# Time for Timbits? Fast Food, Slow Food, Class and Culinary Communication

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The only problem with choice is that citizens have to choose. Time is precious and how resources are utilized and expended, particularly in a recession, matters. Often the issue is not only the choices that are made, but the distribution of resources on the basis of these decisions. While some eat too much, others eat too little. Similarly, governments make a decision about priorities in public services. In 2011, the City of Toronto brought in KPMG to audit 'expendable' services. This expendable list of expenses in the budget included cuts to public libraries. While there was a public outcry in response to such a decision,[1] Councillor Doug Ford, brother of Toronto's then Mayor Rob Ford and representing Ward 2 in Toronto, deployed an odd metaphor to justify such a decision. On the radio station Newstalk 1010, he stated that, "we have more libraries per person than any other city in the world. I've got more libraries in my area than I have Tim Hortons."[2] The idea that a politician would compare the value of fast food and libraries is inappropriate, bizarre and foolish. The reality that he was factually wrong in his comparison makes his statement even more bizarre. Not only were there more Tim Hortons in his district than libraries (39 to 13),[3] but Toronto did not even hold the record for the most libraries per person in Canada, let alone the world.

There is a significant lesson to be learned when a politician appears to validate fast food restaurants over libraries. Such a statement provides an entrée (appropriately) to think about food as a mode of communication with political resonance and bite, particularly after the global recession and the continuing financial instability. The aim of this article is clear: to explore the function of speed – as a trope and variable - in thinking about food as a platform to communicate information. I investigate fast food and its context, slow food and its context, and finally probe how a consciousness of food in/justice is often blocked through the automation of decision making and the deskilling of cooking.

## Speed and Accelerated Culture

Two examples provide a resonant introduction to this study of food and speed, platform management and information literacy. Consider the differing speeds of our online communication. The average email is read within 24 hours and responded to within 48 hours. The average text message is read within a minute and responded to within five. Email is being used less for personal correspondence and more for business and educational communication.[4] Text messaging and social networking are becoming the dominant ways in which personal lives are negotiated. But this changing function in organizational communication is not the focus for this article. Instead, the speed of answering text messages is the propulsion for my inquiry. Why are text messages read immediately and responded to rapidly? What is learnt about the priorities when negotiating analogue and digital time and space? Odd behaviours are emerging, with physical events, people and experiences displaced in favour of digitized correspondence. Analogue lectures and funerals are interrupted. Dinners and meetings are suspended, delayed, mediated and extended to make up for interruptions and distractions.[5] Such practices are normalized and accepted, if occasionally attacked, critiqued or questioned on the basis of manners or efficiency.

This is a displacement culture. There is a desire and decision to deny and indeed lose the present and the

analogue moment, which – by definition - will never be repeated. This choice has been made so that an often trivial and pointless message can be read. The loss of concentration in an actual context – often described as multitasking – is not only significant for education and employment, with lost minutes and hours each day reducing productivity and efficiency, but results in shadowy commitments, attention and allegiances. Andrew Goodwin developed a title – if not an argument or content – to capture this transformation: Dancing in the Distraction Factory.[6] This is a text messaging twilight zone where information literacy is subsumed, denied or delayed. The urgent and quick is a chameleon for the significant and important. Yet receiving and answering these text messages is not about importance. Most text messages are trivial. Many are opt in or opt out advertising or push notifications from social media. It is not the content that determines value. The speed of their arrival connotes importance. Real time and real space are lost, flitting into a displaced time and a displaced space.

To consider the impact of speed on culture, including food, it is necessary to explore the emerging theories of accelerated modernity. The first maxim to consider is that the popularity of a cultural phenomenon is defined by the speed of its production and dissemination. Steve Redhead argued that,

> popular culture is characterized not by content but increasingly by the speed by which its products become outdated and recycled. Or the speed by which the underground becomes overground.[7]

Redhead is suggesting that there is nothing in a particular song, food, fashion or behaviour that makes it intrinsically part of popular culture. It is the speed of movement between texts that creates pop.[8] Therefore, popular culture is – by definition – about movement, change and transformation. It is distinct from other cultural forms because of its mobility. Popular culture is therefore integral to understandings of globalization, industrialization, modernity and speed. Particularly since September 11, celebrity chefs and the proliferation of food programming bounces from television to newspapers and magazines to blogs, through to Twitter and geosocial networking sites such as Foursquare.

Media and popular culture are based upon not only speed, but the speed of the movement in ideas.[9] Newspapers required the telegraph and railways to become the dominant media for an era. Certainly, ideas on paper have moved through space and time before the proliferation of digitized text and images.[10] But railways increased the rapidity and distance by which ideas can move. Similarly television became the dominant medium via satellites. The internet was the key example of Redhead's maxim. It entered popular culture and became a powerful channel of ideas – rather than the hobby of a few - as the bandwidth increased, enabling a much more rapid movement of increasingly larger files. Therefore, the speed between diverse sites increased the range and the adaptability of media.

Speed transforms minor media into popular culture. Speed is therefore a characteristic of modernity. That which is modern is fast. While modernity has as many origins as supposed endpoints,[11] it is linked with a series of expansive events, such as the rise of capitalism, socialism, urbanization and democracy, alongside social movements such as feminism, gay rights and black rights. The increasing importance of science and technology - with the attendant ideologies of the empirical and positivist, or indeed empiricism and positivism - offered a secular pathway to truth. The proliferation of education, with an increasing number of people developing competencies in literacy and numeracy, was matched by the professionalization of medicine and law. Yet the greatest sensibility within modernity is movement, particularly of goods, services, money, information and people.[12] In transgressing the local, formal connections between spaces and places via transportation and communication links were forged. Together, these characteristics, attributes, events and sensibilities not only increased the actual speed at which change took place, but also invoked a consciousness of speed and its consequences. Stress, mental and physical illnesses, family disturbances and an imbalance in work and leisure, production and consumption resulted.[13] The archetype and agent for many of these dissonances is the mobile phone and wifi-enabled laptop. Work intrudes into the home, blocking any definitive compartmentalization of 'free time.' One of the causes of stress is the constant fear about the speed of change. By the early twentieth century, a series of disciplines, like psychoanalysis and psychology, emerged to diagnose these changes. By the end of the 20th century, self help via chat shows was medicating a series of crises from the obesity epidemic to 'toxic' workplaces and family dysfunction. Dr Phil and Dr Oz are modern manifestations. Therefore this double problem – the speed of change and a consciousness of that speed - increased through the twentieth century and provided a seed for the slow food movement.

Paul Virilio has a hypothesis to be tested and applied when considering food as a mode of communication. He argues that the speed of an object, idea, event or entity changes its essential nature. Further, he suggests that the entity that is faster will dominate that which is slower.[14] Such arguments are particularly resonant when considering

how speed activates on and through food, alongside the evaluation of the contexts for both fast food and the slow food 'movement.' Richard Wilk realized that the variable of speed has a profound impact on what he described as "the cultural economy of the global food system."[15] The history and sociology of food is intimately tethered to theories of work, leisure, identity, economic development and social justice. Food Studies scholars have instigated a great service by defamiliarizing the patterns of daily life. The reinvestment in the local and regional has added a complexity to the theorization of space, place and food, with scholars such as Sidney Mintz tracking through the "relative immobility of food systems"[16] in history. When food could be refrigerated and transported, tastes and experiences were diversified. Through such scholarship, it is also important to explore the variable of time and its impact on the meaning, purpose and function of eating.

## Fast Food: Do You Want Fries with Your Obesity Epidemic?

Fast food activates a range of moral panics in our culture: obesity, fitness, health, packaging-fuelled landfill, ocean-polluting plastic bags, environmental waste, animal cruelty and nutrition.[17] If Virilio is correct, then it is important to explore the propulsive trajectory of fast food before moving to a discussion of slow food, as speed – in and of itself - ensures one will dominate the other. Speed also gives fast food a taken-for-granted quality. It is part of popular culture and is embedded into daily life. Automated decision making about food medicates a lack of ability (and time) to cook.[18] That is why Rob Ford felt free to compare the value of a fast food franchise with librarians, establishing not only parity between eating and reading, but the importance of one over another.[19]

Fast and slow food are a direct – and intimate - manifestation of how time, place, speed and acceleration are operating in our daily lives. They are direct applications of industrialization and connect major historical events to the intimate spaces of food preparation, cars[20] and – indeed – the movement of food from hand to mouth. As Albritton realized,

> the car fitted perfectly with the possessive individualism characteristic of capitalism because it seemed to maximize the freedom of movement for each individual, increasing the speed each of us can move through time and space ... Car ownership promotes a kind of possessive individualism which, while instilling feelings of power, at the same time undermines such power with the total futility that comes with isolation. Because more and more individuals spend more and more time alone, isolated in the steel box that is the car, it would seem that the car has probably promoted social atomism and compromised community involvement.[21]

Therefore it is of no surprise that Albritton reports that 19% of all meals eaten by Americans are eaten in cars. [22] The drive-through captures this process, where the consumer does not even have to make a step out of a vehicle to summon a calorific environment. Also, the time compresses between desiring food and being able to eat it, thereby reducing the capacity to create reflections and consciousness in decision making. Sidney Mintz recommended "food at moderate speeds."[23]

The histories of transportation, masculinity, femininity, class, work, leisure, home and domestic life map over food. When the phrase 'fast food' is deployed, it has many connotations. Firstly it signifies food that can be prepared quickly. Celebrity chefs recognize that the changes to work and family-life means that food must transform in response. For example, Nigella Lawson released a series of programmes titled Nigella Express. Jamie Oliver through his career has focused on the speed at which he can create 'pukka treats.' While the speed of preparation offers one entry into the phrase 'fast food,' as an adjective and noun – and indeed a compound noun – it refers to the cooking of bulk ingredients in fast food restaurants.[24] Often these are franchised operations and heavily standardized. A Tim Hortons in downtown Oshawa in Ontario has an identical menu to the one in Barnaby, British Columbia. In the 19th century in the United Kingdom, fast food referred to meat pies and fried food like fish and chips. Sandwiches were also part of fast food in the UK, therefore providing an historical connection to the Subway franchise.

The speed variable in fast food captures the mode of preparation, service and the act of eating. The modern history of fast food is part of North American history and industrialization, tethered to Fordism. The first fast food restaurant opened in 1912 and it was known as Automat. Their slogan connotes the changes to both femininity and family life: "less work for mother."[25] McDonalds is the largest fast food chain in the world. It is almost synonymous with fast food. It was founded in 1940 and offered a simple menu of hamburgers, French fries, milkshakes, Coke and coffees. The food was served in disposable paper wrapping, without conventional crockery or cutlery. They used

a preparation method that Henry Ford deployed to make cars. Staff learnt one task and did not deviate from that assignment, either making the fries or cooking the burgers. The process of cooking was literally transparent, with food prepared behind glass but in the view of customers. Yet one of the other reasons for the success of fast food was that it was linked with another agent of speed: the automobile. The drive-through service combined food and transportation, meaning food could be eaten, and often with fingers.

The consequence of these methods of production and consumption is that fast food is processed, prepared using fordist cooking and preparation principles and standardized ingredients to ensure uniformity of taste, all delivered in the shortest period of time. While fast food is often synonymous with cheap food, a much more complex relationship emerges between food and agricultural policy. If food is seen as a system, rather than a relationship between producers and consumers, then the injustices and complexity are easier to see, track and evaluate. As Michael Carolan asked,

> How could we let this happen, where one quarter of the world is at risk of dying from eating too much, another quarter at risk of dying from eating too little, and some at risk of dying from both obesity and malnourishment?[26]

The distribution of food is a complex question, made more damning and damaging because individuals who have been characterized as obese are also malnourished. So the quantity of post-nutritional food is revealing a powerful series of consequences. As Carolan confirmed, in low-income areas, the choice of supermarkets and the ability to purchase a diversity of healthy foods is severely retracted:[27] "One of the largest risk factors for obesity is being poor."[28] Besides a lack of available healthy ingredients, the other great difficulty is pricing. It is cheaper to buy soft drink than bottled water. It is cheaper to buy frozen chips than a bag of apples. It is cheaper to buy ice cream than yoghurt. Carolan realized that a form of sick – in the many meanings of that adjective – displacement is taking place, "cost shifting, from one industry (food) to another (healthcare)."[29] But there are wider displacements taking place. Cheap and fast food is based on the widely available and 'free' flowing water supply, an inaccurate adjective, and huge quantities of food waste. This 'waste' displaces materials from the food system and into landfill at worst, and compost at best. This waste is not only expensive for the household and the regional economy but confirms the injustices in the distribution of food internationally.[30]

Subway changed the industry. It marketed itself as a healthy alternative to fast food. In response to their marketing slogan – "Eat Fresh" – and films such as Supersize me, 'healthy options' were added to other corporations' menus. Yet even through these interventions, there are profound criticisms of fast food ingredients, such as the use of transfats, salt, and high-calorie sauces and sweeteners. The hyper-calorific environment created through their consumption is one contributor to obesity. But the pay and working conditions for the frequently young employees has also seen critique.[31]

The other major attack, fuelled by the slow food movement, is that fast food is a globalizing formation, destroying local cuisines and ingredients, narrowing seed diversity, increasing the speed of decline in heritage species of plants and domesticated animals and reducing the food literacy of consumers, resulting in hyper-salty and hyper-sweet processed food. Therefore, slow food and the wider slow movement started to address the ingredients, preparation, gastronomic literacy and relationship between production, consumption and food. However they did not probe the wider contextual relationships between time and food.

## The Turn to Slowness

The slow movement is an act of resistance and defiance. It is an act of denial: of speed, fast food and globalized culture. Throughout the last two hundred years, slowness has been a sign of mental weakness or mental retardation. In the last twenty five years, slowness has been transformed in its meaning from a problem or a weakness into a state or attribute of value. There are many origins for this turn to slowness and the slow food movement. Slow food was the first part of the wider portfolio in the turn to slowness. Slow food began in Italy with Carlo Petrini in 1986. He has catalogued the movement through a range of books that has enabled its international growth and development.[32] The slow food movement now includes at least 122 countries.[33] Its local chapters are called convivia, with the head office in Bra near Turin in Italy. This is a fascinating trans-local formation. It signifies the building of bonds and relationships in a non-professional, non-work setting. A space is created to think, speak and eat differently. This localism is a founding principle of the organization, with decentralization a key tenet. Many publications are put out by the group, in many

different languages. Each convivium has a leader who is responsible for promoting local farmers, produce, markets, flavours and events, like wine-tasting, chocolate tasting or cheese tasting. Farmers markets are part of – indeed facilitate - this organization.[34] The history of the entire movement is tracked in a fascinating book by Carl Hanore. This book was called In praise of slow and was published in 2004.[35] A Canadian journalist, he critiques what he calls "the cult of speed." The slow movement has progressed to Slow Retail, Slow Travel, Slow Designs, Slow Cities (Citislow) and the Slow Society, which argues against mobility and flexibility and in favour of sustainability.

The question to pose is why food is the focus of the slow movement. Food has two functions in our lives: it gives us nutrition and pleasure. Food is an item that is ingested to give us energy. Food is also a metaphor for life: bread is the staff of life, food for thought, milk of human kindness.[36] Different places, races,[37] religions and communities prepare food differently, developing into a series of local, regional[38] and national cuisines. Indeed, the phrase "national cuisine" is often a misnomer. Best exhibited by the phrase "Italian cookery," Carol Helstosky showed the major historical and institutional challenges required to build a 'national' cuisine.

> The shape of Italian food habits had its roots in political struggles to encourage some culinary practices and discourage others. What seems peculiar about the Italian case is the nation's self-conscious struggle to improve the dietary standards of the population and the intensity with which this struggle was discussed and debated by the entire population.[39]

When combined, nationalism and food ensures that particular historical moments are frozen and authenticated, forgetting and displacing the struggles, conflicts and deep regional, religious and racial oppressions. Place and taste are commodified. When celebrating the 'Mediterranean cuisine,' the intricate links between northern Africa and the Middle East are marginalized, along with the migration of people. It is easier to enjoy food than to understand the challenges confronted by the citizens of these nations.

Differences between nations and regions are historical, but also behavioural. They occur through particular local cooking processes and practices, different ingredients that are grown and derived from the local agriculture, methods for preparing food and particular ways of manufacturing raw produce. There are two ways in which food is made distinctive. Firstly, there is the selection of ingredients. They can be locally grown, organic, or heavily manufactured with many additives. The second way in which food is distinguished is how it is prepared. Ingredients can be mixed, heated, cooled, fermented or smoked. Food is gathered and prepared for many reasons. Some are to improve the taste. Others are to improve the appearance. Some are to increase the preservation of food so that it does not deteriorate. Some are for the maintenance of cultural identity. In some faiths, animals are killed in particular ways, or particular meats are not eaten at all. Kosher or halal preparations are two examples. But the point of cooking is to transform it by the application of heat or flame. It not only changes its nutritional value, but also its appearance and our responses to it.

Food is now an international business. The key moment in moving local foods to international markets was the arrival of refrigerated shipping. Goods could then be prepared and exported around the world. In response the applications of time and space in relation to food transformed. Because of this innovation – that also presents social and economic costs – a walk through a supermarket will reveal Canadian lobster, Mexican avocados, New Zealand lamb, French cheese, Ethiopian coffee and Germany salami. With the arrival of supermarkets in the twentieth century, a self-service approach to food emerged. Through the economies of scale and refrigeration, good quality food could be delivered at low prices. The consequence of this development for farmers was that supermarkets started to demand lower prices resulting in reduced profit margin for the farmers themselves.

Part of the imperative for the slow food movement was a critique of the corporatization of food and food capitalism, the need for increased payments for farmers and reduced refrigeration. Some of the impact of the slow food movement was to wind back the effect of industrialization on food. However the wider and deeper concern is not refrigeration or even the obesity epidemic. It is the imbalance in food distribution. While some of the world is confronting an obesity 'epidemic' – a glut of food – the rest of the population is confronting starvation and malnutrition. Currently, 815 million people in developing countries are under-nourished.[40] The distribution of food is the key issue, with political, environmental and economic consequences. Therefore, the focus on 'slow' or 'fast' food is, indeed a form of political displacement. As Sidney Mintz realized,

> often enough the choices – for example, fast food versus slow food – are painted in stark terms. At times they even contain an element of nostalgia that does not, of itself, make the problems any clearer. It is worth pondering whether we should invest all of our energies in restoring food to its former importance without tying our hope for better food to programs that raise ethical questions about labor practices, the expansion of cattle herding into crop-poor countries, the dredging of the

sea, the overuse of water and fossil fuels, and much else. In other words – and of course I write this down only for myself – if we can formulate a food program worth supporting, it must have to do with far more than the foods themselves, where they come from, and how we prepare and eat them.[41]

The excess of consumption – embodied by an array of cooking programmes on Food Network including Diners, Drive-ins and Dives, Meat and Potatoes, Man vs Food[42] and any programme by Nigella Lawson – validate, naturalize and create communities around rituals of extreme eating.

While food is part of popular culture, it is also classed, raced, gendered and aged.[43]Different, classes, races and ages eat differently. Through food, social differences and social changes can be tracked. Slow food is anti-globalization and pro-localism. The slow food movement was founded by Carlo Petrini in Italy to preserve local cuisine and stop a McDonalds opening in his local community.[44] This was the first intervention and step in the slow movement. Slow food is about developing food literacy, fetishizing the specificity and micro-distinctions in flavour, sourcing and taste.[45] Indeed, Melissa Caldwell described the multi-literate and multi-sensory manifestations of food. She recognized "food's capacity to evoke bodily responses in different sensory registers: sight, taste, smell, touch, and sound."[46] Yet this sensory experience is not only created through the food itself. Its sourcing delves into stories about local produce and food communities. Events are held like the biennial cheese event in Bra. It is called – no surprises here – Cheese. There is a Genoan fish festival which is called – there is a pattern forming here – Fish. Culinary tourism is growing, creating relationships between food production, place and bed and breakfasts. In 2004, Slow Food opened up its own institution of higher education: the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Palenzo. It aimed to produce good nutrition. Recognizing the role of learning in this mode of specialized consumption, the goals of slow food are clear. Sustainable seed production through seed banks was a way to preserve local and historical varieties of food within local food systems. But supporters also wanted to develop a taste for a region through the celebration of food and traditions.[47] It was also a way to preserve those local traditions for food production. The goal was to bring back small-scale processing. It was anti-fordist, promoting the traditional smoking of meats and localized baking. It was a celebration of local cuisine. It provided an education to widen food literacy and warn about the problems of fast food and the reduction in variety of food species. It was also a promotion of organic farming and argued against the use of pesticides. It was a way to encourage ethical consumerism and taste.

'Taste' is a word with a similar connotative spectrum of 'culture.' They possess both a neutral and highly pejorative usage. As Michael Carolan realized, "taste is strategic."[48] To summon taste is to transform and translate sensations on the tongue into languages of class, race and religion. Taste confirms a belonging to particular communities, and exclusions from others. It is also a word that transforms a lived experience of food into a knowledge system and literacy that can be deployed to judge and demean others. Theories of speed overlay such structures. Therefore, the environment of purchase seeps into – indeed to change metaphors steeps – the 'taste' of the food. Taste is augmented, channelled and shaped by the narratives that encircle it.

Mobilizing and managing the spaces around consumption practices, the slow food movement has been successful. Promoting local food now seems like a motherhood statement. But there are attendant value-judgments of class, literacy and education that accompany such assumptions. For example, consider Richard Wilk's culinary vision.

> I can see this contrast every Saturday morning in my home town. On my way to the thriving downtown farmer's market, I pass lines of cars stacked up at the take-out windows of McDonalds, Taco Bell, and Burger King. While I am buying organic peaches grown less than ten miles from my house and loading up my cooler chest with grass-fed lamb chops from an Amish farmer, others are on the way to the supermarket for grapes grown in Chile and frozen lamb from New Zealand.[49]

Such a statement is not a description of food gathering processes. It is a value judgment of those who do not share the ideology of localism. It also is a commentary about the role of speed in thinking about food. The adjectives of 'organic,' 'grass-fed' and 'Amish' only add to the effect. While Wilk maintains a 'cooler chest,' the rest of us must manage with a refrigerator. However some powerful critiques of this seemingly self-evident ideology of food and its value have emerged. DeLind offers a clear critique of the locavore, the person who eats local food.[50] The locavore seems to be making a great contribution to reducing the air miles of food and supporting local farmers. But when there is a focus on the local, we are not dealing with sustainability, equality and the building of developing nations and regions through socially-just 'trade not aid' programmes.

Further, the discussion of food miles, the distance between where the food is grown and purchased, is not as clear as a pristine localism discourse may suggest. Carolan, in The real cost of cheap food, shows that agricultural conditions within each local community also require attention.

Interestingly while energy consumption is comparable to what would be required to ship New Zealand apples to the UK (2030 megajoules per tonne), the carbon footprint of UK-produced apples far exceeds that of New Zealand apples (60.1kg of CO2 per tonne) due to the latter country's more favourable apple-growing conditions.[51]

Carolan confirms that the simple arithmetical determination of distance between producer and consumer is not as valuable as assessing the methods through which the food has been produced, along with storage and preparation.[52] There is a stark reality presented here: we may live in one local environment, but we are all linked in a trans-local economic and social food system. Sustainability is not a local formation. A person may live in Manchester, but they also live in Lancashire, England, Britain, Europe, the Northern Hemisphere and Earth. By attending a local farmers' market and sourcing local produce, there is blinding denial of the deadly injustices in food and economics. If other local cultures – that may just happen to be in other nations – are ignored or demeaned, then there are profound costs. If the bulk of the Ethiopian economy is based on coffee production, should 'we' block Ethiopians the right to develop a sustainable economy so that we can 'choose' local coffee? Sarah Lyon confirmed an alternative argument. She stated that, "A more nuanced analysis demonstrates that emerging alternative markets, such as fair trade coffee, represent the successful combination of both the oppositional characteristics of slow food and the market-driven strategies of fast food."[53] Another option is to choose ethical exporters of Ethiopian coffee, who offer transparency in both the payment to farmers and the cost of the produce.

DeLind offers a strong critique of localism because it focuses on individuals and their choices.[54] Her critique is complex, because it unsettles many of the assumptions of the market economy and indeed slow food. The environmental movement and the locavore/slow food movement are founded on the ideology that individual choices matter. Partly sourced from Al Gore's An inconvenient truth, there is a pervasive argument that when an individual buys environmentally friendly light globes, they are saving the planet from climate-driven catastrophe. If local carrots are bought, rather than those imported from California, then this is an environmentally correct consumerist decision that benefits the planet. DeLind argues that this theory actively denies an understanding of the international food economy.[55] It suggests that everything that is going wrong in the world can be changed through personal choices and behaviour. The reason we want to believe that changing individual choices can change the world is that it is easier than the formulation of social movement to leverage for change. But actually, the locavore is a consumer like any other consumer. They are buying products. This is not political activism. This is shopping. Therefore the adjective and noun of local and the locavore are not as positive as it may appear. DeLind has constructed a deeply powerful critique, made stronger because the assumptions of the Slow Food movement, naturalizing farmer's markets, counting food miles and buying local, have now hooked into popular culture.

The success of 'slow food' is difficult to determine, evaluate or measure. Proxies can be established. But there is no doubt that the movement has had an impact on how food is covered in popular culture. Cooking programmes create narratives around food that are frequently travel stories. A celebrity chef travels to Sicily, Castellorizo, or a small village in France and visits a market, talks to the locals and cooks from the local produce. But also, whenever Jamie Oliver talks about organic chicken or locally sourced vegetables, that is slow food. Whenever Nigella Lawson discusses the importance of food in bringing families and communities together, that is slow food. The problem is that slow food is a middle class movement. It is elitist. It involves middle class consumers feeling better about eating expensive food, while criticising the food habits of other groups and other communities. These affluent consumers can enjoy local consumption and local production, while disempowered communities from the developing world that require the business from industrialized nations in Europe and North America are being stopped because of a commitment to the local. There is also an appropriation of food, practices and stories from agriculture that is giving consumerism greater meaning. To use some specific national examples: if a consumer buys from Fresh Co (Canada), Coles (Australia), New World (New Zealand), Asda (United Kingdom) or instead selects to buy from a farmer's market, then which purchases have the greater credibility and prestige? If food is about stories and narratives, then local food bought in a market provides the content, depth and history for what can be a banal part and practice of daily life. Occasionally it is important to remember that we are only talking about food. Is food selection really the most important issue at the moment? Certainly it is a proxy and – indeed – symptom of many wider fears, injustices and unequal distribution of resources. But there is a difficult question to ask. After terrorism, war, and international recession,[56] why – and why now – has there been a fetishization of food consumption? Why after September 11, xenophobia, fear, the Arab Spring are there so many cooking programmes? What is their political purpose?

In partially answering such a question, the major critique of the slow food movement emerges. It does not explain how and why fast food emerged in the first place and has increased in its presence and currency. Eating fast

food rather than slow food is not 'about' choice. It is about understanding the context in which that choice is made.[57] There are many reasons why people eat fast food. Here are a few examples.

- They work long hours
- They work irregular hours
- They cannot manage stress and self-medicate through food
- Families are less stable and the role of 'cook' is more unstably designated
- Both parents work, reducing time for both careful shopping for produce and preparation time
- Work intrudes on leisure and family life, reducing the available cooking and preparation time

Food is not isolated from the rest of life. Fast food provides a quick fix for the problems with work, leisure and family. A major question remains, can we solve social problems with food or do we add to the social problems through food? However researchers and policy makers answer that question, it is important to acknowledge and manage the economic and social situation that made fast food a necessity. There is no doubt that odd social and personal relationships emerge around food. Obesity, anorexia and bulimia are a few examples. Entire websites and communities emerge around distinctive eating practices and behaviours.[58] The read write web is filled with user generated content that has disintermediated food media and food policy.[59] Even for those not labelled as obese, anorexic of bulimic, a whole range of problems exist around food that are called 'disordered eating.' A bad day at work results in the consumption of three wines and a tub of ice cream. A relationship disappears, and along with it a bottle of vodka and an entire cheesecake. Food is a trigger, assistance and symptom of a range of wider social problems. The key change in any thinking about over-eating or disordered eating is not to blame the food or to pathologize the people eating it. The focus must be on the question of why food is eaten in a particular pattern.

Many explanations for aberrant and disordered food preparation and eating behaviours have their origins in the home and school. Sarah Robert and Marcus Weaver-Hightower explored the relationship between food, politics and health in School Food Politics: The complex ecology of hunger and feeding in schools around the world.[60] The relationship between trans-national food corporations and a range of resistive groups, from animal rights campaigners, the slow food movement and environmentalist groups, creates a distorted, contradictory and changeable array of food policies. Children's food, particularly in schools, activates a dilemma of moral panics, roles and functions, including training future consumers. Therefore future research needs to explore how these interventions in space, time, movement and speed may be foreshadowing changes far beyond the kitchen. Therefore the final part of this article slams food systems together with social systems.

## Food In/Justice

> Today we have a truly disturbing situation, with parts of the world having so much food they do not know what to do with it, while nearly half the people in the world suffer malnutrition.[61]

> — Robert Albritton

Slow food, like fast food, is not a solution for international inequalities. They are band aids to hide – just for a moment - the deep and deathly consequences of how our food, water, resources, money and power are distributed on this planet. The food system – like all systems in our globalized world - is based on capitalism. That means inequality, injustice and uneven distribution are simply part of the system. The market economy is a competitive economy. But whenever there is competition, there are losers. In the case of food capitalism and the market economy, the losers in the system either eat too much food of poor quality or eat very little of any kind. Albritton's Let them eat junk commences his study with an important question,

> Does it make sense to leave a basic necessity like food to capricious market prices that make food affordable at one place and time and not affordable in the next?[62]

He argues that we need "food regimes"[63] that produce food that is economically and environmentally sustainable, socially just and healthy. While particular nations are dominated – in media discourse at least - by moral panics encircling fat bodies, the size and the prejudice that results from those bodies is only part of the problem. lxiv Certainly 'fatness' and the phobia and oppression of fatness have a history and context. The problem is that

resources are going into producing food that almost inevitably creates a calorific environment. With the proliferation of motor vehicles, desk jobs and a decline in walking, it is almost impossible to balance calorie intake into the body. lxv Yet besides the proliferation of high calorie food and a reduction in opportunities to exercise, there is also an explosion of medical and weight loss practitioners and industries that base their profits on the increasing number of fat people who face oppression and are desperate to remove the weight, at any cost.

Even if citizens in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand are not overeaters, bingers, anorexics or bulimics, the result of body size being framed and restricted by the discourses of health and beauty means that a large proportion – indeed perhaps the majority of the population - become disordered eaters. This invisible problem fails to recognize how food is being used as an emotional crutch to manage – via an indirect and often unsuccessful method – social and personal injustices in families and workplaces. Food speaks. Bodies speak. Researchers require effective methods, often involving unobtrusive research methods,lxvi to translate this metaphoric voice.

The task when studying food as a communication system is to ensure that injustices of bodily size are acknowledged and managed, but at the same time, to also ensure that the food regime that pumps some populations with calories and leaves others to starve is called to account. Food matters, but not in the way that the slow food practitioners suggest. The key is to create a system of accountability for food decisions. Eating fresh, local, organic food, may have consequences for the economic system of other nations. Further, some nations and their food are fetishized: Thai and Japanese 'cuisine' are two examples. It is significant how often these fetished foods map over former orientalist and colonial discourses. Similarly, eating fast food means that the speed of eating is blocking a consciousness of the purpose of eating in the first place. The speed becomes more important than the food.

At its most basic, food is a result of the chemical and social transformation of animals, vegetables and minerals into something that is eaten. Food Studies takes this transformation and explores what happens after the food is eaten. These key questions activate studies of the economy, culture, social systems and bodies. Slow food is not a solution. It is a symptom and a proxy for our need to address – rather than market and fetishize – the injustices in the international food regime. In recognizing the social danger in an honest discussion about food, it can be understood why Doug Ford wanted a few more Tim Hortons and a few less libraries.

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## Endnotes

1. P. Moloney, "Doughnuts vs books? In Ford's Etobicoke, it's 3-1," The Star, July 20, 2011, http://www.thestar.com/news/torontocouncil/article/1027962--doughnuts-vs-books-in-ford-s-etobicoke-it-s-3-1?bn=1

2. D. Flack, "Tim Hortons vs. Toronto Public Libraries mashup," BlogTo, July 20, 2011, http://www.blogto.com/city/2011/07/tim_hortons_vs_toronto_public_libraries_mashup/

3. ibid.

4. J. M. Spector, Finding your online voice, (Abington: Routledge, 2007)

5. T. Moog, "Phone stack restaurant game prevents meal time interruptions and could cost you a lot of money," Digital Trends, January 17, 2012, http://www.digitaltrends.com/mobile/phone-stack-restaurant-game-prevents-meal-time-interruptions-and-could-cost-you-a-lot-of-money/

6. A. Goodwin, Dancing in the distraction factory, (University of Minnesota Press, 1992)

7. S. Redhead, Paul Virilio: theorist for an accelerated culture, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp. 49-50

8. A sonic presentation of this argument is available. Please refer to T. Brabazon and S. Redhead, "Speed and popular culture," Libsyn, 2011, http://tarabrabazon.libsyn.com/webpage/speed_and_popular_culture

9. I acknowledge the importance of John Urry and the mobility studies paradigm in thinking about movement and speed. For an example of this literature, please refer to K. Hannam, M. Sheller and J. Urry, "Mobilities, immobilities and moorings," Mobilities, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2006, http://publicspace.commons.gc.cuny.edu/files/2011/05/editorial-mobilities.pdf, and M. Sheller and J. Urry, "The new mobilities paradigm," Environment and Planning A , Vol. 38, 2006, pp. 207-226, http://www.ias.uni-bayreuth.de/resources/africa_discussion_forum/ws08-09/new_mobilities_paradigm_sheller_urry.pdf

10. I am influenced in this argument by Harold Innis's The bias of communication, (Toronto: University of

Toronto Press, 2006: 1951). Space-biased media not only move ideas through geographical territories, but at increased speed.

11. I wish to note the scale and scope of the debates encircling terms like critical and capitalist modernities. From Anthony Giddens' The consequences of modernity (Stanford University Press, 1991) through to Peter Drucker's Post-capitalist society (Collins, 1994) and Teresa Brennan's Exhausting Modernity, (London: Routledge, 2000), debates about modernity as an era and project are volatile, exciting and extremely important. While conducting the research for this article, I have been strongly influenced by Zygmunt Bauman, particularly Liquid Modernity, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

12. J. Urry, Global Complexity, (Cambridge: Polity, 2003)

13. M. Bunting, Willing Slaves, (London: Perennial, 2005)

14. P. Virilio, "Speed and Information: Cyberspace Alarm!," originally published in Le Monde Diplomatique, August 1995, http://scottkleinman. net/495dh/files/2011/09/Virilio.pdf and P.Virilio, "The Third Interval: A Critical Transition," from Re-thinking Technologies, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), http://webstermedia.nl/mobilemedia/ readings/virilio-thirdinterval.pdf

15. R. Wilk, Fast food / slow food: the cultural economy of the global food system, (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2006)

16. S. Mintz, "Food at moderate speeds," ibid., p. 4.

17. Robert Albritton makes the point that scientists have never known more about food and human health than in our present. Yet because of the corporatization of food, poor individual and collective choices are being made about consumption practices and behaviours. He stated that, "We have increasingly good knowledge about what is good for human health and environmental health, and yet there is a huge gap between our knowledge and policy, precisely because policy change is tightly constrained by the interests of giant corporations," from Let them eat junk: how capitalism creates hunger and obesity, (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2009), p. 8.

18. Brian Wansink in his Food and Brand Lab at Cornell has studied the impact of a calorific environment and the multiplicity of food choices on the rise of obesity. Please refer to Mindless eating, http://mindlesseating. org/

19. This naturalization of fast food in streets and the patterns of daily life was explored in E. Schlosser, Fast food nation, (London: Penguin, 2002)

20. M. Featherstone, "Automobilities," Theory, Culture & Society, Vol. 21, no. 4/5, 2004, p. 1-24

21. Albritton, op. cit., pp. 72-73

22. ibid., p. 73

23. S. Mintz, "Food at moderate speeds," from R. Wilk (ed.), Fast food / slow food: the cultural economy of the global food system, (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2006), p. 3

24. My argument here is not suggesting that quality is standardized. A fine moment of user generated content that generated a consciousness in the gap between the image of fast food preparation and the actuality of its delivery is present on YouTube: Fast Food: Ads versus reality, http://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=mbCwi6EeNAE.

25. G. Chud, "Less work for mother," Giselechudphoto. com, October 12, 2012, http://giselechudphoto.com/ automat-horn-hardart-baking-company/

26. M. Carolan, The real cost of cheap food, (London: Earthscan, 2011), p. 7

27. I experienced a personal example of this context when working at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology. Deciding not to purchase a car and walk to work, it proved impossible to buy housing within walking distance of the downtown campus. Therefore my husband Professor Steve Redhead and I were left to reside in a bed and breakfast establishment that was twenty five minutes walk from the campus. The entire walk, through the former red light district and discarded General Motors sites, included over twenty fast food restaurants and two Tim Hortons, but only one supermarket. This supermarket captured the reality described by North American scholars when discussing the relationship between food availability, obesity, poverty and inner city decline. The range of food available was limited. Food stocks of particular items frequently ran out, particularly fruit and vegetables. But there was a continual availability of crisps, pre-sliced cheese, sliced deli meats, ice cream, pizza and a huge quantity of frozen goods that were so heavily crumbed and fried that the actual animal from which the meat was derived was uncertain. It was – frankly – impossible to eat in a healthy fashion because of the scarce supply of basic ingredients. We ended up eating yoghurt (if available) and a white bread, ham sandwich with avocado (if available) most days. The consequences of this 'diet' were almost continual nausea, regular bouts of food poisoning, weight loss and profound tiredness. We lifted the level of vitamin supplements, which also had minimal availability locally and ended up being sourced from an online chemist, to avoid deep vitamin deficiencies. The only other options were to move to fast food restaurants, which we declined to do. Therefore, whenever a discussion of obesity in working class communities emerges, it is important to explore the context with care. The lack of ingredients for a healthy meal and life may be one – and perhaps the

major – cause of obesity. Our lived reality in downtown Oshawa explains the emerging relationship between obesity and malnutrition. The constant goods that were available in supermarket were pizzas, ice cream and frozen fried goods.

28. Carolan, op. cit., p. 71

29. ibid., p. 75

30. Carolan stated that, ""The food waste generated in the US alone constitutes sufficient nourishment to pull approximately 200 million people out of hunger," ibid., 129

31. G. Lugo, "New York fast food workers strike over low pay," The Guardian, November 30, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/nov/30/fast-food-strike-new-york

32. C. Petrini, Slow food: a case for taste, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), C. Petrini, Slow food nation, (New York: Rizzoli, 2005), C. Petrini and G. Padovani, Slow food revolution, (New York: Rizzoli, 2005)

33. Slow Food, http://www.slowfood.com/

34. K. Lowitt, "Exploring Connections Between People, Places and Food in Three Nova Scotia Farmers' Markets," Cuizine: The Journal of Canadian Food Cultures, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2009, http://www.erudit.org/revue/cuizine/2009/v2/n1/039514ar.html

35. C. Honore, In praise of slow, (London: Orion, 2004)

36. Telfer extended my point here to explore the intricate relationship between ways of eating and ways of thinking. Please refer to E. Telfer, Food for Thought: Philosophy and Food, (London: Routledge, 1996)

37. R. Slocum, Race in the study of food, http://www.rslocum.com/Slocum_final_PiHG_racefood.pdf

38. H. Everett, "Newfoundland and Labrador on a Plate: Bed, Breakfast, and Regional Identity," Cuizine: The Journal of Canadian Food Cultures, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2011, http://www.erudit.org/revue/cuizine/2011/v3/n1/1004728ar.html

39. C. Helstosky, Garlic & Oil: Food and politics in Italy, (Oxford: Berg, 2004), p. 5

40. Economic and Social Development Department, The state of food insecurity in the world, (Rome: FAO, 2004), ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/007/y5650e/y5650e00.pdf, p. 6.

41. S. Mintz, op. cit., p. 10

42. Man vs Food, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8sC7iHMC-M

43. This important area of investigation was described by A. van Otterloo, in The Sociology of Food: Eating, Diet and Culture, (London: Sage, 1992). Please also refer to R. Wood, The Sociology of the Meal, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995)

44. C. Petrini, Slow food: a case for taste, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001)

45. A short piece investigating these micro-distinctions in flavour is A. Trubek, "Maple Syrup: Differences between Vermont and Quebec," Cuizine: The Journal of Canadian Food Cultures, Volume 2, 2010, http://www.erudit.org/revue/cuizine/2010/v2/n2/044354ar.html

46. M. Caldwell, "Tasting the worlds of yesterday and today: culinary tourism and nostalgia foods in post-Soviet Russia," from Wilk, op. cit., p. 100

47. David Balaam and Michael Carey, in Food Politics: the regional conflict, (London: Croom Helm, 1981), stated that, "the regional approach collapses previously separate categories of political and economic issues into a more useful category of the political economy of agriculture in various regions," p. 1

48. M. Carolan, Embodied Food Politics, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 19

49. R. Wilk, "From wild weeds to artisanal cheese," from Wilk, op. cit., p. 13

50. L. DeLind, "Are local food and the local food movement taking us where we want to go? Or are we hitching our wagons to the wrong stars?," Agriculture and Human Values, http://www.agroecology.wisc.edu/courses/agroecology-702/materials/9-farm-and-comm-viability/delind-2010.pdf Vol. 28, No. 2, June 2011

51. M. Carolan, The real cost of cheap food, (London: Earthscan, 2011), 117

52. ibid., p. 118

53. S. Lyon, "Just Java: roasting fair trade coffee," from Wilk, op. cit., p. 256

54. DeLind, op. cit.

55. ibid.

56. S. Feldman and V. Marks, Panic Nation, (London: Blake, 2006)

57. E. Schlosser, Fast food nation, (London: Penguin, 2002)

58. K. Whitehead, "'Hunger hurts but starving works:' A case study of gendered practices in the online pro-eating disorder community," Canadian Journal of Sociology, Vol. 35, No. 4, 2010, http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/CJS/article/view/7976/7584

59. Felicity Cloake investigated how smartphones and social networking have transformed food photography. Please refer to F. Cloake, "Here's one I took earlier," The Guardian, August, 2, 2012, pp. 12-13

60. S. Robert and M. Weaver-Hightower (eds.), School food politics: the complex ecology of hunger and feeding in schools around the world, (New York: Peter Lang, 2011)

61. R. Albritton, Let them eat junk: how capitalism creates hunger and obesity, (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2009), p. 3

62. ibid., p. ix

63. ibid., p. 6

64. J. Braziel and K. LeBesco (eds.), Bodies out of Bounds, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001)

65. I am not suggesting here that fatness inhibits fitness. Indeed it is possible to be both fat and fit. However such a realization is inhibited by a too easy cultural convergence of health and a slender body. For example, Antonia Losano and Brenda Risch, in "Resisting Venus: negotiating corpulence in exercise videos" from Braziel and LeBesco, ibid., conducted an analysis of exercise videos. They explored how the bigger body is 'managed' in fitness programming. They showed that the bigger body is used to present 'modifications' to the correct exercise. In other words, the larger women and men complete an easier exercise. This connection between body size and restricted movement reveals profound consequences outside the fitness video discourse.

66. A. Kellehear, The unobtrusive researcher, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993) and R. Lee, Unobtrusive methods in social research, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000)

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