

Trumping Taste: On the gustatory and the rise of the post-Factual

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The history of taste is a history of class politics, of habitus, as Pierre Bourdieu theorized nearly four decades ago. In *Distinction*, he argues that the notion of taste-makers (in any cultural field) exists through a form of ‘self-confidence, arrogance, which... has every likelihood—in a world in which everything is a matter of belief—of imposing the absolute legitimacy, and therefore the maximum profitability, of their investments’ (Bourdieu 1984: 92). Although taste is not explicitly cited in Bourdieu’s original title (which instead cites judgement), it is clearly a central concept in this now canonical study, which has become one of the key Western explorations of the notion. The distinctions between taste and judgement are keenly significant, relying on a long-standing prejudice in Western society in favour of that that is perceived as more objective. At this historical moment, late neoliberal politics in much of the West appears to be producing heretofore unlikely alliances of populism and privilege. This blending draws in part on a democratization of opinion, a blurring between notions of fact and opinion, brought about in part by the rapid development of social media and resultant shifts in the notion of expertise, which I would argue draws on a historical shift under late capital from judgement to taste as an overarching conceit. This transference moves from knowledge to perception and is reliant upon repetition and reiteration at least as much as on demonstrable stability or reliability of information, as in Michael Gove’s dismissal of experts or in the US-based language around ‘alternative facts’ that has become prominent since the 2016 election of Donald Trump (Gove, Michael, interviewed by Faisal Islam, 2016).

This post-Enlightenment transition appears to both derive from and encourage a collapse between notions of cultural taste-making and gustatory taste. Indeed, the democratization of culinary taste in the West over the past forty years may be seen to ally with the rethinking of cultural notions of taste in ways that at first would have appeared to be in binary opposition. The prioritization of gustatory taste privileges individual choice, while at the same time reiterating and modifying the idea that such relies on a certain level of privilege and expertise. Trump’s campaign, like most recent political elections, used food in ways that were both intentional and unintended. Historically, food pictures have been a mainstay of campaign and political images, used by candidates themselves as well as by oppositional teams. On the one side, iconic images circulate of candidates ‘manning the stove’ and eating

at must-attend events and locations, for instance the Iowa State Fair or a Texas barbecue. Similar images in ‘non-places’ like local diners and cafes privilege the generic everydayness of the candidate, positioned across the campaign trail, yet relying as well on a groundedness in their simultaneous recognizability for locals, where they reiterate the sense of ‘just like us’. Yet there’s also an oppositional subgenre of food pictures dedicated to framing politicians as removed from reality, ‘not like us’, such as oft-ridiculed photos of politicians having problems with seemingly simple acts of eating particular everyday items of food. While similar photo opportunities and images have long circulated, the recent increase in access to politicians in their everyday lives and the rise of social media have led to an increase in the prevalence of such images and in the modes by which they circulate, outside of the carefully constructed photo opportunities. The utility and focus of such images has become more important as campaigns have moved from the ability to stage (and partial ability to hide) such photo opportunities to not being able to control either the existence of images, or the languages that accompany their circulation through forms such as Twitter and Instagram; the photos often possess the ability to develop meaning beyond such attempted framings.

Within this essay, I turn the focus to three such iconic images from the 2016 US presidential campaign, which exemplify the collision of notions of cultural taste-making and gustatory taste, producing a complex narrative about the imbrication of taste and judgement. These three images, all constructed to some extent, span the election campaign from May to late November 2016, with two from early in the campaign and one after the election. The first two images were initially posted by the candidate himself on Twitter, while the third was staged for multiple pool photographers; all three were widely reposted on social media as well as discussed in the press. The first image is of candidate Trump seated at his desk in his eponymous tower eating a taco bowl, the second of candidate Trump on his private plane with a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and the final one features the newly elected Trump sharing a French meal with former Republican candidate (and then mooted contender for potential Secretary of State) Mitt Romney, in Jean-Georges Vongerichten’s eponymous New York white tablecloth classic restaurant.¹

¹ The twitter images can be found at:

<https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/728297587418247168?lang=en> (Taco Bowl) and

<https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/760299757206208512?lang=en> (KFC) and there are a variety of versions available of the pool image with Romney. See, for instance, Lucas Jackson/Reuters:

https://c.o0bg.com/rf/image_960w/Boston/2011-

[2020/2016/11/30/BostonGlobe.com/Politics/Images/5e47b388fc0e46c0ba615c7a3c7b6688-](https://c.o0bg.com/rf/image_960w/Boston/2011-2020/2016/11/30/BostonGlobe.com/Politics/Images/5e47b388fc0e46c0ba615c7a3c7b6688-)

[5e47b388fc0e46c0ba615c7a3c7b6688-0.jpg](https://c.o0bg.com/rf/image_960w/Boston/2011-2020/2016/11/30/BostonGlobe.com/Politics/Images/5e47b388fc0e46c0ba615c7a3c7b6688-0.jpg) or Bryan R. Smith for Agence France Presse:

Before discussing the pictures themselves, it is important to recognize that food has moved to the forefront of political discussions within contexts of sustainability, climate change and questions of global futurity. This development has gone hand in hand with a rise in engagement of taste represented through social media; Barack Obama's legacy demonstrates the centrality of performances of gustatory taste as a crucial marker of identity and contemporary politics. Obama's first major post-presidency international speech was at Seeds and Chips, a Milan-based conference on food and technology. A focus on food had been present in both official policies and practices of the Obama administration, as well as an interest in food that appeared to reflect personal notions of taste. Regular stories were published throughout his presidency, focusing on 'date nights' at higher-end restaurants that reflect a sense of contemporary, 'Instagram-worthy' eating, such as Eater.com's hotlists. From chef-led restaurants such as Dan Barber's Blue Hill and Aaron Silverman's Rose's Luxury, global 'pilgrimages' such as Tokyo's Sukiyabashi Jiro or a Vietnam hole-in-the-wall on the travel and food show *Anthony Bourdain: Parts unknown*, the Obamas clearly enjoyed the privilege of the presidency as a means of exploring gustatory taste, in line with contemporary foodie culture's omnivorousness.² Such interest showed not only in their own eating, but in initiatives from the development of a White House kitchen garden and focus on student lunches to awarding National Humanities Medals to US celebrity chef-cum-food activists Alice Waters and José Andrés.³ While it is important to acknowledge the class privilege evident in this list of restaurants (and indeed the rise of social media 'food porn' articulates visually reproduced taste as a key site of the production of cultural capital), this is a privilege that perfectly illustrates the paradoxes of food issues—an increased focus on celebrity chefs and dining, simultaneous with notions of locavorism, and sustainability, as climate change impacts global food security.

In relation to such focus on sustainability and contemporary conceptions of taste, the three photos that I examine in this essay seem to paint a clearly distinct and troubling notion of relationships between class politics and taste, simultaneously looking backward and forward. The shift from the Obama presidency to the Trump presidency relies upon a simultaneous

https://c.o0bg.com/rf/image_1920w/Boston/2011-2020/2016/11/30/BostonGlobe.com/Politics/Images/AFP_IL4MB.jpg

² Josée Johnston and Shyon Baumann unpack contemporary 'foodie'-ism in their excellent 2010 volume, *Foodies: Democracy and distinction in the gourmet foodscape*.

³ This medal, which since 1997 has sought to recognize people who have 'deepened the nation's understanding of the humanities and broadened our citizens' engagement' had not historically included food, but Obama's choices here are in line with an increasing focus of the humanities on food and food politics.

upsetting and reiteration of historically changing notions of taste; the performative changes around this conception and the ways that gustatory taste and aesthetic taste have begun to be conflated and challenged over the past forty years partially opened the door to the post-truth/alternative fact politics of the contemporary right. As well, Trump's performance of gustatory taste is a key building block of his perceived accessibility. There are three elements to this claim. First, building on work by Signe Rousseau and others, I suggest that the rise of food media has produced fundamental change in the way we understand gustatory taste, relying on productions of narrative and slippage in confusing the distance between the visual and the haptic. Second, these and related changes played into the performance and production of narratives of class in the understanding of notions of taste. And, finally, by placing gustatory taste, with its complex reliance on the personal and idiosyncratic at the base of a cultural understanding, society has implicitly opened the door to an understanding of truth as malleable and down to suggestion.

Taste from philosophy to practice

Much work has been done on reconsidering notions of taste since Bourdieu's 1979 monograph, across the humanities, social sciences and hard sciences, often returning to longstanding philosophical traditions and simultaneously reifying and undoing work by historical philosophers such as Plato, Kant and Hume. Food has also more clearly been accepted as art—evidenced both by scholars and practical actions, such as the 2007 inclusion of Ferran Adrià in the contemporary art exhibition Documenta or the turn by art publisher Phaidon to the cookbook market—although there remains active debate about notions of art, craft and artisanship in relation to different kinds of culinary and gustatory production. The explosion of food media (from cookbooks to television to social media) also plays a significant role in these changing understandings. Philosophical unpackings of taste have oscillated between juxtaposing and separating the gustatory and the aesthetic. Frequently, both, however, have relied upon a downplaying of taste (and smell) as lesser, more animal-like senses compared to the visual and auditory.⁴ For the context of this essay, the shift from Enlightenment philosophies to a practice-led engagement in the nineteenth century prefigures

⁴ 1 Carolyn Korsmeyer's (1999) *Making Sense of Taste* traces this philosophical history in great detail, unpacking complex histories of taste as epistemology.

the challenges presented by Trump in the contemporary moment. Immanuel Kant exemplifies the Enlightenment's reliance on rationality, debasing the gustatory,

[t]wo, [of the senses] however, are more subjective than objective, that is, the idea obtained from them is more an idea of enjoyment, rather than the cognition of the external object... [T]he manner in which the subject responds can be quite different from whatever the external empirical perception and designation of the object might have been. (Kant 1978: 41)

Such privileging of rational judgement over taste is continuous through the present, designating aesthetic taste as 'a faculty of the social judgment of external objects within the imagination', which Kant distinguished from the lower forms of the gustatory that 'can neither lay any claim to true universality, nor, consequently, to necessity (because the judgment of everyone else about pleasant taste would have to agree with my own)' (1978: 142–3). Such Kantian thought may be seen to both demonstrate the difficulty of re-presenting taste through visual media in the contemporary moment and, in the current privileging of taste, allow for the rise of 'alternative facts'. Although David Hume broadly disagrees with Kant, his framing of a class-based argument opens the door to a reading of taste offering the potential for identification (see Hume 1757).

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin and Alexandre-(Balthazar)-Laurent Grimod de la Reynière, key figures in the early nineteenth-century rise of the gourmand and gastronome, served to cement alternative conversations around the value of taste through a literature of engagement, akin to a form of practice-led research. The gastronome, as diner, rather than cook, creates a new space for the representation of gustatory taste firmly between the fields of philosophical discourse and the proscribed space of the cookbook as instruction manual. The work of these authors, who produced this space through the development of a form of scientific literature (as Freud would similarly suggest of the development of psychoanalysis), were fundamentally connected with another moment of vast political change, the democratizing revolutions of the late eighteenth century, and frame a practice-led distinction between gustatory taste and cultural taste. Yet in the seed of this, it produces the paradox of the current moment. Taste remains largely demarcated by privilege, but allows for a broadening 'distribution of the senses'. Brillat-Savarin and Reynière simultaneously reify French cuisine

as standard bearer of both privilege and recognition, while engendering a ‘general widening of the market for sophisticated cooking’ (Mennell 1996 [1985]), facilitating the development of an international literature of cookbooks for a bourgeois market. This rise of domestic literature (such as the work of Isabella Beeton in the UK and Lydia Child in the US) allowed the potential for the construction and development of a (slightly) more flattened class structure through culinary accessibility, and prefigure the complex relationships within the three photos in this essay (Beeton 1861; Child 1829).

While such changes do not inscribe a progressive linear narrative to the present day, the contemporary efflorescence of food media built on such concepts and accelerated them drastically, creating possibilities for significant changes in both the notions and the use value of gustatory taste. Through the parallel rise of Instagram (and similar social media) and food television, there has been an increase in the focus on gustatory taste alongside a paradoxical divorce of gustation (and related notions of olfaction) from the perception of taste. In Roger Hadden’s (2005) essay, ‘Taste in an Age of Convenience: From frozen food to meals in “the Matrix”’, he reads televisual contemporary gustatory taste through *The Matrix* by way of Jean Baudrillard and Niklas Luhmann to suggest that

gustatory experience in the contemporary world is doubly conditioned: by cognitive processing and by a hyperreal mediation.... Without engaging with taste *as a mode of knowing* in its own right, means experiencing sensory taste as gustatory effect; as taste sensations cut off from any real knowledge of the morsel which transports them. (Hadden 2005: 356)

Indeed, the past decade has heightened Hadden’s suggestion through the rise of mediated discourses of taste. The explosion of the popularity of celebrity chefs (who have been repeatedly called ‘the new rock stars’) and their perceived accessibility through primarily visual media leads to a changing understanding of the gustatory. While price and location mean that much *haute cuisine* remains inaccessible in practice, repeated notions of visual presentation and the performative and visual language of the cookbook blur the lines between the gustatory and the aesthetic—the number of people who have tasted food prepared by, for instance, Heston Blumenthal or Mario Batali is dwarfed by those people who have seen images of their cooking restaged through visual media. The reinforcement of such visual

presence and the difficulty in languages around flavour and taste combine to produce a fantasmatic gustatory taste mediated through the visual.⁵ Such a slippage, this eradication of gustatory taste as the basis for understanding food has paradoxically placed food more at the centre of an explicit cultural understanding than it has likely ever been previously. While there has been much excellent work in food studies analysing the presence of food within cultural production, this demands focus on the inversion of such relationships, placing food as perhaps the paradigmatic performance of contemporary culture, a steroidal explosion of Brillat-Savarin's, 'Tell me what you eat and I shall tell you who you are.' Gustatory taste, and its paradoxical exploration through visuality, becomes the necessary basis for an understanding of the socio-political dynamic, upsetting and reconfiguring hierarchies between gustatory and aesthetic taste.

Within this recent moment, David Kaplan returns to a Kantian line of thought in his 2012 edited collection *The Philosophy of Food*, falling short of considering the sense of gustatory taste as equivalent to aesthetic judgement.

Although most of us believe there is a difference between good food and bad food, we also acknowledge that tastes are highly subjective, or at least cultural... It is difficult to describe how something tastes because it is less differentiated and less sensitive than vision or hearing. (Kaplan 2012: 7)

The response of the contemporary moment is then frequently a conflation of gustation with the other senses, which frames a conceptual (and perhaps imagined) taste as a key marker of distinction. While there is a clear validity to Kaplan's claims, the current moment recognizes that such notions of differentiability are in part biases traceable to both linguistic histories and cultural ocular-centrism.⁶

⁵ For a recent discussion of the difficulty of finding a shared language around flavour, see Holmes (2017).

⁶ While still too often reliant on the visual, the contemporary seeks to imagine a cultural basis in which the sense of taste is judged to be more fundamental; this necessitates a shift towards a performance-based view of cultural history. Echoing the liveness debate of the 1990s, a taste-driven imagination (and thus culture) would be fundamentally one predicated on destruction and disappearance of the object. Gustatory taste (like olfaction) breaks down what it encounters, rendering comparability fundamentally questionable. The most basic encounter engendered through taste, that of nourishment and sustainability, is primarily through the chemical dissolution of that that we taste, so to taste is often implicitly to seek to destroy.

Taking the contemporary world as one in which gustatory taste has potentially been re-positioned as a central figure for understanding, it is useful to return to Bourdieu to begin to consider the class dynamics of this relationship in order to turn back to the three images of Trump.

Taste, for its part, a classification system constituted by the conditionings associated with a condition situated in a determinate position in the structure of different conditions, governs the relationship with objectified capital, with this world of ranked and ranking objects which help to define it by enabling it to specify and so realise itself. (Bourdieu 1984: 232)

The rise of food media has placed fine dining more centrally within cultural imaginations, allowing for and foregrounding dining as productive of cultural capital as seen with the Obamas, yet simultaneously such development also produces and contains a performative seed of its own antithesis, a cultural backlash, which has resulted in crazes for various so-called 'dirty foods' (often linked to fast food and seemingly unhealthy preparations) as well as notions of nostalgia for simplicity. In the past ten years, shifts in such cultural positioning have highlighted a return to notions of locatedness and history in the marking of taste while the oscillatory turn of the contemporary moment of food culture additionally highlights street foods and nostalgic childhood foods, but often rendered in ways that complicate their simplicity and a fine-dining culture that rejects the more traditional accoutrements of Michelin recognition in order to engage with contemporary issues and interests. It is a further elucidation of these contradictions that these images of Trump expose.

Lingua franca: (Re-)staging classic French cuisine in the current moment

The final of the three pictures of Trump eating (and I would suggest that it is not coincidental that this image was only allowed to be taken after the election), presents a clear fine-dining experience, which seeks to return to the tastes of an earlier era, depicting a taste for nostalgia and a self-evident class politics. In its citationality, it references a past moment of an

imagined national supremacy to which ‘making America great again’ obliquely refers. Yet this allusion is complicated by the referent, in which US American (and Western) taste at the higher end was imaginable only in a French mode—a lingua franca that delimited taste and perhaps gives the lie to a notion of total US American dominance. The 1997 opening of Jean Georges, Vongerichten’s eponymous restaurant in the Trump International Hotel and Tower, traces a clear history through the French-born chef’s 1986 move to New York as well as his historical training under Paul Bocuse and others at the heart of French nouvelle cuisine. Within four months of opening, Ruth Reichl of *The New York Times* bestowed four stars on the restaurant; in the review, she suggested that

in his quiet way the chef and co-owner, Jean-Georges Vongerichten, is creating a restaurant revolution... an entirely new kind of four-star restaurant. Mr. Vongerichten has examined all the details that make dining luxurious and refined them for an American audience. (Reichl 1997)

Yet she goes on to reiterate tropes of nouvelle cuisine as if his invention. ‘Vongerichten is at the top of his form... intensifying flavors by using vegetable juices and broths in place of butter and cream’ (Reichl 1997).⁷ Such was in fact the seventh of ten rules for nouvelle cuisine—to avoid overly rich sauces—as laid out in 1973 by the influential restaurant guide Gault et Millau.

The image of Trump and Romney serves to heighten this notion of citationality and reiteration of a ‘classic’, which is exacerbated by the focus of media conversation on one particular dish—*cuisse de grenouille* (frogs’ legs). Clearly, such a dish always already references tropes of classic French cuisine, and frames a direct historical connection to Frenchness—it is the dish that is generally understood to stereotype the French through nomination. In fact, the image actually shows a different dish at the centre of the table and in front of Romney—‘diver scallops with caramelised cauliflower and a caper-raisin emulsion’. This dish, like the ‘young garlic soup with thyme and frog legs’, has remained on the menu

⁷ I don’t wish to suggest that, as a chef, Vongerichten is not masterful and inventive, but instead to focus on the ways in which this image and the tastes it embodies rely on a notion of repetition. Indeed, this flagship restaurant has retained four stars in *The New York Times* in reviews from Frank Bruni (2006) and Pete Wells (2014) as well as three stars from Michelin through a willingness to adventure and his frequent forays into Asian-inspired technique and flavours remain on point.

largely unchanged since the restaurant's opening twenty years ago—both actually mentioned by Reichl in her initial review. By foregrounding the frog legs, the discussion of the image places this meal in a historical continuum with a history of *haute cuisine* in the public imagination. The image reiterates tropes of cultural taste-making quite explicitly—a white tablecloth, pale curtains shrouding the space, simple serviceware and plating and three middle-aged white men in dark suits could be an image out of a more distant past. In the broader images, servers appear, several seemingly minorities; Reichl noted the presence in 1997 among staff of 'both women and blacks, which is worth noting because it is so rare in fancy French restaurants' (Reichl 1997), yet in this image, it does little but cement the privileged positionality and role of the white men as 'to be served'. While perhaps unintentional in its framing, this reiterates the datedness of the image and the conception of who 'gets' to taste, echoing back to Enlightenment notions of privilege.

This image stages Trump as iconically 'presidential'; in the aftermath of an election that played out largely on the terrain of gender politics, this image restores a stable performance of white male power. Yet in this recognizability, it re-frames a curious oscillation—the image simultaneously plays to Trump's base in this return, while framing the presidency as unreachable for most—a cultural inaccessibility that concurrently creates desire and unpicks that desire. Returning to traditionalist tropes of fine dining, the image stages this dialectic through an explicit engagement with gustatory taste; as I've suggested above, this is taste distanced through the frame of the visual, thus allowing the imagination to frame this performance. The experience of a Michelin three-star French restaurant is one likely far removed from the realities of most of Trump's purported supporters—it is a taste that for many demands imagination, or stages a demand on the imagination, while in that imagining, implicates a complex history of class dynamics. Frogs' legs are decidedly other to USAmerican cuisine, outside the accepted standards of taste; they become both desirable and taboo in the cultural imagination, marking the eater as 'sophisticated', while at the same time framing a non-American otherness. As Hume writes, 'We are apt to call *barbarous* whatever departs widely from our own taste and apprehension, but soon find the epithet of reproach retorted on us' (1757:226). While my interest in this image is largely limited to its play within a USAmerican context, the discussion of the meal makes the question of barbarity an internal oscillation of self-reproach and belonging. This is the central play of taste in relation to Trump's presidency; it simultaneously frames his privilege as to-be-desired, while marking him as unreconcilable with a large number of his voters. While the Obamas framed a clear

sense of contemporaneity through their food choices, Trump signals backwards to a classic age that is projected as nostalgic, in a way that professes to challenge received orthodoxies, but actually reifies class dynamics, as well as ironically placing something fundamentally ‘un-American’ at the heart of a definition of American-ness.⁸ For Bourdieu,

the tastes actually realized depend upon the state of the system of goods offered; every change in the system of goods indices a change in tastes. But conversely, every change in tastes resulting from a transformation of the conditions of existence and of the corresponding dispositions will tend to induce, directly or indirectly, a transformation of the field of production... Choosing according to one’s tastes is a matter of identifying goods that are objectively attuned to one’s position. (Bourdieu 1984: 231–2)

Bourdieu uses this to read and develop the notion of distinction in relation to first fashion and then the theatre. Yet, in this recent example, placing gustatory taste at the centre of the image highlights the incommensurability and impossibility of the image’s holding the intended meaning, as there is an innate conflict in the situation that Trump’s image stages, reflecting on his arrogance and presumptive role as cultural taste-maker. The centrality of gustatory taste to this image and the conflict between this and the varied audiences to which it speaks, raises fundamental questions about narrative as well as trust and impartiality; the leap to competing notions of ‘facticity’ is straightforward. The question of taste here offers a return to Kantian narratives with a supercharged intensity, relying on belief systems rather than subjectivity.

Low brow, high places

⁸ This American paradox of frogs’ legs appears at the heart of a film that appeared in the same year as Bourdieu’s book, *The Muppet Movie* (1979), with a central conflict between fast-food magnate Doc Hopper, who wishes to use Kermit the Frog as the mascot of his failing chain of French-fried frogs’ legs restaurants, and Kermit, who finds it impossible to justify putting his name to the genocide of his kind.

While the image from Jean Georges focuses on a taste that is likely to be perceived as highbrow, associated with a dominant class, the two images from before the election paint a very different picture. The earlier of these images pictures Trump seated at his desk in Trump Tower eating a taco bowl, which he tweeted in May 2016, with the caption ‘Happy #CincoDeMayo! The best taco bowls are made in Trump Tower Grill. I love Hispanics!’ The taco bowl, as pictured, appears to be ground meat, sour cream, cheese and salsa in a hard-shell flour ‘bowl’, placed on two white plates.

While early discussions on Twitter debated both the dish’s name and authenticity, I’d contend that, while interesting, such questions are largely irrelevant to the notion of taste with regard to the production of the image. The image oversimplifies a number of questions, ranging from the elision of Mexican and Hispanic to the fact, that like the taco bowl, Cinco de Mayo is more likely to be celebrated within US-Mexican culture (despite the fact that its origin is from a Mexican battle in 1862). Crucially, the dish appears immediately recognizable and accessible. Unlike the foreignness of the other image, here the dish’s origin is perceived to be contained, both by its familiar middlebrow (mall or fast casual restaurant) appearance and by the scenographic framing of the plate beneath the leering Trump. The act of eating at one’s desk is an image with strong middle-class resonance and the image here seeks to frame Trump firmly within that practice. The office is somewhat messy, with rolled-up blueprints in the back corner and a pile of newspapers and other things on the desk beneath the plate. The large plate window, with views over Central Park, seems staged to support Trump’s claims of ‘winning’, with various trophies and photographic records of meetings filling the ledge. In Lorna Piatti-Farnell’s writing on food in American culture, she suggests that ‘issues of dominance... lie at the heart of culinary practice’ (2011: 149). This image stages exactly the complex notions of domination that played out in Trump’s election, in large part through the oversimplification and active ignoring of the questions of authenticity and class. Gustatory taste is not in question (indeed the question of how this actually tastes is thrust away), but the visual image of taste here overwhelms the questioning, privileging the individual (Trump) over the questions of logic and civil discourse. Cultural dominance over the perception of a foreign taste, and the actual absence of the workers—the ‘Hispanics’ in the quote seems to simultaneously misrecognize the kitchen workers as immigrant, while privileging the taste produced within the heart of a neoliberal imperial complex.

The slightly later (Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC)) image reemphasizes similar tropes and visual practices, but renders much of the iconography even more straightforward and

dependent upon the transmissibility of taste in late capital. Tweeting an image from his private plane in the early hours of 2 August between campaign stops, Trump did not explicitly mention the food, unlike in the earlier tweet, yet the branding and food are immediately recognizable, bound up in capitalist iconography and mass production that has rendered the individual replaceable—indeed gustatory taste here is likely transmitted through the image to a large number of viewers who will have eaten KFC. The large bucket of chicken sits atop *The Wall Street Journal*, signalling Trump as businessman, but also conveying a sense of familiarity, the need to double-task and the inability to slow down for a meal as hallmark of contemporary life.

In both this and the previous image, the overwhelming sense is of readily accessible food in relatively inaccessible locations, fast/fast casual food eaten on the run in a ‘normal daily life’. Both images replace gustation with recognition. As is widely acknowledged, the so-called McDonaldization of society has developed because of the sense of pervasiveness and security offered by consistent branding:

[T]he ubiquity of the fast-food outlet has had a significant impact on general attitudes toward nutrition, recreational foods, and taste preferences. The standardized products delivered through the chain restaurant are considered appealing because of their guaranteed quality. In this respect, a much-touted promise of McDonald’s has been its reliability and cleanliness. (Finkelstein 2003: 197)

The immediate recognizability of gustatory tastes (rendered through the static image and seemingly divorced from a class-based language of taste) seems to provide the viewer a mode of access into these spaces and thus a parallel with Trump as individual—he eats like me, I can be like him; if I eat that then I can be as ‘successful’, gaining access then to the spaces of ‘greatness’ (and perhaps as well to the possibility of the imagined haute cuisine of the first image, if not simply the wealth that makes such possible). Within the KFC image as well is a demarcation of Americanness as well, the bucket providing a clear evocation of corporatist histories and concerns for cleanliness and consistency that seemingly underlie the sought-after return to restore a former ‘greatness’.

What these examples show is a complex web of taste-making. Trump’s own eating habits demonstrate a domination by a complex sense of American politics and idiosyncrasy across personal tastes and fears as well as insularity and his oft-discussed desire to be part of a class-

delimited public that never ‘really’ accepted him.⁹ In reiterating these gustatory performances within the scope of the political campaign, these images perform a notion of taste-making that cites and resituates this imbricated notion of cultural dominance, siting Trump within Bourdieu’s ‘self-confidence, arrogance... in a world in which everything is a matter of belief... [to produce] the maximum profitability of their investments’ (Bourdieu 1984: 92). Trump’s perceived lack of ‘taste’ in either an aesthetic or gustatory realm pairs with these over-the-top performances to undo contemporary narrative stability.

By reimagining these complex relations of taste and class as well as staging such paradoxical stories, the contemporary moment places unlearned, or untrained, gustatory taste at its centre. These possibilities allow a space for suggestion, for the undoing of the notion of fact-ness, on the basis of taste as a defining marker of relationality. What Emile Peynaud describes with regard to wine tasting then begins to take hold within cultural production.

Suggestion is the insinuated thought, the idea planted in someone else’s mind. When a wine taster has a tasting problem to solve, he is wide open to suggestion, very susceptible to the impressions of other people. He is easily influenced and easily led astray (Peynaud 1996: 110).

Suggestion becomes the operating principle by which the current state functions, destabilizing the fixity of facts. When recalling Bourdieu’s understanding of cultural production, we can see how easily the power of suggestibility may move from the gustatory to the political.

A cultural product—an avant-garde picture, a political manifesto, a newspaper—is a constituted taste, a taste which has been raised from the vague semi-existence of half-formulated or unformulated experience, implicit or even unconscious desire, to the full reality of objectification which, in present circumstances, is almost always the work of professionals. (Bourdieu 1984: 228)

⁹ This includes a focus on a favourite meal of well-done steak with ketchup, and stories of differential treatment from White House staff at public dinners.

The complex webs of ‘facts’ that arise then shift easily from the subjectively experienced to the objective, demanding less interrogation and relying on overly produced relationships to capital. As Signe Rousseau has written, ‘there is no reason to suppose that politics in the food media world should be any different to politics in any other celebrity arena’ (2012: xxix). The readability of the celebrity image both draws upon and overwhelms the notions of gustatory taste that lie at its centre and the rise in notions of personal belief as all-encompassing frame a Hume-like understanding that troubles the idea of consistency and trust.

In the chapter ‘Tables’ in his *The Five Senses*, Michel Serres suggests that the humanity depends upon having a ‘second mouth’ and a ‘second tongue’.

We were too quick to forget that *homo sapiens* refers to those who react to sapidity, appreciate it and seek it out, those for whom the sense of taste matters... before referring to judgement, intelligence or wisdom.... Sensation, it used to be said, inaugurates intelligence. Here, more locally, taste institutes sapience. (Serres 2008: 154)

In the paradoxical privileged populism of the contemporary political moment, expertises are replaced and replaceable, and the complications of gustatory taste frame a world in which taste perhaps undercuts itself.

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