face of large-scale immigration and armed with a supposed food science, reformers invented one. Americans, according to this view, ate plainly seasoned meals with meat, starches, and vegetables (if there were any) all kept separate. Sauces and gloppy food were avoided as these could hide impurities and the body could not as easily digest such “mixed” food (Veit, p. 128). American food was simple, honest, and segregated. By the 1930s, however, more viscous and complex dishes with multiple ingredients were the norm. Initially dismissed as “other” and potentially harmful, dishes like stews, casseroles, goulash, and pasta became mainstays of the American diet. Able to stretch ingredients during the lean times of the Great Depression,

such food showed American tastes were not fixed and that cultural acceptance, pragmatism, and palates could potentially co-constitute one another.

Middle-class food reformers and nativists from the 1880s through the Progressive Era thus idealized a diet that excluded the eating practices of African Americans, immigrants, the poor, domestic traditions based on historical settlement patterns, and almost the entirety of Southern cuisine—to say nothing of American Indians or native Mexicans, both finding themselves in the United States after acts of conquest and war. This rationalized view equated race with culture and food practices. The failings of both the poor and the biological inferiority of immigrants or different "races" could thus be explained by diet. Popular contemporary notions of eugenics, or the pseudo-science of "improving" racially conceptualized populations through regulated breeding, were supplemented by euthenics. Euthenics argued that racial improvement was not just hereditary but was also influenced by environmental factors like "sanitation, exercise, nutrition" and eating habits (Veit, p. 108). Like a culinary Henry Higgins, euthenists believed you could ascertain someone's diet by looking at their face shape. Like eugenics, euthenics was not a rigorous science but was rather a tool to legitimize one's own racial/dietary superiority. Racial improvements, euthenists argued, could be made through eating the correct foods as racial hierarchies were reverse engineered based on eating practices conceptualized as innate.

This inductive racism resulted in muddled and contradictory views. Sometimes whites (also a shifting category) were framed as delicate, their stomachs were frail compared to the coarse digestions of non-whites. In 1897 a physician thus held that white Americans could not eat Chinese food for a sustained period and would die if they tried.

Three years later, a *Washington Post* journalist explained that poor Blacks could eat anything like nails, cans, and animal hides. Meanwhile, other racial food "scientists" claimed white Americans were born with a desire for meat, particularly red meat, which explained their virility. Asians, on the other hand, ate paltry vegetables and were thus contemplative. In 1902 Samuel Gompers, the leader of the American Federation of Labor, published a pamphlet titled "Meat vs. Rice: American Manhood Against Asiatic Coolieism." In it, Gompers argued that Chinese labor could undercut white Americans because the Chinese could subsist on rice alone while masculine Americans required beef. And it would be wrong to "bring down the beef-and-bread man to the rice standard" (p. 24). Gompers may not have known about the high per-capita meat consumption of Koreans or contemplated the so-called "hearty" Eastern European immigrants that ate little meat, but such nuanced views of food were not the point. Racial constructions were legitimated by diet, regardless of veracity. What one ate, it was held, caused or exacerbated one's racial characteristics. Garlic, for example, made Italians more passionate, and one American emigrant in 1908 claimed eating Mexican food everyday dulled his mental faculties and made him adverse to work. Food itself thus became a racial marker; diet was a testament to one's internal traits and rightful place in the racial hierarchy.

Despite reformers attempts to "Americanize" immigrants and their diets, it was so-called foreign food like spaghetti, garlic, curry, stews, casseroles, stir fries, and sausages that were "Americanized" and incorporated as a regular part of the American diet. Spurred by WWI, the approval of nutrition science and home economists, the invitations of the food industry, and guided by an ever helpful/hegemonic media, notions

of a “normal” and “healthy” diet expanded in the 1920s and 1930s. This did not mean certain foods lost their racial associations, but custom, habit, and circumstance were also recognized as factors driving diet and taste. “Foreign” food could even be “fun” and magazines and cookbooks of the era regular featured recipes like Spanish Rice, Indian Curry, and Arabian Delight. Beyond experimentation, some foods once considered foreign were fully incorporated as American while others were accepted but kept at an exotic arm’s length. When Kraft first boxed macaroni in the 1930s, they were able to disassociate it from its Italian roots, while canned and dried spaghetti took longer to loosen its Italian “otherness.” Even though potatoes originated in the Americas, it had long been associated with the Irish and Germans. It was only during the 1910s that potatoes became associated with the prototypical “meat and potatoes” American diet. Broccoli was considered a vegetable used by Italians and was not widely popular until the 1930s. And while cooks in Texas and the Southwest made tamales and chili con carne, tamales remained “Mexican” while chili became as American as (English/Dutch/German) apple pie. A confluence of factors including immigration patterns, marketing strategies, global trading networks, government policy, and the inevitable contingencies of human history, all coalesced to loosen then rearticulate what foods were considered foreign, American, acceptable, and even desirable.

Whether a particular food or cuisine became a regular part of American food culture also depended on how easy such foods or dishes could be adapted to a vaguely defined “American” palette. There was no definitive standard American taste, turn of the century reformers had invented one using a middle-class New England diet as a standard. But as a hermeneutic tool, we can strategically essentialize eating patterns to see how

cuisines were adapted and transformed in the U.S. Overall, traditional cuisines were adapted by Americans (i.e., "Americanized") by reducing spice, increasing meat and cheese, increasing or inventing sweets, and eliminating anything objectionable. The regional cuisines of China and the history of Chinese food in the United States offers a prime example (Chen, 2014). Spice was reduced, particularly sweet sauces were introduced, crab "Rangoon" and other dishes were invented, more items were fried, bones were eliminated, and meats and vegetables were largely kept to those already popular in the United States. Today, there are more "Chinese" restaurants in the U.S. than there are McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King, and KFCs combined, and much of what they serve is uniquely American.

The 1920s was the birth of a nationally minded food culture that recognized something desirable in traditional and regional cuisines. This was not a straightforward adoption of food practices but played into what one food scholar has termed the "American paradox" (Kittler, 2012). In terms of taste, this concept refers to the American desire for the exotic and new while also wanting something familiar. This led to the Americanization of certain cuisines and the tweaking of traditional dishes to make them American food (e.g., adding cheese to a German beef sandwich, using ground meat instead of steak, and the quintessential American cheeseburger is born). Instead of seeing this as an essentialist "American" trait, however, history showed the culinary American paradox was more the result of modern changes than innate drives. The food industry and audience-seeking media kept new eating options on the agenda, while nutritionists and policy experts justified the values of certain foods. There was thus a changing view of immigrant and regional foods. Once considered inferior and a partial cause for

undesirable racial traits, they were now seen as nutritious, economical, and potentially enjoyable. In the face of industrialization and modern stresses, there was also talk of such traditional cuisines being more human and authentic, a comforting answer to Weber's iron cage. Properly Americanized for middle-class tastes, cuisines were adopted to local contexts and some dishes, like casseroles, lost their "foreign" aura and became quintessentially "American."

Overall, Americans new relationship to food from 1880-1950 also meant a new relationship with people, whether that person was fictional, invisible, or an intensified awareness of self. Ingredients and foodstuffs made by strangers were personified with brand names, mascots, and fictive food authorities. Characters and meanings drew on and reinforced traditional gender, race, and class understandings, resulting in newly potent stereotypes. With national product distribution, far-reaching media, and an expanding market economy, increasing numbers of Americans contemplated food as a packaged commodity replete with associated meanings. These meanings modernized racism and sexism while also introducing a detached, authoritative discourse of food science. Food became a moral issue and there was a scientifically wrong and correct way to eat. Americans could contemplate others' eating habits and more intensely scrutinize their own diets. Eating could be divorced from tradition, habit, and pleasure, and considered as isolated nutrients in an abstract exchange for energy. Self-control, discipline, economic prudence, and the exactness of science were necessary ingredients to help Americans master food and eat correctly.

Women were at the forefront of this modern maelstrom. Devalued by a patriarchal capitalist system that did not value their labor, deskilled by a food industry that preferred

commodity exchange, and threatened by marketers and nutritionists that they were providing food wrong, women were nonetheless tasked with negotiating the foodscape. They performed the unremunerated labor of acquiring, storing, preparing, serving, cleaning, and storing food necessary to reproduce households, give commodities a use-value, and enable the realization of profit. With the most intimate relationship to food, women were also encouraged to take an austere, rational view of eating, sacrificing when necessary for her family, country, and the changing ideals of thinness and beauty. "Empowered" as an authority over home cooking, she was nonetheless constantly undermined and offered non-stop advice, instruction, and commercial guidance.

Late Modernity and Media

Like the contentious periodization of modernity, there are questions about when or whether the modern era qualitatively changed and was surpassed. Are we currently living in a post-modern age? This debate often points to information technology and how phenomena like digitalization, the internet, and global supply chains have arguably freed people from the old, monolithic structures of modernity. It characterizes governments, corporations, and individuals as behaving in new, more flexible ways. While negotiating technological change and an explicitly "globalized" world characterizes contemporary living, this also describes the birth of the modern era. The current age thus shows more signs of continuity with the modern worldview and social order than difference. This is even more pronounced when race, gender, and social hierarchy are considered. Today, even when methods of production, the cultivation of self, and the construction of meaning are effectively shown as contrasting with modern routines, these are deviations that developed from modern roots. The liberal modern movement that challenged the

feudal "Great Chain of Being," for example, introduced notions about individuals improving their station in life, while the current neoliberal worldview expanded such thinking to enshrine individual flexibility and "*personal* responsibility" as a virtue. Over the 20th and early 21st century, the social institutions and individual worldviews emerging from the modern order were intensified. Such strategies only appear novel as our contemporary context exacerbates foundationally modern ideas like scientific management, the legitimacy of the market, individual freedom, and the centrality of media. Our current era is thus late modern, with a qualitative change occurring over the historical transformations of the post-World War II age.

Also like the modern era, providing an exact starting point for the late modern age is less important than understanding the process of its development. Postwar affluence was not evenly distributed, as the idealized American dream proved elusive and economic prosperity did not equate to social equity or stability. The countercultural and social upheavals of the 1960s permanently challenged authority, while the economic stagnation of the 1970s and conservative backlash of the 1980s dismantled the liberal welfare state, emboldened marauding capitalists, and reasserted traditional gender roles while inventing new racial stereotypes (e.g., the "welfare queen"). The government was treated as a problem, and conservative politicians attempted to reassert discipline and "traditional values" through market mechanisms. The (neo)liberal consensus and so-called "Third Way" politics of the 1990s echoed these fiscal sentiments as social spending was framed as socialist and a distortion of the market. Social austerity and corporate bailouts defined the state's response to the Great Recession of the late 2000s. And the recent administration that left in 2021 administered corporate tax cuts,

deregulation, and reregulation towards industry interests—with regulatory agencies run by former executives and lobbyists from the very industries they oversaw. The privatization of the state away from civic values was evidenced by a billionaire explicitly against the idea of public education heading the Department of Education. The last several decades—with a tipping point in the 1980s—thus witnessed a new social contract different from that devised in 1788, the Progressive Era of the early 20th century, or the New Deal of the 1930s. The modern liberalism of the Constitution that created a strong federal government and the early 20th century state using expert knowledge to actively solve social problems was replaced by a minimalist state, one that was actively posed as a cause of social problems. This neo-liberal "minimalism" could be misleading, however, as the state was dismantled and remade in the image of industry and finance. The deregulation and reregulation of the 1980s, 1990s, and today, have resulted in concentrations of wealth and power in all manner of industries, including media and throughout the food system (Bettig & Hall, 2012; Howard, 2016). Such changes were framed as good for the individual as the neoliberalism of the post-1980s equated individual freedom with freedom from the state and a freedom to exercise consumer choice.

Modern liberalism has largely given way to late modern neoliberalism, a social order and worldview that devalues the state, elevates the market, and prioritizes the consumer over the citizen. Shopping was posited as good for society, and 19th century self-reliance and early 20th century thrift were slowly replaced with notions of treating oneself, staying modern, buying happiness, and freedom through shopping. As production, externalities, household labor, and the existing resources and starting points

of individuals are ignored, neoliberal ideology often claims a post-gender, post-racial colorblindness that holds everyone as equally free (Dawson & Francis, 2016). This freedom must conform to the market, and any deviations from or inabilities to participate in the market economy are considered personal failures or distortions from the best of all possible worlds.

The beginnings of the late modern era also witnessed a multi-faceted food revolution or pivotal and long-lasting shift in American food culture. Originating in the 1960s, these changes reverberate today and structure the American foodscape. Compounded by the relative absence of state support and a reliance on the market, late modern commercial media systems play a pivotal role for today's eaters. The proliferation of lifestyle journalism is a defining feature of the current mediascape and understanding its developing characteristics fruitfully informs how late modern individuals are invited to eat.

Consumer culture triumphant

In 1900, home economists valued thrift as much as nutrition (Lesy & Stoffer, 2013), and values evolving from American Puritanism saw social leaders promote the wise use and responsible stewardship of money (Yates & Hunter, 2011). By October 11, 2001, one month after the 9/11 attacks, then President Bush told Americans to go shopping or else the terrorists had won. Over the course of the 20th century consumerism—the belief that individuals should acquire commodities to order and give meaning to their lives—firmly won out against all other ideologies (Cross, 2000). Shopping for pleasure evolved from vice to virtue, sometimes taking the form of patriotic duty (e.g., economic recovery from the Great Recession and COVID-19 being reliant on

consumer "confidence" and spending). While this has certainly been a contested process, one current indicator of the "health" of the American economy is the number of new cars purchased. Personal consumption makes up 70% of another pivotal economic indicator, the Gross Domestic Product. Investors, policy makers, politicians, and pundits closely watch this sacred number, planning and praying for its growth. In the United States, personal consumption was gradually equated with the common good and often celebrated for its empowering, pleasurable, and supposedly democratizing value.

Consumerisms relative triumph over all other "isms" was not inevitable or the natural development of some unfolding economic logic. The specific history of the United States—its contextual factors and various active agents—meant different interests vied for hegemony and particular decisions were made. Baudrillard (1998) characterized the 19th century as the age that saw rural populations move into wage-earning factories and the 20th as the century made wage-earning workers into reliable consumers. While a bold generalization, historians have lent this argument empirical weight. Sklansky (2002) examined changing conceptions of freedom, equality, the market, and the self in the 19th and early 20th century. As the US economy changed from a local agrarian society to a corporate-dominated national entity, he argued, the Republic's original socioeconomic ideals such as self-employment and land ownership became increasingly untenable. New conceptions were formulated that equated the market with common social goals and the source for the self-realization.

Changing the social and individual imagination to mirror the needs of capitalist market exchange continued throughout the 20th century. As wage-earners continually lost sovereignty in the workplace, policy experts, government leaders, and business interests

attempted to redefine citizenship from one of autonomous workers to an investor's democracy—citizen-investors with a stake in corporate, and thus national, success. Ott (2014) showed this process was just as concerned with allaying public hostility towards corporate capitalism as it was about raising capital for firms. Hyman (2011) detailed how businesses, government, and consumers all worked for the expansion of credit and thus debt. While this provided businesses with a steady supply of customers and allowed some consumers the ability to make purchases they otherwise could not afford, this also set up a precarious system of dependency and the perpetual threat of insolvency. Using historical analysis, Hyman (2011) showed how the 2007/2008 financial crisis "occurred not because capitalism failed but because it succeeded" (p. 284).

After the debates of the Progressive Era and the Roaring Twenties, the battle for the political-economic hearts and minds of the American public intensified during the Great Depression and Cold War (Burgin, 2015). Fones-Wolf (1994) showed how postwar business interests sold their vision of limited government, managerial authority, and an individualist consumer ethos by controlling ideas and images across a number of contexts: the shop floor, schools, community events, employee educational classes, religious institutions, and various media outlets. Similar to Fones-Wolf, Ewen (1976) and Marchand (1985) explored the role of business leaders and advertising in shifting public attitudes from self-reliance and thrift to spending and market-based solutions. Ewen argued that advertising worked to establish the "authority of capitalistic enterprise" (p. 109). While oversimplifying the complexities of consumer culture and successful mass persuasion, Ewen rightfully examined the ideology of those promoting a consumer society. Marchand identified the 1920s as a decisive shift in advertising from being

product-centered to consumer focused. Advertisers were harbingers of the pressures of modernity—obsolescence, changing fashions, social expectations—but so too did they provide a discursive frame to negotiate that modernity. Advertisers crafted a world of individualism and intimacy, no longer just selling a product they sold "solutions" to one's modern problems. Collectively, these works show the historically and socially constructed nature of American ideals and economic common sense so often posited as timeless, universal truth. It further illustrates the convergence of interests, historical alliances, and substantial resources invested in making the American public's interests appear the same as American business.

Americans were not "born" shoppers, they were taught to consume. The impetus for such instruction largely stemmed from the latest iteration of the modern economic order. Capitalism, a highly contested concept with as many periodizations as modernity, and the issue of "effective demand" can illuminate some key factors in the development of American consumer culture. Replacing guild systems, domestic production, cooperative arrangements, and increasingly artisanship, capitalism is an economic order based on the private ownership of the means of production for profit. It relies on wage-labor, the production and exchange of commodities, and the use of money to facilitate this novel political, economic, and social arrangement. Capitalism should not be confused with all instances of market exchange, and too often academics and ideologues build the concept into an all-encompassing monolith from which there is no escape (Gibson-Graham, 2007). As a hermeneutic tool, we can focus on the commodity-profit logic and the specific social relationships it engenders.

A commodity is something bought or sold in a market and their existence predates modern capitalism. In a pre-capitalist era a baker, for example, would own his own tools, produce a commodity (C) like bread, sell it for money (M), and use that money to buy other commodities. His material conditions could thus be described as C-M-C. His wife and children would also supplement the household economy, not necessarily making commodities, but producing items the family would use like candles, butter, vegetables, kindling, etc. In a capitalist system, on the other hand, a capitalist starts with money, uses it to buy labor and materials to make a commodity, then seeks to sell that commodity for more money than they began with. A capitalist's material logic thus runs M-C-M+. The "surplus value" realized in this process would then be partially reinvested so the M-C-M+ process could start all over again. The more capital one "accumulates," the more can be reinvested for further capital accumulation.

Such a system calls for constant growth as once surplus value is realized in M+, it must be reinvested to realize more surplus value. If no profitable outlets for investment can be found, then the system is in crisis and recession or depression results. In this instance, the capitalist system is in a period of crisis not because of issues in production—of not being able to produce enough things—but because the goods produced cannot be sold at a price to realize a profit. Workers, however, remain under the same logic of C-M-C as their labor becomes commodified. They no longer have access to the tools of production and must sell their labor to a capitalist for money so they can obtain the necessary goods to survive. Workers thus become dependent on capitalists and the consumer system. Rationalized into specialized tasks, workers are "deskilled" meaning their labor is interchangeable with another and thus devalued. Occupied with

wage labor and deskilled, increasing numbers of workers cannot produce things for themselves and became further implicated in this commodity culture (Braverman, 1974).

This relationship suits the capitalist as they look to produce more surplus value. To realize more profit, capitalists are incentivized to speed up M-C-M+ or make more areas of life subject to its logic. As an aggregate, furthermore, the capitalist class cannot pay out in wages what it makes in profit as no surplus could then be realized (it would simply be M-C-M). The system must thus pay workers less than they produce, continually grow, and appropriate non-capitalist value to realize a surplus. Capitalism thus engenders constant growth and incentivizes (and requires) exploitation, expropriation, and externalities—not paying or accounting for the full costs of economic activity. Environmental degradation, the breaking of one's body for manual labor, and the countless domestic and emotional tasks traditionally shouldered by women are a few such externalities. These subsidize the cost of capitalism and enable "it"—as a system of specific relationships—to "generate" value and material growth.

As a social system—and by the activities of human labor—capitalism and changing technologies increased production and productive capabilities on an unprecedented scale. But the contradictions and antagonisms of commodity-profit logic meant capitalism had a distribution problem. Capitalists could organize production and find ways to keep costs low, but they would only realize a surplus if someone bought the goods at an appropriate price. Classical (liberal) economists, in a nascent world of material growth and potential, overlooked such issues with dictum's like Say's law stating, 'supply creates its own demand.' Neo-classical (neoliberal) economists, in a more saturated context still dedicated to growth, argue that supply and demand will always find

equilibrium and reward the best firms. Dogmatism, however, does not explain downturns, and the history of capitalism is rife with booms, busts, panics, recessions, and depressions. In addition to massively increasing production and wealth, another glaring legacy of capitalism is its ability to create poverty, misery, waste, and uncertainty.

For capitalism to function—for capitalists to realize profit, reinvest, and keep the whole process going—its productive capabilities must be matched by the appropriate effective demand from individuals and other organizations. To achieve a surplus, every capitalist is thus trying to limit production costs and realize the highest price for their products. Production costs include wages, and each capitalist must work to convince his own workers to limit their consumption and accept the lowest possible wage. At the same time, each capitalist wants everyone else's workers consuming as much as possible. Moreover, as individual capitalist firms compete, there is a compulsion to increase one's productive capabilities to undercut the competition, to increase scale in order to decrease price. Competing firms must follow suit or be priced out of the market. These contradictions and pressures occur not because individual capitalists are greedy but are instead structural elements inherent in capitalism's logic. Regardless of their origins, productive capabilities are encouraged to grow while wages must be kept to a minimally acceptable standard. Since low aggregate demand relative to production meant economic crisis, policy makers, industry leaders, and government officials became vested in managing effective demand. And since capitalists as a class could not pay out in wages the necessary demand and still realize a surplus, "non-productive" sources of demand and consumption were required.

It is one of the great ironies of history that the first modern welfare state was one of the most conservative in Europe, Otto von Bismarck's newly united Germany. The consequences of capitalist logic were indifferent to political orientation, and Bismarck implemented measures like national health insurance in 1883. This was not done out of progressive benevolence towards the working class. Bismarck practiced a Machiavellian *Realpolitik* and passed social reforms as a practical measure to stave off the growing support for socialism and communism. In the United States, Progressives passed consumer protection laws and provided some worker protections in the early 20th century. It was not until the Great Depression in the 1930s, however, that the country ushered in its "New Deal" of a liberal welfare state. Triggered by the contradictions of capitalism itself and not the threat of an alternative ideology, Franklin Roosevelt (FDR) drew on the work of economist John Maynard Keynes to save capitalism. Basically, the state would facilitate and help guarantee effective demand. Through expenditures like public works, welfare payments, and job programs, the government could act as a source of effective demand, aggregating as one big consumer. At the same time, by regulating and controlling the money supply, the state could keep the cost of investment low, encouraging growth. The modern welfare state was thus created to both tame and encourage the excesses of capitalism.

And nothing about Keynesian economics required the state to spend money on social welfare. Maintaining high rates of aggregate consumption was a quantitative not qualitative matter. Military spending was just as effective and World War II, along with fiscal policy, helped end the Great Depression (US unemployment was still 17% in 1939). Cold War armament and the struggle for geopolitical dominance were also useful

sources of effective demand. Perhaps too useful, in 1961 President and former five-star general Dwight D. Eisenhower warned against a permanent "military-industrial complex" that profited at the expense of the public and influenced policy. Just as liberal notions of individual freedom lacked substantive guides on how to use that freedom, liberal economics provided a solution without substantive grounding. Managing growth and effective demand could be done with the public interest in mind, or it could just as easily be channeled towards private interests and vanity projects.

Starting with the Great Depression, the role of consumption (and under-consumption) became a central concern for policymakers, intellectuals, and other social leaders. In a 1932 presidential campaign speech, FDR presciently argued that economic thinking was changing and "that in the future we are going to think less about the producer and more about the consumer" (Cohen, p. 24). Manufacturers and marketing agents had been considering the consumer for decades now, and product promotion, packaging, and branding proved another effective tool in realizing surplus value (M+). With common concern after World War II and battling Soviet communists defined as the exact opposite of freedom loving capitalists, the state-capitalist nexus restructured American society, infrastructure, and foreign policy around commodity consumption.

American consumer culture was a point of pride during the Cold War, immortalized by the so-called Kitchen Debate of 1959. Then U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon argued capitalism was superior to communism because of all the consumer goods it could provide. Addressing Soviet Leader Nikita Khrushchev in the mock kitchen of a model home, Nixon pointed out the fruits of capitalism—like a dishwasher and refrigerator—that the typical worker could afford. Two decades earlier, FDR suggested

the Soviets read the Sears Catalog to learn about the West. Managing effective demand was not just an economic or policy issue. The access and use of consumer goods proved the supremacy of the American way of life. Such consumption defined Americans, and commodities—their production, promotion, display, purchasing, and use—were a testament to American values.

An obscure but perceptive marketing consultant in 1955 captured the centrality of consumer culture to the American psyche. Appearing in a retail trade publication, he articulated how effective demand, identity work, and consumerism could ideally converge to create the meaning of life:

> Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfactions, our ego satisfactions, in consumption. The measure of social status, of social acceptance, of prestige, is now to be found in our consumptive patterns. The very meaning and significance of our lives today expressed in consumptive terms. The greater the pressures upon the individual to conform to safe and accepted social standards, the more does he tend to express his aspirations and his individuality in terms of what he wears, drives, eats—his home, his car, his pattern of food serving, his hobbies (Lebow, 1955).

This showed how the goals of macroeconomic management and microeconomic surplus value could align and translate into symbols, perceptions, actions, and beliefs for individuals to then negotiate. In other words, it described how a consumer culture could ideally become a consumer society. Social relations could be geared towards the pleasure of "goods" and institutions would help individuals imagine their identities through commodities and leisure.

A consumer culture can generally be described as a way of life where identity, social status, meaning, and values are derived from commodities. Historians have shown there have been many iterations of consumer cultures in American history, each existing

in their own context. Consumer culture before industrialization existed on smaller scales, were not the primary sources of American identity, or were balanced by an esteem for producers (Glickman, 1999). A consumer society, on the other hand, is when commodity consumption channels:

> human wants, desires, and longings into the *principal propelling and operating force of society*…[coordinating] systemic reproduction, social integration, social stratification, and the formation of human individuals, as well as playing a major role in the process of individual and group self-identification and in the selection and pursuit of individual life policies (Bauman, 2007, p. 28).

A consumer society is thus consumer culture widely practiced, reaching a critical point to re-orient individuals, social structures, values, and goals around commodity production, exchange, and use. It is a market society where, "we are all *in* and *on* the market, interchangeably or simultaneously customers and commodities" (Bauman, 2004, p. 91). Capitalist logic encourages the increased scale and speed of production and exchange, not discriminating between commodity use and using up or waste.

At the turn of the 20th century, sociologists observed the consumer culture of the wealthy, and their behaviors, beliefs, and identity work foreshadowed the consumer society. Veblen (1899) studied the "leisure class," those not only exempt from work, but those tasked with managing society's economic "surplus" and political power. In modern society, wealth granted people a certain prestige, and social status was tied to money and property. Unlike other sociologists, however, Veblen did not see modern social rank as entirely new. He argued that it had residual elements of the feudal and what he termed "barbarian" social order. Using a combination of anthropology and history, he argued peaceful and somewhat equitable "savage" people gave way to a predatory "barbaric" culture that separated the labor of the genders. Women were allotted drudgery like

horticulture and child rearing, while men had "exploits" like hunting or going to war. Men's tasks, according to Veblen, were considered more honorable and the first forms of ownership were trophies that illustrated a successful raid. This was the earliest form of property that had nothing to do with subsistence. It was merely to establish "invidious distinction" (p. 17). Among the first trophies of distinction, Veblen reasons, were the women of competing tribes and such "marriage" by coercion also marked the first forms of ownership. By taking an enemy's women, a barbarian man could assert his group's dominance and superiority to the external "other." Historically, this relationship eventually extended to slavery and serfdom, and Veblen's contemporary age did not stray from this logic. Emulation and distinction were still the root of all ownership, he reasoned, and struggle, competition, and exploits now took an industrial form. In this context, property was no longer evidence of a successful raid, but a testament to the individual's importance in his own community. Property was still a trophy but now gave distinction between its own and other members of the same group. Wealth appeared intrinsically honorable and conferred honor onto its possessor.

The roots of ownership still intact, modern society evolved to the point where money and wealth were necessary for self-respect. Wealth as the basis for status meant one's worth was always relative to another. Men prided themselves, Veblen (1899/1994) argued, on having what others did not and could envy those with more. Community members lost esteem if they did not reach a certain property level, and even the comfortable could find themselves lacking the social prestige of the better off. One could even get used to one's level of wealth and desire relatively more (today we call this "growing into one's income"). For the most part, modern community members

internalized this logic as a world of competition meant self-respect was based on the opinions of one's neighbors. Such competition and relativity of status also meant the desire for wealth could not be satiated. There was no point at which one had enough, because one could always have more and gain even more esteem and envy from their fellows. In addition to economic and political incentives, social status and relative self-worth offered another motive to accumulate capital.

One's wealth and thus due prestige, however, was not immediately obvious. Veblen (1899) coined the terms "conspicuous leisure" and "conspicuous consumption" to conceptualize the practices of the status-hungry wealthy. These were behaviors that displayed one's wealth, such as an industrialist's wife doing charity work or wearing luxury clothes. These were not strictly necessary and showed how a person could afford to be "unproductive" and live above and beyond subsistence. While Veblen was an early pioneer of sociology and made empirical observations of the wealthy, this consumer culture was not restricted to the upper classes. A 1913 comic strip named *Keeping Up with the Joneses* satirized modern social competition. The strip ran until 1940 and focused on a family that failed to "keep up" with their neighbors, the never-shown Jones family. The title remained an idiom for using one's neighbors and peers as a benchmark of success and worrying that one was not doing enough.

American consumer culture was not limited to envy, display, managing effective demand, the incentive of capital accumulation, or even the symbolic world of marketing, product packaging, and advertising. Far from being passive "dupes," some Americans, especially women and other marginalized groups, could use consumption for political causes or to critique society and hold it accountable. These were citizen-consumers,

civic-minded community members that happened to be consumers as a result of historical circumstance. As such, consumerism could be harnessed for the public good and the rights of all consumers could be protected. Social reformers at the end of the 19th century and Progressive women of the early 20th advocated for truth-in-advertising, pure food regulation, child labor laws, and worker protections. Since obtaining commodities from the market was a central part of life, these women looked to hold this arena accountable. They were thus citizens first, advocating for their and other's rights through consumer-related issues. During the Great Depression, African Americans asserted their citizenship with the "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work Movement," resulting in the hiring of thousands of Black people. This foreshadowed the success of other consumer-based campaigns like the bus boycotts and sit-ins of the 1950s and 1960s. Citizen-consumers of the 1960s and 1970s sought and achieved consumer protections and brought a new degree of scrutiny to corporations and the various levels of government. Consumerism, when grounded in a strong public-mindedness of citizenship, could thus serve as a political strategy against marginalization and act as a source of animating empowerment.

There were still, however, definitive limits to the political potentials of harnessing consumerism. Purchasing power did not lead directly to political power and money could not buy social justice. African American consumer spending currently exceeds a trillion dollars a year, yet recent events like the disproportionate COVID-19 mortality rates amongst African Americans, police and vigilante killings of Black people around different parts of the country, and the widespread George Floyd summer 2020 protests in Black (and non-Black) communities all indicate ongoing marginalization and frustration.

Historians have made similar arguments about the inadequacies of consumption for achieving equality (Cohen, 2003; Weems Jr., 1998). People not wanted as citizens were still desirable as consumers, and some businesses changed their marketing and approach to court African Americans. While prepackaged goods could assure Black shoppers that clerks were not manipulating weights or giving them inferior goods, economic justice remained Janus-faced and incomplete. Desegregating white businesses undermined undercapitalized Black businesses unable to compete. Discrimination in employment, lending, housing, education, and by government agencies like the USDA meant Black consumers, businesses, and farmers were structurally inhibited from meeting their full potential. Furthermore, the market desirability of Black consumers attracted tobacco and alcohol interests (Jones & Perry, forthcoming). Undercapitalized Black media outlets and politicians became overly dependent on such funding which hampered their ability to address the health and social problems engendered by such products. African Americans also disproportionately consumed more products of the culture industries, but this did not translate into more Black investors, producers, directors, or screenwriters. The profits from industries that thrive on Black artists and creativity remained elusive as African American ownership was largely out of reach. While consumer culture could offer opportunities, capitalist logic meant profits accumulated elsewhere. And buying commodities—even once achieved as a basic right—could not guarantee equality, sovereignty, or the basic right of recognition.

After World War II, the American state-capitalist nexus fully committed to the consumer society envisioned by FDR, Nixon, and the most imaginative marketing agents (Cohen, 2003; Cross, 2000; de Grazia, 2005). Policy makers and private enterprise

looked to build on the economic recovery of the war and avoid the hardships and questioning engendered by the Depression. The government could help newly invigorated industry transition from producing munitions to merchandise, sublimating wartime mobilization into a consumerist lifestyle. This social order was built on mobility, speed, and credit, captured in the growing importance of the automobile. The federal government built the national highway system, and "white flight" from cities made cars a necessity for suburban living (Kunstler, 1994). The 1950s saw the introduction of fast food, shopping malls, credit cards, widespread commercial television, and Disneyland. The G.I. Bill and new forms of lending—which actively excluded many African Americans, women, and others deemed unfit—encouraged homeownership and the pursuit of "white collar" jobs in a growing service economy. A renewed "cult of domesticity" tried to place women back in the home, encouraging them to step aside after stepping up for the war effort. Women were also encouraged to shop, although many were denied access to credit without their husband's permission until the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974. From the government, the workplace, and nearly every corner of the media, Americans were told that purchasing commodities and their role as consumers was good for society. Shopping was proof of their superiority to communists, and Americans had a patriotic duty to fulfill their desires in the marketplace. There was no need to redistribute wealth or actively pursue other forms of justice, this thinking ran, as a growing economy would "raise all boats" and ensure hard-work and good behavior were rewarded.

This ideal that consumerism could balance mass production and consumption to build an ideal society was part of the liberal "new deal" of the 20th century. This was not

just FDR's famed New Deal between citizens and the state but manifested earlier as an arrangement between the owners of capital and wage-earners. In the early 20th century, industrialist Henry Ford was amongst the first to articulate this new world order built on mass production and consumerism. Scholars use the term "Fordism" to describe both a particular social-economic order and also a specific period of postwar economic growth built on such an order and lasting until the 1970s. Ford envisioned a world where workers gladly accepted discipline in exchange for high rates of consumption. Drawing inspiration from the industrial meatpacking plants originating in the 1880s, Ford rationalized his automobile production process in the first attempt to mass produce cars and make them relatively affordable. Fordist production utilized the latest in Taylorism or scientifically managed labor, organizing semi-skilled workers in an assembly line. Worker movements and processes were measured and corrected for efficiencies, each worker assigned a specific set of tasks they routinely repeated. Such production further used economies of scale (lowering costs per unit by increasing number of units produced) to lower prices for consumers, accumulate capital, and further increase scale, potentially repeating the process. In exchange for accepting management's orders, workers were offered a healthy "living wage." Ever concerned with efficiency, Ford looked to temper worker turnover, and in 1914 he more than doubled his highest wage to $5 a day. This attracted other willing workers and rewarded productive employees. The Fordist terms were set: be a good, rational worker, accept your subordination to production, and you can have job security and an increased ability to consume.

Fordism did not limit rationalization to the workplace, however, as this capitalist-worker compromise expanded labor discipline into all areas of life. Workers were

expected to be of high character and practice "100% Americanism." He was expected to be married, keep an orderly house, and have healthy, well-behaved children. Ford infamously started a "Sociology Department" to investigate every aspect of his workers' lives: alcohol consumption, shopping routines, things they were buying, cleanliness habits, personal relationships. It was eventually staffed by 200 people, any number of whom could make sure an employee's child was attending school or show up at a worker's house to see that everything was in order. The business magnate also attempted to set up two ideal "company towns" in Brazil, Belterra and Fordlandia. Establishing plantations to export rubber, coffee, bananas, and other commodities, Ford also built schools, churches, stores, radio stations, and a golf course to incorporate local workers into the Fordist lifestyle and social pact. Worker turnover was high as Ford failed to properly account for local culture. Even the food provided workers did not sit well, as many Brazilians complained it hurt their stomachs. Plagued by unrest and unanticipated complications, the experiment failed, abandoned after the invention of synthetic rubber. Fordism was thus an exchange of discipline for consumerism, both of which extended beyond work and the marketplace to encompass the entire person. It was not always accepted as offered.

Not discounting those that resisted, historians broadly consider the years 1945-1973 as a time of liberal consensus, the Fordist-Keynesian agreement and favorable global conditions resulting in the desired levels of economic growth (Brinkley, 1998; De Grazia, 2005; Slater, 1997). This particular state-capitalist nexus saw the government invest in public projects and infrastructure, facilitate easy credit, encourage education for white-collar or "post-industrial" jobs, and provide some social support for those excluded

or not properly resourced by capitalist accumulation. In other words, the state made society conducive to commodity exchange by ensuring effective demand, mitigating inequality, and addressing some of the exploitation and externalities of capitalism. This attempt to overcome the limits of M-C-M+ resulted in a political system that paradoxically accepted the logic of capitalism, looked to temper its consequences, and simultaneously encouraged its constant growth and development.

With a substantial counterculture "dropping out" of conformity and workplace alienation reaching a tipping point, Fordism reached another limit as economic growth stalled in the 1970s. Saturated domestic markets were compounded by a global energy crisis, and increased worker agitation like strikes and absenteeism indicated that access to consumer culture was no longer an adequate deal. In 1973-1974 stocks lost 48% of their value as the country experienced a new economic phenomenon: stagflation. Growth (M-C-M+) was stagnant and inflation was high, a situation that did not make economic sense. Inflation was not supposed to occur in a "weak" economy. Unemployment spiked, GDP went negative, and the country entered a recession just shorter in length than the Great Recession of 2007-2009. Corporations, policy makers, and investors— the latter increasingly important in the pursuit of surplus—were in clear need of a different strategy.

While some attempted a neo-Fordism, more often the dominant economic paradigm of U.S. firms and policymakers (and the majority of industrialized nations) is described as post-Fordism. Instead of a set and relatively stable factory system based on mass production, post-Fordism is best described by the term "flexibility." It also characterized by a move towards dematerialization or generating surplus value beyond

physical production. This has been called a "post-industrial" society (Bell, 1976) and maps onto the larger history of the United States from primarily an agricultural, then industrial, and now service-based economy. Dematerialization can also refer to the physical form of a corporation as many firms invested more in information technologies, public relations, and brand management while outsourcing physical production to developing nations (Castells, 1996; Klein, 2000; Graham, 2006). There has also been a move towards financialization, where surplus value is "created" using various financial instruments such as futures, credit swaps, and packaged debt. Financialization can also refer to the focus on shareholder value as a form of corporate governance and the strategies involved in maximizing stock prices. The finance, marketing, and branding revolutions of the 1980s meant the economy and M-C-M+ was no longer bogged down by heavy material, but was instead a flexible economy based on signs, the manipulation of meaning, and outsourcing. Much of this took place in the dematerialized digital realm (still supported by a material world of servers, energy use, etc.) as the internet, mobile communication systems, and other technologies loosened the previous limits of information flow and enabled more fluid and flexible individuals and institutions.

Such flexibility also meant worker insecurity as the consumer bribe and sociological management of Fordism gave way to an internalized and personality-based "human resources" approach to labor (Rose, 1991). There was no longer a long-term social contract between employer and worker as firms needed to stay lean and flexible, able to shed employees, hire contract workers, or outsource labor as swiftly as "the market" and now stock value dictated. This "flexible accumulation" (Harvey, 1989) could help firms negotiate the traditional limits of M-C-M+ but proved more precarious

and destabilizing for wage-earners. Labor was expected to be flexible while ownership and the accumulators of capital remained relatively fixed.

The limits of economic growth and saturated consumer markets of the 1970s also saw a shift from mass-produced, standardized products intended for a homogeneous mass to more specialized goods marketed towards a niche or "target" audience. This is also when women's pages were rebranded as "lifestyle" sections. Goods were not just bought for their one-off enjoyment, they were part of a core (but flexible) identity and system of goods, a lifestyle. This led to a change in marketing. Instead of differentiating products from one another and trying to aggregate broad demographics as potential consumers, marketing would use coded cultural meanings to differentiate consumers into lifestyle groups. Such post-Fordist, late modern marketing did not just cater to pre-existing groups but helped create them, reifying and articulating these lifestyles through various media channels.

Along with popular culture like movies, music, and magazines, such commercial communication created specific cultural meanings around different systems of objects and practices, offering clearly defined but relatively accessible and plastic identities. Economies of scale, while still valuable, were supplemented or redirected towards economies of scope—decreasing cost by producing complementary or a variety of goods that would have been more expensive to produce separately. With an array of styles that comprehensively addressed seemingly all aspects of modern living, individuals were invited to create a sense of self (identity work) using commercially driven, but seemingly personalized symbolic systems (i.e., lifestyle media).

The value of symbols in the creation of profit, known crudely since at least Benjamin Franklin, took on a new decisive importance in the post-industrial order of information technology and financialization. In the 1980s, companies like Microsoft, IBM, Apple, and Intel started playing a bigger role in more people's lives and government re/deregulation enabled a frenzy of corporate speculation, hostile takeovers, mergers, and other strategies to maximize "shareholder value." Companies like Nike took advantage of a global economy and media system to reinvent how they did business. The CEO admitted Nike no longer made shoes, they sold ideals, aura, and image. Outsourcing production to developing nations with lower wages, worker protections, or environmental regulations, the company could focus on marketing and the symbolic meanings associated with the brand. Unburdened by the material, the company could instead focus on creative messaging and, for example, buy media time to show Michael Jordan dunk a basketball in slow motion. The Nike swoosh logo, designed by a college student for $35, became the most valuable part of the company. Sponsoring professional athletes, teams, sporting events, and organizations, as well as having a wide range of products using an economy of scope, Nike attempted to embed itself as ubiquitous to sports, as being part of the athletic lifestyle. With its focused and consistent marketing style, it tried to associate its brand-logo with the very ideals of sport itself: individual performance, determination, hard work, perseverance, victory (Nike being the Greek goddess of victory). In the latest stage of capitalism, it was not just land and industrial production that generated capital. The increased circulation and consumption of goods meant the creation and management of meaning took on new significance. To overcome the limits

of constant growth, much of the economy was dematerialized as capital accumulation would rely on information, aesthetics, and knowledge (Lash & Urry, 1994).

Even as firms pursuing profit and the means to accumulate capital were dematerializing, the material world remained. Food was still grown, structures were built, healthcare was provided, hardware and energy were still required to access the internet, physical goods were still made, and humans were still attached to their bodies. The power to socially define these things, however, had noticeably shifted to those that specialized in image management, branding, public relations, or other strategic communications. The power to value these things also shifted, to hedge fund managers, venture capitalists, policy makers, and other financial and corporate interests aggregating and analyzing "data" to pursue short term gains. The very way surplus value was "produced" indicated how the United States had become reoriented as a consumer society. Unlike agriculture, industry, or artisanal labor that produced a final material product, the production of value in the service-finance-information economy entirely depended on consuming resources. A marketing firm, for example, consumed office space, drafting supplies, resources for focus groups, and a host of other goods while also relying on food systems to feed employees. Crucially, they also relied on other producers of goods and services and service to market. In Hollywood, where actors and "producers" are said to "make" a movie, this making is entirely reliant on consuming resources produced by industrial and artisanal workers. Investors do not themselves make any goods or services but solely rely on the work and consumption of others. In American consumer society then, the most valuable forms of "production" relied the most heavily on consumption.

At the heart of consumer society was the hero upon which the entire order was built: the sovereign consumer. In addition to providing effective demand, his [*sic*] rational choices were said to guide social institutions, ensuring they were accountable to individuals and their preferences. Any standards, values, criteria, or considerations outside of individual taste was considered authoritarian, elitist, idealistic, or simply unfounded fantasy. Consumer sovereignty, it was reasoned, would lead to the best of all possible worlds because institutions would either respond to freely choosing individuals or cease to exist. The modern subject was interpellated in terms of freedom and choice, and his unhindered consumer decisions were elevated above all other considerations. Nixon did not just brag about kitchen appliances because they fulfilled something as trivial as human "need." Rather, he tried to show that the capitalist (as opposed to communist) order was built on individual freedom, as self-determining consumers worked hard, their desires leading to social progress. Social planning was unnecessary and the sovereign consumer himself did not need to worry about production or the underlying material relationships that enabled his consumption. In the age of marketing, symbolic strategies to realize surplus value, and dematerialized capital accumulation, it was his duty to ignore it. The sovereign consumer had no external guides or constraints as he was merely asked to follow his wants; he was actively encouraged to pursue romantic fantasy (Campbell, 1987). Rationalized, disciplined, and otherwise unfree in production, the sovereign consumer could then "reenchant" his world through consumption (Ritzer, 1999).

The sovereign consumer—divorced from his role of producer and asked to only consider his desires—amplified a general tendency of capitalism, the commodity fetish

(Haug, 1986; Marx, 1983). Commodity fetishism is when economic value is mistakenly seen as inherent in a commodity, instead of as arising from the social relationships and human agency that enabled its production and valuation. As commodities are produced under the wage-relation of capitalism, mediated through a market, and further abstracted by money, the value of all commodities is made relative to each other. Workers no longer controlled the products of their labor and the market thus appears as a series of "things," made comparable by how much they cost. The market is not merely things in relation to other things, however, as human relationships, co-operation, activity, and choices are obscured in this abstract valuation. Humans thus give up their agency as "the relations connecting the labor of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as…material relations between persons and social relations between things" (Marx, p. 447) Commodities thus appear as independent entities with inherent value set by predetermined laws like supply and demand, while humans appear thing-like, as interchangeable workers or consumers.

Commodity fetishism thus externalizes and projects human agency onto an abstract and vague source, divorcing the commodity from all social context and processes of its creation. Decoupled from its origin, the commodity appears as something that just is, without genesis it magically appears in its final form. Consumers are encouraged to only consider the commodity in relation to themselves, as commodities are decontextualized and celebrated purely for the pleasure they give individuals. The part (the final form of the commodity) is mistaken for or treated as the whole (the relationships and consequences of producing/using the commodity). The romanticism of marketing, consumer culture, and the sovereign consumer exacerbates this fetishism,

answering consumer ignorance about commodities and relationships with desirable associations, positive fantasies, and all manner of possible (i.e., arbitrary) meanings.

Like commodity fetishism at a larger scale, prioritizing consumer sovereignty can lead some individuals to reify the self and economy in overly simplified ways. In statements regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lieutenant Governor of Texas said, "there are more important things than living" and that 500 deaths was not enough to warrant harming Texas' economy (Samuels, 2020). Such thinking ignores the relationships and processes that constitute an economy and confuse it with an independently existing thing outside of people. The abstract entity, the economy, is considered an end in-itself without considering the relationships, materiality, activities, choices, and people that constitute it. Humans with agency are instead treated like things, while the abstraction that is a thing is animated with life and agency. This fetishization of "the economy" is where capitalism gets its name sake, as capital—abstract value used to generate more value—is prioritized over individual, social, ecological, and all other considerations.

In consumer society, identity, joy, pleasure, emotional investment, and freedom are primarily found in consumption, not production (Bauman, 2007). There is an invitation to create and individualize oneself (i.e., create one's identity) with an array of commodities. The commodity-profit logic and commodity fetishism means producers are incentivized to make commodities *appear* as valuable as possible to consumers. This has resulted in what some call the "aestheticization of everyday life" (Featherstone, 1991). This is when design and aesthetics—a concern for beauty or art—are applied to new areas, and even the most mundane forms of consumption are made expressive, playful, or

symbolically loaded. Furthermore, consumers are asked to prioritize themselves without questioning who they are outside of market choices. The citizen-consumer of the past—Progressives, women activists, civil rights advocates, consumer rights proponents—achieved pivotal victories, but this has not resulted in social equality let alone the consumer utopia envisioned by liberal economists, policy makers, or business leaders.

Post-war business leaders tried to enshrine consumer choice as the essence of American freedom, but only consumer choice made as an isolated individual selecting from already-existing options. Consumer movements were vilified as harming consumer choice and infringing upon consumer sovereignty. But consumers were not merely individuals, nor were they some monolithic mass with everyone starting from the same place or even having the same rules. Discriminatory government policies or application of those policies by financial institutions, real estate developers, homeowner's associations, employers, and the like, meant women and African Americans were not able to fully participate in the post-war consumer culture (Cohen, 2003; Weems Jr., 1998). Denied credit, jobs, access to their entitled benefits, and even physical entry into certain neighborhoods, this exclusion had far-reaching consequences on African American socioeconomic mobility and future public resources (e.g., public education funding is based on property tax). Historically, materially, and structurally, the American consumer utopia built on a Fordist-Keynesian social contract of disciplined work, higher wages, and social welfare did not apply to everyone equally, rendering the entire enterprise moot. The "American dream" remained a nightmare for the marginalized, as this particular social contract was morally bankrupt, null and void from the very start.

Despite its utter lack of moral, material, or logical foundation, the United States is currently a late modern consumer society. The market segmentation in the 1970s transition to post-Fordism further tied consumer habits to traditional categories of identity. Such invitations reified race, gender, and eventually sexual orientation, ability, age, etc., playing on social divisions to create target audiences and consumer lifestyles (Cohen, 2003). Market segmentation was further applied to politics, epitomized by the so-called "Southern strategy" of the 1960s and 1970s. This Republican electoral tactic sought to win over Southern Democrats by appealing to racism against African Americans. Conservatives used political-marketing campaigns to target white audiences, cultivate their "negrophobe" tendencies, and invite them to identify with the Republican party using racist stereotyping, hatred, and fear (Boyd, 1970). Such rationalized racism and political target marketing showed how consumer values spread to spheres outside the market, interpellating egocentric subjects actively encouraged to disregard empathy or anything outside their own immediate experiences.

The affordances of digitization and the internet, along with the proliferation of media outlets and marketing/public relations specialists means individuals can be further segmented, categorized, cultivated, targeted, and otherwise invited into commercial-first or egocentric identities (Turow, 2011). The consumer mentality continues to colonize non-market spheres such as higher education, public discourse, and mental health (Esposito & Perez, 2014; Fairclough, 1993; Habermas, 1985). And nowhere is this more obvious than the state. From the hybrid consumer-citizen of social activism and wartime solidarity of pre-1980 America, there has been a decisive shift toward viewing the government through a lens of self-satisfaction. Spurred by the conservative public

relations blitz against government during the 1980s, ideas of citizens with a shared duty and service towards one another have been largely replaced by consumers seeking all forms of satisfaction and justice in the marketplace. The U.S. discourse surrounding taxes provides a telling example. Instead of Tax Day being approached as an occasion where members of a society come together, pool their resources, and leverage shared wealth for the good of the community, it is often portrayed as government stealing "my" money. American entitlement to pre-tax income, even as workers are exploited and externalities are paid by the most vulnerable, is a fetishization of money and the material and social relationships that enable capitalist economic activity. Today, Americans are less often invited to think of themselves as citizen-consumers, as the consumer-customer exclusively asks how things like government spending, public institutions, and their hard-earned purchases are serving a narrowly defined (i.e., fetishized) version of themselves. Far from the anomaly contemporary "liberals" and "progressives" hold it to be, the previous administration embodied this consumer ethos. It is the transactional politics of a president and party that shirks responsibility and craves praise, that outbids and confuses "our stockpiles" of emergency medical equipment with the needs of individual states/actual people, and continually asks, "what's in it for me?" Flexible notions of truth, stances, and personnel are the result of a nation putting its most revered social value, salesmanship, in a position of leadership.

Agreeing on economic organization and the creation of value (i.e., the commodity-profit logic), however, Democrat, Republican, liberal, conservative, socialist, and libertarian all coalesced around consumerism. Born from modernity, markets were a progressive force that challenged the divine right of kings and a predetermined social

order. Today, however, as this capitalist system has historically met limits it had to creatively overcome, there is a new social contract between corporations, the state, and the individual. While consumer culture remains, the state has minimized its role in social welfare and increased its efforts in facilitating effective demand and capital flow. The onus is now on the individual to be flexible, aesthetically minded, and to make themselves attractive and useful to the market. More than a Fordist sociology of disciplining labor outside of work, this neoliberal order is an attempt to change the very subject of modernity, encouraging individuals to internalize the commodity-profit logic as an entire life orientation and worldview.

Neoliberalism and American Media

In neoliberalism, the liberal individual entitled to rights is articulated with the romantic sovereign consumer. Politics is subsumed by the marketplace, as the desiring individual legitimates the social order, his consumer choices ensuring the correct producers are rewarded. There is a hostility toward the traditional institutions of politics—like investigative journalism, grassroots activism, and the state—these being viewed as disruptions or distorters of an otherwise perfect market. A populist ideology that underlies a political-economic project of the elite, neoliberalism amplifies the values of modernity and redirects them further inward, isolating the individual into a solipsistic world of alienated work and daydreams. This benefits those who have already accumulated substantial amounts of capital, as they can dismantle the social welfare function of the state while still using the state's ability to manage effective demand in their own interest.

Like modernity and capitalism, neoliberalism is a potentially loaded term with a great deal of epistemological, political, and emotional baggage. It has been used to refer to an economic ideology, a form of governance, a political agenda, a kind of subjectivity, and to particular political-economic regimes. Its use across disciplines and widespread application, almost entirely emanating from "leftist" academics and critics, has caused some to call for abandoning the term (Dunn, 2017). Even its supposed adherents do not embrace the label as there are no conferences, offices, or organizations of "neoliberals." Neoliberalism is not even a systematic body of theory. Its supposed canon is a hodgepodge of thinkers with sometimes contradictory views.

There is a common ideological purpose, however, to something called neoliberalism, involving the mental gymnastics and ad hoc logic to justify market power and the state's intervention on behalf of the market. There is thus a qualitative and analytical value to the term neoliberal, and the roots of this disparate but widespread and dominant view originate in the once progressive impetus of liberalism. Furthermore, neoliberalism is an intentional agenda of the political-economic elite, its irrationality and lack of coherence does not lessen its importance.

As neoliberalism redirected Enlightenment rationality into pure market reason, it spoke the language of market populism while eroding older notions of solidarity, social responsibility, and citizenship. Democrats and Republicans post-1973 agreed on the "democratic" nature of the market, and consumerism was taken as a policy goal. This differed from the previous liberal consensus of 1945-1973, however, because the state now minimized its role towards social welfare and managing the externalities of capitalism. This market populism, while widely appealing for those who could afford to

participate, was also useful to an economic elite dependent on capitalism. In the 1980s the Reagan administration in the U.S. and the Thatcher administration in the U.K. led and implemented an upper-class assault on the government (Harvey, 2005; Mercille & Murphy, 2015). These led to substantial policy changes that favored investors, bankers, the already wealthy, and otherwise privileged members of society while shifting risks, burdens, and even more externalities onto everyone else. The state was no longer a public institution for the common good as Reagan claimed, "The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the Government, and I'm here to help." Thatcher argued that society did not exist, only individuals and their families. The message was clear: people relied too much on the government when they needed to depend entirely on themselves. Individuals were entitled and simply needed to work harder so they could earn their place in the consumer society. There was no need to think about society, however, as individual desire and disciplined work was deemed the only criteria for creating the perfect world order. Neoliberalism thus invoked the invisible hand of an 18th century economist (Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* was published in 1776) while ignoring his initial work about balancing self-interest with empathy (Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was published in 1759). While dogmatically employing a metaphor based on ideal and ahistorical conditions, neoliberal actors conveniently ignored the morality of liberal philosophy.

By the 1990s and 2000s, the administration's direct hostility towards government had been tempered, but the underlying logic and policies remained. While a Republican-led government created the conditions for the concentration of corporate ownership in the 1980s, it was a Democrat who signed the 1996 Telecommunications Act, a bill that

deregulated converging media systems and allowed unprecedented amounts of media cross-ownership (Miller, 2011). In 1998 that same administration ran a federal budget surplus, as social spending cuts of the 1980s were not replenished. Democrats echoed Republicans in their desire to eliminate "welfare dependence." In this view, the state itself was a savvy consumer, not looking to actively provide for citizens, but instead cutting costs, ignoring externalities, and otherwise organizing public rules and resources for private gain.

In addition to the state and economy, both popular culture and academia also experienced an enthusiasm for values aligning with neoliberal definitions of reality. In 1980, the Cable News Network (CNN) was founded, commodifying news content with the added demands of visual appeal (aestheticization), 24-hour coverage (instant disposability/constant renewal), and all the dictates of a commercially successful cable television channel. Scholars, often working in new disciplines like "cultural studies" or retroactively identified as "postmodern," touted the absolute freedom and agency of the individual. Social structures and authority existed, they argued, but individuals were free to negotiate these powers, to play with them, appropriate them, and actively make their own worlds. Before such enthusiastic language was applied to the internet, this logic could argue that a bumper sticker reading, "A woman's place is in the mall," was a form of resisting traditional gender roles. In a mall, this logic ran, women were "empowered" and "free" to behave outside of nuclear family expectations (Fiske, 1989, p. 18-20). Like political-economic neoliberalism, cultural populists and certain academics wanted to start and end their worldview or analysis with already-formed structures and individuals. There was no need to consider the source of the individual or the influence of social

change and history, they reasoned, because individuals themselves did not care about such things. There was no longer debate about whether consumerism was right or wrong. It was all there was. Individuals were free when they shopped, free to watch what they wanted, and free to negotiate or interpret the world as they saw fit. Such thinking was consistent with market populism and easily squared with neoliberal notions of avoiding accountability (e.g., ignoring exploitation, externalities, and history), downplaying power-resource inequities, and placing responsibility squarely on the individual.

Neoliberalism is thus not just an ideology, subject position, or a political-economic agenda of the elite. Its (irrational) logic is structurally embedded in the late modern social order, guiding institutions and providing the generative limits of our current episteme (Foucault, 1970, 1972). In addition to the state-capitalist nexus, the built landscape of consumerism, and the daily ordering of work, eating, and leisure, neoliberal values provide the very scripts for imagining success, personal worth, and the good life. Today, the constellation of market competition, individualization, historical amnesia, willful ignorance, outward appearance (e.g., branding and social media), venerating choice, and prioritizing egocentric pleasure has redefined subjectivity and the very possibilities of how we think, what we do, and who we are.

The "neo" of this liberalism selectively employs choice residual elements of the modern order. As a worldview, neoliberalism draws directly from classical liberal conceptions about the individual. It restricts these ideas to the market, however, reducing the Enlightenment or Progressive individual to the consumer. From here, an ethically flexible or liquid libertarian logic enables authoritarian discipline presented as the freedom of choice. Such freedom, far from providing sovereignty, limits the individual

and subjects them to new, more subtle forms of domination, dependence, and nonconsensual control. Building on its predecessor, neoliberalism thus fetishizes the already entitled individual, removing them from all contexts that constitute them (e.g., historical, social, economic, political, cultural, embodied, ecological) except those most convenient to the propertied and privileged. The divine right of kings has become the divine right of capital (Kelly, 2001).

While previous forms of liberalism like Fordism or Black activism considered individuals as workers or citizens, neoliberalism conceptualizes individuals as strictly consumer-customers. There are rarely workers in the neoliberal worldview, only jobs. Jobs are fetishized as an end-in-themselves, their quality or pay is irrelevant as they are an absolute good that allows participation in the consumer capitalist order. Classical liberalism, on the other hand, had contemplated man's (sic) role as a producer and grounded notions of sovereignty in self-determination. Thus, previous forms of liberalism prioritized a more comprehensive notion of individual freedom: if the individual was suffering at the hands of the market, then one should regulate the market. There was also a recognition of class compromise and capitalism's "creation" of value through exploitation, externalities, and the use of public or common resources. Instead, as capitalism in a purer form, neoliberalism holds that people should work and adjust for the economy, not the other way around. If individuals were suffering at the hands of the market, then it was the individual's fault. They should be flexible, entrepreneurial, and adapt. While liberalism was willing to regulate the market to ensure more freedom for individuals, neoliberalism is willing to regulate individuals to ensure more "freedom" for markets, commercial corporations, and financial interests.

Neoliberals argue that regulating individuals to ensure "free" markets is necessary, because the *natural laws* (see classical liberalism) of the market are objectively true. These natural laws, furthermore, were not limited to economic transactions and could apply to every area of life. A neoliberal order is thus a consumer society *par excellence*. Not only are the state and most social institutions aligned with the commodity-profit logic, but so too are individuals asked to be entrepreneurs of the self (Bröckling, 2015). Individuals should be ambitious and enterprising, always shaping themselves and constantly looking to improve their "marketability." This applies not only to one's job but to all aspects of the social realm, including one's general orientation towards living and "life projects." Individuals signal their social-market value through consumer goods, aesthetic pursuits, leisure activities, exclusive practices, and the curated world of social media. While classical liberalism had instructed individuals to "cultivate their own garden" and improve their lot in life, this was done through slow growth, engaged learning, active reflection, and struggle. Neoliberalism did not have time for gardeners, instructing people to be flexible, fashionable, and attractive. Late modern dematerialization exacerbated the importance of image, information turnover, and speed. The individual subject was expected to conform to the objective market, and the efficacy/image of such adaptation became the basis of social worth. Desiring basic recognition and lacking options or support, individuals largely accepted the role of entrepreneurial self and helped create (i.e., co-constituted) the neoliberal order that was presupposed.

If markets were objective and could deliver truth, where does that leave the subjective human? By this logic, humans are objects in the world just like anything else.

Such thinking stems from a capitalist worldview that commodified people as another cost (labor) in pursuit of accumulation. The human subject is then asked to identify objective laws (of which there is no alternative) and to follow them, discounting their own subjective positions to allow the otherwise smooth operation of "reality." But the convenient truth, neoliberalism holds, is that all of reality operates as one big market, with atomized individuals competing for scarce resources. The best thing for individuals is to then (exclusively) exercise consumer choice for their (purely) self-interested desires. Everyone pursuing what they want means everything, including people, will have their correct price and value, and everyone will get what they objectively deserve. In neoliberalism, to be human is to be obedient to one's unquestioned desires and to conform to the structures always-already in place to fulfill them.

The dehumanized subject of neoliberalism is a result of a once progressive but ultimately inadequate liberalism. Liberalism empowered the individual by dismissing previous social institutions as arbitrary and extolling universal, empirical science as a tool to measure, negotiate, and control society (p. 61). The individual was thus detached from the apparently irrational group and equipped with a formal logic. Universalist science, however, could not provide substantive values on how to use that logic, and Enlightenment liberals (e.g., the so-called Founding Fathers) compensated with ideals like civic virtue and the common good. There was nothing substantive in the liberal worldview, however, that made these particular values necessary, and neoliberalism could decouple (or disarticulate) these values while maintaining the open, formal logic of classical liberalism.

Neoliberalism thus exploited three shortcomings in liberalism, enabling its proponents to either devalue or exalt individuals based on the viewer's own emotional and material needs. First, while liberalism described how individuals should pursue their interests—as free and rational—it did not provide any guides to what those interests might be. Nuclear bombs or cheeseburgers, quality journalism or mindless propaganda, social welfare or corporate subsidies, the liberal worldview did not care about what was pursued so long as it was done "freely." Second, this view assumed individuals came ready-made to the market, already knowing what they wanted (not *needed,* a concept neither liberalism nor neoliberalism can address). This acceptance of desire without question assumes individuals are self-contained, autonomous beings who have never been in a relationship or influenced by anyone outside themselves. Envy, competition, and status displays aside, however, individuals did not raise themselves, and each is socialized in a particular culture. In other words, individuals are *always-already* subjects (p. 66). Historians have shown that social definitions of what was considered a luxury versus a necessity have constantly changed, the former increasingly becoming the latter (Glickman, 1999). No person, no matter how free, has ever been formed in a vacuum, and nobody lives in one. This denial of how humans operate means individuals are susceptible to influence without this influence being recognized. People, under liberalism, are assumed to want what they want regardless of context and circumstance. And lastly, the liberal narrative produces a potentially egocentric individual without responsibility or awareness outside of the self. In this worldview, the individual had to wrest their freedom from the irrational grasp of tradition and the group. This created an isolated, paranoid individual that puts his own freedom (without questioning who "he" is)

first. If the group was not to be trusted, and "I" am to assert my own autonomy, then whatever I want is justified. Society is only legitimate if I get what I want.

Neoliberalism is thus irrational—not only because it lacks coherence—but because it is malleable enough to justify selfishness while also being too rigid to engage anything outside of the self. Proponents of neoliberalism sometimes call themselves *market realists* and claim they have the sole view on truth, everyone else being bias (Aune, 2000). With a monopoly on reality, neoliberalism shuts down conversation as an idealized market depoliticizes politics. There is no room for deliberation, social values, or recognizing each other's personhood as institutional politics and personal sovereignty concede their authority to the capitalist market logic of M-C-M+. Market populism replaces democracy, as the dictate to accumulate capital guides all debate and public discussion. People are again dehumanized, made secondary objects and thing-like in the face of a supposedly perfect logic. Neoliberalism is thus an outcome of liberalism while also being a reductive distortion that quickly descends into illiberalism.

This coercive logic is discursively constructed as freedom, articulated as it is with the embodied and visceral pleasures of consumer culture. The hyper-individualization and depoliticization of neoliberalism enabled a great amount of care-free personal pleasure, the complications of material relationships or social responsibility could be ignored for "the bright side of life" (p. 72). This leaves the commodity-profit logic unquestioned and accepts the perpetual accumulation of capital through exploitation, externalities, expropriation, and deskilling as the only viable form of life. As a political agenda, neoliberalism thus seeks a total consumer society, where the self-interested consumer mindset applies to all relationships, institutions, and measures of value.

With the same structural foundations of consumer society and the consuming individual, lifestyle journalism is a quintessential form of neoliberal media. The transition from women's pages to the empty signifier of "style" and "lifestyle" sections coincided with the post-Fordist transition of the 1970s (Harp, 2006), and predated the neoliberal transformation of the state. Lifestyle media is thus a post-Fordist culture industry. Instead of a Fordist system of mass production to reach "mass" society, lifestyle outlets *targeted* specific audiences, using specialized content, cultural codes, and economies of scope to integrate the desired individuals into networks of commodities, meanings, and sponsored messages. Scholars have defined lifestyle journalism by this invited subject, describing it as content that, "primarily focuses on audiences as consumers, providing them with factual information and advice, often in entertaining ways, about goods and services they can use in their daily lives" (Hanusch, 2012a, p. 2). Both assuming a well-resourced individual concerned with only their own pleasure, lifestyle journalists spoke the language of neoliberal rhetoric.

Some media sociologists described this alignment as a historical process that increased the power and importance of media. As industrial then post-industrial societies moved towards the individualization of consumer culture and relied less on tradition, people increasingly turned toward the media for guidance and advice (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2013). Responsible for creating their own identities amongst a sea of commodities, these individuals utilized a lifestyle journalism consisting of "the journalistic coverage of the expressive values and practices that help create and signify a specific identity within the realm of consumption and everyday life" (p. 947). Lifestyle journalism could thus help individuals help themselves. Journalists could socialize newly

adrift individuals, guiding and thus incorporating them into the commoditized, aestheticized, and expressive or demonstrative order of post-Fordist, late modern identity work.

In a consumer society, lifestyle journalists were thus hegemonic agents addressing issues of advice, style, inspiration, explanation, and orientation within a consumer order. They could articulate, reify, and provide exemplars of lifestyle identities. Sometimes belittled by their traditional news colleagues for lacking autonomy or dealing in "fluff," these media agents often considered themselves journalists and not beholden to special interests or seemingly trivial matters (Fürsich, 2012; Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2013; Voss, 2012; Voss & Speere, 2016). Some media sociologists have thus tried to analytically separate journalism's political roles from its lifestyle roles in everyday life (e.g., Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). They rightfully showed that global journalism studies had been limited by narrow definitions of journalism that favored political "hard" news and news agents in Western democracies. Conceptions of journalism should be broadened, they argued, because there are separate expectations, rules, and outcomes for different genres of journalism. While true, this modernist conception of distinctly separate media realms can reinforce a neoliberal logic that attempts to depoliticize everyday life through consumer sovereignty and market realism (Fisher, 2009). While social scientists do the important empirical work of identifying trends, journalistic self-perceptions, and what the media is, we should not lose sight of how these came about and what media could be. Scholarly positivism accepts the sovereign consumer as fact and further leaves questions about the source of the self unexamined.

Other scholars have documented lifestyle journalism's deviation from traditional, liberal journalism (this study, p. 62-70) while also investigating the consequences of such differences. Hanusch (2012b) argued that because identity, consumption, and choice were so intertwined, lifestyle journalists treated their audiences like citizens *and* consumers, not *just* consumers. He discovered some Australian travel journalists, for example, who viewed themselves as cultural mediators that promoted cross-cultural empathy. Fürsich (2012) characterized lifestyle journalism as a field of review, advice, and commercialism. Clashing with previous notions of journalistic independence, such attributes could be countered with a public and civic mindedness. Journalists could offset commercial influence by emulating traditional news values like providing multiple points of view, having an ethics of disclosure, questioning sources of authority, or reflecting on their own hegemonic social position. Such journalism could facilitate a rational private sphere with civic impact. It could potentially address audiences as publicly oriented individuals that actively valued information, creating social cohesion like Berlant's (2008) intimate public. Such approaches to journalism did not separate lifestyle journalism into its own distinct world of entirely separate rules. Instead, they embraced lifestyle media as a form of journalism and held it accountable as a form of public, and thus privileged, communication.

Lifestyle journalists thus reproduce neoliberal logic not because they themselves are "neoliberals," but because they are both institutionally embedded in a commercialized mediascape and also socially embedded in the very communities, epistemes, historical contexts, and lifestyles they cover. The journalistic habitus—as it has historically developed in the commercialized media of the United States—often aligns with the

individualism, claims to realism, and market-oriented logics of neoliberalism. This is not an inevitable fact of a journalistic Whig history, nor do descriptions of media content or individuals as "neoliberal" offer much to our understanding. Without an analysis beyond positivist description, identifying neoliberalism in media obscures how journalism itself can be *neoliberalized* by external influences (Phelan, 2014). Thus, we cannot dismiss media as hopelessly neoliberal—especially so-called mainstream media—or simply accuse journalists of being part of the neoliberal agenda. Not only does this ignore the individual agency and range of individual journalists and media entities, it also misses the genuine challenges, political potential, and social dialogue inherent in such media. Instead, we should ask how the particular practices of journalists and other media agents interact with other institutions, how these discursive practices then constitute meaning, and how such meaning can generate material, social, political, cultural—in short—ecological consequences.

The American Food Revolution, 1960s and Beyond

The 1960s was a historically revolutionary period and the social, cultural, and political questions it raised still reverberate today. The American foodscape is similar. Like the upheavals for social rights in the 1960s, the transformation of American food culture was a long historical process, the term *evolution* being a more apt empirical term for its development. But in 1960s America, something qualitatively different took hold and snowballed into the avalanche that is the current food scene. Two sometimes contradictory but sometimes aligning value systems came into play: it was socially acceptable to have an active interest in food, and it was equally valid to question the production practices, health value, and consequences of the current food system. This

twin movement of pleasure and criticism was continually fed by media outlets and continues to animate the discourse, invitations, and meanings of our current foodscape.

If an interest in food was still not traditionally masculine in the 1960s, it was at least no longer considered effeminate (Lakoff, 2006). Before—as Progressives debated nutrition and duty or the Great Depression and wars called for a pragmatic approach to food—caring about the taste or flavor of one's food was seen as frivolous, flippant, or elitist snobbery (Finn, 2017). But the emergent consumer society and lifestyle milieu of the postwar era paved the way for men to participate in (and sometimes take ownership of) taste. Men's lifestyle magazines like *Playboy* and *Gentlemen's Quarterly* (*GQ*) were founded in the 1950s and in 1957, Craig Claiborne became the first male editor of the *NYT*'s food section. Claiborne brought a sense of scientific male authority as food, style, and taste increasingly became socially legitimate pursuits for men. Equally if not more influential, renown chef, author, and television personality James Beard also popularized notions of gastronomy for both men and women. With the first television cooking show and a personality to match, in the late 1950s and 1960s, Beard was the face of an accessible but still refined American cooking scene, and his eponymous awards are still amongst the most coveted today. While 20th century issues of style and aesthetics were previously considered the domain of women, dandies, or snobs, in the postwar era such concerns were democratized. In the neoliberal 21st century, style and taste are considered individual achievements and thus compulsory to accumulate cultural capital, market value, and social worth.

The most influential figure in the 1960s democratization of food and taste in America was Julia Child. Along with Claiborne and Beard, Child brought an authority to

cooking while also providing an accessible appreciation of eating and its potential joy. Her eminent 1961 cookbook, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking,* assumed the American cook knew nothing of French cuisine, then considered the standard of the culinary arts. Written in a decisively pragmatic tone, the book demystified the world of *haute cuisine* and adapted it for the American home cook. Along with a confident and no-nonsense know-how, it was her presence and demeanor on television that made Child the voice and lasting legacy of America's culinary awakening. Standing 6'2 with a big smile and charming goofiness, Child was not the graceful housewife so imagined in 1960s popular culture. Food journalist and scholar Molly O'Neill (2003) fondly considered her a "clown who made cooking fun and, week by week, demonstrated the delight of being wholly human and less than perfect" (p. 41). A nation with a recently stark relation to food and easing into a consumer lifestyle did not look to elitist tastemakers for guidance. Instead, Child provided an authoritative warmth that instructed an audience's taste while also reassuring them with a humble sense of joy. Child communicated a sheer delight about cooking and eating, putting a once Puritan nation at ease by demonstrating how earthly pleasures were obtainable, practical, and okay to pursue. Her combination of competence, accessibility, and vulnerability is widely emulated by food personalities today.

While the American food revolution made food in general more popular, another aspect was the creation of food's own culture industry, making chefs, media personalities, and industry insiders into celebrities replete with symbolic capital. One contemporary journalist described the rise of the "Food Establishment" (Ephron, 1968/2007). After discussing the modern obsession and anxiety over food choice, she

delineated the gossipy and cliquey world of celebrity chefs and so-called experts, vying for media attention and promoting their latest cookbooks or restaurant ventures by bragging about how well they knew Julia Child or James Beard. While the article was mostly an ironic indictment of the food scene, it identified a crucial crossover in America as the shape and expanse of the foodscape was intricately tied to the mediascape. Popularizing notions of good eating and taste required spokespeople and earning legitimacy as an authority required accumulating culinary and symbolic capital. A relatively small world, the Food Establishment was a self-referential system that never seemed to run out of things to talk about. Food in this world was often marketed more for appearance than actual taste, and the article ended by lamenting how so-called food writers were worried about the authenticity of quiche more than the pesticides in their foods. Moral issues aside, reflexive journalists realized that for the pleasures of food to be widespread, media agents and outlets were required.

If newspapers, magazines, books, and the occasional television segment democratized food in taste in the 1960s, then the 1990s belonged to television, and TVFN in particular. Co-founded by a newspaper company and the co-founder of CNN in 1993, TVFN was an innovative channel that took a bold move on a 24-hour food channel (Salkins, 2013). Its initial flagship show was called *Food News & Views* as the channel started with a journalistic bent. It broke the story, for example, about the use of recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH) in milk. Once its founders had been pushed out, however, the channel quickly changed course to food entertainment. From there, TVFN pioneered food marketing integration, live events, and the promotion of their own personalities, effectively making the channel a culture industry onto itself. Its “chefs”

became household names as TVFN mimicked celebrity agents turning food personalities into rock stars (Salkins, 2013). Perhaps more than any other single organization, TVFN worked to democratize issues of food and taste while also writing the playbook on integrating and generating culinary, symbolic, and economic capital.

TVFN's accessibility and culinary capital also played a pivotal role in further integrating so-called global, foreign, or ethnic foods into the American foodscape. While the early 20th century integrated foreign foods as nutritional boons and the 1960s witnessed a new openness to global cuisine (especially Chinese), TVFN exploded the idea of Americans eating food from "other" cultures. TVFN made foods from around the world accessible, drawing from stereotypes and simplifications to ease Americans into difference. In 1998, for example, a show called *East Meets West* featured Chinese American Ming Tsai, a California native and Yale alumnus. Tsai presented Chinese and other Asian recipes in an approachable and essentialized manner. The opening credits featured Chinese pipa music and Tsai dressed in traditional Chinese dress (a white "Mao" suit) meditating, doing karate, and other stereotypical images related to China/Asia. The show itself tried to show how American and Chinese food was related, such as the fact that both cultures used bell peppers. Tsai, American born and Ivy League educated, looked Chinese and spoke perfect English, a combination he used to significant effect, explaining, for example, what ginger was like. TVFN perfected this cultural model, utilizing cooks with "ethnic" backgrounds (and appearances) that would appeal to American audiences through charisma, simplified explanations, and media training. In this manner, "Food Network's own" Manuet Chauhan could explain Indian food, Marcela Valladolid-Rodriguez (trained as a French pastry chef) presented Mexican food,

and African American couple, the Neelys, provided guidance on "soul" food. Aware of food's ties to culture and cuisine, TVFN utilized the optics (and ownership) of difference to show Americans the ease and potential joy of eating outside one's upbringing. Easing audiences into the "exotic" while also highlighting difference, this was done largely through stereotypes, simplified and exaggerated presentations that sidestepped nuance and minimally challenged the white, middle-class American comfort zone.

Newspapers and television were eventually joined by the internet and digital media, and Eater has shown itself an influential player in this new realm. Originally started in 2005 as a website covering New York City's food and nightlife scene, the outlet went national in 2009 and was purchased by digital conglomerate Vox Media. It currently covers 25 cities and is a major source of restaurant industry news, having won four James Beard Awards and acclaim from Food Establishment players and other food media outlets.

Today's digital environment has residual and emergent cultural forms and employs additional strategies to generate surplus value on top of the previous audience commodity/dual product model of media funding. In addition to commodifying an audience and selling its attention to advertisers, online firms can now also sell the behavioral digital data of audiences to data aggregating firms, technology companies, marketers, or any interest seeking user data to fine-tune algorithms for predictability, influence, and control. This new form of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019) thus weaponizes people's own interests against them, utilizing machine learning to further discipline audiences by increasing the effectiveness and value of the *attention economy*.

The digital mediascape also offered more diverse forms than legacy media outlets. In addition to magazine-style journalism, food has also proliferated in platforms such as social media, blogs, video-sharing forums, food delivery apps, amateur restaurant review sites, and all manner of content on streaming services. All three outlets under study—TVFN, *NYT* and Eater—had channels and posted content on the popular video-sharing site, YouTube (owned by media giant, Google). With social media, blogs, and user-generated sources of food information, there are thus numerous sources of food authority (Lewis, 2020). Home cooks can learn how to peel acorn squash or cut up a whole chicken in the instructional "just-in-time" videos on YouTube. Blogs have proven a popular place to obtain recipes (without a subscription) and personalized stories, often accompanied by stylized photography and the warmth of a parasocial or even interactive relationship. With a proliferation of sources and formats for food advice, instruction, sociability, and pleasure, food and eating are legitimized as an important source of consideration and attention.

Food as a legitimate source of pleasure and amusement, however, was only part of the American food revolution. In response to the increasing industrialization of farming (e.g., the increased use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and animal cruelty) and the commercialization of food (e.g., marketing campaigns targeting children, questionable additives, the creation of value at the expense of the farmer), the 1960s also saw the birth of the alternative food movement (Grauerholz & Owens, 2015). This movement stressed the importance of local, seasonal, and so-called organic and natural foods. It valued smaller, human-scale communities and relationships, pioneering our current notions of farmer's markets and eventual community-supported agriculture

programs (CSAs). The countercultures of the 1960s also rallied around food, using diet to challenge norms, build alliances, express their values, and establish alternative worlds (Belasco, 1993). Environmentalists, Black activists, the women's movement, radical homemakers, each challenged the corporate food system with organic food particularly ubiquitous today. Although scholars have shown how organic agriculture was appropriated by corporate interests and a neoliberal state that vastly reduced the original vision of organic farming (Guthman, 2004), there is no denying the 1960s started seemingly permanent conversations around food.

Food discourse—no matter how straightforward, trivial, or mundane—is never simple, as one can always point to contested values or unintended consequences (e.g., Jacobsen, 2004; Jaffe & Howard, 2010; Shiva, 1991). Julia Child's public arrival, for example, coincided with Betty Friedan. As Child was instructing women on "mastering" delicious food, Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique,* lamented the social norms that claimed women could only find fulfillment in the home. Both found a ready audience, and sometimes this audience overlapped (Shapiro, 2004). The organic food movement has only grown since its initial conception, but such scalability can also undermine its initial goals (Wald & Hill, 2016). In a further twist, certain processed foods like chips and cookies could further legitimate themselves under the organic label and appear as healthy options (Shapiro, 2019). Aided by the new functional nutritionism of the 1990s (Scrinis, 2013), even snack foods could be framed as natural, quality choices. For many Americans, constant snacking has become a way of life (Wilson, 2019). Where previous diets had recommended people eat less, functional nutritionism emphasized the positive

benefits of certain nutrients (e.g., so-called superfoods), and dietary advice could thus be directed to consuming more.

Food media are a crucial component in constituting, circulating, and contesting food meanings and today, an "aesthetic disposition towards food and eating has been popularized, both through actual consumption of and through food journalism" (Hanke, 1989, p. 228). Media beyond journalism has also contributed to this process, especially as utilized by members of the Food Establishment (see, for example, cooking competition shows, celebrity food series, and celebratory food documentaries). Digital platforms have further enhanced the distribution of desire (Kozinets, et al., 2016) as late modern individuals are exposed to a larger range of eating possibilities. In other words, an expanded mediascape means a more extensive foodscape, with choice increasingly framed as a matter of style, pleasure, and cultivated taste. With the internet, *keeping up with the Joneses* is no longer confined to one's neighbors or social circle, as digital media reveals an otherwise unavailable world and enables a wider range of social emulation and edibility.

But so too has this overall enthusiasm and enjoyment of food been subject to criticism and questioning. In a *Double Movement* (Polanyi, 1944/2001) the increasing commodification and marketization of food has resulted in a push for greater social and environmental protection and accountability. Akin to women reformers and Progressive's calls for food safety, accurate weights, non-adulteration, universal standards, and consumer protection, the countercultural backlash against industrialized food sees advocates demand environmental responsibility, fair trade practices, and the consideration of local communities and livelihoods. In other words, as neoliberal

capitalism attempts to *disembed* (i.e., fetishize) food away from its contexts of production-exchange-use into an abstract commodity, the materials identified as food—and the people that produce/prepare/eat it—are embedded and constantly re-embedded into the specific instances of their production/exchange/consumption. Food cannot remain an abstraction as it is experienced and eaten by actual humans in a specific lived world (i.e., physical location, context, and subjective position). Neoliberal commodification thus remains incomplete as eating subjects and their concomitant social values and moral considerations of food persists. Which questions are asked, who and what are valued, and how this manifests in the material-semiotic worlds of individuals, institutions, and global relationships, however, are continuously negotiated, contested, and realized. Various media are a key means, site, and institution where such meaning creation and prioritization occur.

Journalists' and media agents' roles, performances, relationships, routines, practices, choices, and texts—their embedded habitus, institutional incentives, and active agency—shape the discursive limits of food and largely determine key social invitations to our "individual" selves. As cultural intermediaries, they are "market actors" that mediate the meaning of commodities (Maguire & Matthews, 2014), and the communications they produce behave as market devices (Callon, 1998) legitimizing and stimulating exchange and desire. Not isolated actors, food writers exist alongside and draw from other food agents, institutions, and discourses while adding their own lifestyle media values like individualization and personability.

Over the 19th and 20th century, Americans—whoever they were and wherever they were starting from—fundamentally changed their relationship to food, how it was

procured, prepared, and eaten. The combination of industrial agriculture, dietary science, domestic expectations, and commercialized media meant new ways of thinking about what and how Americans ate. Largescale food manufacturers, distributors, product packagers, fictitious brand characters, and other food marketing actors, as well as policy makers, nutritionists, medical experts, social reformers, and community leaders all created new invitations to eating. The Food Establishment also asserted its legitimacy as a valued cultural institution capable of producing worthwhile knowledge. Journalists and media agents were there to negotiate, translate, amplify, and prioritize these voices.

With the pressures of modernity and intensification of late modernity, eating became consuming as workers were deskilled, everyday life was commoditized, and time was made evermore precious. As a supposed relief from modern stresses, the realm of consumption was celebrated and everyday life was aestheticized with a sense of style, design, and—if one had the resources—accessible amusement. At the same time, some Americans were dissatisfied with the industrial-commercial food system, criticizing and seeking alternatives from its risks, constraints, and harmful environmental, physiological, and socioeconomic consequences. While alternative food networks have offered tangible political openings (Harris, 2009), these twin movements have largely resulted in an acceptance of commodity culture that places the onus on individuals to ethically consume (Thompson, 2012). Social issues, relationships, and processes have been largely individualized, reduced to matters of individual responsibility and choice. Such thinking accepts social structures and arrangements as they are and, depending on one's resources, can only make limited decisions within the range of the already given.

Lifestyle journalists and media makers—as cultural intermediaries and co-creators of imagined communities—have harnessed and employed this thinking, prioritizing and inviting the sovereign consumer. As part of a culture industry designed to extract value from this consumer, these media agents have often employed familiar categories of understanding such as gender, race, class, and the entitlements of the egocentric/family-serving shopper. But so too have such agents served individuals by considering everyone's safety, well-being, and care, i.e., as a public. Journalists have also addressed the citizen-consumer or created an intimate public sphere built on practical knowledge, emotional labor, and shared experiences like serving one's family and community. Even as hegemonic agents of consumerism, such media makers could invite public subjects through private experiences, explicitly showing how the personal was political (and vice-versa). Thus, as more Americans are separated from production and at least partially ignorant about the origins of their food, we ask how specific media fill, sublimate, or otherwise address this lack of life-sustaining knowledge.

Chapter 3: Methodology

To contextualize U.S. American food media and understand the dynamics of larger society, this project combines history, social and cultural theory, textual analysis, and ethics. Together, these constitute my version of a critical discourse analysis (CDA). While CDA is not a dogmatic method, it is a rigorous and comprehensive approach to communication and social phenomenon. It is a methodology animated by an attention to context. Applicable to media studies, CDA does not begin or end with the text but instead understands media texts as historically situated social practices. Media is produced by certain interests, operating within a specific context, flowing through a particular channel, interpreted by certain people, and put to use for distinct purposes, not all of them done consciously. A critical discourse approach thus involves contextualizing and analyzing media texts as constituting and being constituted by a "circuit of culture" (du Gay, et al., 1997). The purpose of such analysis is not to criticize the text or media message but to critically evaluate the social order and its version of reality (Fairclough, 2015).

Food media is ripe for CDA as any social order is partially but definitively built on the understandings and materiality of the edible. As we have seen, the omnivore's dilemma and the contingencies of history, geography, class, and gender have resulted in numerous cuisines and eating practices. As one of the earliest forms of socialization, food discourse and its institutionalization into a public sphere of eaters is constituted by a confluence of social, cultural, and material forces. CDA can disentangle these influences and offer us a richer understanding of how the physical world is managed and legitimized through specific justifications and ideological work. Armed with such a view, we can

then question this social construction of reality and work to transform the world as we collectively see fit. Just des(s)erts served.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

CDA is thus concerned with language use in particular contexts and relationships and as these relate to social practice and material consequences. Discourse is not a thing but a social process, an ordering of language to achieve desired ends and make an argument for the way the world should be. This process is guided by social structures and is in dialectical development with other, non-discursive social elements including ritual, belief, material practices, and power (Fairclough, 2015). These non-discursive elements are themselves understood by subjects in discursive terms, and active agents continuously reproduce, resist, challenge, and transform the meanings and practices produced in this never-ending process.

CDA is thus not concerned with “the truth” of a text or communication in any positivistic sense. In more traditional forms of communication studies and textual analysis, texts are considered a reflection of some underlying reality. In a content analysis, for example, the frequency of a word or theme is then read as some “true” indication of what an author or institution thinks. Epistemologically, this is a foundationalist way of thinking that assumes there is a singular knowable truth that can be discovered by a researcher. The purpose of such research is to obtain elite scientific knowledge that one could replicate or use to control or predict. This is potentially used for policy or industry practices as texts are seen as instrumental tools to inform and persuade. Messages are crafted and attempts are made to measure the (usually short-term) effect of that message.

CDA, on the other hand, does not approach discourse as a measure of effect. While not denying communication's influence on individuals (quite the opposite), Butler (1990) might ask a media effects scholar to point to a time when a person was *not* "effected" by communication. Language use is not something external to people that affects them; it constitutes them: it is part of who we are and what we do. So instead of effects, communication and its discursive form are seen as something people do to assert, realize, or perform their humanity. In this sense, language use and discursive practices constitute a person's very being and identity. Foucault (1970, 1978) argued most effectively for this constitutive nature of the ordering logics of discourse. He held that individuals could not have an identity or any knowledge of themselves independent of the discourses that invite them into various subject positions. Foucault has been accused of taking things too far as he seemed to deny human agency. In the extremes of his account, there appear no free, active subjects. Instead, active discourses flow and manifest through human subjects. We agree with Hall (2000) that this "decentering" of the subject is not a denial of human agency but a fruitful "reconceptualization" (p. 16). We do not have to go so far and reject a reflexive agent not entirely subsumed by discursive powers. Instead, we can see how human subjects depend on various discourses—various genres, domains, themes, and logics—to constitute who they are, animate their decisions, and negotiate the various aspects of the social and material world.

Like CDA, Foucault is concerned with the generative aspects of discursive regimes and practices. He does not set out to uncover some "truth." Foucault does not examine the institutional discourse of clinical madness, for example, and ask if it is a true discourse or not. To Foucault, truth is a *process* not some *thing* that just exists. Instead,

Foucault is interested in how certain things are made to be true and this happens through the constitutive nature of discourse. For this reason, he rejects the notion of "ideology" as it assumes a false consciousness where something ideological covers over the truth. Foucault's point is that everything is ideological—hence the uselessness of the concept—because the truth is not covered up. Truth is actively *made* by particular interests, in a particular context, at a specific historical moment. A discourse is a particular way of positioning and understanding a specific subject matter and thus prioritizes certain practices, actions, and truths. This is Foucault's knowledge-power nexus, where the power to constitute knowledge on a subject is the power to determine truth. In this instance, CDA is a heuristic tool to examine the making and unmaking of specific knowledge-power nexuses. Foucault (1970, 1978) himself used his particular form of discourse analysis—from which CDA is partially derived—to delineate specific "truth regimes" throughout history and delineate how each period had a unique "episteme" through which they mediated and shaped their social world. An episteme is thus the epistemological foundation, the generative presuppositions that ground all knowledge and discourses at a particular historical moment, defining that era's conditions of possibilities.

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) use the socially constitutive nature of discourse to argue that CDA is not about critiquing a text but critiquing social reality. They reason that one can start with the text and do the very formal and descriptive analyses that other media studies epistemologies and methods deem appropriate. For this, we can look at word choice, metaphor, themes, active/passive voice, etc. But this is only the first step. The next step would be to understand the text in the context of its production, circulation, and reception. How, in other words, is the text an active piece of social practice. Finally,

the text as social practice can be understood within the larger context of society as a whole and the scholar can question the ideological work of the text and practice. Unlike Foucault, ideology is not a worthless concept and is described as common sense in the service of power. The critical inquirer thus questions the assumptions, presuppositions, and other preconditions for the text to work, that is, they examine what remains otherwise unquestioned in the discursive construction of identity, relationships, and understandings. Differentiating this from other forms of text analysis, Fairclough (2105) considers CDA a dialectic view where texts/manifestations of discourse are not mere representations or reflections of social reality. Instead, discourses constitute understandings of social reality and active agents operating in that reality then act back and change those discourses. This changed discourse then shapes society and the dialectic continues as such, with the world a place of constant becoming where discourses, agents, and institutions mutually limit and constitute each other.

Fairclough (2015) also takes a more active view of human subjects than Foucault through a concept he calls "member resources." A communication is not just provided by a transmitter to a blank slate receiver. In addition to being subjects of discourse (as Foucault holds), individuals are also social subjects, each with their own unique experiences, background, etc. For a communication to make sense and for a discourse to "do" ideological work, it must be interpreted or decoded in the correct manner from the receiver (Hall, 1980). This process of making sense depends on that receiver's member resources, an individual's cultural literacy and cognitive tools derived from one's society, experiences, and interactions with specific institutions. CDA thus embraces the postmodern idea of polysemy: the notion that words and concepts can mean different

things to different people. This means that things like propaganda or ideological communications are not a matter of straight brainwashing or magic bullet effects, but rather that their effectiveness is a matter of utilizing existing member resources or how individuals have been socialized in the past. This means that CDA can move beyond description and also respond to libertarian critiques that any message can mean anything. Instead, CDA can see how a text positions its ideal audience and plays on existing member resources to do ideological work. In this way, Fairclough has moved CDA from a theory of description to one of explanation, where a critical scholar can explain why a text looks the way that it does: to further some point of view, interest, or ideology.

Wodak and Meyer (2016) agree with Fairclough's assessment of the central importance of social context and add a historical element. A discourse, being constitutive and not reflective, is a particular form of justification or legitimation for a particular point of view and its concomitant practices. As such, it is intertextual and interdiscursive: a particular text draws on the meaning and discursive strategies of others. A text can only be understood in relation to others and thus derives its meaning from all other communications and utterances that have proceeded it. Wodak and Meyer (2016) extend this intertextuality throughout time and show that one cannot understand a discourse without looking at its development (and the development of its context) over time. One cannot, for example, understand the current discourse on immigration in the United States without looking at previous discourses and the material history of immigration. Akin to Gramsci's (2000) notion of hegemony and historical blocs, such historical thinking allows a critical scholar to examine the various strategic alliances that form and break over time in support or opposition to any particular view.

To understand current food discourses, for example, we need to understand the history of science and the dominating power of nutritionist discourse starting in the late 19th century. While Fairclough would have us consider the text within the contemporary social context, Wodak and Meyer demand we recognize that current texts (and their various discourses) are the products of historical processes. This historical view enables us to more explicitly see ideological work and the changing notions of common sense. It also allows us to delineate the various institutions and interests that align to construct and contest a specific discourse domain.

Starting with the notion of historical contingency, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) provide the clearest articulation of the word "critical" in CDA. For these authors, "critical" simply means recognizing that things could be different. Society is contingent as the social world is so but not necessarily so. Like other aforementioned theorists they approach discourse as an attempt to fix meaning, as an attempt to tame polysemy and make permanent connections between certain ideas and concepts. In other words, a discourse asserts truth by closure or closing off other possible meanings. Being critical simply means acknowledging this radical contingency and asking what the consequences are for viewing the world in a particular way. It also means questioning the consequences of exclusion or what is left out of a discourse. Like Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) do not see anything inherently malicious or ideological about such an attempt to fix meaning. Afterall, the temporary fixing of meaning is how we communicate, build societies, and are able to function at all in the world. But just because it is necessary to get things done does not mean it cannot be criticized or investigated for its consequences.

This view opens up every avenue, from social institutions to everyday life, to the exploration of power. Every little thing, from our daily routines to the joys we find mindlessly pleasant, could be different; the personal is very much political. In this view, power does not reside in some central location or is not something that one person simply exercises over another. Power is instead something that flows and must be daily enacted and circulated. Power is not something one has but something one does or is subject to. And because power must be renewed and enacted on a continual basis, it can also be contested and resisted. Students do not just listen to their teachers but push back. Administrative assistants do not simply take orders from their bosses but negotiate a space to assert their agency and beliefs. Laclau and Mouffe's views of power, discourse, and radical contingency means that anything is open for analysis and the taken-for-granted are particularly primed for investigating: how else could it be?

So critical discourse analysis is different from other forms of text/discourse analysis because it moves beyond the descriptive accounting of a text and into the realm of explanation and social critique. It questions the common-sense worldview of ideology and asks whose interest are being served and who is being excluded—even as it admits that ideology and the social construction of reality is inevitable. It is capable of delineating and deconstructing certain justifications and legitimations for the way things are. Furthermore, it takes the next step and questions the consequences of such views and how things might be imagined differently. Unlike positivist investigations, CDA takes an equal interest of what is left out of a text. Also unlike positivism, it can then make normative judgments and, through contextualization, attempt to explain why a particular text looks the way it does.

The goals and questions of CDA also differ from other theories and methods. The purpose of CDA is not to find truth or ask questions that would enhance someone's ability to predict and control. While other approaches may use scientific methods wielded by elites to provide answers, CDA is about problematizing the taken-for-granted to enhance democratic conversations. CDA questions the relationship between communication, the social order, and the material world to enable active agents to reflect and act on the powers that constitute them. It allows individuals to step back, take notice of their entanglements, and potentially change the way they think, act, resist, or acquiesce. Far from elites providing truth, CDA is about empowering agents to co-constitute their world.

CDA and Social Critique

From nutritional labels, marketing campaigns, and documentary film to advice columns, corporate statements, and government policy there is no shortage of discourse—of attempted closures of meaning—on food and eating. Because eating is fundamental to any society, critically analyzing this language use is a direct means to understand social practice, legitimations of power and access, and invitations to selfhood. Such understandings do not isolate variables and argue for truth but instead contextualize communications to explain the dialectical, co-constitutive nature of relationships and the ethical implications of meaning construction. Our late modern context implicates the entire world in this material-symbolic entanglement, as the global political economy moves and mingles foodstuffs, people, and media images at unprecedented rates.

For these reasons, this project examines food media in the realm of everyday life both historically (Lüdtke, 1995) and critically (Lefebvre, 1947/2014; Vaneigem,

1967/2012). In media studies this is the realm of lifestyle journalism (Fürsich, 2012; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016; Hanusch, 2012c; Kristensen & From, 2012). Such media offer practical information to orient individuals, often addressing their audience as consumers. Lifestyle journalism potentially helps individuals negotiate and constitute their foodscape (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Johnston & Baumann, 2015). Originally conceptualized in geography but expanded by sociology and cultural studies, a person's foodscape refers to the totality of spaces and locations they acquire, transform, eat, learn about, deliberate, or otherwise deal with food. Today, media is a central component of a person's foodscape as the omnivore's dilemma and a globalized economy means a proliferation of possibilities, anxieties, and meanings. Here, CDA will delineate how lifestyle media spaces discursively constitute foodscapes and implicate physical places, people, cultures, ways of being, ways of knowing, and ethical considerations.

To comprehensively apply CDA to contemporary lifestyle media, this paper intermixes theory and history before culminating in a comparative case study of the aforementioned media outlets: *The New York Times* food section, TV Food Network, and Eater. The project does not just critique these outlets specifically, but explains how history and context shape institutions, social practices, relationships, and subjectivities. Guided by normative theory, I evaluate how specific media—with its relationship to other institutions—invite us to ourselves.

Data Collection

This project examines three specific media outlets: *The New York Times*' food section, TV Food Network, and digital first outlet, Eater.com. It asks two broad research questions : 1) how do these media outlets discursively construct the meaning of food? 2)

how do these media outlets invite people to imagine distinct cultures, cuisines, and groups of people? These answers are then placed in historical context to critique the social order. To this end, there are two distinct types of data collection.

To answer the first question, I scraped data from each outlet's website once a day. I also read each outlet's newsletter (via email). Data was collected until I reached a point of saturation (Creswell, 2007) or at least something approaching data saturation[3]. This occurred between 12/18/2019 and 2/1/2020. The Association of Food Journalists have an annual award for Best Food Coverage, and this is based on an outlet's food content over a three-week period. In this study, 46 days data collection thus seemed a fair assessment and provided sufficient materials to characterize and assess these particular organizations, their routines, discursive practices, and invitations. I thus analyzed 274 articles/entries and 34 newsletters from Eater, 308 articles featured in *NYT* with 32 newsletters, and 373 entries from TVFN with 11 newsletters.

Answering the second question involved more targeted and purposeful data collection. The first part of data collection provided a rough idea of how these outlets discussed other cultures, and this was used to search each outlets website for more specific coverage. Eater, for example, employed terms like "authentic" or "traditional" and I read articles outside of the time window from the first iteration of data collection. This second form of data collection was a hermeneutic (not positivistic) understanding of grounded theory, and data collection was complete once discursive strategies emerging from the data begin to repeat, indicating I had reached a level of data saturation. The

[3] CDA is a particularly fruitful approach capable of close linguistic analysis as well as constantly seeing issues from a new perspective. Data saturation was thus determined by the broader sociolinguistic endeavor of discerning the consistent discursive strategies of today's food journalism.

exact number of entries was not counted as I read headlines, followed concepts, and otherwise utilized *hyper reading* (Hayles, 2010), a process of skimming, switching between different modes of information, and pecking through ideas by association, constant clicking, and an intentionally scattered approach. In this manner, seemingly unrelated texts (broadly understood to mean articles, videos, images, etc.) are explored for their commonalities, and I could follow and search for specific concepts, discursive strategies, and topics when characterizing each outlet's cultural understandings of food.

The Hermeneutic Circle of CDA

So CDA is a recursive or iterative process that involves continuously connecting a descriptive textual analysis with larger socio-historical conditions. This has been described as a three-step process: description, interpretation, and explanation (Fairclough, 2015). Data was subject to a close reading where I delineated the content and formal aspects of the text. Here I examined tone, lexicon, themes, tropes, metaphors, and intertextuality. Furthermore, more specific linguistic tools were utilized such as questioning transitivity (who does what to whom), nominalization (reducing a process to a noun), and modality (how much a communicator is committed to or hedges their views). I identified social actors in the text and if they were portrayed as active or passive. I examined social processes, relationships, and explicit values and beliefs. The overall logic or cohesion of a text was also analyzed, as delineated how a message held together and worked as a composite whole to make arguments and communicate its position.

The process of interpretation involved a robust understanding of context as I identified the presuppositions or inferences in a text, what went unsaid as "common

sense." I also considered what was left out of a text and how it communicated through *productive silences* (Derrida, 1982). Political economy was also considered as interpretation involved understanding both the producer and potential users of a text. Interpretation was closely tied to explanation as both involved identifying an *ideal reader* with the necessary *member resources* to decode a text (Fairclough, 2015; Hall, 1980). Communication is thus seen as a social process, greater than its explicit content and occurring within various matrices of power relationships and multi-leveled contexts.

Unlike a traditional "transmission" model of communication that views information passing through sender-message-channel-receiver, this study approached communication as culture (Carey, 1989). This means communication does not reflect something called society, it actually helps bring society into existence. Through providing, articulating, and performing cultural codes, communication constitutes community. The words "communication" and "community" have a common root, and viewing communication as culture means it is "not [just] the act of imparting information but the representation of shared belief" (Carey, p. 5). Something called *news*, for example, is "not pure information but a portrayal of the contending forces in the world" (Carey, p. 6). Reading the news, then, is as much if not more about reaffirming a worldview and "how things are" as it is about learning new information.[4] Even within the same media outlet, individuals are invited into various subject positions and multiple social roles: a story on trade disputes addresses Americans as patriotic members of a global world order, an article on banning the confederate flag calls upon readers as

[4] This partially explains the historical and contemporary success of partisan news outlets. It also characterizes so-called objective news which purports to show an unbiased view of "reality." Reality, according to the communication as culture view, is already constituted by agents socialized in a particular manner: communication does not reflect reality but helps articulate and create it.

amateur historians or cultural critics to pick a side, a piece on playground safety invites readers as parents or sociologists to contemplate the socialization of youth. Individuals are not merely reading news and acquiring new information, they occupy different identities and points of view, implicating them in the lived world of action and competing forces. Communication is not just information; it is an orientation.

Critically and culturally analyzing communication (or more specifically texts, discourses, and discursive strategies) thus involves a hermeneutic circle where individual communications can only be understood within the larger context of society, while larger social systems and relationships are made intelligible by examining individual communications. The part and the whole cannot be isolated from one another (or measured as distinct units as in the transmission model). While individuals actively and strategically use communication for various "gratifications,"[5] material relationships and language systems provide a common culture that sets the context and limits of such activity.

Culture as Process, Identity as Work: CDA as Social Critique

Individuals do not exist in their own private worlds, a free association of ideas swirling in their heads with thoughts chosen as isolated individuals arbitrarily see fit. Rather, this seemingly private world is enabled by publicly available symbolic systems (e.g., member resources) and the shared cultural understandings that render a particular individual's world intelligible (and edible). An individual's identity—who somebody is—does not preexist these language systems and cultural frameworks. The meanings, understandings, and symbolic systems of culture and the social roles they present thus set

[5] This refers to the largely tautological *uses and gratification theory* of communication, devised in the 1940s and still widely used today.

the terms from which individuals draw their identity and approach to the world. Culturally specific communications and meanings establish a (non-exhaustive) base that individuals can then *identify* with. While the term identity has traditionally been defined as what something is or who someone is, this is a recognition that people never just "are" their identity, but rather people constantly *become* their identity. Being invited into the world in culturally specific ways, individuals identify with these invitations (or not) and continually perform the active work of identity construction and maintenance.

Like discourse and society (p. 47), this identity work is a dialectical process where individual agents negotiate and act back on the social invitations to self. In other words, such socialization is not all-determining as individual experience and idiosyncrasies means social structures are interpreted, handled, and transformed in countless ways. Still, some people do not have an equal opportunity or the available resources to negotiate (or resist) social invitations, and culturally specific member resources are foundational to individual identity.

Particular cultural systems—at the local, national, and increasingly transnational level—and their concomitant media messages thus constitute a version of "reality that gives life an overall form, order, and tone" (Carey, 1989, p. 7). More than isolated pieces of information influencing variables and effecting individuals as data points along a linear model, "communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" (Carey, p. 8). Attending to communication as culture thus exposes the fragile fictions of our shared social world and explores how such necessary myths constitute the very meanings and possibilities of our individual lives.

Culture—like power, discourse, identity, society, truth, and even food—is better understood as a process than as a thing or object someone simply has. Meanings are constantly negotiated in the practice of everyday life, and individuals to do not neatly internalize the social roles, discipline, and logics on offer (de Certeau, 1984). Culture should thus be understood as a dialectical process with various individuals appropriating and using social institutions and meanings for diverse but sometimes shared ends. This does not mean that individuals can arbitrarily do what they want. Culture, after all, is built on shared meanings that allow people to identify and communicate. Neither homogenous nor random, culture is an iterative process of the establishment, circulation, negotiation, and modification of meaning.

As a process involving shared meaning, culture is discursive. It works through a process of *articulation* where signs are given meaning in relation to other signs (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, 1990). Material objects, symbols, and concepts are filled with connotations or made equivalent as cultural agents attempt to relatively fix meaning through ideological closure. This fixation of meaning occurs around *nodal points*, a privileged sign around which other signs are situated and ordered. "Health" or "the body" are thus potential nodal points in food-related discourse as are "indulgence" and "special occasion." While there are various degrees of intransigence or path-dependency to the articulations and nodal points of cultural understandings, they can be challenged and remade. As meanings must be brought into existence through specific iterations (i.e., performances), they can also be changed. The discursive operation of culture thus ensures that culture is never complete, its realization is never total or final.

Theorizing at both the macrolevel and also how individuals drive social change, Williams (1977) argued that cultural groups are composed of three parts: the dominant, residual, and emergent. Dominant culture is not explicitly defined as the author presupposes it is the easiest to understand, it is the most visible practices and ideas that guide a social group. Not a mere ideology externally imposed, a dominant culture was embodied, experienced, and lived, constantly practiced and reproduced in everyday life. In the United States today, for example, consumerism and individualism are two strains of dominant thinking. Residual culture is the influence of previous cultural practices on contemporary society, something not always done consciously. The elements of Puritan culture that sometimes appear in public debates about sex or social spending in the United States are an example of residual culture. So is a meat, wheat, and dairy-heavy diet, this diet being driven by the U.S.'s historical idiosyncrasies of its early development and the public policies of the 20th century. And finally, emergent forms are the new ideas and practices that arise from the workings of institutions and individuals. These have the potential to become dominant or they can be alternative or oppositional. Today's foodie culture, defined by a search for both democratic "authenticity" and social distinction (Johnston & Baumann, 2007), is a prime example of an emergent cultural form. Never static or monolithic, culture is thus a multifarious, dynamic process capable of shaping and being shaped by active agents.

As individual and group identity does not preexist the dynamic cultural systems that socialize and invite individuals to their "selves," who a group or individual "is" materializes through active work. If the public world of symbols enables the private world of thought, and this enabling cultural system requires negotiation and maintenance,

so too do the identities built on these culturally specific invitations. In other words, individuals actively identify (or not) with cultural invitations, and this process of identification is never complete or finished.

Like the culture that enables it, identity is iterative, discursive, and necessarily reductive. First, identity is not what one is but what one does, that is, identity must be performed into existence (Butler, 1990, 1993). A doctor's pronouncement of "It's a girl!" is an early performance, a bringing into existence through a specific iteration, of gender (today's so-called gender reveal parties further precede this invitation to one's selfhood). Far from a neutral, objective label of what the baby is, the newborn is only intelligible according to the already-defined expectations of the culture in which it is born. This discursive performance thus "produces the effects that it names" and shows "the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler, 1993, p. 2). Initially categorized a girl, then treated as a girl and internalizing "acting like a girl," the repetitive performance of "girlness" thus brings the identity into existence. The person is not a girl (eventually a woman) because of some internal essence that radiates *girlness*. The person becomes a girl by being declared a girl and performing *girlness* and the things expected of girls. If the person were to perform incorrectly, for example as a "tom boy," they then risk ridicule and social rejection.[6] The same is true for items deemed edible, becoming "food" through iterative declarations and performances. Certain foods and practices, through ritualized repetition, can then eventually become a cuisine.

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[6] An admittedly tame example, the LGBTQ community and scholarship offers a wealth of insight.

Discursively constituted and performed into existence, identity is also subject to the changing articulations of the current historic moment and a group or individual's unique circumstances. Identities, through no internal characteristics or impetus of their own, can thus change. While a discourse is organized around nodal points, a *master signifier* is a nodal point of identity orienting a subject (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Different discourses fill the master signifier with meaning, articulating specific values and traits to the term. Individuals then identify with the master signifier and its connotations, like being a "man" or "American." A master signifier and its concomitant discourse(s) thus provide guiding instructions or an orientation for an individual that considers themselves a "real" man or American. And as discourses are dialectically shaped by active agents and historical context, the connotations and meanings of master signifiers can change over time or place. In the United States "Italians" and Italian food, for example, was not considered part of dominant (white) American culture until well into the 20th century. To many Americans, Italian food was initially undesirable as it was deemed too garlicky and spicy; eating it was believed to make one a lustful alcoholic, the dominant characterization/stereotype of Italians at the time. As Italians were integrated into the dominant culture (i.e., they became considered white), respect for their food increased, and today Italian is amongst the most popular food genres in the U.S. Today. Master signifiers around food include various geographical levels such as the contested definitions of "French" or "Szechuan" cuisine, specific ethnic groups like "Cajun" cuisine, fusions like "Tex-Mex," regional categories like "Carolina Barbeque," or more generic national categories like (Americanized) "Chinese food," "Indian," or "Mexican."

Like the ideological work of a specific discourse or a culture's attempted fixation of meaning, identities are necessarily reductive. A culture or identity cannot be all things and are defined by the limitations, boundaries, and simplifications—the closures of meaning—they employ. In other words, an identity is primarily defined by its exclusions, what it (and thus one) is not. This is also why culture, and its discursive nature, is referred to as a process and symbolic *system*: the meaning of something or someone is only intelligible through its relation to other entities. Hall (1990) thus argues that identity is, "not an essence but a *positioning*" (p. 226, emphasis in original). Less a positive affirmation or substantive claim about what something itself is, identity is relational. Its substance is determined by its relative position; its logic is constituted by what it leaves out and actively defines itself against.

Such binary thinking characterizes the historically significant push of European "exploration" and colonialism, explicit by 1492, that saw Europeans define themselves as "civilized" and the peoples of the world they encountered as "savages." Europeans projected their own categories of understanding onto the world and evaluated other cultures according to European standards, the textbook definition of ethnocentrism. They then claimed themselves as people of high culture while everyone else was closer to nature, the non-European having their "culture" equated to their "nature." This has been described as *othering*, where European imperialism involved "a process by which the empire defines itself against those it colonizes, excludes, and marginalizes" (Ashcroft, et al., 1998, p. 158). This is also the birth of the modern stereotype, a widely disseminated, fixed, and simplified idea about a person or thing. Having their culture equated to nature, non-Europeans were thus said to be unchanging, their habits, customs, and traits derived

from an eternal natural order. A stereotype is thus an overly simplified and persistent closure or fixing of meaning, and *othering* enables the employment of stereotypes to justify domination and self-serving relationships of power and resource disparity.

As a discursive practice, this employment of pernicious reduction is known as *ideological squaring* (van Dijk, 1997). Discursive elements such as topic selection, schematic organization, presupposition, hyperbole, metaphor, narration, contrast, and the like are used to create ingroups and outgroups. This is specifically done to highlight the positive aspects of the ingroup while downplaying anything negative, while doing the reverse to the outgroup, highlighting the negative and ignoring the positive. Such ideological squaring played, and still plays, a leading role in the historical construction of race.[7]

It was ideological squaring that allowed white Europeans to violently displace American Indians, and consider some black Africans sub-human, objectifying these "marked" groups and articulating physical appearance with inferiority. In other words, "Blacks," people primarily from west and central Africa, were discursively (and thus materially) made into a race, externally defined by their new status as slaves. Historically, there was thus not a "Black race" that was then enslaved. Instead, violent and cataclysmic social events in the Americas and eventually United States, created a shared history for a group identified in racial terms. This social construction took the historically novel form of chattel slavery. Black slaves were literally considered property, and even their children

[7] The term historical still applies to our contemporary period—being the result of and constantly becoming history—as ideological squaring continues to characterize racism and conceptions of race today. While this paper refers to modern notions of race, ideological squaring is also evident in the Ancient writings of Greece and Rome. The word *barbarian* comes from the term used to refer to people who did not speak Greek and was then applied to people who were non-Romans.

were subject to enslavement, something unprecedented in human history. More than a stereotype, this was institutionalized racism. It was stereotyping with institutional backing and the concomitant power of producing a dominant culture (Williams, 1977). In the 19th century the new discipline of anthropology and now debunked phrenology, as well as the stubbornly persistent eugenics movement, created a pseudoscience of race (Kelves, 1985; Mosse, 1978; Zimmerman, 2001). Using skin color as an "empirical" marker of difference, these knowledge-producers articulated non-whites with traits that allegedly superior whites wanted to dissociate from: violence, hypersexuality, laziness, stupidity, criminality, etc. These articulations had less to do with anything inherent in non-whites and were born from the insecurities of a social order that always claimed to have "objectivity" on its side (Fanon, 1963).

To say that race is a historical and social construct does not, as far as its consequences, make it any less *real*. On the contrary, such processes articulate and reify race creating the necessary meanings that perform race into existence. Framing race as a construction simply recognizes that it is interactions between humans and not any sort of natural difference that creates "race" (Haney-López, 1994). In the early 19th century, for example, Americans in the western territories considered Latin Americans by their nationality, not their race. In this way, one could talk of a white Mexican. By the 1840s, this had shifted where Mexicans were considered a lazy and inferior race. This coincided with a period when Americans were dispossessing Mexicans of their land and property. After 1865, when these Americans then needed Mexican labor, Mexicans were again considered a race but this time were seen as industrious and hardworking. The change from Mexicans not being a race, to being an inferior race, to being industrious, did not

occur according to any internal attributes of Mexicans but instead resulted from the social, political, and economic needs of a specific historical moment. One's race and its concomitant attributes and articulations is therefore dependent on context. The same can be said for cuisine as we saw with the case of Italian food in the United States.

Along with race, gender has also been shaped by ideological squaring. Women have also been subjected to ideological closure, often being articulated with food preparation, child rearing, and domestic work, not to mention the exclusions and negative definitions of what they were denied. This was not always the case, however, as during World War II, for example, women in the United States were encouraged to join the workforce. A massive government program was launched to convince employers that traditional views of gender were misleading, and that women could contribute to society outside the home. Again, this was not because women themselves had changed but because the social situation had shifted. Women and society at large were invited to think of themselves and "women" differently. Identities, especially those imposed by social categorization, are not freely chosen and are context dependent.

As identity is enabled via cultural systems, symbolic representations, and discursive means, both personal agency of *who I am* and social expectations of *who I should be* are active processes of negotiation. Identity—both imposed and chosen—is work. It is necessary, daily, involves agency and effort, often goes unrewarded, and is more noticeable or apparent when something goes wrong or awry. It is also physically demanding and has material consequences. Being physical it involves embodied experiences of "I," and is attuned to taste, preference, and bodily sensations—pleasure, pain, discipline, surveillance, effort, and discomfort. In addition to the physical

necessities and manifestations of this process, identity work is cultural and symbolic. It is enabled by particular systems of representation—the subject-positions, master signifiers, articulations, episteme, and reductions or closures of meaning that constitute a specific group. Through culturally conditioned ideologies (understood as the necessary closure of meaning to function in the world) individuals are interpellated—hailed or invited—into various roles, logics, and systems of discipline, i.e., subjecthood (Althusser, 2001). Individuals, however, cannot control how they are invited, especially regarding the aggregate history of gender and race or one's explicit limitations due to class. Individuals are thus not equally free to build or work on their identities as they see fit. Some face the burden of social impositions like stereotypes, ideological squaring, unequal treatment, or inequitable assumptions. This can also lead to a lack of resources—whether cultural, social, or economical—hindering one's ability to freely maintain or improve one's identity (Rasborg, 2017). In the last instance, however, individuals must answer the invitation.

The agency to respond to interpellations exceeds the power that enables it (Butler, 1990, 1993; Hall, 1980, 2000). This ensures identity is continuously a matter of active work. While answering cultural invitations is often internalized subconsciously, there is a pre-discursive agent (a not yet positioned subject) [8] that cannot be contained by ideological reductions and rigid social structures. As identity is discursive and only relational, constituted by exclusion, social invitations are not substantially comprehensive. They thus never exactly "fit" the individual.[9] Through socialization and

[8] Since our conscious identity is only formed in discourse as a subject, contemplating or naming this pre-conscious entity is unnecessary for this project. The German term *Geist*, understood as will, mind, or spirit offers a placeholder for those so inclined.
[9] Or indeed anything named and identified.

interpellation, individuals internalize images of who they are. Built on necessary reductions of meaning, they cannot satiate or provide absolute, final answers to human beings (who are constantly *becoming*). Such invitations are thus simultaneously a source of identification and alienation or estrangement (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Hall (2000) described how processes of articulation and identification could not absorb and neutralize difference, that identity was "always 'too much' or 'too little' – an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit or totality" (p. 17). Identification is thus situated, contextual, and conditional, a matter of contingency that is continually negotiated. While ultimately individuals make the "final" decision, this is a small part of a much larger process and cannot mark the beginning or end of any meaningful social analysis. The causes and consequences of the *self* are much greater than individual choice or preference, and this process of interpellation, identification, and negotiation perpetually plays out.

In addition to never being finished, identity work has always-already begun. Individuals only become subjects through interpellation, that is, through the ideological reductions that invite them into specific subject positions. Thus invited, even before they are physically born, "*individuals are always-already subjects*" (Althusser, 2001, p. 119, emphasis in original). People are not blank slates receiving information that then "effects" them, and individuals do not approach something called *news* with an infinitely open mind. It is thus untenable and difficult to discuss the "independent" variable of the transmission model or the independent, rational being freely making choices in the neoliberal consumer model (see below). While individuals who are *always-already* subjects are still active agents, they are dependent on material-cultural systems (e.g.,

member resources), have had their rationality or ability to reason shaped by previous interpellations, and are only as free as their socialized selves allow.

A CDA of food and eating thus attends to the active interpellations and articulations of media while also examining how specific groups and individuals are not equally free to identify and accumulate resources. This active process of inequality occurs in and through particular institutional settings. Specific discourses, especially those favorable to people with resources and access, are rationalized or institutionalized into more impactful and widespread systems of distribution. My methodology thus approaches food media as part of the *culture industry*, a social institution where human creativity, desire, and drives for amusement are organized and employed to accumulate capital—increasingly for transnational corporations and conglomerates (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947; Rosati, 2007).

The original conception of culture industry showed how the social and economic forces behind mass production were applied to cultural products such as movies, popular music, and advertising. The culture industry's use of standardized production processes meant culture as a common symbolic system that was once revered as high art, became a series of recycled plots, formulas, stereotypes, and schemas. As any other factory, the culture industry churned out replaceable cultural commodities in the form of magazines, books, advice columns, radio shows, and the like. Horkheimer and Adorno (1947/2002) argued that such a commodified culture disciplined its audience and transformed that audience into a commodity, into an "apparatus" that continually adhered to an ideology of economic coercion (p. 136). So commoditized, the audience—even unconsciously—strove to the meet the requirements of success presented by the culture industry. The

industry's schemas became more real than reality and life—as well as the individual—was expected to conform to all the clichés the commercial media circulated. The relationship of capital owner and commodified worker (selling their labor to the capitalist) was thus extended to non-work. Even, "entertainment [was] the prolongation of work under capitalism" as the commodity logic subjugated workers in their leisure time (Horkheimer & Adorno 1947, p. 109). Leisure was rationalized and recreation packaged and sold to audiences, colonizing the previously non-commodified lifeworld as "the off-duty worker can experience nothing but after-images of the work process itself" (p. 109). This dulled or limited the audience's imagination and produced a "dreamless art" incapable of seeing anything outside its small, ready-made boundaries (p. 98). This conception is often criticized for being overly pessimistic and denying audience agency. Seeing agency as conditioned, situated, and enabled through a dialectic with a specific context, however, we can temper these critiques and use the culture industry to name and theorize an increasingly important social institution in the late modern era.

Empirically (using political economy and history) and discursively analyzing the culture industry shows how power is circulated, difference is negotiated, and the material order is recreated through the production and commodification of cultural forms. Power is a necessary and constitutive (as opposed to repressive) part of any society, and the culture industry offers symbolic systems of representation, shared meanings, and active exclusions to invite audiences into contestable notions of the good, the valuable, the true, and the expected. Today, the culture industry is multifarious and caters to multiple corners of the lifeworld. Everyday life is commoditized, meaning more of its activities require the purchase and use of commodities. This is perpetuated through *lifestyle*

industries who use a network of integrated media, goods, and services—especially related to style, health, and niche interests—to circulate signs, meanings, and values in the hopes of creating surplus value and accumulating capital. Today, modern economies are still built on material production and physical labor, but so too are they increasingly constructed on an edifice of information, signifiers, branding, aestheticization, specialist knowledge, intellectual property, shared myths, and the commodification of meaning perpetuated by the culture industry.

Commercial media play a key part in the United States economy (McChesney, 2013), and are representative of a larger structural shift from industrial to more information-based methods of generating profit (Bell, 1976; Castells, 1996). Media producers (whether individuals, organizations, or institutions) can thus also be theorized as *cultural intermediaries* or "'market actors who construct value by mediating how goods (or services, practices, people) are perceived and engaged with by others… [they are] defined by their expert orientation and market context" (Maguire & Matthews, 2014, p. 2). This conception aligns with scholarly conceptions of lifestyle journalism (see Chapter 3) and explains the importance of culture industry work and their attempt to make commodities meaningful. This also aligns with Horkheimer and Adorno's (1947/2002) description of the culture industry as a filter through which the world was passed (p. 99). More than just a mental filter, food media implicates the material realm of objects and the embodied world of private sensation, personal taste, and physical pleasure. But although the culture industry and cultural intermediaries are incredibly important for the creation of common meaning, they are not all powerful. Their invitations must be answered by situated subjects who are not just discursive, abstract,

and symbolic, they are material, embedded, active, and hungry. A CDA of food thus explores how people eat their identities and the material-symbolic relationships, networks, and ecologies that nourish the co-constitutive processes of subjectivity, maintaining physical bodies, and reproducing society.

Chapter 4: Findings

Each outlet—the *New York Times* food section, Television Food Network, and Eater—invited audiences in unique but overlapping ways. First, *NYT* and TVFN provided recipes and a large focus on home cooking, while Eater was concerned with the more political, cultural, and human-interest issues of a traditional news magazine. All three discussed restaurants and various agents of Food Establishment. In their differences, these outlets addressed specific but not mutually exclusive target markets. An individual could easily enjoy interrelated content from all three outlets. A person, for example, could watch a TVFN celebrity recipe clip, read a *NYT* feature store on that celebrity chef's newest restaurant, and find an in-depth Eater story on how that known member of the Food Establishment treated their staff. This chapter will address each outlet individually and make comparative statements as each outlet is more fully described. Chapter 5 discusses each of these outlets in a more explicit comparative manner to draw larger conclusions about the current relationship between food media, food systems, eating individuals, and the late modern historical context.

TV Food Network

Of the three outlets, TVFN was the most accessible and attempted to have the widest appeal. Unlike the *NYT*, it did not have an immediate paywall for content and unlike Eater, content was not aimed at foodies, restaurant workers, or those with a special interest in food. Instead, TVFN used simple, unspecialized language identifying its audience as those tasked with the daily labor of thinking about and cooking food. Requiring the least amount of "member resources" (Fairclough, 2015) or previous knowledge about food, TVFN focused on practical over aesthetic matters, though issues

of beauty and style permeated content. Speaking more to the everyday person and less to the taste-driven foodie, the outlet sought to establish itself as an expert guide for the trials of everyday life. Its features matched those described as "service journalism" (Eide & Knight, 1999). Content addressed viewers as consumers and clients, blending marketing and instruction to give advice, guidance, and direction about how to best manage one's shopping and cooking duties. With a relatively wider class appeal and clear mission to help home cooks navigate the consumer landscape, TVFN thus invited its audience to commodify food, rationalize their desires, use food as display-oriented identity work, and rely on a closed system of experts.

As an organization, such characterization echoes TVFN's own stated goals. On their "about" page, they describe themselves as "a unique lifestyle network, website and magazine" that wishes "to be viewers' best friend in food and is committed to leading by teaching, inspiring, empowering and entertaining through its talent and expertise" (About, 2020). Using the term "lifestyle", self-promoting its "talent" (or cultural capital), and using the language of friendship, empowerment, and expertise, TVFN marked itself a late modern media outlet embedded in consumer culture and seeking to establish legitimacy as an arbiter of proper consumption. Positioning itself as a "friendly" expert, TVFN aligned with the cultural populism of the U.S., using relatable celebrities and media personalities to downplay (if not reject) any perceived notions of elitism or snobbery. Celebrity chefs became personified branding agents like the mascots of early packaged food. Whether professionally trained or endowed with charm and kitchen charisma, TVFN personalities co-constituted social capital with the outlet. These anointed "chefs" were legitimated by TVFN as they acted as embodied cultural capital

for the Network. This personification offered an individualized and more personal form of mass media and TVFN could be your "best friend in food" via television, magazine, traveling cooking demonstrations, book signings, the website, and now the TVFN kitchen app, it's growing foray into the digital. Using 2nd person (you, your) and personality as an organizing principle, TVFN offered a warm and seemingly democratic invitation to the world of food cooking and consumption.

In terms of being a mass mediated friend, however, democratic invitations did not mean egalitarian thinking and TVFN was the kind of friend that assumed you live by certain means and liked to spend a decent amount of money. Life's problems were solvable with the proper commodities, which TVFN presumed audience members could easily obtain. Originating in television, however, some scholars have argued TVFN was intended as vicarious consumption, being aspirational as much as inspirational (Adema, 2000). Regardless of intent, if you were going to be friends with TVFN, especially digitally, you needed ample time and resources. Thus, even the most accessible food outlet in terms of previous knowledge was distinctly middle class. TVFN exemplified "lifestyle" as a post-traditional commodity package and answered modernity's pressures by requiring audiences to play by modernity's rules, properly utilizing money in the market and behaving as an entrepreneurial self.

School Is In

Adopting the persona of friendly expert and true to its self-description, the website of TVFN prominently featured its role as educator and cooking instructor. For everyday of data collection (and every visit since), the webpage greets viewers with a large advertisement for the Food Network Kitchen App. The advertisement is about 1/3

of the initial webpage. A subscription to the app currently costs $39.99/year, a penny less than a *NYT* Cooking subscription. It features cooking demonstrations, live cooking classes, "trusted" recipes, the ability to integrate recipes with grocery delivery services, and provides the services of "your favorite chefs." Utilizing its media savvy personalities as a draw, TVFN frames their new digital presence as a one-stop shop for the post-traditional amateur cook. The app is offered as a tool of empowerment, where home cooks who lack the oral transmission of cooking traditions can find trusted experts and recipes. With the ability to order online, the time-poor and harried subject of late modernity does not even need to leave their home or worry about logistics to procure the necessary provisions. Promotions for the app made promises about gaining cooking "confidence" and that "your perfect burger is one class away." These initial invitations set the tone for the rest of the website, as TVFN attempted to legitimate itself as a lifestyle expert and offer instruction, reviews, and advice on cooking in a commercial age.

TVFN's presentation of itself as a cooking school is reminiscent of late 19th century American newspapers. By the 1880s, women's pages offered guidance on "household economy," daily recipes were a regular feature, and the *Chicago Herald* even ran a Sunday "cooking school" (Baldasty, 1992, p. 126). Such journalism in a then industrial and increasingly commercial era was also known for self-promotion. TVFN also displayed such behavior, and in a post-industrial era, did so through both explicit promotion and also its self-referential legitimating nexus of lifestyle network-celebrity chef.

Explicit but playful promotion of the app/school was placed throughout the website but often featured prominently. Besides menu options, the initial landing site on the webpage has 3 distinct sections of content: the advertisement for the app, a main story/recipe, and 3-4 smaller featured stories. A main story could offer a wink at the app, personally address the viewer, and set up one of its own chefs as friendly expert: “Psst! Bobby Shared His Secrets for Pancakes in This Class!” Or a featured story could endorse the app and TVFN: “8 Amazing Things About Live Classes on the Food Network Kitchen App.” This kind of promotion could be presented as uninstructive as it represented the core of TVFN stated mission: teaching and inspiring as a lifestyle expert. During the stress of the holidays, for example, one story ran: “This Class Has So Many Smart (and Simple) Tips for Holiday Entertaining.” A guide for navigating modern stresses, TVFN could gently nudge viewers towards its paid service because it had their best interest at heart. Promotion also carried personal promises using a direct address to engage the viewer: “Ina’s Class Will Change How You Cook Chicken.” Utilizing the second person perspective made the self-promotion conversational and informal. TVFN could thus promote a paid service, perform their stated mission, endorse one of their own celebrity chefs as an expert, and mass-address individuals with a promise of helping them improve.

As a multimedia organization, TVFN also self-promoted its other platforms. In 28/30 days of data collection, at least one of the three top featured stories was about a TVFN television show. This self-referencing also worked to promote their own anointed chefs and celebrities as desirable experts, inviting a viewer, for example, to “Get to Know Ian” or “Kick Off Superbowl Weekend with Guy.” The use of first names and the

personification of shows added to the informalization of the website and TVFN's attempt to be personable and accessible.

Each day, there was also a feature taking up the space of 3 normal stories to promote the TVFN magazine. Each magazine featured a smiling TVFN personality, further imbued with an aura of accessible expertise. As the newest trendiest platform, however, the kitchen app garnered the most salient placement on the website (the initial content), with television shows and the television schedule a principal component organizing the reminder of the content. App promotion could further endorse the network's celebrities, revealing, for example, that a class on the app showed "Ina's Genius Hack for Sautéed Brussel Sprouts." In addition to this initial content, recipes and stories on the rest of the webpage referred to TVFN chefs saying things on the cooking app in a cooking class. There was even a particular set of stories that TVFN editors described thusly: "In this series, we're showing off some of the coolest recipes, tips and tricks we've learned from chefs in the all-new Food Network Kitchen app." TVFN is indeed a network unto itself, a self-referencing and self-legitimizing system of expertise with multiple platforms, culinary capital embodied in celebrities, and a host of endorsement strategies, cross-promotions, and legitimating discourses.

Although TVFN presented itself as an expert guide to help consumers navigate the contemporary foodscape and learn to cook, this was done in an informal, affable, and personable manner. This expert was not an elitist dictating from above but a confidant (our chefs share secrets with you!) or perhaps a member of the family who had your best interests at heart. They aspire to be your "best friend in food." Using the discourse of cooking classes draws on the legitimacy of school as expert system, but in this school,

there are no teachers to evaluate students. TVFN can teach "you" with fun and engaging personalities, and there are no grades. You pay us, they might say, but the world and your social circle will be the judge. Like other forms of service journalism, TVFN evoked the problems and pressures of modernity in order to then solve them.

What to Cook and a Reason Why

If TVFN was your friendly guide to cook, then they were also the sort of friend that reminded you why they were important. To play the expert guide, the network manifested late modern pressures and explained how to overcome them. Like Warde's (1997) women's magazines, TVFN was a "discursive institutionalization of anxiety" (p. 177). Unlike his modern antinomies, however, TVFN did not choose a single pole, rationalize their choice, and thus legitimate their stance as expert. While still drawing on the floating signifiers of novelty-tradition, health-indulgence, extravagance-economy, and convenience-care, TVFN freely combined both sides of each opposing pair. The ability to overcome these structural dualities provided one source of TVFN's culinary capital and legitimacy as an expert source.

To orient audiences in this otherwise "liquid" world, TVFN invited audiences into relatively limited relationships with food. This could make the outlet easier to navigate, less overwhelming, and more accessible to those intimated by the complexities of the current foodscape. It also meant TVFN structured its answers to the omnivore's dilemma in flexible, creative, and reductive ways. TVFN and its personable celebrities offered the comforts of tradition, the gentle promise of something new, and the uncomplicated enjoyment of something delicious. The network did not just tell audiences what to eat, it instructed them how to consume. Filtered through the warmth of personal authority,

TVFN directed audiences to choose this over that by interweaving the “reason why” hard sell, the psychological appeals of expressive or display-based food practices, and the rationalization of taste.

Formatting Food. The layout and content of the TVFN website oriented viewers to its purpose in their lives: this outlet is going to tell you what to cook, buy, and watch. Along the way, it could tell you how to accumulate and display cultural capital, what trends were worth following, and where to eat. In other words, it could help one cultivate and consume a desirable sense of food style. Like the traditional fashion understanding of “being in style,” this food style had rules that constantly changed. An individual needed a source of expert authority to keep one in the know. While food and cooking were approached as practical endeavors with discoverable solutions, these solutions were often stylized, offering an aestheticization of everyday life where individuals could answer the omnivore’s dilemma by purchasing sleek design, creating something to mark their social distinction, or follow the latest trend.

The TVFN webpage held a consistent format throughout data collection. After the initial advertisement for the Food Network Kitchen App, there was a thin horizontal bar where you could follow TVFN on various social media sites, link to the magazine, link to the app, or search the website. Just below that was another small horizontal bar with a menu. Before 12/25/2019 this menu read: Food Network Kitchen (another link to the app), Recipes, Healthy, Holiday Guide, Shop, Shows, Chefs, Schedule, and Watch Full Seasons. Starting 12/26/2019 and after, the menu read the same except “Holiday Guide” was replaced with “Comfort Food.” These menu options clearly state TVFN’s value-

orienting social roles: cooking guide, personal shopper, entertaining instructor, celebrity friend.

Below the menu was a large (1/3 of the screen) main story complete with visual imagery. This was either a themed recipe collection ("All-Star New Year's Recipes" and "These are our 50 most popular recipes"), or a recipe that was demonstrated in the app (the aforementioned Bobby's secret pancakes and Ina changing your chicken). The latter is a promotion as a visitor cannot access the recipe without paying the subscription. Next, three or four featured stories aligned horizontally, also having an image as the leading feature. These were themed recipe collections ("7 ways to make Hanukkah Latkes" or "Classic Cocktails for Anyone Who's Not Into Champagne), a recipe ("Giada's Panettone Bread Pudding with Amaretto Sauce"), an app promotion, or a personified story about a show ("Cook Along with Anne and Alton" or "Meet the New Recruits" referring to the TVFN show Worst Cooks in America). Below this horizontal row of stories were four recipes aligned horizontally, each with their own image and text. Then came a series of larger single stories again. These were recipe guides ("How to Make Healthier Homemade Granola") but also contained feature stories ("10 Questions We Need Answered After Watching Paris Hilton's New Cooking Show"), advice articles ("You Shouldn't Rely on Weight to Determine Health"), and product promotions ("The 10 Kitchen Organizers You Need, According to Pinterest Users") associated with more traditional human-interest or lifestyle journalism.

Next came similar, large-block, large image, single stories organized under a "What's New" heading. This was the only section where articles/entries had a byline or named author. While celebrity chefs might be mentioned in the headlines of other

sections, each entry was otherwise a nameless invitation. Being the only section with a byline, What's New stories resembled the traditional lifestyle journalism of women's pages and magazines.

Then came a series of recipes, each with their own image and in a large block on their own horizontal line. Then came a guide to what was on the television channel with four stories. Below that was a guide on "Where to Eat" feature restaurant promotions and city eating guides. Then one more recipe collection, a large image and link to subscribe to the magazine, 3 horizontally arranged full episodes of shows, and finally content from their "Sister Site" also owned by Discovery, Inc. (Travel Channel, Cooking Channel, and HGTV) and Scripps (Food.com). Besides the sister site content, there are no advertisements for outside entities on the initial webpage. Some stories themselves, however, promote other brands and advertising for non-TVFN entities adorns the pages once a story is clicked on. This consistent format rationalized the content and organized it into a predictable product for viewers. Its self-referential content also engendered self-promotion and a closed world of recognizable experts and manageable food choices.

Routinized Discursive Strategies. More than format, regular patterns of language use and meaning creation defined TVFN's digital identity and constituted its specific invitation to consider food. Most noticeably, TVFN offered a "better living through consumption" view as many of the problems TVFN posed were answered with a brand name product. The outlet also approached the opposing tensions of food in modernity (novelty-tradition, health-indulgence, extravagance-economy, and convenience-care) by trying to have it both ways and reconciling these polar opposites. And finally, TVFN combined the tactics of the "hard" sell and the "soft" sell to offer a

particular rationalization of taste that could appeal to a late modern audience. These strategies constituted TVFN's particular "voice" and positioned viewers into a specifically commercial, instrumental, and worried relationship with food and the food system.

Food Solutions. As a late modern lifestyle outlet, TVFN was part cooking instructor, part consumer guide and many of its feature stories answered food "problems" with a consumer "solution." Consumer answers went beyond a buy-this logic and could be colored with a stylized "reason why" someone should buy a particular product. Having a problem getting enough liquid throughout the day? Here are "11 Beautiful Water Bottles That Make Staying Hydrated Easy." Here, the aestheticization of everyday life is presented as addressing the problem of dehydration. Readers could also be given a more empirically based reason why, as products could be "Food Network Kitchen Tested" allowing TVFN to run a story, for example, on "Our Favorite High-Speed Blenders." Incidentally, the top pick was $299.95, but they also provided the "best budget pick" which was $79.85. This was not some cold, empirical scientist carrying out a test, however, but was a seemingly honest friend: "We Tried 10 Popular Sheet Pans + These Are Our Faves." Consumer choices were thus legitimated by aesthetic or stylized quality, ease of problem solving, first-hand testing, and an appeal to a trust between friends.

For TVFN, teaching and "inspiring" viewers to cook meant ensuring its audience had the correct products. Food preparation could be "made easy" as the website featured stories like "This Gadget Can Peel a Whole Potato in 10 Seconds" and "Must-Have Kitchen Organization Products." Viewers were encouraged to "stock up" in stories like "The Best Kitchen Tools of 2019—All under $50!" The article goes on to say that "you

can’t have too much of a good thing, especially when it comes to kitchen tools” and describes 13 such “favorites” including a professional popcorn maker. Clicking the headline, “Give Your Kitchen a Much-Needed Refresh with These Small Kitchen Tools” told viewers how it “doesn’t take much to revamp your cooking,” just buying a series of products all sold by one brand (including $24 cooking tongs). An early January article even put the entire TVFN mission behind one product: “Trying to Cook More in the New Year? You Need an Instant Pot.” TVFN editors seemed particularly enamored with Instant Pot, with stories appearing 19 of the 30 days the site was visited. TVFN appeared eager to share news of the brand: “Attention Instant Pot Fans! The Brand Just Released a New Product.” And they were not hesitant to praise the company in headlines: “This Instant Pot Toaster Oven Is Like Two Appliances In One — And It's on Sale.” One TVFN author rhetorically asked if there “was anything the Instant Pot can’t do?!” while another put forth a recipe claiming it the “genius Instant Pot hack we all need.”

Consumer recommendations were often framed as “needs,” perhaps in a playful manner to emphasize the self-care of consumerism. The article, “5 Quirky (and Totally Necessary) Products Every Coffee Lover Needs” uses what critical discourse analysts call overlexicalization. This is when a text uses more words than necessary, giving a sense of being overcomplete. Such over-persuasion can indicate that something is problematic or ideologically contentious (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Using both “totally necessary” and “needs” in the same phrase is repetitive and the writer appears to be overcompensating. The standfirst, however, was equally forceful and assuring: “These under-the-radar finds will forever change your morning.” Perhaps coffee lovers did *need* these products that are initially described as quirky. But the author knows audiences need

convincing. The article starts by explaining "the power of a good cup of coffee." There are a range of ways to drink it, it can boost productivity, reduce risk of certain diseases, and even make you a "functioning person" after a late night of TVFN binge watching. In this description, coffee offers choice and the magic of healthy, efficient personhood. The article continues: at first, making coffee may seem simple. You really just need beans, a machine, and a mug (link to a $36 mug). But if you want to take "caffeine consumption" to the "next level" then these products are "absolutely necessary" for "the perfect cup of Joe every time." Products included an ice cube tray to make coffee ice cubes, a mug warmer, and a portable espresso maker. Extolling something (in this case coffee), problematizing it, promising perfection, and offering commodities as solutions was a common strategy of TVFN. This led to an exaggerated use of the concept "need." If they were a friend, TVFN was quite hyperbolic, yet subtly deep. They saw the good things in life, hinted at some anxieties or factors keeping you from perfection, and recommend you buy something to make things right. The good life had a clear price.

Sometimes buying products is the solution you did not know you even needed. After arguing that your budget has been through enough this year, TVFN tells you "The Cheapest Way to Throw a Fun New Year's Eve Party." This meant buying a giant cardboard Happy New Year frame for people to take pictures in and serving (after buying) champagne in plastic instead of glass flutes (also purchased). Buying in bulk was also recommended. It seems that in order to have a cheap party, sometimes it involves buying more things. Along similar lines, if you want to "waste less + be more sustainable" then this also involved shopping correctly. You could buy your staples in bulk. More—for saving money and the planet—it seems, is better. To cut back on

aluminum cans or plastic bottles, you could invest in a $114.96 home soda-making machine. If you were on a budget or worried about overconsumption, then TVFN had the best products for you to buy. And, as a bit of friendly advice, you should probably buy in volume.

Despite its talk of being a teacher and offering empowerment, TVFN was not above letting consumer products do the heavy lifting. A story titled "16 Gifts You Can Order this Valentine's Day" had a standfirst (subheading) that read, "Skip the risk of making it yourself ☺ ." Items included a cake layered in a mason jar for $60 and donuts that spelled out "I love you" for $79. TVFN is not just a "re-skilling" site of empowerment-through-doing and even reminds viewers there is a "risk" to making things. Endorsing purchased products that look homemade, TVFN accepts the (re)commodification of gift giving. As an entity that prided itself on teaching people to cook, gift giving is a potential area where individuals could be empowered outside of the market. As a late modern lifestyle outlet, however, TVFN approached the market as nothing but helpful, a source of relief to aid the busy individual. If it means saving time and avoiding "risk," then buy a Valentine's day gift for your significant other. Too much to do and you don't want to miss any of the Superbowl? Then "These Store-Bought Hacks Will Win Big on Game Day." There was a limit to TVFN's empowerment. Such lifestyle "solutions" required individuals have disposable income.

TVFN also used their lifestyle lens of problem-solution to mention brand names in headlines beyond Instant Pot. Some were informative teasers: "Taco Bell Nacho Fries are Coming Back Again…Only Different" Others expressed gratitude at something that should have been inevitable, like "finally" being able to get oat milk at Starbucks.

Webpage visitors were told “All Clad is Having Another Amazing Sale Right Now,” and TVFN could mark the seasons with “Valentine's Day Shopping Starts Now With Nordstrom's Le Creuset Sale.” TVFN could reference brands as a testament to their own helpfulness: “We’ve Got Your New Year’s Resolution Covered with These Vitamix and Blender Deals.” This power of granting consumer access and role of personal shopper meant TVFN was not afraid to endorse products: “Prepare to Be Obsessed with the Cheesecake Factory’s New Ice Creams.” Entire articles could be devoted to product promotion: “The Best (and Craziest!) New Groceries Hitting Store Shelves in January 2020.” As a lifestyle expert, TVFN was well-versed in brands and used this knowledge to legitimate their food credentials and show their cultural relevance.

TVFN particularly embraced the role of consumer guide around holidays. Some invitations to shop came with the added impetus of modern pressures and social expectations: “It’s Not Too Late to Decorate: Our Top Picks for Last Minute Kitchen Décor.” But TVFN could also prove itself a help against modern pressures as five days before Christmas it ran: “11-Last Minute Holiday Gifts on Amazon That Will Arrive Before Christmas.” These gifts were all food related. Seemingly out of place was another article titled, “7 Picture-Perfect Sets of Family Christmas Pajamas.” This was the only non-food related or non-food adjacent story found during data collection and speaks to TVFN’s confidence in their role as shopping guide. These featured pajama sets were linked and sold through Kohl’s, however, a regular retail partner of TVFN where its own branded merchandise was largely sold. And while Martin Luther King Jr. Day did not bring any articles about remembrance or the holiday itself, it did prompt the story **“**All the Sales You Need to Shop This Long Holiday Weekend.**”** For TVFN, a commitment to

"teaching, inspiring, empowering" often meant positioning audiences as consumers first. Apparently, when life gives you lemons, buy a professional grade lemon juicer.

The Best of Both Worlds. Another common practice saw TVFN use the supposed tensions and antinomies of modernity as an opportunity to guide audiences and assert TVFN's lifestyle expertise. The contradiction between eating traditional and familiar foods with a desire for novelty and new flavors, for example, was sublimated into solution: ease into an updated tradition. Traditional cuisine, as we saw with coffee, could be taken to the "next level" (or as a TVFN chef Emeril used to say, "kick it up a notch"). If you customarily ate latkes at Hanukkah, you could mix in some sweet potato, carrots, or apple. If you had a long-established practice of eating "Christmas Steak" why not "Dress up holiday steak with vibrant red and green sauces"? It was not only new but also stylized and themed with the season! A promotional story for the app indicated, "Molly's Upgrading One of Your Childhood Favorites," a personal invitation that promised an updated version of something classic "you" used to eat. You could even "Treat Yourself" by negotiating those sometimes-burdensome traditions with "10 Creative Uses for Leftover Eggnog." Bored with the winter seasons conventions? Here are "6 Ways to Jazz Up Regular Ol' Hot Chocolate." Holiday baking and entertaining, which TVFN framed as a yearly tradition, could also be stylized. In TVFN's typical aesthetic, many holiday cooking projects were whimsical and embraced kitsch. There was eggnog served and garnished to resemble a snowman. Or you could make cookies that looked like Santa torsos, or a cake easily mistaken for a winter hat. The traditional gingerbread house could be made over with a crudité version using raw vegetables. Recipes offered a "simple twist" to "completely change the taste" "without sacrificing the classic holiday flavor"

(Quick and Easy Holiday Recipes). In all of this, TVFN managed the expectations of tradition with the flair of the aestheticized life and consumer society's need for novelty. Such "inspiration" assured audiences that tradition did not have to be monotonous.

TVFN equally negotiated other modern tensions that preoccupied the omnivore's dilemma, including the opposing values of health-indulgence, economy-extravagance, and convenience-care. As a resilient institution of late modernity, however, TVFN did not see these as distinct, contained values that were mutually exclusive of each other. Instead, both could be combined and synthesized, one sometimes sliding into the other and co-existing without conflict. If holiday cooking was known for being special, taking time, and showing care then TVFN could help the stressed modern cook with "Quick and Easy Holiday Recipes." Even quick and easy, however, could still mean stylistic and visually appealing, especially with the ease of premade ingredients, like piecrust "such as Pillsbury." Consumer solutions played a vital role in having it all (i.e., appeasing both sides of a food antinomy while displaying distinction). Comfort foods, also known for taking time and providing care, could also be "reinvented" in ways that were "quick," "simple," and "easy." Like throwing a new year's party on a budget, TVFN did not claim one pole of a food value absolute. Instead, they helped readers negotiate those tensions, guiding choices and justifying decisions.

Nowhere was negotiation and justification more prominent than TVFN's balancing of health and indulgence. The same page that offered tips for substituting healthier ingredients could also run a story on making bacon cheeseburger-stuffed bread. In a health-conscious age that still demanded the delicious, TVFN told audiences they could have the best of both worlds. Regularly contributing dieticians and nutritionists

(identifiable by the credentials that followed their names), lent scientific legitimacy to food recommendations. Here were "10 Hacks Nutritionists Use for Healthier Cookies." Just because you were watching your weight does not mean you have to give up cookies. The same with exercise and alcohol: ""The Best Happy Hour Drinks, According to Top Trainers." Comfort foods, separated in TVFN's menu from "Healthy," were also brought into the realm of health acceptability. Audiences were told "How to Lighten up Classic Chicken Parm" or that "These Comfort Foods Just got a Healthy Upgrade." According to TVFN, fitness and flavor did not have to clash, and their experts could explain how.

While enticing audiences with the delicious and impressive, TVFN embraced its health expert role in a segmented and strategic manner. Health-conscious content was spread throughout the website without being overly concentrated or moralizing. Collections of healthy recipes began appearing on New Year's Day, a time when Americans are most self-conscious about their diets and habits. TVFN sometimes invoked new year's resolutions when discussing healthy food. Such eating was never described as denial or lack (remember cookies and alcohol were still on the table!), and consumer solutions could help audiences keep their eating both healthy and delicious.

For audiences seeking more health-focused content, TVFN had a separate blog, "Healthy Eats." Here, viewers could find healthy recipes, diets, tips, and even a "news" section. The blog used the same discursive techniques as the main website, running stories like, "10 Healthy Ingredients Nutritionists Keep on Hand." The "News" section appeared like a public relations feed promoting, for example, new dairy-free products to "stock up on" or investigating why Triscuits are called Triscuits. TVFN's health discourse, like its other content, oriented individuals as consumers. An article posted on

TVFN's homepage, "Can Water Have More Calcium Than Milk?", linked to the Healthy Eats blog. The byline was "Amy Gorin, M.S., R.D.N." The headline grabbed attention by posing a preposterous question and the credentialed author promised an expert answer. The story itself was product promotion for different brand so mineral and spring water. Kids could be taught to eat better by downloading an app and pairing it with a purchased toy. Here were "9 Products To Try If You're Always Exhausted During Your Workout." Health "news" included the article, "11 of the Healthiest Store-Bought Foods We Tried in 2019." It told readers they did not need to "cook *everything* from scratch every night of the week in order to be healthy…Many food companies have done a wonderful job creating healthy, well-balanced products…" It then listed such products with some praising promotional copy and provided a link to purchase the product. This was TVFN's eternal return of the consumer, as asserting itself as a health food authority—or any authority to resolve modern tensions—meant another marketing opportunity.

Hey You! TVFN's positioning of audiences as consumers expanded beyond product promotion and consumer solutions. Commercialized content and the commodification of the audience also influenced how audiences were addressed, appealed to, and engaged. TVFN often used clickbait-like headlines, appealed to the competitive or display-based side of people, and provided infotainment via celebrity culture. Such content invited audiences with the promise of uncomplicated pleasure, the opportunity to earn and demonstrate cultural capital, and the exciting legitimacy of the aura of fame.

As a website, TVFN often used gimmicky headlines in the second person. This strategy to command attention produced headlines similar to clickbait, online headlines

that use sensational or leading language promising a huge payoff but often deceiving or delivering underwhelming content.[10] Because it was used by a lifestyle outlet people willingly chose, however, it created quirky, informal, and intimate invitations to click and view further. These headlines went beyond intriguing rhetorical questions. Such routines also resulted in low-stake normative statements such as, “You Should Be Melting Chocolate In Your Instant Pot.” This was a commanding but playful tip to inform “you” about a cooking process and evoked Instant Pot’s importance. TVFN could also tease viewers and play upon a fear of missing out: “4 Mistakes You’re Probably Making when Prepping Berries.” Such fun-filled threats were intended to get the viewer’s attention and let them know about the importance of the information. TVFN could also make a recommendation while introducing the viewer to a potentially new concept of interest: “You're Gonna Want to Make This Whole30 Sesame Chicken Dinner — Even If You're Not on the Diet.” The outlet thus performed its role as food guide, legitimized its position as expert authority, and offered an intimate promise: “The One Spice Blend You Probably Never Thought To Use in Baked Goods”; “This Flour Hack Will Help You Bake the Best Christmas Cookies.” As with clickbait, such headlines produced a sense of anticipation. Clicking on the headline and viewing further was potentially a great reward. Thus, “7 Surprising Ingredients You Need to Try in Your Holiday Cookies.” Unlike clickbait, however, TVFN had a willing and already captive audience. It could construct a common identity for its viewers even as it intimately invited them into TVFN’s world of expertise. The website, and thus brand of TVFN, could relate to its audience, recognize

[10] This practice was inspired by the sensationalistic headlines of commercialized, tabloid newspapers and magazines of the late 19th century.

modern pressures, and delivery the relief-producing news that "Breakfast Burritos Are the Genius Instant Pot Hack We All Need."

Addressing the late modern pressures of entrepreneurial identity work, TVFN articles and stories also appealed to the expressive, signifying, competitive, and display-based side of food. This was food as cultural and symbolic capital, a means to perform and earn distinction. The active audience member of TVFN was thus invited to, "Impress Your Guests with Giant French Toast" or create "Over-The-Top-Treats" and "Showstopping Desserts That Will Impress Your Guests." Here, conspicuous consumption becomes conspicuous cooking as food preparation becomes a way to display one's success at life. TVFN can thus instruct on, "How to Throw an Oscars Party in Style" or how "you" can, "Win Your Big Game Bash with Six Foot Nachos." In this view, cooking is a competition and feeding others is not about nourishment or community but something that can be won. Going to a holiday potluck? Then why not display your cultural capital and perhaps cultivate your symbolic and social capital with "epic" recipes? If you are a "Pinterest perfectionist"[11] then TVFN can even help you, "Knock their socks off with a salad (yes, salad)" or, "Sneak in a winning side dish" or even, "Win the Pinterest award." Here, food preparation is a performance of identity work directed at others and conspicuous cooking a means to "impress," "dazzle," and, "win."

Such better living through consumption and identity work for social winning was often accompanied by the promises (and pressures) of perfection. Recipes were described as "the ultimate" version of a dish, and TVFN did not guide audiences on how to make a good chicken sandwich, for example, but how to make, "…*the Best* [emphasis added]

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[11] Pinterest is a visually based social media network known for its beautiful imagery and identifies as a place to receive inspiration "for your real life."

Chicken Po' Boy." They instructed audiences on, "How to make Picture-Perfect Potstickers" or how to give the "perfect present for absolutely everyone you love" (which just happened to be a TVFN app subscription). Asserting their authority and appealing to "your" desires for perfection and social success, TVFN could promise, "This Flour Hack will Help You Make the Best Christmas Cookies." Even as a low-stakes, informal authority TVFN aimed for perfection assuring viewers a "perfect burger," "Party-Perfect Appetizers," or instructing them how to prepare a "…Perfect Weeknight Dinner." The idea of *the* best, or ultimate, or perfect version of a dish is a closure of the foodscape and self-referential TVFN can then claim its own experts can deliver such perfection. With such proclamations TVFN tells audiences there is no need to look anywhere else or to their own instincts, as TVFN alone and its limited world of experts and products could create ideal food.

In addition to their own cultivated celebrity chefs, TVFN also used the infotainment value of larger celebrity culture to garner attention, invite audiences, and generate a sense of fun around food content. Headlines could provide playful teasers such as, "Oprah Unofficially Endorses the Rock's Tequila" or "10 Questions We Need Answered After Watching Paris Hilton's New Cooking Show." Clickbait celebrity headlines could also feed into aspirational stories like, "Now We Know Everything Gwyneth Paltrow Eats in a Day" or articles of astonishment that promised amusement through wonder and spectacle as in, "10 of Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson's Craziest Cheat Meals." Celebrity provided a vehicle to blend the tabloidization and marketing that defined TVFN's particular brand of lifestyle content, combining aspirational desires, the aura of fame, and the promises of consumerism, wealth, and care-free amusement: "5

Products That Will Make Your Pantry Look Like Kim Kardashian's"; "If You're Oprah, Why Eat Chicken Sandwiches When You Can Eat Lobster Rolls"; "7 Things Inside Kim Kardashian's Kitchen That Made Our Jaws Drop." This last article with the promise of disbelief mirrored consumer culture's use of anticipation and the potentials of ever-new purchases. In a world of food as social "winning" and promises of perfection, celebrities—as explicit social winners and idealized persons—embodied, performed, and promoted TVFN's values and primary invitations to its audience.

Like celebrity itself, the idea of something being popular was presented as a legitimating factor in what food was good and desirable. Claiming ownership while also appearing democratic, TVFN can offer, "These Are Our 50 Most-Popular Healthy Recipes" or give consumer advice by appealing to already proven market success: "We Tried 10 Popular Sheetpans + These Are Our Faves." TVFN could also guide media users by providing purchasing links and additional reasons-why something should be bought: "Grab this popular model for 30% off at Target and stick to your resolution this year." Promoting a national fast food chain's nacho fries, TVFN highlights their desirability by stating, "the ultra-popular menu item will soon return with an 'all-new flavor innovation." Recipes or kitchen gadgets are recommended because they are "trending," a more positive word than "fad" that lets media users know something is legitimate because others are using or doing it. The wisdom of a more curated crowd is also called upon when recipes or gadgets are presented as the best "…According to Pinterest Users." TVFN can also use its authority to help users separate the best options from the merely popular as a staff dietician, with all of the proper credentials, can present a headline, byline, and subheadline as: "These Were the Most Popular Healthy Food

Trends of 2019 By Toby Amidor, M.S., R.D., C.D.N. Not all trends are meant to last forever." While TVFN often trafficked in anti-elitism by using popularity as a criterion of quality, it could still construct its own legitimacy on identifying, questioning, and ultimately legitimizing the popular. The network could even anticipate the popular with articles like, "Eddie Jackson's Secret to Perfect Hummus Will Be Trending in 2020." As with measuring market success, being popular meant something was good, and TVFN could inform individuals on what was popular or even what would become popular enough to "trend."

The employment of food as a problem, to be solved through purchase, perfection, popularity, emulation, and winning was sometimes patronizing and could play on social anxieties, hence the "4 Mistakes You're Probably Making" type headlines. TVFN constantly reminded audiences they were doing it wrong. But as your parasocial friend, TVFN would trigger then address your anxiety with a smile. A headline announcing, "The One Shortcut You Shouldn't Take When Cooking" had an encouraging subheadline reading, "Plus a few that are totally OK!" Once they had your attention, TVFN could ease media users into proper behavior, encouraging these audiences to want more with low-stakes advice that seemed to have "your" best interest at heart. A main headline reading, "You're Not Ready For Football Until You've Got Chili" is thus a friendly warning; it is a smiling nudge toward correct behaviors, tastes, and how to "win" socially. Hence, "It's Not Too Late to Decorate" and "You Might Be Surprised" after reading the shocking secrets of, "These Are the Foods Nutritionists Won't Eat." In the world of TVFN, food is a problem, and they have the expertise, connections, and insight

to solve it. As a so-called friend they were playfully patronizing, flippantly explaining that here was, “The Next Low-ABV Drink You’re About to Be Obsessed With.”

In addition to being lighthearted or playful threats of potential failure, TVFN’s approach could resemble the paternalism of traditional media outlets (Thomas, 2016). This meant TVFN explicitly embraced the role of informative authority, guiding media users with explanatory content like, “What Exactly is Calamari?” “What is Umami?” “Is Honey Healthy?” and “How-to Eat a Lobster.” This unapologetic power of arbitration could take the form of an assertive, confident expert, thus, “When You Don’t Know What to Cook for Dinner, Make This Chicken.” If TVFN was going to mobilize late modern social anxieties and invite audiences to aspire to celebrity-exemplified perfection, then it decided to take command and tame these challenges with a strong instructional approach that put media users at ease and garnered confidence and trust. Combined with their endless self-promotion, gimmicky headlines, and deference to commercialism and external determinants, however, this paternalism appeared less that of a concerned parent and more like an insecure partner in need of attention and reassurance.

In the midst of celebrity, paternalism, social anxiety, popularity, and the guiding path of a demanding consumerism, TVFN also utilized staff members as a relatable source of authority. It was not just larger than life celebrity chefs and personalities offering expert advice, but in an appeal to class solidarity (and utilizing the traditional clickbait format of intrigue, anticipation, and promise), TVFN offered, “The One Thing Food Network Staffers Always Buy at Costco” or “Snack Like a Food Network Staffer on Game Day.” Still aligned with TVFN consumer-based values, the staffer point of view signaled a food cultured not exclusive to the uber wealthy as the TVFN lifestyle was

presented as accessible to the "everyday" person. The non-celebrity and personality employees were just like you but just a little bit closer to the realm of professional food knowledge and taste. What they buy at Costco and how they eat on game day are thus deemed important things to know, they are relatable while also being just that much better. Audiences can thus expect upgraded or classier appetizers without the added snobbery in a story on, "Food Network Staffers' Favorite Pre-Dinner Bites." In another exercise of relatability, "Food Network Staffers Share Their 2020 Food Resolutions" and act as exemplars, showcasing desirable behaviors and communicating to audiences that they too struggle with food-related issues. Staff-related stories were strongly worded emphasizing trust such as, "Meal Prep Strategies Food Network Staffers Swear By" and "Game Day Snacks Food Network Staffers Swear By." In this relatability and earning of trust through peers, TVFN utilized a populist approach that still spoke to upper middle-class aspirations. While an appeal to class solidarity and a lifeline in a world of anxiety, this discursive strategy reiterated and endorsed the neoliberal social pressures of competitive individualism and making oneself marketable.

Erasing and Easing into Culture

In many ways departing from their founding practices of the 1990s and 2000s, TVFN placed much less emphasis on the cultural origins and dimensions of food. While shows like *East Meets West* once used stereotypes to simplify and gently introduce audiences to different Asian cuisines, the current digital iteration of TVFN mostly worked in a culture-blind world operating in a manner that could aptly be described as *post-cuisine*. While there were a few exceptions that proved the rule, this selective employment of cultural identity was used to establish culinary credentials, elevate Italian

cuisine, and allow audiences to pick and choose from global traditions as they saw fit. Overall, however, the cultural identity of cuisine or the person cooking did not matter as it once did, as the domestication of the once "exotic" was routinized to the point of cultural erasure.

On the website itself, collections of recipes were presented without cultural identity markers and, as far as cuisine was concerned, randomly. Recipes for pork tamales, fried rice, and shrimp scampi could thus be grouped together and without any mention of Latin America, Asia, or Europe (let alone specific regions) either in the headline or recipe itself. In its presentation of seemingly cuisine-less food, TVFN exemplified the (misleading) metaphor of the United States as melting pot. More telling about the need for immigrants to assimilate on American middle-class terms, these Americanized recipes were scrubbed of their historical origins while simultaneously constituting the national diet.

Recipes for "Fajita-Stuffed Peppers," "Eggplant and Kale Parmesan," and "Teriyaki Chicken Thighs" were thus presented together as a typical weeknight of cooking for American TVFN audiences. There was seemingly no need to discuss the material-semiotic origins of culture and cuisine or explain ingredients like cumin or soy sauce and how best to source them. The one cultural marker in this particular trio of recipes was a "shredded Mexican blend cheese" for the stuffed peppers. This was less a recognition of cultural origin as TVFN simply used the shorthand for a nationally available and nation-state named bag of pre-shredded cheese.[12] With such smatterings and hodgepodge collections of recipes, TVFN thus offered food variety without the

[12] While the other widely available and nation-state named shredded cheese blend is Italian, the eggplant dish in this collection called for the more specifically named mozzarella and parmesan cheeses.

complications of recognition, explanation, and discourse outside of instrumental use. This was pragmatic American cooking, where late modern pressures spurred flexible, post-traditional food preparers who could disregard origins and dwell on personal ends.

The culture-blind approach was most explicit in TVFN's newest recipe author: Food Network Kitchen. While TVFN had previously used individual celebrity chefs and their ethnic/racial background and appearance as cultural markers of culinary legitimacy, recipe bylines could now read "Recipe Courtesy of Food Network Kitchen. This culture-less, position-less entity could provide a disembedded recipe from nowhere, avoiding the complications of personal and social history. This further sidestepped questions of cultural appropriation and allowed TVFN an authority and ownership over generic, Americanized recipes. Tamales, stir-fry, chicken biryani, and pad Thai recipes were thus put forth by the neutral and culturally blank Food Network Kitchen. Even the widely known French onion soup, became just "onion soup" as presented by FN Kitchen. With no cultures, institutions, or even individuals to recognize, TVFN could offer a range of seemingly post-cuisine recipes, while TVFN users were free to make whatever was accessible, convenient, and available.

The American diet as presented by TVFN thus appeared to have no culture or cuisine, it was "just" food (p. 17). Pulled pork, cheesy pretzel dumplings, broiled salmon, chicken and broccoli stir fry, these recipes had no history or clear relationship. When TVFN did use explicit cultural markers or nomenclature, it was more often to identify ingredients and not necessarily a cuisine. A "Cajun Cabbage Skillet" recipe, for example, thus got its name from the use of Andouille sausage, an ingredient originating in France and popular in Louisiana. The recipe, however, matched TVFN's loose and casual

approach to food as a cultural category, claiming "any type of sausage would work." The use of Cajun is thus an ingredient suggestion and not a hard marker of cuisine or identity. In this instance, the alliterative recipe is catchy while there is no need to adhere to anything authentic or concern oneself with cultural origins or tradition.

As a post-cuisine food media outlet, TVFN was a postmodern bricoleur, mixing and matching styles, elements, and tastes. They also blurred the boundaries of previously distinct entities. In addition to its recipe collections using (but not recognizing) diverse cuisines, for example, TVFN also offered fusion recipes like "Cheeseburger Fried Rice" and "Thai Chicken Pizza." Not limited to the previously strict separations of past cuisines, readers were invited to new hybrids like "French Dip Cheeseburgers on Brioche Rolls," "Carbonara Fried Rice," and "Pastrami Sandwich Meatballs." This liberal rearranging and combination of styles and cuisine was done in a particularly American manner. That is, TVFN's food offerings echoed the pragmatic American pastiche that produced such collages as the Mall of America, Disney World, and Las Vegas.

This mixing and simultaneous disregard for culinary origins freed TVFN from the limits and questions of authenticity, tradition, and cultural-historical ownership. It also meant TVFN hosts, recipe designers, and culinary surrogates did not have to adhere to pre-existing closures of meaning such as the modern recipe. Such a context thus allowed Eddie Jackson, a Black American and ex-NFL player, authority over hummus, a dish originating from Middle Eastern cuisines. His "Secret to Perfect Hummus" was Tajin, a Mexican spice blend popular south of the United States. The article also mentioned that Tajin is used in Disneyland on top of their famed Dole pineapple whip, further evidence of the American foodscape's culinary bricolage as well as TVFN's valuing of the

popular. Along similar lines, an article "All Your Guac Questions Answered," referring to a dish originating from Central Mexico, posited California-based Guy Fieri as "the guac doc." Guacamole has permeated American cuisine especially in California and Tex Mex, and TVFN did not concern itself with the ethnic origins of the dish or choose a host/authority with the matching ethnicity. In fact, questions of culture did not appear in this article as all inquiries were based on how to use, buy, and prepare ingredients or execute a recipe (e.g., what are best avocados to use, how stop it from turning brown, how to cut avocados). Thus, even dishes with a clear cultural history were exclusively discussed instrumentally, with no apparent time or interest for other information and purely asking "how can I benefit?" *Disembedding* food from cultural origins and re-embedding purely for instrumental use freed cuisines from their constituting limits, and TVFN could thus avoid institutional questions of legitimacy, ownership, and appropriation.

Not recognizing culture, disembedding dishes, and re-embedding them in the language of post-cuisine, however, did not mean cuisine and cultural definitions of food were absent or not used. Every ingredient, technique, flavor, and recipe TVFN discussed was the result of a specific history and socially constructed material-semiotic system of the edible. TVFN thus relied on cuisine and the material-cultural history of food while ignoring the process of its formation. In an article featuring the relatable TVFN staff (see above) sharing their favorite TVFN recipes, producer Larisa Alvarez[13] identified chicken biryani, a dish originating with Muslims of the Indian subcontinent. With the recipe credited to the culture-less Food Network Kitchen, this history was erased or assumed

[13] In a separate interview, Alvarez says she is from Kentucky and her family is Venezuelan.

known to the audience. Either way, TVFN ignored the history of active humans organized by cultures that devised cuisines, enabled their use for personal ends, and limited the consideration of enabling social means. Such instrumental use eliminated people from the sovereign consumer's mind and fetishized food as a free-floating pleasure.

The few times cultural makers were explicitly employed and the ethnic identity of the TVFN host mattered as a source of legitimacy, it was in the instrumental use of a cuisine to accumulate cultural capital and enhance one's social standing. Matching their competitive and display-based approach to food and entrepreneurial identity work, for example, TVFN could tell audiences, "Tortillas Are the Bread-Making Project You Should Tackle This Year." Drawing on the legitimacy of trends, the article argues, "sourdough was so last year" and provides Rick Martinez, an "expert in Mexican cuisine," to instruct the audience. An ethnically corresponding chef[14] or (seemingly) culturally appropriate cook thus offered the culinary capital or legitimate sense of authority necessary to ensure audience members that such performative food knowledge was authentic and valuable. Still aligned with culinary American pragmatism, however, the recipe and instructions were "flexible" and left "room for experimentation." An "expert in Mexican cuisine" could thus guarantee TVFN's idea of "winning" at tortillas while also absolving audiences of the need to faithfully adhere to tradition.

Another example of TVFN recognizing culture by making it usable came with two stories about Chinese New Year: "All the Lunar New Year Dishes That Will Bring You Luck" and "How To Host a Lunar New Year Dumpling Party." Being explicitly

[14] Mexican is a national identity comprised of multiple ethnicities and Martinez is from Austin, Texas.

Asian (celebrated in China but also Korea, Vietnam, and much of Southeast Asia), American audiences seemingly needed explanation to make Lunar New Year's relevant, and these articles devoted, by far, the most space to discussing the cultural aspects of food. "In the Chinese tradition, each dish has a special meaning," one article stated, then delineated the symbolic meanings behind noodles, whole fish, dumplings, and rice balls. Both articles were authored by individuals with the appropriate ethnic identities, one sharing her experience "as a little girl growing up in Singapore" and the other "How to Host" article reporting on a TVFN App class hosted by Anito Lo. Lo talked about memories of her mother making dumplings and this being a "common Chinese experience." Both articles, in contrast to the vast majority of TVFN content, explicitly discussed cultural differences and the specificities of particular methods and cuisines. Like other TVFN content, however, this was a simplified explanation that utilized novelty and cultural legitimacy to offer audience a culinary competitive advantage. Cultural difference was thus recognized, if only to offer distinction, symbolic capital, and a social enhancement of the individual through the instrumental use of the "exotic."

There was one noticeable instance where cultural "others" and the exotic was used as a strict marker of difference. An article titled, "These Are the Foods Nutritionists Won't Eat," started with the expected health concerns. Credentialed nutrition experts sourced by TVFN explained, for example, that they would not eat commercially grown sprouts because they were prone to contamination, rare beef because of foodborne illness potential, and bologna because it was too high in sodium. But then the list took a turn as a registered dietician (RDN) said they would not eat crickets because they were icky, and "I just can't go there." Maybe, the author claimed, "I could choke them down if I was in

the wild…,” objecting to crickets not for any health reasons but the culturally constructed semiotics of eating an insect. While a clickbait style headline used the legitimatization of science and the promise of surprise to draw readers in, the article also showed the limits of culinary and cultural openness, ignoring the science of high-protein crickets and dismissing dozens of cuisines that eat insects (according to the United Nations over 2 billion people in more than 80% of the world's countries eat insects). More than personal preference or aversion, this RDN abandoned the supposedly universal and objective standard of science to protest the eating of crickets as bizarre, further implying that eating insects was for people closer to nature. Even with the required credentials of an American nutritionist, this surrogate of TVFN did not use science to understand the cultural contingencies of the omnivore's dilemma. Instead, they projected their subjective position onto others, asserted their own preference as valid, ignored the more universal categories of nutrition, and created a definitive closure of meaning around cultural difference and cuisine.

In addition to delineating difference, the cultural aspects of food and diet could also be used to create a sense of inclusion. Mixing their practices of cultural erasure, Americanization, and identity as cultural capital, TVFN presented their own specific version of Hanukkah. A collection of “The Best Hanukkah Recipes,” for example, did not mention it as a specifically Jewish holiday and offered “classic comfort food” corresponding to an Eastern European and Americanized understanding of Jewish cuisine. This meant various iterations of brisket, fried potatoes or latkes, noodle dishes, and donuts. Such traditionally Jewish fare could be provided by gentile chefs, like Rachel Ray's potato and carrot latkes. An article instructing “Throw a Hanukkah Party”—

utilizing the *best of both worlds approach* (see above) with "new spins on traditional favorites"—offered latke and brisket recipes from the culturally neutral "Food Network Kitchen," a noodle kugel from TVFN host Dave Lieberman, a broccolini side dish by Ina Garten (born to a Jewish family), and a fried donut dessert from Sunny Anderson, an African American TVFN chef. Here, there was a recognition that Hanukkah dishes came from a particular cultural tradition, but the source of these recipes and dishes mattered less than the potential comfort they could provide to a public with a meat, potatoes, and fried-things diet. There was no gefilte fish, chopped liver, or even Israeli definition of Jewish cuisine here. There was a nod to cultural origins, but this was limited by Americanization and TVFN's particular cultivation of audience. There was a loosening or dis-embedding from a specifically Jewish community to make these traditions more accessible, widely applicable, and adaptable to the essentialized American palate. In this manner, the limited understanding of Hanukkah dishes meant they were not exotic or foreign food, they were part of American culture. TVFN could thus downplay Jewishness, focus on beef, potatoes, noodles, and donuts, and make food with Jewish cultural roots a relatable part of American cuisine, ready to use as a standardized product of mass consumption.

So cultural markers or labels could be used in a specific, reductive way to downplay difference and invent a *selective tradition* (Williams, 2005), positing certain foods as constituting American cuisine. While recipe collections were discursively constructed as post-cuisine and thus only implicitly part of an *American* diet, TVFN could articulate *the* American cuisine—an explicit and indisputable American cultural food identity—using regions, states, and cities. When promoting restaurants and eateries,

TVFN highlighted “The Best Bites of New England” and talked of “The Vegas Spirit,” “Santa Barbara Style,” and “The Palm Springs Experience.” Each take was thus a culinary embodiment of a specific American locale and a culinary imagining of a national diet.

TVFN also built and performed a larger imagined culinary community with lists like, “The Best Sandwiches in America” and “50 States of Pizza Slices.” The sandwich list even gave a bit of history with some of the entries. A pastrami on rye in a New York deli, for example, featured an eye-level, close-up photograph of the sandwich with accompanying text that explained Eastern Europeans brought the dish to the city in the late 1800s and thereby into “America’s essential culinary canon.” Philadelphia was described as “the birthplace of American democracy and the home city of Rocky,” but its biggest claim to fame was the all-American Philly cheesesteak sandwich. The “Mexican torta”—featured at an eatery in San Francisco—was described as a sandwich so good it was on “the essential sandwich list in cities and towns across the United States.” Featuring an “Italian sub,” TVFN told readers that “If an American city is home to Italians, it’s home to some version of an Italian sandwich.” TVFN thus built a national identity through food by mapping (some) migration histories, showing the simultaneity of sandwiches amongst strangers, and articulating the exemplars of American eating. Incidentally, TVFN was the most explicit about ethnic and immigrant influence in the American diet when building such direct expressions of national identity and provender patriotism.

Another limited cultural marker TVFN employed was using a recipe title in the original language of the dish, such as “Pasta e Fagiolo” (Italian for “pasta and beans”).

Not from the cultural-less Food Network Kitchen, this recipe was from popular celebrity-chef Rachel Ray. Her cultural authority and legitimacy were provided by her Sicilian grandfather as she explained this "was a quick version of my Gran'pa Emmanuel's masterwork." Evoking an authentic cultural original and using explicitly Italian ingredients like pancetta and ditalini, there was no explanation of these ingredients. Audiences were assumed to know what these ingredients were and what "pancetta, chopped" might look like. A type of non-smoked, salt-cured pork belly and a specific pasta shape, these two ingredients have become more widely available in American grocery stores and TVFN assumed their audience had the proper member resources and familiarity. This showed the general acceptance of "Italian" food as part of American cuisine and the expected level of knowledge TVFN, an organization that defined itself by accessible instruction, still had for its relatively modestly skilled home cook.

It was Italian food that TVFN most explicitly addressed as something cultural, and here the network offered the most direct authority on Italian cuisine and recreating authenticity. One of their more popular celebrity-chefs is Giada De Laurentiis and this Roman-born, now American suburban mom provides the majority of TVFN's cultural cache on all things Italian. Born to a well-to-do, Italian show business family, Giada moved to Los Angeles at the age of seven. With no discernible "Italian" accent (the same as second generation Chinese American Ming Tsai from the 1990s) and a focus on her current American suburban life, Giada was a non-foreign feeling cultural bridge. Her name and use of Italian food pronunciations (e.g., a lyrical *mozzarella* that emphasized the double letters and e of "ella"), however, were cultural markers that lent authority and performed cultural legitimacy. Besides Giada offering "The Best Authentic [Italian]

Recipes," TVFN could also tell audiences "7 Ways to Eat Like a *True Italian*" or "8 Things at Olive Garden That *Real Italians* Would Never Do" [emphasis added].

Ironically, the cultural marking of Italian food and habits worked to make it a recognized and internal part of American cuisine. Meanwhile a "Chicken and Broccoli Stir-Fry" recipe was not considered Asian, Chinese, or a more specific regional identity associated with the stir-fry method but was just a "simple weeknight" dish. Here, stir-fry does not need a cultural marker as it is simply part of the home cooks repertoire. Not associated with any celebrity chef of a specific ethnic or cultural background, this recipe came "Courtesy of Food Network Kitchen." It was part of American cuisine not by recognizing or including its original "otherness" (as with "Italian") but by ignoring the process of Americanization and assuming ownership. So-called Chinese food was kept *othered* by having its origins erased, made exotic for cultural capital accumulation as mentioned above, or relegated to the realm of foreign restaurant.

As opposed to an embodied Italian celebrity chef instructing audiences on authenticity, the recipe collection "Chinese Takeout at Home" showed audiences how to recreate something external and originating outside their home. To ease audiences into this Americanized otherness, recipes did not go by their original language as with some Italian recipes. Thus, instead of a cultural ambassador explaining and correctly pronouncing Hundun Tang (wonton soup), Gong Bao Ji Ding (Kung Pao chicken), Chǎofàn (fried rice), or Zhajiangmian (a noodle and sauce dish originating from the Shandong province), audiences were instructed on Americanized food assumed other but seemingly without origin. Such egocentric, instrumental use of culture reduced the meaning of food, eliminated cuisine, and stereotyped those deemed other, all to the

dictates of one's pre-existing worldview. TVFN thus appropriated food traditions without appreciating their origins or how their treatment might create hierarchies of belonging.

Overall and most often, TVFN presented a post-cuisine eating universe. As a consistent strategy, the network and its celebrity experts or culture-blind kitchen pulled dishes and ingredients from pre-existing food cultures without recognition and combined or Americanized them in novel and pragmatic ways. This allowed TVFN a wide range of authority and legitimacy in answering the omnivore's dilemma and ensured a veritable banquet of possible dishes to attract and hold an audience's attention. When TVFN did mention the cultural aspects of food, it employed instrumental logic to ensure audiences they had the proper cultural capital and that TVFN could help them gain or "win" socially. Cultural aspects of food were also used to imagine a national culinary identity, marking dishes that belonged (e.g., Italian food) and establishing exemplars of American cuisine (e.g., Philly cheesesteaks). This reductive use of culture exhibited a willingness to appropriate while denying an opportunity to appreciate.

The *New York Times* Food Section

NYT Food also walked a delicate line of democratic invitation and class-based consumer solution. Like TVFN, it was "news you can use" for home cooking. Unlike TVFN, *NYT* included restaurant reviews, lifestyle journalism, and human-interest stories with equal vigor. Unlike TVFN's self-contained world of experts, *Times* journalists connected readers to a wider realm of food. Food was a cultural beat; like traditional journalists, *Times* reporters built stories (and reputations) talking to official sources and legitimizing certain social institutions of eating or the food system. Food was not just a problem to be solved, though it was sometimes that, but it also expanded into an entire

lifestyle. Food was situated in a wider symbolic order as journalists explored the cultural or human-interest stories behind what, where, why, and how people ate.

While there were journalistic routines like bylines on every story and regularly repeating columns, *NYT* was more a romanticization of food than a rationalization of taste. *Times* food writers had the aesthetic flair of gastronomes, even when providing practical advice. Through narratives food was made human, not personified as corporate mascots, but made meaningful and relevant for the realms of mortal desire. And these realms seemingly knew no pain besides the hunger of desire. As O'Neill (2003) noted about the changing nature of the *NYT* food section, it was less "food news" and more news for self-interested foodies. While former editors like Craig Claiborne lamented this change, he was also aware that people, "just wanted to eat dinner" (O'Neill, p. 41). The section thus focused on the "bright side of food," inviting audiences into a poetic relationship with eating. This aesthetic understanding gave food a welcoming human element. It also elevated eating to art appreciation. More accessible than art, *NYT* fostered an appreciation for good eating by downplaying unpleasantness and cultivating a romantic culture of desire. Some journalists embraced a marketing role, drawing no distinction between food enthusiasm and public relations.

While articles and newsletters could be read with a standard *NYT* subscription, *NYT* Cooking required a $40 subscription, a penny more than TVFN's Kitchen App. The *NYT* Cooking subscription provided access to recipes and multiplatform organizing tools. While a "selection" of recipes was available to the *Times'* 5 million subscribers, the company says 600,000 pay additional for the cooking subscription (Feuer, 2020). As a subscription-based newspaper outlet, *NYT* has a more specific class demographic than a

cable television outlet. While class expectations did not stop TVFN from offering pricier food solutions, the *Times* was more explicit about its service to middle and upper-class foodies. Audiences were expected to have some food-based knowledge, like the names of famous restaurants and chefs, the Michelin star rating system, and other aspects of the "Food Establishment." With paywalls for content, *Times* readers were a dedicated target audience and assumed to have certain member resources: previous food knowledge, access to quality ingredients, leisure time to contemplate and prepare food, and ample purchasing power.

Overall, *NYT* was a balanced hybrid of its legacy: part practical guide for daily living, part aesthete articulating the finer things in life. Operating in our current context of neoliberal consumer culture, journalists also played the role of social influencer, a marketing agent legitimized by their personal authenticity (Maguire & Matthews, 2014; Pöyry, et al., 2019). This enabled an individualized form of self-care, aligned with notions of personal responsibility and unfettered self-interest. In *NYT*, however, this individualized notion could be tempered with the recognition of the social aspects of food, at least in terms of social capital or the personal stories of journalists and chefs. On exceedingly rare occasions, the environment or labor (once) could appear in a story, but these were framed for the individual and made relatable to the experience of a consumer. While this could make stories relevant to a reader, they did not offer a comprehensive account delineating the complexities of such issues. The *Times* appeared wary of compassion fatigue and saved more "news" type stories for other sections of the paper. This made the food section a relative refuge from "bad" news and allowed conversations on egocentric pleasure and self-care to flourish.

Foodie Journalists

Although *NYT* constituted an audience through class expectations—e.g., $150 being considered a "relative bargain" for good sushi—this did not mean the food section was overly elitist, formal, or exclusionary. On the contrary, *Times* journalists were warm, friendly, and inviting. These were not snobby gastronomes waxing philosophic or even the expert teacher like TVFN. They were poetic guides that offered guidance in a cordial and very human manner, extremely personable and undemanding. More than TVFN, *Times* journalists really did appear your "best friend in food" and they were not as loud or vocal about that fact. From dinner idea confidant to restaurant reviewer to food industry insider, *NYT* was simply your friend in the know. Sure they had an above-average vocabulary and got a little flowery, but it was rarely pedantic and always personable. As professionally trained journalists, *Times* food writers could communicate matters of taste and personal experience in seemingly "objective" ways. Building from firsthand experience or verifiable facts, they could articulate their own subjective experience. As talented writers, this was entertaining yet straightforward. *NYT* was your self-assured friend that did not need to remind you of their credentials or how great they were. Simply relaying what they liked in an engaging and seemingly authentic manner, the *Times* had a more subtle and apparently meritocratic form of authority.

This fellow traveler permeated *NYT* Food, providing recipe instructions, restaurant "reviews," and product recommendations. Recipe instruction—socioeconomic class and habitus expectations aside—were informal and down-to-earth. While assuming access, purchasing power, and specific culinary knowledge such as measurements, herbs, cutting techniques, etc., *Times* cooking instructions came from a neighbor or friend, not

celebrity expert. While TVFN had used carefully cultivated personalities and editing to create rationalized videos of friendly experts, *NYT* used roughly cultivated personalities and editing to create organic-feeling videos of goofy but capable friends. TVFN videos followed the traditional TV format of expert or specialist explaining and showing how to prepare a dish. This was done with no audience and seemingly no one present but those preparing the food, complete with heavy editing to ensure smooth transitions and perfect camera shots and finished products. *NYT* videos also used heavy editing, however, this was done to make the cooking process seem more improvised and chaotic, more organic and less than perfect. For one thing, the recipe presenter would often break the fourth wall by admitting something embarrassing to the audience or displaying a fault. The presenter would always break what I assume is one of the first three walls, as they would talk to their camera crew, food stylist, etc. who were off camera. This playful banter with crew also let the viewer know this was all staged, and vulnerable utterances of "we're going to edit that out, right?" can be quickly followed with perfect still shots of heaping, steam-filled bowls of mouth-watering food, lightly kissed with citrus, color, a dash of herbs, or some other twist of artistic flourish. This vulnerable fellow human in roughly the same (middle class) boat did not take away from their authority but lended a sense of authentic credibility.

Celebrities are idealized and make perfect things, while "regular" people make do with what they have. *NYT* recipes appear as the latter while still promising the former. A few *Times*'s food writers/journalists, like Alison Roman, Melissa Clark, and David Tanis, had previously worked in the food industry. Professional experience, however, was not their primary source of cooking authority and was rarely, if ever, mentioned. Instead, an

aura of care, conviction about the delicious, Food Establishment knowledge, and the raw, humanities-based approach to writing and communication provide *NYT* cooking-journalists the necessary air of authority. Ultimately, the proof was in the polenta as audiences carried out their own reproduceable experiments, sometimes pushing back or complementing knowledge in the comments section.

Routinized forms of cooking instruction came in the form of regularly weekly columns like Sam Sifton's, "What to Cook This Week" and "What to Cook This Weekend," or Emily Weinstein's, "Five Weeknight Dishes." These were also emailed weekly as newsletters. Such columns offered practical guidance on everyday life, not just because it was a problem, but because it had the potential to be joyous and delicious. Both columnists employed the more personable format of a blog, starting with first-person narration or conversation before launching into recipes. On 1/24, Sifton opened his "What to Cook This Weekend" with:

> Good morning. I'll be out in strange, corporate, post-industrial riverside New Jersey this weekend, the south part of Edison where the roads end in wetlands and garbage, where Alabama 3's "Woke Up This Morning" is the secret song in your head.

He then explained he was going to a fly-fishing convention, self-deprecating and calling it "nerd prom." He smoothly transitions into how he could then stop by a specific Staten Island Italian grocery (complete with weblink) and pick up ingredients for a "New York take on the classic muffuletta sandwich." He offered suggestions for variations on the traditional Italian item saying, "the muffuletta is canon, but not. You can make that sandwich your own." His narrative turned course, Chinese New Year festivities started Saturday, so here were a few links for appropriate recipes. For Sunday cooking he offered a relatable universal: he wanted to cook a big batch of something to eat during the week,

offering a potato soup or clam chowder. Or perhaps he would cook something of his colleagues, as he offered two Melissa Clark recipes, each with an additional recipe for its leftovers. And Sifton finished with a flourish:

> And then there's dessert, weekend's favorite friend. Wouldn't this bittersweet chocolate mousse with fleur de sel (above) be rad after dinner on Saturday night? Or you could raid the freezer for some frozen wild blueberries and embrace the imperfection of blueberry pie. Tangerine sherbet? I'd be happy running out the weekend with a big slice of 7Up cake. Better yet, how about a spoonful of Dorie Greenspan's Eton mess? (That's best served with the Jam.)

Aside from less than timely slang like "rad," Sifton delivered personable and authoritative suggestions for things to cook on the weekend.

Despite having over 400 recipes to his name, Sifton's authority did not pull from his own expertise, instead offering colleagues, retail outlets, and other recipe creators as the exact source. His use of first person was measured and warm, not desperate and insistent. His initial self-depreciation was not meant to harm his credibility, but showed vulnerability, a humanness that denoted accessibility. He promoted an Italian grocery store and recognized the cultural roots of a recipe, while informalizing tradition and encouraging creativity. He recognized a major Chinese holiday period but did not comment on such traditions, providing links to other sources. He provided a relatable reason to cook something then matter-of-factly offered recipes as if from a friend. Finally, with a winking opening sentence, he finished by asking rhetorical questions about dessert, all while providing weblinks and undemanding suggestions. This was low stakes but delicious cooking. You could even "embrace the imperfection of blueberry pie." Sifton's authority and legitimacy in making such recommendations came from his position at the *Times*, but his communications and role performance were not elitist. Instead, the tone was conversational, and the voice was open, eliciting a response or

facilitating further questions. The author's authority came from the conviction of what they liked, and an appearance of disinterested care. Here's what I am doing, the *Times* invited, I'm like you and I think it's good. Have a look and decide for yourself.

On the same day, the weekly column, "Five Weeknight Dishes," ran, "Bright Flavors for Dreary Days." Julie Moskin was filling in for Emily Weinstein who was away on parental leave. Moskin, newly tasked with weeknight cooking, embraced the problematic nature of daily work and food preparation-eating. More than consumer solutions, Moskin offered a similar blog-like format, narrating a collection of recipes from *NYT* Cooking. After a first-person address of "Hello and welcome…," the author brings the "dreary days." January 24 is like September's back to school, "except with more darkness and lesser holidays to look forward to." She can relate and craves to "jolt awake my hibernating urge to cook." Transition into five presented, but paywalled recipes. One recipe is from Alison Roman, a journalist listed as one of nine "Times Cooks." The nine also included Sam Sifton, Melissa Clark, Julia Moskin, but not Emily Weinstein (who is listed as the original columnist). After bringing the sadness, Moskin narrated the first recipe—Italian Wedding Soup with Turkey Meatballs—with playful first-person banter that brought back the Column's regular author:

> What's that? You thought that, with Emily away, this newsletter would take a break from meatballs? Think again — I love them, too, especially made from ground chicken or turkey, which I always have in my refrigerator as a quick-cooking, super-versatile protein.

Food was social and the author's authority lay in personal conviction, her relationship with the previous author, shared struggle with the audience, and a dash of helpful nutritionism. Freelance food journalists or those associated with other food organizations provided four of the five recipes, including two by Sarah Copeland, one by Ali Slagle and

one by Kay Chun. Dreariness aside, we can eat with a little help from our friends (after fees have been sorted).

NYT's full-time cooking staff could explicitly articulate food with care. On Martin Luther King Jr. Day—when TVFN mentioned holiday weekend sales—Sam Sifton's email newsletter about weekly cooking was titled, "The Impact of Love." While readers expected a quick personal intro and a slew of recipes, Sifton paid respect to the day, and promoted more than delicious recipes or consumer solutions:

> Good morning. We celebrate Martin Luther King's Birthday today, a national day of service, a day to practice love, as the minister said, not as an expression of impractical idealism, but of practical realism, a way to ensure the life of our civilization.
>
> Some will make pecan pie (above) in his honor, because some say that was one of King's favorite foods. I'd prefer to read his work and consider how in this coming year we all might do better by those around us. Start with his sermon "The Death of Evil Upon the Seashore," from 1956, if you want to join me.

Sifton also named Ali Slagle when suggesting one of her recipes. While such gestures might seem small, food was made meaningful outside of individualized pleasure and such basic recognition provided a baseline for social conversation.

NYT also showed a certain thoughtfulness and care in restaurant reviews, perhaps more accurately called restaurant recognition. Like Craig Claiborne's pioneering review style and attuned to the Association of Food Journalists' Code of Ethics (2017), *Times* journalists were sensitive to restaurant reputations meaning livelihoods. There were not overly negative reviews, and even places that do not overly impress are described more than critiqued. Restaurant reviews were more like human interest stories, and owners and their back stories could feature prominently in a review. Any comments about meat being dry or a dish falling short are hedged by explanations and surrounded by either positive

copy, or "objective," descriptive reporting. Regardless of words, almost all reviews came with a slideshow of professional photographs, capturing the food, ambience, patrons, workers, and owners. These images were extremely high quality and often quite beautiful, a reader would be forgiven for missing less than flattering copy as they gazed at a steaming pile of perfectly plated noodles framed against a stark backdrop. Such restaurant recognition helped map the city foodscape and could generate interest in the local food scene. Former *Times* Journalist Ruth Reichl said something similar about her time covering food in the 1990s, that it was about getting people excited about eating. Besides emphasizing the positive and providing artistic photos, *Times* reviewers could offer entertaining and engaging first person narratives, describing the sound of a first bite or the subtleties of the restaurant's ambience. Aesthetically descriptive language could make unfamiliar food more relatable and enticing. A January 16 review for a Georgian restaurant, for example, described dishes like "ojaxuri, a heap of pork, potatoes and onions, browned and seething, to be anointed with a sauce of sour plums." Words like "seething" and "anointed" added an artistic dignity to the food while a mixture of past and future tense created a sense of movement and activity. *Times* reviewers promoted the local restaurant scene and encouraged readers to at least try places for themselves.

Some restaurant promotion did not take the form of review but were instead written as a human-interest story on a chef or owner. News of new restaurants opening outside of New York City also appeared, so long as the chef or owner had notoriety. These were primarily high-end restaurants. Restaurant industry coverage showed the *Times* was aware/part of the Food Establishment and the social world of food as an institution. That world often ran on social capital or who someone knows, and

restauranteurs could do worse than know the *Times* journalist Florence Fabricant. By volume, she was by far the most prolific food writer, often producing four or five articles a day. Many of these were short, however, offering information about food products or restaurants. These were not review, as there was no indication Fabricant actually ate at some of these locations. A December 23 piece mentioning a restaurant that served afternoon tea explained: "the tea features a multitiered stand holding little sandwiches (ham, roast beef, cucumber and smoked salmon) and pastries like scones. Linzer cookies and mini-Sacher tortes are also included thanks to Markus Glocker, the Austrian chef of Bâtard, who is running the kitchen." There are no evaluative statements and the descriptive statement provide "just the facts" reporting but enough to pique curiosity and name-drop specific culinary capital. Fabricant often reported on restaurants with noteworthy owners and chefs, and not in an evaluative review function, but in a straightforward, informative manner. She would trace the pedigree of the owner, chef, and sommelier, discuss how they came to collaborate, and describe what they would serve. This could generate buzz without the hype of promotion or necessity of critical evaluation, and it used journalistic trappings to generate social conversation.

More than restaurants, Fabricant also promoted local food events like food history lectures. A *Times* contributor since 1980, she had a trusted reputation as a food authority with impeccable taste. This reputation could explain her ease at promoting products. She did not use gimmicky headlines, or present life as a problem and offer a consumer solution. Fabricant did not explicitly provide a "reason why." She merely mentioned a product, described it and its founders, and provided an implicit endorsement with objective reporting. Like her restaurant stories, product pieces did not often exceed one

paragraph. In a simple statement built from verifiable facts, Fabricant explained that an Irish Whiskey first made in Dublin was now available in the United States. Without hyping it as the best she's ever had or claiming she kept cases of it at home, she stated that the whiskey was, "a honeyed dram both in color and flavor, makes for rich sipping, on the rocks in early evening or later or straight up to mellow the mood after dinner." Such understated promotion is in stark contrast to TVFN and other food blogs. While Fabricant often published three product articles in a row, they did not compete with each other or feel overly commercial. While they were promoting a product, the stories were not loud, with Fabricant calmly informing you about a supposedly superior product. While she occasionally instructed someone to "add this" to their brunch spread, most products were simply given short descriptions. The weight of Fabricant's reputation, the fact they were being mentioned, and their seemingly own "objective" merits, meant overt salesmanship could be kept to a minimum. Fabricant appeared a trustworthy expert, bolstered by her own convictions of taste, and seemingly calm and objective with the reader's best interests at heart.

While *NYT* Food is a late modern expert system intended for the relatively well-off, it is thus an informal authority. *Times* writers and cooks presented themselves as vulnerable and flawed fellow travelers. They just happened to be in the know and were self-assured in their taste. Their tone was conversational, sometimes poetic, but they could also sprinkle in key adjectives or turns of phrase into an otherwise informative piece. A "news" article thus appeared as a client-crafted press release. But in world of flawed friends looking for the delicious, the roles of publicist and journalist could blend like steamed milk in a latte. *NYT* was there to get people excited about food, to inform

people about delicious things and generate conversation. With an informal authority, *Times* journalists exuded an aura of care, relating to audience desires and passing on relevant information. Promotion was thus restrained and could appear very human, as if a good friend was simply concerned about your happiness.

Why Not Cook?

In *NYT*, food was not a problem to be solved but something that could be joyous and care providing. While weeknight cooking could be a grind, the answer was not to buy the right branded products, it was to seek inspiration to keep going. This meant buying the right ingredients and taking the time to cook "from scratch." But the drive for the delicious, nourishment, and comfort banished any sense of burden. Cooking and eating were sheer joy, captivating, enchanting, charming. *NYT* did not give "reasons why" someone should cook something. A hard sell was unnecessary, and *Times* journalists need merely show their audience what was out there. The soul-satisfyingly delicious was in reach, and *NYT* could help audiences with the proper resources.

Presupposing their audience had the appropriate habitus, knowledge, income, and time, *NYT* could ignore certain poles of modern eating tensions and creatively combine others. While reviews could indicate the approximate price point of a restaurant, the question of extravagance-economy was the least discussed. The convenience-care question was not approached as an either/or as *NYT* promised to make care convenient or at least manageable. The health-indulgence tension was similarly transformed as the *Times*' discursive style made supposedly healthier foods feel more indulgent. There was a conscious stance by weekly columnists to eat less meat (mainly for environmental reasons), and an upshot was to present a more plant-centric diet as satisfying comfort

food. And finally, novelty-tradition was overcome with a nod and creative use of tradition to ensure novelty. During the holidays, the newsletter offered collections of "traditional" recipes for Hanukkah and Christmas, but the website and featured stories were novel twists on celebrations. These included a recommendation to drink rosé champagne during the holidays, making a seafood pie for Christmas Eve, or serving an upside-down lemon sponge cake to guests. While the food section itself was rationalized and segmented off into its own separate part of the paper, this segregation allowed journalists to romanticize taste. This romanticism was primarily aimed at the individual, to stir and inspire. In the hands of *Times* journalists, however, it also offered opportunities for the public deliberation of traditionally private concerns.

Formatting Food. The *NYT* Food section was housed in the larger "Living" section of the overall newspaper. It is useful to see the other larger categories of the *Times* or what the food section was not. It was not "News" or "Opinion" or even part of the "Arts." The food section was grouped with health, style, parenting, love, jobs, education, and the daily crossword. As part of "living" it thus did not need a specific news angle or to aspire to the realm of art.

NYT Food's webpage layout had fewer initial options than TVFN and quickly oriented viewers to its "living" function. Two small menu options offered: "Wine, Beer & Cocktails" or "Restaurant Reviews," while a large search bar asked, "What would you like to cook?" Next to the search bar were two options for the uninspired: "What to Cook This Week" and "Cooking Guides." Similar to TVFN, it then offered one large headline story and image, with three smaller featured stories and images. Unlike TVFN, these stories all had bylines. There were then two rows of five horizontally aligned stories w/

images before larger single stories were organized under the "Latest" section. The layout was simpler and less cluttered than TVFN, but it was also less categorized and rationalized. Featured food stories did not show the same patterns and were not clearly grouped. Instead, different types of food stories were "scattered" and juxtaposed. A simpler layout meant less organization and viewing food as less contained. Food was not just a product or something one ate, it was an organizing master signifier, connected to a larger lifestyle.

The most common stories were on recipes and restaurants. There were also obituaries for members of the Food Establishment and a number of feature stories. These could be human interest stories related to restaurants, notable chefs, social trends, or food related businesses. Such features were international in scope discussing influential individuals (e.g., "India's 'Pickle Queen' Preserves Everything, Including the Past") or international business news stories (e.g., "Impossible Dumplings and Beyond Buns: Will China Buy Fake Meat?" and "Uber Sells Food Delivery Business In India"). The most instructive and authoritative stories, those that embraced the expert role, were on wine. There was a recurring feature called "Wine School." These articles were shy of pedantic, but the author informed the reader without the democratic deference of fellow traveler found in other articles. Even with a more confident embrace of expertise, however, the column reasoned you should "try it for yourself." Despite this deferral to individual choice, Wine School was one of the few spaces where victuals were presented as a problem, the complexities of wine allowing a place for experts to create meaning and play guide. The website also contained the muted product promotions of a productive

Fabricant. Overall, the webpage mixed practical recipes, purchases, and restaurant options with more historical, cultural, and personal investigations of cooking.

Routinized Discursive Strategies. A clear layout prioritizing practicality, a well-resourced audience, and an authentic but informal authority were key ingredients of NYT Food's constituting power. Overall, the outlet invited readers into an aesthetic relationship with food, a kind of "art appreciation through eating." While food had utility and was a daily necessity, there was also a hidden wonder to it, accessible with the right mindset, knowledge, and resources. Times journalists thus reported on pleasurable facts. They started with verifiable data or the empirical existence of a restaurant. They then spun poetic webs, peppered in choice adjectives, or introduced noteworthy names to reveal the beauty of food. This aesthetic appreciation was not off in the clouds, it was grounded in something tangible and visceral. Aesthetic pleasure was accessible and verifiable. Like the early gastronomes of Europe, this iteration of American journalism produced a science of feeding the soul (p. 39). This science, however, was not tyrannical or dogmatic like the modern scientific management of society (Weber, 1921/2013; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002). With informal authority and strong convictions about eating preferences, the Times romanticized taste and cultivated an open and encourageable sense of desire.

Edible Odes. Food is beautiful and eating is sheer delight, and the New York Times, dear friends, promises e'er to make it right. So did *NYT* go about making food meaningful, through colorful language, human-interest stories, and artistic images. As cooking instruction came with self-deprecating humor and a personable narrative, so could restaurant reviews. Reporting on someone else's cooking and without need of

humility, restaurant reviewers could also express the attractiveness of food and all the ways it was pleasing. On 1/31, for example, Times journalist Ligaya Mishan described her recent eating experiences at a Sichuan restaurant. She used personal stories and positioned the reader in the same subjective space, saying of one item, “this is a dish of excess, a great massing of eggplants, long trunks with skins caramelized at the edges, flesh surrendered to sauce. On a recent evening, there seemed to be more eggplant than my table of eight could ever eat, and then it was gone.” She continued and explained how the green beans were prepared, and that “the scent alone makes you thirst, a flavor before the flavor.” Even if one did not eat eggplant, tofu, or fish, such personalized poetry invited contemplation of their appeal. Dish descriptions continued:

> Salted egg yolks, dark and oily, are steamed, mashed and beaten into a creamy custard the color of sea urchin roe, with buried treasure of soft tofu and imitation crab. It’s rich and forthright in funk.
>
> Fish might come wrapped in foil and parchment, to be undressed at your table, revealing a loose sheath of chiles and scallions, then gently slashed with a spoon. Or delicate, flaking slices might appear in a broth of fish and pork bones, simmered for half a day and mobbed with fresh tengjiao (a type of green Sichuan peppercorn). “You can drink it,” Ms. Dong said, and I did, eating the fish as an afterthought.

This was not just a description of something the journalist ate. It was a full engagement of the senses, and an awareness of food’s physical qualities. It described processes and the experience of eating, offering guidance on how to eat a dish. This was a linguistic appreciation of food, capturing the aesthetic aspects of its materiality. While the narrative built on empirical “facts,” these were made spiritual; food embodied the very pleasure the journalist experienced. Expertly styled photography accompanied this objective or object-based ode to the delicious. Through such multimodal narratives, objective facts of food were made subjectively meaningful.

Restaurant reviews were often accompanied by such professionally designed slide shows. While Fabricant food establishment articles and feature stories on high-end chefs featured professional photography, so too did smaller "mom-and-pop" eateries get the visual treatment. Like professional bloggers on their various platforms, these restaurants were then featured on social media. Without publicists to write press releases or cultivate an online presence, locally owned restaurants appeared in the *Times*' social media feed, equipped with the visual gravitas and followers necessary to grab attention in the digital realm. Slideshows contained pictures of the food, owners, restaurant, and patrons. These photographs received the same treatment and attention to care as photographs for *NYT* recipes. Food was styled and plated, arranged on a clean, matching surface. In the photos below, the two on the left (marble backdrop) are *NYT* recipes for hosting a party. The two pictures on the right (wood panel) are dishes from a Georgian (the nation-state) restaurant described as "rustic." The *Times* thus used their resources and journalistic tools to make other organization's food as beautiful as their own.

The Both-And. *NYT* performed its authority, invited audiences, and made food meaningful by using contradictions or incoherencies that worked in tandem. Top among these was their informal approach to aesthetics. Art and beauty imply hierarchy and discerning taste, as judgment and exclusion are a prerequisite for aesthetic critique. Aesthetes are thus often associated with snobbery and the food world of haute cuisine and fine dining are no exception. But *Times* journalists utilized an informal authority, combining the position of both populist and expert. Experts normally derive their authority from institutional status, appeals to science, or a marker of some kind of authority (Van Leeuwen, 2008). The populist expert of the *NYT* did not appeal to

credentials, authority, or reason. They used a measured, relatable, and personal approach that only seemed to praise and never disparage. Reviews of expensive restaurants were the notable exception to this rule, as the higher the price point, the more critical the reviewer allowed themselves to get. Still, these were rare, and the vast majority of the food section exclusively dealt in pleasure. Only mentioning things they liked or tempering their disdain, the *Times* presented an optimistic approach to food. They rarely put themselves in the position of playing dismissive food snob and could simply perform or manifest their authority by being informative. Discussing renown chefs opening restaurants, announcing a brand's new line of baking chocolates, or describing the creaminess of a pasta was simply straight, objective reporting. *Times* journalists built stories on verifiable facts or empirical experiences while also subtly expressing preferences or explicitly praising quality. They could thus be both informal and an authority, both objective and subjective, and offer both an open, democratic invitation to food and one that still delivered discernment and distinction.

The *Times* also employed a both-and logic when negotiating some of the modern antimonies or tensions of food. On 12/17, Alison Roman could thus promise desserts that were "sweet, celebratory, and a little grand – but not too difficult to make, either." Care could be provided with convenience. The choice between eating traditional food and eating something novel could be answered by treating unfamiliar "traditional" food as a source of variety. As an organization in New York City, with a diverse population and food scene, *Times* journalists were exposed to an array of cuisines. They were cosmopolitan in their outlook and seemingly open to a range of flavors. There was thus never any shortage of novelty and indeed, one got the sense that *Times* readers could go

the rest of their lives without eating the same thing twice. This novelty was not risky, however, as it was still tied to (someone else's) tradition and endorsed by *NYT*. The plethora of cuisines, their combinations and adaptations, ensured there were always news things to eat, as *Times* journalists and audience could both appreciate and appropriate the practices of other people.

Having it both ways also applied to the pressures of style and the aestheticization of everyday life. A 1/22 article promised the reader instructions on "How To Throw a Dinner Party Like a Gallerist" and said it would be "unfussy." Hosting an event like a professional who exhibits art for a living is intimidating and being "unfussy" seems quite the paradox. The article does not make it much clearer with guidance like, "serve food that feels special, but not overly precious." This is a fussy piece of advice, and the *Times* employment of both-and logic could be awkward and unconvincing. But *NYT* was committed to the idea of informal authority, of democracy and distinction, and the casual attitude of a populist expert. In Emily Weinstein's last article before parental leave, she described her replacement Moskin as having "impeccable taste and low-fuss ways." This combination perfectly described the *Times* food section and captured the difficult line its journalists had to negotiate. How is it possible to be an aesthete that is not a fussy or overly concerned about anything? Working in a late modern lifestyle outlet built from the women's pages, journalists celebrated the joy of cooking and the splendor of eating. *NYT* thus offered reassurance and did not remind audiences how much they needed their expert guidance. Instead, journalists showed and displayed aesthetic appreciation in a low-key manner, being expressive but not overly hyped. This appreciation appeared effortless just as "Five Weeknight Dishes" wanted cooking to appear effortless. The

Times invited its readers by admitting taste was important but entirely accessible. In this way it could be both passionately discerning and utterly low maintenance.

And while modern recipes have been viewed as the rationalization of home cooking, the *Times* offered the whimsically named “no-recipe recipes.” These were simple narratives where Sam Sifton described how hectic his life was at the moment. All he had time to do was grab a few common ingredients, do easily describable things to them, and come out with something delicious. Not only could the times be both informal and aesthetic, populist and expert, democratic and offer distinction, they could also offer recipes that weren’t recipes.

The attempt at both-and logic was at its most noble when *Times* journalists attempted to make the food section about both pleasure and newsworthiness. Amongst the recipes and celebrations of chefs opening new restaurants, was a story about a high-profile restaurant, the Spotted pig, and its owner paying a relatively large settlement for sexual harassment. The article was written by Kim Severson and Julia Moskin, both of whom were part of a team in 2018 that won a Pulitzer Prize for public service. Like that previous work, the article explored issues of exploitation and abuse finally gaining public recognition in the age of the “me too.” movement. While it may have been an uncomfortable topic in a section otherwise concerned with pleasure, Severson and Moskin addressed and explicated the inconvenient truth of restaurant work culture. This longform piece explored the intricacies of the case and how it compared to other high profile #MeToo incidents. A few weeks later, they wrote another article about the Spotted Pig closing. Such stories were a reminder that food was in the “Living” section, and that living could be both pleasurable and unjust.

Well, this is particularly interesting… If *NYT* could be poetic about food, it could also present such poetry matter-of-factly, another seeming contradiction the *Times* employed to pronounced effect. What was traditionally understood as an either/or, someone was either flowery or straightforward, was sublimated to a both-and. Journalists could thus use expressive language to inform readers about verifiable facts. They could appear both subjective and objective. *NYT* offered firsthand experiences of things they ate or drank. Finding such experiences pleasurable, they could then share them, secure in their convictions that you would also enjoy them.

Since *NYT* exercised an informal authority based on aesthetics, any information could be presented as newsworthy. As long as something was potentially pleasing and journalists did not appear snobby or overly promotional, then any food-related product, person, or place could be deemed important and worth knowing. This process of agenda setting, of selecting what deserved attention, was framed as common sense. The reporter had simply followed their taste, social connections, and insider knowledge. They were merely informing readers about something's existence as the food/product/restaurant spoke for itself. Complicating traditional ideals of journalism and aligned with the late modern media environment, a person could be both a publicist and a journalist. They could both promote and inform.

Promotional content could evoke the "reading notices" of 19th century advertisers or the so-called native advertising and sponsored content of today. This is when what otherwise would be advertising is formatted to look like news. Using a journalistic platform for marketing, articles could read like press releases written by a public relations specialist. One of Florence Fabricant's columns, "Front Burner," for example, featured

short, informative, blurbs on food products, services, or restaurants either local to New York City or available online. In their brevity and description, they were also subtle endorsements. In one day (January 14) and three stories, Fabricant could tell readers about a Japanese whiskey class in TriBeCa, a new Japanese tea shop in NoHo, and Godiva's new line of baking chocolates. More efficient and artistic than the empirical inverted pyramid, Fabricant described the whiskey class in 5 sentences. The last two were a gentle nudge: "These classes sell out early, so consider this a heads up. The class is designed for twosomes." Unlike her longer restaurant pieces, Fabricants tea shop mention was quick and to the point. Like her restaurant articles, it was a human-interest story, the business personified by its owners. In the accompanying photo appearing above the copy, the husband-and-wife owners greeted the reader, smiling from behind the counter of their new location. The retail outlet was a "Japanese green tea specialist," Fabricant explained, and among other features, the owners offered "precisely brewed teas." The wife was a potter that also made tea utensils and the husband was a tea-lover that worked for Ito-En, a Japanese multinational tea company. Godiva was the quickest mention, at four sentences. In that short span, Fabricant told readers the chocolate was "especially formulated for melting, so you can coat your own fruit" or could be used in cookies "for a more generous chocolate hit." For food and drink, informative stories also meant human interest stories and muted, but clever, endorsement.

"Front Burner" articles were not always subtle, and promotion could be more inviting or direct. Headlines could promise, "Sleek and Subtle Chocolates," available online, or point to a particular brand and explain, "This Dutch Oven Has a Dutch Pedigree." The introduction—the text accompanying headlines—could more forcefully

recommend, “Add this cold-smoked Ora King salmon to your next brunch spread” and a Headline could do the same: “Add This Cheese to Your Party Board.” Headlines could be aimed at a “target market” and provide a reason why: “Vegan Soup Ready to Reheat.” And endorsement was clear with a story on “The Only Saucepan You Need.” While not as ubiquitous or loud as TVFN, *NYT* also promoted specific products. This was a late modern consumer culture and eating involved buying commodities. The *Times* told audiences what to expect. Invitations to follow NYT Food on social media told readers “Get regular updates from NYT Cooking, with recipe suggestions, cooking tips and shopping advice.” Like TVFN, *NYT* was also a consumer guide. Overall, however, the invitation to understand or explore this consumerism was different, as *NYT* proved less reductive and more open to exploring cultural origins and social connections.

Most importantly, *Times* journalists were not explicitly paid for its product and service endorsements. On the contrary, it sometimes used its own resources and journalistic platform to tell other people’s stories. In its ethical statement, A Handbook of Values and Practices for the News and Editorial Departments, the *Times* forbids its staff from taking “gifts, tickets, discounts, reimbursements” from organizations or people they cover. They may not accept any kind of payment or fees for their coverage. Food critics cannot own restaurants, nor can food writers endorse their own businesses or family’s businesses. They cannot even recommend chefs to restaurant owners as they should avoid even the appearance of favoritism. The *Times* staff, however, could show favorites when it came to eating and making consumer recommendations to audiences. Since these journalists were not directly paid by food companies, endorsements were seemingly authentic, relayed because the journalist thought the food or drink was objectively

delicious. While journalists themselves could not have a conflict of interest or accept payment, the *Times* itself did not discuss affiliate revenue, or the money the newspaper itself might earn for directing audiences to third parties.

There was one story that mimicked the discursive strategies of TVFN, and this came from Wirecutter, a product promotion site owned by The New York Times Company. The *Times* acquired Wirecutter in 2016, a website that generated money through affiliate links, earning a percentage when consumers clicked them and made a purchase (Kafka, 2016). Wirecutter stories occasionally appear in *NYT* Food, and the one Wirecutter article during data collection contrasted with the rest of the food section. "Organize Your Fridge (And Keep It Neat)" laid out steps to rationalize your fridge along with concomitant brand name products that could get the job done. Instead of romanticizing a product for its design qualities or providing a human-interest story to personify a brand, this Wirecutter story used a consumer solution format. Modern life was presented as a problem and technology/commodities were offered as a rational solution. Through a subsidiary specifically designed for product promotion, *Times* editorial voice thus resembled the salesmanship of TVFN.

Another sister publication, *T*, The New York Times Style Magazine, could also play the lifestyle journalism consumer guide role, contributing articles like, "What to Eat, See, and Wear This Weekend." This included eating Hawaiian poi and six restaurants in Hawaii that served it or buying $745 sandals by Dries Van Noten. As a style magazine, *T* further embraced the aestheticization of life and the desire to keep up with trends. What critics saw as a passive consumer culture, lifestyle journalists viewed as luxury, style, and

taste. In this world, food was coupled with high end fashion, art museums, and other trappings of upper-class, aestheticized living.

But *NYT* Food staff were not upper-class trendsetters or experts offering rationalized consumer solutions. While Florence Fabricant did recommend gifting a brick of caviar at $100/ounce, for the most part *NYT* eschewed snobby elitism for an informal authority built on romanticized taste and social connection. Kim Severson, for example, could also cover trends and examine, "What Will We Eat in 2020?" She saw, "the annual avalanche of food and drink predictions as an anthropological window into the state of the American psyche" and thus predicted an austere year ahead. Environmental awareness had a new urgency and suggested people bring their own coffee mugs to cafes and learn what "plant-based" meant. While there was a somber sense of seriousness and realism in the air, "that doesn't mean we can't have some fun," and the author explored trends like toast with ice cream and how this related to the national mood.

Times journalists could also offer guidance on the latest trends, thus legitimating their trendiness. Mezcal is an artisanal liquor made in Mexico and distributed in the U.S. The *Times* assembled a "spirit panel" of columnists, drink writers, and food historians to taste twenty brands of the "quirky" and "joyous" mezcal. A 1/23 article first described the process of using agave, mezcal's relation to tequila, and a history of its introduction to the U.S. This could inform the audience and offer a more comprehensive consideration of a commodity than just a consumer understanding. It could also legitimate the author as a knowledgeable tasting authority and make the commodity appear all the more valuable. Panelists then offered tasting notes and described them as they would wine. Such an

article aestheticized mezcal to the level of connoisseurship, endorsed its meaningfulness, and legitimated both mezcal's popularity and the *Times* role as food and drink enthusiast.

More than promoting particular products or trends, the *Times* looked to generate a general passion for eating and drinking as an aesthetic experience. This was not achieved through hype, but by building from verifiable facts including artistic empirical descriptions, firsthand experiences of enjoyment, or the life stories of successful people related to the food industry. Restaurants were not just places to eat, they were institutions built by humans, particular persons in fact, with rich histories and unique struggles. And food was not just something one ate, it was beauty made edible, pleasing to all of one's senses and nourishing to one's soul.

When none of these things were available for verification, other facts could be used to generate excitement. A headline could thus read "Quality Bistro Offers French Fare in Grand Space." The article then described the space, the name of the owner and a previous venture, and the name of the chef and his previous job. Being a bistro, diners could "expect French onion soup, escargots, steak frites, Dover sole meunière finished tableside, a pork porterhouse, tuna tartine and profiteroles." Even without a human-interest story or poetic description of a firsthand meal, *NYT* could build an enticing narrative from straightforward facts.

Using specific discursive practices and historically available logics, the *Times* established their legitimacy to promote eating and their own subjective tastes. The first step was to become a relatable populist and eschew (some) notions of elite hierarchy. In that way, *Times* journalists would not be pushing their own taste or promoting particular products, they would simple be narrating their everyday lives. *I am just living*, *NYT*

posits, *and I too am busy. I'm not snobby, but I want to enjoy life. I'm going to share things I like, because I think you will enjoy them too. There is a lot out there, and I'm not plugging anything with a hard sell, I'm just informing you of what I've found noteworthy. I'm not demanding your attention or promising some final answer. I'm inviting you. Who am I? I have a reputation, but I'll show you my credentials through poetic prose and imagery. I'm vulnerable and not perfect, just like you, and I want you to eat delicious things. Here is what I like.* Part gastronome, part practical guide, *NYT* was your fellow everyday pleasure seeker. Filled with sophisticated opinions but wary of sounding snooty, they seemed to simply report things as they saw them, and let audiences decide for themselves.

Tracing and Embracing Culture

In complete contrast to TVFN's post-cuisine approach, *NYT* explored and utilized explicitly recognized cuisines and cultural identities to build a more subject-centered, humanities-based food discourse. Being a city or place-based newspaper, for example, the *Times* featured local restaurants and specialty shops. New York being a cosmopolis, this often meant a human-interest story about immigrant owners and operators, transplanted migrant communities, or the global influences and cuisines that constituted the local foodscape. Additionally, *Times*' recipes were always provided by an individual, not a culture-less, generic kitchen or anonymous source. If the individual providing a recipe did not have the cultural or culinary background of the cuisine in question, they discussed where they got the recipe, naming individuals raised or trained in that cuisine or explicating the migration history of ingredients and influence. Like traditional journalists, *NYT* food writers and recipe designers did research and interviewed experts

with specific culinary backgrounds and upbringings. Using culture, history, and the lived experiences of individuals, the *Times* thus reported on the objective, material facts of food and made them subjectively meaningful, embedding the edible in human activity, history, and relationships.

Contrasting with TVFN's "Chicken and Broccoli Stir Fry" or "Cajun Cabbage Skillet," *NYT* recognized cultural origins and more fully explored their implications with recipes promising "These Armenian Flatbreads Stuffed with Greens Are the Perfect Snack." London-born and Los Angeles based *NYT* writer Tejal Rao provided the "Adapted by" recipe, introducing the traditional bread (*jingalov hats*) with a journalistic essay and giving the recipes first by-line to three accredited "original" authors. Well-crafted journalism, Rao's essay started with a human doing something while also naming a local eatery, specifically narrating Rusana Sayadyan's work in an L.A. bakery. In this manner, the author could also discuss the history of the Armenian bakery, Sayadyan's career from apprentice to artisan, and even the ingredients this artisan now mastered and manipulated. The article then cited an Armenian cookbook and its authors, discussing technique, before providing more specific cultural history through interviewing an Armenian-American journalist, Liana Aghajanian. Aghajanian discussed her eating upbringing, travels, and community knowledge, describing different regions of Armenia and their variations on ingredients and method. She also said the same greens and herbs in Armenia where available in L.A., but that Armenians around the world have adapted to local conditions. Rao thus quoted Aghajanian, "Food isn't a static thing…We take it and we change and that's one way diasporans have connected with that region." Rao then

ends the article on Sayadyan back at work, narrating methods, ingredients, and tips, before providing the recipe.

Indicative of the *NYT* food section, this article thus researched and investigated culinary cultural origins, interviewed and credited eaters of those cuisines, and recognized the diversity, nuance, and continual transformations of cultural definitions. Such journalism recognized and appreciated culture, complementing its use/appropriation of cuisine with social understanding. Furthermore, this understanding did not stereotype or assume a monolithic cultural authenticity, instead it engaged in conversation, listened, and explored the inadequacies of essentialism.

While cuisines and cultures were not static or monolithic, however, *NYT* also relayed the *strategic essentialism* (Spivak, 1988) involved in defining food and making it a constitutive part of one's identity. This was especially the case with migrant cuisines recreated in the United States or facing potential Americanization. A story by Amelia Nierenberg, "Pop-Up Dinners That Share a Culture, Course by Course," explored how so-called "pop-up" restaurants were not exclusively opened by profit-seeking professionals, and that some more small-scale home cooks hosted meals "that explore their personal memories and culinary traditions." The article detailed culinary-eating biographies of these more modestly aspiring cooks/chefs, contextualizing their specific roots and current cooking endeavors. Leigh-Ann Martin, for example, lived in New Jersey but winter weary, took numerous trips to the Caribbean. She toured multiple islands, including her native Trinidad. Here, she explored her culinary heritage, talking with relatives about how they cooked and observing their methods, ingredients, and subtle twists not explicitly stated in recipes. Like TVFN's occasional use of ethnically

coded individuals to provide culinary capital and legitimacy, such a narrative articulated Martin's cooking credentials and showed she had the proper cultural credibility to charge $85/person (with wine pairings) for a four-person meal in her home. Unlike TVFN, however, *NYT* and their featured chef exhibited cultural nuance, discussing "Trinidadian-inspired food" and exploring cuisine as an active historical process. Martin herself dismisses and deconstructs stereotypes even as she discursively employs and defines cultural markers: "It's not like everyone is eating out of coconut shells [laughing]…But you have to respect that Jamaicans cook like Jamaicans, and Trinidadians cook like Trinidadians. There's no 'Caribbean food.' That's a myth." There is thus nuance to otherwise essentialist cultural markers.

Nierenberg, the *Times* journalist, further legitimated Martin's credentials with personal details and articulating her with a simultaneously promoted local Food Establishment. Each meal, the article said, was planned months in advance, as Martin calls herself a Virgo who thrives on preparation. Martin also collaborated with a Park Slope wine store to "plan each pairing." The *Times* could personalize Martin's endeavor, providing a human-interest narrative while legitimizing her culinary capital to generate (modest) economic capital. Nierenberg also provided the trademark edible ode of the *Times*, accompanied by the usual professional, artistic photography. Beautiful images of food were accompanied by pictures of owners, chefs, patrons, and sometimes other members of the kitchen staff. The eating foodie journalist could describe how, "The briny taste of her souse, pickled pigs' feet served in an acidic brine, recalled the salty waves" and quoted Martin saying, "A lot of people within the diaspora would rather not speak about the undesirable cuts of meat, but I want to show respect to the people of my

country." The *Times* journalist could thus explain how Martin's meals "pole-vault stereotypes of Caribbean food," while adhering to the material facts of cuisine. Such cooking and coverage recognized tradition while also discerning its contingency and socially constructed nature, offering a non-essentialized understanding of the authentic. A food historian[15] was further quoted at the end of the piece commending Martin for avoiding "stereotypical dishes that tourists expect." *NYT*—their journalists and subjects of coverage—could thus recognize and offer cultural definitions of food, while being less reductive and more open to its history, tensions, and contingent construction.

Per the routines of *NYT* Food, cultural discourse often came with a visual element. This could be the usual stylistic and artistic photography of a restaurant's dishes or it could show proprietors or the hired preparers of food. The story on the pop-up diner contained photographs of an aesthetically plated soup as well as Ms. Martin talking to her guests. A featured restaurant piece contained photos of chef Boonnum Thongngoen and the kitchen staff of Thai Cook, where, the *Times* claimed, "old Thai favorites [are] made with fresh energy." Another restaurant article showed the all-women staff of "experienced pierogi makers" as well as the owners of Pierozek, an eatery in a "Polish neighborhood." The caption for the co-owners' image explained Alexandra Kucharski "was born in Brooklyn while her husband, Mr. Kucharski, was born and raised in Poland. They both have fond memories of eating pierogi." *NYT* was articulating their ethnically based culinary capital, both explaining and showing they had the required credentials of Polish cuisine. In all three instances, there is thus a racial element added to cultural

[15] Specifically, Therese Nelson, a Black New Jersey native and founder of Black Culinary History, an organization that celebrates the African culinary diaspora. Nelson used the collective term "our heritage" when complimenting Martin's cooking.

explanation. In addition to providing personal narrative or tracing the history of cuisine, the *Times* also showed the individuals that made that cuisine or profited from its commodity form. Featuring Chinese, Japanese, Egyptian, Georgian, Haitian, Yemeni, Mexican, Filipino, and a host of other eateries, *NYT* showed readers what people who originated and ate certain cuisines might look like.

Like TVFN, there were elements of instrumental use in *NYT*'s cultural definitions of food as the *Times* enabled an appropriation of cuisine to mark distinction and cultivate cultural capital. This was news you could use (chew?), and such use included adapting and re-embedding historically constructed eating practices and traditions. *Times* journalist David Tanis could thus pen "A January Dinner Party That Doesn't Deprive" with a standfirst announcing, "For exquisitely simple dishes that don't skimp on flavor, David Tanis looks to Japan." The article begins with Tanis stating his needs, after indulgent holidays he requires a break from rich foods. He would also like to still have dinner parties. He can thus use Japanese cuisine to "lighten up without sacrificing flavor." Beyond this use, however, there is an additional layer of recognition and appreciation, exploring the culture being used and at least having conversations about its specific character, history, and nuances. This particular article identifies the source of this cultural knowledge, Japanese cookbooks, and the author openly admits, "Though I am no expert I try to mirror, respectfully, this uncomplicated approach [of cooking]." He admits the recipes he provides are "not remotely authentic" as he uses ingredients and flavor combinations more familiar to his audience. The article explained the traditionally Japanese ingredients employed and delineated how *Times* readers might integrate elements of Japanese cooking philosophy into their own dishes. So unlike TVFN, even as

NYT used cultural definitions of food as a means to an end, this use was accounted for and supplemented with a respectful consideration of the culture in question, a recognition of a journalist's shortcomings in execution of a cuisine, and reflections on how a cuisine might change in the process of being re-embedded.

The nuanced recognition of culture and cuisine also meant *NYT* and the people they covered could also contextualize food, re-embedding it in the social, political, and economic relationships that enabled its existence. An article titled with a blunt statement, "Chinese Restaurants Are Closing. That's a Good Thing, the Owners Say," investigated the history of Chinese-owned restaurants in the U.S. and New York. Much of the narrative detailed the travails of immigrant owner-operators, providing personal and subject-centered stories to contextualize and humanize food. This showed the people that enabled eating while explicating food's social and economic role in enculturation and social mobility. In other words, food was embedded in the lives and practices of actual people and played an active role in identity work or constituting who people are.

This identity work was based on history and the culture of cuisine, not the competitive entrepreneurial identity work of demonstrating and accumulating cultural and symbolic capital. Food was thus not for display and not solely part of "the bright side of life." An article titled, "In Japanese New Year Dishes, a Family Connects With Its Past" featured the Sasakis family in Washington state and claimed, "their history, including internment, is the story of many Japanese in America." Cuisine and eating were thus not always celebratory, and the constitutive power of food encompassed the full range of human identity and experience. So too could this history-based identity work create a sense of solidarity and community. Featuring an eatery/grocery store in, "Haitian

and Jamaican Patties, Traditional and Not, in Brooklyn," *NYT* provided its usual nuancing of cuisine by recognizing culture categories (Haitian and Jamaican) and showing how they are different when re-embedded in a new context (traditional and not). Such strategic essentialism could also be used to serve a particular community: "Ms. Saget (the owner) said it was important for her to cater to a Haitian-American community that had a complicated relationship with its home country. 'When they come here, it gives them a sense of pride again,' she says." In this instance, cultural definitions of food could be used for social and cultural uplift. The story and owner also discussed economic impact as Ms. Saget planned to "import $250,000 worth of Haitian products this year." *NYT*'s invitations to cultural understandings of food and identity work thus allowed a more comprehensive consideration of relationships and the multifarious causes, consequences, and idiosyncratic processes that co-constitute eating and who people are.

This open, more investigative approach to food and eating resulted in a wider range of stories than recipes, restaurants, and product promotion. The *Times*, for example, displayed a willingness to confront past mistakes with the article, "Campaign to Redefine Chinese Restaurant Syndrome." The article detailed a campaign to change the Merriam-Webster definition of "Chinese Restaurant Syndrome," a condition supposedly onset by the consumption of MSG. This syndrome was more the result of xenophobia and racism, the article described, as the medical establishment could not find scientific evidence for its existence. This was especially the case since dozens of foods the average American consumed contained MSG, while the affliction was only reported relating to "Chinese" food (Sand, 2005). The article (another written by Nierenberg) explored the history of anti-Chinese sentiment in the U.S., contemplating the proper way to respond to

oppressive stereotypes resulting from a complex history. Some, the article argued, would banish all stereotypes from the likes of a dictionary while others worry about "cultural amnesia," and still others to add addendums or explanations to such terms. A quality piece of journalism that examined social history through food, the article nevertheless did not mention *NYT*'s role in propagating the idea of Chinese Restaurant Syndrome.[16] Still, such writing invites readers into a more nuanced and comprehensive relationship to food, noticing the relationships that enabled eating, being, and becoming.

Times readers were also invited to contemplate "8 Ways Restaurants Have Changed in the Past Decade" (including Instagram-driven cooking for the camera and the success of POC in the industry) or how sushi had to overcome American racism to become widely accepted and even mainstream in the states. These cultural considerations of *food*—the symbolic meanings, history, and relationships that constituted the edible—thus expanded what eating meant in the larger context of human activity. *Times* writers interpellated audiences into a sociological imagination of eating, and their discursive construction of food encompassed all manner of material and semiotic connections.

In addition to culture as the shared histories of ethnic eating identities and cuisine, *Times* writers also utilized a wider conception of culture that investigated some socio-ecological connections of food and eating. Multiple contributors—including the core staff of Sam Sifton, Melissa Clark, and Julie Moskin—employed this culture-as-connection strategy to endorse eating less meat. This could be for health reasons or, as Moskin conceded, had more to do with feeding a meat-adverse child. But most often, eating less meat was about the meat industry's ecological impact. Never advocating to give it up

[16] Such as a May 19, 1968 article, "'Chinese Restaurant Syndrome' puzzles doctors."

entirely, they invited readers with headlines like, “The Meat-Lover’s Guide for Eating Less Meat.” Clark opened the article admitting she loved meat and dairy. In a poetic edible ode typical of the *Times*, she adored and cherished it, as she “reveled in rare rib-eyes steaks and oozing camembert” and “won’t let go of my drumstick until I’ve gnawed off every bit of cartilage and golden skin.” But, citing her colleague Moskin’s work with a *NYT* Climate journalist,[17] Clark said she had intentionally eaten less meat because of meat productions contributions to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. She admitted she thought she had done enough, eating “ethically raised meats” and otherwise making the correct “food choices.” But she had come to realize it was not enough. To meet NGO or public policy climate goals, Clark and her fellow citizens of wealthy nations needed “drastic changes” to their diets. Not having the “willpower to stick to” being vegan or vegetarian, Clark argued that eating *less* meat and dairy would help the cause. Not entirely relying on personal responsibility and denial, however, she evoked pleasure and reasoned:

> On the upside, eating less meat and dairy means there is more room on my plate for other delectable things: really good sourdough bread slathered with tahini and homemade marmalade, mushroom Bourguignon over a mound of noodles, and all those speckled heirloom beans I keep meaning to order online.

From there, the article addressed any “anxiety” about not getting enough protein, and provided six tips to “strive for” a “balance of plant-based versus meat-dairy meals.” This hedged, more modest discourse contrasted with the initial more urgent bad-cop language of choices, ethics, and drastic change. The article expanded the culture of food—it’s considered causes, consequences, and connections—but pulled back on

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[17] Moskin, J., Plumber, B., Lieberman, R., & Weingart, E. (2019, Apr 30). Your questions about food and climate change answered. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/04/30/dining/climate-change-food-eating-habits.html

paternalism and perfection to instead ask readers to seek pleasure while doing the best they could.

NYT Food's mode of service journalism was thus noticeably different from TVFN—and indeed the larger dominant culture of American food media—by the sheer number of non-meat dishes and recipes they featured. In weekly meal plans or recipe collections, more than half of the entries were so-called "plant-based." According to the *Times*, plant-based meant eating predominately plants, not giving up meat entirely. In addition to abstaining from meat for certain meals, meat could also be utilized more sparingly when it was included. Instead of being the main event, meat could play more of a supporting role. And *NYT* Food did not eliminate steak dinners or large roasts entirely, they were just noticeably fewer and more far between then has typically been in the case in the general American foodscape. While eating less meat was generally tied to a personal action to counter climate change, this was not overly preachy and was constituted using the delicious. In his last newsletter before the new year titled, "The Way to Cook Now" (an unusually authoritative heading for *NYT* Food), Sam Sifton articulated some resolutions:

> Me, I'd like there to be more plants on my plate in 2020, and smaller portions of meat. I'd like to cook with more nuts and seeds, with more tofu, with more mushrooms. I'd like to mess around with tempeh. I've already got my nutritional yeast. Melissa Clark's going to tell us all about how to cook with less meat later this week. Stand by for her guidance!

Sifton thus eased readers into social change and less-meat expectations without the strict call for elimination, denial, and guilt. He also took responsibility and embodied his own desired behavior using intentional first-person narrative (e.g., "I'd like" and "I've…got"). Instead of this individualism being used as cultural capital to accumulate symbolic capital

and socially win (as in TVFN, entrepreneurial individualism, or the logic of social media), it stopped short of seeking perfection and instead focused on modest goals and pursuing delicious ingredients and flavor combinations. Like a good co-worker, Sifton could also promote and legitimize the authority of his fellow columnist. Expanding the culture of eating to include the environment, larger social connections, and sensual pleasure, *Times* columnists advocated for a specific view without being forcefully paternalistic. Instead, *NYT* Food—even in an explicitly "political issue" like climate change—was informalized, aestheticizing, and individualizing.

NYT's socio-ecological approach to food resulted in exactly one story about farmers, and it articulated cultural identity with agricultural production. Nierenberg's article, "Hard Times for a Hot Commodity, the prized New Mexico Chile," was a synthesis of hard news and human-interest story, exploring how "years of drought, erratic weather and other stresses are taking their toll on the peppers that are central to the state's economy and identity." Nierenberg explained how generations of farmers had built their livelihoods around the Hatch chile and why it could not just be grown somewhere else. She quoted numerous farmers and sources, facilitating a conversation on how soil and local ecologies influence the taste and qualities of an agricultural product. Readers were asked not just to think of a chile they are eating but of the farmers that cultivate them and the water cycle, immigrant labor, and government policies farmers depend on. A fickle plant that is not as profitable as many others, Hatch chiles are a risk to grow and production numbers have dwindled. Some farmers grow other crops like watermelons for income while reserving a small amount of land to grow chiles they sell to locals. Currently, they will not stop growing chiles because, as one farmer stated, "It's who we

are." But even the anointed "Queen" of the New Mexico Chile is worried that her children will not continue her legacy because "they can't make a living." An informative piece that showed some limits of industrialized agriculture without directly questioning its logic, this article showed that climate change was not just bad for business but could also harm cultural identity. This lone concern for farmers (limited here to commodity producers) was the exception that proved the rule, as *NYT* was primarily concerned with the priorities of consumers.

Far more than farmers, immigrant laborers, truck drivers, factory workers, meat packers, grocery clerks, or other individuals in the food supply chain, *NYT* Food discussed restaurants and specialty retailers, the entities with which consumers had direct contact. The *Times* was a city newspaper and provided the objective, fact-based information of what businesses, services, or events existed and where. The food section thus gathered, organized, and presented a cuisine of the city. By mapping out restaurants, specialty stores, and retailers, *Times* journalists helped imagine the New York City foodscape. This oriented city residents and could help them understand their own embeddedness in an imagined, but no less real, culinary community. The *Times* provided a space to deliberate the nature and location of the edible and further nuanced such deliberation by tracing and embracing cultural influence. Journalists mapped the foodscape and audiences could use and contemplate that information, acting on it, cultivating opinions, understanding local culture, and provide their input in comments sections, on social media, or in everyday conversation. While restaurants, stores, and edible things existed in the material world, *NYT* and its associated agents organized that material world into a more comprehensive and comprehensible symbolic system. *Times*

journalists thus articulated a culture of food, making the objective, material, and distant, into something subjective, meaningful, and real. Such a reality, while built from the material, is necessarily selective. *NYT* Food's construction of reality was specifically limited by the expectations of class privilege, its sectioning off from the "News" and editorial pages, and varying degrees of individualized consumption.

Eater

Unlike TVFN or *NYT* Food, Eater was not an outlet for cooking or recipes. While it did provide the "service journalism" of restaurant reviews, Eater did not guide home cooks in meal preparation. Instead, Eater provided food news and views, a combination of hard news, lifestyle journalism, cultural critique, advocacy press, and longform essays. Originally founded as a restaurant dining guide in 2005, Eater was purchased by Vox Media in 2013. Its "About" statement said it was a "source for people who care about dining and drinking in the world's best cities." It also identified a focus on the restaurant industry and a wide consideration of its concomitant gossip, trends, and "minutia," "obsessing over all aspects of the industry." Like *NYT* Food, it had an ethics statement explaining its journalistic integrity pursuing such coverage. Unlike *NYT*, its focus on restaurants over domestic dining meant a further investigation outside the private pleasures of the home and an eye towards even more connections and relationships that enabled food and eating. Without recipes and individual cooking instruction, Eater took an even broader approach to treating food as a cultural beat. As its nomenclature suggested, Eater's content invited readers as embodied, contextualized beings, not as cooks but as persons sustained by a process of eating. In addition, this eating was enabled by others (i.e., restaurant workers). This meant a range of stories from hard news investigative pieces to "the silly and ridiculous ephemera of the food world." Eater was

thus a digital tabloid, but one roughly modeled on legacy media, attempting to incorporate the social roles[18] necessary for the realization of liberal democracy (Chapter 3).

As with magazine culture, Eater was a specialized niche outlet and attracted a specific audience with shared interests (and the shared lifestyle coveted by marketers). Eater was for someone with an interest in food that went beyond taste, perhaps a restaurant industry worker, that wanted to see how *eating* (not just commoditized food) interacted with and co-constituted other elements of life: the political, economic, social, and cultural. This wide symbolic order of an "eating beat" also skewed towards a younger demographic, discussing the latest popular culture, utilizing internet lingo and recent slang, and characterized by the cynicism and snark of Generation X, millennials, and Gen Z. Eater was often critical and investigative, with strong (restaurant industry) working-class sympathies. Socially progressive, some of its coverage was similar to the muckraking of the Progressive era. In contrast, Eater was much more comprehensive and self-reflexive when considering the historical and social construction of gender and race. Also unlike the magazines of muckrakers, the commercialism of the digital realm seamlessly flowed into Eater content, as consumer culture was presupposed as an entrenched and unavoidable part of everyday life. An irreverent tabloid that criticized consumerism while often reproducing its very logic, Eater both challenged and legitimated the Food Establishment.

[18] These include: informing a self-governing public; investigating, analyzing, contextualizing, explaining, and clarifying that information; fostering accountability; engendering conversation; facilitating empathy; articulating and reifying shared values for a public.

Editorialized Eating

With its ethics statement and professional routines like fact-gathering, verification, and interviewing multiple parties, Eater fashioned itself a journalistic outlet. But in addition to reporting the news, the digital-first outlet took a clear stance and expressed opinions, embracing its own subjectivity and advocating a specific position. This was best exemplified by stories outside of official data collection during the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic: "As Restaurants Go, So Goes Everything Else"; "The Livelihoods of Food-Service Workers Are Completely Uncertain"; "Restaurants Are Fucked – Unless they get a Bailout." Eater was clearly on the side of the restaurant industry and not just its most successful class of owners but its workers as well. This was evident well before the pandemic elicited such an explicit stance as Eater questioned, "The Pros and Cons of Going Corporate" or the recurring series called "Young Guns" that detailed and promoted "future leaders" of the restaurant world. Even headlines could immediately tell readers Eater's pro-restaurant stance: "Grubhub Adds 'Common Sense' Step to Protect Restaurants From Its Unfair Fees." Priding itself on its accuracy and variety of sources, Eater used its "broad editorial independence" to report food stories but also to explore context, make connections, and sometimes choose sides.

Eater embraced its journalism that went beyond "just the facts" and recognized this editorializing is what drew readers in the first place. More than once, it addressed readers directly as a form of shorthand explaining, look, you're at Eater, you value restaurants, or you enjoy food, or you have a favorite food charity, or what have you. Eater thus assumed a high level of member resources from its readership and

presupposed an active audience invested in the broadly conceptualized world of food and eating culture. Its writers and journalists could thus supplement objective reporting with contextualized subjective meaning, building on journalistic principles and routines to offer explanations for the *why*, *how*, and *with what consequences* of food and eating.

Such explanatory journalism[19] was not always explicitly political (like choosing sides in a labor debate) as editorializing also applied to culture and lifestyle. The article, "Every Ridiculous Food Trend Predicted for 2020" could thus cover food as a cultural beat without necessarily buying-in to its current logic. In this story, Eater journalist Brenna Houck identified key players in the Food Establishment as supposed "seers of the industry," consisting of "data mining consulting firms, PR reps, chefs with PR reps, and major brands." Each had their own motivations for making their predictions and not all of it was genuine or socially valuable. Houck joked that such an exercise meant this was also the "most likely time of year to encounter the term 'ethnic' in a press release." These industry interests, according to the Eater author, made the notion of food trends absurd, frantically oscillating between a seeming "hive mind" and numerous voices contradicting each other for no logical reason. Houck's conclusion before her listicle of trends (which included the source that identified each supposed trend) is worth quoting at length as it exemplifies Eater's irreverence and critical distance from its beat:

> Are these trends the real deal or simply a way for marketers to infiltrate the end of year news cycle and will their future products into popularity? Regardless, Eater has sifted through the many, many lists copying other lists to create a megalist of what will be hot and what will be, well, not in the coming year. Are the predictions conflicting? Yes. Are the words nonsensical? Yes. What is gastrophysics? Don't ask. See you in hell.

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[19] Vox Media is often considered an exemplar of explanatory journalism while "Explanatory Reporting" has been a category of the Pulitzer Prize since 1988.

Eater thus questioned the authority and motivations of those they covered and deconstructed the process of popularity and legitimacy in the food world. This made the social, cultural, and symbolic capital of the food world more transparent, holding it to account not from an elitist perspective but from an embodied, situated eater.

Eater's critical distance and editorializing of the meaning of food did not always result in cynicism and snark but also engendered thoughtful investigations. Photojournalist Gary He's, "Food and Loathing on the Campaign Trail" and Meghan McCarron's "Why We Never Want Politicians to Stop Stuffing Their Faces" were nuanced explorations of American politicians and their exercises of eating relatability at local eateries, on camera, and, famously, at the Iowa State Fair. Not just a dismissal of merely performative politicians, these articles explored the appeal of watching political hopefuls eat as "This is What Democracy Tastes." These articles also investigated the painstaking efforts teams of political staffers went through to scout popular diners, food vendors, and local eating customs all for the perfect photo-op. While this may seem like a lot of work for candidates to perform some "absurd ritual" like stuffing their faces with fried foods at a state fair, Americans know that "campaigning is one long flim-flam of spectacle." Regardless, voters want someone "who isn't a phony." While politicians can hide their policy goals or true beliefs, according to these articles, a person cannot hide their disgust, familiarity with how to eat a food, or other traits while eating. Providing the history of political eating, detailing the advanced work of staffers, exploring the human-interest side of specific eating instances, and otherwise investigating how food related to identity, such articles showed how eating could be a barometer test for a candidate's authenticity.

Eater's editorializing of eating thus began with facts, but such facts were made meaningful by contextualizing them and asking the right questions to find their causes, consequences, and apt characterizations. Such reporting meant going outside Eater journalists' own expertise and talking to specialists, locals, and even other news outlets and journalists. Unlike TVFN, Eater's authority was not derived from a closed, self-referential system of in-house pundits. It was instead constructed through inquiry and investigation, a transparent process where readers could see how editorial arguments were made and judge for themselves.

Eater's Jaya Saxena (by far the most prolific journalist on staff), for example, interviewed science journalist Deborah Blum about her work on the history of food regulation. In an article titled, "We Owe Food Regulation to a 19th-Century Chemist Who Poisoned His Colleagues," Saxena opened with a rhetorical question directed at readers that framed the entire piece: "What does it take to get the American government to care about its citizens more than corporations?" A factual account of food regulation history followed—and the formaldehyde-tainted milk and corn-syrup-sold-as-honey common before label and purity laws. Over the course of the interview, answers to Saxena's initial question came to the fore as Blum detailed her findings. The science journalist was given the last word in describing why her work was so important: "…as an American citizen today, I think the most important takeaway is that this is still relevant…We need to be aware of how strong the federal government-industry handshake is and try to bring it out in the open." A fact-based article that took a stance based on pointed questions and outside expertise, such work exemplified Eater's editorializing and larger contextualization of food.

Eater's particular fact-based editorializing also engendered investigative human-interest stories. Freelance contributor Angela Burke[20], for example, penned, "The Pressure of Being First," with the standfirst: "Mariya Russell is the first black woman to command a Michelin-starred Kitchen. She's primed for it her entire career." More than a personal biography, the article combined an interview format with factual reporting and poetic descriptions of Russell's restaurant worthy of *NYT* Food. Like many biographies, Russell discusses her career and growth, the importance of family, personal trials and tribulations, and the contingencies of her life. Such details define human-interest stories and humanize news, making a personal and emotional connection between audience and topic (Hughes, 1980). But through Burke's purposeful questions, Russell also discussed the history of the Chicago food scene, its various neighborhoods, and the developing connections between race, representation, and opportunity. She was introspective and personal, relating this to the anxiety of others liking what she's cooked and the joy she found watching people take that first bite. Such articles were thus more comprehensive and "thick*er* descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) than a typical human-interest story, providing a more subjective but also more informed affect.

The critical distance, transparency, willingness to contextualize, strong editorial stance, and informed affect of Eater's journalists were all ways Eater could report consumer news without completely deferring to consumerism's logic. Unlike TVFN or *NYT*'s endorsement of a brand or business, Eater provided caveats and sometimes pushed back against the entities they themselves had deemed newsworthy. An article/newsletter

[20] Burke is also the founder of Black Food and Beverage, a "site that amplifies the voices of black food and beverage professionals."

from regular contributor Jenny Zhang could thus inform readers, “General Mills and Hershey are launching more candy for breakfast.” While this seemingly promoted these brands and products, Zhang explained:

> “Like a lot of other sugary cereals, these new products are probably about as good for you as actual candy for breakfast, which makes their long-term viability questionable in a time when more consumers are looking for healthier alternatives, according to Food Dive (an industry publication). Still, there is apparently a market for this kind of indulgent, brand-associated cereal — namely, children and nostalgic adults who don’t mind a hit of sweetness in the morning.”

Zhang thus reported the factual news while also questioning its social value and impact. This was decidedly not “objective,” but being transparent, contextualized, and informed, it was decidedly fair.

In the same newsletter, Eater also aggregated stories from other media outlets, in effect using food stories to report the news. Thus, “World Central Kitchen is currently in Australia serving meals for those affected by the devasting bushfires.” A Bloomberg story (complete with link) detailed how “Borden Dairy, co. filed for bankruptcy,” while a *NY Daily News* article announced, “A judge has temporarily blocked part of a new law that would expand labor rights for New York farm workers.” Not all stories were the “hard news” of business and natural disasters, as there were also articles about the Golden Globes serving a plant-based menu, a Japanese sushi chain paying $1.8 million for a 608-pound endangered bluefin tuna, and a Ferrari crashing into a minor celebrities Hollywood restaurant. Eater, after all, was a digital tabloid and negotiated its own version of TVFN’s *best of both worlds* and *NYT*’s *both/and* by providing relatively progressive content in conjunction with gossip, amusement, oddities, and the sometimes problematic pleasures of eating.

Cultural Studies Food Journalism

Capable of being both celebratory and critical, Eater exercised a form of journalism akin to the academic field of cultural studies (Kellner, 2020). This meant the outlet took a more investigative, comprehensive approach to the political dynamics of food culture, examining history, conflict, and the social or contextual reasons behind its defining characteristics. It also meant, on the other hand, that Eater recognized and sometimes emphasized human agency in these more structural analyses, as the cultural politics of eating were far from fixed, stable, monolithic, or even determining. There was thus a sense of playfulness in such media coverage, as investigating the political did not have to mean an absence of fun. This dialectic between structure and agency characterized by play, resulted in engaging and sometimes penetrating analysis. It also meant, however, that otherwise sharp criticisms could be tempered by downplaying structural consequences, emphasizing individual outcomes, and intensifying the aestheticization of everyday life.

Formatting Food. Eater's website was the most streamlined presentation of stories as the initial page offered one large image and headline as well as two smaller image and headline combinations. While this format stayed the same, unlike TVFN or *NYT*, the topics, genres, or news-you-can-use functions of these stories was seemingly random. These were not consistently promotions, recipes, or restaurant reviews but rather showed the full range of the types of food news Eater created. Also on the landing page was a large advertisement (roughly the same size as the main story-image and sometimes bigger) and also the menu bar of options. Of the three outlets, Eater had the most advertisements and sponsored content stories. This is at least partially due to the fact that

Eater did not have a paywall (like *NYT*) or (seemingly) another medium to sell advertising, celebrity goods, and marketing services (like TVFN)[21].

The Eater menu bar showed the outlet's priorities and self-conception, and the first choice was "Cities." As *NYT* was for New York City, Eater helped imagine food communities in different cities, countries, and global regions. Not just restaurant coverage, Eater had full websites and staff devoted to 22 American cities, the Carolinas as one unit, Montreal, and London. Large U.S. cities had Eater offices like Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles, but so did some smaller metropolitan areas such as the Twin Cities, Nashville, and Austin. "Travel" was also a menu option and here Eater contracted with regional journalists so readers could "Eat Like a Local." The 6 regions were: Africa & The Middle East, Asia & Australia, Europe, North America, and United States. These were further broken down by city (e.g., Cape Town, Chiang Mai, Bogota, etc.) and stories were either credited to "Eater Staff" and the use of local guides (or "fixers") or written by regional/city-based freelancers. While based in the United States, Eater aspired to provide a "Guide to the World." Simultaneously, its local outlets (e.g., Eater Detroit, Eater San Francisco, Eater Atlanta) and "forks on the ground" journalism provided a situated and embedded view of food and eating, covering the specific while appealing to more universal categories like taste, comfort, consumerism, food labor, cultural pluralism, and gender. Other menu options included "Features," "Videos," "Podcasts," and the usual social media links (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube). Through its menu options, Eater presented itself as a wide-ranging but locally applicable imagined culinary community.

[21] More recently, Eater has added branded merchandise such as a water bottle, stickers, baseball cap, and sweater, all with large print "Eater." A bumper sticker reads "Honk if you need a restaurant rec."

Below the initial large advertisement, menu options, and three main stories were three consistently present boxes, smaller than the stories and advertisement but larger than the menu. The first box read, “The 16 Best New Restaurants in America,” the second, “Eater Travel: Where to Eat Around the World,” and the third being a place to enter one’s email and sign up for the Eater newsletter. These again showed an orientation toward restaurants and endorsing the industry overall, while Eater also positioned itself both a national and global authority on eating out. Below these boxes and like *NYT* Food was a section called “The Latest.” As both outlets positioned themselves as sources of “news,” such a label communicated the up-to-date nature of the content and the importance/authority of timeliness as a “news value.” Like the three featured stories on the landing page, articles under “The Latest” ran the gamut of Eater’s content. Sometimes incongruous stories appeared next to one another as an article celebrating consumer culture, for example, could be immediately followed by one questioning and condemning it.

Routinized Discursive Strategies. Indeed, it was this very dialectic of celebrating and questioning consumer culture that characterized Eater's content. Overall, the outlet invited audiences into an investigative and thoughtful relationship with food, one that especially focused on the political and cultural meanings of eating. Sometimes cynical and always filled with snark, Eater struck a defiant tone even as it sometimes legitimated the very institutions it criticized. Regardless of such outcomes, Eater approached food as embedded and relational, asking readers to understand food in a larger context and in addition to its immediate experience by an embodied self. This resulted in discursive strategies that engendered consumers confident in their buying choices, deconstructed notions of deliciousness, and questioned the very cultural (i.e., symbolic, shared meanings and practices, and aesthetic) context of food and eating.

Confident Consumers. Because Eater often criticized consumerism and advocated for restaurant industry labor and farmers, when it did cover brands or commodities more sympathetically, its reporting carried the weight of endorsement. So Jenny Zhang telling readers, "Krispy Kreme Debuts Mini Versions of Its Four Most Popular Doughnuts" was a tacit endorsement of the brand. Zhang also reproduced the discourse of the brand's public relation's messaging before playfully dismissing it. These mini doughnuts, according to "the company's chief marketing officer," were released on January 6th as part of the "new year, new me" campaign. Each was less than 100 calories and could thus help one maintain dietary goals. Zhang impishly dismissed this logic, stating:

> Krispy Kreme, you're a doughnut company. No need to try to insert yourself into the sanctimony of diet culture. Just peddle your sugary fried dough and be done with it, without assigning moral value to food one way or another!

The piece finished by mentioning a free give-away promotion. Like *NYT* and TVFN, Eater promoted products and brand on the grounds that they were delicious. Unlike the other outlets, Eater would playfully banter with branded messaging, finding fault with its reasoning but stopping short of unfavorable criticism. This informal "calling-out" of a brand's problematic messaging could assuage readers, letting them know they were "in on the joke" even as they acquiesced to its overall appeal of consumption.

Promoting products as delicious did not have to come with any criticism or tweak of messaging as Eater could itself discursively construct cultural and symbolic capital for a brand. Eater could thus put out a video categorized under "Cult Following" titled, "How the Tabasco Factory Makes 700,000 Bottles of Hot Sauce Per Day." With a byline of "Eater Video," an unnamed male journalist visited the island in Louisiana where the hot sauce was first made and production still continues today. The journalist emphasized how the same family still owned the operation and that every CEO of the last 150 years was a member of that family. Instead of growing the peppers exclusively in the region as was originally done, now the seeds were grown there then sent to contracted farmers in parts of Africa and South America. These farmers would harvest, mash, and salt the peppers, then ship them back to southern Louisiana. This was a selective retelling (as all discourses must be) and excluded from the conversation were the terms of those outsourced contracts or the environmental or social impacts of growing elsewhere. More attention was paid to the industrial process of aging the mash in barrels and the high-tech automation of bottling. The journalist was an enthusiastic hype man throughout, emphasizing the continuity, consistency, and passion of the family owners and their product. He even gave a leading statement to/for a non-owner floor worker, rearticulating

the worker's words with, "So what keeps you interested and excited [in working] is making something that is as close as possible to the thing that's been done for 150 years." The interviewee responded with:

> Yeah, so knowing that, it's tradition for me and, it's uh, when I go in the store, I get see Tabasco brand pepper sauce on the shelf. You know, I had my hands in making this, and it's gone all over the world. So I'm just, uh, proud to be a part of it.

The Eater journalist thus elicited a specific answer as he advocated for the brand and emphasized its authenticity and tradition.

This framing was an intentional choice for a standardized industrial product now utilizing a global supply chain (and thus *had* changed). The journalist ended by saying, "so while hot sauces may come and go, Tabasco has staying power" and told the current owner that he was now an even bigger fan of the brand after meeting (some of) the people involved in its production. Like *NYT,* Eater used their high production values and human-interest storytelling tools to personalize a brand/company, articulate that brand's legitimacy, reify its brand identity, and generate cultural and symbolic capital. As a food media outlet competing in a crowded and fickle neoliberal-dominated mediascape, Eater's competent execution of coverage was mutually beneficial, generating symbolic capital for both the featured brand and Eater's own journalistic-media reputation.

Advocacy and editorialized eating could thus take the form of product promotion, and Eater also offered "consumer solution" articles akin to TVFN. The managing editor, Ellie Krupnick, sent a weekly newsletter called "Add to Cart" aimed at "people who like shopping (almost) as much as they love eating." In these, Krupnick invited readers to contemplate products like, "The Pasta Bowl I use for Pretty Much Everything." Also matching TVFN's clickbait-style headlines, she could playfully tell readers, "You

Probably Need This Copper Japanese Grater." Along with its critical and investigative stance, Eater was also a lifestyle tabloid concerned with modern pressures and helping readers navigate consumer culture and the directives of style.

To be fair, there were fewer consumer solution stories than investigative human-interest stories, and such articles do not serve as an adequate representative sample of Eater's content. But the appearance of entirely consumer-oriented headlines was jarring amongst the range of more critical headlines and thus offered such promotions more authority and weight. Like *NYT*'s use of sister outlet Wirecutter, Eater provided space for another Vox outlet, the Strategist, to provide the most explicitly commercialized content. Headlines like "The Best Drinking Glasses, According to Restaurant and Interior Design Experts" and "The Best Coffee Grinders According to Baristas and Coffee Roasters" drew on industry authority to provide endorsements and affiliated links. There was even a special collection of such articles with the outlet saying, "Eater is sharing our favorite recommendations for everyday things from our friends at the Strategist." Eater could thus add its editorial authority to this (seemingly) cultivated collection of stories, and Vox could use multiple outlets to cross-promote outlets and sponsors, garnering attention and generating revenue.

In addition to explicit commercial promotion, Eater's editorial decision-making could implicitly and playfully endorse brands. The outlet could thus engender confidence in audiences who were assured that an expert evaluation had vindicated their consumer practices. Such tacit and lighthearted validation was exemplified by the "2020 Eater Bowl Bowl," a series of articles that evaluated national fast-food outlets in a tournament style competition. Mimicking the bracket-style play and language of NCAA March

Madness (a basketball tournament), the outlet announced: "It's the Sweet 16 of the first-ever Eater Bowl Bowl, with Sweetgreen, Olive Garden, Taco Bell, and Chipotle all facing off to determine who has the best bowl of all." A sequence of articles then comparatively evaluated products from each food outlet, advancing the winner to the next round of comparison, ultimately resulting in an overall winner. Not taking itself too seriously, Eater congratulated the winner, "Congrats…on this meaningless-though-flattering honor. Eater's food beat and irreverence, even while self-reflexive and jocular, could thus provide free publicity for national brands and legitimize a consumerist lifestyle.

Eater thus invited more informed consumers, at least as far as cultural and lifestyle evaluation was concerned. Delivered with snark and self-deprecation, this information lacked the appearance of elitism and compulsion. Headlines could even appear to resist consumer culture like, "You Don't Really Need a Pasta Machine to Make Your Own Pasta." With this particular article, however, even if a pasta machine was not needed a host of other products was necessary. These included a digital scale, a specialized rolling pin, multiple cutting and shaping tools, brand name cooking pots so you can "cook it with care," a peppermill, a Microplane ™ rasp grater, and aesthetically pleasing ceramic ware. Each could be purchased using affiliated links with Vox Media earning commission. Even as audiences were made confident that they did not need a specialized gadget for cooking (e.g., "F**k your pasta machine"), Eater could offer an interconnected web of branded consumer goods they did "need." This article was part of the "starter kit" collection of stories, characterized as: "Everything you need to take on that hyper-specific, possibly daunting kitchen project." When playing a promotional role,

Eater could mirror TVFN's discursive practices, problematizing food and offering the necessary consumer solution.

Deconstructing Deliciousness. Just as Eater's editorializing deconstructed food industry PR or the social appeal of politicians eating, so too did Eater journalists investigative, take apart, and make connections between the internal logic and external factors of food practices. While not an outlet that prioritized itself around cooking, for example, Eater did a deep dive into a common cooking practice and explained, "How Sheet-Pan Cooking Became Everyone's Dinner Go-To." The article traced the phenomenon of cooking all of one's dishes for a meal on a single sheet pan to a Melissa Clark recipe at NYT and its subsequent endorsement and adoption by convenience-seeking and picture taking bloggers. Combining the ease of "one-pot cooking" with a "social media-friendly" appearance, the trend, according to the article, was also an empty signifier that allowed a "performative nonchalance" on social platforms. The journalist (a one-time contributor) analyzed the words that most appeared with sheet-pan dinners on blogs and the range of messages a posted photograph might have: speedy, healthy, family-friendly, no fuss, easy. Sheet-pan cooking was thus "democratic and forgiving" and its photogenetic qualities and convenience in a harried world made it the perfect oeuvre of cooking for the current moment. Despite its suitability, however, the article also pointed out its flaws: different types of ingredients have different cooking times so things won't be evenly cooked, claims of only dirtying one dish can be misleading considering food prep, and overcrowded pans can cause food to steam and become soggy. Still, the article concluded, it was an uncomplicated way to cook at home for loved ones. Like many of Eater's stories, the article analyzed why something was

popular, pointed out its shortcomings, and ultimately endorsed the best parts of a trend. Like Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project* or certain cultural studies practitioners, Eater could thus criticize some aspect of society (or a social practice) while also recognizing and attempting to rescue its more positive, utopian elements.

This dialectical approach characterized by an ambivalent optimism was epitomized by the headline, "20 Food Hot Takes You'll Probably Hate Read in 2020." Presenting itself as an informal authority like *NYT*, Eater skewed younger, employing colloquial slang and the cynicism of a stereotypically brooding teenager. Eater did not want to take these gossipy or click-bait stories seriously and invited audiences to be in on the joke and "hate read" (i.e., feel shame or guilt for indulging in them). It was not a big deal anyway, Eater admitted, hedging its language with "probably." But the article itself was an ironic and snarky indictment of food media and the current political economy of communication. Restaurant editor Hillary Dixler Canavan thus offered spoof (but maybe not spoof) story ideas and headlines to writers "falling behind on your traffic goals" or tired of "being liked by your own Twitter followers." These included:

- All Barbeque is the Same
- My Daughter's Private Preschool Banned Her Daily Omakase Lunch Menu Because Another Student Has a Deadly Fish Allergy: Here's Why That's a Problem
- Sorry to This Pan: The Cast Iron is Overrated
- Only Assholes Drink Sours
- All White Wine is Better Over Ice
- Just Because You Got Your Dad to Buy Us Frappuccinos Doesn't Mean You're Popular, Kayleigh: an Op-ed by an Eighth Grader
- Your Waitress Loves It When You Call Her 'Hon'
- It's Okay to Add People to Your Party Without Changing the Reservation

Pointing out the absurdities of the attention economy, Canavan showed how click-bait, manufactured controversy, and relatively low-stakes opinions could drive the now sacred

media metric of "engagement." The Eater journalist also exposed the entitlement and seeming arrogance of non-informal authorities or those that might take their opinions too seriously, again, knowing that acting stubborn can garner attention and elicit response. Ever the advocated for the restaurant industry and its workers, the last two would appear so obviously wrong to Eater readers that a "hate read" would be called for. Itself peddling in gossip, chasing metrics, and seeking success in the attention economy, Eater could deconstruct the logic of its own field. Such articles performed boundary work, showing how some media might go too far in the search for clicks and establishing Eater as a relatively better option.

Being a relatively better option meant Eater might use a click-bait or more playful headline, but that the article would competently deconstruct the latest food trends. Jaya Saxena's story, "Cabbage is Your Next Vegetable Crush" used a cute headline to expose the compulsory logic of the food world, with a standfirst explaining, "Get ready to eat way more of it in 2020." Saxena relayed a popular *Bon Appetit* cabbage recipe and some hip cabbage dishes from trendy restaurants, then exploring some history of cabbage in America and its usual associations as cole slaw or sauerkraut. She explained that the now popular kale (a type of cabbage) is lauded as a new fad, but that it had been the purview of soul food for generations (Saxena included a link to an expert on soul food). The Eater journalist cited the rising popularity of kimchi in the U.S. and deferred to Korean-American food writer Noah Cho to explain its significance. Cho "bemoaned the rise of 'hipster kimchi,'" as a food originally constituted by "women's labor, community, and scarcity" could be fetishized. Such narratives get "lost when people are simply subscribing to the latest food trend." Next, Saxena took on the celebrated health benefits

of cabbage and its appropriation by the "faddish Keto diet" and others bordering on cultish behavior. In addition to these indicating factors, Saxena made a socioeconomic argument:

> The idea of something delicious coming out of common ingredients is ultimately why cabbage might be showing up on more menus. There are rumblings of another recession on the way (hyperlink), but even if it's not a full-blown financial crisis, wages are stagnant (hyperlink) and Americans increasingly don't have cash to spare (hyperlink).

Cabbage, according to author, exists at the intersection of delicious, hearty, and cheap and its wide geographic availability and the potential to "discover" (seemingly) new dishes means it will appear on menus across the country. Celebrating its potential while exasperated by its hype, Saxena concluded, "Get ready to be sick of it by 2021." Cabbage, like much of the food covered in Eater, was an ambivalent pleasure.

More than TVFN or *NYT*, Eater thus showed a willingness to look behind the delicious and connect it to a larger context. This could be a relatively simple explanatory piece like, "What's the Difference Between a Hero, Sub, Grinder, and Hoagie?" Such articles, while akin to TVFN and *NYT* explanatory stories, exhibited more depth than these outlets. Eater was willing to make connections outside of pre-packaged press releases from industry spokespersons and did not provide as much journalistic cover for PR. Eaters contextualized and more comprehensive journalism could be more complex, investigating feel good values that were otherwise taken for granted. Freelancer Gosia Wozniacka thus explored, "The Dark Side of 'Compostable' Take-Out Containers" and exposed that they were not the unproblematic solution people might think them to be. Problematizing pleasure, the now Civil Eats journalist quoted an environmental policy analyst who reminded people that compostable packaging is a "bit of a red herring…most

of the damage has already been done by the time you buy it." This invited readers to question the very sustainability of consumer culture, a most unusual view for a lifestyle outlet, especially one that advocated for the restaurant industry. Not completely defeatist, Wozniacka employed Eater's ambivalent optimism and admitted that at least restaurants, cities, and consumers were trying. Deconstructing the delicious thus involved self-reflection, introspection, and slowing down to consider personal responsibility and the consequences of one's actions.

This self-reflexivity, however, was not entirely despondent, as Eater also deconstructed the playful side of cultural politics and allowed room other voices to steer the discourse of food and eating. Freelancer Isabel Ling thus wrote a piece on "queer food" and the intersection of art, queer politics, and fine dining, headlining the article with a playful quote from one of her sources: "'If You Eat This Food, It Will Deconstruct Your Toxic Masculinity.'" Gabe Hiatt of Eater Washington D.C. informed readers about the cultural politics of eating in the nation's capital with, "The SCOTUS Cafeteria Is Now Serving Terrible Pizza, Thanks to Brett Kavanaugh." The junior justice sat on the cafeteria committee and changed the menu, bringing in his favorite pizza. This was surprisingly not, Hiatt joked, a story about beer.[22] Supreme court beat reporters and food reviewers found the pizza lacking, and as a socially progressive advocacy and investigative outlet, the Eater editor argued, "For many, serving crappy pizza will likely be the least offensive thing he does with his position." Eater could thus use food to talk

[22] When questioned during his confirmation hearing about sexual misconduct at a party, Kavanaugh famously got defensive and emotional saying, "I drank beer with my friends. Almost everyone did. Sometimes I had too many beers. Sometimes others did. I liked beer. I still like beer, but I did not drink beer to the point of blacking out and I never sexually assaulted anyone."

about other social issues, decentering individual consumption for more embedded narratives.

These situated narratives could be sourced outside of Eater's staff and Vox's world of freelancers and cross-promotional synergy. Eater described its reoccurring column, "Eater Voices," as a space "where chefs, restaurateurs, writers, and industry insiders share their perspectives about the food world, tackling a range of topics through the lens of personal experience." Chef Omar Tate, in his article "Wisdom of the Giants," thus explained, "Black history through the lens of Black folks is not well documented. When I left the restaurant industry, it became imperative to me to learn as much as I could about our foodways." Tate described how he had been trained and aspired to be a certain version of a chef. He decided he couldn't "play the game" and walked away from the restaurant industry, instead delving into researching his culinary heritage. He learned a new appreciation for food and went back to the industry where he is now a respected artist. Providing a nuanced look at Black history, social positioning, the restaurant industry, and cooking and eating the delicious, such articles humanized and personalized food in a manner not available to journalists, PR reps, bloggers, social influencers, academics, or other food writers.

Questioning Residual, Emergent, and Dominant Culture. In addition to assuring confident consumers and deconstructing the delicious or latest food trend, Eater's investigate mode and strongly held position of advocacy also manifested as a discourse of endless questioning. Specifically, Eater journalists, contributors, and media partners questioned the residual and emergent cultural meanings of food practices and the power of food institutions, organizations, and other actors to shape dominant understandings of eating. Such content could thus ask and answer, "Why McDonald's has been slow adopting meatless meat." It could result in accusatory headlines like, "Coca-Cola Says It Won't Ditch Plastic Bottles." Here, the accompanying story was fairer than the headline suggested as it quoted the company's head of sustainability and his stance on giving customers what they wanted. It also gave the brand representative the last word, ending with the spokesperson saying the company knew it "must be 'part of the solution.'" But the article also took Coca-Cola to task, showing what other companies had done to limit plastic use and cited a non-profit that reported the company as the largest plastic polluter in the world (for two years running). While allowing the brand a chance to answer, Eater questioned its practices in an attempt to hold it accountable.

Eater's pursuit of accountability in the food industry and social policy led the cite to promote stories from other sites like Civil Eats, a non-profit, investigative outlet. Eater was thus willing to provide links to a potential competitor in order to carry stories like, "How Big Food Uses Big Tobacco Tactics to Manipulate the Public" or "The Fight to Use Food Stamps for Restaurant Food." While this meant less content Eater had to produce to garner attention, it also meant promoting an organization Vox did not own, one that no-less offered an alternative, non-profit business model to food journalism.

Eater also regularly included links to other non-Vox media outlets in its newsletter, further showing its willingness to share a wide consideration of food news over monopolizing attention.

Accountability could also tilt into advocacy, as Eater covered and contemplated the labor involved in restaurant work. Whether it was discussing Taco Bell's new sick leave policy or asking how restaurants should protect their undocumented workers from deportation, the outlet, just by discussing such topics at all, took a stance in favor of worker's rights. This stance was executed in good faith, however, as Eater employed journalistic practices like interviewing multiple sources, consulting experts, and allowing anyone criticized to respond to allegations. A story on how "Thousands of Google's Cafeteria Workers Have Unionized," for example, pointed out that such organization was "some of the most significant union activity tech industry workers have accomplished." It also quoted workers, management, company spokespersons, and experts both for and against unionization in the tech industry. This use of sources provided a measured and balanced view of the issue. The journalist, Shirin Ghaffray, was objective in method, keeping her own views unstated as she provided facts and the views of others. Otherwise lacking access to message-amplifying media, however, Eater's coverage of workers and their grievances was its own form of advocacy. Objective in method, such stories provided a more comprehensive understanding of social connections and invited readers to think about (some of) the people and processes that enabled eating.

Although Eater was a lifestyle outlet funded by advertising, affiliated promotions, and a profit-seeking parent company, this did not stop its journalists and surrogates from questioning the consumerist social order. Eater thus featured a story from The Verge, a

Vox outlet focused on science and technology, titled, “Dear Keurig, Thanks for inspiring a generation of worthless gadgets.” The article criticized the company and the entire industry that sold single-use gadgets (like a $700 “juicer” that squeezed a pouch) or machines that required additional and specific purchases to make them usable (like garbage cans with specialty bags or floss dispensers with proprietary floss). Questioning this logic and its profiteers, the article lamented its interpellation of willing consumers: “So as long as venture capitalists think there’s money to be made from two-part tariff devices, this trend is likely to continue. At least, until consumers wise up and realize they’re being played.” Cynical and somewhat defeatist, this article nonetheless lambasted consumer culture and refused “the bright side of life.”

Questioning or challenging consumer culture, however, did not mean that Eater dismissed it altogether or that Eater could not legitimate such logic. While a snarky title like, “The Smartest and Most Ridiculous Kitchen Gadgets at CES (Consumer Electronics Show) 2020,” Eater attempted to present critical distance from the event being covered. The author described it as “a tour through the consumer freak show featuring smart trashcans, voice-activated faucets, and beyond,” both making light of it and sensationalizing it. Endorsing its importance by covering it in the first place, Eater both mocked it and presented it as an alluring fascination. Dismissing the trade show as something for “people with too much discretionary income,” the outlet still attempted to rescue its positive contributions and the potentially useful. This dialectic of ambivalent optimism typical of Eater meant criticism was not entirely negative but neither was it emancipatory or entirely oppositional. Eater’s coverage legitimated mainstream

institutions and a consumer lifestyle, but its discursive strategies were not entirely complicit in circulating institutional and consumerist hegemony.

Investigating the cultural politics around food extended beyond consumerism, labor, and the environment to address the seemingly permanent issue of gender. Freelancer Naomi Tomky thus questioned dominant gender roles and an uncaring capitalist order with the article, “Who’s Watching the Kids?” While many parents in the restaurant industry struggled with childcare, women faced unique and particularly demanding challenges as they were the ones expected to provide it (and more criticized for being “absent.”) Tomky took a human-interest approach and provided a platform for individual narratives. One woman chef was advised, “Don’t get pregnant.” Two women Tomky talked with left the industry for more set and family-friendly hours in food employment at retirement homes and public schools (at significantly lower pay). But the article also offered solutions journalism and featured work being done by progressive restauranteurs and nonprofits. Highlighting gender disparities and the shortcomings of the social order, Eater could also offer counter-logics and tangible alternatives.

Eater also published stories on the Spotted Pig, the same high-profile restaurant reported on by *NYT*, and linked it with a collection of #Metoo stories. Since investigative reporting was more common in Eater, the Spotted Pig story was not an anomaly or reminder, it was categorized with other manifestations of injustice the outlet sought to expose. Not limited to physical threats and socioeconomic injustices, Eater also investigated the cultural meaning of gender. Former contributor Rachel Levin explored why, “In 2019, Men Named Their Restaurants After Women.” Such monikers, Levin argued, signaled a specific type of hospitality, one that was warm and caring. But why,

Levin wondered, would a man's name not suffice? The journalist then engaged in a series of penetrating conversations, listening to chefs, a food historian, restauranteurs, and brand specialists. Thus, Levin did not indulge in a diatribe about absolute truth, political dogma, or the injustices of patriarchy. Instead, she crafted a story on verifiable facts and the subjective views of individuals involved with the issue. The last word was given to a restaurant consultant who was against naming restaurants after women because first names failed to communicate what a restaurant was really about. With so many restaurants, he argued, "if you can't figure out something better than your grandmother's name, maybe you're in the wrong business." Thus, even while questioning the cultural politics of gender, Eater could employ an objective method and still take a strong position, insisting on critical reflection.

Investigating Culture

Unlike TVFN's culture-blind and post-cuisine approach, or *NYT*'s use of culture to establish culinary capital or mark social distinction, Eater questioned the very social construction of culture, its articulations and concomitant meanings. Its longform journalism allowed a longer treatment of food's meaning and relation to other social phenomena. This slower, more comprehensive consideration offered insight into cuisine and a deeper understanding of how humans have answered the omnivore's dilemma. As a restaurant-focused outlet, the publication also helped imagine culinary communities at the city, national, and regional level. Therefore, as a lifestyle tabloid, Eater could map specific locations and cuisines while also engendering social conversations around the meanings of eating.

Thus, as Eater celebrated restaurants in Beijing and Shanghai, legitimizing their cuisines as delicious and desirable, the outlet also addressed negative social perceptions surrounding Chinese as a cultural identity. On January 31st, Jenny Zhang penned, "Pinning Coronavirus on How Chinese People Eat Plays Into Racist Assumptions," arguing, "The outbreak has had a decidedly dehumanizing effect, reigniting old strains of racism and xenophobia that frame Chinese people as uncivilized, barbaric 'others.'" Highlighting media outlets that reproduced the "Western gaze" by showing old videos of Chinese people eating bats and mice, Zhang also utilized multiple sources to debunk the myth that this was common. Chinese eating practices were beside the point, however, as Zhang rightfully pointed out the omnivore's dilemma and "the hypocritical idea that some animals are socially permissible to eat, while others are not, is a belief in one's own cultural hegemony." People from India, for example, do not approve of eating beef, and other cultural groups are equally repelled by eating pigs, wild game, and highly processed foodstuffs as is common in the U.S. Zhang fully admitted there were legitimate hygiene and ethical issues in Chinese food systems, but these were not unique. The intensive farming and disregard for animal welfare in U.S. industrial agriculture should also give perspective to those Americans who would judge other cultural practices as "weird" or contemptible, as should the fact that "we" eat a limited range of meats, distributing them by chopping them into parts, wrapping them in plastic, and storing them at grocery stores. The excessive use of antibiotics in American farming has also created drug-resistant bacteria (link) and foodborne illnesses and food recalls are still issues. Zhang's point was that diets are socially constructed and specific to one's history and circumstance, and

eaters should consider the contingencies and idiosyncrasies of their own food systems before denigrating others.

The Eater journalist also pointed to other forms of anti-Chinese sentiment, connecting the prejudice against culturally defined food with larger practices of exclusion, harassment, and marginalization. While panic about a global pandemic was an understandable response, Zhang concluded, “devaluing other humans’ lives will not save your own.” Eater could thus analyze and explain the cultural meaning of eating by exploring food’s relationship to other institutions, ideologies, and fields. It could also engender empathy by inviting readers into a position of critical self-reflection.

Such reflection was often aimed directly at cultural notions of eating like Jaya Saxena’s article, “What Did ‘Authenticity’ in Food Mean in 2019?” The Eater journalist held that the concept still mattered but it had become more complicated, an “authenticity 2.0.” Less than a decade ago, authenticity in food was highly sought after. It was a legitimating label that meant “real” ingredients, not industrial substitutes, and translated to favoring local eateries over national chains. But a few years back, there was a dismissal of the label by a number of chefs and food critics. The term had been misused, they argued, appropriated by people who had fixed expectations on what “authentic” Chinese, Thai, or Indian food be. The concept denied cultural change, fusion, or innovation, they held, and became the purview of “foodies more concerned with appearing to have the correct taste than doing any tasting.” The term also seemed to only apply to so-called “ethnic” foods. There was an association of such food being cheap, and “what consumers deemed ‘real’ was heavily influenced by whiteness.” Authentic food was thus not about cultural origins or who was making it but whether or not it fit a

consumer's preconceived notions. Today, the article argued, cultural authenticity is no longer the selling point. Tastes change and cuisines undergo transformations through migration, exchange, and experimentation (e.g., a renown Chinese American cookbook author called his recipes "100% inauthentic.") From today's view, dishes that were considered authentic representations of their respective cuisines in the 1990s were themselves fusions and adaptations.

Just because "authenticity" is not a selling point, however, does not mean that some notions of it do not still exist. Saxena pointed out that migrants and travelers can still lay claim to notions of authenticity as they experience food presented as Thai or Chinese, for example, that has obviously been changed for the "Western palate." When someone from Thailand or China claims such food is not authentic, it is not out of a desire for exoticism or to try and impress others with culinary capital. It is simply to say that although a dish may have the same name, that is not how it would taste where I am from. Interviewing immigrant and second-generation chefs, Saxena showed that there was nothing wrong with desiring authenticity, with wanting to experience food from a cultural tradition prepared with firsthand knowledge and care. But sometimes the word could be "weaponized," denying the reality of cultural nuance or the adaptations and inventions of "diaspora cooking." As a concept, authenticity could thus be a kind of "quicksand" where an individual tried to one up their friends, over-explain history, or fetishize what were actually fusions. As eating is inherently tied to identity, Saxena argued, something may be authentic to one person's experience but not another's, even if they are said to belong to the same cultural group. Since identities are not static, she

continued, then foods that are valued as authentic are also continuously shifting. Authenticity is a "social construct" and is thus "ours to define or to give up entirely."

At the end of this nuanced investigation of authenticity in food, Saxena was able to preserve the concept's ambivalence while also taking a firm position. A larger issue, she argued, was that "People of color and immigrants [need] the space to experiment without their identities getting called into question." Harkening back to an early piece she had written, Saxena also pleaded that, "White chefs and diners [should] stop fetishizing immigrants just for their food." Tradition and change could exist side by side but to do so successfully, Saxena concluded, we need to center chefs of color and undo white assumptions about "ethnic" cuisine. Authenticity means different things to different people and "the next goal is recognizing every definition of the word." In this article, Eater thus engendered an informed conversation without offering a paternalistic, single solution or ultimate answer. Instead, culture was treated as a social construct of strategic essentialism, and the journalist invited readers to negotiate an ongoing tension.

The preference for negotiating tensions as opposed to providing final answers also meant Eater could analyze the social connection engendered by food without fetishizing its final product or the people who made it. Thus, an article titled, "For Puerto Ricans, It's Not Christmas Without Pasteles" might appear to essentialize Puerto Ricans and declare they are a monolithic group. And Eater did employ a shared narrative of food history, including Puerto Rico's experience with colonialism. Contrary to essentialism, however, the article showed how Puerto Rican cuisine was always a mix of different elements and resulted from creative Afro-Puerto Rican and mestizo cooks, blending Indigenous, West African, and Spanish influences with local conditions. Far from there being a single

“authentic” version, the article showed how Pasteles evolved over the years according to specific tastes and access to resources. More importantly, it was a labor-intensive dish involving the whole family. Giving everyone a task—the social performance of the dish—was as an important ingredient and part of the tradition that an interviewed couple hoped to pass on. A more comprehensive look at tradition, Eater did not discuss cuisine to create value for commodity exchange, or to provide culinary capital, or even to stimulate desire. Instead, Eater explored how tradition was invented and how such a specific history resulted in culturally unique practices, shared but subject to change and adaptation.

As a restaurant guide, Eater did provide definitive answers in its recommendations, especially as it promised to help readers “eat like a local.” Eater thus laid claim to its own authority of determining the authentic, although the outlet often deferred to more local or regionally based food journalists. Despite its tagline of eating like a local, Eater could also celebrate the nuance, evolution, and diversity of a global city’s foodscape. In Bogotá, for example, Eater showed how, “Dishes merge the region’s native—and in many cases, long-forgotten—ingredients with modern sensibilities like albacore tataki seared in native *achira* leaves, and slow-braised pork with a fermented sauce made from local coffee husks.” There were of course “comforting class foods” like empanadas but Eater travel also recognized how a city’s food scene evolved, not limiting restaurant guides to preconceived notions of *the* authentic.

In its global restaurant guide, Eater made a conscious effort to expand beyond the usual destinations of Paris and Tokyo. The outlet thus partially built its own culinary capital on exploring less traditionally popular food destinations like George Town,

Malaysia and Cork, Ireland. It also included Milwaukee, Wisconsin as one of its top places to eat in 2020, an American city not often celebrated for its food scene, especially compared to larger cities. In making their recommendations, Eater claimed to employ deep "on-the-ground-research" as well as "local input" with guides "written by locals, made for travelers." Each city came with a brief history and an insider's guide to local practices. A local fixer in Mexico City, for example, explained *sobremesa*. This literally translated to "over table" and referred to "the time people spend drinking, smoking, and talking around the table once a meal is done." This could make getting a table difficult. But, according to the local guide, it was not a nuisance but ingrained in the local culture. Talking after dinner was a common occurrence and servers did not see it as a problem, it was just something travelers had to be patient with and aware of. A tourist could even partake and get to know the locals. Eater thus showed a sensitivity to cultural practices, as eating in these regions was thus understood as a set of practices, customs, and ingredients embedded in a particular geography and history.

For Eater, "eating like a local" was thus not some display of culinary capital inherent to the outlet or a call for strictly defined authenticity. Instead, eating like a local meant respecting regional customs and avoiding the pitfalls of being the "bad tourist." Eating in a foreign country was more than the individualized experience of pleasure or an exercise of exoticism, it was a grounded connection to place and the people and social rhythms that enabled a specific food scene. Furthermore, Eater's restaurant recommendations around the world did not limit cities to preconceived notions of what a specific national culture should offer. Their guide to Barcelona, for example, offered spots selling the famous paella (which Eater pointed out was not "authentically Catalan")

but also promoted eateries that specialized in Japanese Ramen, Malaysian curry, and chicken shawarma. “Eating like a local” did not box particular cultures into some unchanging, essentialist identity but was instead an appreciation of cosmopolitan diversity while deferring to the nuances and practices of a local way of living.

Eater’s cultural treatment of food was not limited to global “others” but was also a self-reflexive consideration of American cuisine. First, the wider restaurant recommendations around the country and its offices in over thirty cities meant Eater invited readers into a nationally imagined culinary community. More explicitly, Eater had a recurring series of articles called “American Intel.” These stories addressed American consumer culture, eating practices, and symbolic meanings. The story about American cereal brands and their promotion of candy for breakfast, for example, was part of the American Intel series, as was the article on Coca-Cola. Many of these stories dealt with national brands, showing how American cuisine was intertwined with American commodity culture and consumerism. Some Costcos suspending free samples due to Coronavirus (an article from March, 2020) was thus a newsworthy national story. While some articles were critical and acted as a watchdog on national brands, others could appear promotional as if written by a corporate publicist, like: “Panera is Making its Menu More Plant-
Based to Become More Sustainable.” Celebratory and critical, Eater’s American Intel series thus articulated a national culture of food and eating. In the hands of Eater journalists, such a culture was introspective and ambivalent, capable of reveling in pleasure while also skeptical of influence and power.

Readers were thus informed that, “Chipotle Fined for Committing over 13,000 Child Labor Violations.” While the national chain was doing well in Eater’s Bowl Bowl, the outlet told readers that, “good food can’t make up for bad labor practices.” Such coverage was an attempt to hold otherwise pleasure-giving companies accountable, again helping consumers be confident in their purchasing. American Intel stories could thus bring attention to a food company’ faults as well as their attempt at redemption like: “Wendy’s Pledges Ambitious Animal (and Employee!) Welfare Plan Following Scrutiny.” Publicist and journalist, Eater took on the hybrid roles necessary for an investigative outlet that advocated for the restaurant industry.

American Intel stories were not all business news as Eater incorporated lifestyle, human-interest stories, crime, and even media criticism as well. The outlet thus covered American celebrity culture, telling readers, “Paris Hilton’s lasagna apparently doesn’t taste great, and more news to start your day.” A broad definition of “news,” Eater seamlessly mixed “hard” and “soft” stories, questioning the very separation of such content. Stories about potential tariffs leading to the stockpiling of wine and cheese appeared next to attention-grabbing crime headlines like, “In a Pinch, Boston Man Crashes Stolen Lobster Truck Into Another Lobster Truck.” And other media outlets could be held to account with stories like, “New York Post Dragged for Article Shaming Homeless Man for Eating From Whole Foods Hot Bar.” National understandings of eating were thus not limited to food and individualized pleasure, as Eater’s coverage delineated food’s connections to other social institutions and issues.

In another American Intel story, Eater explored the restaurant industry’s relation to race in, “Desegregating McDonald’s.” An excerpt from a new book, Eater editor

Monica Burton contextualized the piece with a recent story about a lawsuit accusing McDonald's of forcing out Black owners and employees. The snippet from Marcia Chatelain's work *Franchise: The golden arches in Black America* then detailed a less discussed aspect of the civil rights movement. While lunch counter sit-ins are a large part of American collective memory, Chatelain gave the history of, "A 1963 civil rights protest at a drive-in in Plain Bluffs, Arkansas, [a] momentous first step towards ending segregation at the franchise." Chatelain's book also showed how the fast-food franchise paved a small path for the generation of Black wealth, and the complicated relationship between a popular national brand and African Americans. Eater thus provided a platform to others that also uncovered the ambivalence of American eating.

So, like *NYT*, Eater had a larger understanding of food and explored its cultural meanings, investigating the social connections of eating. Food was used to report the news or food itself was made newsworthy through its relationship to other fields. Ashok Selvam of Eater Chicago reported on a local bar that some residents and restaurant workers demanded be closed due to rape allegations. The piece investigated bar culture and sourced information from a non-profit about domestic violence, explicating gender relations, victim blaming, and police procedure along the way. Hong Kong-based freelancer Andrew Genung used food to report on current events in the story, "In Hong Kong, Many Restaurants Are Literally on the Front Lines of the Protests." And Jaya Saxena explored corporate-state power through a story about the state of Virginia, at the behest of "Big Dairy, attempting to change the legal definition of milk so increasingly popular plant-based alternatives (e.g., almond milk, rice milk, oat milk) could not

use the term. Using food to report the news or exploring the larger implications of specific practices, Eater thus showed the social construction of food, the consequences of such a process, and its contested nature.

Eater's openness to the contested nature of food's meaning also allowed it to entertain some unpopular opinions. Monica Burton interviewed another book author, Jacob Grier, in an article with the interrogative title, "Have Restaurant Smoking Bans Gone Too Far." Burton contextualized the interview with a brief history about smoking bans and the initial concerns for bartenders/health in the 1960s. The piece then provided Grier a platform to explain why he thought anti-smoking had gone too far. Grier was not a smoker and did not want to return to the 1960s, but he did see how smokers had been denied a place to socialize. He suggested laws like licenses to allow smoking, brought in the class element of who tends to smoke, and otherwise brought a thoughtful analysis to a question that had long seemed decided. Eater could thus push it readers to consider their own views, even those accepted as common-sense.

Confronting dominant culture, Jaya Saxena asked, "What Does Plant-Based Actually Mean?" The Eater journalist investigated the origins of the oft-celebrated term and its use and abuse. A short-hand for "meat-substitute" the term evolved "to refer to just about anything a marketer wants." Coined by a biochemist in the 1940s, the term was originally devised to advocate for a non-animal diet without the political baggage of being vegetarian. Today, the term does not denote a collective ethical movement but now refers to health and the individual and those who want to limit their meat consumption. The foods it is applied to, Saxena pointed out, are not inherently healthy as highly processed foods or a big bowl of mashed potatoes are still considered "plant-based." And

while the term refers to a meat-substitute, marketers now use the term for things not originally made of meat (e.g., Ancient Harvest touting their "plant-based pasta" or calling margarine "plant butter"). Marketers, Saxena continued, have picked up on the "healthy but relaxed" vibe of plant-based and now promote plant-based celery juice, oatmeal, pumpkin seeds, black beans, things that are indeed plants. The journalist pointed out that plant-based items can still have animal products in them so unlike "vegan," the term can obscure the issue of eating animals. A term that has come to mean everything and nothing, the trending of the environment as a social issue meant any plant product was incentivized to call itself plant-based, even if potato chips or coffee have always been plant products. Saxena contextualized the term in the omnivore's dilemma and our economic system, saying

> What we eat has as much to do with global supply chains and tradition and economics and ethics as it does our own bodies, and side-stepping serious thought about where one's choices fit into that web makes less sense than ever. Plant-based could become the new vegan, or it could wind up diluting a message of collective action in favor of individual choice under capitalism. It remains to be seen what plant-based will become. But rest assured that in a few years, a different vague term will probably take its place.

Identifying the cynical nature of consumer capitalism, the Eater journalist deconstructed the social construction of food, invited readers to take responsibility for their choices, and showed how capitalism could dilute such attempts at responsibility. Concluding on a cynical note herself, Saxena's disillusionment was a reminder that while we may make food choices, we do so in circumstances that we ourselves have not chosen.

As a lifestyle tabloid, albeit one that invited self-reflection, Eater also appeared wary of compassion fatigue, pessimistic overload, and the negative consequences of overthinking. The outlet thus provided stories and videos providing "'Small but Certain

Happiness'" like a piece on "Home Café Videos." Originating in South Korea, these videos "[showed] people crafting beautiful drinks for the sake of beauty." The article had a few examples of such videos but also analyzed their appeal. They were short, 60 seconds long, and journalist Jenny Zhang discussed their appeal, the history behind their popularity, and their calming effect. Offering a bright spot in a dark world, Zhang concluded:

> fantasy, like home cafes, are a rare, soothing pleasure in a world increasingly plagued by ugly realities. Much is bad, it's true. So I'll take the tiny comforts that I can, the snatches of warmth in the chill. These small but certain happinesses.

Even as Eater questioned consumer culture and some of the problematic sides of eating in America, it still allowed room for sanctuary. In other words, Eater journalists could identify the spectacle but still allow themselves the pleasures of (occasionally) indulging in it.

Overall, however, Eater was an investigative outlet and one that was highly critical of those they covered. Jenny Zhang, the same journalist that allowed herself "small but certain happiness," thus wrote a scathing piece headlined, "Food Brands Went Fully Off the Rails in 2019—and Profited From it." Exploring the intensified trend of food brands using manufactured controversy, social media stunts, sensationalism, and publicity stunts, Zhang showed that some brands had even turned nihilistic to try to convince consumers not to care about the ethics of eating. Quoting another Eater piece, Zhang argued that food brands creating personas on social media had an air of desperation as "logging onto Twitter feels like walking into a party full of simpering idiots covered in brand gear incessantly trying to one-up each other with asinine jokes and flexes." Such antics, however, seemed to work and translated into profit. The Eater

journalist then showed the absurdity of this situation and how brands themselves could use this absurdity to sell even harder. Zhang is worth quoting at length as she captures the spirit of Eater's ambivalent coverage:

> The continued consumption of these brands' products requires a certain measure of cognitive dissonance or maybe just lackadaisical acceptance, as do most seemingly simple decisions in an increasingly complicated and compromised modern world. Most of us are complicit in capitalist malfeasance in one way or another, whether it's by eating a fast-food chicken sandwich while knowing of the chain's shitty labor practices, or allowing some dumb brand stunt to obfuscate a corporate figurehead's murky past.

Brands are aware of this tension, however, and responding to a criticism about eating meat, Steak-umm tweeted:

> we (sic) all have a degree of cognitive dissonance. your smart phone and clothes were likely made with slave labor. unjust features of our economy function as universal commodity. you being self righteous (sic) about 1 perceived moral high ground you have doesn't fix systemic problems.

Zhang's analysis of this messaging revealed its twisted logic:

> Here, even a brand is positing that there is no ethical consumption under capitalism — not as a way to deter consumers, but to sedate them. It's a sign of how far we've gotten from the dream of Slow Food[23], and it makes you wonder if it ever actually had a chance. Ultimately, in the year 2019, the brands won.

Eater, a lifestyle tabloid with a critical bent dependent on advertising, promotion, commoditizing audiences, and profit, could use their indignant and astute journalists to question the very order that enabled its existence. If, as Audre Lorde argued, the master's tools cannot be used to dismantle the master's house[24] then indeed, the media brands have also won.

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[23] Slow Food is a grassroots social movement focused on local ingredients, livelihoods, and culinary traditions.

[24] The quote goes: "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change (Lorde, 2007, p. 112).

Chapter 5: Discussion, Speaking Back

All three media outlets—TVFN, *NYT*, and Eater—were products of their time, resulting from the historical development of a commercialized media sphere and the industrial-capitalist production, distribution, and consumption of food as a commodity. Each outlet also negotiated a relatively recent digital scape that exemplified liquid modernity, and each was required to constantly produce content amidst a competitive and fickle attention economy. Structurally, the circulation of commodities to realize surplus sped up, user attention was further commoditized and instrumentalized into "data," and the post-Fordist culture industry was established as a principal component to create meaning and generate surplus value. Each outlets' content thus simultaneously targeted and created a specific audience, inviting individualized viewers with the proper material and cultural resource into interconnected lifestyle networks of commodities, meanings, and sponsored messages. The branding and personification of food has only expanded in the digital realms, and all three outlets provided consumer "solutions" for food ignorance. In other words, the invitation to eat was primarily as a detached, individualized, yet dependent subject, and negotiating the food system was reduced to shopping. Intended for the well-resourced and limited to the already given, such media was for the seduced and repressed, ignoring the enabling relations and social issues inconvenient to individualized pleasure.

There were also, however, distinct differences between the outlets. This included the varying degrees and willingness to consider food within a larger social, ecological, or economic context. Variation in content and discursive practices was especially salient regarding cultural understandings of food, culture here referring to both group identity

cuisine and also the symbols and meanings surrounding eating. But if outlets differed over food culture as a strategic essentialism characterized by shared history (i.e., cuisine), they were roughly in accord about the culture of eating in America, that is, the culture of consumerism. This understanding of culture as a shared way of life (and thus shared practices, views, routines, and values) approached eating as an individual act, even if this act was enabled by others. *NYT* and Eater could thus recognize *some* of the labor that went into food, but ultimately limited their invitations and subject positionings to those already resourced and properly socialized into commodity culture. While these journalists were embedded in a late modern consumer society and media consultants might say they were simply "giving people what they want" or "meeting audiences where they are," such fated language ignores the dialectical and discursive nature of identity work and absolves journalists of their role in engendering social deliberation, comprehensively informing citizens, and otherwise facilitating a never-finished public sphere. Thus, regardless of nuance, such journalism lacks the imagination to think outside or counter to the status quo and results in novel but no less problematic forms of commodity fetishism.

These new forms of fetishizing commodities, furthermore, provide a legitimacy to one's consumer choices, justifying consumer culture and one's behaviors as such actions were now considered more informed. Commodity fetishism has thus shifted to different aspects of food (e.g., from Tabasco's branded product packaging to happy factory workers) and still remains an act where individuals are presented partial understandings as a complete whole. Some food scholars have suggested embracing the commodity fetish and harnessing it toward more worthy causes (Crook & Crang, 1996). This is a tactic with tangible merit and is exemplified in the findings section of this current project,

various food sections of the legacy media, and known philosophies like veganism. A similar logic is also at work in food-based social movements like Slow Food, the Agriculture Justice Project, and Social Generation. This approach reduces the meaning of food via a strategic essentialism, making social justice, local livelihoods, or community sovereignty the master signifier around which food discourse—its articulations and legitimations—is organized.

Under the incentives, editorial priorities, and routines of digital-commercial media, however, the logic of individualized consumption remains the primary subject position for food media. While the treatment of audiences as consumers is valid given the current state of society and such an audience's ability to relate to a consumer role, such a position is only one option among many and limits an eater's imagination. In such an invitation, human omnivores exchange questioning for ignorance, losing the sovereignty to answer their own dilemmas. While nearly all Americans rely on the market for obtaining food (including the farmers that grow it), approaching food as primarily a commodity effectively depoliticizes food, obscuring the material-semiotic elements that enable eating. Even as audiences are potentially more informed about where their food comes from, who has made it, or its cultural history, they are still subject to the power imbalances of a concentrated industrial food system and digitized attention economy, institutions that willingly offer new forms of commodity fetishism to keep their basic structures intact.

So long as food and media remain commodities organized by capitalist relations—and thus subject to the compulsory logics of constant quantitative growth and the creation of surplus value through externalities, exploitation, and expropriation—food

sovereignty will remain limited. Invitations to individualized consumption are the best media can offer, even as some outlets investigate and report a larger world of eating. Today's mediascape thus needs a new, emergent form of food journalism, one capable of treating audiences as both community members and embedded individual eaters. Drawing on the residual elements of legacy media and liberalism's most commendable attributes, such media would negotiate individual experience as it is socially situated, explicating the personal as political and vice versa. The current moment thus requires a feminist food journalism, one capable of speaking back to liberal assumptions, countering neoliberal logic, and offering substantive values for the cultivation of care.

Late Modern Food Media's Invitations to Eat

While there was significant overlap in the overall logic, each outlet treated food in their own way and positioned subjects to approach eating in ways unique to a particular idiom. TVFN treated food as a blank slate, as a commodity without the burden of history and thus infinitely malleable for individual use. In *NYT*, food was an aesthetic experience, connected to a larger human and thus symbolic order. For Eater, food was a problematic pleasure, capable of enhancing life and providing a livelihood, but also fraught with the injustices of late modern social construction. Thus, while each outlet had varying degrees of reflexivity and instrumental use, the individualized experience of eating as a lifestyle dictated the orientation of the eating imagination and interpellated food subjects limited by consumer choice.

This individualization of eating was accompanied by the informal authority of populism as each outlet played role of accessible expert. Information and guidance on food was not provided by an elitist authority, but instead came from the position of

knowledgeable friend. TVFN had the closest positioning to a traditionally elitist discourse, self-promoting its own expertise and calling itself a cooking school. While this echoed back to harkened back to the smugness of 19th century commercialized news (see Chapter 3), TVFN's mavens were affable celebrities, imparting wisdom with a jovial charisma and personability. TVFN article writers and the language of the website itself were also highly personable, using intimate first and second person as well as non-celebrity "staff" members for relatability.

NYT, the organization most associated with historically taking an elitist conception of journalistic roles, took an even more casual approach to their authority. Not flawless, charismatic celebrities or snobbish gastronomes, *Times* journalists showed their vulnerabilities and expressed their insecurities. Videos did not edit out all of the mistakes and narratives were self-deprecating as food writers embraced their nerdiness and conveyed a sometimes awkward relatability. Newsletters and articles expressed a shared sense of struggle, regaling audiences with personal tales of the trials and tribulations of everyday life. *Times* journalists were excellent writers, sometimes poetic masters, and they could match these skills to a well-developed and impeccable sense of taste. But they were seemingly just like you, positioning readers as confidants and earning the audiences trust through friendly advice and a non-imposing style of communication.

Eater epitomized the casual authority that characterizes much of the online world including the practices of social influencers, digital magazines, lifestyle newsletters, social media, and blogs. Eater's editorials, even its outrage, came from a place of playfulness and anti-elitist irreverence. Not taking itself too seriously, articles of critical self-reflection could use click-bait like headlines or ironically point out the absurdity of

food media and its own practices. Most explicitly, Eater's overall tone of cynicism hedged its claims to formal authority, as its condemnation of hierarchy extended to its own views. Thus, with consumerism accepted as an inevitability, all three outlets' invited audiences to eat as already-formed customers. As presented, food media did not have the authority to change their mind or the way things were and would thus merely, even disinterestedly, offer guidance, criticism, and advice.

Through consumer orientations, populist authority, and their own particular lifestyle idioms, TVFN, *NYT*, and Eater furthered the aestheticization of everyday life. All three offered consumer solutions (with varying degrees of insistence), from TVFN's buy this for a better life, to *NYT*'s buy this as a taste revelation, to Eater's buy this if you are a true foodie. All three invited audiences to eat at particular restaurants, not through a traditionally elitist critique of evaluation and judgement, but simply because they were delicious. Encouraging aestheticization attainable to the middle class, the beauty of such modest but satisfying eating could also offer something more humbly quotidian and accessible. All three also offered food and its concomitant gadgets, products, and experiences as a triumph of sleek design or the height of convenience, taste, and quality. The "problem" of eating could thus be solved with the correct purchase, not just to alleviate modern pressures, but to build a better economy, a better world, a better you. Life is beautiful, and it's even more beautiful with an artisanal pizza peel, specialty coffee mug, or every meal being an artistic experience.

The aestheticization of everyday life through informal authority and a populist approach was not presented as a contradiction in values, even though aesthetics implies discerning hierarchy and making judgment. On the contrary, outlets could make populist

appeals to avoid questions or debates about what actually constituted "good" food while appealing to a seemingly innate understanding of the delicious and good. TVFN thus avoided moralizing about healthy food and used what was current, popular, and trending as an orienting criteria for quality. *NYT* took a light touch when discussing eating less meat for environmental reasons, and oriented questions around climate change with its consequences for consumers. Eater could gloss over a global supply chain of chili peppers and talk to the African American factory worker proud of his work. In our current consumer culture, populism, aesthetics, and the good life can coexist, an uncanny combination that legitimates desires without questioning their causes, consequences, or context.

The populist aestheticization of everyday life could also be utilized for various forms of advocacy. *NYT* did not have to remind readers in every article or newsletter that eating meat used more resources than consuming plants. Instead, they could artfully present vegetarian food as enticing comfort food, seamlessly and consistently offering a primarily plant-based menu as a week's worth of recipes. Eater offered the supposedly soul-satisfying nature of specific foods and places to advocate for both particular restaurants and outsourced eating in general. TVFN, on the other hand, advocated most strongly for the self, telling home cooks how to "win" at food, impress others, keep up with trends, and otherwise display shopping, culinary, and display-based prowess. The populist legitimations for incorporating a vague and undertheorized notion of aesthetics into more realms of life thus advocated for a particular stance while claiming it was not taking anything that seriously. Offering casual commitments, playful messaging, and

informal authority, this aestheticization was a new disciplined behavior and compulsory social expectation presented as a matter of individual choice.

The disdain for so-called "elitist" experts and the veneration of choice aligns with neoliberal assaults on the state and inconvenience science. Such views also match neoliberalism's sovereign consumer epistemology. While food media outlets have different intentions than the class-based actors actively implementing neoliberal policies, their embeddedness in our historical episteme means they use and recreate the dominant limitations of our time.

The United States was born in rebellion against the entitled elites of aristocracy and royalty of a strong British state. It immediately experienced Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democratization, political and social movements that again favored the "common man." The rugged individualism of pioneer culture, a populist penny press, and mass political movements defined the 19th century. While Progressives of the early 20th century implemented the "elite" status of science in state management, this was done in the name of supposed social reform and the everyday person's best interest. FDR's New Deal did the same as government expertise was used to support all of society (including the "non-elites") struggling in the Great Depression. But world wars, continuing social inequality, and an empty consumerism proved too much for some to continue believing in the populist-elite social contract. The counterculture movements of the 1960s cemented the residual forms of mistrust in authority and engendered an emergent form of questioning elites, anything popular, and essentially all forms of power.

The classist neoliberal backlash doubled down on the mistrust of the state, looking to strip it of its social legitimacy while maintaining its crucial role in the

accumulation of capital. This was again supposedly done for everyone's best interests, as neoliberal proponents claimed there was no class warfare, and that the invisible hand of unquestioned self-interest created the best of all possible worlds. Here was the consumer utopia of the 1930s-1960s repackaged, scrubbed of social spending by the state. Such social programs, neoliberals contend, was a main reason that liberalism had failed. With government out of the way of pleasure and experts chastised for ruining an individual's "freedom" to live a good life, neoliberal governance asks nothing from its consumer-citizens except an unquestioning acceptance of the socioeconomic hierarchy. Built on being fun and to avoid the accusation of impeding pleasure, the culture industry of commercial media must match the low stakes, low accountability of the dominant political-economic epistemology. Even if, like Eater, they channeled the counterculture anti-consumerism of the 1960s, such criticisms and calls to responsibility were hedged as a matter of personal choice. Look at these injustices, such media opined; the social order and world must be changed; well, if you want to. And even then, maybe not. Thus, in a neoliberal order with its co-constituting commercial media, populism is left incomplete, sublimated towards exacerbating pre-existing social inequalities and in support of economic elites.

This political-economic agenda is not accepted by mere "dupes" who act against their own best interests. Instead, neoliberal values and practices are a compulsory necessity in a seemingly depoliticized world that assumes the perfection of a consumer order. Even as Eater, the most skeptical outlet, pushed back and exposed the absurdity of consumerism's logic, its journalists were defeatist, resigned to apparently "just the way things are." Critical headlines were sandwiched between entries using the lifestyle

language of consumer solutions. And the advertisements, stories-cum-brand promotions, and positioning of readers as consumers who could be confident in their choices all hedged, if not entirely counteracted, any challenges to commodified leisure. In all three outlets, an unyielding consumer order was assumed, its inevitably presupposed, and its correctness endorsed. This alignment with a neoliberal worldview was not an actively made choice or deceitful trick. Instead, it was an unacknowledged prerequisite for participating in an attention economy, generating surplus value, and meeting the resulting audience-subject where they were targeted and assumed to be. Solutions to neoliberal problems thus often contain the same logic that engendered issues in the first place (Allen & Guthman, 2006), while adopting a neoliberal subjectivity is a compulsion that individuals help co-create (Hilgers, 2013).

NYT, a legacy media outlet that has long prided its objectivity and independence from special interests, could thus reaffirm the predetermined nature of the consumer order in articles regarding climate change. Not counting cooking columnist discourse on eating less meat, three articles explicitly discussed humanity's relationship with the planet. Two addressed climate change and its effects on consumer access. The third, the aforementioned article on the New Mexico Hatch chile, also discussed climate change's challenges to farmers who could potentially lose their livelihoods. This loss of livelihood would be devasting to individuals, and *NYT* rightfully pointed out the magnitude of the situation. But these individuals were reduced to their role as commodity producers without considering the larger political economy and ecological context of their work. In other words, it did not make a difference to *NYT* whether a farmer was struggling to realize profit because tastes had changed, distributors were charging farmers higher rates,

or because unsustainable human activities made growing in previously fruitful regions impossible. This was irrelevant because production and having a job was an end in itself.

In every other article, however, consumer practices were also ends in themselves in need of no justification besides the delicious. The *Times* could thus isolate and treat both ends of the economic process without ever linking the producer and consumer, two roles that only exist because of each other (i.e., as a prerequisite for their existence, they co-constitute one another). Alienating the two and alternatively considering each side, the *Times* showed that the worst of both worlds was anything that meant less economic activity. Any decrease in production or consumption, regardless of why, was considered harmful. As unrelated goods in their own right, there was no need to question the commodity-surplus relationship, the entitlements of consumerism, or the dependencies of market production and procurement. This confirmation and legitimation of the consumer view is all the more consequential as climate and the human impact on the environment are topics especially primed for thinking outside and counter to consumerism.

Invitations into consumer society were effortless, as each outlet played consumer guide without difficulty or ethical qualms. TVFN, *NYT*, and Eater all offered shopping guidance and product recommendations. Like the earliest newspapers in the Americas, did it even matter if it was paid content? Why separate out product promotion when such information in an age of consumption is newsworthy nonetheless? Audiences, of course, would not want product reviewers to lie for money, and Eater and *NYT*'s ethics statements assured readers that gifts and sponsorships did not influence editorial content. This stance on journalistic independence acted as reason to trust a food writer's opinion. If a journalist was not directly benefitting from mentioning Target, then Eater's guide to

holiday shopping that told readers to buy everything at Target was just an honest recommendation. The Eater reporter just "genuinely" bought everything at Target, so Christmas gifts were no different. A journalistic statement of ethics could reassure the audience that a reporter really did consider themselves a "Target person." Their advice came from being a fan of the store, not some endorsement for money. The reporter and outlet were thus authentic and simply made recommendations in good faith based on what they themselves did. This is a humanized endorsement, not some cold corporate entity throwing cash at an advertisement. Eater, TVFN, *NYT* and their chosen surrogates were thus fellow travelers in the rough modern world, a place where we could all use a little help shopping. Without need for propaganda or ideological "brainwashing," these outlets painlessly interpellated audiences into consumer society, their identity as shoppers both presumed and overdetermined.

In such a world, consumer culture was just the way things are, not a matter of choice and certainly not the product of historical development. Media outlets could thus uncontroversially and implicitly claim that the market was necessary for survival, so readers should just let outlets blend in a commercial role and allow them to sell. You have to buy things anyway, the outlets implied, so why not listen to our professional opinions that are ethical, heartfelt, and not (directly) paid for. Like the reading notices of the 19th century press or the native advertising of digital media, editorial content and commercial promotion were seamlessly intertwined, accepted as an inevitability of the status quo. Journalistic ethics and routines could thus be used to legitimize consumerism.

Historically, Americans were taught how to be consumers, transforming from a puritan society of thrift to a consumer society. Successive generations took items once

considered "luxuries" as "necessities," and were increasingly deskilled as they relied more on commodities and market exchange. Post-war, the entire American social order was oriented toward increasing the circulation of capital in commodity exchange, and social goals and aspirations were quantified. Each generation since is enculturated into an amoral order, one that socializes individuals through an egocentric consumerist mindset increasingly applied to more aspects of life. The reification of "the economy" and the fetishization of money and abstract value thus shape both the socioeconomic order and the embodied subjectivities that negotiate such an integrated lifestyle.

While celebratory cultural studies or postmodern scholars can argue that commodities provide a means to perform identity, assert the self, or what have you, this understanding of self-creation fails to question the historically contingent nature of this process and how individuals are always-already formed before making a choice on the market. The origins of desire, decision-making schema, other member resources are ignored, as are the enabling relations of care so vital to individuals and systems of material production. Subjects are thus interpellated into an unthinking relationship with commodities and the world, a position that legitimizes a limited understanding of "self" and what is good or desirable. Not dupes or heroes, consumers are incentivized to primarily consider their already-formed choosing and using selves.

Knowing the history of the taco and the complexities of Mexican cuisines does not make you a better person. Neither does knowing the name of your chicken or the specific farm it was reared. But mindlessly eating an appropriated form of a chicken taco enables you to fetishize food and ignore labor, culture, and history. Food journalists should be mindful of their roles as cultural intermediaries and the hegemonic role they

play in effortlessly inviting audiences into an assumed consumer culture. So-called service journalism does not just help consumers and clients, it also serves the status-quo, legitimizing the current relationships of commodity production, surplus value appropriation, and the distribution of socially generated wealth.

The point of such self-reflexivity is not to either celebrate or condemn consumer culture. Such either/or thinking is not useful in social criticism or the active negotiations of everyday life. But too often, lifestyle journalism has little to do with actual living, becoming a glossy world of consumer-only subject positions. Audiences, whether through subscriptions or the attention economy (or both), are paying media outlets so they *don't* have to think about labor, the environment, supply chains, other people, etc. Or, human interest stories on a farmer, factory worker, successful chef, or artisanal baker are presented as adequate knowledge and another reason to live one's best life through consumption. Such reductive understandings of food, both exemplified and countered by Eater in this study, are at best misleading. Food journalists, in service to a public as well as individual consumers, should instead embrace the productive tensions and limitations of consumerism. This would mean investigating consumerism's logic, recognizing its usefulness, and allowing that there is no final answer that justifies or excuses all behaviors, relationships, and processes.

Food media—in providing simplified recipes like TVFN, the edible odes of *NYT,* or the investigative pieces of Eater—can empower audiences, equipping them with the knowledge, confidence, and instruction to complete shopping, cooking, or eating tasks. But such forms of empowerment come with their own forms of limitations, accepting presuppositions, excluding by design, and unthinkingly reproducing existing reductions

in meaning. Such misinformation can influence consumers while seeming to respond to what consumers want (Jaffe & Gertler, 2006). The stereotypes and prepackaged food of TVFN, for example, could provide an easily navigable world of eating choices. But such choices were always structured according to the neoliberal logic of capitalist commodity consumption. While this could genuinely help those made vulnerable in the late modern context (i.e., flexible individuals with precarious labor positions), it also recreated the very logic that made them vulnerable in the first place.

Under the guise of giving people "what they want," such content could exclusively focus on the bright side of life, and ignore the exploitation, externalities, and negative consequences of commodified food. Thus, the limited sense of empowerment provided by media outlets comes at the price of isolation, ignorance, and accepting dependency and extra-human discipline as a legitimate form of "freedom." Critical food scholars, drawing on the work of Julie Guthman, characterized the late modern foodscape as one in which, "Post-Fordist possibilities are re-constituted in essentially Fordist structures that fail to challenge relations of power and control" (Jaffe & Gertler, 2006, p. 158). A more historical version of Audre Lorde's (2007) metaphor of the master's tools inability to dismantle the master's house, we see that enabling individuals and celebrating their free consumer choices does not mean the structural limitations of such choices are overcome or surpassed.

Food journalists must thus properly acquaint themselves with the biological, political-economic, social, and cultural systems of food and eating in order to avoid recreating structurally induced ignorance, exclusions, inequalities, and general limitations. While this may seem a lot to ask, many agricultural journalists set a good

example, and we should allow food journalists the time and resources to embrace the complexity of their beat. When food media assumes consumer culture and only invite audiences as individualized, private eaters they are no longer addressing the entangled and contingent world of an eating public. Media practitioners must thus decide if they seek to serve a *demos*—the common people considered as a whole—or an *idios*—the private individual without concern beyond the self. Because food is the material-semiotic consequence of history, the ecosystem, and the labor of others, food journalists should create content for a *demos*[25]. Being embodied eaters that experience the world as individual subjects, however, the *idios* is not inherently negative or to be shunned from the food beat. But to truly enable the individual and ensure their sovereignty (not just their freedom of consumer choice), food journalism must investigate and consider the material and social connections that feed democracy (*demos* and *kratos*, literally "people's power").

Food media's reliance on consumerism and neo/liberal notions of individualized choice inhibits the exercise of freedom and makes people less sovereign while offering a friendly face. While the Fordist social contract and liberalism of legacy media journalism offered a clear stance of expert authority and leadership, consumer-friendly capitalism proffered an informal authority that appealed to the desires of the chooser. The traditional journalism and social order of the 20th century has thus been considered paternalistic, while the neoliberal social order and digital media ingratiates itself with target audiences and individuals. The competing voices of the late modern mediascape must thus command attention and flatter audiences. They must seduce and entice so that the chooser

[25] Ideally, a *demoi* where the concept of "the people" is not limited to a nation-state or political unit but across border and political divides (Bohman, 2007).

appears as their own authority (Bauman, 2000). Such an approach is a reorientation from journalism, a turn away from primarily serving an entangled public and justifying this stance with concepts like "engagement" and the need to commodify news. Media's move towards purely egocentric pleasure impedes sovereignty by failing to notice how individuals are enabled (in this case, to eat). Far from being a killjoy or believing consumers should not enjoy themselves, I argue this shortcoming limits pleasure. The commodification of news and food limits the potential of a more holistic enjoyment of eating and sublimates one's knowledge. Food tastes better when one is knowledgeable of its socioecological embeddedness (Berry, 1999). With consumer-induced ignorance, individuals are simply pandered to and less in control.

In all of this, it is not the ideologically driven media practitioner that purposeful reproduces neoliberal principles and intentionally delivers undemocratic, command and flatter content. Instead, there are structural and historical relationships that result in media's *neoliberalization* (Phelan, 2014), such as the commercialization of media, the development of journalistic routines, the profit-oriented affordances of technology, and a changing social contract of governance. While conversations about individual or personal responsibility for journalists and media makers can certainly be worthwhile, for current purposes it is important to see that the journalists and content producers for TVFN, *NYT*, and Eater did their jobs well, at least according to the modus operandi and brief of each outlet. The issue is thus about the entire social order and not just a question of some distinct, isolated entity called *the* media.

In the United States, the transformation from Puritan self-restraint to greed-is-good hedonism occurred via a changing episteme and subject orientation. As

quantification and market values replaced God's judgement and man's salvation, production, consumption, and the discipline of the market became the highest good. Consequently, commodity consumption—their use and display—became a primary mode of self-expression and increasingly a language or sign system to categorize others. Consumer culture thus became its own moral order as redemption for one's actions were found in return on investments, the wealth one "generated," and the proper use of money on the correct status markers and utilitarian goods.

A morality based on markets, however, is less solid, permanent, and fixed than one built on the divine, and the moral mode of consumerism is more flexible and liquid. The question of ethical behavior becomes moot as generating and appropriating surplus value is the only criteria for evaluation. Money, now an end in-itself, is the only moral measure, and having it means one is worthy and "good" while a lack of it means one is irresponsible, lazy, or redundant. In a consumer society (as opposed to a society of Fordist producers), the traditional antagonism between owner and worker is replaced by what some sociologists call, the *seduced* and the *repressed* (Bauman, 1998, 1992, 2007). Such language reflects the compulsory nature of the consumer moral order as individuals have little choice but to consume in the matter society dictates, proper consumption being a condition of membership for even civil society. The terms also reflect the hegemonic appeals of consumerism. While the repressed are so-called because they lack the means to properly participate in consumer culture, it does not mean they do not strive and aspire to its call. In this manner, even the marginalized and repressed can be seduced by consumer society's logic. For the current project, it is plain to see that all three outlets are seduced and invite audiences into a consumerist mindset. Most noteworthy, however, is

how the seduced and repressed operate not as an antagonism but in tandem to ensure seduction and acquiescence. Eater's audience, for example, can adapt the stance of repressed and underpaid restaurant staff or lament the absurdities of marketing and the Food Establishment. But simultaneously, Eater promotes restaurants, brands, and the overall act of consuming food originating from outside the home (as a commodity). Audiences are thus able to feel both seduced *and* repressed, craving the validations of commodity culture and appeasing guilt through marginalized (but not oppositional or counter) views. With consumer choices justified, an Eater reader can participate in and reproduce consumer society, while claiming to have done their due diligence, negotiating and criticizing "the system" as best an individual can.

The amorality of late modernity, its flexibility and liquid nature, can also be seen in current conceptions of self-identity. The stable identities allotted under Fordist social relations (e.g., working at the same company for one's entire career) are increasingly rare, and society has transitioned from one of *pilgrims* seeking long-lasting meaning to one of *tourists* seeking novelty and low-stakes fascination (Bauman, 1996). All three food media outlets offered a high turnover of food options and cuisines, using global restaurants or recipes to offer an endless and fleeting experience of eating. All three thus offered a wide range of experiences and cultural exposure but also contributed to the rootlessness of an eating identity, a diet appropriate for the entrepreneurial self and digital citizens no longer bound by place.

In neoliberal thinking, the sovereign consumer's freedom to buy what one can afford is the ultimate and only legitimate form of freedom. The late modern individual is thus condemned to such "freedom" (the freedom to select amongst the given) and faces

pressures to build their identities through what they buy. Alienated on the side of production (Marx, 1983), people were equally individualized in the realm of consumption and detached from social relationships (Bauman, 1988). TVFN, *NYT*, and Eater thus offered themselves as "guides" through the wonderland of consumer choices. Sociologists and cultural studies scholars have characterized this as a reflexive process, where individuals build identities through self-narration and reflecting on the stories they tell about themselves. In this manner, identity is *post-traditional*, something voluntarily chosen and stylized, not merely dictated from convention. While such thinking fetishized choice and missed the *re-traditionalization* of previous inequalities (e.g., class, gender, and race limitations), the prioritization of individual choice and detachment of identity from traditional norms gave a renewed meaning to lifestyle media. It is now a primary institution of identity work and, as a field driven by the circulation and accumulation of capital, it provides evermore content to feed the attention economy and generate surplus value. Like the commercialization of news in the 19th century where soft news was used to appease advertisers during a "slow" news day, digital media provides its own forms of planned obsolescence and daily renewal. Such content reminds audiences of their insecure, fluid position and appeals to the satisfaction of egocentric desire as a solution to such problems.

Even as *NYT* or Eater offered reflections and investigations into the relationships that constituted food, all three outlets acted a digitized release of desire (Kozinets, et al., 2016), inviting audiences to contemplate individualized pleasure, actively crave new experiences, and increase their passion for consumption. No longer limited to the physical or time constraints of food seasonality, print media, or network television,

digital food outlets can stimulate and sustain lifestyle networks of desire in virtual spaces around the clock. This consumerist view, articulated with varying degrees of legitimizing reflexivity, was tailored for those already resourced with "disposable" income. It thus enabled individualism (identity work) for some and did not consider the enabling individuals outside the consumer-enhancing narrative. Farmers, truck drivers, food processors, immigrant workers, or any non-romanticized, non-product enhancing supply chain labor is thus eliminated from the discourse. Also out of mind are global farmers harmed by trade and food policy, local populations that pay for the externalities of capitalist food production, and everyone currently going hungry because food is treated as a competitive commodity and not a common good. These outlets thus invited audiences into an incomplete form of identity work, one that cultivated and built on desire through the exclusion of those that enabled it.

Like television, digital media's relative accessibility and transcendence of time and space constraints meant such content was not limited to those that could actually afford to purchase the necessary commodities. These outlets are a form of aspirational media (Adema, 2000), manufacturing desire, offering vicarious experiences, and attempting to *seduce* viewers into the consumer order regardless of income, class, or gender. Like commercialized news, this was rationalized desire, one that offered a predictable but ever-novel product. Exploiting the omnivore's dilemma and humanity's infinite creativity to answer it, commercial food media is a never ending well of appetite stimulation, an ideal institution for the attention economy. Actually eating the food on offer is irrelevant as desiring itself becomes part of the pleasure. Individuals hungering for something delicious and media offering a promise of aesthetic joy are the products in

this attention economy, with audiences sold to advertisers, data companies, and sister sites. These outlets thus offer a commodification of desire and a simulation of hunger for which there is no corresponding food to satisfy.

Such food media points to the ambivalence inherent in lifestyle and service journalism where journalists continually point out problems in order to solve them. Audiences are made to feel insecure so media makers can offer security. Lifestyle content perpetually reminds audiences what they are lacking and cultivates desires. Even as an individual might personally partake in what's offered, lifestyle media has already moved on to other problems, deficiencies, and sources of want. As the founders of the Frankfurt School put it, "The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises…the diner must be satisfied with the menu" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002, p. 111). In late modern media and the attention economy, the packaging of food is perfected while its distribution and nourishment are rendered irrelevant.

TVFN, *NYT*, and Eater offered commodified food and communication by limiting the discourse of food in a manner that targeted and created a specific, well-resourced (or aspirational) audience. This audience, its attention and behavioral data, was then sold to other commercial entities seeking to generate surplus value via capitalistic logic (i.e., exploitation, externalities, expropriation) thus commodifying the audience and directing the whole endeavor towards reproducing and growing consumer society. Despite the real differences in questioning consumer culture, recognizing history, or investigating restaurant labor practices, all three outlets were beholden to the same logic of audience "engagement" and employed their own versions of a *useful fetish*. TVFN, for example,

peddled in culturally blind or reductive stereotypes, while such understandings were meant to empower an unencumbered audience. Food and cuisine were thus treated as a blank slate, an empty commodity, for audiences to build whatever meanings they needed. Stereotypes were thus meant to *serve* audiences (service journalism) allowing them ignorance and providing a safe, familiar, and well-contained world of appropriation and use. *NYT* fetishized businesses and brands by personifying capital accumulation and equating consumer culture with human-interest stories. In this world, business owners and investors were heroes delivering deliciousness to the grateful masses. Audiences with the time and money could pay so they would *not have to think* about the consequences and externalities of their behavior, or any forms of labor, time, and exploitation in the production and circulation of commodities. Eater could also put a human face on consumer society while simultaneously making populist appeals to restaurant staff, factory workers, and some elements of the traditional working class. Accompanied by content characterized by critique and cynicism, such fetishes legitimized current hierarchies, social relationships, and systems of exchange. Deviating from classical liberal notions of a public, all three outlets addressed pure consumers or consumer-citizens, limited by a lens of exclusive self-interest.

The unimaginative limitations of consumer-citizens and concomitant focus on "the bright side of life," or the critique of commercial logic that simultaneously legitimated its social practices, illustrates the individualization of food media audiences. An overall way of life—commodity-based capitalism—was established and accepted. The only variation available was the "style" or lifestyle one was going to use to pursue such life. Individuals were depoliticized as this style was presented as a matter of

consumer choice, an integrated habitus that came with a network of commodities. Individuals could thus choose and change lifestyles but not society itself. This was a turn away from politics, from deliberation and collective solutions, as the consumer took precedence *over* the citizen. In the neoliberal order, being a consumer *and* citizen was impossible as individualized consumer choices were the only legitimate form of action. Such an arrangement meant an empty, formal democratization without substance, attempting to empower the individual without first emancipating the subject. Neoliberalism—and its concomitant socioeconomic organization and media—thus "empowers" individuals who already have resources, condemns those without, and designs a system which accelerates resource inequality (IMF External Relations Department, 2016). Such digital media interpellates an unconnected network of isolated, desiring machines, not a co-constituting assemblage of embedded eaters. Ethics, the deliberation of inclusive flourishing and the good life, are exchanged for a *micro-ethics* of individual problems (Thompson, 2012), and such limited notions of individual choice do not translate to institutional freedom, social justice, or even individual sovereignty.

Neoliberal notions of freedom are thus ultimately empty and consist of the freedom to ignore, to be ignorant, and to warp one's own sense of reality to pursue whims and defensively protect one's delicate ego. Even seemingly progressive outlets like Eater or certain aspects of NYT and their exploration of cultural connections are limited by this illiberal adoption of liberal thinking. Ahistorical by design, this worldview sees decontextualized individuals, markets, firms, and a pro-corporate state as the ideal social order. In the U.S., and as a residual notion of classical liberalism, this arrangement is seen as natural and balanced. It is believed to always self-correct toward equilibrium, as long

as everyone follows the rules. Freedom thus becomes a compulsion to shop, to enjoy, to seek egocentric pleasure, but also to keep up with trends, to stay ahead of trends, to socially win, to not question the correctness of fetishized markets, and otherwise conform to the dictates of an outwardly facing entrepreneurial self. In media*, target markets* replace notions of a contested *public* as democracy is abandoned for catering to the wealthy and well-resourced. Citizen groups are replaced by focus groups as the common destiny of national or global belonging dissolve into feeding the dreams of desirable demographics. Americans escaped the divine right of kings only to be subject to the divine right of capital. Far from sovereign, such individuals are utterly dependent, trapped in their own iron cages with bars fashioned from manufactured desires and the ever-increasing drives of society-by-accumulation.

The transition from liberal consumer capitalism to a neoliberal order that decontextualized and elevated markets while undermining previous notions of social welfare, community, and solidarity was a quiet revolution and one seemingly without politics (Hilgers, 2013). American society was continuously individualized as subjects were interpellated to disregard the rest of the world and work only for one's family, putting themselves and their immediate kin into defensive bubbles and solely focusing on getting what they were entitled to and supposedly deserved. Fordist discipline and work ethic persisted while the other side of the bargain—an adequate wage, lifelong employment, the public management of externalities—melted into notions of flexibility and the priority of capital. Instead of accepting workforce and social discipline for the betterment of one's family and nation, individuals were expected to accept the dictates of capitalist accumulation, thus embracing exploitation, externalities, and expropriation to

care *solely* for one's family and the continued existence of the objectively correct social relations of capitalism.

Since the mass commodification of food in the 19th century, food has increasingly been mediated. As the origins and control over food was made more distant, marketers and distributors have filled ignorance and loss of sovereignty with branding and personalization. State institutions added their own mediated messages regarding health and nutrition, as well as basic rules regarding the management of risk and public safety under industrialized eating (e.g., pure food laws, truth-in labeling, sanitary regulations, etc.). Lifestyle journalism and eventually blogs, influencers, and the mechanisms of social media added another layer of "private" pleasure and social pressure, drawing on elements from previous institutional discourses and mixing and matching them to offer both dictates and advice on "proper" eating. Cost and convenience were promoted by the first group, a healthy workforce by the second, and care for one's family as well as socially winning and being "cool" (i.e., having symbolic capital) were prioritized by this last group. While commercial media has managed the odd story holding the food system accountable to a public, in a competitive environment and economically strapped industry, lifestyle journalism proved a financial benefit and branding opportunity (Kristensen & From, 2012), and outlets responded with pleasurable content targeting individuals. But given our current circumstances, should foodies determine such a large part of the national food discourse?

Late modern commercial media, now equipped with on-demand digital networks, create target audiences and cultivate the interests of well-resourced or "desirable" demographics. This does not result in a Habermasian public sphere free from inequities

and intended to deliberate the common good. While today's media has the potential to create a caring, intimate public, the commercial imperative, class position, and gourmet interests of foodie journalists often challenge and set definitive limits on such care potential. It seems foodie journalists are too invested, interpellated, and enamored by eating and the Food Establishment to maintain the critical distance necessary to holistically consider food for the eating public. This does not have to be a structural limitation so long as journalists remain self-reflexive. With food—as with lifestyle journalism and human-interest stories—critical distance is not always desirable and can quickly alienate audiences in what should otherwise be a personal, subjective, and utterly human experience. Food writing should inspire, connect, and awaken something in people that only art and literature can. But without curiosity, without the historical and sociological imagination required for critical thinking, even the most uplifting and beautiful prose is nothing but mere gluttony and indulgence. This is a difficult line to walk, much harder than objective "straight" reporting of hard news. Food journalism needs to let people in, to show them the cultural, physiological, and ecological connections of food. But so too does it require clarity and a reflection on context and appetite. Otherwise, it quickly devolves, becoming a "slave to the passions" and all too easily sublimated towards unthinking, uncaring neoliberal ends. The fetishized freedom to consume only makes people more susceptible to other forms of non-freedom (influence, control, limitations, etc.), and food journalists must empower individuals and help restore their sovereignty through more substantive means.

Talking about and eating food can be a pleasurable experience, helping individuals understand their embeddedness in complex systems and assemblages and

viscerally experiencing the material manifestations of one's history, ecology, and cultural influence. Eating can be an embodied joy, providing a heightened sense of one's humanity, vitality, and the animating forces that constitute our particular ways of life. Discourses on dining, however, can also enable pleasure through ignorance, and people can also enjoy eating through fetishizing food and ignoring its animating history, relationships, and context. Therefore, today's digital audience and entangled public needs an ecofeminist form of food journalism, one capable of making connections. Holistically considering context, such media engenders care and knows that such work is never done.

Ecofeminist food journalism, however, does not simply recycle liberal notions of individual duty, responsibility, and the active citizen. These values are reworked and situated within a co-constituting community while pleasure is also rearticulated in a more comprehensive manner. Like the intimate public sphere of the women's pages, ecofeminist food journalism is also mindful of the vulnerabilities and pressures of now late modernity. Audiences also need a sense of sanctuary, especially those already stretched thin and who "just want to eat." But this right to sanctuary does not result in a permanent vacation characterized by ignorance and egocentric fetish. Unlike much food media, such journalism avoids this perniciously inaccurate and harmful view of life, the world, and one's place in it. Instead, an ecofeminist food journalism understands that fetishized pleasure robs its viewers of sovereignty and agency, making them more susceptible to exploitation and hindering their ability to negotiate change, disruption, or the consequences of contingency. Eaters have more individual control and food can taste that much better when an eater is aware of its (and thus their) socioecological embeddedness.

This criticism of pure infotainment is thus not some elitist charge moralizing and condemning people's chosen media, far from it. Accessible, engaging, aesthetically pleasing, and otherwise fun media can indeed capture and coax out the joys of what it means to be a human. Food is an ubiquitous and fairly universal (though uneven) pleasure in the late modern world. This immanent critique holds that an exclusively egocentric view of amusement and information actually limits and impairs the self; it is thus an egocentric argument for the importance of understanding relationships, causes, and consequences outside the immediate purview of the self-interested individual. In other words, caring about others is in everyone's best self-interest.

When considering food journalism, individuals can thus ask themselves if they want a media system that works on their behalf or one that works solely for commercial interests. Late modern lifestyle media has too often employed individualizing and fetishized understandings of pleasure which impedes sovereignty, compartmentalizes otherwise connected parts of the world, eliminates individuals from consideration, subjugates people to social pressures, reminds audiences of their shortcomings, stimulates desire without chance of satisfaction, and otherwise keeps people dependent on an order where they themselves are vulnerable and dispensable. In other words, such media attempts to discipline audiences while portraying a world of meritocracy and choice. This formal idea of freedom lacks substance and exposes the inadequacies of the consumer-citizen, a subject only able to choose amongst the strictures of the already given. The consumer-citizen thus resembles a rat in a maze, free to go anywhere so long as it is in the maze[26] and perpetually ignorant of the outside world that enables the maze to exist.

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[26] This metaphor is drawn from science fiction writer Margaret Atwood. In *The Handmaid's Tale* she writes: "A rat in a maze is free to go anywhere, as long as it stays inside the maze."

The attention economy, furthermore, is indifferent whether media informs or misinforms, generates empathy or hatred, or engenders accountability or misplaced blame. Audiences should thus reject the command and flatter strategies of an economic system that encourages aggressive close-mindedness and echo chambers of an alienated self. Instead, democracy, pleasure, food, and the public/private divide can be rearticulated, shaped by an ecofeminist food journalism that prioritizes connection and care.

Constructing Culture

The invitations of late modern media are not restricted to socialization into a political-economic order but are also an enculturation into specific subjectivities, epistemologies, and ethical orientations. While the sovereign consumer provided the underlying subject position across the three outlets, Eater and *NYT* showed varying degrees of willingness to nuance or challenge this orientation. Unlike TVFN, these outlets investigated some of the cultural consequences of capitalism, creating new understandings of meaning and identity in the process. TVFN also had a distinctly different understanding and employment of cuisine, often ignoring it. Eater and *NYT*, on the other hand, embraced and investigated the history, construction, and meaning of cuisine. Such an approach represented the most useful and utopian aspects of late modern food media, harkening back to liberalism's accountability to a public while incorporating post-traditional worldviews of a liquid age.

For the most part, TVFN disembedded food from its cultural context and made eating a matter of purely personal choice and private experience. While this can be read as a familiarity or unspoken acceptance of food's cultural origins, such an erasure of cuisine also resembled a colonial mindset that employed reductive stereotypes to use

others as they saw fit. This reductive thinking now went unrecognized, and the residual elements of modern colonialism were articulated with emergent forms of post-racial, colorblind neoliberalism. As race was dismissed as a non-issue under neoliberalism—people simply being individuals making choices and allegedly rewarded on merit—so too were explicit markers of cuisine eliminated from the American diet, food being pregiven and simply a matter of individual choice. Food was a blank commodity, scrubbed clean for purely personal use then filled with meanings relating only to the consumer's desiring self. In such media, the sovereign consumer—the only valid subject position in neoliberalism—need not worry about history. They could now *other*, ideologically square, and instrumentally use cultural groups and categories while eliminating any actual people from their minds.

This is a substantial shift for TVFN who traditionally used chefs from specific ethnic and racial backgrounds as cultural capital and markers of the outlet's legitimacy. Using such POC (people of culture), TVFN presented simplified and often Americanized notions of cuisine to ease audiences into eating "foreign'" or "exotic" cuisine. This arrangement worked well with commodity culture as "ethnicity becomes spice, [a] seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (hooks, 1992, p. 21). TVFN thus commodified people and culture, racializing their chefs' bodies and dishes to exploit uninformed audiences in the attention economy and generate surplus value. Now, as this current project shows, such commodification still occurs and further aligns with neoliberal values of eliminating people from consideration and solely thinking in terms of the sovereign consumer. Human culture and the "other" are "eradicated, via exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other,

but denies the significance of that Other's history through a process of decontextualization" (hooks, p. 31). In other word, to make foreign cuisines palatable to American consumers TVFN eliminated "circumstances conspired to bring these cuisines into [our] world in the first place" (Heldke, 2003, p. xv). Such a stance thus continues the project of colonial domination while further displaying traits of the authoritarian personality (Adorno, 1950), disdaining nuance and ambiguity. The erasure of cultural makers and need for sameness is a residual practice of the Americanization of migrants and cuisines in the 20th century. Amplified by neoliberalism, this approach appropriates someone else's labor and history without consideration, recognition, or even a hint of thought.

Eater, *NYT*, and TVFN, by their very existence, created imagined culinary and eating communities, articulating identity and cuisine at the city, state, regional, and national levels. Both explicitly and implicitly, all three outlets thus offered their ideas of cooking and eating an *American* diet. An American eating identity, like any identity, requires iterative performances and work (Chapter 2). This meant that food media content aimed at target audiences was itself a manifestation of what Americans should eat. A performance of possibilities that showed what was available, desirable, and appropriate, such content invited the contemplation (and articulation) of an emergent American cuisine. While not explicitly stated in such nationalistic terms—and certainly without limiting the attention economy and pursuit of surplus to national borders—these outlets acted like cookbooks, offering culinary codes to a specific audience/public and creating imagined communities of cooks and eaters. While TVFN created their American cuisine through cultural erasure, Eater and *NYT* embraced the multicultural influences of

American eating and placed the “good immigrant” in their narratives of American pizzerias, sandwich shops, eateries, recipes, and restaurants.

In all three outlets, when food was discussed as an explicitly *cultural* phenomenon, it was most often articulated with notions of family and personal history. The tie between culture and family has existed since the concept of culture was first theorized in the 18th century (Herder said we learned our culture on our mother’s knee) and explains the fierce “blood and soil” loyalties of cultural preference and national identity. TVFN reinforced this more unforgiving understanding, using one’s family as a form of cultural legitimacy and assuming a relatively monolithic, essentialized notion of culture. A TVFN surrogate could thus speak to a cultural matter because they came from a normal or “typical” Chinese family, articulating an unchanging notion of exoticism, most often expressed at the nation-state level. Eater and *NYT*, on the other hand, offered a non-essentialized or at least strategically essentialized version of the family-culture nexus. These outlets showed that individual families within the same region or language group could differ and that one’s upbringing did not result in some automatically shared experience without idiosyncrasy or subtlety. This approach nuanced ideas of “authentic” food, freeing it from stereotypes and the expectations of essentialism. An auntie or grandma uses a different balance of spices or slightly different method than the one next door, and family-cultural traditions could change and adapt to new circumstances and environments. This was authenticity 2.0. Even if food as culture had deep familial roots, it did not mean families were fixed in place or that cultures were isolated and immune to influence and context.

TVFN thus represented food and culture as either non-existent or essentialized while Eater and *NYT* approached culturally defined food as distinct but characterized by fusion, transformation, and exchange. TVFN offered a stripped-down, accessible version, while Eater and *NYT* investigated the intricacies of complexities of cultural connection. TVFN cannibalized cultural influence while Eater-*NYT* used it as selling point for market differentiation in the attention economy. Consequently, all enabled a liquidity of culture, a flexibility and looseness for adaptability, appropriation, and use. In our post-traditional age of entrepreneurial identity work, audiences were thus presented an array of disposable identities, a veritable buffet of cuisines to put on and take off at will.

The appropriation and pragmatic use of culture and cuisines could enable individuals, helping them negotiate everyday life and the commodity realm (like lifestyle journalism). TVFN could commodify culture and repackage it as a generic good to be finished at home and made one's own. Eater and *NYT* could show how culture and cuisines were not static or readymade. Like all identities, they are iterative and constantly performed or negotiated. As a material-semiotic process they are the result of migrations, borrowing, improvisation, fusion, and are co-constituted by "different" cultural groups. Its own form of commodified culture, such content exploited an interest in cultural meanings, their development and assemblages. Both sets of commodities are thus useful and offer audiences either practical knowledge or an enriched understanding of one's embeddedness in the diverse and changing webs of the human condition.

Such usefulness had its consequences as culture was offered as a thing to consume without real discretion or any particular reason to eat one thing or another. While it seemed like there were endless things to chow down on, the omnivore's

dilemma had no definitive answer. Audiences were invited to an endless parade of novel iterations and unique takes on food. Without compulsion or given a reason-why, individuals were merely asked to follow their whims and desires and to keep trying new things. This also meant keeping thin loyalties and following the latest trends. Audiences were asked to indulge everchanging whims, inviting a shallow appreciation of food to constantly chase the novel. Keeping the audience hungry was both the goal and the means to manage effective demand in the attention economy. Stimulated and unsatisfiable desire in the constant turnover of culture-based content increased capital circulation and the realization of surplus value. But the commercialization of media did not just help "create" value, it also permeated the episteme and reoriented subjectivity in ways conducive to neoliberal domination.

In terms of eating, this subject positioning created a sense of rootlessness. Eaters had "no choice but to choose" (Giddens, 1991, p. 81), and no substantial values to guide them. With global traditions, supply chains, and endless fusions at their fingertips, food was simultaneously from everywhere and nowhere. Diets were disembedded from any sense of place except as a selling point or "added value" of human-interest exoticism. With the only consistency being novelty and the only directive to sample or rethink tradition, eaters became perpetual foreigners in their own cuisines and food practices. In terms of approaching the meanings, practices, histories, and groupings called culture, it meant taking the stance of a flippant consumer. Commoditized (food) culture was thus used solely at one's own discretion without thought of cause or consequence, enabling the consumer by individualizing their social consciousness. Culture merely existed for the

self, and combined with a rootless, disorienting hunger, meant the individual was perpetually open to suggestion and primed to consume.

Merely existing for consumption, cultural understandings of food were isolated and siloed from the rest of society. While Eater and *NYT* did an excellent job showing the nuance and non-essential nature of cultural identity, culture was presented as a style or add-on, something in addition and different to public policy, politics, economics, and other aspects of the social world. While these areas of life interacted with cultural identity (especially the economics of restaurant ownership), they were not part of the causes and consequences of culture, they did not co-constitute what a culture was and how it was negotiated by its users and members. This thin understanding of culture, of something a person just has or is, reduced culture to a matter a choice and ignored the complexities of social hierarchy and intersectional identity. In other words, culture was an attribute or added spice seemingly without social consequence.

In the context of the United States, culture as tradition or identity is often understood through the lens of race (race being confused and articulated with culture). As an immigrant nation/settler colony that pioneered a novel form of race-based chattel slavery, racial hierarchy permeates American history and perceptions of cultural comparison. 19th century immigrants from China, Ireland, and Eastern Europe, for example, had their supposed inferiority tied to their diets, and in racist discourses today, people can still be marginalized and reduced to what they supposedly eat (captured by derogatory terms like “beaner” or “rice queen”). But today’s food media do not work by ideological squaring and the “us” versus “them” mentality of marking the Other. Instead, cultural-racial difference is something to be captured and used as a selling point, steeped

as it is in novelty, authenticity, and distinction. Some media outlets, like TVFN, still stereotype cuisines but eliminate the Other marked as an outgroup "them," instead presenting food as cultureless. In addition, the cultural markers that were present in such discourse were used as props of differentiation. TVFN reserved the specificities of identity for Italian food—presented as an in-group (with Italian people largely considered "white" since the 1930s)—or the exotically framed practices of Chinese food—marked as outsider.

Eater and *NYT* could equally talk of race without explicitly mentioning it and were more celebratory in their use of culture-race difference. One's cultural background was a point of interest and such discourse made positive associations with foods marked by cultural distinction. This assessment of cuisines and their adaptations reinforced notions of the "useful immigrant." It created racial hierarchies without overtly addressing race. Immigrant entrepreneurs with successful restaurants or the revered cuisines of the world represented "the deserving" POC, a "model minority" that contributed to society. Like a neoliberal worldview that used the sovereign consumer to ignore racial and structural inequalities, such thinking could create a racial order while claiming race did not matter. Some foods were just delicious, and resources and rewards were simply distributed according to culinary contribution and merit. While acceptance of a cultural group's cuisine does not equal social acceptance of that cultural group, *Times* and Eater readers were invited into a democratization of acceptable tastes, and audiences could imagine consuming cuisine as an act of cultural solidarity.

Today's food media does not operate as a form of exoticism that reveres the "noble savage" because he is "closer to nature." Instead, the *industrious immigrant* is

celebrated because they are *closer to culture*. In a post-traditional consumer culture where individuals are compelled to choose, the self is accepted as the standard, a blank. The sovereign consumer, readymade in choosing capacity but lacking in substantive identity, then chooses amongst the cultural commodities, the deviations from the standard and the clothing to dress the blank self. In other words, the dominant-culture consumer evaluates and uses other cultures so much, he forgets he has one. This is not to say the dominant culture is isolated, unchanging, or otherwise essentialized as some objective, free-floating monolith. On the contrary, this is to argue that the
dominant culture in America is constantly shifting as it attempts to incorporate increasingly more of the once marginalized in an attempt to realize profit. Food media do not offer cuisines as something strange and exotic to be gawked at; they are offered as something unfamiliar and enticing to use for oneself. Come here and know them better, food media beckons, as they command attention, flatter the audience's worldliness, and then seamlessly flow to the next offering. The sovereign consumer—the depoliticized neoliberal subject—thus yearns for culture, some grounding of authenticity capable of defining life beyond the exercise of consumer choice. With POC and their food, the supposedly post-traditional individual seeks re-enchantment in a disillusioned world of market realism.

This selfish pursuit of redeeming the sovereign consumer's humanity was also sublimated towards democratic notions of tolerance and inclusion. Consumers of food media could feel the self-satisfaction of inclusion and equality, every cuisine and individual apparently having the same footing and starting point. There was (seemingly) no hierarchy here as food was simply delicious. Like neoliberal populism, what one ate

was simply a matter of choice, and not the result of history, contingency, and the actions of intentional actors. Audiences did not have to trouble themselves with the power dynamics of geopolitics or feel guilty about grossly unequal supply chains, exploiting immigrant labor, or the appropriation of tradition. On the contrary, *NYT* and Eater readers could pat themselves on the pack and feel good about their consumption, as they had done their due diligence and informed themselves about culture.

Considering the culture of a "useful immigrant" or "model minority," still asks, what can cuisine do for me, and fails to ask more important questions of consequence. Even as media investigates the cultural constitution of food, it does so through exclusion, erasing undesirable people and groups from mind, and often siloing culture from political-economy and the supply chain. Such discourse accepts the exploitation and negative externalities of capitalism while presenting a more human and meaningful version of an amoral, sometimes immoral, order. In other words, food media leaves the worst parts of capitalism intact while offering a smile instead, resulting in a friendly form of domination that reduces criticism to choosing between variously fetishized commodities. Audiences may choose commodities that are less bad or ones that make them feel the most good, but commodity use does not address the social issues that persist, nor the conditions that enabled such choice to begin with. Consumers are free to choose from the already given, but not free to choose the conditions of consumption. There is thus a compulsion to consume, an incentive toward socioeconomic ignorance, and an obligation to ignore the inconvenient relationships and rules that constitute society. Less free than a rat in a maze, consumers do not just stay in the maze, they are completely dependent on its mystifying twists and turns.

Each outlet thus positioned and used culture in a unique way to "serve" their audiences. TVFN offered ease of use, *NYT* offered accessibility with glimpses of accountability, and Eater provided an ambivalent endorsement and criticism of food culture in a global consumer order. As commercial participants in the attention economy, however, these differences mattered little when it came to the cultural consequences of capitalism. In the attention economy, generating surplus value is indifferent to the origins of this surplus or the intent of its producers. Despite their differences in contemplating social issues and attempts at responsibility, all three outlets used culture as a spice, as a selling point to mask the flavor of lost food sovereignty. Not inherently sinister or an intentional attempt to instill "false consciousness," food and culture nonetheless became just another commodity in the pursuit of capital accumulation.

While all three outlets offered traits that might contribute to an intimate public served by food journalism, each was limited by their overall orientation and concomitant routines. Each targeted desirable demographics, individualized audiences, and legitimized the social order even in critique. As hooks (1992) argued, media messages and their discursive "power to ignite critical consciousness is diffused when they are commodified" (p. 33). Instead of critical (i.e., empowering and sovereignty-inducing) thought, this food media normalized consumerism, model minority racism, and a limited understanding of individualism. Akin to the neoliberal episteme, human agency is reduced to an unconnected series of individualized choice.

As part of the culture industry, food media institutionalized social anxiety and cultural/racial inequality, even as it presented itself as a solution to both. Food was fetishized for those with resources and those made vulnerable by an exclusionary and

demanding social order. As Americans have shifted from primarily food producers to having a local relationship to their food source to consumers of industrial products, media has evolved to navigate this distance. The change from self-determination and personal relationships, to product packaging, branding, media personalities, and food experts has resulted in a shared logic and similar discursive strategies. Such strategies can be characterized by thinking in types, reducing phenomenon solely for instrumental use, ignorance sublimated towards private pleasure, and the exclusion or marginalization of the actual people and practices enabling food's production, distribution, and final form. While such moves may be deemed necessary to feed consumer capitalism, a more comprehensive consideration of eating—identified here as an ecofeminist food journalism—is necessary to feed the democratic relationships that ensure sovereignty, justice, and care.

Ecofeminist Food Journalism

Instead of media serving sovereign consumers entitled to pre-given choices, this project proposes an alternative orientation for journalism, one concerned with care, context, and the co-constituted nature of citizen-society-ecology. The point of this section is not to exhaust its potential but to suggest the contours and key principles of what I call *ecofeminist food journalism*. This approach combines care ethics, feminist political philosophy, and critical ecology. These views often directly contradict neo/liberalism and offer a counter discourse, even as they retain the most fruitful residual elements of liberal thinking. In this manner, food media does not just serve isolated individuals. Instead, food journalism cultivates care, enabling democratic actors by comprehensively considering the entire food system, identifying the vulnerable, problematizing the

segregation of the private and public, examining the full range of causes and consequences, and thus feeding the social connections necessary for widespread and transformative flourishing.

Ecofeminist food journalism (EFJ) utilizes an ethics of cares, a vastly different orientation than legacy news outlets that pride themselves on objectivity, neutrality, and their deontological or duty-based codes of ethics. Taking into consideration context, relationships, and the specifics of each situation, care ethics is a more nuanced approach than the traditional ethics of absolute rights or unqualified individual freedom. This section will thus thus explicate EFJ's ethics of care and show how it is informed by feminist political and ecological thinking. This assemblage of particular epistemologies makes EFJ theoretically resilient: durable enough to have grounded meaning but flexible enough for situational application. Such media thus has a grounded approach and subject orientation, while specific practices, routines, and norms are thus left for individual practitioners and editorial teams to respond and create as warranted.

Care ethics

The initial impetus for articulating an ethics of care came from the rationalization and quantification of ethics in the period of post-war Fordism. A moral psychologist posing ethical dilemmas to eleven-year-old boys and girls concluded that boys (and thus men) were morally superior to girls (and thus women). Boys exhibited a more advanced understanding of moral reasoning, this moral psychologist argued, as his hierarchical point system reduced morality to a math equation of which there was but one proper solution. Carol Gilligan (1982), however—who happened to be this psychologist's mentor—posited that moral reasoning was not that simple. Gilligan strategically

essentialized girls/women and said they thought differently than the high-scoring boys. Instead of a math equation, they saw a world of interconnecting relationships that were negotiated and realized over time. This more nuanced and accurate characterization of society ensured life could be maintained, not merely validating an individual's ability to win at some paranoid and illusionary competition.

Unlike liberal thinking that asks what is right or what am I owed, care ethics asks, how can I respond. While neo/liberal views consider individuals who stands outside of the world and pass judgement as an observer, care ethics sees an embedded individual, co-constituted by and dealing with a specific situation. Early thinkers compared care to the mother-child relationship (Noddings, 1984). This ensured care would not be co-opted by commercial or other interests, idealized into abstract nothingness and used as an empty signifier to achieve a purely self-interested agenda. Care was thus defined by *engrossment,* understanding the cared-for on their own terms, and *motivational displacement*, where care was determined on a relatively consensual basis and determined solely by the cared-for's needs. Such qualifications ensured care-givers did not simply project their own selves and impose their will for self-gain. This also positioned care as a universal need that had specific characteristics. It allowed the situational and specific consideration of care while avoiding the pitfalls of moral relativism or egocentric appropriation. Care was thus universal while its specific form differed for everyone depending on their particular context.

In the epistemology of care, individuals can only be fully understood by considering their relationships. In the lived experience of everyday life, people exist in relational webs of caring and thus every individual has a responsibility to care (Manning,

1992). But individual efforts may not always be enough and sometimes care requires collective action or a care-giving surrogate. Institutions of care then arise and social roles that put people in particular relationships can engender care. While familial roles like being a mother is an obvious example, professional roles like being a teacher or journalist can also sustain individuals and their social networks. Care is thus not merely a "private" issue but exists in the "public" realm as well.

As a public issue, care also has a component of rules and rights. Unlike the liberal notion of rights that arises from a social contract between individual and group, these are considered in the context of interconnection. On its own, care is not a substantial guiding value as harmful or defective care may occur. We should thus "create socially recognized moral minimums, to respond to expectations of others where such expectations are colored by moral rules, and where moral attention flags, for reasons which are beyond our control" (Manning, p. 82). Correctly employed, such standards can complement care and ensure its comprehensive and responsible realization.

There are also definitive limits on the obligation to care. While we may appear morally bound to those who cannot help themselves or when care is part of a role responsibility, "actual obligations rest upon the seriousness of the need, the assessment of the appropriateness of filling the need, and the ability to do something about filling it" (Manning, p. 72). While care is extended beyond the family into the public realm of strangers, not everyone has the equal capacity or obligation to provide it. Care is not simply an absolute, as needs exist on a continuum. Care does also not preclude harm. The care-giver must also have the capacity to meet the receiver's needs and this includes what Manning calls avoiding "caring burnout." Care giving should thus not be all-consuming.

This recognition to consider self-care and the larger context of needs is another reason rules and rights can contribute to an ethics of care.

The concept of justice also has its place as care ethics ensures people get what they deserve. Approaching the self as relational and understanding the interdependence that enables autonomy, however, this conception differs than liberal notions of individualized fairness or total equality. Despite this difference, care falls within the realm of self-interest as being provided for and enabled to develop autonomy could be the basis for a healthy and happy individual. That is, "given the choice…people would, out of self-interest, prefer to participate in societies, communities, and institutions where care was complete" (Tronto, 1995, p. 146). Care thus simultaneously exists at the individual and social level and can guide the formation and operation of just social structures.

Guiding social institutions or the abstract principles of justice and rights, care is ultimately grounded in the material and psychological realm of everyday life. Examining people's daily-lived experiences should continually inform our political positions and whether there has been "a full account of human needs" (Tronto, 1995, p. 144). Fisher and Tronto (1990) identified four phases of care: caring about, taking care of, care giving, and care receiving. Tied to the context of their appearance, these stages in the care process engender a concomitant virtue: attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness. A just and good society would thus ensure these principles of care were put into practice.

Understood in its own context, this would mean a social institution like journalism would need to recognize individuals and issues in need of material, mental, or even semiotic care. Even when considering the different journalistic genres and roles,

journalists would then take responsibility for their chosen topics and messages. News and lifestyle content would not be a passive obligation, as if compelled by some outside interest or influence, such as a press release, client, obtaining clicks, increasing engagement or the host of traditional “news values”. While these may still have their place, responsibility implies a flexible and accountable mediator of information and analysis. This role of selection, synthesis, and delivery—as medium of the larger world—is such an immense responsibility, that competent or skillful execution is both complex and paramount. For journalists, this means a reflexive awareness of their own sociocultural context and how this colors their craft. It means the skills and abilities to ask the proper questions, investigate the necessary avenues, and generate awareness or social empathy. In the final stage of care—if the institution of journalism could responsibly and proficiently respond to social needs—then the public or receivers of journalism’s care would be responsible for responding. This could mean an active audience that acted on the provided information and used media to build, maintain, change, or otherwise construct their social, cultural, and material worlds. Such a public would also respond with their own appropriate care, perhaps in the form of material compensation, courtesy towards its practitioners, or constructive criticisms that drove journalists to be better. Extended beyond the interpersonal, practicing care ethics can thus play a vital role in the constitution of a just and responsible social life.

An ecological subject

What I call critical ecology provides fruitful epistemological tools when contemplating an ethics of care in journalism. This approach reinforces the relational aspect of individuals and expands this notion to challenge the very notion of

"individuals." What appear as autonomous and distinctly separate entities (as in liberal models of justice and economics), are actually co-constituted, embedded amalgamations that do not pre-exist their relationships. The more one tries to pinpoint the individual the more one sees they are always-already "contaminated" by the world around them. Even further still, critical ecologists do not limit this view to individual persons but consider non-human animals, plants, minerals, molecules, discourses, and every part of our material and semiotic ecology. Such thinking draws on actor-network theory, science and technology studies, and new materialism, among others. I will here limit this incredibly rich field to what is most salient for journalism's ethic of care. Perhaps most important is the notion that we can *think with* this enlarged web of entangled relationships without imposing the limits of homogeneity and absolutes so detrimental to widespread flourishing.

The boundaries of what and who is considered human are shifting, porous, and incredibly complex. Individuals do not merely interact as "nothing comes without its world" (Haraway, 1994, p. 70). Already co-constituted by their previous engagements, encounters create new entangled worlds, and no single individual exists statically or in isolation. Individual identity, however, is not experienced as continuous flux. But neither do individuals pre-exist their relations. Instead, they are made in the muck and mud of daily existence, layered and mixed with their current and previous relationships. Individuals are always-in-process and the fact that humans develop from embryos means that no human has ever existed as a fully distinct individual (Haraway, 2008).

The world does not consist of individual people, animals, or even species. Instead, human persons, non-human creatures, and entire species are constituted by interspecies

encounters. According to this logic one cannot assume an individual body or species before the encounter, and humans have too long ignored the complex dance of relating (Haraway, 2008). No species has ever evolved in isolation but only lives according to an ecology that has been shaped by countless others. This process can be observed in situated encounters. No individual human can exist without the billions of microbes that enable human digestion and the general functioning of metabolism (Yong, 2016). Humans are further dependent on bees that pollinate our food. Critical ecologist Donna Haraway offers more specific examples and asks who and what she is touching when she touches her dog. This situated touch "shapes accountability. Accountability, caring for, being affected, and entering into responsibility are not ethical abstractions; these mundane, prosaic things are the result of having truck with each other…[touch] peppers its partners with attachment sites for world making" (Haraway, p. 36). She investigates other entangled sites of multispecies encounter: prisoners and therapy dogs each working to make the other a productive member of society, lab animals used for human research, Haraway's deeply personal relationship with her dogs as she trains them for agility courses. These specific instances complicate notions of human separateness and exceptionalism and challenge those who would claim the entitlement of absolute individual (and human) freedom.

Critical ecologists also make full use of a material-semiotic approach that can inform the practice of journalism. Not only are individual persons, non-human creatures, and entire species co-constituted by one another, but for language-using humans, these relations are simultaneously between material things and meaningful concepts. Communication is thus seen as more active than mere words or symbols. Media and

messages have far-reaching consequences as their meanings inform actions and those actions can influence future meanings and messaging. The entanglements of the material and discursive world means the stakes of journalism are high, even beyond issues of representation, framing, and individual media "effects." Journalism is a sense-making institution that orients humans in an otherwise contingent, contestable, and indeterminate world.

The food media outlets featured in this study (and indeed all journalists) employed instrumental reason, using other people and cultures as a means to an end, namely, audience engagement in an attention economy. Liberal philosophy, like Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative, instruct individuals to not treat others merely as a means to an end. While journalists should certainly follow this maxim, it is only the baseline of ethical considerations as the world is more complex. All biotic life is instrumental as anything mortal must "live in and through the use of one another's bodies" (Haraway, 2008, p. 79). Kant's maxim, while a useful place to start, obscures this fact by trying to overcome it. A moral absolute that recognizes others as ends-in-themselves is admirable but appealing to such a precept potentially legitimizes the use of another person when it (inevitably) occurs. A number of injustices could seek forgiveness claiming there wasn't "mere" use of another individual. Being co-constituted by their relations, humans interact with, are entangled, and otherwise "use" each other and other species to survive. No ethical rule should forgive or excuse this fact so that it can be properly addressed. Journalists and their public could then take responsibility for this use and respond in the appropriate, caring manner. Such thinking could even extend to other species, lifeforms, and the greater ecology in which all biotic life depends.

Critical ecology also challenges and supplements other forms of German idealism, such as the philosophies of Hegel and Goethe. This tradition held that the world was dialectic flux, that one was eternally striving and never arriving. In other words, that there was no *being* in the world, only continual acts of *becoming*. Critical ecology takes this further and shows becoming is always an instance of *becoming with*. Individuals are not self-contained entities simply emanating their virtues or enacting their duties. Instead, individuals are constituted by their interactions, co-shaped by what are traditionally termed "others." Using Haraway's (2008) analogy, *becoming with* is a multi-partner dance in the muck of everyday life where partners do not pre-exist their constitutive interactions. And it is this *becoming with* that allows us to become *worldly*, to dwell where critters dwell. Here, the material-semiotic comes to life and animates us mortals. This is no smooth process, however. Haraway reminds us that such encounters "do not produce harmonious wholes" (p. 287) and that the clean, totalizing ethical systems of the great religions or liberal philosophy provide incomplete guides. Dogmatic only about "the open", Haraway insists we must learn to "cohabit well without a final peace" (p. 299). Morality is not calculable, and no universal and permanent rules can provide legitimacy when the task of building more caring, livable worlds is continuously at hand.

This lack of lasting solace in negotiating mortal entanglements stands in stark contrast to two philosophers often considered harbingers of care ethics. Both Levinas's face-to-face encounter and Buber's I-thou relationship are often cited as moral exemplars for human sociality. Both showed concern for the "other" and argued encountering another person in a particular way was man's (sic) highest state and a way to transcend difference. Instead of a mystical retreat into "totality", "infinity", or "God", however,

critical ecology suggests we instead look each other in the eye with all of its messiness and dwell in the plane where we exist. We should thus continually revisit the comfort of our absolutes, recognize our situatedness, take responsibility, and do the work of becoming worldly. Building relationships in the muck of everyday life is a more fruitful and pragmatic approach to care ethics, especially one intended to guide journalists.

The messiness of everyday life and situated entanglements, however, need not be entirely combative or conflict-ridden. Critical ecologists recognize that beings in the world do not just compete in Darwinian struggle. Instead, organisms often collaborate to survive and for people, transformation through collaboration is foundational to the human condition (Tsing, 2015). People are not isolated individuals as neo/liberalism holds but exist in an "assemblage—an open-ended entanglement of ways of being" (Tsing, p. 83). Like mushrooms, people—their constitution, characteristics, and development—are contaminated by their ecological community, incredibly diverse, and defined by indeterminacy. There are no separate, stable, and "pure" individuals as society is instead an assemblage of "contaminated diversity" (Tsing, p. 33). Some humans may exercise an "unselfconscious privilege" that enables them to mistakenly believe that "we each survive alone" but we are always-already "mixed up with others" (Tsing, p. 29). This assemblage of worldmaking can never be entirely rationalized to establish objective standards or fixed measures of livability (e.g., providing absolute ethical codes for journalists or eaters). Notions of progress should thus be tempered as utopian elements and ideals are entangled with unforeseen consequences and harm. Still, the work of transformation through collaboration continues.

The problems and transitory solutions to achieve transformation do not come from some abstract realm outside the ecosystem. Instead, they are embedded, percolate, and ooze forth from within the very structures and relationships that exist. These are the *latent commons*, often unnoticed and inherently underdeveloped (Tsing, 2015). Broadening the concept of the commons, Tsing characterizes them in the negative. The latent commons do not only include humans. They are not a "common good" as collaboration also involves exclusion. They are not easily translated into institutions, ephemeral as they are. And finally, the latent commons cannot save humanity. Progress can never be complete and utopia never realized. Thinking with the latent commons means recognizing that existence is messy and entangled, like a viscous muck. There are conflicting interests, irresolvable dilemmas, and contingencies. Tsing (2015) thus recommends employing "arts of noticing" to observe distinct, unique, and ever fleeting "worlds-in-the-making" (p. 255).

Even with a newfound skepticism of progress, this noticing can still be a pleasurable act. Critical ecologists ask that we take our material bodies seriously and experience the trans-corporeality of the material-semiotic landscape. This means that all beings are porous and contaminated by both the material and symbolic world. Creatures are constituted by the physical world but also exist inside each other's heads (the material-semiotic). Alaimo (2016) holds that we can find joy by embracing the co-constituted nature of our shared world of *becoming with*. The entanglements of always-already exposed and penetrated subjects is not only a tale of violence, harm, and the need for discipline or duties. From another view, it can also be a pleasurable experience where accounting for the full range of one's thoughts and actions can facilitate a responsible and

ethical life. We can recognize and respond to our trans-corporeality where never finished bodies playfully flow, occupy, and intertwine in ethical-political engagements. Using the word “play” does not mean that certain kinds of relationships are not problematic. It is a specific invitation into a way of *thinking with* others that has us reckon with our desires, hesitations, guilt, and fragile fictions that are our “own” selves. As Alaimo (2016) argues, ethics are always situated within an epistemology and ontology—that ethics, knowing, and being are mutually constitutive (p. 8). By thinking with others, we can intentionally situate our ethics in surprise, play, and mutual becoming. We can then take joyful responsibility and seek to build a world of multi-species thriving. Critical ecologists thus invite journalists and their public to interpellate new ethical subjects through the pleasure of acknowledging entanglements. The good life is thus not about denial but embracing the responsibility of our co-constituted, entangled world.

This loosely defined critical ecology shows that although individuals do not pre-exist their relationships, neither are they absorbed into some homogenous mass that precludes conflict, contradiction, and instrumental use. A critical ecology-informed care ethic is not one of transcendence but instead dwells in the material-semiotic muck of the everyday. It recognizes the diverse, indeterminant, trans-corporeal nature of the body politic, imagined as a shifting assemblage and not a static entity. This assemblage transforms through collaboration though unforeseen consequences and harm are not precluded. The potential of what is held in common is transitory and often scrutinized, as collaboration (and care) simultaneously excludes. This inevitable exclusion and the relentlessness of *becoming with* guarantees there is no utopian solace or harmonious whole. Recognizing and responding to the constant *becoming with*, however, can be

pleasurable. Thinking with others as they are—situated, co-constituted, and entangled—invites potentially joyful and responsible forms of noticing, relating, and worldmaking.

This more comprehensive view of care, relationships, and the ecology of the collective provides journalists a nuanced mental map of society, its interconnections, conflicts, and transformations. At the same time, it recognizes the responsibility of journalists as material-semiotic worldmakers, as mediators of meaning in an endless process of community building. Care is not an end goal with a final answer, it is a constant negotiation, continually renewed or realized in each moment (or not). We now turn to a feminist intervention on the public sphere and citizenship to see how active agents can use or respond to a care-full journalism. In this conception, communication constitutes imagined communities while situated, active agents co-constitute the very political, social, and cultural contexts that make them who they are.

The embedded citizen

Select forms of feminist political theory complement the ecological subject in need of care, rearticulating the citizen as an interdependent, co-constituted, and active agent embedded in an entangled public. The opposite of isolated and independently formed individuals that stand outside the public to make free choices, the embedded citizen understands they are shaped by their community and bear the responsibility of its maintenance. Not blindly obligated to some homogenous mass, however, the embedded citizen rightfully questions notions of "the common good," and sees their own situated history and position. Society has never been inclusive and without conflict, and under modern liberalism, advancing the "common good" has also meant hegemonically reproducing the status quo. Journalists—as embedded citizens working for an entangled

public—should thus be mindful of social inequality even in spaces that are formally considered inclusive, equal, and free.

In the United States, there has never been a fair and equal public sphere, let alone economy, and neo/liberalism's sovereign consumer is necessarily built on an incomplete understanding of freedom and equality (Fraser, 1990). Having the freedom to consume ignores history and how people were socialized into consumption, as well as the processes resulting in situated individuals with specific resources. Individuals do not come to the market as entirely free; they have been enculturated with a specific habitus and worldview; they have been taught what to prioritize and how to live. Free choices do not originate from a vacuum, they are a product of culture, social arrangements, and our individual histories. And consumers are not all equally free as the social order invites individuals in unique ways. The intersectionality of an individual's identity combined with their specific circumstances means opportunities, resources, and choices are not available to all. As Bauman (1998) argues, "All of us are doomed to the life of choices, but not all of us have the resources to be choosers" (p. 85).

The sovereign consumer is thus an inadequate citizen for a just social order that prioritizes care, and journalists should avoid writing for such an audience. Instead, journalists should question their cultural frames and confront their situatedness in social positions that could exacerbate uncaring inequalities, exclusions, or subordinations. They should ask if their deliberations about a common good (or any topic) simply masks domination, dismisses difference, or uses diversity as a selling point. Basically, journalists can ask themselves whether they participate in a harmful hegemony serving the privileged or a culture of care that cultivates connections.

And it is a feminist conception of the citizen that offers journalists a valuable guide to direct and measure their care. This is a situated citizen whose "every thought, value, and act…takes its meaning and purpose from the wider political and social reality that constitutes and conditions" them (Dietz, 1987, p. 1). This is a co-constituted citizen where context means everything and the personal is very much political. There is no separation between a "public" and "private" sphere as so-called public issues influence individual lives while supposedly private interests guide social decisions. It is also a citizen that cares for and about the collective community and the vulnerable. This citizen recognizes, takes joyful responsibility, and is actively engaged in the shared, contested, and perpetual endeavor of making worlds.

In many ways, this feminist conception of the citizen is the mirror opposite of the liberal tradition in the United States. Neo/liberalism assumes the individual exists prior to society and independent of any immediate relations or context. From there, it makes a number of assertions: there is perfect equality (among men) so everyone should be free to realize their capabilities; the individual should be able to choose his activities without interference; the individual has inviolable rights regardless of society; women can legitimately be limited to the "private" sphere; individuals are free to compete on the market and pursue self-gain. In this, what is "right" or "good" is backgrounded for notions of complete autonomy. Liberal citizenship means individual economic activity more than collective political will (Dietz, 1987). In this model, democracy was reduced to representative government and was less associated with active citizens in a public realm. Liberal theory is helpful for certain well-resourced individuals but is inadequate for understanding an entangled ecosystem or for envisioning the collaborative good life.

As alternatives to liberalism, Dietz (1987) finds both Marxist and maternal feminism lacking. While each has legitimate critiques of liberal theory, Marxists seem to abandon the citizen for notions of “the masses” or “workers” and offer little for “after the revolution.” Maternalists, on the other hand, use the family as a model of citizenship and practice an ethics of care. While seemingly admirable, Dietz (1987) reasons that maternalist care is not a political bond, but a retreat from the public into the private. Women are problematically raised as superior while there is nothing inherent in mothering or care that inevitably leads to democracy.

Instead, Dietz (1987) proposes an active, participatory citizen. In this model politics is not reduced to representative government but is understood as the “collective and participatory engagement of citizens in the determination of the affairs of their community (Dietz, 1987, p. 14). Not a bearer of rights or mothering provider, this citizen is one who speaks and acts in the public realm. This is not a realm of competing strangers or loving intimates but of civic peers also actively engaged. Like Haraway observed of all creatures and species in the world, citizenship is a continuous process; a citizen is always becoming, indeed, *becoming with*. This recalls Dewey’s stance in his debate with Lippman when he argued that democracy was not an end goal but a process. Democracy itself was continually worked out, negotiated and realized in communication and the lived world. Citizenship is thus “a demanding process that never ends” (Dietz, p. 16). As citizens are co-constituted by their relations and context, it is their responsibility to deliberate and actively shape the context which is everything. This is self-government in perhaps its fullest expression.

This feminist political theory has thus reoriented the citizen from a detached individual concerned with rights to a co-constituted participant focused on responsibilities and community. Not everyone is allowed equal access to active citizenship and the public realm, however, even if formal barriers are absent or arguments about the common good are put forth. In contrast to the maternal ethic of care, this ecofeminist model of care based on critical ecology and politicized care sees a useful role for thinking with and about non-familial others. When care permeates our assemblages and is embodied in our institutions, we have the best opportunity to transform through collaboration. This kind of care also enables a comprehensive, though never complete, sense of justice. While we will never achieve universal rules or a "final peace," ecofeminist care can encourage diverse "arts of noticing" and response, ideally fostering widespread flourishing. Journalists—in their role as material-semiotic worldmakers—can think *with* (not for) co-constituted citizens, act with care, and play a vital role performing, transforming, and calling forth our most comprehensive, caring selves.

Feeding, Eating, Becoming With

An ecofeminist food journalism (EFJ) thus operates by an ethics of care that serves embedded citizens and an entangled public. It does not write/create for the sovereign consumer or even the consumer-citizen as these are inadequate subject positions to understand the empirical operations of society, the lifeworld, and the co-constituted nature of reality. Instead, EFJ invites democratic actors in the fullest sense of the term, recognizing their interdependence, co-constitution, and life-enabling assemblages. Seeking to empower such active citizens, EFJ comprehensively considers the causes and consequences of the food system, eating traditions, and choice.

EFJ does not pursue some idealized notion of perfect knowledge or even the goal of absolute equality. Such journalism—striving to cultivate care—considers positionality, contingency, and available resources. This care is not hopelessly relativist or abstract as care ethics is an ethic of solidarity that avoids projection and stereotypes, attentively listens, and continuously thinks in terms of connection, attachment, and interdependence. An ecofeminist food journalist does not see a world of isolated individuals making arbitrary choices. Instead, she approaches eaters as embedded in assemblages, their choices and even ability to choose co-constituted by history, negotiable cultural meanings, social structures, ecological systems, and the labor of others. She asks who is vulnerable and in need of care and adjusts her work in response. These ideas of care are comprehensively applied. She is not a reporter that covers something called food and the food industry and then relays this information back to a separate audience of consumers. The eating public is part of her beat and that public also consists of immigrant farm workers, Taylorized meat processors, food delivery drivers, grocery store clerks, restaurant staffers, government food inspectors, policy makers, business owners, as well as overwhelmed home cooks, single moms, divorced dads, uninspired bachelors, children, and everyone involved in food production, preparation, obtaining, and eating. She is part of the community she covers as is everyone, each with their own unique set of resources and entanglements. She is competent and capable of investigating and delineating such connections, prioritizing her agenda-setting according to care. In this matter she connects the so-called public and private as well as production and consumption, treating the world not as isolated fragments but as a continuous network of care, flow, and co-constitution.

A further ideal for the bold ecofeminist journalist is to extend such considerations to non-human creatures and people that are not immediately understood as part of the American eater's food system. This last group includes peasant farmers affected by transnational agriculture companies and climate change, non-American eaters influenced by food policy and consumer choice, and indigenous eaters having to negotiate disrupted ways of life and encroachment. This extension of care would also mean covering climate change in ways beyond its effect on entitled consumers and isolated producers. Delineating the connections of cause, consequence, and the enablement of care, climate change would be part of many stories, not sequestered to one-offs about individual effects.

Covering animals, insects, plants, microbes, and other parts of an externalized environment or non-human world might be the biggest shift for traditional American food journalists. Audience's previously interpellated purely as consumers may also find this hard to accept. The fact remains, however, that these are co-constituting species and processes that enable existence and make humans who they are (or are constantly *becoming with*). Humans are not isolated, exempt, or anything resembling independent of an "outside" world. All of us are trans-corporeal, our bodies consisting and being maintained by organic flows and connections, from the air we breath, food we eat, pollinators we depend on, microbes that enable us, to the work of all other beings that operate in the ecosystem, co-constituting the environment and thus our "selves." The environment is not some empty playground or provider of commodities. It is more accurate to say humans are an expression of the environment (Alaimo, 2010).

Comprehensively covering society, facilitating democracy, and enabling sovereignty thus means covering and considering those things long defined as separate from humans.

EFJ being more comprehensively aware of the food system and the trans-corporeal interdependence of biotic life is not a joyless task of shame, guilt, or blame. On the contrary, practicing these arts of noticing and inviting eaters into more informed and connected versions of themselves is a pleasure that neo/liberal lifestyle media only hints at. Eating is an embodied pleasure, and the embedded citizen served by EFJ eats with the most appreciative enthusiasm[27]. While TVFN, *NYT*, and Eater all offered their own forms of limited gratification, EFJ seeks joy beyond brand promotion or legitimizing consumer choices. It takes delight in deliberating community impacts, the distribution of work in food, ecological processes and sustainable practices, governance and food safety, trade and labor issues, public health, food security, land justice, food sovereignty, and the myriad networks and cultural meanings of eating. EFJ also revels in the delicious and the soul-satisfying potentials of cuisine and taste but is intimately aware of commodity culture's limits and its inability to engender widespread care.

The Association of Food Journalists (AFJ), founded by women food journalists in 1974 and defunct as of December 2020, offered a code of ethics (2017) that was an excellent starting point for food journalists in a commercialized mediascape. It valued respecting the work of others, not abusing one's position, being transparent, avoiding conflicts of interest, including a variety of voices, respecting diversity, and approaching food an issue of people's livelihoods and identities (see also Gold, 2015). With such thoughtful moral minimums in place, EFJ extends such thinking to a systemic level,

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[27] For a discussion on how environmental issues can be approached through a lens of pleasure see (Alaimo, 2016) and (Craig, 2016).

participating as a consumer while never satisfied with with an inherently unjust, exclusionary, and irresponsible system of food production, distribution, and externalized burdens.

Building on AFJ's principles, EFJ also seeks to hold capitalism accountable and counter the limits of commoditized food. Investigative journalists working in the liberal tradition (e.g., women food journalists since the 1880s, muckrakers, current legacy media) have done the work of holding some of the powerful accountable. In this study, Eater's snarky cynicism towards consumer culture, PR, and commercialized food also criticized neoliberal forms of capitalism and questioned its practices.[28] But EFJ must create care as much as it lays blame. While fostering accountability is still crucial, food sovereignty and control over a basic necessity must be actively enabled and made democratically available. By addressing issues like land justice, food workers rights, animal welfare, peasant farmers, as well as restaurants, the price of vegetables, and available commodities to the home cook, journalists can help notice and develop the *latent commons* (Tsing, 2015). EFJ thus invites a more comprehensive and perceptive form of identity work, interpellating a more joyful, responsible, and care-engendering citizen than the neoliberal sovereign consumer.

EFJ creates a new subject position by approaching both food and media as a form of commons—a resource that is necessary for life and belongs to a community of users (not private interests, an external market, or an external/representative state). Since at least the 19th century, food and media have been privatized away from common concern, and their commodification has resulted in continued exploitation of worker-consumers,

[28] Eater was also built and thus dependent on the practices some of its journalists would criticize, thus legitimating the very order it was holding to account.

the reductive understanding of co-constituting relationships with “others,” and an overall loss in sovereignty. When journalists make food a matter of public concern, the definition of “good” or quality eating should thus extend beyond the individual consumer. Ecofeminist food journalists ask what kind of quality of life, of relational living, does such food promote. In other words, she holistically considers what makes food good.

By approaching food and media as commons, such journalists show that eating is a social act, even when done alone. Even if one did sow, grow, collect, and cook one’s “own” meals, it is the historical interactions and accumulations of peoples, plants, biological processes, chemical reactions, and the ever-vital energy of the sun that defined an individual’s understanding of the edible, and created the material-semiotic cultural knowledge of what, when, by what means, and how to eat. Thinking, being and identity, and cooking are all social acts, and an individual’s act of choosing and eating is the result of countless instances of *becoming with*.

Ecofeminist food journalists are participants and not mere observers of this process. As a late modern worker-consumer, they also participate in using commodities and are part of a consumer society. With an orientation towards the latent commons, however, consumption and the market are seen as a means to an end, not an end in-itself (De Schutter, et al., 2019). Unlike liberalism’s externality-managing state or neoliberalism’s externality-driven market, solutions for (food) sovereignty are not sought using the logic that engendered the initial problems. Whether the state or the market, power imbalances make individuals dependent and limits their options, coalescing into hegemonic dominance that demand flexible ethics just to get by (Hendrickson & James, 2005; James, et al., 2013). As embedded eaters in an ecosystem of food and media

commons, ecofeminist food journalists build identities around connection and care, not individualized consumer culture. By using media to investigate, delineate, articulate, and deliberate, EFJ understand "communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common" (Dewey, 1916, p. 7). Further attune to the latent commons, EFJ avoids the unintentional reproduction of hegemonic logics and values, facilitating instead the pleasures of transformative collaboration and responsible worldmaking.

EFJ's specific agenda would depend entirely on context and the decisions of embedded, participatory, and co-constituting journalists. Utilizing ecofeminist care ethics, they would look at the full range of needs, both human and non-human, and employ the four phases of care (caring about, taking care of, care giving, and care receiving). Journalists would address power relations and vulnerability, investigating whether care practices were adequately interconnected or left incomplete. What this care looks like is culturally and historically specific, particularly situated and thus impossible to define with context. But with an ecofeminist ontology, a journalist in our current context could start with the practices of agriculture journalism. Utilizing commodity chain analysis and a scientific understanding of biotic processes, this would provide the necessary baseline knowledge for covering the current food system.

Always seeking more comprehensive arts of noticing, EFJ should also use tools from the discipline of rural sociology. This would help not only with understanding the political economy of food production, but also in seeing the relationships, networks, and cultural consequences that constitute the social life of food in our late modern, increasingly global but always local world (Holt Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). Such journalists would also draw on critical theory, cultural studies, their own feminist

epistemologies, and any other number of views needed to play the role of sociologist, historian, concerned citizen, or community organizer as the situation demands. Never shirking pleasure, ecofeminist food journalists also speak the poetics of the delicious, articulating the entanglements of the relational world, aesthetics, and intimate joys. Like a politically minded gastronome without the elitism, the journalist writes like a philosopher, novelist, poet and activist, and unlike contemporary foodies, egalitarianism and care are extended beyond the depoliticized sovereign consumer.

Self-reflexive and understanding the discursive nature of democracy, EFJ continuously seeks out new voices and points of view. This is not done merely for the sake of "diversity" or to hit some metric of acceptable inclusion that displays an outlet's cultural capital of social consciousness. Instead, inclusion is desired because it is the right thing to do for a healthy eating public and one that holds food and media in common. This is not any one individual journalist's obligation as when handled collectively, it encourages the enhanced pleasure of widespread care and flourishing[29]. And because even the latent commons and notions of *the* public are built on exclusion, the intimate public sphere of EFJ must be built from the margins. This is not because the marginalized should shoulder the burden of extra work but because the views of the excluded can help ensure care is being comprehensively considered and applied. In our complex and entangled world, democracy needs an unlovable press (Schudson, 2008), and EFJ should constantly be held accountable, constructively criticized, and pushed to be better.

An ecofeminist food journalist must thus survey all that is available to her and feel empowered while recognizing such empowerments also constitute their own limits.

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[29] The some can be said for democratic notions of care distribution where care is a collective responsibility and not simply an issue delegated to women, moms, nurses, etc.

She must then mix and match competencies, points of view, and epistemologies as appropriate. Her context is constantly changing and one week may call for investigating the food served at a local for-profit correctional facility while the next has her explain the latest foodborne illness outbreak. And there is always the issue of advising home cooks in need of guidance. This is asking a lot of the journalist and she requires adequate education, training, and most importantly social and institutional support. Like the subjects in her beat, the journalist is never isolated and should be justly compensated, adequately cared for, and helpfully co-constituted by her organization and public. Ecofeminist journalists are thus owed care not because they are some privileged category of person with status, but because they are fellow co-constitutive citizens and creatures.

EFJ does not serve individuals—even if it is personable and addresses them as such—it serves an intimate, entangled public, connecting various people and creatures into imagined but very real communities. This shifting assemblage of a public is also maintained through material relationships, and ecofeminist food journalists comprehensively consider and characterize the causes and consequences of these flows. Not designed for a target market or to simply stimulate individual desire, such media represents and thus performs the entire food system and all its dimensions. EFJ feeds the democratic process that is eating in an entangled public, not consumers, freedom prioritizing citizens, consumer-citizens, or whatever individual one conjures.

Neither does EFJ exist to merely guide individuals into the correct buying choices, as if "ethical" consumerism and solely relying on the market could address the issues engendered by neoliberal market fundamentalism (Jaffe & Gertler, 2006; Thompson, 2012). Rejecting this hallow, depoliticized "micro-ethics," EFJ does not treat

the individual as the end or even starting point for understanding eating. Instead, it points to the larger connections, resources, co-constitutions, and social movements necessary for structural accountability, counter-hegemony, and transformation through collaboration.

EFJ feeds us stories that would otherwise go unspoken in consumer society and shows how we never eat alone, even in the most private and seemingly solitary acts of choosing, buying, and digesting. It thus invites an engaged and animated citizenry, one embedded in their life-enabling relationships and aware of their stake and position in the food system. Ecofeminist food journalists organize reality to invite embedded citizens into the joyful responsibilities and benefits of care-focused, ecologically minded, civic identity work. Such "moments of connection, of enchantment, of affective force…propel us to ethical generosity" (Skeggs ,2014, p. 16), and there is an unmatched pleasure and ability to improve the world with such informed eating. EFJ further serves the public's best interest by facilitating food sovereignty. The choice between EFJ and our current commercialized mediascape is one between a care-based sovereignty defined by responsibility or the continued cultivation of insecurity and dependence characterized by a reductive selfishness.

It is important to recognize the media outlets and actors who do the kind of work that either aligns with EFJ or occasionally overlaps with some of its concerns and practices. There are excellent non-profit newsrooms like The Counter, Civil Eats, The Splendid Table, and National Public Radio's The Salt. These are digital outlets reporting on farming, foodways, food policy, gardening, culture-as-connection, and other sovereignty-enhancing topics. They also provide platforms to rural sociologists, community organizers, social activists and other experts who can help people navigate

the food system outside of consumer choice. Then there are those legacy news outlets that continue the work of the original women food journalists. These food journalists did not create some idealized inclusive realm free from inequalities or social pressures, but neither did they create a space populated solely by individualized consumers. Sustaining the intimate public sphere is Hanna Raskin of *The Post and Courier* (Charleston), Kimberly Kindy at *The Washington Post,* Soleil Ho at *San Francisco Chronicle*, and Helen Rosner at *The New Yorker*. There are also hard news digital outlets that cover food issues like Helena Bottemiller Evich at for-profit Politico or Michael Grabell at non-profit ProPublica. Excellent freelancers and independent journalists also dot the mediascape like Clare Leschin-Hoar, Tracie McMillian, and Stephen Satterfield, co-founder of *Whetstone* magazine. Quality work is being done in the field of food journalism and now is the time to recognize these contributions, build on them, and encourage their proliferation.

Those already accustomed to the neoliberal consumer mediascape may object to the "hard news" treatment of food and claim that eating is merely delicious and ask why we should take it so seriously. I do not need the burden of knowledge to enjoy a cheeseburger, they might say, or, life is busy; I just want to feed my family and eat. It is certainly true that a person does not need detailed knowledge to take pleasure in food. And the demands and burdens of an uncaring capitalism have left many vulnerable, harried, and drained of the energy to care. Some people may feel it their right to work their job, earn their money, and pay others so they themselves do not have to think about food. While this may all be true, food was enabled by other people and processes. Even if you work hard, reap the benefits, and ignore the rest, the co-constitution of food (and thus

you) has happened nonetheless. History has happened. Culture was made. Efforts were put forth, energy transformed, and the material world was made meaningful and present, all for you. There is another way to approach food, one that is more satisfactory and contributes to the continuation of pleasure. When you eat with all your senses, EFJ holds, food can taste that much better. When you recognize the care you have been given and the relationships and processes that sustain you, you can better exercise sovereignty, nourish your community, and cultivate the co-constituting care of *becoming with*.

As long as the digital attention economy, surveillance capitalism, commercialized media, and commodified food remain what they are—our communications about food will always be incentivized to create the most surplus value by exploiting the least informed consumers. EFJ thus requires non-commercial funding and a public open to counterhegemony. Furthermore, the cultural consequences of capitalism include perpetual invitations to egocentric ignorance. This results in a race to the bottom where competing individuals exploit each other, living creatures, and the ecosystem as quick as possible. For a sustainable and democratic future, food cannot remain merely a commodity. For food journalism this means that audiences cannot remain mere consumers. They must be skeptical of their own eating motivations, have solidarity with those who are not "good subjects" of Western domination, and allow marginalized peoples the strategic essentialism necessary to defend their identities against colonization (Heldke, 2003). In other words, audiences should not just be consumers, they should be more like colleagues and good neighbors (p. 217). EFJ offers a vision of what that might look like. While further clarification is needed in concrete contexts and situations, EFJ

can supplement traditional understandings of journalism's role in the realization of democratic sovereignty by arguing that journalists should:

- inform (everyone, comprehensively considering public needs, verifiable facts, and co-constituting subject positions)
- investigate (employing scientific, verifiable methods and proportionate to that which most requires attention and care)
- analyze, contextualize, clarify, and explain (exhaustively considering facts and interconnections to obtain best approximation of truth and ensuring the most appropriate forms of care for widespread flourishing and transformation through collaboration)
- foster accountability (of everyone in society to each other, but proportionate to power, vulnerability, and who is in most need of care)
- engender social conversation (that is thoughtful, worth having, attentive, and responsible)
- facilitate empathy (inclusively, independent of power or special interest, and proportionate to who is most deserving of care)
- articulate and reify shared values (using verifiable facts and accountable to a comprehensively considered public, one that is entangled and characterized by a transitory latent commons)

Adhering to such roles and ideals will not result in a harmonious society free of dispute. The contingencies of existence and constant negotiation of meaning and the material world means there will inevitably be divergent or conflicting interests. But democracy is a process continually realized (or not) and such guidelines provide a

fighting chance to cultivate care and nourish the relationships necessary for the mutual flourishing of democratic, care-minded actors.

EFJ could prove an invaluable tool of the *social imaginary* (Appadurai, 1996). Not a matter of escapism or fantasy, this socially derived imagination is a pivotal part of contemporary agency, and one that sets the limits and possibilities of social practice, self-worth, and achievement in the world. Such imagination is no mere contemplation, as responding to such interpellations is an active performance of one's humanity and vitality. As Ida B. Wells understood, "The people must know before they can act, and there is no better educator than the press." While media itself cannot improve society, it can invite citizens into more mutually beneficial caring relationships and embedded subject positions. Our historically shaped food systems, the material-semiotic cultural connections that bind and nourish us, should be guided by a sense of community that is too big to fail. No media outlet, academic, entrepreneur, consumer, producer, or any other entitled individual has a monopoly on reality. Instead, reality is continuously sought after, articulated, repaired, and transformed and should thus be realized through communication systems characterized by care. This endless negotiation requires the bold, perceptive, and intentional efforts of willing worldmakers, humble and caring enough to artfully notice the ongoing processes of *becoming with*.

Chapter 6: Conclusion - Moving Forward

What started as an inquiry into contemporary food media led to a critique of the social order, particularly regarding the food system, digital media, the political-economic system, racial and gender hierarchies, and the episteme of individualism and the sovereign consumer. An alternative ethical and subject orientation was put forth, offered as a counterhegemonic starting point for future deliberations about food, media, the individual, society, and their entanglements in a relational ecological system. Such a suggestion is not meant to substitute my preferences for the specific reflection, decisions, and work required by situated citizens, journalists, and eaters. Instead, I hope I have offered some useful perspective to rethink processes born from the contingencies of history and amplified by the path-dependent logic of modern and late modern social change. Taking the long view, I showed how the once progressive ideas of modern liberalism were intentionally manipulated and reshaped into a compelling but ultimately self-destructive neoliberal "common sense" of market fundamentalism. Altogether misreading or ignoring the embeddedness of the entire person, neither liberalism nor neoliberalism is adequate for future challenges and the necessary transformations through collaboration necessary to avoid ecological disaster or to achieve extensive realizations of care. With a more comprehensive and situated view of truth and reality, feminist thinking and ecofeminist food journalism invite citizens into active, co-constituting communities too big to fail. If we can translate these into practice, it currently offers us the best chance to feed the democratic connections necessary for an inclusive communal table and widespread flourishing.

The commercialization and mass commodification of food and media originated at roughly the same time in the late 19th century. These changing structures and processes invited new human subjects—new practices, identities, epistemologies, and ethics—and the cultural consequences of capitalism extended far beyond the material arrangements between owners, workers, and customers. The post-war advent of consumer society and the new self-oriented social contract of neoliberalism intensified these changes. Today's digital environment of surveillance capitalism, target markets, and a self-reinforcing attention economy further feeds the fetishized ego and reduces the world available to individualized consumers. Encouraging food sovereignty, not by simply growing "one's own" but through relations and responsibilities of care, can counter the harmful consequences of such social developments and invites us into new subject positions and comprehensive approaches to true empowerment. Guided by ecofeminist care ethics, pursuing sovereignty to determine one's own life and eating practices is not a neoliberal project of individualization and entrepreneurialism. Instead, individuals strive for food sovereignty as equal partners in the dialectic of identity work, questioning their status as entitled individuals and always noticing their evolving state of *becoming with*. EFJ and ecofeminist democracy do not offer final answers—there can be none—as issues of ethical eating remain a constant tension to negotiate, articulate, and perform.

The next steps for this research would be for eaters and eater-journalists to consider its principles and do the work of cultivating care. EFJ should be defined through its specific iterations, and eater-media users, eater-journalists, and eater-academics could all contribute to its creation, demand its continued presence, and articulate why and how particular forms of care operate and look the way they do. While substantial resources are

needed for an adequate investigative journalism proportionate to the powerful, there is nothing in EFJ that demand it take the institutional form of historic news outlets or our current digital journalism. Any eater can create EFJ and the gatekeeping and boundary work of traditional journalism are no longer the hurdles they once were. When food communication valuable to sovereignty and inclusive self-government is created, it should be identified and held up as something to be emulated. We are all eaters and anyone can create, recognize, and encourage EFJ.

Because of food journalism's importance in feeding democratic relationships and processes, EFJ should be valued by the public and given the necessary resources to thrive in whatever forms it finds itself taking. While there is no difference in status between a professional food journalist and any other eating citizen that creates quality food communication, paid journalists have more time and support. EFJ should thus be partially institutionalized, not as an act of status and exclusion, but to ensure its continued existence, encouragement, and adequate resources. Food journalists would thus have the privileged time and space to cultivate care and produce quality work while also being held accountable and encouraged with good faith deliberation and eater dialogue.

Academia is also a privileged institution, not in status, but because of the time and space allotted to pursuing care-inducing ends. Educators could thus incorporate the principles of EFJ into journalism, agriculture, hospitality, media, or business courses. Researchers could explore potential funding models, a particular challenge for a digitized attention economy incentivized to exploit ignorance and keep audiences hungry and engaged. Direct sponsorship also matters less when user data itself is commodified, so the ethical codes of not taking gifts or avoiding conflicts of interest are quickly becoming

inadequate. Academics could also delineate care in specific cases, perhaps working with rural sociologists or colleagues in agriculture departments to better understand the food system. Different forms of CDA could be employed on different outlets, looking for the nuances and commonalities on the creation or impediment of quality, care-engendering food media. While more diverse than even a decade ago, food media remains predominately white and largely the realm of women. For my own future research, I intend to explore how positionality influences food media and how eating is constructed in Black, brown, and Indigenous media spaces. Such work also involves new approaches to history and how food and media regulated social belonging in other kinds of communities. This is not to treat the world as hopelessly divided or merely consisting of isolated parts. Instead, a more comprehensive view of how human worlds have been co-constituted is sought while also respecting and delineating idiosyncratic situatedness in a diverse world of active agents.

TVFN, *NYT*, and Eater followed their briefs, performed what they set out to do, and by their own standards, created quality work. I personally frequent all three outlets outside of research and commend the journalists and media makers that consistently deliver useful and engaging content. The definitive limits of such media, however, meant there were minimal invitations to audiences as citizens, as the role of consumer subsumed civic identity. The nominal glimpses of a consumer-citizen hybrid offered in such content showed how this combination is inadequate. In our current consumer society, neoliberalism puts the "me" in media. The exploitation of others and externalizing of consequences is normalized and notions of "personal responsibility" are insufficient for negotiating and deliberating collective (i.e., *becoming with*) issues. Material-semiotic

systems that have been socially constructed are thus siloed into individualized choice, and criticisms are neutralized or hedged by an ultimate appeal to consumerism and caring only for one's immediate family. This is not the sinister, intentional work of contemporary media practitioners. They are doing the best they can in circumstances they did not choose. As a social system, neoliberalism does not just reduce everyone and everything to the calculating reductions of market logic, "it [also] develops institutional practices and rewards for enacting this vision (Brown, 2005, p. 40). Media that was commercialized for private gain through a market has been further *neoliberalized* through a digital attention economy of individualized targeting and surveillance. This context means it is unfair (and unhelpful) to simply dismiss food media, and eaters should appreciate the communicative work that is done and the embeddedness of its creators.

But we can always ask more of our food journalism, especially if it is to live up to its moniker. Commercialized media has made journalism profitable, but this diverts from the fact that journalism is a public good. Media does not exist just to give people what they want; it can invite people to who they are, who they could and should be. Rejecting the flexible ethics of an individualized consumer, care-oriented journalism could avoid the fetishization of culture, labor, individualism, and identity. Emphasizing relationships, context, and situational responsibility, such media could comprehensively consider its topics, not shaming people or speaking from above, but tracing material-semiotic connects and facilitating empathy as a fellow eater. When done correctly, this could result in joys more rewarding than consumer culture can offer.

The consumer's entitled desire for pure pleasure or their claims of compassion fatigue are no longer an adequate excuse for egocentric media. The world is more

interconnected and complex, and there is no going back; pleasure demands responsibility. In a social order where capitalists are charged with "creating" value, joyful responsibility is a must. A good journalist can simplify complex processes and concepts, explaining the world in relatable and easy to digest ways. Slightly better journalists, however, can do this without sacrificing the nuances and contingencies of living, co-constituting the media user's imagination without dictating its limits. Journalists should not just fetishize topics and present reductive reasoning; they should open up understanding and give focused, well-informed views connected to a context by considering all of the relations that enabled it. Such journalism would thus be helpful without patronizing the public, reducing those it covers, or treating audiences as solely a means to an end.

The bold practices of EFJ and its time-consuming investigative work, means food journalists and outlets need adequate funding, resources, and time. As commercial media proves a limit on journalistic independence and private gain often comes at the expense of the public good, EFJ should not be primarily funded by the profit model. While markets and profits can still play a role, the majority of the wealth generated from EFJ should be under nonprofit community control. This would ensure its independence and continued ability to carry on its necessary and important work.

As it stands, lifestyle media content resembles the discursive strategies of a cult leader or abusive partner that reminds you of life's problems, claims they alone have the answers, and constantly reminds you how much you need them. Harangued, made dependent, and devalued, audiences are positioned as a replaceable part of an otherwise perfect market. Individual humans are made interchangeable objects as consumer culture dictates they pursue their desires in the market, and neoliberalism now demands they

think of nothing else. Over 150 years of commercialized media has cheapened American democracy and made many of its consumer-citizens neurotic. Entitled and paranoid sovereign consumers can now wield a flexible, nihilistic pragmatism that denies all forms of inconvenient reality. In a social order supposedly built on equality of opportunity, freedom, consent of the governed, and the necessary compromises of democracy, such a position cannot be encouraged.

How long do we allow the degradations of capitalism to weigh us down and abuse us? How much longer can we tolerate an uncaring neoliberal order that benefits those already well resourced and tells everyone else that society no longer exists? How much more "growth" is needed before we can stop treating our ecosystem with disdain, recognize each other as embedded and co-constituting citizens, and ensure everyone is provided adequate care? No matter how much wealth is "created," we can never seem to afford a just life where needs are met, people are secure, and flourishing is widespread. Could it be that capitalism, and especially its most adaptable and aggressive form yet, neoliberalism, were never intended for such ends?

We live in a market economy, and I myself do not wish to grow my own food, make my own clothes, find my own water, or go back to a time before states enforced the bare minimum of rights. But markets and communities existed well before capitalism, and the current consumer society that prioritizes the perpetual quantitative growth of capital accumulation regardless of means is not the only way to live. As individuals and as a collective (as this project has shown, each co-constitutes the other), we must reevaluate our concept of value and ask if it is good enough. Is the current form of commodity capitalism—with its compulsions, incentives, and consequences on culture—

good enough to create the kind of world we want? Is a system based on abstract growth derived from exploitation, externalities, and expropriation adequate for us to say, good enough, we currently live in the best possible world?

The media provides a menu, not a meal, and it takes an active, caring citizenry to bring a better world into existence. To know better is not necessarily to do better, and to think that socioecological problems could be solved if media just made more people aware is naïve and incomplete. But just as communication-as-culture does not look for immediate media "effects," so too can cultural symbolic systems interpellate and invite new ethical eating subjects, even if slowly and only over time. Media can be a focused place to start the difficult work of worldmaking, and not as an ultimate authority but as a fellow citizen inviting an entangled public into a nuanced conversation with itself. In our current context, there cannot be a meaningful and adequate politics for life without emancipating the subject solely concerned with an individualized lifestyle of self-actualization. While audiences must choose to care, lifestyle journalism—if only to live up to its name—should comprehensively discuss life and call forth the actively invested, embedded citizen. This is not done because it sounds nice or can drive engagement in a crowded attention economy. Rather, it is continually strived for so "individuals" can be free enough to co-constitute care.

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Vita

Taking the historical long view and using a variety of critical/cultural approaches, Joe investigates media and the creation of meaning in everyday life. Examining consumer culture, lifestyle journalism, news, and popular forms of entertainment, he is primarily concerned with the entanglements of pleasure and power in constituting worldviews, identities, and ethical scripts. These have material consequences, and Joe seeks to understand how such media enable or constrain our abilities to think holistically about other people and the environment. Engaging in both empirical analysis and theory building, Joe is the epitome of an interdisciplinary scholar capable of teaching and researching an array of subjects.

Joe has taught a wide range of courses on topics including history, globalization, popular culture, and the principles of journalism. He has also led a study abroad. Regardless of the course, Joe seeks to cultivate well-rounded students capable of critical thinking, empathy, and articulating their diverse views and positionalities.

Joe's research often engages the intersections of race, gender, class, and environmental consciousness. His recent work includes the influence of commercialism on the Black press, the discourse of sustainable fashion, and the construction of culture, gender norms and race through food media. He also won a top paper award on the potentials of feminist and environmental theory for journalistic ethics. The common thread of this research has us question how everyday communications and seemingly innocuous topics invite us to imagine and treat ourselves, each other, and the world we all inhabit.

Joe currently lives in West Virginia with his best friend and spouse, Katie, and the loving memory of their two rabbit roommates, Inga and Barnaby.