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Visceral difference: variations in feeling (slow) food

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Abstract. This paper responds to concerns over a lack of diversity in alternative food movements by entertaining the possibility of understanding difference as a visceral process—a process of bodily feeling/sensation. Participatory research within and around the Slow Food (SF) movement reveals the complex role of feelings in motivating food actions and activism. On the whole, the cocreated data from this research illustrate that food is never ingested by itself: in the body, molecular connections develop between food and a countless array of other factors. Thus, food and food movements come to *feel* differently in different bodies as a result of *inner*-connected biological and social forces. In paying attention to such biosocial processes alternative food movements like SF may develop new understandings as to why they activate some people to participate in alternative food practices while chilling others. Accordingly the paper suggests that attentiveness to visceral feeling could enhance the ability of food movements to mobilize across difference.

Introduction

> "Slow Food has spread in the US through a certain gastronomic society, which is basically white. It has only spread in one category, white and wealthy, and has done so through volunteers. We have never made a selection of volunteers ... it was just whomever asked to be part of the movement, and so the message reached only those who were there and ready to hear it. This [process] revealed the organization, and [being] organized this way organically generates problems. It doesn't guarantee diversity."
>
> Slow Food leader (personal interview)

As the above quote indicates, many alternative food activists—people dedicated to securing alternatives to conventional means of food production/distribution—purport to want to increase membership diversity in alternative food movement organizations. At least this seems to be the case for the Slow Food movement (SF), whose leaders have suggested that inadequate racial and economic diversity may be an impediment to strengthening the US faction of the global movement. As movement leaders in the US begin to ask the tough and laudable question of how to increase membership diversity, they find themselves attempting to recruit across difference. Recent research has examined how structural/economic and discursive/rhetorical processes work to maintain alternative food movements like SF in the US as largely liberal, white (European-American), upper-middle-class groups (eg Allen, 2008; Guthman, 2008a; Hinrichs, 2000; Jarosz, 2008; Slocum, 2007). Particularly intriguing here is Guthman's (2008a) insistence that alternative food discourse codes spaces of alternative food practice as white, having a "chilling effect on people of color" (page 388). This paper enriches such work by questioning whether visceral processes may also be relevant to understanding difference in alternative food.

While this paper speaks through empirical example, more than an assessment of 'gathered' data, what we attempt to advance here is a particular approach to understanding difference that takes into account what we call the visceral body. Throughout the paper, *visceral* is defined as the bodily realm in/through which feelings, sensations, moods, and so on are experienced (similar to Connolly, 1999; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008; Hayes-Conroy and Martin, 2010; Longhurst et al, 2009; Probyn, 2001). Necessarily, visceral includes the cognitive mind; the visceral body is an internal relation of mind/body. Thus, we do not seek to circumvent so-called 'cognitive' and 'representational' aspects of identity/difference, but rather we seek to rework concepts of identity/difference to include both bodily sensation and mental conceptualizing. Addressing difference viscerally, we ask: how do various relations between bodies and their social and material environments manifest as feelings/sensations/moods which can encourage or inhibit participation in food-based social groups such as SF? We use SF in Bay Area, California as a working illustration that allows us to interrogate how differences in feeling/sensation/mood surrounding food can be seen to both emerge from and help to construct boundaries in alternative food.

This paper is thus premised upon the suggestion that recruiting a diverse membership in alternative food movement organizations demands an understanding of how different bodies differentially feel food, food environments (restaurants, markets, farm fields), and food practices (buying local/organic, culinary customs, gardening). We pay attention to cases of feeling to offer a moving picture of the catalytic potential(s) of visceral experience: how feelings can work to *charge* or to *chill* membership and participation in alternative food groups like SF. The picture we offer while focused on SF is one of many potential pictures that might have been given. We do not try to make claims about SF as a social movement organization through this paper; the paper is about the *possibilities of understanding* that emerge from our engagement with SF.

We use data cocreated through participatory fieldwork in order to track some visceral mechanisms through which movements may (often unwittingly) generate or reinforce boundaries along various lines of difference. Fieldwork tended to involve people whose local versions of SF were permeated by an existing culture of anxiety in the Bay Area over class and racial privilege. Our cocreated data echo this undertone and help us to illuminate difference as a visceral phenomenon. In the coming section we discuss recent literature that explores the materiality—specifically the molecularity—of feeling, and this helps us to understand difference in terms of the visceral body. Then, after explaining our methodology, we draw on empirical examples to explore the viscerality of difference—one focused on tangible food ingestions and another focused on intangible (food-based) ingestions. Throughout these examples, we often use the term Slow Food (SF) in reference to all material and immaterial aspects of SF (foods, events, environments, claims, ideologies, missions, and members). We also use the lexicon 'feeling' as shorthand for all sensations, moods, and states experienced in the visceral body. Importantly, we understand bodily feeling to result not from purely individual sensations or intrinsic qualities of the self, but rather from different(ly situated) bodies' capacities to affect and be affected by other bodies [including non-human bodies, like food or music, as in Anderson (2005)].[(1)]

[(1)] For a clear explanation of the relationship between affect, feeling, and emotion see Anderson (2006).

Understanding difference as visceral

Difference, particularly social difference, has been a common theme in social research for over two decades. Scholarly interest in how to sensitively theorize difference intensified throughout the late 1980s and 1990s (Calhoun, 1995; Fincher and Jacobs, 1998; West and Fenstermaker, 1995; Young, 1990). An important agenda in this work was to replace boxed or static understandings of classic social differences, including race, class, gender, and sexual difference, with more fluid and dynamic understandings of these categories by pointing out the processes through which they are continually socially produced. Meanwhile work on bodies and embodiment reacted and responded to discursive approaches by trying to express the real, material impact that cultural representations of difference have on bodies (Butler, 1993; Jacobs and Nash, 2003; Weiss, 1999). Within this work there has been much dispute over the role of bodies themselves in the creation of difference; maintaining distance from biological determinism as well as (total) social constructivism, scholars have tried to eke out a way to adequately depict difference as it relates to the body. Today, many find feminist theories and relational philosophies helpful in theorizing cultural representations of difference alongside the 'fleshy realities' of the human body (Beasley and Bacchi, 2007; Colls, 2007; Longhurst, 2005). Specifically, corporeal feminist scholarship is cross-pollinating work on affect, emotion, and sensation to demonstrate a need to attend to *visceral difference*—singularities and variations of experience that emerge as sensations/moods/states of the human body [eg, Knights and Thanem (2005). Markula (2006), Probyn (2001; 2005). Saldanha (2006), and see Grosz (1994) on corporeal feminism].

Particularly relevant for thinking through visceral difference is the notion of 'biosocial', which invites us to understand biological and social forces as internally combined. The term has been used as a disruption to the nature/society binary, and thus effectively to the mind/body binary (Pollard and Hyatt 1999). Notions of 'biosocial' have penetrated a handful of geographic subdisciplines—eg health geography [Mansfield (2008); and differently, Hall (2000)]; resource geography (Bakker and Bridge, 2006); social and cultural geography (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly, 2004); and urban geography (Latham and McCormack, 2004). In a valuable illustration, Mansfield (2008), inspired by various relational theorists (Castree and Braun, 2001; Whatmore, 2002), uses the term 'biosocial' to complicate understandings of bodily health. She explains how the wellbeing of the body is "about the 'physiological' translation of...'social' practices, even as these [social practices] react to physiological processes. The social [becomes] the biological, while the biological [does] not exist on its own, without the social" (page 1018). Drawing from this account, we similarly suggest that feeling is more than either biological response or socialized reaction to situations/surroundings—feelings are visceral judgments that are simultaneously biological and social in a way that is irreducible to either/or.

Yet, if visceral experience is an ever-shifting biosocial process, how are we to 'get at' feeling as social science researchers? McCormack's (2007) work on 'molecular affects' reminds us that 'lay' intervention into the visceral realm of mood and emotion has become increasingly commonplace. McCormack describes how various scientific and industrial advances have offered working maps of the molecular body by attending to biochemical movements in the brain and body. With this new cartography, affective experiences are increasingly rendered available for manipulation, as various drugs, techniques, and practices are presented and sold to the public as molecular self-help technologies. It is now commonplace to take an active role in manipulating one's biochemical exchanges—from the ingestion of Prozac or St John's Wort to the practice of exercise or meditation. Of course, many pharmaceutical interventions for altering brain/body chemistry are marketed in bioreductionist ways, claiming to produce

specific and certain results, and ultimately eschewing the more holistic, biosocial conception of bodily wellbeing described above by Mansfield. Yet, as McCormack's work illustrates, this focus on the biochemical has also opened the door for envisioning other ways of intervening in corporeal/affective economies that admit and allow a great deal more uncertainty.

For our interest in the visceral, these advances are important because they make affective relationships both imaginable and palpable. Once we accede that drugs can alter one's mood, sensations, or state of being ('bodily feeling' for short), other ingestions—like food and drink—are not far behind. Nor, we would add, is the leap so great between these tangible ingestions and more intangible ones—things like ideas, representations, or theories. Certainly if meditation and yoga have been used to alter bodily feeling, so too could other mind–body activities: learning, reading, discussing, labeling. More accurately, tangible and intangible ingestions happen concurrently: eg foodstuffs being eaten along with food ideas, food rhetoric, food labels. Part of our goal as researchers in this project was thus to witness and to critically discuss the production of different states or feelings through participants' engagement in food-based activities (tasting, growing, creating, describing, etc). A bit later, we hope to describe how food produces feelings that serve to differentiate bodies in/around SF.

An important point to reiterate first is that whether we are talking about tangible food ingestions (sugars, fats, spices) or intangible food ingestions (ideas, beliefs, values) we cannot reduce bodily state or feeling to chemical composition. Foods and food-based activities could help to produce certain moods, or might get certain feeling chemicals moving (McCormack, 2007), but the molecular economies of bodies are much too complex—and unique—to claim guaranteed, universal results. Instead, we take McCormack's view that, "bodies emerge as nonreducible, relational rhythmic orderings, the affective capacities of which can be transformed through various techniques and practices" (page 370). For McCormack the value of biochemical mappings of the body lies not so much in providing scientifically objective explanations for feeling but rather in proposing one potential means through which the 'barely sensed' micro-spaces of the body might be surveyed and discussed in their biosocial complexity (page 369). Biochemical or molecular processes offer 'material consistency' to all kinds of affective relations, without needing to draw watertight causal equations about them. Moving in the realm between biological and social sciences, we can begin to see the visceral body as an active and translational space in which constantly mixing and merging molecules interpret and convert (various 'ingested' parts of) the rest of the world.

A second and related point to make clear here is that, again whether talking about tangible or intangible ingestions, different bodies will interpret and convert differently. Such difference may seem obvious when discussing seemingly immaterial/cultural things that a body might take in: for instance, the idea of local eating might translate to a rousing feeling in one body as a singular blend of chemicals spill out and move within the body upon hearing, viewing, and/or mulling over the idea, while in another body the same idea might translate into quite different chemical mixtures and movements. But, we insist that such visceral difference can also exist in regard to material ingestions: ingredients like sugar, fats, or spices also inspire different molecular movements in different bodies, and ultimately differences in feeling. To be clear, these visceral differences are not simply a product of social variation, but instead result from the particular interactions of bodily molecules themselves, translating ingestions, releasing and reacting in a wider climate of biosocial variability, and building upon previous interactions and bodily memories to produce variation in moments of feeling.

Therefore, contrary to colloquial depictions of viscerality as knee-jerk response, we understand visceral differences (or, variations in bodily feeling) as developmental in their immediacy. That is, an in-the-moment feeling builds from a seemingly chaotic intersection of new(er) and old(er) factors influencing that moment's unique molecular mixing and moving in the body: things like a smell, a comment, weather, prior moods, a new theory, a recurrent idea, a headache, a memory, or a pat on the back. Herein we might also add structures like race, gender, and class; these can be seen as key factors in forming visceral difference both because they influence how bodies can and do develop on a chemical/molecular level and because the social categories themselves can be 'ingested', generating mixings and movings of molecules, and ultimately shaping bodily feeling. It is for this reason that we insist a visceral approach is a way to see social difference operating *in* the body alongside and interconnected to other processes more often recognized as chemical, molecular, or bodily. Issues of race, gender, and class are not outside the visceral (for instance, see Saldanha, 2006).

Below, after summarizing our methods, we offer a background to some of the anxieties (about difference) that seem to be present in/around SF. We then venture into the visceral, detailing two conversations about particular ingestions, which serve as illustrations of how differences in feeling are produced in relation to SF.

Explorations in slow food

The data discussed in this paper reflect our contention as researchers that it is possible to get at visceral experience through intentional dialogue and conscious bodily/sensory action. The research activities we discuss come from the California-based portion of a larger research project on visceralities of food activism that took place in Nova Scotia, Canada, and Bay Area, California. To be clear, viscerality in this project worked as both method and theory in a fully participatory sense; that is, we found that an attentiveness to the visceral body both centered our/participants' bodily capacities of feeling (in order to make feeling available in research encounters) and proved valuable for *thinking* about food–body relations (and more broadly food–environment relations). Our project directly engaged past and present SF members as well as food activists and professionals on the edges of SF; participants (forty in total in California) and researchers cocreated data through a series of research events that allowed for verbal and nonverbal communications, of which participants had overall control. Events included 'intentionally designed experiences' of SF created by participants, as well as in-depth conversations and group discussions, which often included further sensory exchanges (meals, gardening, marketing, or outings to food-production sites). During fieldwork stays in California and Nova Scotia, we also immersed ourselves ethnographically in the regions, talking with adults and school-age children met in day-to-day activities and while volunteering. The second author was engaged in a related project regarding school garden and cooking programs, which greatly enhanced our understanding of food activism in both sites. All communications loosely addressed the question, what does food and/or SF *feel* like?

The theme of difference, while playing a lesser role in Nova Scotia, emerged as a particularly powerful theme in California, most likely because difference—particularly issues of race and class—has intensified as a pressing issue among Californian food activists and academics in recent years. Evidently, to be politically correct in alternative food circles in California is to be aware of multiple intersections of race, class, and food. The work of Alkon (2008), Allen (2004; 2008), Guthman (2004; 2008a), and Slocum (2007) parallel this increasing awareness in the academic world, and indicate persistent inequity in California alternative food, particularly along class, race, and occupational lines. Appropriately, in a project such as ours, where data are created in collaboration

with participants, it is unsurprising to have generated much *discussion* on difference. We emphasize discussion because the theme of difference emerged more in verbal communications than in nonverbal communications. We attribute this to two related factors: first, the fact that participants had total control over nonverbal, sensory experiences usually meant that they designed experiences that resonated with them viscerally and thus did not tend to recall differences in feeling between themselves and an 'SF other'; second, as activists working within particular political repertoires, many of our participants found that the topic of difference was something easier to insist upon verbally than to show/share through sensory engagement with food. Hence, we use mostly verbal data below to offer an illustration of how SF/alternative food *is being felt* (by some) and *might be felt differently* (by many).

Before doing so, however, it seems crucial to note that SF, in the context of Bay Area food politics, is unique. SF began in Italy in the 1980s as a resistance to food-system standardization/corporatization (Pietrykowski, 2004). Today, as an internationally organized, member-supported movement, SF seeks to shape the future of food systems and culture worldwide, focusing on the protection and enjoyment of 'good' (tasty), 'clean' (environmentally friendly), and 'fair' (socially just) foods. SF has many branches, working through grower communities, 'presidia' projects aimed at agro-biodiversity preservation, global and regional conventions, and local chapters called 'convivia'. Internationally, SF is quite diverse, including food producers and consumers, wealthy and poor, from over 100 countries in the Global North and South.

In contrast, as previously indicated, SF's US membership (particularly the convivia) is not as diverse. In California specifically, spaces and networks of SF often appear to be divided across racial and economic lines. Lack of diversity has been suggested in critiques of food elitism leveled on the region, such as that made by SF founder Carlo Petrini himself (Petrini et al, 2007), as well as by the voiced concerns of numerous local food activists (including SF), and by a survey conducted as part of this project: consider that, in the Bay Area over 90% of approximately 100 SF members responding to our survey were white (only 7% were Asian, 3% other, and 0% black, also 2% Hispanic of any race), while the Bay Area statistics at large are considerably more diverse: 47.3% white, nearly 20% Asian, 9.5% other, 7.3 % black, and nearly 20% Hispanic of any race. Rates of education were similarly skewed. Of those responding to our survey nearly 90% boast undergraduate degrees or higher, while in the Bay Area, 41% of the population has an undergraduate degree or higher.[(2)] We cite this apparent lack of diversity in Bay Area SF not to critique the organization, but rather to point out why race-based and class-based difference seemed imperative to our participating group of California food activists. (For more on our methods see Hayes-Conroy, 2010).

Feeling Cheetos, differently

One of us has explored elsewhere the emergence of pleasurable feelings via social and material aspects of SF (Hayes-Conroy and Martin, 2010). We understand such sensations as indicative of particular body – food and body – environment relationships that catalyze forms of alternative food practice (eg organizing workshops or public events, supporting local farmers, participating in community gardening). For instance, one

[(2)] Statistics come from an online survey answered by ninety-six members in the San Francisco Bay Area and from the US Census Bureau 2006 data for the defined area referred to as the 'San Francisco Bay Area'.

food activist described her relationship with a box of apples that sat next to us during a conversation:

> "These apples give me physical pleasure and an emotional response. My friend's mother grew them on their cherished family farm. They are an heirloom variety. It is really raising an emotional response to smell them and that galvanizes me in a way that is much stronger than any intellectual or abstract or ideology could" (Cecily).[3]

As we hope to have made clear already, one critical matter that arises in accounting for such motivating is: how do some bodies become inspired or charged through SF—activated towards alternative food practices—while others are chilled or turned off? Before delving into the visceral body to answer this question, we use this section to set the stage—to illustrate (one version of) the background of food–body politics and political anxieties and ambivalences in/around Berkeley-area SF.

SF's eco-gastronomic projects have often focused on the goal of *taste education*—the cultivation and appreciation of particular tastes like heirloom varieties, seasonal organic produce, and free-range heritage poultry—for the purposes of protecting these species and upholding agro-biodiversity (Petrini et al, 2007). The predictable flipside of such appreciation of tastes is a disapproval of other tastes. In conversations and during shared meals and other activities, many SF members reported negative feelings and sensations in relation to products like Coca Cola, microwave oatmeal, and Sysco chicken, or upon entering chain supermarkets. Others referenced bad meals—eg McDonalds or Jack in The Box[4]—in comparison with better meals, usually at nonchain local restaurants or cooked at home. Such visceral appraisal of bad taste, negative feelings, or other adverse sensations can be easily problematized, as they were in numerous conversations with activists in this project. A number of participants recognized that such feelings not only trigger a rejection of certain foods, activities, ambiances, or experiences but also set up a dynamic of judgment against others for their own food enjoyments.

Yet, while some food activists take issue with the potential dynamic of judgment that comes linked with the rejection of fast/processed foods, many hold firm to the value of tasting what they consider to be 'real' food. One social-justice-oriented food activist insisted:

> "The allure of Jack In The Box is everything tastes so over the top. It's like Extreme Cheetos. That's what everyone in my neighborhood eats.... If you grow up eating .... I mean, I ate tons of junk food when I was little and somehow I got out of eating that way but when I see people eating Extreme Cheetos I think how are you ever going to enjoy a peach or whatever?" (Thea).

Another activist, equally spirited towards justice was even more adamant about what 'good food' is:

> **Cecily**: "Everyone can enjoy good food. I mean, I am not wealthy.... I just ate at Chez Panisse today and man it is good.... I think that everyone is redeemable, everyone can experience and enjoy good food if they have a chance to taste it. Even little black kids who live in Oakland and eat cheese puffs, they are redeemable."
>
> **AHC**: "Is good food always universal? I mean doesn't goodness depend on what some people like the taste of?"
>
> **Cecily**: "Goodness in food differs, yes, but good food is never Cheetos, never!"

[3] All names have been changed.

[4] A major fast food chain.

Such comments demonstrate an ambivalent kind of attention to feelings engendered through food. On the one hand, activists are uncomfortable with the scenario of ostensibly training bodies to feel negatively about what many others ('the masses') eat, do, or find pleasure in; such a scenario quickly begins to seem either elite, colonialist, inequitable, or otherwise unacceptable (eg see Guthman, 2008a; 2008b). Yet, many are also unwilling to accede that all tastes, feelings, and sensations engendered by foods are equally acceptable; some foods—like the highly processed foods produced by the corporate industrial system—are not good.

The political challenge entangled in this ambivalence becomes ever more complex if we insist on a biosocial understanding of bodily feeling. The 'feel' of food experiences, including quite emphatically the 'taste' of food itself, cannot be separated from each event of feeling or tasting; the taste of a meal or the feel of an environment includes the social relationships embedded in it, the cultural representations it brings up, the spiritual keys, imagery, a body's past experiences with flavors, hunger sensations in the stomach, and so on. Hence, included in one's in-the-moment 'taste' for Cheetos or Jack in the Box is a variety of factors that become intertwined (whether unintentionally or intentionally) with SF commentary on fast/junk/processed foods. As one Berkeley food professional explained:

> "It's not just the food. It could be, I go to Jack In The Box on my own, or with my friends, or [maybe] it's my family ritual. So there are these other parts of the experience ... . Food is deep, so deep, and people have so many issues around it ... you don't want to judge them on that" (Cindy).

Indeed, food is one way in which bodies connect to innumerable aspects of the social world. Thus, by criticizing popular 'tastes' for fast or processed foods as uninformed or false, alternative food movements can end up denying the biosocial mechanisms through which fast food actually comes to taste good to some people. In opting for a simpler, fixed explanation of bodily tastes and pleasures, a taste for fast food may be read as a symptom of a passive, incapable, or malfunctioning body that should be 'redeemed' to its 'true' state of being/tasting. In rejecting the notion that fast food can really taste good to some people, alternative food movements end up overlooking the possibility that people's taste for fast food could indeed be a result of an *active* and *capable* body responding to a particular social and physical environment. Most importantly, as a few participants insisted, this kind of a rejection also can *feel bad*. In the next section we unpack what we mean by 'feeling bad' by using some participants' reflections to imagine what might be happening in the body at a microlevel when different bodies encounter SF.

Variations in feeling food

As we previously insisted, the data revealed through this project reflect our contention that it is possible to get at visceral experience through intentional dialogue and conscious bodily/sensory action. Much of what we draw upon in this section comes from participants and researchers' collective attempts to think through and to verbalize, as well as demonstrate, how food/activities propel molecular or biochemical changes in their bodies. Our intentional dialogue often progressed through the vernacular of feeling, which served as a common point of entry to visceral matters. We used dialogue on feeling to collectively imagine—more accurately to *glimpse* in bits and pieces—the molecular, visceral body. Below, we use our collective imaginations to discuss some processes through which 'difference' is constituted between SF and 'the rest'.

Jorge (and beyond)

We begin, strategically, with Jorge, a non-SF food activist, who, when we met him, had recently begun to think about food activism in terms of the body. Our dialogue with Jorge not only helped us to imagine what SF and fast food each *do* to different bodies, but it also specifically addressed how race and heritage might be ingested along with food. Jorge, himself a Mexican-American who represents a variety of communities of color through his Bay Area activism, began by expressing how SF rouses him at the same time that it repels:

> **Jorge**: "I think I am warmed up [to SF] because it's very romantic and I do have my dream of seeing our communities of color ... participate in ... our own [kind of SF], our own way of slowing down and having sacred relationships with our food ... redefining [it] in our own, with our own flavor. So in a sense it does inspire me to recreate it for us."
>
> **AHC**: "So why does it need re-creation? What about it doesn't feel right?"
>
> **Jorge**: "I don't see us joining that movement, nothing against the movement, or the people, but they don't reflect us and they have never really tried to incorporate us in any way. So, I just see that as a natural, I don't want to say process. It just hasn't happened so it's not natural; it hasn't been natural for them, it hasn't been natural for us to gravitate towards it, so that's alright."

While Jorge seems to judge SF positively, citing it as a source of inspiration, he goes on to express dissatisfaction with SF's approach to body–food relations, particularly its failure to encourage a sense of bodily wisdom coming from one's own lineage. In a similar vein to the postmodern critique of expert knowledge, Jorge implies that much of the alternative food movement sees food knowledge as something that connoisseurs, food professionals, or educated and refined individuals have, and that others, often the uneducated, minorities, and the poor, need to be provided or taught. Instead, the food initiative that Jorge leads is about giving people of color a sense of wisdom in relation to food that is not simply about intellect but rather about the cultural and biological ways in which intelligence has been embodied in them:

> "I want to reinforce that what their culture eats, that is intelligent, that is wise, a part of their evolution ... they still exist because they knew to eat [such and such] foods and spice them with this, and make these certain combinations that maybe killed this bacteria or had this enzyme to break down this protein and make it available, that kind of stuff ... [I want] to begin [alternative food practice] there ..." (Jorge).

As Jorge talks, he describes his hopes for a different way to *feel* alternative food, which SF could be creating/tapping into/transforming. This alternative 'visceral imaginary,' or feeling potential, has to do with an inclusive and biosocial rather than reductive and intellectual view of food wisdom. Jorge suggests that SF is not encouraging affective relationships with food in which bodies are activated in/through the feeling that people *already have* wisdom in their minded bodies. He further suggests that by not tapping into or, worse, eliminating the validity of already existing wisdom(s) in many bodies of color, SF physically turns off many of these bodies to the possibility of feeling alternative foods in empowering ways.

Jorge's comments also imply that, by not acknowledging already existing capacities of bodies of color, alternative food movements may be relinquishing the opportunity to better understand why and how processed/fast foods come to be desired within his community. More specifically, in not allowing for the possibility that desire for fast food could signal a functioning and capable body, movements may fail to account for the often inequitable social and physical circumstances in which such bodily desires develop. For example, Jorge gives an illuminating explanation of why he

thinks that communities of color may be gravitating towards certain kinds of (not so 'good') foods:

> "[I think] that we are filling voids—emotional, social, psychological voids—with certain foods and behaviors ... [We] find ways to try to feel connected or a part of something ... and we find that we *do* get the right chemicals moving when we eat certain junk .... It will fulfill certain feelings that our people are sometimes looking for in these unjust times and environments. Whether it's a sense of sweetness that we might not be feeling; it's easy to fill us up with other sweetness, pan dulce Mexicano ... you really experience that sweetness and that rush in your blood and your whole chemistry changes and for a moment you really feel good."

He continues later:

> "We are not gravitating towards [junk foods] saying, '[these people are treating me badly], so I am going to go eat this to protect me from them,' but there is a part of our intelligence that starts to realize, 'Hey, I feel like this when I eat this and either, I want to feel like that right now, or I might want that [food] in me before something like this.' ... This is what's new for [our activist community], in bringing to the ... bigger analysis of our food system issues and [in figuring out] our community's health, that not only is [junk] food strategically situated and placed in our environments but now, psychologically we are more inclined to eat it. We might even go a little bit further to find it; it's our refuge at times ... a short way, a quick easy way to feel a way that we are kind of desiring."

We emphasize Jorge's statement about feeling in order to draw attention to the visceral mechanism he posits behind actions of eating; there is a bodily *charge* there, an impetus to eat something in order to *feel* a particular way. Jorge refers to this as a psychological phenomenon, but clearly makes the connection to the visceral/biosocial in recognizing that such psychological tendencies arise out of his community's desire for sensations that particular foods offer. Moreover, Jorge implies that this visceral drive makes sense within the context of a disadvantaged community; it is a sign of a functioning and capable body that is coping with economic inequities and emotional voids. In this example the question of how food feels in the viscera therefore becomes a matter of a whole host of factors including race/heritage, but also cultural longing, social inequity, and perhaps personal healing. Jorge helps us to imagine how social relations involving food in various settings—home, community, school—may encourage people to develop or nurture visceral associations (specific molecular tendencies of mixing/moving) between particular types of food and particular social identities, groups, cultural ideas, and discourses. According to Jorge, social inequities may indeed heighten and reify these associations.

In our work within the Bay Area we were told numerous times about associations between being 'black' and enjoying fast and other processed foods. Likewise, what has come to be known as common 'California' cuisine—like local arugula and goat cheese salads—were perceived as 'white' or 'hippie' foods. As a middle school student from Berkeley commented:

> "If you look around Berkeley you'll see that the people who are all about organic [food] happen to be white hippies, not African Americans or Latinos ... it's just what they are used to, what they grew up with."

Considering the commonness of these associations (according to research participants), it is not surprising that SF does not *feel* equally 'good' or 'right' to all racial/ethnic groups. While the outcomes of SF's food politics are certainly not predetermined, by encouraging the trendy, expensive, organic kinds of food to be posited as simply 'better' or more 'wise' than the 'inferior' cheap, easily accessed, processed foods, SF and other food movements can encourage certain visceral feelings

about food to adhere to other tendencies of feeling about race, economic capacity, and social status (eg tending to feel biochemical 'heat' of anger with the way that 'they' call 'my' food inferior). Without acknowledging and countering such associations, even the most well-intentioned and socially conscious food activists can end up reinforcing such visceral difference.

At times over the course of our research, such associations did indeed seem to be deeply embedded in the social networks and structures we were studying. Yet, as we engaged our participants in discussion about these associations we also came to understand them as fluid biosocial propositions (as in Latour, 2004), rather than just definitive statements. In other words, at each moment of experiencing goat cheese or arugula these foods can feel more or less black or white, good or bad, fitting or not; there is always an opportunity for small shifts, or even large jumps. Differences in the *feel* of food result from the heterogeneous ways in which memories, ideas, discourses, moods, tastes, and so forth come together in the body; they are unpredictable, but also not completely beyond our control. It was for this reason that several of the nonwhite food activists that talked with us indicated that being visibly nonwhite played an important role in their work, not only in re-presenting alternative food to nonwhite consumers but, in so doing, encouraging new visceral experiences of alternative food within Berkeley's communities of color. These activists felt as though their visible appearance created new visceral opportunities for nonwhites to experience alternative food as something that feels 'good', 'fitting', or other-than-white.

From such examples, then, we begin to expand our repertoire for imagining how difference might be constituted viscerally. Jorge's discussion invoked tangible ingestions, like pan dulce (sweet bread), with which certain bodies have developed particular affective relationships. Yet, as we can quickly realize, it is not just ingredients—eg sugar—that get 'feel good' chemicals moving. Intangibles such as values, ideas, and labels, as well as things like prior experiences with a food are part of the irreducible biosocial production of feeling. Indeed, not everyone would 'feel good' eating pan dulce (eg, we have encountered many an organic foodie that seems repulsed by refined sugar). Body–food relationships are emphatically not reducible to either biological or social explanations; yet, as we attempted to do in a small way with Jorge, by calling attention to and imagining how specific foods work in specific bodies, we begin to appreciate the biosocial nature of these relationships. To further advance this project, we now turn to a second example from our empirical work, focusing on our dialogue with an SF activist, Missy.

Missy (and beyond)

If the above subsection highlighted the tangible ingestion of food, slowly illuminating the intangibles that come to be ingested therein, this subsection works on the contrary, focusing on intangible ingestions, which circle back to and play into the tangible ingestion of food. Our conversations and shared sensorial experiences with Missy, a young food professional and SF member, often detailed how values, discourses, and practices of SF were 'taken in' and judged by the visceral body as feelings.

For instance, as we shared a green salad at her workplace, Missy scrunched up her nose to describe how she came to 'feel bad' eating lettuce in the SF context:

> "[In SF] it's always called lettuces, not lettuce ... you will notice that people [who aren't food professionals or activists] call it lettuce and that's what it was growing up and all of a sudden it's, 'Oh those were delicious lettuces,' and I am like, 'Oh really? Were they?' You couldn't just say lettuce?" (Missy, Berkeley, CA, with a sarcastic tone).

Missy went on to hypothesize that similar discourses make others in SF 'feel good.' In other words, some members may have developed affective relationships with the ways in which food is discussed and valued in particular alternative food circles that 'charge' them viscerally, offering bodily sensations that inspire continued SF interaction/participation. Indeed, many of our research conversations in California explored how alternative food tends to attract bodies that can use various intangibles of 'slow' food (values, discourses, and so on), as well as those of associated food-based spaces, to access positive feelings, which 'charge' the body or 'physically inspire' continued SF actions. For instance, a professional woman and single mother in her late thirties commented:

> "In Berkeley [SF/alternative food practice] to me is a scene, a hip thing ... it's part of the little Berkeley club. It's about being 'in' in Berkeley. Like, you know that Friday night is going to Cheeseboard Pizza. You hear the Berkeley kids play jazz. You see people in line and all of it. It's a good feeling" (Brynn).

In Brynn's case, daily acts of SF practice, like going out to eat at alternative restaurants, allow her to access (self-defined) 'good' feelings that charge her, or encourage her continued presence at these establishments as well as her continued attempts to inform herself about food system issues. While Brynn is indicative of many, certainly not all SF members have the same affective relationships with the intangibles of Berkeley-area alternative food. The quote below exemplifies a contrary trend in which a man encounters the SF movement through convivia events and comes to feel a series of 'bad' feelings (narrated as feeling 'blue collar' or inexperienced) that deactivate or *chill* him towards continued attendance at SF events:

> "Although I support the ideals of Slow Food, belong to a CSA, shop at farmer's markets ... I do find the local events to be mostly 'Foodie' events, with prices that are out of many of my friends' reach. I grew up on a working farm, growing most of our vegetables, fruit, and nuts, trading for eggs and butter, contracting with another local farmer for a side of beef and a side of pork, and supplementing our meals through hunting for squirrel, deer, wild turkey, rabbit and possum (I don't recommend possum). So ... I was raised in a slow food culture. But at events, I feel a little 'blue collar' since I'm not a wine expert, and have limited international travel experience" (anonymous male).

In keeping with our collective research task we want to insist how this quote, as well as the others above, do more than narrate participants depictions of what SF *feels* like in a colloquial sense; they edge toward a molecular imagination of what is going on in the body during SF events by indicating that feelings are (bodily) judgments, which encourage or discourage action. Throughout the research, participants discussed 'good' or 'positive' feelings, feelings that charged them towards continued SF actions, as well as 'bad' or 'negative' feelings, that chilled them. To be clear, 'good' and 'bad' here are stand-ins for highly complex and subjective visceral judgments defined by each body in the moment of action. While we explore elsewhere the distinction of good and bad feelings in SF (Hayes-Conroy and Martin, 2010), the point to understand here is that a kind of visceral resonance (or lack thereof) serves to offer physical rationales for various kinds of food-based acting.

Thus, through such commentary we can begin to envision the production of difference as a visceral process: varied affective relationships between minded bodies and social/material environments manifest as different feelings about SF. These differences in feeling engender diverse 'needs' of action—going out to an SF-type restaurant or separating oneself from an SF event. While each time–space moment of encounter with SF is unique (eg some days Brynn might feel less 'charged' through dining out), over time, the way that bodily feelings come to correlate with actions can influence

future tendencies of visceral judging and acting. We can imagine how through SF events and activities, feelings of the minded body can become viscerally associated with acting, speaking, or thinking in certain ways. For instance, Missy explained:

> "New behaviors come up and the in-crowd knows it.... Like, people in this scene love to eat salad with their hands. I asked [my peer] about it, saying, I felt [that] it was this in-crowd thing to do, like once you learn you are in, and he said that it's true. It's supposedly a way of being with your food in a more sensual way because lettuce is so crunchy and sort of slimy and all" (Missy).

Here the act of touching/eating the lettuce couples with particular SF intangibles—perhaps the theory that this is the best way to eat lettuce or the thought that one belongs to a group of food enthusiasts who really understand how to eat. These intangibles act molecularly in a similar way to the tangible foods discussed with Jorge above; in certain bodies they help to produce certain moods, or they might get certain feeling chemicals moving. They are feeling-producing, mood-altering ingestions.

Of course, as Missy recognized and explained, these ingestions do different things to different bodies. Missy expressed disillusionment with SF as a result of the mood she feels in/through various SF practices, including eating salad with one's fingers. Such practices create physical feelings, coupled with a clearly articulated intellectual response, that have come to differentiate her minded body from an 'SF other':

> "All of it feels really snobby and exclusive. I am not intimidated by it; I just am not interested in being in that little microcosm. There are things that are much more important to me. I mean, if there is [a hypothetical] African American woman with three children and two jobs, you can't tell her that [enjoying salad with your fingers] is [so] important... that disconnect will always exist and I am becoming bitter about it. The more I work in this community the more I see the intense irony and intense conflict in that and I want to move away from it" (Missy).

We once more want to stress the importance of a visceral reading of the above quote. In Missy's words, SF *feels* at times snobby, elite, and trivial, and, in comparison with her previous enthusiasm for SF, she feels bitter and conflicted. Her use of the term *feeling* here importantly works as more than just a colloquial epithet; Missy is also talking about sensations in her body, which she associated in the particular time–space of our research conversation with the words 'snobby', 'elite', and 'trivial.' Without denying the content behind these words that Missy chose for narrating the experienced sensations, our research task was to focus on presence of these feelings in her body and what they make her capable of doing or not doing. Participating in this project through several in-depth conversations and two sensory-led experiences (mostly meals), Missy came to express how her minded body began to feel SF as 'bad' and how this shift in bodily judgment has deactivated her urge to participate in the movement, separating her from others for whom SF still engenders mostly 'positive' feelings. Thus importantly, the terms Missy uses to describe SF are not simply adjectives—cognitive categories through which she organizes an understanding of where she fits in the world; we can also see these terms as verbs—words describing the actual *motion* of bodily feelings that allow her to do, act, and be in specific ways (similar to Thien 2005).

Complementing our dialogue with Jorge, narrations such as Missy's help us to appreciate and imagine difference in alternative food as a function of visceral feelings engendered in/through various 'intangible' elements of slow foods or SF events. As we insisted at the beginning of this paper when we claimed that mind–body practices and even ideas, theories, or beliefs could have mood-altering (perhaps biochemical) effects, these intangibles of food are 'ingested' (often alongside the actual food) and do become molecular, catalyzing different feelings in different bodies. These differences in feeling indicate powerfully divisive mechanisms through which boundaries may be created and

upheld within alternative food activism. Yet, unlike the fixed categories revealed by our above-mentioned survey (race and education), these differences in feeling seem to be constantly shifting. Many participants insisted that the way SF feels is not 'black and white'. Some days, SF feels 'better', more resonant, offering more 'charge'. Other days it may feel 'worse', less resonant, more 'chilling'. More often contradictory feelings may be experienced concurrently. Thus, without denying the fact of persistent social categorizing that undoubtedly permeates many alternative food circles, by focusing on feelings we emphasize the variable ways in which bodies meet up with and become these groupings. Each encounter with food and SF brings a new mixture of categories, memories, friends or strangers, flavors, information, and so on. People come to feel alternative food through this mixture, thus *feeling out* difference and identity in relation to food as they come to be knowable in the minded body.

Conclusions

This paper has illustrated a means of understanding difference in alternative food as visceral. In presenting this illustration we have suggested that alternative food movements like Slow Food could benefit from assessing how various foods and food environs come to *feel differently* in different bodies. Such assessment might involve, alongside a critique of the structural constraints and discourses that shape alternative food movement organizations, an acknowledgement of the varied ways in which food enters into the body to shape feeling. Together with our participants, we have imagined how food is 'ingested' in both tangible and intangible ways that amount to interventions in the molecular realm of mood, state, or feeling. Such ingestions are irreducible to mere biological or chemical equations, and instead might be understood as biosocial phenomena, producing variable (albeit somewhat directable) results. Through intentional dialogue on bodily feeling (as well as through shared sensory experience), our project worked to detail specific instances of ingestion in order to describe some processes through which 'difference' is constituted between SF and 'the rest'.

In insisting on the need to attend to the viscerality of difference in food systems, we do not seek to deny real and formidable societal forces—institutionalized discrimination, organizational procedures, economic disparities—that are unquestionably powerful in solidifying social difference and creating social boundaries. Certainly these forces have much impact on the way that food movements and systems operate. The visceral approach we advance attempts to understand these forces, as well as many others, from the perspective of the visceral, minded body. Thus through empirical example we have sought to show, in a small way, how we might imagine the body taking in, embodying, and acting upon the tensions of these broader societal forces. We used food, and specifically Slow Food, to do this.

Our two brief but revealing empirical examples help us to grasp not only how certain foods become powerful forces in certain bodies, but also how imagining and tracing the differential feelings engendered through foods could help food movements to understand and ultimately recruit across difference. Attending to the visceral seems valuable in at least two ways: first, in the sense that alternative food projects could find more support if organizers began to attempt to understand and perhaps tap into the myriad ways in which foods and food environs come to feel differently to people who identify as 'other than SF,' specifically to those nonwhites and working-class communities who feel 'other than SF'. And, second, in the sense that minority and disadvantaged groups could work to develop new ways of *feeling* alternative food projects/practices by recognizing the evolution of feelings and bodily wisdom that they have inherited as part of their own racial, ethnic, or cultural heritage. Attending to difference *viscerally* thus seems to be a potentially fundamental way to break down

some of the barriers that academics and activists have noted in alternative food. Our participatory work not only details the power of visceral feeling, but it also models some kinds of dialogue and shared experiences that make accessing the visceral a little bit more possible.

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