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A Taste For Things: Sensory Rhetoric Beyond The Human

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A TASTE FOR THINGS: SENSORY RHETORIC BEYOND THE HUMAN

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Richard Wells and Christie Charbonneau Wells, who infected me with their diverse passions for the arts, humanities, and sciences, and who were extraordinarily supportive in my stumbling journey to rhetoric as the site for bringing these together. And it is dedicated to my partner, Anthony Stagliano, who, incredibly, appeared next to me, and took that journey too, and changed me, and changed with me.

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ABSTRACT

Amidst rising agricultural pollution, poor conditions for livestock animals, and disparity between “high” and “low” food cultures, gustatory taste has entered contemporary public rhetoric as a significant modality of intervention. This dissertation considers the environmentalist and social potential of this public embrace of sensory rhetoric. To do so, I build a rhetorical theory of sensation through a sensory re-engagement of the rhetorical tradition. Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, I argue, embraced aesthetic taste as a site where rhetoric and ethics mingle, and yet in promoting its cultivation, they fell into elitism. The subsequent, Marxist discourse on sensory emancipation developed rhetoric’s sensory and taste-based connections to ethics, taking an historical rather than an individualist perspective. I evaluate to what extent this discourse overcame Enlightenment elitism, and forge connections between the Marxist tradition and the current call among new materialists such as Bruno Latour for an immanent, compositionist reworking of critique. My final two chapters examine how a theory and critical practice of sensory rhetoric is elaborated in contemporary activist efforts from the industrial food exposé to the slow food and farm to school movements. Contributing to work in rhetoric and politics, my project provides an account of rhetoric’s materiality that closely links processes of materialization and practices of sensation. Contributing to work in rhetoric and ethics, I demonstrate that the ethico-rhetorical capacity for response abides not in the individual subject alone, but among all participants in the evolving zone of sensory contact. To the extent that those sensory collectives can recognize and

embrace their ambient, inventive, and ever-evolving character, they harbor the potential to break with the Enlightenment ideal of a standard of taste and its associated elitism.

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CHAPTER 1

RHETORIC'S COOKERY

In his bestselling 2001 exposé, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*, investigative journalist Eric Schlosser ventures into the heart of flavor. His mission brings him not to a family farm or a local restaurant, but rather to an industrial park off of Exit 8A in Dayton, New Jersey. Nestled in among “a BASF plastics factory, a Jolly French Toast factory, and a plant that manufactures Liz Claiborne cosmetics” (121), Schlosser locates the heart of flavor at International Flavors and Fragrances (IFF), one of the largest flavoring and fragrancng manufactories in the world. “Without [the] flavor industry,” the reporter explains, “today’s fast food could not exist” (121). The processing, preservation, and transportation of modern food, he says, destroys most of its existing taste, leaving a “blank palette” to be decorated with added flavors (126). Though manufactured flavor often forges our most intimate connections of recognition, enjoyment, and remembrance with our favorite processed foods, how that flavor is composed is a secretive and mysterious process, even to those who practice it—and one Schlosser hopes to illuminate in his visit.

Touring the IFF flavor laboratories, Schlosser is fascinated—one might even say charmed. He likens the strange, magical scene to Willy Wonka’s Chocolate Factory: “Wonderful smells drifted through the hallways, men and women in neat white lab coats cheerfully went about their work, and hundreds of little glass bottles sat on laboratory tables and shelves” (122). The research area includes a “snack and savory lab,”

responsible for the flavors of everything from corn chips to pet food, a “confectionary lab” attending to the tastes of ice cream, toothpaste, and antacids, and a “beverage lab” developing additives for sodas, wine coolers, and “organic soy drinks” (122). Like Willy Wonka’s factory, the spectacle is at once stimulating and disturbing, and at all points uncanny—particularly as it materializes in the figure of the flavorist. On his tour, Schlosser comes across one such figure: a “dapper chemist” in tie and lab coat who is “carefully preparing a batch of cookies with white frosting and pink-and-white sprinkles” (122). Marking a collapse of gender roles and a strange collision of art and science, the flavorist is “a chemist with a trained nose and a poetic sensibility” (127). This unlikely combination recalls the alchemists, magicians, and—well, sophists of old who cultivated a mysterious knack for producing their powerful effects.

In language that for a student of rhetoric strikingly resembles Plato’s critique of sophistry, Schlosser declares “the job of the flavorist is to conjure illusions about processed food” (127). In the hands of these contemporary, sensory sophists, food and flavor pull apart into separable realms, with bland, cheap, and overprocessed food matter serving as the mere vehicle for the charms of flavor. Thus, Schlosser remarks, “adding methyl-2-peridylketone makes something taste like popcorn. Adding ethyl-3-hydroxybutanoate makes it taste like a marshmallow” (126). The “chemical wizardry” of the flavorist, then, casts vibrant illusion over dull truth. The processes for producing such likenesses are carefully guarded trade secrets, but those that are known are strange and surprising. To produce smoke flavor, for instance, manufacturers burn sawdust, capture the chemical aromas released into the air, and bottle them in a water suspension—all “so that other companies can sell food which seems to have been cooked over a fire” (129).

At the conclusion of his tour, Schlosser encounters illusion in its purest form—in “an unusual taste test” where “there wasn’t any food to taste” (129). Instead of food, the reporter is presented with an array of small glass bottles and a stack of aroma-absorbing paper strips:

Before placing the strips of paper before my nose, I closed my eyes. Then I inhaled deeply, and one food after another was conjured from the glass bottles. I smelled fresh cherries, black olives, sautéed onions, and shrimp. [Then] I suddenly smelled a grilled hamburger. The aroma was uncanny, almost miraculous. It smelled like someone in the room was flipping burgers on a hot grill. But when I opened my eyes, there was just a narrow strip of white paper and a smiling flavorist. (129)

In his encounter with the flavorist, Schlosser follows Socrates in his suspicious yet interested flirtation with rhetoric and its realm of appearance. Like Socrates, he groups knack, persuasion, appearance, and deception together in the specter of the rhetorical magician. For Schlosser as for Socrates, the flavorist/sophists are cause for suspicion both because they work in a world of appearance rather than “reality” and because they bring about their effects without full knowledge of the volatile materials they work with.

On the one hand, today’s sophist, who conjures flavor and fragrance alike, is quite literally closer to “cooking” and “cosmetics” than was Socrates’. Yet if Socrates’ sophists lacked science, these modern-day, sensory rhetoricians do not, instead dwelling in a queer middle space between science, art, and knack. “Flavors are created by blending scores of different chemicals in tiny amounts,” Schlosser explains (127). This is “a process governed by scientific principles but demanding a fair amount of art” (127). The

flavorist draws from physics and chemistry, physiology and psychology. But he also relies on a certain *je ne sais quoi*, an art and a knack for striking up alluring chemical combinations. The flavorists Schlosser met were “charming, cosmopolitan, and ironic,” embracing their unusual place in (sensory) culture (127). One likened his work to musical composition: “A well-made flavor compound,” in his view, has “a ‘top note,’ followed by a ‘dry-down,’ and a ‘leveling-off,’ with different chemicals responsible for each stage” (127). There is fervent competition among these artist-scientists to achieve masterful flavor compositions—though all occurs, Schlosser emphasizes, behind industry doors. Flavorists do not publically reveal the food products enlivened by their masterpieces, and they carefully conceal their prized chemical formulas and unique manufacturing processes from competitors. Though he may tour the flavor laboratories and test kitchens, Schlosser is forbidden from visiting the manufacturing wing of IFF, for fear of compromising trade secrets.

Also like Socrates, Schlosser reserves the sense of sight as the ultimate domain of the real. In his strange taste test, it is Schlosser’s vision that tells him something is off, while taste seduces him into enchanting illusion. And in the reporter’s tour of flavor, the traditionally “lower” sense of taste emerges in its most ethereal articulation. Dealing in appearances, the “smiling flavorist” “conjures” the spectacle of grilled hamburger, fresh cherries, and buttery popcorn for the reporter, who “tastes” by sniffing alone. In the reporter’s encounter with the flavorist, olfaction emerges as the preeminent arena of taste. Schlosser reports that olfaction comprises 90 percent of our taste experience, with the human nose being “more sensitive than any machine yet invented” (125). The result is that the realm of the flavorist is airborne, elusive, ethereal. Flavor cannot be pinned

down, grasped, or visualized. It is developed experimentally, intuitively, and blindly, through trial-and-error processes of sensory exploration and innovative mechanical techniques. But flavor does not only come down to smell—touch too plays a key role. To help integrate smell and mouthfeel, flavorists turn to the machine, further reworking traditional means of cookery. Incorporating the physical science of “rheology,” they assess mouthfeel with such technologies as the texture analyzer—“essentially a mechanical mouth” with multiple probes that judge a food’s “bounce, creep, breaking point, density, crunchiness” and so on (126). The apparatus of today’s sophistry, then, goes well beyond the scroll hidden in Phaedrus’s robes. Yet still its operations elude its practitioners, who cannot explain why exactly their magic potions work, but can only mix them together.

In revealing contemporary cookery as an unsettling enterprise of mimicry, Schlosser’s tour of flavor presses at the apparent divide between “natural” and “artificial.” The reporter quotes a food scientist to sum up the (non)distinction: “A natural flavor . . . is a flavor that’s been derived with an out-of-date technology” (126). As such, “when you distill it from bananas with a solvent, amyl acetate is a natural flavor. When you produce it by mixing vinegar with amyl alcohol, adding sulfuric acid as a catalyst, amyl acetate is an artificial flavor. Either way it smells and tastes the same” (127). Flavor, then, masks its own origins. While consumers are led to believe that “natural flavor” is more healthy, this is not necessarily the case, the reporter explains. For instance, when almond flavor (benzaldehyde) is “naturally” derived from peach and apricot pits, it contains traces of cyanide, absent when it is “artificially” derived through a mixture of oil of clove and amyl acetate. On the biotech side of flavor, Schlosser reports,

“natural” flavors are being developed through evolving technologies of “fermentation, enzyme reactions, fungal cultures, and tissue cultures,” enabling the production of “extremely lifelike dairy flavors” and “much more realistic meat flavors” (128). Whether classified as natural or artificial, Schlosser insists, added flavors concern the realm of pretense rather than truth—a play of appearances epitomized by “natural smoke flavor.”

Like Socrates, Schlosser is drawn out of his own in following the flavorist. Where rhetoric led the lover of wisdom out of the city, it leads the lover of food away from the farm—to a seductive realm of appearance that at once fascinates and repels him. Out of his element, the very grounds of Schlosser’s value system are queered—truth comes to blend with appearance, and nature with artifice. In his odd taste test Schlosser wants to reject flavor for being artificial and deceptive, and yet his nose resists. The aromatic flavors come to him as vibrantly real, while vision struggles against that reality. Though he does not trust the work of the flavorist, the reporter is awed by the artistry of this modern-day composer.

What these two suspicious yet curious critics reveal, perhaps against their better intentions, is that in all realms—whether we call them art, science, or knack—we always run up against the limits of human knowledge and human control. We never transcend appearances, but only come to sense and compose them differently. Even the flavorist, with all his science, cannot deduce good flavor from formulas and principles alone, but must blindly cook them up in experimental “tastings” like Schlosser’s. If Socrates suggested how language and truth could adopt an agency of their own in the materiality of the scroll, then, Schlosser gestures toward the unruly material agencies of chemicals and taste buds—complex forces that can be tracked with science and machinery, to be

sure, but that always also reserve a creative energy and a chemical potency that eludes these. Flavor, in short, dwells an arena between subject and object, truth and appearance, in the indeterminate space where experience and reality entwine.

If Socrates and Schlosser perhaps unwittingly suggest that rhetoric, in its world-composing activity, is not so far from truth, appearance not so far from reality, this is not to dismiss their unease over rhetoric. On the contrary, rhetoric is indeed a powerful, risky, and often intractable activity, and the rhetorical practices that Socrates and Schlosser critique in their own times are particularly so. Just as some ancient sophists surely duped their students for money, the drive for wealth to the detriment of consumer well-being continues to fuel today's more complex machineries of rhetoric. Yet if sophistry and flavory are problematic, it is not for the reasons these critics give—that they work at the borders of human agency and knowledge or that they deal in “mere” appearance and sensation. The problem also isn't their use of technology—as Schlosser himself demonstrates, in the realm of flavor, the divide between nature and artifice breaks down. While the reporter means to suggest that even “natural” manufactured flavors are artificial, he at the same time points to the chemical composition of all flavor—and what's more, the “cooking” of all cooking. The flavorist works and plays in a potent chemical realm, to be sure. But this is the realm of all kinds of food preparation, whether it “smokes” its product by a real fire or an added chemical.

If Schlosser's Platonic critique of the flavorist will not help us to articulate the dangers of rhetoric in its current sensory articulation, what will? If the flavorist, and the entire apparatus of industrial food that he figuratively embodies, is indeed a great modern danger—as Schlosser and many other food activists argue—how can we track that

danger, once we dispense with oppositions of reality/appearance, nature/artifice, tradition/sacrilege, and art/science/knack? What could better guide a critical practice, a critical pedagogy of taste? If rhetoric continues to work at powerful, sensory levels, seducing consumers beyond the reach of knowledge and reason, we cannot rely on truth alone to critique and change it. How can we then assess the contemporary workings of sensory rhetoric and participate in them ethically? This dissertation engages these questions by building an account of sensory rhetoric through an examination of how sensation and taste have been tapped in Enlightenment, post-Enlightenment, and contemporary rhetorical theory and practice. The remainder of this chapter frames my inquiry by reviewing several distinct materialisms that have manifested in rhetoric and arguing that a sensory theorization of rhetoric could integrate them and help address a shared problem of immanence. I then establish taste in particular as an ideal conceptual site for theorizing sensory rhetoric and advancing on the problem of immanence.

Materialism and Immanence

Since poststructuralist critiques of the 1980s recast rhetorical agency in distributed, discursive terms, focus has turned to the body, things, and environments as co-constitutive rhetorical forces, and rhetoric has been expanded beyond the realm of the symbolic. A more recent branch of this initial “corporeal” or “affective” turn is a turn to “new materialism” that draws on theorists like Martin Heidegger, Bruno Latour, Jane Bennett, and Donna Haraway. This development has been crucial for elaborating rhetoric’s ontological, world-making role, emphasizing the entanglement of language and materiality, and staging inquiry into the nonhuman world. However, these advances were enabled by a certain bracketing of practical, political questions that we are now in a

position to revisit with a new set of orientations. In facing this task, it is worth recalling an older materialist tradition in rhetoric—the Marxist strain reaching back to Kenneth Burke, which has long pursued its theorizations of rhetoric’s materiality with a sense of political urgency. The central problem in this older materialist tradition is that of immanence.

In brief, the problem of immanence (to be discussed further toward the end of chapter 3), refers to the inability to get outside—the inability of the critic, the activist, and even the object to get outside of an existing realm of practices. For Marx and the critical theorists who followed him, the challenge is how to conceive rhetorical and political agency given that material life is always already conditioned by structures of domination—or, as it is sometimes put, how to reckon with people’s participation in their own oppression. The problem is elaborated in Michel Foucault’s conception of power. According to Foucault,

relations of power are not in a position of *exteriority* with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are *immanent* in the latter; they are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums which occur in the latter, and conversely they are the internal conditions of these differentiations. (*History* 94, emphasis added)

For Foucault, power is not imposed from some outside entity onto bodies, but rather is produced through everyday activity. He elaborates, positioning himself against a certain interpretation of Marx: “relations of power are not in superstructural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play” (*History* 94). The immanence of power comes from its

generativity, its continual production of objects. It is existing and ever-evolving power relations, then, that compose any potential object of study or of political intervention. Foucault famously explored sexuality as an example of the immanent, generative workings of power: “If sexuality was constituted as an area of investigation,” he said, this was only because relations of power had established it as a possible object; and conversely, if power was able to take it as a target, this was because techniques of knowledge and procedures of discourse were capable of investing it. Between techniques of knowledge and strategies of power, there is *no exteriority*, even if they have specific roles and are linked together on the basis of their difference. (*History* 98, emphasis added)

Like Marx and the Frankfurt School (as we will see in chapter 3), Foucault recognizes and embraces the fact that any object of dissensual study or intervention—such as the concept/phenomenon of sexuality—will necessarily exist only because of existing power structures (and thus will already be articulated in a certain way by them). There is no way to step outside of the objects, concepts, values, feelings, or even sensations emergent from existing power-knowledge relations. These objects, sensations, and so on can, however, always be inhabited and performed differently. The challenge, then, becomes how to do so—how to practice immanent critique and intervention. As my project will suggest, this challenge can be traced back to the notably apolitical search for a “standard of taste” that animated the Scottish Enlightenment, and it can be traced forward into the project of new materialism to promote an ecological sensibility, an attunement to the vitality of things.

Rhetoric's new and old materialisms, I propose, can come together around the problem of immanence to generate a richer theorization of rhetoric's materiality and a fuller sense of immanent political critique and action. My project stages such an intervention by tracking rhetoric's connection to sensation and aesthetics. If the problem of immanence dwells in the way domination is produced and reproduced within rather than outside of human experience and practices, then sensation is an important site for interrogating the immanence of rhetoric. My project thus builds on Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought to theorize gustatory taste as a rhetorical capacity that operates at both sensory and aesthetic levels. Gustatory taste invites theorization from each of the angles by which rhetoric's materiality is approached: it is a bodily capacity that can also be mapped onto things and environments, a site where human/nonhuman and life/death distinctions are blurred, and, as a qualitative field where subject and object co-compose each other, a paradigm of immanence. A rhetorical theory of sensation (and taste in particular) positions us to produce a rich, posthumanist conception of critical capacity that can inform the problem of immanence. In addition to advancing the theorization of rhetoric's materiality, this inquiry will enhance our understanding of rhetoric as a receptive capacity interwoven into ethical life, inform the discourse of critical rhetoric, and nuance our understanding of critical pedagogies within and beyond the academy. An incorporation of new and traditional materialism also marks an opportunity to bring rhetoric scholarship on the communication and composition sides of the discipline into fruitful conversation.

Three Materialisms

In the late 1960s, Michel Foucault declared that discourses are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (*Archaeology* 49), and Jacques Derrida detailed a view by which “there is nothing outside the text” (158). The subsequent attention to the constitutive powers of discourse revolutionized the humanities in ways particularly significant for rhetorical studies, opening a way to think rhetoric as not mere ornament, but something with the power to produce knowledge and worlds. However, the new enthusiasm for discourse eventually prompted a concern that the humanities may have “forgotten” materiality. Thus, in a recent material turn, scholars have drawn from Foucault, Judith Butler, Gilles Deleuze, and Eve Sedgwick to complicate approaches to discursivity through attention to the body, emotions, and affect (e.g., Massumi, Ahmed, and Berlant). In a posthumanist development of this turn often termed new materialism, scholars have brought in Hans Driesch, Bruno Latour, Martin Heidegger, and Graham Harman to emphasize the overlap between discourse and materiality, the vitality of things and environments, and the imbrications of human and nonhuman forces (e.g., Haraway, Hayles, Wolf, Bennett, Barad). Yet while poststructuralist thinkers have spent the past few decades retrieving materiality from a temporary amnesia, Marxist thinkers have been integrating certain poststructuralist ideas into political theories which all the while have remained rigorously committed to materiality (e.g., Connolly, Hardt and Negri, Jameson, Laclau and Mouffe, Spivak). The resultant versions of materiality are provocatively varied. Today, while many new materialist thinkers continue to declare a break with Marx and Marxism (e.g., Latour,

Bennett, Braidotti, Rickert), others seek an engagement with Marx in poststructuralist territory (e.g., Barad, Deleuze, Berlant).

We can thus, for heuristic purposes, describe three materialisms in the humanities: (1) an older, Marxist materialism (itself very diverse); (2) a newer, corporeal/affective materialism; and (3) a more posthumanist branch of corporeal/affective materialism termed “new materialism.” We can accordingly map three relatively distinct approaches to theorizing rhetoric’s materiality. First, and oldest, is a traditional materialist approach that variously emphasizes rhetoric’s connection to economic conditions, material structures of power, and the materiality of discourse itself (McGee, Cloud, Aune, Greene). Second is a corporeal or affective materialism that has reinvested in the role of pathos and turned to the body, things, and place as significant rhetorical forces that interact at the presymbolic level of affect (Kennedy, Biesecker, Edbauer Rice, Davis, Hawhee, Blair, Dickinson, Ott, Selzer, Syverson, early Rickert, Gross, Senda-Cook). Third, and most recent, is a “new” or posthumanist materialism that posits a highly distributed, immersive sense of rhetoricity which includes nonhuman things and environments (Hawk, Barnett, Rickert, Rivers, Marback).

These three materialisms are capable of productive interaction, yet the poles of new and old materialism remain relatively insulated from one another. In addition to their theoretical conflicts, these two materialist approaches are also fairly divided across rhetoric’s disciplinary locations, with communication scholars inclining toward traditional materialist views of rhetoric’s materiality and composition scholars inclining toward “new” materialist views.¹ My project aims to put these two materialist poles in deeper conversation, drawing in part from the engagement with affect and corporeality

common to both communication and composition scholars. In what follows, I offer a brief discussion of the two “poles” of new materialist rhetoric and traditional materialist rhetoric. I then turn to a proposal for how, why, and to what end rhetoric’s three materialisms might be integrated over the concept of taste.

New Materialist Rhetoric

In 1968, when Lloyd Bitzer described the rhetorical situation, rhetoric scholars began to complicate simplistic models of communication and persuasion. Bitzer argued that identifying the situation in which discourse occurs is key for understanding the relationships among sender, receiver, and text that emerge out of that situation. In response, Richard Vatz objected that exigencies are not simply out there, but are created by the speaker—it is the speaker, rather than the situation, who is the origin of the rhetorical event. Influenced by the poststructuralist critique of the self-present subject, subsequent rhetoric scholars further complicated things. Barbara Biesecker, for instance, argued that the Bitzer/Vatz debate maintained a common but unsupportable assumption that rhetoric plays out as a dance of independent elements which affect each other in only superficial ways. According to this typical “logic of influence” model of rhetoric, the text is situated as “an object that mediates between subjects (speaker and audience) whose identity is constituted in a terrain different from and external to the particular rhetorical situation” (110). In its place Biesecker proposed a logic of articulation, by which the elements at play in a rhetorical event (text, audience, speaker, situation) are never fixed, fully present entities simply influencing one another, but are provisional emergences in a constant flux of co-constitutive articulation.²

As part of the affect turn, composition scholars have cast such poststructuralist disturbances of elemental, influence-oriented models of rhetoric in more ecological, material terms. Thus Margaret Syverson proposes that we think of composition “across physical, social, psychological, spatial, and temporal dimensions” (23). And Jenny Edbauer Rice, drawing from Deleuze and Guattari, elaborates on Syverson by offering the figure of the rhetorical ecology as an alternative to the rhetorical situation, one that better enables us to think rhetoric’s viral, affective movements across bodies and environments (“Unframing”). As such, then, a poststructuralist approach to rhetoric’s materiality has cast rhetoric’s role in material and ontological terms, where audiences, speakers, texts, things, and environments are continually co-constituted.

This work, part of the field’s affect turn, begins to shift rhetorical theory away from its traditionally human center. The more recent development of this shift brings Heidegger, Latour, Hayles, and Harman into the theoretical mix (Hawk, Barnett, Rickert, Rivers) to further emphasize rhetoric’s entwining of human and nonhuman, material and discursive. Thus in his 2007 *A Counter-History of Composition*, Byron Hawk draws on Heidegger’s view of technology as fundamentally relational, deriving its being from its associations with humans, environments, and other equipment in a way that disrupts the human/technology dichotomy. This enables him to build on and extend Hayles’ view of posthumanism as an embrace of the intelligence of environments which “[locates] thought and action in the complexity of distributed cognitive environments” (177). Referencing Deleuze and Guattari’s argument for the overlapping realms of book, world, and author, Hawk maintains that world, representation, and rhetor must not be thought discretely, but as elements of assemblages where semiotic, material, and social orders

overlap (205). Ultimately, Hawk articulates a complex, Deleuzian vitalistic approach to rhetoric and composition that casts rhetorical invention in terms of not just distributed cognition, but a liveliness distributed throughout environments virtual and concrete.

In his 2013 *Ambient Rhetoric*, Thomas Rickert supplements the metaphors of network and ecology with the concept of ambience to better evoke the “vital, material, and encompassing” aspects of rhetorical invention (105). Brian Eno’s work serves an example, inviting the environment to “play” music in ways that reveal it as not inert, but actively involved in everyday being (109). Rickert builds on Hawk’s discussion of Heidegger by theorizing rhetoric’s ambience in terms of the Heideggerian notions of thingness—the way nonhuman entities are complexly interwoven into worlds—and by theorizing our reckoning with rhetoric’s ambience in terms of dwelling—a way of being “conditioned and permeated by things so that they are inseparable from what it means to live in the world” (223). He also extends the Heideggerian perspective with Harman’s view that it is not only when humans interact with things that new worlds are revealed and concealed, but also when things interact with each other. As such, he theorizes the rhetoricity of things (speed bumps, keys, rooms, etc) not merely in terms of persuasion (as he understands Latour to do), but in terms of their ontological role in calling worlds into being. In other words, rhetoric concerns not the way things are represented or the way things and language are mediated, but rather how things show up and thus *are* for each other in moments of contact, calling upon each other for a response. Rhetoric’s call cannot be isolated as linguistic or material, nor as a medium between the two. Rather, like Hawk, Rickert sees language and materiality as inseparable forces of rhetoric: evoking

Heidegger, he defines language as the preconditions for symbolicity (rather than symbolicity itself), conditions that are enmeshed with materiality.

Rickert and Hawk both identify broad political implications for theorizing rhetoric's materiality in terms of nonhuman vitality. Thus Hawk's material view of invention leads him to object to critical pedagogies, such as that of James Berlin, as being limited by a simplistic understanding of invention. Berlin's mechanical process of ideology critique, he argues, has a definite end-goal: cultivating a certain kind of critical consciousness, liberating students according to a specific vision of freedom. To this extent, Berlin's program functions as a rigid *process*, rather than a more open-ended, circuitous *method* where politics is at risk and pedagogical outcomes are unknown. Invention, for Hawk, is not the lone act of an individual subject, but the generative play of energies among student, teacher, classroom, and technology. It is only more open-ended methods that can help the full potential of invention be realized in the classroom (Hawk cites Gregory Ulmer and Geoffrey Sirc as furnishing examples of such methods).

Rickert unpacks the political implications of material rhetoric in terms of the efforts of environmentalism. Resonating with Biesecker's move from a logic of influence to a logic of persuasion, he argues that environmentalists have assumed a simplistic model of rhetoric aimed at persuasion rather than world-making. As an ambient view of rhetoric reveals, the problem of sustainability is not merely a problem of people's beliefs, attitudes, and policies (which Rickert believes environmentalists too often assume), but a problem of an entire way of dwelling in which things and environments actively participate. Cars, for instance, having woven themselves into landscapes, lifestyles, infrastructures, and policies, are a dominant force in generating an unsustainable world.

An environmentalism that adopts an ambient view of rhetoric would aim not merely for changes in human values, attitudes, or choices, but would stage ontological change in the human-nonhuman world. For instance, rather than simply embracing the value of sufficiency over efficiency (as environmentalist Thomas Princen proposes), it would aim to cultivate environments where sufficiency can be materially enacted—all the while recalling that the things and environments with which we dwell can never be fully known or controlled.

While new materialist approaches to rhetoric have thus generated important political implications, these are so far very broad, and offer more of a critical ground-clearing than positive alternatives. Many questions remain open, perhaps most significantly the question of how power is to be tracked and engaged in a vitalistic, ambient rhetorical field. Hawk, for instance, is correct that Berlin's pedagogical methods are limited. Yet while a richer approach to invention demands we relinquish rigid processes for more open-ended methods, we still must respond to Berlin's Marxist call to confront the ideologies that animate our teaching and emerge (often unexpectedly) from it. How can a vitalistic approach to the classroom enable a better, more open-ended response? Rickert leaves us with practical-political questions in a similar fashion. He establishes that environmentalism must target the forces of world-making rather than beliefs and practices alone, but leaves unaddressed how a more ambient approach to political critique and action could point the way. Meanwhile, whereas Rickert's theorization of rhetoric's nonhuman, ecological operations is crucial, he misses an opportunity to engage Marxism and rhetoric's Marxist materialist traditions in his political inquiry, dismissing them cursorily in a single paragraph for an (albeit

problematic) overemphasis on the human (21). Yet Marx (as I will discuss in chapter 3) was a new materialist in his own right, commencing his career with a dismissal of the less lively treatments of matter that preceded his own (*Theses; German Ideology*). Returning to the Marxist roots from which the most recent materialisms have distinguished themselves (e.g., Hawk, Rickert, Bennett, Latour) is an important next step for material rhetoric, and a step that can benefit traditional materialist approaches as well. The next section thus turns to traditional materialist approaches in rhetoric with an eye to how they can inform and be informed by “new” materialist approaches.

Traditional Materialist Rhetoric

Since Kenneth Burke, rhetoric scholars have adopted Marxist approaches in both composition (particularly via work on critical pedagogy) and communication (particularly via practicing and theorizing criticism). However, the bulk of this work attends to Marxist ideology critique without connecting this to a theory of materiality. Marxist theories of rhetoric’s materiality have been developed primarily by communication scholars—among them Michael McGee, Dana Cloud, and Ronald Greene. Like posthumanist approaches, the Marxist angle on rhetoric’s materiality emphasizes rhetoric’s ontological, world-making functions, with rhetoric theorized as more or less constitutive of social and political worlds. Yet the focus has been not on rhetoric’s extra-linguistic or extra-human aspects, but instead the connections between rhetoric’s materiality and power. In this vein, scholars inquire into how rhetoric can be understood as material in two senses originally tapped by Marx: as real, concrete human experience of economic and social realities (as opposed to the abstractions of consciousness), and as the materializations of power that condition those concrete realities.

Thus, in his 1982 “A Materialist Conception of Rhetoric,” McGee followed the precedent of Marx and Engels’ *German Ideology* in responding to a perceived idealism in the field of rhetoric. Contemporary rhetorical theory, he declared, conceived rhetoric as a body of principles for reaching a particular outcome—effective discourse. To replace this idealist, product-oriented approach to theorizing rhetoric, McGee proposed we rethink rhetoric as a real, ongoing process rather than an idealized aesthetic product, a process continually prompted by an ever-present exigence—the necessities of life. This process was “as material and as omnipresent as air and water” (26)—though, following Marx, rhetoric’s materiality included much more than the sheafs of paper that might archive a speech. Indeed, “the whole of rhetoric is ‘material’ by measure of human experiencing of it, not by virtue of our ability to continue touching it after it is gone” (26).³

Recalling the 1960s’ “process” turn in composition, McGee was responding to an aesthetic, literary orientation in a field that he saw as more properly concerned with “the brute reality of persuasion as a daily social phenomenon” (25). Yet unlike many process-oriented compositionists, for McGee what mattered was not the cognitive process of an individual inventor, but rather the larger process of social negotiation occurring at levels from individual speakers and auditors to vast institutions and publics. And here entered the second Marxist dimension of his materialism. Though McGee in 1982 did not discuss economics or justice per se, he was concerned with how the lived, necessary practice of rhetoric played out in shifting relations of dominance and compliance. Thus he figured rhetoric, that everyday practice of social negotiation, as fundamentally “a species of coercion” (40) by which “speakers” (ranging from individuals to institutions) seduced “audiences” (from individuals to “the people”) into acquiescence. Rhetoric, he declared,

was as coercive as war, but distinct in being “the symbolic sublimation of pain” (40), offering as it did an appeasing sense of concern for the audience’s interests.

Though many have developed on McGee’s essay (indeed, Barbara Biesecker and John Lucaites have devoted an edited volume to its legacy), the most prominent, and perhaps most contentious, have been Dana Cloud and Ronald Greene. In her oft-cited 1994 essay, “The Materiality of Discourse as Oxymoron,” Cloud affirms McGee’s 1982 essay, as well as the more orthodox modes of Marxist ideology critique prominent in his and Wander’s Marxist work from the 1970s and 1980s. However, she objects that a subsequent poststructuralist, Althusserian turn in both McGee’s work and the field at large has led to a preoccupation with discourse and a lost sense of rhetoric’s materiality. Views like McGee’s of the materiality of discourse, she argues, manifest more as the discursivity of materiality, stalling at the stage of interrogating ideologies and the apparatuses that house them (including Greene and McKerrow), rather than following McGee’s earlier efforts to bring the tools of rhetoric to bear on analyzing how ideologies fuel and are fueled by economic inequality and social injustice. Rhetorical critics, Cloud argues, seemed to have forgotten that people need to be liberated from more than just discourses and codes, but from actual material realities. For Cloud, then, rhetoric’s materiality lies less in its overall practice (as McGee saw it, inclining as he was toward an integration of materiality and discourse) and more in its motivations and effects as a medium of power. Though admittedly modernist, she maintains, the job of the rhetorical critic is to reveal rhetoric’s connection to everyday material conditions—to unmask and demystify dominant ideologies, to speak up for marginalized discourses.

Cloud's greater emphasis on material experience can potentially motivate an engagement with corporeal and new materialism, and, as I will argue in chapters 3 and 4, her continued focus on demystification is not without promise, despite recent new materialist criticism. Still, Greene ("Another Materialist Rhetoric") convincingly objects to Cloud on a number of grounds. Ignoring legitimate and pressing criticisms of poststructuralism, he argues, Cloud retains a bipolar, oppressor-oppressed model of power (rather than a more complex, multiplied understanding); a representationalist understanding of discourse (rather than a more constitutive one); and a misguided focus on power "interests" (which undergirds an intentionalist view of rhetorical and political forces). Related to these problems, he maintains, Cloud continues with the logic of influence model criticized by Biesecker, conceiving rhetoric as a medium between fixed speakers and audiences—assuming, for instance, that if Gulf War protests had been given proper media voice, the public would have realized the problems with the war and resisted. Such an assumption, Greene maintains, fails to recognize entire apparatuses of power that generated consent for the war in the first place—it fails, in short, to reckon with the problem of immanence. Rhetoric, in Greene's view, occurs at the more primary level of "governing apparatus," material configurations of ideologies, institutions, and technologies that continually and immanently generate speakers, audiences, situations, and constellations of power, rather than simply moving ideas through language between fixed speakers and audiences in stabilized situations. Echoing Biesecker, Greene asserts that this approach to rhetoric's materiality demands a critical method of articulation to replace the hermeneutics of suspicion that Cloud offers, and one that attends to both institutional histories (including rhetoric's own), and larger apparatuses (including

institutions, discourses, practices, technologies) (“Another Materialist Rhetoric,” “Rhetorical Materialism”). The rhetorical critic’s task is to investigate how ideological elements map onto political issues through rhetoric’s technologies of deliberation.⁴

Greene develops his materialist approach in his 2004 essay “Rhetoric and Capitalism: Rhetorical Agency as Communicative Labor.” Here he resonates with Rickert, arguing that (especially among Marxists) rhetorical agency tends to be imagined as “a communicative process of inquiry and advocacy on issues of public importance” (188). Such a view (which he maps to both Cloud and Aune) prompts a moralizing approach to citizenship and overlooks “how capitalist exploitation works in and through cultural logics of domination and representation” (194). As an alternative, Greene seeks a view of rhetorical agency that is immanent to capitalism and social being, rather than separate from it. He proposes that a shift from viewing rhetorical agency as communication to seeing it as “communicative labor” offers such an opening. Drawing from feminist economists, Greene expands the notion of labor to include not just the factory worker, but also “the large amounts of (often gendered and raced) labor associated with care, affect, and consumption that take place beyond the factory gates at home, in hospitals, in schools, and in stores” (199). Evoking Hardt and Negri’s notion of immaterial labor, he casts rhetorical agency as “a form of life-affirming constitutive power that embodies creativity and cooperation” (201).

Of the developments of traditional Marxist materialism, Greene’s is the most compatible with the new materialist approach to rhetoric, and is becoming more so as he develops the influences of Foucault, Althusser, and Deleuze. Greene shares with new materialist rhetoric an emphasis on rhetoric’s powers to constitute things—at least human

things, like subjectivities, values, and consent for war. His approach also shares an insistence that desirable political outcomes cannot simply be identified and aimed for (a view likewise shared by Marx, Adorno, and new materialists, to be discussed in chapter 3). Yet despite these resonances, Greene’s approach to rhetoric’s materiality remains distinctly human-centered, a fact made most explicit in his contribution to the 2009 volume dedicated to McGee. Here, he objects to the recent proliferation of work on the rhetorical powers of monuments, quilts, environments, bodies, and everyday practices. This sort of expansion of rhetoric’s object domain, Greene argues, leads to a commitment to a “generalized rhetoricality inherent in cultural forms and objects” (44) that (1) risks presenting as a transcendental power that produces the subject as an effect and (2) derails a more systematic and concrete exploration into the material forces that constitute rhetorical subjectivity. Instead, he argues, rhetoric should focus on how specific networks—of institutions, technologies, discourses, and so on—produce a “concrete rhetorical subject, a subject that speaks and is spoken to” (44). Greene’s example is the “citizenship apparatus” we can unpack as: a complex of institutions that promote civic engagement in high schoolers, discourses about progressive education that promote communication as a means of citizenship, and rhetorical technologies like learning how to debate. In the end, for Greene, the things and environments that constitute speaking subjects are ordered in politically significant ways that we can analyze through specific technologies, institutions, discourses, practices, and so on, but rhetoricity inheres in speaking subjects alone.

It is true that taken in isolation, many studies expanding rhetoric’s object domain to include quilts, monuments, and so on do not provide robust theorizations of rhetoric’s

materiality, offering instead more local critical insights on their objects of analysis. However, considered as a whole, this work is doing much to shift the field's concepts, methods, and habits of thought, as becomes apparent in more reflective or comprehensive treatments of this work (e.g., Blair, Senda-Cook, Stormer) and more theoretically inclined object studies (e.g., Marback, Morris). Moreover, chances are that in his critique, Greene does not have in mind the work of compositionists Syverson, Edbauer Rice, Hawk, and Rickert—scholars who have offered a rich theoretical milieu for the expansion of rhetoric's object domain. As I argued above, this work has indeed entailed a certain abstraction of the political and bracketing of concrete political questions. However, the vitalization of objects it has accomplished opens a new, lively territory of rhetorical materiality and power. With the new materialist turn and against Greene, I propose that expanding rhetoric's object domain is crucial to exploring the operations and political stakes of rhetoric's materiality. Such an expansion, as Jane Bennett has argued, avoids the arrogance of imagining human agency as something separate. This arrogance impedes environmentalist orientations, and in any case is increasingly less viable as we encounter our own otherness in cyborgian form (Hayles, Haraway, Hawk). It also enables us to look beyond the rhetorical subject for the energies of change (a potential which is present in Hardt and Negri's work, though not engaged by Greene).

At the same time, to take on political questions, new materialist rhetoric needs methods for evaluating emergent power structures such as those Greene offers. This is apparent when we consider Rickert's chapter on ambient sound, where he investigates the Microsoft start-up tune. Here Rickert offers a robust theorization of the vibrant rhetoricity of both room and sound. Yet while his attention to Microsoft's ambient presence in

everyday life is certainly provocative, gesturing at the corporatization of life that proceeds through ambient rhetorical means, Rickert makes no move toward critique (indeed, it is not clear that he wants to make such a move). For those such as Greene, whose primary motivation in theorizing rhetoric's materiality is political (seeking new theorizations and approaches to worldly change), the ambient approach offers a rich opening onto the task of mapping articulations of power. In such a view, these articulations ultimately include the participation of technologies, things, and environments as well as the actions of people. In short, any generalized rhetoricity that an ambient approach assumes need not mean an abandonment of the logic of articulation.

That said, rhetoric scholars might approach articulation somewhat differently. It is in gesturing at this difference that Nathan Stormer suggests a way to bridge new and old materialist rhetoric. Reading the explosion of work on “environments, genes, rituals, and monuments” (262) to indicate a promising posthuman turn in the field (259), Stormer echoes Greene in acknowledging a need to “account for questions of *order* from scholars who hold rhetoric to be present in multitudes of practices” (260, emphasis added). He proposes the concept of articulation as a helpful heuristic for such a project, but draws from Haraway and Latour to unpack a posthumanist model of articulation, in contrast to the dominant Laclau/Hall model embraced by Greene and many others. This enables him to acknowledge the imbrications of materiality and discourse even while recognizing a need to posit them as separate spheres in certain instances. Stormer proposes that rhetoric scholars might adopt a “posthumanist historiographic perspective,” thinking prosthetically and using a genealogical approach to our objects in order to study how they

are articulated and what they articulate. This opens the way for a posthumanist mode of political criticism, though Stormer does not address this directly.

Drawing on both versions of rhetoric's materiality, I want to extract a shared problem for new and old materialist rhetoric: the question of how to approach political intervention given an immanent, human-nonhuman understanding of rhetorical agency and an acknowledgement of the fluid, multiple character of power. This question combines the problems of immanence and articulation that traditional materialist rhetoric investigates with the inquiry into emergence that new materialist rhetoric has undertaken. Drawing on both traditions to interrogate this question promises to produce a richer view of rhetoric's materiality and why that materiality matters. This project pursues such an approach to the problem of immanence with an inquiry into the sensory dimensions of rhetoric. The next section maps how taste, in particular, offers an ideal conceptual site for unpacking a sensory account of rhetoric.

A (Re)turn to Taste

An historically significant concept in rhetoric and politics, taste—in both its aesthetic sense (as a cultivated, critical response-ability to things) and its sensory sense (as a modality of object-human relations)—is an ideal conceptual site for putting rhetoric's materialisms into conversation for several reasons. First, taste's complex rhetoricity invites a theory of *rhetoric's materiality* that draws together the multiple and disparate existing theorizations. Taste (in both its aesthetic and sensory dimensions) manifests at each of the material levels that rhetorical theory has engaged, while also opening a way to think a merging of those levels. As a bodily capacity for discrimination, judgment, pleasure, and desire, it evokes Debra Hawhee's description of rhetoric as bodily training.

As a mode of involvement with nonhuman vitality, it resonates with new materialist approaches, acting, on the one hand, as a path to the ecological sensibility Bennett calls for, and staging, on the other, the sort of politics of things for which Latour calls under the banner of *Dingpolitik*. Finally, as a concrete site of power, taste directs us to how bodies, things, and environments can become permeated with the structures of power that concern traditional materialist rhetoric. As new materialism turns to questions of human-nonhuman politics, Marxism's long history of theorizing the politics of the senses and aesthetic taste promises to be informative. At the same time, an ambient approach to taste could guide an understanding of sensory rhetoric as a technology of power. Both possibilities are evoked in chapter 3.

Second, as a mode of encounter between bodies and things, the concept of taste enhances our understanding of rhetoric as a receptive capacity that is fundamentally generative (e.g., Davis). As such, it is a provocative conceptual site for thinking the complications of *rhetorical agency* that rhetoricians have offered from traditional and new materialist perspectives. From the vantage point of new materialist rhetoric, taste stages the dissolve between active and passive forces of invention that Hawk describes in terms of adaptability and Rickert describes in terms of *chora*. At the same time, as a product of capitalist forces as well as a (re)producer of those forces, taste helps us to think the dissolve in economic production and consumption that for Greene (2004) is central to rhetorical agency. In short, taste can act as a bridge between rethinkings of rhetorical agency that collapse production and consumption at economic-political levels (Greene) as well as broader ontological levels (Hawk and Rickert). These complications of rhetorical agency in turn speak to puzzles of immanence by complicating the notion of

conscientious consumption (an issue to be discussed in chapter 4) and enriching our understanding of rhetoric and ethics (to be discussed in chapter 5).

Finally, taste in its aesthetic and sensory articulations is an ideal site for reengaging the question of *critical capacity*. This promises to assist in exploring the paradoxes of immanence that Greene points us to, by which public consent is manufactured in ways that reproduce structures of power and prevent critical distance—a view from outside of the operations of power. A new materialist approach to taste figures it as a set of orientations that not only become conditioned into people’s bodies, practices, and sensory worlds (Bourdieu; Ranciere), but also that become inscribed into things and environments. As such, taste considered from a new materialist perspective enriches the question of how to reckon with not just people’s participation in their own oppression (Marcuse; Adorno), but the participation of the human-nonhuman world at large. This in turn speaks to conversations in communication about critical rhetoric and in composition about critical pedagogy, offering a bridge between them. Implications of my investigation for theories and practices of critique, specifically, will be discussed at the end of chapter 3.

An integrated materialist rhetorical study of taste also promises to inform several additional discourses within and beyond rhetoric. Taste-based approaches to ethical refinement and political change from the Enlightenment through Adorno have been criticized as elitist (see, e.g., Bourdieu, Saisselin, Cottom, Shusterman). Bourdieu, moreover, argues that taste practices in general create class division and reproduce the orders of rule that construct them in the first place. As rhetorical studies develops its attunement to the material and sensory dimensions of rhetoric, we must both address and

complicate these positions, a challenge this dissertation takes on. Such a project is particularly important as food, food environments, and gustatory taste are increasingly implicated in the biologically mediated magnification of animal suffering and the (re)production of economic, social, and nutritional disparity at a national and global level.

Defining Taste: Sense and Sensibility

As a term, a concept, and a phenomenon, taste is murky and multiple. I provisionally map it out with the following necessarily (and provocatively) unsatisfactory schemata, drawn primarily from traditional thought in psychology and aesthetic theory.

From the perspective of the individual, the term “gustatory taste” can refer to two things: (1) the *sense* of gustation (which itself includes bodily sensation and the phenomenal experience of sensation) and (2) one’s aesthetic *sensibilities* in relation to gustatory experience. The sense of taste refers to a bodily orientation to an object that enables a particular quality or modality of experience not possible via other sense modalities. But such a concept is never actualized, because the distinction between different sense modalities immediately falls apart when we consider the synesthetic character of the senses: taste sensation, for instance, is conditioned by visual, aural, and tactile experience, and olfactory experience most of all—as Schlosser suggests, the human body registers some 90% of flavor through the nose, not the mouth. In the end, there is no agreed-upon standard for distinguishing among the sense modalities—the traditional five senses, as well as the traditional four taste sensations of sweet, sour, salty, bitter, are joined by many more in some theories, and it is difficult to distinguish senses (taste, sight, smell, etc.) from sensations (sweet, sour, etc.). Regardless of how the sense modalities are carved up, we can make physiological and functional distinctions between

the bodily apparatuses connected with sensation. Flavor and smell enter the body chemically, for instance, in contrast to sounds and images, entering by physical impact.

Continuing (provisionally) from the perspective of the individual, I define aesthetic taste (whether for music, art, food, etc.) as an affectability or response-ability related to a particular realm of things that is cultivated in deliberate and accidental ways. Every individual has a particular range of aesthetic tastes, which may be termed “high” or “low,” in various discourses. Aesthetic taste is a changeable affect-ability that involves four components: (1) discriminatory (in)ability (which can manifest in experience, brain, and/or sense organs, and is complexly related to language) (2) immediate experience (including enjoyment, intoxication, and disgust) (3) objective orientation (including desire, craving, and addiction) (4) (in)capacity for judgment of quality. These are schematic divisions of aesthetic taste which can easily be troubled—for instance, enjoyment is arguably an order of desire, as well as an experience that includes judgment. Yet to the extent that we can conceptually separate them, we can understand them to affect and blend into one another. For example, one’s ability to discriminate cherry vs. raspberry flavors in wine, surrealism vs. realism in painting, or saxophone vs. horn in jazz, can enhance enjoyment, drive desire, and assist in a more nuanced and reliable judgment. In cultivating the aesthetic affectability of gustatory taste, one necessarily impacts the sense of taste—the range or zone of possible qualitative engagements of a subject with an object.

While focusing on the subject’s side of taste alone surely has theoretical value, a new materialist perspective urges us to complicate these subject-centered definitions of aesthetic and sensory taste, and in ways that can serve environmentalist purposes. Such a

perspective would ask us to highlight the active participation of the object (whether food, clothing, art, etc) in enabling certain modes of sensation and affecting each of the components of aesthetic taste. For instance, the sensation of the smooth, moist properties of Velveeta is enabled by multiple emulsifiers, and Velveeta's emulsifiers in turn enable an enjoyment of a certain kind of creaminess. Likewise, the sensation of tartness is enabled by a grape's particular acidic content, and here the grape's acidity enables the judgment of a certain kind of fineness. Thus taste (and sensation more broadly) could be extended from the capacity of an individual human to a capacity of human-thing-environment assemblages or networks, where subject and object are not stable and discrete, but constantly co-emergent. For instance, an eggplant has a set of affordances that interact (and in some cases intra-act) with the historically conditioned affordances of environments, cooking and eating practices, marketing practices, and bodies, each of which play a role in the overall taste ecology. In English there is already a linguistic tendency to include objects in the realm of gustatory taste—we say the eggplant has a bitter taste or tastes bitter just as we say people have or lack a taste for eggplant. This of course suggests multiple senses of the term “taste,” but I am interested in relocating that multiplicity to the concept of taste itself.

In the end, gustatory taste cannot be fully parsed into sensory and aesthetic categories (either definitionally or in practice). My project engages this overlap and builds on it as well, inquiring into the connections between rhetoric and taste (in all its senses) to build, more broadly, a rhetorical theory of sensation.

Methodologies of Theory/Criticism

While my next two chapters draw from the various theoretical strands of rhetoric's materialisms to theorize the concept and practice of taste, the final two chapters mobilize and develop the resultant theorizations of taste as a complexly material rhetorical capacity. In the course of this project, I draw from a variety of critical and theoretical models and heuristics.

In 1989, Raymie McKerrow offered his much-debated theory of "critical rhetoric" as an interested (rather than detached) approach to rhetorical criticism aimed at intervening in structures of domination and gesturing toward possibilities for future action. While I adopt many of the aims of McKerrow's partly immanent approach to critical rhetoric, I reject many of its more transcendental assumptions, including: (1) that a critical distance is achievable, enabling a final unmasking of reality; (2) that critique best operates by opposing itself to a fixed object in a traditional dialectical movement; and (3) that power crystallizes into poles of dominance and subversion (see Greene 1998 for criticism along these lines). At the same time, my project is explicitly and methodologically committed to the question of the critical, seeking to describe a posthumanist mode of critical engagement and, in some way, to enact such a critical engagement with my objects of study. I thus approach my theoretical and critical practices with the question in mind of how to perform and discover an alternative to McKerrow's version of critical rhetoric.

James Jasinski's 2001 essay points toward a more immanent understanding of critique that blends theory and criticism, rejecting the assumption present in McKerrow that an object of study might simply sit still in the studying. In so doing, he distinguishes

“methodologically driven” criticism from “conceptually oriented” criticism.

Methodologically driven criticism begins from a particular theoretical perspective, such as Marxism, derives its procedural approach to its object from that theoretical perspective (e.g., look for class dynamics), applies the perspective to the object, and offers conclusions in terms of how they enrich or complicate the theoretical worldview from which the procedure emanated (e.g., Marxism). Conceptually oriented criticism, in contrast, is an immanent sort, proceeding “abductively,” through a circular, back-and-forth movement between the object being studied and the concepts emergent from that study.

Two developments that I integrate into my approach press Jasinski’s model toward a more posthumanist mode of theory/criticism. First, we must consider the critic/theorist’s abductive movement to produce not just concepts, but also objects. For example, as John Law suggests in his 2002 book *Aircraft Stories*, the stories about the TSR2 that he explores are “a way of helping to perform the aircraft” (5). And for Law, an object is always multiple—his scholarly performance of the aircraft composes it into multiple, overlapping ontologies. Likewise, Bruno Latour calls for a dismissal of negative modes of critique in favor of a critical practice that composes. He comments “with a hammer . . . in hand you can do a lot of things: break down walls, destroy idols, ridicule prejudices, but you cannot repair, take care, assemble, reassemble, stitch together” (475). Under Latour’s metaphors, the abductive criticism Jasinski describes becomes an ontologically generative stitching. I take this first supplement to heart in understanding my theorization of taste to help perform taste in the multiple ways it constitutes itself

through the texts, theories, and practices of my study—as, for instance, a rhetorical capacity, an ecology of people and things, and a technology of power.

The second supplement to Jasinski’s conceptually oriented criticism is to call attention to the abductive movement itself as a generative theoretical exercise (regardless of any concepts or objects it generates). To this end, in engaging the various historical and contemporary texts in my project, I will use a combination of Derridian, deconstructive reading and Deleuzian, appropriative reading. Following John Muckelbauer, I seek to adopt an engagement with texts that does not simply appropriate or negate, as with traditional dialectical styles, but orients to the “singular rhythms” of the encounter. For instance, Muckelbauer’s affirmative reading of Plato’s dialogue *The Sophist* joins the dialogue’s search for the sophist in an encounter that produces something new—the insight, both representational and affective, that a style of movement—“itinerant travel”—is all that the sophist, and by implication, rhetoric, is. But emergent from Muckelbauer’s reading is not just a concept, but also a style of conceptual movement. As such, affirmative reading is ultimately more than a reading practice. Just like the search for the sophist, it is a practice in conceptual movement in which an apparently fixed object being “read” not only emerges as unfixed, but in so doing comes to move the “reader” in ways that exceed symbolicity. As such, Muckelbauer’s essay performs Deleuze’s assertion that we cannot ultimately distinguish between words, concepts, and things, making philosophy a practice of intervening in the world, not something fundamentally cut off from it.

Because I find taste to be an object of study that uniquely invites the orientations we now connect with posthumanism, an affirmative reading practice will enable me to

register the posthumanist rhythms of various discourses on taste that do not identify as posthumanist (e.g., ranging from Hume's writings to Schlosser's exposé reporting to the curricular materials for Slow Food's taste education efforts). Inhabiting these discourses as a posthumanist ultimately will generate a transformation of posthumanist rhetoric itself. Like Muckelbauer, I seek an intervention not only in the concepts of the discipline, but also in its styles and sensibilities of conceptualization. To this extent, performative writers like Vitanza and Ulmer are also an inspiration, even though I adapt a more analytic tone.

Chapter Outline

The next two chapters draw from and recast the rhetorical tradition to theorize sensation as an ambient, generative rhetorical capacity. Chapter 2, "The 'Savour of Things,'" argues that David Hume's, Hugh Blair's, and Lord Kames' celebration of aesthetic taste as a rhetorical and ethical capacity posed an instructive paradox. On the one hand, the Scottish Enlightenment's obsession with establishing a standard of taste fostered elitism, prejudice, and class division. As I show, the belletrist embrace of taste was problematic in its commitment to a standard of taste, its departure from the original, sensory dimensions of aesthetic taste, and its failure to theorize sensory-aesthetic power. On the other hand, this period's enthusiasm for taste generated affective and vitalist perspectives on communication, rhetorical invention, and the ethics of taste that resisted these problematic tendencies and opened the way for the kind of ecological sensibility recently advocated by Jane Bennett.

With the shortcomings of the Scottish Enlightenment in mind, chapter 3, "Sensory Power," turns to Marxist discourse on aesthetic education and "sensory emancipation,"

moving from Friedrich Schiller through Karl Marx and the Frankfurt School. As I argue, Marx's attention to aesthetic capacity as an historical rather than an individual power grounded in bodily senses and not just "higher" ones tempered Enlightenment elitism. In his vision of sensory emancipation, Marx did not fully break with a standard of taste, but he gestured toward a standard that was broad and vague rather than individualized and specific. To a theory and critical practice of sensory rhetoric, I argue, Marx contributes a useful heuristic in his analysis of the sensory forms and the attendant material forms that, in any given era, enable and disable arenas of contact among the human and nonhuman participants in sensation. While Marx ultimately puts more stock in attention to material form, his Frankfurt School predecessors developed his early emphasis on sensation, reconnecting to Schiller's original emphasis on aesthetic education as a modality of political intervention. The attendant notion of immanent critique, I argue, can be joined with recent emphases on affirmative reading and generative response-ability in the field of rhetoric.

My final two chapters explore how a sensory, compositionist kind of critical capacity is under development in the contemporary food movement, one that attunes us to the rhetoricity of everyday sensation. I ask how this revived and notably sensory attention to taste repeats or reformulates the elitisms of past connections of rhetoric and taste. Thus, chapter 4, "Reassembling the Senses," analyzes new theories and enactments of sensory rhetoric emergent in recent, exposé-style food journalism with a close study of Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*. This text, I argue, elaborates sensation as a rhetorical power in an ambient sense—that is, as a rhetorical capacity and vulnerability that is not a matter of individual human subjectivity, but rather a qualitative field of intra-acting

entities both human and nonhuman. In the course of this, it offers a model of critique that is immanent, sensual, and compositionist, describing and diagnosing sensation as a rhetorical, world-building power. While adopting the classic form of the exposé, *Fast Food Nation* (and other recent food documentary) also demonstrates how the exposé effects sensory (rather than purely representational) exposures that complicate its stated commitment to demystification.

Finally, chapter 5, “(Re)Zoning Ethics,” considers how the pedagogies of taste apparent in contemporary food writing and documentary are developed in the explicit sensory education initiatives of today’s growing “slow food” and “farm to school” movements. In these efforts, sensory capacity is embraced as the most fundamental of rhetoricities—as an affectability or response-ability that calls “eater” and “eaten” into co-emergent, relational being. In the process, the “eaten” is revealed not as an object but a vibrant thing, alive in its evolving connections to the human and nonhuman energies composing complex foodways. Today’s taste-based interventions, then, enrich the eater’s response-ability, her capacity to respond to the complex ecologies that compose her at both bodily and ethical levels. But the enriched response-ability of these interventions is not limited to the eater. Ultimately, eater and eaten participate together in composing a rhetorical response-ability that zones their possible modalities of contact and thereby stages lived environmental ethics. The more that efforts give themselves over to the risks, uncertainties, and multiple agencies of eating, the more they step away from the commitment to a standard of taste that limited Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment practice. While many activist interventions into taste currently retain elitism and paternalism, I argue, their embrace of nonhuman vitality commences a posthumanist

reformulation of ethico-rhetorical agency that was latent in the traditions surveyed in my early chapters.

The sensory tradition that I trace in rhetoric casts sensation as not the private experience of individual minds or bodies, but rather a contingent, generative play of affect among human and nonhuman forces. Contributing to work in rhetoric and politics, my overall project provides an account of rhetoric's materiality that closely links processes of materialization and practices of sensation. Contributing to work in rhetoric and ethics, my investigation of taste demonstrates that the ethico-rhetorical capacity for response abides not in the individual subject alone, but among all participants in the evolving zone of sensory contact. To the extent that those sensory collectives can come to recognize and embrace their ambient, inventive, and ever-evolving character, they harbor the potential to break with the Enlightenment ideal of a standard of taste and its associated elitism.

Chapter 1 Notes

¹ While composition scholars have a long history of Marxist approaches to the classroom, this body of work largely focuses on ideology critique and does not extensively theorize rhetoric's materiality. Meanwhile, new materialist approaches to rhetoric are just beginning to find wider engagement among communication scholars (see, e.g., Stormer, Keeling, Rogers).

² Similarly, Louise Wetherbee Phelps (1988) objected to totalizing views of rhetoric as a collections of discrete elements (ethos/pathos/logos, or speaker/audience/text).

³ An interesting upshot was that McGee's focus on rhetoric's materiality ultimately made it more ephemeral than the idealist, product-oriented approaches to which he objected—indeed, McGee compared the written speech to nuclear fallout, and rhetoric itself to the explosion.

⁴ Greene broadens “technologies of deliberation” into “technologies of power” in his 2009 essay.

CHAPTER 2

THE “SAVOUR OF THINGS”

In eighteenth-century Britain, rhetoric’s sensory dimensions were most elaborated via its connections to aesthetic taste. Amidst a flowering of the fine arts and a time of increased cultural mobility, greater access to elite culture was being made possible by the transformation of scholarship from Latin to English, the wider dissemination of written texts, and the movements of rural peoples into urban centers (Herrick 186-7). Good taste was sought for a vast range of aesthetic objects, including the “belles lettres” (which encompassed poetry, history, and philosophy), as well as art, music, architecture, and even the natural world. Cultivating taste was a means for many non-elites to build their cultural capital, and there was a general feeling that British society was reaching an apex of civilization and aesthetic refinement. Among rhetoricians, the infatuation with taste was so pervasive that Barbara Warnick has proposed we consider aesthetics to be a sixth canon of rhetoric thriving during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As I will show in what follows, the Scottish Enlightenment embrace of “aesthetics” implicated both its original meaning—concerning the bodily senses—and its emerging meaning—concerning the mental experience of beauty and sublimity. For simplicity, I will here adopt the latter and more contemporary meaning.

Many have characterized the Enlightenment turn to taste as an individualist, humanist, and elitist moment that marked an aesthetic narrowing of rhetoric and a retreat from its public function (e.g., Berlin, Clark, Conley, Covino). Mobilizing the perspective

of affect theory, this chapter joins recent efforts to complicate aspects of this picture (Agnew; Manolescu; Warnick). As I will argue, although the enthusiasm for taste among Scottish thinkers was undeniably elitist, its affective reformulations of rhetoric were in tension with that very elitism. The embrace of taste inspired new theories and enactments of rhetoric as a flow of affect among human and nonhuman forces, sparking not a retreat from public engagement, but rather a material reformulation of it. In aesthetic education efforts, new perspectives on rhetorical invention and rhetoric's ethical and civic functions emerged. As such, an inquiry into the affective tenor of rhetoric's encounter with taste can recast existing understandings of Scottish Enlightenment rhetoric, and in ways that inform a contemporary theorization of sensation as a rhetorical capacity. In particular, this period highlights the conflicting potentials and dangers of taste-based enactments of ethics and civic life that continue to haunt public efforts at the education of gustatory taste today.

To frame my analysis of the affective dimensions of Scottish Enlightenment thought, I begin with a brief discussion of contemporary affect theory and its significance for political and rhetorical theory. I then turn to an explication of David Hume's theory of taste, which, anchoring as it did a rich, affective theory of ethical communication, deserves more attention as a part of the rhetorical tradition. Next, and for the bulk of the chapter, I consider the integration of aesthetic taste into rhetorical education by Scottish belletrists. This integration, I argue, expanded rhetorical skill to include a not fully conscious capacity for sensory and emotional response that grounded ethical and civic life. In the process, rhetorical capacity (in the form of aesthetic taste) came to be seen as a capacity of cultures as well as individuals, and rhetorical invention was recast as

proceeding not from discrete individuals, but a play of human and nonhuman communicative forces. As I argue in my conclusion, the Scottish Enlightenment treatment of aesthetic taste as a rhetorical capacity was problematically elitist, but its transformations of invention pointed the way for an affective understanding and practice of rhetoric that resisted that elitism.

Politics, Affect, and Rhetoric

As briefly discussed in chapter 1, in the past few decades, an affective turn in the humanities has significantly reworked traditional methodologies of political theory, analysis, and practice. Supporting what Lauren Berlant calls “another phase in the history of ideology theory,” this turn has complicated critique that focuses purely on subjects, institutions, or discourse, directing attention instead to the flows of emotion, materiality, and sensation that only temporarily and unstably articulate into such forms. In this development, Gilles Deleuze’s notion of affect as a constitutive, pre-personal force has been crucial.¹ For Deleuze, drawing from Baruch Spinoza, a body is both defined by and emergent from its capacity to affect and be affected, to move and be moved. Being both generated by and generative of bodies, affect always operates before, after, and between bodies (*Spinoza*). Conceived in the Deleuzian/Spinozan tradition, then, affect is distinguished from emotion as an impersonal, preconscious play of forces. The emergence of subjectivities, emotions, and even sensations marks the capture or territorializing of affect, which in turn changes affective flows. From a political perspective, then, inquiry into the nature of that capture—into how affect articulates and its possible alternative articulations—becomes crucial.

One fruitful new critical approach has thus been to identify and diagnose problematic calcifications of affect. Working in the feminist tradition, for instance, Sarah Ahmed has argued that the Western imperative to be happy corrals affective flows in such a way as to arrest the possibility of political change and to alienate bodies that resist happiness. She locates the possibility for an emancipatory politics in affective reformulations that would resist assuming that unhappiness is an obstacle to be overcome (*Promise of Happiness* 217). Lauren Berlant is similarly interested in how affective formations can calcify in politically damaging ways. She argues that a habit of “cruel optimism”—people’s desires for things that are bad for them—has infected Western political climates since the 1980s. Her attention to how cruel optimism feeds “fantasies of the good life” guides a provocative narrative of the affective habits fueling “class bifurcation, downward mobility, and environmental, political, and social brittleness” (*Promise of Happiness* 11).

In considering how to intervene in such problematic articulations of affective flow, political theorists have proposed that we seek new affective attunements and sensibilities rather than new intellectual dispositions alone. Thus William Connolly has urged that critics and theorists attempt to break habits of thought reliant on classical notions of causality, time, and agency. Insisting that primarily intellectual approaches to political theory and practice are insufficient for democratic thriving, he advocates for a substantial, “deep” pluralism that embraces the “visceral register of being” (*Pluralism* 11). Similarly, Jane Bennett has concluded that demystification and exposé are limited approaches to political intervention because they “do not reliably produce moral outrage and . . . ameliorative action” (xiii-xv). Both Bennett and Connolly propose that our

political analyses and practices should rely on interventions not just into concepts and knowledge, but also into sensibilities. For them, scholars and nonscholars must break with humanist habits of feeling and reasoning and develop our capacity to register the nonhuman dimensions of affect that play into political realities.

The affective turn has inspired a rethinking of rhetoric and composition that situates the field to play an important role in Bennett's and Connolly's calls and in Ahmed's and Berlant's modes of criticism. Crucially, Deleuze's impersonal, nonsubjective notion of affect has enabled rhetorical invention to be thought in more dynamic and distributed terms. Thus, Jenny Edbauer Rice argues that shifting our rhetorical analyses from an emphasis on situation to one on affective ecologies will provide a better sense of the way public rhetorics move. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari, she asserts, "A given rhetoric is not contained by the elements that comprise its rhetorical situation (exigence, rhetor, audience, constraints). Rather, a rhetoric emerges already infected by the viral intensities that are circulating in the social field" ("Unframing" 14). In a compatible approach, Debra Hawhee retrieves the "middle voice" usage of the Greek term for invention, to indicate that invention "at once combines and exceeds the forces of active and passive. In the middle, one invents and is invented, one writes and is written, constitutes and is constituted" ("Unframing" 17). As in athletic competition, rhetoric's movements cannot be mapped to the purely active productions or passive receptions of discrete bodies; rather, rhetoric proceeds as a play of affective encounters that continually articulate and re-articulate into subjectivities, modes of sensation, structures of feeling, and so on.

While affective approaches recast rhetorical invention as a material, distributed process of emergence, they also recast rhetorical skill as a capacity to move and be moved, to respond and evoke response. Thus, Hawhee (*Bodily Arts*) elaborates on the capacity of *mētis*, or the readiness for response to unpredictable situations, emphasized in the conjoined classical training of sport and rhetoric. Hawhee reads the stranger in Plato's *Sophist* as a prime example of this wily, shape-shifting skill of cunning responsiveness. In John Muckelbauer's more explicitly Deleuzian terms, Plato's sophist "is less a determinate identity than a differential movement of the encounter in which the subject itself must be at stake" (97). And in Sonja Foss's resonant feminist formulation, thinking rhetoric in terms of its invitational force situates us to understand it as a fluid capacity to move and be moved characterized by the mutual offering and reception of persuasion, rather than its imposition from above. For these and other scholars, rhetorical capacity is not just a capacity to move, isolated from a passive, moved object. Rather, it entails a capacity to move and be moved in a co-constitutive relation with an otherness and a future that are not fully predictable.

Rhetoric's affective turn has at least two powerful implications for the stakes of rhetorical practice and inquiry. First, in figuring rhetoric as a response to otherness, it has aligned rhetoric with the logic of ethics. Thus for Diane Davis, engaging the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, rhetoric inheres in the ethical origins of being, the fact that "I" am only insofar as I respond to an other. For Davis, a rich ethical life abides in the imperative to manage our "affectability," our infinite responsibility and response-ability to others—a task which is fundamentally rhetorical (*Inessential Solidarity*; see chapter 5 for an extensive discussion of Davis). Similarly, for Lisbeth Lipari, drawing from both Levinas

and Martin Heidegger, a receptive rethinking of communication in terms of listening involves an emptying of expectation and a surrender to the unpredictable that paves the way for ethical life. A rethinking of rhetoric as an ethically fundamental capacity to be affected in turn situates rhetorical practice to ground the visceral, ecological sensibilities called for by Connolly and Bennett.

Second, an affective formulation of rhetoric also nuances our approaches to rhetorical criticism in ways resonant with Ahmed's and Berlant's methodologies. Thus, as Ronald Greene argues, if we are to understand rhetorical power in terms of an impersonal flow of affective forces, our political analyses must ask not after fixed heroes and enemies, but rather after how those forces constellate into bodies, concepts, institutions, and habits of being ("Another Materialist"). From a similar standpoint, Christine Harold approaches activist critique by seeking those modes of activism that avoid simply resisting the market as a monolithic oppressor, and rather enter and follow market logics in ways that ultimately transform them. For these scholars, instead of thinking rhetorical power in rigidly dialectical terms, we must understand it as a more chemical, multi-directional, and not entirely tractable flow. Rhetorical criticism grounded in Deleuzian approaches, then, offers powerful new tools for not just diagnosing problematic articulations of affect, but also for imagining and enacting alternative articulations. In sum, considering rhetoric at the level of affective flow enables a model of ethical and civic being grounded in a response-ability to the other, a preparedness for (and thus invitation of) the unpredictable, and an engagement of power as multidirectional and immanent.

The wager of this dissertation project is that thinking rhetoric in terms of taste can advance these connections between rhetoric, ethics, and politics, and this chapter argues that it did so for eighteenth-century Scottish rhetoricians. Though generally dismissive of the bodily senses, the Scottish Enlightenment enthusiasm for aesthetic taste grew out of an analogy with those senses, and engaged them as a rich component of rhetorical and public life. Rhetoric, under its influence, emerged as a distributed, co-constitutive practice of affecting and being affected that was ultimately in tension with the humanist logics typically associated with Enlightenment thought. As such, the Scottish Enlightenment stands to offer a new past for rhetoric understood affectively and sensorially. The next section begins the project of exhuming that past with an examination of David Hume. Although a widely acknowledged influence on the belletrist rhetoricians who followed him, Hume has been given little in-depth consideration as a significant figure in the rhetorical tradition in his own right.² Yet, as I will argue, his model of aesthetic taste grounded a distinctly affective theorization of rhetorical action and ethical communication. Himself a substantial influence for both Deleuzian affect theory and contemporary cognitive science, returning to Hume's work promises to enrich today's affective and material theorizations of rhetoric and composition.

Hume's Ethics of Communication

Taste as an Internal Sense

Developing on a medieval view that the mind operated by means of "internal senses" comparable to the external senses, eighteenth-century treatments of aesthetic taste

repeatedly compared it to gustatory taste. Perhaps the closest analogy was drawn by Jean-Baptiste Dubos, who in 1719 argued:

Do we ever reason, in order to know whether a ragoo be good or bad. . . . No, this is never practiced. We have a sense given us by nature to distinguish whether the cook acted according to the rules of his art. People taste the ragoo, and tho' unacquainted with those rules, they are able to tell whether it be good or no. The same may be said in some respect of the productions of the mind, and of pictures made to please and move us. (238–239)

For Dubos, aesthetic taste was quite literally a sixth sense “given by nature” in the way that gustatory taste is given—which is to say that it is a modality of human engagement with things that is not dependent upon reason.

Francis Hutcheson, the first to offer a full-fledged theory of aesthetic taste in 1729, similarly figured the sense for beauty as an “internal sense.” Assisting his departure from neoclassical views, the metaphor with gustatory taste helped him establish that beauty itself was a mental perception rather than an independent property of objects: “Beauty . . . properly denotes the Perception of some Mind; so Cold, Hot, Sweet, Bitter, denote the Sensations in our Minds, to which perhaps there is no resemblance in the Objects, which excite these Ideas in us” (14). Evident in this comparison of aesthetic and gustatory taste is a view that Hume would adopt—that beauty, like “cold, hot, sweet, and bitter,” was a secondary quality in the Lockean sense—emergent from certain independent qualities in the object to be sure, but not resembling any of those qualities.

Communication as Affective

Hume's theorization of taste developed on these "internal sense" approaches.³ For Hume, likewise, there was a "great resemblance between mental and bodily taste" ("Of the Standard" 834), with both sharing a noncognitive immediacy. Indeed, he frames his inquiry into a standard of taste with a wine-tasting example drawn from *Don Quixote*.⁴ Yet Hume diverged from his influence, Hutcheson, who believed taste was an innate capacity one either possessed or lacked. While he acknowledged native limitations to taste, including both discriminatory power ("delicacy of taste") and rational capacity ("good sense"), Hume believed taste could be improved with experience. The discussion he offered of how was later mobilized and developed by instructors of rhetoric.

Less apparent among the Scottish rhetoricians he influenced, Hume also innovated on previous thinkers by contextualizing his view of taste in a theory of communication that blended human and nonhuman senses of the term. Considered "the Newton of the moral sciences," Hume, in his 1748 *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, theorized human psychology with not just bodily analogies, but also broader physical analogies drawn from Newtonian physics. Ideas, he asserted, demonstrated an "attraction" to one another that paralleled the attraction of things in the "natural world" (*Enquiry* 1.1.4.6), whereas habits were a mental "force" (*Enquiry* 5.2.2) resembling gravity. In an anticipation of poststructuralism that is significant for Deleuzian and cognitive scientific theory alike, Hume's empiricism and his view of the mind as primarily a sensing organ led him to question the assumption of a stable personal identity enduring over time. As a constellation of mental forces that resembled physical forces, human experience, Hume argued, was nothing more than a "bundle or collection

of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement” (*Treatise* 1.4.4.4). We can have no direct experience of the coherence of these perceptions—the “I” is simply an idea that we posit onto this “flux” of perceptions as their container.

This view of the subject significantly impacted Hume’s theory of communication. If mental life was primarily a flux of perceptions, this held both for belatedly posited subjects and for communication between those subjects. Resonating with affective and posthumanist approaches, Hume conceived of human communication in ways closely connected to the communication of force in the physical world, rather than in primarily linguistic terms. In his repeated usage, “communication” refers to the basic flow of passions that moves individuals to a response, circulating from one body to the next via movements of depersonalized and repersonalized affect. Thus he remarks:

A good-natur’d man finds himself in an instant of the same humour with his company; and even the proudest and most surly take a tincture from their countrymen and acquaintance. A chearful countenance infuses a sensible complacency and serenity into my mind; as an angry or sorrowful one throws a sudden damp upon me. Hatred, resentment, esteem, love, courage, mirth and melancholy; all these passions I feel more from communication than from my own natural temper and disposition. (*Treatise* 317)

Community, then, is soaked through with affect, in elusive but intimate ways: immersion in social life “infuses a sensible complacency,” “throws a sudden damp;” suddenly one “takes a tincture” of another’s sentiment, or “finds himself” sharing “the same humour with his company.” Recalling Edbauer Rice’s language, feelings travel across individuals

like viruses, forming affective communities: “The passions are so contagious,” Hume says, “that they pass with the greatest facility from one person to another, and produce corresponding movements in all human breasts” (*Treatise* 3.3.3.5).

Because of contagious flows of affective communication, most of the feelings and perceptions we experience are not our own: “all these passions I feel more from *communication* than from my own natural temper and disposition” (emphasis added). Hume elsewhere likens this natural affective flow to a network of strings: “As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature” (*Treatise* 3.3.1.7). Communication between people, then, parallels the communication of force in the physical world in that forces flow through things, rather than being possessed or produced solely by them. Just as the motion of a string is not confined to the string, but an impersonal force that territorializes onto it, so also do the passions travel impersonally in society before being narrated onto subjects—who are themselves narrativized affects.⁵

For Hume, affective communication is enabled by sympathy, a psychological power of receptivity which allows us “to receive by communication [others’] inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own” (*Treatise* 2.1.11.2). That sympathy seems instantaneous, however, does not make it nonreflective. Instead, Hume gestures toward unconscious modes of reflection that support it: We initially know another person’s sentiment or passion “only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it.” Assisted by sympathy, we respond to the bodily and linguistic cues of our interlocutors, and our cold, distant “idea”

(our mental representation) of the other’s passion “is presently converted into an *impression*, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself” (*Treatise* 2.1.11.3, emphasis added). This conversion process may be imperceptible to us, but it is not automatic—rather it proceeds by either “certain views and reflections” or the “force of the imagination.”⁶ Later instructors of rhetoric will target both imaginative and reflective practice as a way to intervene in this conversion process, thereby conditioning the individual’s affective response-ability and society’s affective flows.

Taste as a Capacity for Ethical Communication

To Hume’s view of things, sympathy provides the basis for both moral and aesthetic judgment, but only when corrected, just as we would correct any of our sensory experience. We do not, for instance, judge objects to shrink when they retreat from us, even though they have the appearance of doing so. Likewise, via corrected sympathy we do not judge our sympathy “with persons remote from us” to be any less lively than sympathy with those who are near (*Treatise* 3.3.1.15). This, finally, is where taste comes in: for Hume, taste, whether moral or aesthetic, refers to “corrected” sympathy.⁷ Guided by taste in its ethical dimension, the moral man is able to “depart from his private and particular situation, and must choose a point of view, common to him with others: He must move some universal principle of the human frame, and touch a string, to which all mankind have an accord and symphony” (*Enquiry* 9.6). Taste, then, resonating with today’s affective formulations of rhetoric, marks a certain preparedness for connection to the communicative strings of humanity, a certain cultivated affectability and response-ability.

Taste enables sentiment to manifest not just feelings of pleasure or displeasure, but also feelings of approval or disapproval—making moral and aesthetic judgments a matter of sentiment rather than reason. The Humean view of taste thus differs significantly from the Kantian conception which will follow in locating both aesthetic and moral judgment in sentiments of pleasure and approval rather than cognitive reflection. Though a quick, unconscious reflection *precedes* moral and aesthetic sentiments, judgment itself (which for Hume includes both the representation of something’s value and the motivation to act) is fully contained in the sentiment that emerges. In short, aesthetics abides at the everyday, bodily level of communication. As we will see shortly, it is via this pre-Kantian view of taste that rhetoric will find a provocative reckoning with a notion of human judgment that exceeds reason or consciousness, and that renders rhetorical capacity intimate to ethical life.

As mentioned earlier, the Scottish Enlightenment turn to aesthetic taste has often been seen as a turn away from communication and toward private modes of rhetorical life. But as this explication suggests, for Hume’s theoretical approach at least, taste is anything but private. On the contrary, the cultivation of both moral and aesthetic taste is a thoroughly social process of rendering sentiments less personal through the cultivation of extended sympathy. This corrective process itself relies on everyday communication. Thus Hume elaborates on conversation as a means to that cultivation, preparing us for the direct experience of passions beyond our own, rendering our sentiments “more public and social” (*Enquiry* 5.42), and allowing us to “speak another language” than our private one (*Enquiry*).

In addition to conversation, Hume believed, taste (or corrected sympathy) demanded conscious reflection and reasoning in order to be properly cultivated—even if it proceeded to operate, like sensation, by unconscious, reflexive means. In fact, conscious reflection was so crucial to the “proper” experience of beauty that one might not enjoy the sentiment of beauty (or correct a false perception of beauty) until long after an encounter with an object (“Of the Standard” 835). However, practice in such contemplation could prepare one for a more instantaneous and “accurate” aesthetic response in the future. Thus Hume announces:

[I]n order to pave the way for [the sentiment of beauty], and give a proper discernment of its object, it is often necessary, we find, that much reasoning should precede, that nice distinctions be made, just conclusions drawn, distant comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained. (*Enquiry* 1.9)⁸

Through such careful reasoning, combined with frequent practice, one could achieve “a quick and acute perception of beauty and deformity” (“Of the Standard” 835). As with the athletic training in Athens that Hawhee discusses, what Hume here describes are the conditions for cultivating a capacity for communicative response, a response-ability, that will proceed to operate at a preconscious level. For Hume, resembling contemporary affect theorists, the bundle of sensations that we posit as “me” is constantly penetrated and reworked by sensations from the outside—by communications that move us, but do not originate in us. Cultivating taste means developing our capacity to be overtaken by this promiscuous “intercourse of sentiments” in the proper way—that is, by experiencing them as sentiments of general humanity. As such, Hume’s taste-based ethics is a call to

cultivate an ability to be affected by remote sources of otherness without appropriating that affect, a lived ecological sensibility that might be moved by forces or communications it does not seek to own. This pre-Kantian mode of ethics is encoded in our everyday, immediate engagements, rather than our preparatory or belated linguistic representations.⁹ As we will see in the next section, rhetoricians influenced by Hume took on the task of educating this affectability or response-ability as a rhetorical one. Although they did not fully engage Hume's expanded, affective view of communication or his view of taste as a simultaneously moral and aesthetic capacity, their treatments of taste indirectly mobilized and developed his connections between affect, communication, and ethics.

Aesthetic Taste and the Transformation of Rhetorical Invention

The Generativity of Reception

Hume's theory of taste and its associated conceptions of communication, sympathy, imagination, and vivacity greatly influenced rhetoric's eighteenth-century uptake of aesthetic taste, particularly via Henry Home, Lord Kames (a distant cousin of Hume's); George Campbell; and most especially, Hugh Blair. Following Hume, belletrist rhetoricians believed taste to have innate components, and yet to be amenable to cultural influence and formal instruction. With most eighteenth-century Scottish rhetoricians adopting the popular view of taste as an internal sense, the workings of this power were assumed to be largely inaccessible to conscious experience.¹⁰ Also in line with Hume, though it operated unconsciously in the moment, they believed taste could be instructed and improved via conscious reasoning, conversation, and practice in aesthetic criticism. Thus, Hugh Blair explained, the pleasure of a great poem "is felt or enjoyed by taste as an

internal sense; but the discovery of this conduct in the poem is owing to *reason*; and the more that reason enables us to discover such propriety in the conduct, the greater will be our pleasure” (19, emphasis added). For Blair, improving the sense of taste meant cultivating an online readiness for response that evokes Hawhee’s explication of *mētis*. Thus, in one of many comments that follows Hume’s essay “On the Standard of Taste” nearly word for word, Blair connects the improvement of aesthetic and physical capacities for response: “exercise is the chief source of improvement in all our faculties. This holds both in our bodily and in our mental powers.” (18). The significant consequence of this perspective on taste was that rhetorical instruction ultimately targeted a sense rather than reason—even though instructors regularly invited students to consciously reason about objects of art and nature, the ultimate goal was to develop a “quick and acute” mental sensibility that operated preconsciously.

It is commonly noted that rhetoric’s eighteenth-century enthusiasm for taste substantially revised rhetorical instruction to target reception as well as production, and that it expanded the ends of rhetoric beyond persuasion to include such functions as entertaining and instructing. Whereas many have concluded that the classical canon of argumentative invention thereby fell out of the realm of rhetoric, others have objected. Thus, for instance, Beth Manolescu emphasizes that the aim of Lord Kames’ *Principles of Criticism* is to facilitate the invention of arguments about art, and not simply the reception of art. While Manolescu certainly identifies a key strain of argumentative invention in the *Principles*, I follow approaches such as Vincent M. Bevilacqua’s and Barbara Warnick’s (10-14) in resisting holding belletrists’ contributions to the rhetorical tradition to pre-authorized categories of rhetoric that, for instance, would limit

invention to the realm of argument in the first place. Proceeding in such a spirit, in what follows I suggest that we can discern among belletrists the beginnings of a new approach to invention, one that involves a play of production and reception and that aims at the invention not of arguments, but of affective and sensory realms of being.¹¹

Blair defined taste as “the power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and of art” (16). In tracking how invention was reformulated in eighteenth-century discourse on taste, we should note that this “power of receiving” was not simply a matter of passive consumption, but was itself an active inventional practice. This was evident at one level in Kames’ discussion of “ideal presence.” For Kames, the exercise of taste in the realm of fictional arts immersed the audience in a vibrant imaginative world, offering “a perception of the object similar to what a real spectator hath” (I 74). As an accomplishment of great theater, texts, and paintings, ideal presence envelops auditors entirely in imaginative sensation: under its sway “we perceive every object as in our sight; and the mind, totally occupied with an interesting event, finds no leisure for reflection” (I 78). Whereas for Kames taste generated new, imaginative sensory worlds, Hume had taken taste’s inventive powers a step further. For Hume taste was also a productive power, but its productions impacted actual sensory worlds as well as imaginative ones. Thus Hume distinguished taste from what he saw as the merely passive power of reason: Reason, he declared, “discovers objects as they really stand in nature, without addition and diminution.” Taste, however, is a “productive faculty” which, “gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner a new creation” (*Enquiry*, Appendix I). As such, taste generates a product that is difficult to locate in either the subjective or objective realm,

suggesting that it had a constitutive impact on the phenomenal realm of being that would be later elaborated by Immanuel Kant and Edmund Husserl. The exercise of taste generated not merely individual pleasures and perceptions, but entire sensory worlds, whether actual (as for Hume) or “merely” imaginative (as for Kames).¹² The eighteenth-century treatment of taste, then, prefigured the contemporary notion of the “sensorium” theorized by Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, and others. Rhetoric’s inventions were no longer just modes of argument, but modes of actual and possible being.

But taste did not enter the realm of rhetoric only as a (generative) receptive capacity—it also made demands on rhetoric’s traditional domain of discursive production. Given the belletrist belief that “the public ear [has] become refined. It will not easily bear what is slovenly and incorrect” (Blair, 12), good speech demanded rich appeals to sensation. Appealing to British audiences’ new level of taste meant appealing to the imagination, for which purposes Hume’s notion of vivacity, or the liveliness of perception, was central: for Hume, impressions (which included sensations and sentiments) were the most vivacious of our perceptions, whereas ideas were faint, and the strength of one’s belief increased with the vivacity of one’s mental experience. For belletrist rhetoricians, vivacity was utterly essential to the practice of taste and the engagement of audience taste. This was evident in Kames’ notion of ideal presence. For Campbell, the orator’s challenge is to make his appeals to the imagination “resemble, in lustre and steadiness, those of sensation and remembrance” (103). And Blair, in his critical lectures, praises uses of language that appeal to sight and sound, celebrating works for “clothing abstract ideas, in some degree, with sensible colours” (218) and one work in particular for a “musical” use of the period that enabled “one of the most

melodious closes which our language admits” (217). Though efforts to achieve vivacity remained primarily visual and aural (and indeed Kames explicitly limited them thusly), the felt need to appeal to audiences’ tastes nonetheless marked a new importance for sensory appeal, expanding rhetoric’s constitutive function to the realm of sensation as well as that of character, emotion, and reason.

Resonating with contemporary theorizations of rhetoric’s multidirectionality, the turn to taste not only revised rhetorical instruction to target reception as well as production, but also substantially entwined the positions of reception and production. Thus Kames introduced his *Principles of Criticism* to the king as a presentation of “those principles that ought to govern the taste of every individual” (I viii), suggesting a focus on audience receptivity. But shortly thereafter, he shifted attention to artistic production, asserting that his “chief aim” is “to establish practical rules for the fine arts, derived from principles previously established” (I 160). Likewise in Blair’s treatment, “the same instructions which assist [some] in composing will assist [others] in discerning, and relishing, the beauties of composition” (13).¹³ Whereas rhetorical receptivity, then, was itself generative, the productive work of rhetoric could not proceed without receptive attunement: to successfully appeal to audience taste, the rhetor himself must have good taste. Taste, as such, began to break apart the active/passive, production/criticism, and rhetor/audience distinctions in ways resonant with the contemporary affective turn.¹⁴

In sum, the receptive power of aesthetic taste marked an active, inventional articulation of rhetorical receptivity that composed entire sensory worlds, whether actual (as for Hume) or “merely” imaginative (as for Kames). As the goals and positions of rhetorical practices expanded under rhetoric’s attention to aesthetic taste, its operations

came to be understood as less conscious and less grounded in reason than was assumed when rhetoric was confined to the realm of argument. Resonant with Hawhee's and Muckelbauer's rereadings of the sophist, in the eighteenth century, too, rhetorical skill was expanded to the capacity to move and be moved in sensory and emotional ways. Moreover, to the extent that instructors of taste saw themselves as educating whole cultures (as many of their comments suggested), the sense of taste targeted by rhetorical instruction was not housed exclusively in an individual. Indeed, as I will suggest next, rhetorical instruction enrolled objects themselves in the project of taste education, situating rhetorical pedagogy to span entire human-nonhuman ecologies of taste.

The "Glory" of Objects

If audiences, artists, cultures, and taste itself were rethought as the complexly entwined agents and patients of invention, so also were natural and manmade objects.¹⁵ For Hume, breaking with Platonic aesthetics, beauty lay not in the object, but entirely in the mind. Particular objects, however, still had mysterious powers that afforded the experience of beauty. In their efforts to instruct tasteful production and consumption, rhetoricians greatly elaborated on how those powers might be attuned to, resonating with Bennett's call for ecological sensibility.

The rhetorical vitality afforded by belletrists to the nonhuman world was most directly evident in Kames' study of gardening and architecture, which discusses in great detail the various powers of objects and spaces to elicit particular emotions, and the standards by which emotions ought to be elicited by these material arts. Gardens, for instance, can elicit not only "the emotions of beauty from regularity, order, proportion, colour, and utility" (II 432), but also "emotions of grandeur, of sweetness, of gaiety, of

melancholy, of wildness, and even of surprise or wonder” (II 432). Kames also figures nature itself as an inventive force meant to participate in aesthetic effects—the gardener, for instance, is advised to work with the existing forces of nature whom, “neglecting regularity, distributes her objects in great variety with a bold hand” (II 435).

In aesthetic education efforts, objects were attributed rhetorical powers not only in their capacity to evoke pleasures, but also in their capacity to instruct audiences in better or worse taste. Thus Kames asserts that tasteful gardening and architecture both “contribute to the same end, by inspiring a taste for neatness and elegance” (II 485). What’s more, in the course of educating taste, landscape could in turn inculcate virtue. Thus,

A field richly ornamented, containing beautiful objects of various kinds, displays in full lustre the goodness of the Deity The gaiety and harmony of mind it produceth, inclining the spectator to communicate his satisfaction to others, and to make them happy as he is himself, tend naturally to establish in him a habit of humanity and benevolence. (II 453)

While maintaining an undoubtedly humanistic orientation to nonhuman vitality, the Scottish Enlightenment attention to the rhetorical powers of place nonetheless prefigures today’s new materialist focus on nonhuman vitality. Whereas Blair devoted most of his attention to writing and speech rather than the other arts, he closely echoed Kames in asserting that the natural and manmade objects of taste are the sources of “no less than all the pleasures of the imagination” (90). For Blair, “beauty is always conceived by us, as something residing in the object which raises the pleasant sensation; a sort of glory which dwells upon, and invests it” (53).¹⁶ As for Kames, then, objects of taste were attributed a

certain “glory” or rhetorical vitality. In promoting a cultivated attunement to nonhuman vitality as a part of rhetorical capacity, these rhetorical instructors evoke contemporary connections between rhetorical capacity and affectability—and also suggest a connection to be drawn between rhetorical affectability and the ecological sensibility discussed by Bennett.

In belletrist rhetoric, nowhere was taste’s potential to host an ecological sensibility more evident than in the experience of the sublime. Thus Blair directs his audience to “the grandeur of earthquakes and burning mountains; of great conflagrations; of the boisterous ocean; of the tempestuous storm; of thunder and lightning; and of all the uncommon violence of the elements” (33). For Blair, communicating the sublime requires, first and foremost, being moved: one must have a “lively impression” and be “deeply affected, and warmed, by the sublime idea which he would convey” (39). This affectability enables the rhetor properly to deliver the object’s “glory”—a delicate task which requires working with the object to let it have its rhetorical effect, and above all to avoid undermining that effect. Hume’s view of taste as a mediator of communication thus was not only apparent in Blair’s and Kames’ treatments of taste, but also extended to affective communication with the world of natural and manmade objects.

In the end, then, the introduction of taste into rhetorical instruction during the Scottish Enlightenment did not merely shift attention to reception, nor did it dispense with invention altogether. Rather, anticipating contemporary, affective theorizations of rhetoric, it opened new territory for conceiving invention as an ontologically generative process of emergence from an inextricable tangle of reception and production, where the distinction between active and passive positions of communicative flow breaks down. To

the extent that nonhuman powers entered the realm of rhetoric and rhetorical sensibility, the foundations can be discerned for a posthumanist conception of rhetorical invention, as well as a connection between rhetorical capacity and ecological sensibility.

Aesthetic Taste and the Rhetoricity of Ethics

The cultivation of taste was championed by eighteenth-century rhetoricians not merely as a means to increase the pleasures of life—it was also a means to stimulate ethical and civic being. While rhetoricians did not directly mobilize Hume’s view of ethical capacity as itself a kind of taste, they believed their instruction of aesthetic taste to have significant moral benefits. Thus, for instance, closely echoing Hume’s view of taste as corrected sympathy, Kames announced that from the imaginative state of ideal presence

is derived that extensive influence which language hath over the heart; an influence, which, more than any other means, strengthens the bond of society, and attracts individuals from their private system to perform acts of generosity and benevolence . . . without it, the finest speaker or writer would in vain attempt to move any passion: our sympathy would be confined to objects that are really present; and language would lose entirely its signal power of making us sympathize with beings removed at the greatest distance of time as well as of place. (I 82)

To the extent that the rhetorical capacity of taste included imaginative capacity, then, rhetoric anchored ethics itself. Furthermore, given that aesthetic taste, as I argued above, was connected to a sensory conception of the imagination, the path this rhetorical capacity forged between communication and ethics articulated in highly sensory terms.

The eighteenth-century project of connecting taste to ethics unsettled Platonic efforts to install reason at the seat of moral life, a development that was particularly significant for rhetoricians. Famously for Hobbes and Hume, the passions dominated over reason. And for many concerned with taste, sensation, craving, fantasy, and emotion were key drivers of human behavior. Lord Shaftesbury put succinctly how the concern for taste altered understandings of ethical being:

‘Tis not merely what we call principle, but a taste which governs men . . . they may believe ‘this a crime or that a sin; this punishable by man, or that by God’: yet if the savour of things lies cross to honesty . . . the conduct will infallibly turn this latter way.¹⁷

Resonating with contemporary affective approaches from both Deleuzian and psychoanalytic traditions, people, Shaftesbury tells us, are driven not primarily by “principle,” but by “taste” or “the savour of things.” Blair echoes this affectively attuned approach to ethical life in his distinction between convincing—the province of philosophy—and persuading—the province of rhetoric: “I may be convinced,” he explains, “that virtue, justice, or public spirit, are laudable, while at the same time, I am not persuaded to act according to them” (262). The ethical and civic improvement of individuals and cultures depends upon intervening in habits of desire and inclination, a task that rhetorical education took on in alliance with taste.

The cultivation of taste for its receptive and productive powers thus made taste an important site of virtue, but rhetoricians equally attacked it as a mechanism of vice. Resonating with later Marxist approaches to the paradoxical political powers of aesthetic taste, taste could be either a weakness (an opening into bad judgment) or a strength (an

opening into good judgment). Rhetorical instruction aimed to strengthen taste—and given its ethical and civic importance, the stakes were high in determining what this meant. By what standard was taste to be improved, given its apparently great variability? This question centrally occupied, even plagued, Enlightenment thinkers. With other empiricists, Hume wanted to debunk the Neo-Platonist view that beauty was an external property of objects available through reason. Since he nonetheless wanted to maintain that beauty is both real and true, the question of the standard was a tricky one. Rather than turning to principles of beauty, which he saw as too rigid, he turned to experiencers of beauty—those, that is, of “strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice.” It is the joint verdict of these ideal tasters that constitutes “the true standard of taste and beauty” (“Of the Standard” 837).¹⁸ Hume’s model, then, suggests that the true standards of taste could not be known intellectually, though they could be approximated in a lived way by “proper” enculturation. Rhetorical education, the means of this enculturation, was thus crucial, especially given “how early in life taste is susceptible of culture, and how difficult to reform it if unhappily perverted” (Blair 12).

Implicit in fears of “perverted” taste was the concern for the loss of self-control that pervades the entire history of rhetoric. Thus, Blair announces, it is necessary to develop “the power of distinguishing false ornament from true, in order to prevent our being carried away by that torrent of false and frivolous taste, which never fails, when it is prevalent, to sweep along with it the raw and the ignorant” (12). Both evoking contemporary “viral” notions of rhetoric and echoing Plato’s worries about rhetoric, Blair here figures taste as an avenue by which one risks being “carried away” by the “false and

frivolous.” But Blair also locates the means of preventing this risk in taste itself. To some extent, this recalls *The Republic*’s assignment to rhetoric the task of coaxing the values of the philosopher-kings into the young via incantation. Like Plato’s proposal, the question here arises of how rhetorical instruction anchored in taste (and thus ultimately targeting sensation rather than reason), could avoid manifesting simply as brainwashing in aristocratic values. This is a concern I will return to in the next section. For now, it is important to note simply that rhetoric, located in the receptive/productive realm of affectability and response-ability, came to follow the logic of ethics: Rhetorical instruction was not a means to manipulate others as it was for Plato and Aristotle, but rather a means to develop the capacity to be moved by an other in the “right” ways.

As a capacity for movement that resists the “false and frivolous,” the belletrist notion of taste may seem to repeat a Platonic ethics that condemns desire. Yet it is important to note that the aim of cultivating taste was not simply to rein in or transcend the appetites, as in Plato’s view of the just soul. On the contrary, the objective was to enrich the sensations, cravings, and desires that unavoidably animated human life: in Blair’s terms, the “exercise of taste and of sound criticism” will “increase our acquaintance with some of the most refined feelings which belong to our frame” (13). The power of taste was understood as a gift from the benign creator which “widely enlarged the sphere of the pleasure of human life” (23). To develop one’s capacity for the rich pleasures of taste—a pursuit Blair figures as a rhetorical one—was thus to both develop as a human and pay respectful tribute to God. Cultivating taste, as such, was not a way to repress desire, but rather a means to nuance and enlarge it, in a Stoic logic that anticipated Friedrich Nietzsche’s view of human thriving.

In sum, rhetoric's eighteenth-century foray into taste gave way to a notably emotional and sensuous approach to ethics, one that immersed ethical judgment in the everyday communicative flow of affect rather than removing it to the throne of reason. To the extent that taste mediated affective flow, rhetorical education achieved a new, sensory and affective articulation as preparation for moral and civic capability. Given that taste, as Hume suggested, was the mental capacity for expanding one's imaginative range, its cultivation offered a means to extend sympathy beyond one's own experience, to open oneself up to impersonal passion—in brief, to support an ecological affectability, an attunement to the rhetorical vitality of people and things. Finally, aesthetic taste emerged as a rhetorical capacity of both individuals and societies that mediated the communicative flow of affect by organizing powers and habits of sensation, sentiment, desire, and judgment. Rhetoric's ethical subject came to be not just a speaking and thinking subject, but also a feeling subject—and more than that, a capacity for feeling that exceeded singular subjectivities.

Conclusion

Despite the theoretical and practical innovations enabled by the Scottish Enlightenment celebration of taste, that celebration failed to escape a serious worry that holds for gustatory modes of aesthetic taste at least as much as other modalities: the problem of elitism. Indeed, the entire Enlightenment discourse on taste has been extensively criticized as a troublesome site of pretension, discrimination, and social exclusion.

Richard Shusterman, for instance, has argued that by Kant and Hume alike, the standards of taste were “accorded the status of natural and necessary facts rather than seen as the contingent and alterable product of social dynamics and history” (92). Not only did Hume

and Kant naturalize taste by appeal to universal principles of human nature, both also emphasized alternative taste as “not merely different but diseased or unnatural” (92). For R.G. Saisselin, “The man of taste was an aristocrat in spirit if not by race, and the judgment of taste was aristocratic rather than democratic, for it was not founded upon the likes or dislikes of a majority” (64-5). This held even for Blair, who wanted to locate the standard of taste in “the common feelings of men,” and yet excluded outliers on the basis that anyone who “should maintain that sugar was bitter and tobacco was sweet . . . would infallibly be held to be diseased” (960). Taste, then, may have been rendered a fascinating opening onto ethical being, but it was also practiced as a powerful vehicle for normalization.

Concerns such as these have led some to dismiss taste as a hopelessly elitist mode of politics and ethics. For sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the worry falls specifically to gustatory taste, which he understands as a means for individuals to perform and accumulate cultural capital, thereby reinforcing class difference. Yet all the same, Bourdieu worries that taste cannot be escaped as a modality of political power. Certainly today gustatory taste increasingly functions to bifurcate “high” and “low” food cultures, not only exacerbating differences in cultural capital, but also propagating nutritional disparity. In responding to this reality, we might consider Terry Eagleton’s assessment of the paradox of Scottish Enlightenment aesthetics: according to Eagleton, the Enlightenment enthusiasm for taste on the one hand dispersed ideological power across individuals and invited the participation of “all,” suggesting a positive potential for taste as a mode of political and ethical growth. Yet on the other hand, Enlightenment aestheticians licensed the powers that be to encode aesthetic ideologies into bodies in the

first place—a limitation particularly present in Hume, who turns to the state as an apparently legitimate institution to stage the cultivation of taste.¹⁹

This tension of democratic potential and oppressive risk succinctly characterizes the problem with the Scottish Enlightenment logics of taste and the paradoxes that I will suggest continue to haunt taste-based modes of ethics, citizenship, and activism today. However, as my explication in this chapter suggests, Scottish Enlightenment thinkers offered many of the conceptual means for grappling with the dilemma of taste, even though they did not themselves escape it. First, they established taste as an unavoidable driver of political and ethical life. Understood as such, taste disturbs models of civic being premised on rational deliberation (those, for instance, subsequently offered by Kant and Habermas). If we follow Scottish Enlightenment rhetoricians, we must not simply situate rational deliberation over and against taste. On the contrary, we must take seriously Shaftesbury's assertion that it is not reason alone, but also a "savour of things" which "governs men." Any form of self-government, of political being, must offer a deeper engagement with this "savour of things" than a dismissal or displacement in favor of reason. As the work of Scottish Enlightenment rhetoricians suggests, a fuller model of civic engagement, one both more effective and more ethical, would not treat taste as something to be reined in by reason. Rather it would embrace taste as a fundamental part of human-nonhuman life, one to be inhabited in more critical ways—ways which involve the participation of reason, to be sure, but do not entail its despotism. It is difficult to cultivate and maintain critical relationships with our beliefs, desires, and habits, and perhaps especially so in matters of taste, given "how early in life taste is susceptible of culture, and how difficult to reform it if unhappily perverted" (Blair 12). But this does not

mean that efforts at critical enactments of taste should not be pursued. The question, rather, is how to find a better mode of criticality than that offered by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers.

Instructive in such a project is the affective tenor of Scottish Enlightenment thought that was itself inspired by the enthusiasm for taste. As I have argued, eighteenth-century treatments of aesthetic taste invited a distributed, material rethinking of political power that contemporary affect theory has elaborated. Hume's theory of taste and its eighteenth-century developments in rhetorical pedagogy resonate with contemporary affective views of power that resist simplistic, binary approaches to political change, recognizing rhetorical power to operate in viral formations that both shape and are shaped by habits of sensing, thinking, and feeling. The perspectives on taste developed by eighteenth-century rhetoricians also begin to acknowledge the active public role of environments and things, anticipating efforts spanning from Karl Marx to Bruno Latour to register and engage the political vitality of nonhuman forces. As such, the Scottish Enlightenment treatment of taste situated rhetorical instruction at a powerful point of intervention not simply in individual response-abilities, but in the response-abilities of larger ecologies of ever-evolving human and nonhuman forces. Perhaps most significantly, in his focus on the orientations we cultivate with others, his encouragement that we learn to touch the complex networks of human being, Hume's program in particular shares a concern for rhetorical receptivity expressed in today's calls for ecological sensibility and attentive, visceral engagements with otherness (e.g., Bennett, Connolly, Rickert, Lipari, Davis).

Despite these remarkable theoretical reformulations, however, the belletrist movement ultimately contained the potential of taste to disrupt understandings, flows, and formations of communicative affect that were exclusionary and oppressive. In the fervor to discover a standard of taste to ground judgment, belletrists overlooked the inventional potential of taste that they themselves gestured toward. An embrace of taste as first and foremost a site for generating new and unpredictable relations with humans and nonhumans would have nudged taste away from a rigid, transcendental kind of judgment, and toward a more immanent style of judgment, one immersed in sensuous worlds of human-nonhuman contact. In locating the standard of taste in hypothetical tasters rather than in the object or in any external principles, Hume moved toward such immanence, but his commitment to the notion of ideal tasters, ideal conditions for evaluation, judgment remained largely transcendental. The commitment to a standard of taste, furthermore, prevented belletrists from giving self-critical attention to the exclusionary cultures of taste they were helping to create. The quest for a standard, that is, distracted from theorizing taste's connections to power. A final limitation was that the discourse on aesthetic taste retreated from a focus on the sensuous dimensions of aesthetics. Originally meant to suggest corporeal sensuousness itself, aesthetics was turned toward allegedly "higher" senses, such as the sense for beauty. As I have suggested here, Scottish thinkers, especially Hume, did not fully break with the bodily realm of aesthetics. But in positing bodily experience as a more lowly realm of human life, a realm hosting a lesser kind of taste at best, Scottish Enlightenment thinkers reinforced elitism: since taste applied the "high" arts rather than the lowly occupations

(or knacks) of, say, cooking, its cultivation as a civic, ethical, and rhetorical power excluded the “common man” from the beginning.

To the extent that taste instruction offered a point of intervention in the habitual distributions of affect, it might have been mobilized to rework eighteenth-century distributions of political power in complex, non-dialectical ways. What’s more, the connective it offered to the vitality of objects and environments had the potential to do so at materially and ecologically attuned levels. But instructors in taste did not take up the transformative potential of taste education, instead containing the ethical and political power of taste to classical views of virtue that were rigid, exclusionary, and elitist. In the next chapter, I turn to an intellectual and political tradition that did seek to tap the potential of taste and sensation to transform material structures of human and nonhuman domination: the discourse on “sensory emancipation” that can be traced from Friedrich Schiller through Karl Marx and the Frankfurt School thinkers Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. This discourse, like the Scottish Enlightenment one, treated aesthetic taste as both a rhetorical capacity and a potential rhetorical weakness, but it interrogated that capacity as a modality of political change in ways that Scottish Enlightenment thinkers conspicuously avoided. Furthermore, this discourse marked a return to the original sensory realm of aesthetics, inviting the possibility that the senses could be cultivated by all, could be emancipated on the whole, and not just by an elite few. In the process, sensation itself further emerged as an ethically and politically significant capacity. The Marxist attention to political power and structures of domination transformed the taste into not simply a critical capacity, but also a capacity for *critique*—for registering and reworking problematic flows of power. The sensory treatment of taste invited by Marx

and critical theory, moreover, shifted away from a transcendental style of judgment and toward an immersive, sensuous, and immanent practice of judgment. The currently undertreated discourse on sensory emancipation is thus a crucial installment in the rhetorical tradition told from the perspective of taste.

Chapter 2 Notes

¹ The traditions of psychoanalysis and feminist thought have also been absolutely crucial, but for the purposes of this chapter, which elucidates a Deleuzian/Spinozan mode of affect in Scottish Enlightenment thought, I confine my brief treatment of the affect turn to its Deleuzian dimensions.

² Important exceptions are Donovan Conley's *Pre/Text* article, "The Good Body, Skilled in Eating," which similarly defends a materialist reading of David Hume, and political scientist Marc Hanvelt's book-length study, *The Politics of Eloquence: David Hume's Polite Rhetoric*. See also Hanvelt's article, "Polite Passionate Persuasion: Hume's Conception of Rhetoric."

³ Adam Smith distinguished "moral sense" from "moral sentiment" theorists, implying Hume belonged in the latter category. See McAteer for a discussion of the distinction.

⁴ While the bodily analogy guides his analysis of delicacy, Hume, like most seventeenth- and eighteenth-century aesthetic theorists, does not discuss how gustatory taste might be cultivated, and he treats "mental" or "aesthetic" taste as superior, reliant for its cultivation on a full range of factors, including practice, comparative reasoning, and lack of prejudice. However, as I will argue later in this chapter, the bodily senses nonetheless snuck back in to the eighteenth century treatment of aesthetic taste.

⁵ In this rendering of Humean sympathy, I follow Neil Saccamano's compelling argument that for Hume sympathetic communication marks the adoption of impersonal sentiments rather than, as has often been assumed, the adoption of a sentiment owned by another person: Sympathy, Saccamano says, "underwrites the disinterested sociality of judgments of taste for Hume not by enabling the spectator to feel a pleasure that

corresponds to the owner's pleasure in beauty but rather by rendering this pleasure as a sentiment that does not originally belong to anyone and does not exist prior to its sympathetic communication" (37). Such a reading of Hume situates his sympathetic communication alongside contemporary Deleuzian views of affective communication.

⁶ Hume says that sympathy "is nothing but the conversion of an idea into an impression by the force of imagination" (*Treatise* 427). He elaborates: "However instantaneous this change of the idea into an impression may be, it proceeds from certain views and reflections, which will not escape the strict scrutiny of a philosopher, though they may the person himself, who makes them" (*Treatise* 317).

⁷ Hume also refers to corrected sympathy as "extended" or "general" sympathy.

⁸ Here, Hume is specifically discussing moral beauty, which he sees as a species of beauty also made available by the faculty of taste.

⁹ However, see Gina Ercolini's essay, "Ethics Improper: The Embodied Ethics of Kant's Anthropology" for a treatment of the "improper" ethics of Kant's anthropological writings, which engages taste in the setting of the banquet, offered a far more bodily and mundane articulation of ethics than the *Critique of Judgment*.

¹⁰ Edmund Burke was an exception in rejecting the internal sense view of taste (Dolph 108).

¹¹ This is not at all to say that I do not bring preexisting categories to my reading—quite the contrary, I explicitly conduct my reading of belletrists from the perspective of contemporary affective and new materialist understandings of rhetoric, asking after the resonances.

¹² As later chapters will make clear, the imagination connects to ontological work in important ways, since it generates the conditions for possible worlds.

¹³ Some have argued that the assumption that the mechanisms of rhetorical production and reception were similar was to the detriment of rhetorical education in the eighteenth century and beyond. For my purposes, whether or not that was the case, the fact that it occurred is testament to the power of taste to multiply the directionality of rhetoric and pedagogy.

¹⁴ It is worth noting that Blair distinguishes taste, “the power of judging,” from genius, “the power of executing,” and considers genius a higher rhetorical power (“necessary to form the poet, or the orator”) (21). But he is emphatic that despite the native aspects of genius, it can be developed through the improvement of taste.

¹⁵ For more on the vitalistic dimensions of Enlightenment thought, see, e.g., Byron Hawk’s *A Counter-history of Composition: Toward Methodologies of Complexity*, and Catherine Packham’s *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics*, and Peter Hanns Reill’s *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment*.

¹⁶ Here Blair seems to stray from Hume’s insistence that beauty lies only in the mind, and not at all in the object. For Hume, there must be qualities in the object that makes it appear beautiful, but beauty is itself a sentiment. Though the beautiful object is a mysterious product of the exercise of taste.

¹⁷ *Advice to an Author* Char. II, 265; see also Char. 1, 122, 207, 11, 278, note (cf. Townsend 31-2).

¹⁸ Many have objected to this line of reasoning as circular in a variety of ways—for instance, to identify these rare few, Hume appeals to both enduring works of beauty and

the principles of the day. One of the qualifications is also experience with beautiful objects, but these objects can't be identified except through appeal to "true" taste in the first place. From my perspective, Hume's standard is necessarily circular, since it defines a relational property. In other words, Hume is drawn to ideal tasters not simply because it is too hard to articulate a principle of beauty, but because bodily human experience is a condition of beauty in the first place—because beauty is emergent in the phenomenal space where an object is "gilded" with a subject. Moreover, the encounter is central to the emergence of taste at a broader social level as well as an individual one—as Alessandra Stradella has argued, and we will see when we get to Hume on extended sympathy, beauty is a private sentiment which is corrected by taste, the province of the social.

¹⁹ As potential avenues for taste education, Hume cites "the artifice of politicians, who, in order to govern men more easily, and preserve peace in human society, have endeavour'd to produce an esteem for justice, and an abhorrence of injustice" (*Treatise* 500). and private education, where parents are "induc'd to inculcate on their children, from their earliest infancy, the principles of probity, and teach them to regard the observance of those rules, by which society is maintain'd, as worthy and honourable, and their violation as base and infamous. By this means the sentiments of honour may take root in their tender minds, and acquire such firmness and solidity, that they may fall little short of those principles, which are the most essential to our natures, and the most deeply radicated in our internal constitution" (*Treatise* 500).

CHAPTER 3

SENSORY POWER

The flaws of Marx and Marxism have been often sung by those associated with the turn to “new” modes of materialism. Joining other poststructuralists, for instance, Bruno Latour has criticized the Hegelian elements of Marx’s historical materialism, including his often dialectical and teleological version of history (by which capitalism was destined to provoke its own overcoming), as well as his sometimes essentialist view of human nature (by which the communist revolution would enable the emancipation of man into a more fully human mode of sensing, believing, producing, and being in the world). Latour has further objected to the scientific spirit of historical materialism, focused as it was on developing a “a science of politics instead of the total transformation of what it means to do politics (so as to include nonhumans)” (“Compositionist” 479). Reading Marx’s notion of commodity fetishism as a thesis about the misleading appearances of material life under capitalism, Latour also criticizes historical materialism for an idealism by which scientific demystification is the central strategy for inciting political change.¹ Adopting a similar understanding of Marx’s critique of commodities, Jane Bennett charges that critical theory’s associated method of demystification “presumes that at the heart of any event or process lies a human agency that has illicitly been projected onto things” (xiv). Like Latour, Bennett worries that the exposé-style approach of demystification does not “reliably produce moral outrage” or “inspire ameliorative action” (xv).

For Bennett and Latour, the project of new materialism is to “advocate for the vitality of matter,” as Bennett puts it, to learn to respond to the call of the nonhuman, as Latour often puts it, and to rework our politics accordingly. Like Bennett and Latour, Thomas Rickert renders this project in rhetorical terms, noting that “*things make claims on us*” in ways that we must learn to register (229). “Why advocate for the vitality of matter?” Bennett asks. Her answer is that she suspects that in the modern world,

the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption. It does so by preventing us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies. (ix)

As Bennett frames it, a new materialist approach opens the way to a richer environmental ethic—an ethic whereby things are not simply inert vessels for human agency—*objects*, in Heidegger’s terms—but vital agents with trajectories all their own. This sort of ethic, Bennett suggests here, demands a difficult but important change in our *sensibilities*—we must learn to see, hear, smell, taste, and feel things differently if we want to better connect to their vitality.

Taking our cue from Bennett and Latour, it is indeed crucial to be able to locate the humanist and determinist assumptions that Marx’s early thought inherits from Hegel, as well as where Marx hangs on to notions of objective truth (failing, for instance, to see science itself as ideological, and defining ideology in terms of false consciousness). We also must note that, led by Bennett, Latour, and Rickert, among others, today’s new materialisms offer a view of nonhuman vitality and of the inherently prosthetic, nonhuman character of human life that is richer and more explicit than we can find in

Marx's work alone. But efforts to establish the "newness" of today's materialisms sometimes neglect the tools that Marx himself offered for attending critically to nonhuman vitality and its penetration of human life, as well as his crucial suggestions regarding the social and environmental significance of doing so. Moreover, the emphasis on nonhuman vitality can sometimes turn us too far away from human vitality. In the spirit of new materialism, Bennett asserts the following:

It is important to follow the trail of human power to expose social hegemonies (as historical materialists do). But my contention is that there is also a public value in following the scent of a nonhuman, thingly power, the material agency of natural bodies and technological artifacts. (xiii)

Whereas Bennett helpfully focuses on the latter task, "following the scent of a nonhuman, thingly power," this need not be done at the expense of the former one—and indeed, to the extent that human and nonhuman are entwined, we ought not always separate these two tasks at all. Retrieving Marx's own vitalist and posthumanist views, as well as their development in Frankfurt School thought, offers a way into conceiving and practicing an integrated analysis of and attunement to human-nonhuman power.

Embarking on such a project, then, we must recognize first and foremost that Marx's materialism was a new materialism in its own right, with vitalist dimensions that many recent scholars have noted.² In his dissertation, Marx defended Epicurean materialism as "dynamic" (Rose 75). And in *German Ideology* and the *Theses on Feuerbach* which preceded it, Marx and Engels objected to materialisms from the ancients to Feuerbach for maintaining a mechanical determinism by which an objective, nonhuman realm of matter (e.g., atoms, forces, substance) undergirded human bodies and

minds. This view had inert matter determining humans, rather than recognizing how matter is always already imbricated with humans. Thus while Marx and Engels lauded Feuerbach's insistence, contra Hegel, that we must focus on sensuous life in thinking of history, they objected that Feuerbach treated sensuous life as an objective, given realm of nature cut off from the human, rather than realizing how nature was run through with human forces (an objection to be discussed at the beginning of the next chapter). Marx's diagnosis of the problems and potentials of capitalism and his vision for a communist revolution elaborated the political significance of the entwined fates of human and nonhuman forces. These political takes on the vitality of matter can inform the newer materialisms of Latour, Bennett, and others, and can guide rhetoric's increasing engagement with such approaches.

This chapter argues that, as for Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, the discourse on aesthetic education and sensory emancipation that began with Friedrich Schiller and extended through Marx and the Frankfurt School elicited vitalist and posthumanist currents of thought. Moreover, this discourse offered a theorization of power and a political framing for aesthetic education that the Enlightenment discourse had emphatically lacked. These Marxist elaborations, then, can be incorporated into the rhetorical tradition as complications of the Enlightenment view of taste as a rhetorical capacity. They can also inform a contemporary materialist theorization of sensory rhetoric. As I will establish, although Marx and the Frankfurt School offer little explicit engagement with rhetoric per se, they depict both aesthetic taste and sensory power as rhetorical capacities that could harbor critical and resistant modes of being and connect people with nonhuman vitality, thereby eliciting human and worldly thriving. In their

rendering, sensory and aesthetic dispositions were cast, on the one hand, as rhetorical deficiencies—weaknesses in critical and experiential capacity engendered under Enlightenment and capitalist dominions—and, on the other hand, as rhetorical powers capable of eliciting resistance and liberation. They pointed the way toward an immanent, sensory modality of critique that could enhance the environmentalist project of new materialism discussed above.

In what follows I first consider Marx’s call for the emancipation of the senses as it developed from Schiller’s vision of aesthetic education. I argue that Marx’s phenomenological view of sensation supported an immanent, human-nonhuman notion of emancipation and, accordingly, of rhetorical power and its relation to political change. I then trace the legacy of aesthetic education and sensory emancipation in Frankfurt School thinkers Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Together, I will argue, the posthumanist reformulation of emancipation enabled by Marx, Adorno, and Horkheimer points toward an approach to emancipatory critique that exceeds the intellectual operations Bennett and Latour associate with demystification.

Aesthetic Education and the Project of Emancipation

With Friedrich Schiller, the Enlightenment project of aesthetic education was turned to explicitly political ends. With ethical and social thriving at the forefront of his scholarly inquiries, Schiller deployed Kant’s moral theory while developing the attention to sensibility that he believed Kant neglected. His *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, published as a series of letters in 1795, asserts “it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom” (Letter 2). Cultivating aesthetic taste, the letters argue, does not just assist ethical development and social justice, but is necessary for it. For Schiller, the

specialization of roles under the modern state has led to a situation with “not merely individuals, but whole classes of people, developing but one part of their potentialities, while of the rest, as in stunted growths, only vestigial traces remain” (Letter 6).³ In Schiller’s vision, a “form drive” toward the universal, abstract, and rational and a “sensuous drive” toward the particular, concrete, and sensual, can, through the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility, be brought into balance in a “play drive.”

Following Schiller, Marx too connected freedom with aesthetic capacity and envisioned aesthetics as a part of a fuller human life.⁴ Yet Marx located emancipation in the realm of sensation itself, rather than in a realm such as Schiller’s “play” that would mediate between sensation and reason. Schiller, like the Enlightenment thinkers before him, saw sensation as fundamentally characterized by this sort of necessity.⁵ For Marx, sensation was indeed problematic when turned to “crude practical need” alone, but it was not fundamentally characterized by such need (*Manuscripts* n.p.). Instead Marx, in his “new” materialist orientation, saw sensation as a potential site of human thriving, the gateway to a visceral, vibrant engagement with things. What’s more, Marx rejected Schiller’s Kantian view that “art could represent a non-alienated area outside production which was simply able to educate man to a realm beyond his alienated state” (Rose 74). As such, Marx treats not only the high arts that concerned Enlightenment conceptions of aesthetics, but also the more fundamental (and commonly accessible) realm of aesthetics evoked in Baumgarten’s original use of the term—everyday sensory experience.

Marx’s connection of sensation and emancipation is most elaborated in his early work, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. As he asserts here and elsewhere, both the forms of sensation and the forms of material things are not natural but

historically constituted, conditioned by an era's reigning mode of production. Specifically, he announces: "The *cultivation* of the five senses is the work of all previous history" (n.p.).⁶ Marx lamented that via private property—itsself an historically contingent material form—capitalism had ushered in a dulling of the senses: "Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided," he laments, "that an object is only *ours* when we have it—when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc.,—in short, when it is *used* by us" (n.p.). Private property, for Marx, had relegated humans' relations with objects to relations purely of possession and consumption, of brute exploitation. As such, man had come to a state of profound sensory impoverishment: "In place of *all* physical and mental senses," the era of capitalism brings "the sheer estrangement of *all* these senses [by] the sense of *having*" (n.p.). For Marx, humans engage with things through both "physical senses"—sight, sound, smell, etc.—and "mental senses"—which include desire, love, care, and the sense of "having." These many powers, when practiced and cultivated, potentially enable vibrant, intimate connections with things, and consequently with other humans. Yet, Marx believed, with the rise of the material form of private property, people had become habituated to engage things through *only* the single, limited "sense of having." The overturning of private property that Marx envisioned in the onset of communism promised to emancipate the heretofore oppressed senses and to reconnect people with things.

Marx's vision of sensory emancipation provocatively gestures toward the political potential of rhetorical training based on bodily responsiveness. Yet, since Michel Foucault transformed our understanding of power, the logic of emancipation has been rigorously called into question. A Foucaultian perspective suggests that the project of

emancipation assumes a repressive view of power by which concentrated, rigid structures oppress individuals from the top down. This overlooks the productive, local character of power. As Foucault's life work testifies, power's fluid, multi-directional, and ever-morphing constellations cannot be simplified into any binary, top-down, oppressor/oppressed configuration. To neglect the always multiple and changing character of power in seeking political change risks never really changing anything. Moreover, on an emancipatory logic, so the objection goes, the overcoming of these oppressive forces tends to be imagined as an escape into some pure, unadulterated realm of human spirit. Such a dream situates the unfettered human mind at the center of power, overlooking the contingent historicity of human being as well as the fundamental imbrications of human and nonhuman forces.

Marx, especially via Hegel's early influence, at times engages essentialist logics and repressive, binary views of power, yet as will be apparent shortly, in turning to sensation as a site of critique, he troubled these logics and significantly reworked the notion of emancipation. Unlike typical liberationist projects that target individuals or human powers, the aspiration to emancipate the senses produces an immanent sense of emancipation that aims to alter the flow of human and nonhuman forces in ways more conducive to mutual thriving. From a material perspective, new material modalities become possible, and from the perspective of human experience, an enhanced capacity to respond to the unpredictable and a commitment to perpetual becoming take root.

Complicating Emancipation

Marx's vision of the emancipation of the senses is summed up in the following dense passage from the *Manuscripts*, which I will continue to unpack throughout this section:

The abolition [*Aufhebung*] of private property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and qualities, but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become, subjectively and objectively, *human*. The eye has become a *human eye*, just as its *object* has become a social, *human* object—an object made by man for man. The *senses* have therefore become directly in their practice *theoreticians*. They relate themselves to the thing for the sake of the thing, but the thing itself is an *objective human* relation to itself and to man . . . and vice versa. Need or enjoyment have consequently lost its *egotistical* nature, and nature has lost its mere *utility* by use becoming *human* use. (n.p.)

At face value, this characterization of emancipation appears strikingly guilty of the sort of humanism often associated with emancipatory projects. For instance, with the onset of communism, Marx predicts, “the eye [will become] a more *human* eye, just as its *object* [will become] a social, *human* object—an object made by man for man” (n.p.). Yet we must note that Marx was outlining his view of sensory emancipation at a time when he had not yet broken with Hegel’s humanism. In the *Theses on Feuerbach* that follow the *Manuscripts*, this break will become far more clear. There, Marx insists “the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations” (Thesis IV, *Marx-Engels Reader* 145). Humanness, that is, is something that is performed into being over historical time, and its performance necessarily relies on engagements with the material world.

What then would it mean for the eye to become more human? Part of the answer comes in the *Manuscripts*, where Marx previews the more explicit anti-humanist claims

that will emerge in the *Theses* and later works. Here he declares that “plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc., constitute . . . a part of human life and human activity” (n.p.). As such, “Nature is man’s *inorganic body*” (n.p.). It is so both in that nature is “his direct means of life,” and “the material, the object, and the instrument of his life activity” (n.p.). Resonating with posthumanist views like those of Bennett, Rickert, and Stormer, what Marx here offers is not just a fundamentally performative theory of human being, but also a fundamentally prosthetic one. As humans, we are prosthetic through and through—humanness only comes into being in our engagement with material things—with plants, animals, stones, air, light, as well as with machines, possessions, commodities, and so on. The *Manuscripts*’ attention to sensation and to the political powers of material form, then, was prompting a deconstruction of Hegel’s humanism, with the notion of the “social” subtly stepping in to replace that of the “human.” Through Marx’s conception of the “social,” we can ultimately read the *Manuscripts*’ project of sensory liberation as aiming not toward a more human world, but toward a vibrant entwining of human and nonhuman forces.

Sensory and Material Form

This posthumanist strain in Marx emanates at least in part from the complex phenomenological view of sensation set forth in the *Manuscripts*. In Marx’s framework, the senses do not simply connect humans to things, but participate in the very constitution of things—that is, an era’s sensory forms shape its material forms. Thus “To the *eye* an object comes to be other than it is to the *ear*, and the object of the eye *is* another object than the object of the *ear*” (n.p.). What Marx is getting at is most apparent when our senses give us contradictory information. A corked wine, for instance, manifests as a

quite different object to our eye than to our nose. Thus Marx says, “the peculiarity of each [sense] is precisely its *peculiar essence*, and thus also the peculiar mode of its objectification, of its *objectively real, living being*” (n.p.).⁷ In other words, each sense circumscribes or zones the possible articulations of an object: the unique power of vision creates the possibility for visible objects to manifest, that of hearing enables audible objects, and so on. Each sensory form gives way to a particular modality of living being, a particular form of material reality. Because the human senses and their acuties are historically contingent, the very existence and vibrancy of certain object modalities in a given historical era—visible objects, for instance, or audible objects, and so on—is itself at stake in our sensory capacities. Marx’s view, then, that the multiple, varied senses developed by “work of all history” are being dulled and displaced by the single sense of having, suggests that the material world itself is increasingly inhabited by a single, homogenous material form—private property—and, attendant to this, a single kind of relation to objects—consumption (either possession or literal consumption).

The ontological generativity of sensation works both ways: sensation is shaped by an era’s available material forms just as objects are shaped by its available sensory forms. Marx expresses this in terms of music: “only music awakens in man the sense of music” (n.p.). Music, that is, can “only exist for me insofar as my essential power [sense] exists for myself as a subjective capacity” (n.p.). Marx also speaks of good theatre and fine minerals as sites where material forms “awaken” sensory forms. Marx’s attention to the power of objects to shape sensation brings him to a key conclusion, one that presses toward a rejection of humanism: “Only through the objectively unfolded richness of man’s essential being is the richness of subjective *human* sensibility . . . either cultivated

or brought into being” (n.p.). Human being and thriving, to the extent that it relies on the practice of sensation, is fundamentally a matter of an era’s available sensory and material fields, the modalities of being-with available to people and things alike. For instance, the sensory experience that comprises human thriving—“a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form—in short, *senses* capable of human gratification, senses affirming themselves as essential powers of *man*”—is zoned by an era’s available material forms (n.p.). As such, human (sensory) thriving is entangled with material thriving, and things emerge as vital, world-building agents in their own right. This is a new materialist note in Marx that also nuances contemporary new materialism by emphasizing the complementary world-building powers of both sensory form (which tends to be Jane Bennett’s focus, for instance) and material form (which tends to be Rickert’s focus): both, Marx suggests, are world-building powers, two sides of the same coin.

Alienation

Given this ontology, then, Marx’s diagnosis of *alienation* and his vision for emancipation are discernible from two angles—that of sensation and that of material form. Considered from the perspective of material form, Marx’s diagnosis is most familiar in his later and better-known work, which, taking a slightly different angle, highlights the form of the commodity, rather than private property, as the significant, world-shaping material form of the capitalist era. Thus, in Volume 1 of *Capital*, Marx argues that under the capitalist mode of production, matter took the commodity form—or was “fetishized” as a commodity—when its quantifiable market value was naturalized onto it, as what it really was and what moved it, rather than its qualitative relevance to humans—its use value and value as a product of labor. The value of the fetishized

commodity, in other words, materialized exclusively as its market behavior, where it related to money and to other commodities, and not to its human producers or users. In this way, the commodity entirely co-opted and enacted the social relations among humans that gave it its existence and life in the first place—relations among workers, capitalists, and consumers. For this reason Marx characterized the commodity as having acquired “grotesquely” human-like aspects (here he speaks of a table being made to stand upon its head and think). Meanwhile, the laborer had become alienated in relation to the commodity because it had robbed him of his real social relations. The upshot of this alienation was a loss of sociability—the only sociability a laborer could experience was through material movements dictated by capitalists and encoded into machines, rather than a more involved, experimental engagement with the products of those movements, where subject and object were both at risk.

As Hylton White has extensively argued, then, for Marx, commodity fetishism does not refer to the illusions we project onto objects—it is not, in other words, an instance of “fetishizing” in Latour’s sense, which figures it as a problem of projecting a human-like agency onto an object, such as a ball (e.g., “Why Has Critique?”). It instead refers to the lived relations with materiality that emerge via a certain historically contingent material form, the commodity. The commodity form, Marx argues, effects the very schism between nature and culture that concerns Latour, and that Marx proposes we must surrender. Via the commodity form, humans are excluded from the life of the objects they create and use, thereby alienated in a world that is all-too-human, cut off from nonhuman materiality. Meanwhile, the commodity lives and moves “on its own” in the marketplace—likewise alienated from humans. The problem of commodity fetishism

is not, as Latour explicitly misreads it, a problem of projecting a human-like agency onto the ball. It is instead that in Marx's assessment, the ball is the only player in the game, moving about the court of its own accord. Meanwhile, insofar as the worker's only possibility for sociability is "merely" material, it is as if the human is made to run, dart, and move alongside other players, every movement dictated from above, with no ball to be seized, served, and incorporated into human life, nothing *gathering* those movements. In both cases, the *sensual* quality of human-nonhuman entwinement is absent.⁸

With the perspective of material form in mind, we can now return to the *Manuscripts'* diagnosis of alienation from the perspective of sensory form. As we have seen, Marx declares that "private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only *ours* when we have it—when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc.,—in short, when it is *used* by us" (n.p.). Just as the commodity form limits human engagements with objects to engagements based on their market value, so the closely related form of private property, for Marx, had relegated humans' sensory relations with objects to relations purely of possession and consumption, of brute exploitation. As such, a single modality of sensation, and thereby of human-object relations, had come to dominate. Rather than engaging objects in terms of the traditional five senses, or even the intellectual senses, people had become habituated to engage them through only the single, limited "sense of having." The reign of this single, sensory modality has made us "stupid" and "one-sided" not only in that, recalling Schiller, it has rendered human experience monolithic, but also in that it has rendered lively material things inert and singular objects of possession, rather than vibrant and multiple *things*—rich materializations of sight, sound, and so on.

But if the goal is simply for objects to be “ours” in richer ways, isn’t this the sort of instrumentalism Bennett is worried about when she welcomes the *new* materialist approach as a turn away from “the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter” (ix)? Not if we understand just how expansive Marx’s idea of “ours” can be. Here, an oft-quoted remark from Marx’s *Capital, Volume III*, is helpful. Envisioning that with the onset of communism the notion of private property will come to seem “absurd,” Marx announces:

Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not owners of the earth, they are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations, as [good heads of household]. (911)

For Marx, things can be “ours” in many other and more vibrant ways than being “our property”—for instance, as things that benefit us and deserve our respect, as objects of our care (to evoke Heidegger), or of our concern (to evoke Latour). Yet with the dwindling of sensory capacity, we have lost the ability to be with things in these multiplied and less domineering ways. Private property has thus become a “*material*, immediately *perceptible* expression of *estranged human* life,” the “perceptible expression of the fact that man becomes *objective* for himself and at the same time becomes a strange and inhuman object” (*Manuscripts* n.p.).

Emancipation

Just as for today’s new materialists, then, in gesturing at alienation Marx is gesturing at how people have become cut off from things. Marx also has offered a systematic diagnosis of *why* we are situated toward things in this impoverished way.

Through the reigning sensory and material forms of capitalism, things have been situated as mere objects of possession or consumption, rather than vibrant beings in their own right—as Bennett puts it, matter has been situated as something “dead” or “thoroughly instrumentalized.” This more posthumanist perspective on alienation renders *emancipation* something quite different from an expansion of human agency over the realm of things, or a transcendence of the material world, as Marx’s view of emancipation is sometimes understood (and as the passage quoted in this section’s opening would seem to suggest). On the contrary, whereas alienation expresses a certain mode of being cut off from things, emancipation entails a freeing of people and things into richer and more multiple modes of being and entwining. What is emancipated, in short, are complementary flows of energy between human and nonhuman being.

On the whole, although Marx does not explicitly engage the Enlightenment discourse on taste, he significantly shifts its grounds. Like Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, Marx gestures toward a rhetoricity that proceeds at the level of affect-ability or response-ability, and like them he connects the vision of *cultivated* affectability to human thriving and ethics. Marx also establishes a standard of taste or aesthetics broadly understood, in what I have argued is a proto-posthumanist conception of emancipation. But this standard is vastly different from that of the Scottish Enlightenment. Unlike belletrists, Marx returns to the bodily and sensory dimensions of aesthetics, a shift which allows his standard to apply to affectability at large. Marx also interrogates affectability at an historical level, rather than an individual one, and he expands on the participation of the object that I noted in belletrist discourse. Affectability for Marx abides not just in the individual human, the “man of taste,” or even only in an era’s

human consciousness more broadly, but rather in the capacities of both humans and nonhumans—the forms that human experience and material reality are able to take in (sensuous) relation with one another. In focusing on affectability and response-ability as an historical condition, Marx gestures toward a sensory-aesthetic theorization of power that Scottish Enlightenment thought sorely lacked. Also unlike many Enlightenment thinkers (Scottish and beyond), Marx did not locate *value* in the object or subject alone. Rather, in seeing subject and object, sensory form and material form, as co-constitutive, he evaluated an era’s affectability according to its rhetorical powers and effects rather than anything intrinsic about its subject or object. In Marx’s notion of sensory emancipation, rhetoricity, response-ability, and ethics all abide at a vast ecological level, and admit of reworking through interventions in sensory and material form. Finally, Marx develops the vitalist notes of the belletrist treatment of affectability, connecting rhetorical capacity (that is, human-nonhuman affectability) to the ethics—and particularly the environmental ethics—of whole eras, rather than individuals. In Marx, ethics manifests at an ambient level.

In an emancipated world, “subjectivity and objectivity, spirituality and materiality, activity and suffering, lose their antithetical character, and thus their existence as such antitheses only within the framework of *society*” (n.p., emphasis altered). Marx is emphatic that this is not a conceptual dissolution of oppositions, but a lived one. In a revolution by which more vibrant material forms and sensory modalities become available, subject and object are no longer discrete, opposed entities—that is, alienation is overcome because the thing is no longer relegated into being either an inert object of possession (an instance of what Latour will term a “fact”) nor a “grotesquely

human” commodity whose activity excludes and appropriates human life (what Latour will term a “fairy”). In sum, with the onset of sensory emancipation, humans relinquish their efforts to dominate objects and objects relinquish their efforts to dominate humans. Domination itself, as a human-nonhuman relation heretofore invited by the sensory form of “having” and the material form of private property or commodity, recedes.

Society, then, is a crucial concept in Marx. The core result of Marx’s focus on the emancipation of the senses was to shift human life away from the non-social being he associated with capitalism and toward the more social being he connected with communism. And for Marx, social being and non-social being were not so much about more or less *humanity* as they were about more or less *sociability*—that is, vibrancy in humans’ relations with one another and with nonhuman things. The dream of sensory emancipation, then, was a dream of a society of people and things, resonating with Bruno Latour’s concept of the social (to be discussed at the beginning of the next chapter). Thus Marx says:

It is only when man’s object becomes a *human* object or objective man that man does not lose himself in that object. This is only possible when it becomes a *social* object for him and when he himself becomes a social being for himself, just as society becomes a being for him in this object. (*Manuscripts* n.p.)⁹

For Marx, the displacement of the five bodily senses by the sense of having had relegated humans to non-social engagements with both each other and things. The emancipation of the senses from their subjection to the sense of having would enable things to manifest not merely as objects of consumption, but as participants complexly and intimately involved in humans’ physical activity and sensuous experience.¹⁰ Marx’s focus on the

emancipation of the senses, then, is in tension with the humanist assumptions he inherits from Hegel and ultimately will discard. What Marx terms the onset of a more human world we might equally cast as a step toward a more posthuman world, one that discards an alienation from things for an intimate, sensuous interplay of human and nonhuman vibrancy.

What might assist such a development, which after all, today's new materialists still await? While in his moments of economic determinism, Marx locates the mechanism of emancipation in the self-overcoming of the capitalist mode of production, he also, in a later *Grundrisse* introduction (1857), recalls Schiller in an implicit suggestion that the cultivation of a public "appreciative of beauty" might itself be a means of attenuating sensory alienation. In this later work Marx also elaborates the sensory ontology offered by the *Manuscripts* in suggesting that artwork "is able to both produce an object of aesthetic value, and to create a subject for its object" (Rose 95). As such, he sees production and consumption as entwined practices—practices whose entwinement operates at sensory levels. Elaborating the vibrancy of the art object, Marx positions it as not only "supplying the want with the material, but the material with a want" (cf. *Marxism and Art* 35). Like Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, Marx sees the art object itself as a rhetorical agent capable of cultivating a fuller mode of human-nonhuman being.¹¹ Beyond art specifically, Marx also points to critique more broadly as a means of assisting that self-overcoming, which I will discuss in the final section of this chapter and the first section of the next.

Marx's vision for sensory emancipation, then, pressed him toward a Foucaultian engagement of power as a productive phenomenon immanent to everyday experience. On

the one hand, of course, it is precisely Marx's view of the capitalist system as a higher-order concentration of repressive power to which Foucault objects in offering his alternative vision of power. And indeed we can see this binary, top-down view of power at work in Marx's determinist conviction that a transformation of the economic system and its replacement with a new system will accomplish emancipation. However, when emancipation is considered as an alternative to the sensory alienation that Marx theorizes, an entirely different version of power emerges. Marx's focus on the senses draws his attention to local, productive power, even if he continues to understand the full productive potential of that power to be harnessed by larger structures of domination. If the senses have become dulled and admit of rehabilitation, this thus points rhetorical activity not toward the goal of transcendence, but rather toward an intimate, worldly reworking of humans' sensory relations with things.

Culturing Emancipation

The Frankfurt School thinkers who followed Marx—specifically Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer—elaborated on his sensory diagnosis of alienation and the potential for such a sensory reworking of the world. *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* and the *German Ideology*, written in 1844 and 1845 respectively, were not published until 1932. Their publication revolutionized the understanding of Marx at the time, especially among those associated with the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. Fourteen years later, Adorno and Horkheimer published their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This influential work and the Frankfurt School ethos more generally have been extensively criticized as elitist. While the charge of elitism holds some legitimacy to be sure, in Adorno and Horkheimer, as in Marx, vitalist and posthumanist tendencies are discernible that open

the way to counteract that elitism (a claim I will develop in chapter 5).¹² In particular, the early Marx's attention to sensory powers as political powers capable of engendering vital human-nonhuman ecologies of life are evident in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, especially in its criticism of the Enlightenment ethos and its marriage with capitalist production: the "program of the Enlightenment," Adorno and Horkheimer charge, has effected "the disenchantment of the world" (3) and its equivalent, "the extirpation of animism" (5). The Enlightenment celebration of reason has enthroned man as the master of nature, debunking "any illusion of ruling or inherent powers, of hidden qualities," from nature (6). Through its logics, "the multiplicity of forms is reduced to position and arrangement, history to fact, things to matter" (7). Through the ruling trope of the number, a once vibrant, mysterious, and complex world of "things" is reduced to a single plane of homogenous, inert, and exchangeable matter. In exchange for the renunciation of things in their vibrant complexity, the human subject is carved out as an "identically persistent self" (54).

Yet, Adorno and Horkheimer assert, the effort to raise man up as a self-sufficient master of nature backfires. As in Marx, the disavowal of and triumph over nature deadens not just things but also people, whose alienation from the vibrancy of things impoverishes their lives, too. Like a "dictator toward men," the master "knows [things] only insofar as he can manipulate them" (9). His thinking is calcified into rigid concepts, since "the subjective spirit which cancels the animation of nature can master a despiritualized nature only by imitating its rigidity" (57). Echoing Marx's concern for the shift toward a singular sensory modality of human-nonhuman engagement, Adorno and Horkheimer lament that under the current articulation of the Enlightenment, the "multitudinous

affinities between existents are suppressed by the single relation between the subject who bestows meaning upon the meaningless object” (10).

Adorno and Horkheimer trace this de-vitalization of man and nature alike in the figure of Odysseus, “the self who always restrains himself and forgets his life, who saves his life and yet recalls it only as a wandering” (55-56). Paradigmatic of the renunciation of vertiginous vitality that enlightened man performs in exchange for stable subjectivity, Odysseus must renounce all the enticing mysteries he encounters, and pleasures of the tongue first and foremost:

he may not taste the lotus or eat the cattle of the Sun-god Hyperion, and when he steers between the rocks he must count on the loss of the men whom Scylla plucks from the boat. He just pulls through; struggle is his survival; and all the fame that he and the others win in the process serves merely to confirm that the title of hero is gained at the price of the abasement and mortification of the instinct for complete, universal, and undivided happiness. (57)

Odysseus’s denial of the pleasures of taste is not mentioned in passing. Instead, Adorno and Horkheimer suggest that the eating of the lotus flower is the epitome of the sort of ecological engagement that is dismissed as non-productive and even dangerous under Enlightenment rationality. Recalling Marx’s and Schiller’s concerns with need-based modalities of sensation, Adorno and Horkheimer reflect that flower-eating is

a promise of a state in which the reproduction of life is independent of conscious self-preservation and the bliss of the fully contented is detached from the advantages of rationally-planned nutrition. The fleeting reminiscence of that most

distant and most ancient pleasure attached to the sense of taste is still limited by the almost immediate need actually to consume the food. (63-4)

The distinction Adorno and Horkheimer establish here between the enjoyments of *taste* and the necessities of mere *consumption* develops a contrast Marx pointed to in including eating under the sense of having, while lamenting at the decline of the bodily senses such as tasting. For Adorno and Horkheimer, as for Marx, eating has displaced tasting; people no longer have the capacity to attune at bodily levels to the vibrancy of things, but only to have them for breakfast.

This distinction between consumption and taste is developed not just in the realm of gustation, but also in aesthetic realm more broadly. Like Odysseus, modern man has been made to exchange the capacity for a deep engagement with things for the privilege of mere survival in a sensuously and intellectually dull world. In Adorno and Horkheimer's well-known critique, not just capitalism, but the culture industry in particular is to blame. In the context of Marx's earlier works, Adorno's critique of the culture industry in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and beyond can be understood to develop on Marx's view that the senses have been dulled by the rise of the single sense of having, and its concomitant displacement of physical and intellectual senses alike. The culture industry is distinguished by its production of readymade consumables. For Adorno, regularly offering gustatory metaphors, its products are "pre-digested"—delivering their goods directly to passive body of the consumer, and preempting the intimate joys of tasting and digesting. Recalling Marx's critique of the commodity form, then, the commodification of culture situates the product as the active, humanlike agent and the consumer as a passive receptacle. As such, each is alienated from the other.

Inundated in the realm of commodified culture, people lose not only their sensory capacities, but also the “higher” capacity of aesthetic taste, as is made apparent in Adorno’s later comment that “taste has become outmoded” (“Fetish” 288). Indeed, for Adorno, the capacity for taste has been replaced by the whims of a predilection ruled by *familiarity*—an active, involved enjoyment is being replaced by mere recognition. As entertainment replaces autonomous art, seeping into everyday being, the decline of aesthetic taste manifests at the more basic level of everyday perception: thus, music has become mere background, and people have lost the ability to listen. In the end, people’s relations to cultural objects have become nothing more than a matter of recognizing and possessing. Overall, then, Adorno develops Marx’s diagnosis of the dulling of the senses into a fuller diagnosis of rhetorical decline, wherein response-ability—the active, engaged capacity of *taste*—is receding, and along with it communication and critical engagement. In its place is emerging the passive disposition of predilection and the presumably non-rhetorical activity of consumption.

Adorno’s diagnosis is indebted to Kant, according to whom judgments issued by taste are disinterested and autonomous from all other judgments (e.g., of knowledge, morality, etc.). To Adorno’s rather pessimistic view of things, the last bastion of hope for aesthetic taste (and thus for rhetorical capacity) is in the practices and products of autonomous artists, who are able to produce their works significantly outside the system of commodification. For these few, taste is (recalling Hume) a decidedly productive faculty, guiding their artistic creations. As in Adorno’s other discussions, aesthetics and the body are not far apart here. The artist’s “aesthetically advanced nerves” undergird hair-bristling, flinching disgust against previous taste that drives them forward into new

arenas of sensory and aesthetic provocations (*Minima Moralia* 145). The artist's taste enables an intuitive and inventive engagement with an era's sensory forms: through a "secondary mimesis," as Adorno terms it, "the artist reacts mimetically not to pure sound or color (if there were such a thing) but to the sounds, tones, colors and relations that the period sets forth as 'unavoidable' and 'necessary,' that is, as supposedly natural" (Kaufmann 73). Following Marx, then, Adorno recognizes the historicity of sensory and aesthetic forms, and situates art as a practical means to engaging and reworking that historicity.

In Adorno's view, the product that emerges from the artist's exertion of taste is distinct from commodified entertainment in two key ways, both of which can engender critical consciousness and social change. First, autonomous art is in tension with reality rather than being simply part of it: art "is defined by its relation to what it is not" (*Aesthetic Theory* 3), whereas entertainment has no such tension. As such great art itself harbors a *critical* relationship with the world. Second, and related to this, art is never complete or fully self-present, but its energies are only realized in the encounter with audiences and their exercise of taste: "Because art is what it has become, its concept refers to what it does not contain. . . . Art can be understood only by its laws of movement, not according to any set of invariants" (*Aesthetic Theory* 3). The same, we will see, will hold for Adorno's notion of critique.

Marx and Adorno's treatment of sensory emancipation leaves questions. We must ask, for instance: Are the senses really dulled? Might an era's material forms on the contrary offer different modalities of sensation through the eyes, ears, mouth, and so on? In other words, if capitalism marks the onset of a new, pervasive sense of "having,"

might there also be positive and productive articulations of that sense of having? Marx provocatively expands the realm of sensation beyond the five traditional senses to include, for instance, not just a hearing ear, but a “musical ear,” and to suggest a synesthesia of sorts in such specialized senses as a “minearological sense” which he believes the dealer in minerals must lack in his singular concern for the commercial value of the mineral. But why should the sense of having, the concern for commercial value, be limited to a single expression? Might there not be additional modes of sensation that have cropped up as variations of the single sense of having, and that promote more vibrant relations to things than were possible before? These questions will certainly be worth recalling in future chapters—but we can thank Marx for bringing us to them.

Meanwhile, Adorno’s elaborations of Marx’s sensory diagnostics can be of assistance in addressing the problem of elitism, as the next two chapters will argue. Of course, Adorno’s diagnosis of the rise of passivity among the masses (and the attendant decline of taste, which he sees as an active mode of reception) has been much criticized, and often with good grounds. Indeed, it seems that Adorno’s hard-and-fast distinctions between activity and passivity, production and consumption, are both limiting and untenable—especially if we follow Adorno himself in envisioning a field of subject-object relations where subject and object are not so alienated. As the Birmingham School of cultural studies has established, there is much opportunity to complicate Adorno’s views and to uncover local flows of consumer power.

Adorno is certainly limited by his commitment to a Kantian definition of taste, by which taste necessarily operates autonomously and is primarily the property of an individual. His considerable pessimism regarding the potential for change, as well as the

elitist dimensions of his thought that dismiss the masses as the site of any real change, can be traced to this Kantian standpoint. Yet despite these limitations, Adorno's conception and diagnosis of taste has much to offer a theorization of sensory rhetoric, especially when we interpret it as an elaboration of Marx's call for sensory liberation. For one thing, his elaboration of the imbrications of taste with the commodity form, while admittedly rigid, is not necessarily so. If we dismiss his totalizing view of commodification, his diagnosis still challenges us to attend to the mechanisms of passivity in more nuanced ways. Moreover, Adorno offers a political standpoint by which to diagnose and imagine the political potentials of taste considered as a rhetorical capacity: For Adorno, developing Marx's latent environmentalism, a healthy capacity for taste opens one onto a more vital connection with human and nonhuman life that registers its actualities and its potentials. The distinction he offers between the dispositions for passive, non-digestive consumption and active, digestive enjoyment also offers a potential means for distinguishing rhetorically empowering from rhetorically disempowering tastes, a distinction which I will put to the test in my final two chapters. Finally, Adorno also points us further than did Marx toward a bodily, sensory understanding of critical capacity. Unlike the Kant of the *Critique of Judgment*, taste for Adorno was both a bodily and sensory capacity whose cultivation and operations were not fully conscious and which thus opened an alternative pathway for connecting with the multiplicity of the material world that countered the tide of Enlightenment thought. If we can recuperate from Marx and the Frankfurt School a posthumanist notion of emancipation, then, we can also start to unpack the potential of their emancipatory methods of "immanent critique" to join the environmentalist project of new materialism.

In the next section, I will offer a brief genealogical sketch of the notion of immanent critique, which I contrast with a Kantian, transcendent style of critique. Then I will argue that a re-engagement of the concept of immanent critique promises to inform contemporary material and rhetorical theory. The next chapter goes on to explore this potential with the example of *Fast Food Nation*.¹³

Affirming Critique

In his well-known public essay on the topic, Immanuel Kant defines Enlightenment as “man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity”—the inability and lack of courage “to use one’s understanding without guidance from another” (n.p.). Michel Foucault praises this essay, whose practice of critique, he believes, is distinct from that of Kant’s three formal *Critiques* in functioning as an “ontology of the present” (cf. Hendricks 222). Kant’s essay, Foucault enthuses, functions as “an act of defiance, as a challenge, as a way of limiting these arts of government and sizing them up, transforming them, of finding a way to escape from them or, in any case, a way to displace them” (44-5). Despite its dissensual spirit, however, Kant’s practice of critique is problematic in that it continues to rely upon an analytic of truth that “appeals to the conditions of possibility of true knowledge and universally valid moral laws” (Hendricks 223). Kant’s vision of Enlightenment as a freedom “to use one’s understanding without guidance from another” in fact limits freedom to a pre-existent, universal grounds of understanding, one not admitting of variation or participatory reworking. It is a similar, transcendental style of critique that Diane Davis objects to in Kenneth Burke, arguing that Burke’s commitment to critique “retains an almost absolute faith in the power of reason” (33), overlooking

Sigmund Freud’s insight that “no flex of reason, no amount of proper critique, can secure the interpersonal distance on which Burke had pinned his hopes” (35).¹⁴

For Davis and Foucault alike, we must resist many of the impulses of transcendent critique, including the dichotomy it strikes between subject and object, its commitment to universal standards of evaluation, its faith in reason as the primary modality of analysis, and its aspirations for, as Davis puts it, “interpersonal *distance*.” Foucault distinguishes his own, immanent practice of critique from Kant’s transcendental approach. Rather than proceeding from a stable, universal grounds of knowledge or moral law, Foucault continually emphasizes the historicity of any such grounds—indeed, his genealogical style of critique quite directly examines the historical conditions of various articulations of power-knowledge. Foucault further departs from a transcendent, Kantian style of critique in resisting the tendency to prescribe actions, refusing to take on the role either of the “prophet” who declares “here is what you must do—and also: this is good and this is not” or of the “universal intellectual” who claims the right to speak for others (cf. Hendricks 212). This critical attitude is part and parcel of Foucault’s overall view, discussed in chapter 1, that political change must proceed immanently.

Foucault’s commitment to immanent critique as an alternative to transcendent critique can be traced back to Marx, who himself developed the concept from Hegel. For Marx, “immanent critique evaluates reality not with alien principles of rationality but with those intrinsic to reality itself” (Buchwalter 254). As in the later genealogical approaches of Foucault, Nietzsche, and others, in Marx, “rather than providing the *sources* of critique, value systems, conceptions of human nature and allegedly scientific discourses are themselves turned into *objects* of critique” (Celikates 113, emphasis

added). As such, the criteria for immanent critique “are not derived abstractly by appealing to moral principles, an a-historical human nature or scientific truths” (Celikates 113). Departing from Kant, Marx held that political evaluation cannot rely on concepts alone: “Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself,” he says, “so one cannot judge . . . a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production” (*Contribution* n.p.). Instead of attending to an era’s self-consciousness alone, Marx sought a different source of immanent critique, one seeking out contradictions and tensions in existing reality. As such, he attended, on the one hand, to the contradictions *within* material reality (and between the forces and relations of production), and on the other hand, those *between* material reality and reigning ideals. Marx also departs from the Kantian commitment to a stable standard of critique, which situates an emancipator in a privileged, transcendent position of knowledge and power in relation to the emancipated: “The emancipation of the working class,” he announces, “must be the work of the working class itself” (cf. Celikates 105). Marx explicitly rejects the idea that “workers are too uneducated to emancipate themselves and must first be freed from above by philanthropic big bourgeois and petty bourgeois” (cf. Celikates 105). For Marx, an evaluative standard must emerge from a people’s attention to the tensions and contradictions of reality.

That said, Marx’s vision of sensory emancipation outlined above does seem to offer a somewhat external (if not transcendent) standard of critique. Still, the generality and vagueness of that standard (which, I argued, distinguished it from Enlightenment

elitism), admits of countless potential ways of articulating emancipation. As such, the notion of sensory emancipation well supported Marx's commitment to an experimental, inventive relation to the future. Articulating the mission of a journal for which he was an editor (the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher*), Marx declared "we do not attempt dogmatically to prefigure the future, but want to find the new world only through critique of the old" (cf. Celikates 115). The critique Marx invites for his journal, then, is far from the transcendent, prescriptive kind toward which Kant gestures: "Up to now the philosophers had the solution of all riddles lying in their lectern, and the stupid uninitiated world had only to open its jaws to let the roast partridges of absolute science fly into its mouth"(cf. Celikates 115). For Marx, critique does not position itself apart from some "stupid uninitiated world," and nor are premade "roast partridges" its proper aim or product: "the designing of the future and the proclamation of ready-made solutions for all time is not our affair"(cf. Celikates 115). Quite in contrast, Marx announces, "we can express the credo of our journal in one word: the self-clarification (critical philosophy) of the struggles and wishes of the age"(cf. Celikates 115). For Marx, there are two components to "the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age": critique takes as its object both human experience and material relations. As Seyla Benhabib characterizes Marx's critique of political economy, it is "both a critique of a specific *mode* of theoretical and social *consciousness*, and a critique of a specific *mode of social production*"(cf. Celikates 112). As we have seen above, Marx held that an era's modes of consciousness (e.g., its sensory forms) and its modes of production (e.g., material forms) work in tandem to generate the world, and the task of critique is to interrogate them in tandem.¹⁵

Marx's notion of immanent critique greatly influenced critical theory. As Horkheimer and Adorno lament, the culture industry's reduction of the masses "to mere objects of the administered life . . . preforms every sector of modern existence including language and perception," (cf. Antonio 334). Yet this condition cannot be evaluated and reworked from the outside. Rather, available linguistic and perceptual forms must be turned to critical work: "Again and again *in history*," Horkheimer notes, "ideas have cast off their swaddling clothes and struck out against the social systems that bore them" (cf. Antonio 338). Marx offers a similar heuristic for critique, pointing us toward how not just existing ideas, but also existing sensory forms and their attendant material forms might be reworked with emancipatory effects. By attending to the transformative potential of existing forms of thought, sensation, and material life, immanent critique recognizes and affirms the potential of the given world to rework its own givenness. Defined in a nutshell, immanent critique "attacks social reality from its own standpoint, but at the same time criticizes that standpoint from the perspective of its historical context" (Antonio 338). This style of critique "exposes the way reality conflicts not with some 'transcendent' concept of rationality but with its own avowed norms" (Buchwalter 254). To this extent, it rests not on stable grounds but grounds that are continually being appropriated and reworked.

Many critical theorists follow Marx in their approach to immanent critique, drawing out the "contradiction between the existent and ideology," which in turn "transforms legitimations into emancipatory weapons" (Antonio 338). Adorno, however, believed that the potential to trace those contradictions had been lost with the unfolding of late capitalism and the rise of the culture industry. For Adorno, the possibility for

today's reigning ideals to conflict with today's realities of suffering—a possibility that Marx's mode of immanent critique had exploited—has receded as capitalist ideology has seeped into every arena of consciousness and culture. We have become so pervasively deluded in our concepts, logics, and even sensory capacities that we can no longer draw out contradictions between consciousness and material reality. Adorno thus dismisses as “naive” the thought that “unflinching immersion in the object will lead to truth by virtue of the logic of things” (cf. Freyenhagen 177).

Transformative critique calls for something other than “unflinching immersion in the object,” and Adorno offers at least two ways for critique to help us “flinch,” as it were. First, as my explication in the previous section suggests, Adorno follows Marx in implicitly offering a usefully underarticulated, vitalist vision of human-nonhuman emancipation that could guide critique—Adorno and Horkheimer, like Marx, critique the current conditions of reality for the alienation it effects between people and things. Second, and more broadly, Adorno locates a critical orientation in our ability to discern suffering. As Horkheimer states, critical thought is “grounded on the misery of the present” (cf. Freyenhagen 178). Although “this misery does not provide the image of its abolition,” reckoning with it does offer the potential for change (cf. Freyenhagen 178). It is such a reckoning that Adorno calls for repeatedly in his work, most famously in his declaration that there can be no poetry after Auschwitz. For Adorno, the pressing task of critique is to reveal how the current conditions of consciousness and material life could enable evils such as Auschwitz. The gesture of critique in this vein is not so much judgment as explanation: Auschwitz is not offered as a source of a transcendent standard by which to judge the present. Rather, it is given as an evil, and critique is turned to the

task of explanation, of tracking how such an evil could occur. Adorno's notion of critique, while not transcendent, differs from Marx's immanent critique in that "it does not require that there is a gap between a social world and the norms used to defend it" (Freyenhagen 186). Rather, Adorno's "critical standard consists in the objective bads generated by this world and is independent of whether or not these bads are recognised as such by its defenders" (Freyenhagen 186).¹⁶ For Adorno, those who are suffering may not be able to recognize their own suffering, or emancipate themselves.

Whether highlighting Marx's model of immanent critique or Adorno's complications thereof, critical theory has supported a distinctly un-Kantian, non-transcendent vision of critique. As Robin Celikates puts it in a recent edited volume on critique:

Theories can only claim to be critical if they are aware of their own historicity, avoid dogmatic and idealist appeals to abstract norms, and self-reflexively question their own status as well as their political implications. . . . a second lesson for contemporary critical theory is that it cannot proceed in a purely normative way, but has to aim at integrating philosophical, historical and sociological aspects. Focusing on obstacles to individual and collective practices of self-understanding and empowerment, it has to encompass both the diagnosis and the critique of current forms of socially induced suffering. If critique is to understand itself as a form of self-reflection anchored in the actual experiences and struggles of our times, it has to avoid constructing an asymmetrical opposition between science and critique, on the one hand, and the purportedly naive perspective of "ordinary" agents, on the other hand. (Celikates 114-115)

Despite the promise here, there are limitations to critical theorists' embrace of immanent critique. For one thing, the dream of immanent critique is not easily realized—critics regularly revert to assuming a transcendent attitude even while attempting to resist it—Foucault perhaps protests too much in his repeated disavowals of the role of the prophet. Further, and especially in Adorno's case, once the project of immanent critique is reworked in response to the conditions of late capitalism, the object and addressee of critique alike become unclear.

Perhaps most disconcerting, the vision of immanent critique laid out in the passage above often tends to fall short of its potential to rework existing power dynamics because of its reliance on a negative movement that situates it in opposition to the status quo, dominant thought, or some other reigning force. John Muckelbauer helps us to see this. As he characterizes it, much “postmodern” critique seeks to effect change while emphasizing its own immanence:

Against the privileging of a universal truth, it emphasizes the contingency of opinion. Against the privileging of the object, it promotes things like point-of-view and perspective. It denies the possibility of unmediated facts (and highlights interpretation), criticizes the concept of universality (and accentuates contingency), censures the western tradition's privileging of the mind (and praises a renewed interest in the body), etc. (7)

Despite all this, Muckelbauer notes, such critique most often interpolates an “other” to which it remains in binary opposition. Operating oppositionally, postmodern critique attempts to “change the traditional privileges, to overcome the conventional power structure by inverting the valence within any given binary” (7). This doesn't ultimately

effect much change: “through this response, the concept that has traditionally been negated and refused becomes dominant”—but such a movement merely repeats the allegedly oppressive logic, rather than reworking it (7).

In light of the failures of contemporary critique, Muckelbauer forwards a reorientation to critical practice: “The challenge,” he announces, “is to invent a practical style of engagement that doesn’t just repeat the structure of negation and refusal” (12). Such a style of engagement would not, of course, be a subversive “other” or alternative to dialectical kinds of criticism, which would orient to dialectic in the same way as oppositional critique. Rather, it seeks a different *style* of dialectic:

if the negative movement of dialectical change cannot be overcome and can only be repeated, this does not mean that all repetition is the same or that all repetition necessarily reproduces the same. Instead, it only means that everything hinges on *how* one repeats . . . in any particular encounter, everything depends on one’s *orientation within* repetition. (12-13, emphasis altered)

Muckelbauer offers “affirmative repetition” as an orientation to repetition that is at once less oppositional and more productive than the postmodern style of critique he describes. Working from Deleuze, the principle move of affirmative repetition in approaching its object is to ask not what it is, but what it can do. Rather than advocating, critiquing, or developing a concept, that is, affirmative repetition engages that concept as a *relay* to another place. An “affirmative inclination,” Muckelbauer says, marks “an experimentation, an attempt to explore, for instance, what a particular concept can become capable of by connecting it elsewhere” (43). It is not that negativity is entirely gone in affirmative repetition. As Muckelbauer notes in the passage above, “the negative

movement of dialectical change cannot be overcome and can only be repeated.”

Affirmative repetition is simply a different orientation to the negative movement of dialectic, one that is not oppositional, but rather receptive. Though affirmative repetition does not transcend negativity, it is also not *reducible* to a movement of negation, in that it adopts a receptive stance to the status quo.

Bennett likewise objects to the oppositional stance characteristic of critical theory’s practices of demystification and exposé. She worries, in particular, about their rhetorical efficacy: demystification, she says, “does not reliably produce moral outrage,” and even if it does, “this moral outrage may or may not spark ameliorative action” (xv). “A relentless approach toward demystification,” Bennett asserts, “works against the possibility of positive formulations” (xv). For Bennett, it is not that we must throw out critique, but rather that we must resist its “relentless” negativity. To do so, we must supplement critique with another kind of response: “we need both critique *and* positive formulations of alternatives, alternatives that will themselves become the objects of later critique and reform” (xv, emphasis added). Echoing Muckelbauer’s vision (and performance) of affirmative repetition, Bennett says, “the capacity to detect the presence of impersonal affect requires that one is caught up in it. One needs, at least for a while, to suspend suspicion and adopt a more open-ended comportment” (xv).¹⁷

As a rejection of the negative, oppositional valences of “critique” and an embrace of the receptive, generative and inventional valences of “affirmation” and “response” has taken root among rhetorical theorists like Muckelbauer, Davis, Hawk, Rickert, and many others, discussion of critique has waned. This is particularly so on the English studies side of the field, perhaps given its traditional emphasis on the generative work of

invention and composition. But critique, to my mind, has been too readily abandoned, especially as the field turns to an interest in the rhetoricity of affect, sensation, and materiality—points where a tradition of critique reaching at least as far back as the Enlightenment can offer insight. It may indeed be the case, as Muckelbauer charges, that much work presenting under the label of “immanent” or “postmodern” critique falls into a limiting, oppositional relation with the privileged side of a binary. Certainly many efforts at demystification break with the commitments of immanent critique to an analysis based on unstable, changeable standards and to resisting binaries of emancipator and emancipated. Nonetheless, it should be clear from my brief genealogy that the *concept* of immanent critique reaches beyond this—a simple repetition of binaries is not what immanent critique seeks, but rather a richer reworking of the world on the world’s own (problematic) terms.

To the extent that demystification reverts to the adoption of a transcendent, privileged perspective on the world and a commitment to revealing truth, it is not an instance of immanent critique (though as I will argue in the next chapter, there is often an immanent critique to be discerned even in such transcendent posturing). If the vision of immanent critique has failed to be realized to the extent that it might, this is not grounds to abandon it altogether. Rather, we would do well to return to the concept of immanent critique, and to continue to ask how this difficult style of engagement can be practiced. Indeed, today’s contemporary projects of attuning to nonhuman agency, of affirmative repetition, of generative response, can be assisted by a (re)engagement with the legacy of immanent critique—with its failures and successes alike.

If immanent critique has often degenerated into an orientation of negativity and disavowal, this is perhaps largely due to the care that it takes to avoid the tyrannies of specific, positive prescription. As we saw above, Adorno focuses on negative response exactly because of an impulse to resist pre-programming positive change. Sometimes, a negative orientation is needed (for these or other purposes). Still, as Bennett and Muckelbauer maintain, it is important not to get caught up in a *wholly* negative, oppositional attitude, as critical theory, and Adorno most especially, often seem to. Here, a return to Marx can be instructive. Even if, as Adorno believes, we are no longer at a point where our era's values conflict productively with realities of suffering, Marx continues to offer resources for an immanent kind of critique that is not so wholly negative and pessimistic as Adorno's. First, as my work in this chapter has suggested, Marx, in his commitment to immanent critique, has left us valuable and underutilized evaluative tools, such as the examination of co-implicated sensory and material forms. Though these forms might provide a heuristic for oppositional critique, they could equally do so for an affirmative orientation that attends, as Muckelbauer suggests, to their "singular rhythms," the potential of these forms to relay us elsewhere. (The next chapter will argue that such an affirmative orientation is partly at work in contemporary food exposés, even those that suspiciously take industrial food as their target.) Second, Marx has left us a broad, productively underarticulated and positive standard of critique in his posthumanist vision of emancipation, prompting critique to seek out more vibrant relations among humans and nonhumans. Marx, like contemporary new materialists, invites us not only to oppose problematic forms, but also to rework existing sensory and

material forms to emancipatory ends. I will note how *Fast Food Nation* and *Super Size Me* alike do so.

Another crucial reason to retain a scholarly engagement with the legacy of critique is that people still do it. Critique, demystification, and exposé remain a widespread mode of public rhetoric, whether we look to documentaries (as I will in the next chapter), blogs, Facebook exchanges, or the like. These forms of critique are recognized and embraced as part of a long rhetorical tradition—they have sparked, or are believed to have sparked, real, concrete, and positive change in the past (Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, which inspired legal change, offers an example, which the next chapter will discuss). As such, critique, demystification, and exposé carry with them a certain rhetorical energy that might be tapped even while reworking their problematic tendencies. In embodying “traditional,” even sometimes rather Kantian, performances of critique, these interventions should not be dismissed as passé and impotent. Rather, as my next chapter will model, we might turn affirmatively to critique itself, asking what it is capable of, what it relays us to, rather than (only) where it has failed.

Conclusion

An attunement to critique in a sensory, generative key can assist with the project of affirming critique. Through a critical practice of sensation, both scholars and activists can revivify immanent critique, moving away from a solely negative orientation even while maintaining the commitment of Marx, Foucault, Adorno, and many others to resisting a prophetic stance, resisting a tendency, as Marx put it, “dogmatically to prefigure the future.” In this, it is worth noting that immanent critique has its efficacy exactly *if* the thought of new materialism is correct—the belief that we can and should cultivate our

response-ability to nonhuman vitality. If we cannot get outside of our sensory worlds to evaluate them, we can deploy Marx's emancipatory standard to enrich them, seeking out sensory and material forms that promote human-nonhuman intimacy—even while acknowledging that we cannot describe and call for such forms in advance. A sensory approach to critique can, in short, enable a positive, affirmative orientation that yet remains committed to the risks and uncertainties of invention.

As I will argue in the next chapter, Marx, put in contact with Latour, can point the way to a sensory practice of immanent critique, one which, to use Latour's terms, is eminently "compositionist." For the task of affirming critique to be begun in the next chapter, I propose and work from a broad definition of critique, one that encompasses more than intellectual interventions alone. With Adorno's vision of art and critique in mind, I provisionally define critique in general as any performance or practice (sensory practices included) that strikes up a tension with reality, that brings us to "flinch." This tension could be sparked immanently or transcendentally, negatively or affirmatively, oppositionally or appropriatively, suspiciously or erotically—or, more likely, as some mix of these supposed "poles." Tension with reality could be sparked through judgment, description, or intervention, though these three cannot be cleanly separated out from one another. Critique could proceed, as Kant's did, from a fixed emancipatory standard, judging reality in connection to that standard. It could proceed from a more open-ended emancipatory standard, like Marx's. Critique, for example, could generate tension by figuring reality as something constructed rather than natural or given, a movement characteristic of both genealogy and the Latourian network tracing to be discussed in the next chapter. Tensions with reality could likewise emanate from an inquisitive or

questioning orientation, or a suspicious one, or a curious one. An affirmative orientation to reality is also a means by which a tension could be struck up—in this sense, we can understand affirmative reading as a kind of critique insofar as it experiments with how a concept, logic, or object in the world might relay us elsewhere.

Narrowing in from this conception of critique in general, I will frame my next chapter by articulating specifically a sensuous style of critique that is immanent, compositionist, and emancipatory in Marx's proto-posthumanist sense. Both Marx and Latour, I suggest, point us to this sort of critique, which strikes up its tensions with reality through an everyday practice of sensation that registers the constructed (rather than natural) status of the world and that thereby cultivates a compositionist orientation to it. This kind of sensuous critique, I propose, is increasingly emerging out of the more traditional, exposé style of American food journalism. While industrial food exposés such as *Fast Food Nation* explicitly situate themselves as gestures of demystification and at times adopt a transcendental approach to critique, their contact with their object of food brings them toward a more sensuous style of critique, and one that is notably immanent, compositionist, and posthumanist. While this critique may adopt an oppositional or an affirmative orientation, in either case, it carries a compositionist energy.

Although I will focus on the transformative potential of sensuous critique as it is emerging in today's publics, I want it to be clear that I am not simply championing this style of critique as some ultimate best practice. In proposing that we affirm critique, I am proposing that we re-orient to critique on the whole. Critique may be more oppositional or more affirmative in its orientation. It may be more transcendent or more immanent. And typically it is a mix of these. What I want to do with my case study in the next

chapter is to attune us to one instance of what critique can do, where it can relay us, with the multiple and even conflicting orientations it adopts.

The dilemma posed at the end of the previous chapter was whether sensation could be a viable rhetorical site for resistance and revolution. Considered together, Schiller, Marx, Adorno, and Latour answer with an emphatic yes and offer a rich set of ways into theorizing sensation and taste as such. As I will suggest in the final two chapters, we can locate a new materialist, posthumanist elaboration of this “yes” in contemporary food activism. These efforts inform a theorization of sensory rhetoric and develop the potential for an immanent, sensory critique that could draw from both “traditional” and “new” materialist sources. However, we will see, troubling challenges of elitism and paternalism continue to haunt today’s latest articulations of sensory rhetoric. My final chapter will consider how a compositionist approach to sensory rhetoric can help resist these.

Chapter 3 Notes

¹ For these criticisms, see “Compositionist Manifesto” and *We Have Never Been Modern*.

² See, e.g., Henning 2014.

³ Schiller calls upon the state to address this problem by carefully balancing the needs of individuals and particular problems with the needs of larger systemic problems.

⁴ See McLellan for an elaboration, *Marx Before Marxism*, 92, cf. Rose 74.

⁵ See Rose 74, who makes a similar point.

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, this and all the quotes that follow from *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, are drawn from the primary, Benton translation made available on Marxists.org (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/epm/3rd.htm>). No page numbers are available. This line is also translated: “the *forming* of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present,” (n.p.) by the alternative, Mulligan translation provided on Marxists.org.

⁷ One might resist Marx on this point in light of the inescapably synesthetic character of the senses. But Marx’s objective is not to so much to draw hard and fast distinctions between each sense—which after all he believes exists in its distinctness only thanks to “the entire history of the world.” Instead, his point should be taken as a means to draw out the fact that each of the five, relatively distinct senses that has emerged out of human history open us onto its own, distinct plane of being—even if those planes of being overlap. Marx is enthusiastic about the richness of human-nonhuman relations that the five relatively distinct senses enable—his dismay over the dominance of “the single sense of having” seems to come not only from the way that sense severs human and objective realms, but also from the *singularity* of that sense. For clarity, I here used the alternative,

Mulligan translation provided on Marxists.org. The Benton translation renders this passage: “The specific character of each essential power is precisely its *specific essence*, and therefore also the specific mode of its objectification, of its *objectively actual*, living *being*” (n.p.).

⁸ It is true that Marx expresses horror at the prospect of an object’s taking on “grotesquely” human-like qualities. Indeed, it often seems that, for all Marx’s emphasis on the vitality of nonhuman things, this vitality always emanates from human relations, rather than also from objects themselves. Still, to the extent that Marx’s vision of emancipation relies on a deeper engagement with material life, he opens the way for the more vital views of the object emergent in new materialist thought today—while yet reminding us that the vitality of the object is not always something to be celebrated. What’s more, in articulating the nature/culture schism which worries Latour in terms of the historically conditioned material form of the commodity, Marx offers a more material diagnosis of the problem, and thus potentially has much to offer Latour’s vision of a *Dingpolitik* than Latour, who focuses on our attitudes about things, and less on how we might change our historically conditioned possibilities for engaging them in the first place.

⁹ Again, I use the alternative, Mulligan translation for clarity. The Benton translation renders this passage: “We have seen that man does not lose himself in his object only when the object becomes for him a *human* object or objective man. This is possible only when the object becomes for him a *social* object, he himself for himself a social being, just as society becomes a being for him in this object” (n.p.).

¹⁰ Marx is undeniably speciesist in characterizing the *non-social* existence of man as an animalistic mode of being. However, his attention to the senses begins to lead him away from an essentialist view of human nature, which unsettles any fast and sharp distinctions between humans and animals.

¹¹ For an elaboration of this, see Rose 95.

¹² For other vitalist readings of Adorno and especially the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, see, e.g., Jay 1984; Rentsch 2000, cf. Henning 2014.

¹³ Indeed, Adorno himself explicitly elaborates a notion of immanent critique that could be put in conversation with that of Marx and Latour outlined below.

¹⁴ For the brief genealogical sketch of critique in this paragraph and the several that follow, I am greatly indebted to Karin de Boer and Ruth Sonderegger's 2012 edited volume, *Conceptions of Critique in Modern and Contemporary Philosophy*. The arguments about Foucault in this and the next paragraph are elaborated in Christina Hendricks' essay in that volume, "Prophecy and *Parresia*: Foucauldian Critique and the Political Role of Intellectuals."

¹⁵ I am grateful to Celikates for the sketch of Marx's view of immanent critique in this and the previous paragraph.

¹⁶ See Freyenhagen for an elaboration of the argument that Adorno's critique is neither immanent nor transcendent. In contrast to Freyenhagen, I suggest that Adorno points us toward a different mode of immanent critique, rather than fully breaking from it.

¹⁷ As mentioned at the start of this chapter, Bennett also worries that demystification "presumes that at the heart of any event or process lies a human agency that has illicitly been projected on things" (xiv). As my explication of Marx and the Frankfurt School

above suggests, however, this objection can be complicated when we consider the anti-humanist stance that Marx, Adorno, and Horkheimer shared, seeing human being as having no fixed essence, but rather emergent in fundamental entanglement with nonhuman things and environments.

CHAPTER 4

REASSEMBLING THE SENSES

Like the Scottish belletrists, today's American public is undergoing a taste craze—this time, returning to the original, bodily realm of taste. In popular books, TV shows, films, and websites, cooking and tasting are emerging as respected arts, sciences, and hobbies. A vibrant digital food culture is emerging and thriving, with recipes and images of food and cooking circulating on websites, personal blogs, and all forms of social media.¹ Consumers are increasingly valuing foods that are local, organic, sustainable, and natural.² With the explosion of “foodie” culture, direct-to-consumer food sales have surged, and great enthusiasm proliferates around local restaurants, food trucks, and farmer's markets.³ My final two chapters will track how today's public embrace of taste extends the thinking and enactment of the sensory arena of rhetoric traced in the previous three chapters, marking a new installment in the sensory history of rhetoric.

The current chapter examines the turn to taste in the realm of food journalism. Growing as it has out of a reaction to the industrialization of food production, exposé-style food journalism in the United States can be traced at least as far back as Upton Sinclair's 1906 *The Jungle*. Yet the more recent explosion of food writing and documentary can be roughly dated to the publication of Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*. Serialized in *Rolling Stone* in 1999, published as a New York Times bestseller in 2001, and rereleased with a new afterword in 2012, *Fast Food Nation* has been adapted into a children's book, a 2006 fiction film of the same name, and more closely rendered

in the 2008 Oscar-nominated documentary *Food, Inc.* This chapter examines the text as paradigmatic of a new approach to critique that taps the inventive rhetorical powers of sensation. In what follows, I will engage *Fast Food Nation* in this key, demonstrating how it develops on previous rhetorical treatments of sensation from Hume to Latour, and helps us progress in the question of the evaluation of taste. I frame this inquiry by culling a sensuous, compositionist style of critique from an engagement with Marx and Latour. I will then turn to *Fast Food Nation* as an example of such a critique at work, one that at once contributes to a sensory *theory* of rhetoric and models a sensory *practice* of rhetoric as compositionist critique.

Sensuous Critique

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels, speaking of their predecessor Ludwig Feuerbach, lament that Feuerbach's important attention to material life was ultimately limited by the logics of idealism. Feuerbach, like Hegel, envisioned emancipation in purely intellectual terms, as a freeing from material and ideological shackles into full intellectual self-possession. As a counterpart to Feuerbach's "idealist" materialism, Marx and Engels situated communism as a "practical materialism," that aimed to conduct emancipation at the concrete, worldly level explored above. Thus they famously remarked,

it is only possible to achieve real liberation in the real world by employing real means . . . slavery cannot be abolished without the steam engine and the mule and spinning-jenny, serfdom cannot be abolished without improved agriculture, and . . . in general, people cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain

food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quantity and quality” (*German Ideology* 61).

To achieve the vibrancy of human-nonhuman relations that Marx associates with emancipation, then, requires not only a shift in human thought and values, but also a complex transformation in human-nonhuman relations.

Critique, Marx believed, could assist both movements. Though implicit in Marx’s work, an immersive, sensory practice of immanent critique is discernible. This potential manifestation of immanent critique we can locate (perhaps ironically) in the more traditional, negative critique Marx and Engels perform in their disavowal of their predecessor, Feuerbach. As becomes clear in Marx and Engels’ critique of Feuerbach’s inadequate sensory attunement, practical materialism, oriented as it is to “practically attacking and changing existing things” (62), depends on a certain *sensory* disposition. Marx and Engels complain that Feuerbach gleefully celebrates the natural world as a place of intellectual retreat and spiritual healing in a way that essentializes it, failing to register its fundamentally contingent and historical character:

He does not see how the sensuous world around him is not a thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and of the state of society an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations. (62)

Feuerbach, in short, lacks a perception of the sensuous world as something that is composed by specific economic and social relations, and that might be composed differently. In a series of imaginative examples, Marx and Engels elaborate on Feuerbach’s limited sensory capabilities. First, they note that

the cherry-tree, like almost all fruit trees, was, as is well known, only a few centuries ago transplanted by commerce into our zone, and therefore only by this action of a definite society in a definite age it has become “sensuous certainty” for Feuerbach. (62)

Just as Feuerbach perceives the cherry tree to be a fixed given rather than a contingent historical composition, so even does he see the obviously built environment as an inert backdrop, rather than a lively, collaborative, and contingent manifestation of human-nonhuman relations:

in Manchester, for instance, Feuerbach sees only factories and machines, where a hundred years ago only spinning-wheels and weaving-looms were to be seen, or in the Campagna of Rome he finds only pasture lands and swamps, where in the time of Augustus he would have found nothing but the vineyards and villas of Roman capitalists. (63)

The same holds, finally, for Feuerbach’s perception of people:

when . . . he sees instead of healthy men a crowd of scrofulous, overworked and consumptive starvelings, he is compelled to take refuge in the “higher perception” and in the ideal of “compensation in the species” at the very point where the communist materialist sees the necessity, and at the same time the condition, of a transformation of both industry and the social structure. (64)

Lacking a perception of the world as a contingent construction of economic and social relations, Feuerbach fails at a basic, sensory level to see it as something deserving of questioning and re-composition. In other words, what Feuerbach lacks in Marx and Engels’ view is a *compositionist* modality of sensation. It is this limitation in his sensory

capacities that keeps Feuerbach from moving toward a more *practical* sort of materialism: “he never manages to conceive the sensuous world as the total living sensuous activity of the individuals *composing* it” (64, emphasis altered).

Though Bruno Latour does not explicitly engage the Marx outlined above, Latour’s overall project can be understood as an effort to “conceive the sensuous world as the total living sensuous activity of the individuals composing it.” Like Marx and Engels, Latour emphasizes the world as something continually being built, and his explication of the value of the concept of “construction” has marked resonance with Marx and Engels’ statements about Feuerbach. Like Marx and Engels, Latour embraces the notion that phenomena are constructed not to suggest that they are *false*, but rather to indicate that, like any construction site, they have a traceable origin that invites investigation. As he points out:

the great advantage of visiting construction sites is that they offer an ideal vantage point to witness the connections between humans and non-humans . . . [to be] struck by spectacle of all the participants working hard at the time of their most radical metamorphosis. . . . Even more important, when you are guided to any construction site you are experiencing the troubling and exhilarating feeling that *things could be different*, or at least that *they could still fail*—a feeling never so deep when faced with the final product. (*Reassembling* 88-9)

For Latour as for Marx, perceiving the world as something constructed means seeing it as composed rather than natural or given; as composed by a rich, ever-evolving entanglement of human and nonhuman forces; and as a composition that admits of being otherwise. Echoing Marx’s concern for a practical materialism, Latour insists that a sense

of the world as something constructed is crucial, since “if it’s already there, the practical means to compose it are no longer traceable” (*Reassembling* 163). In other words, if we cannot perceive change and the potential for change, we cannot begin the practical, generative work of politics (what Latour conceives as “the progressive composition of the common world,” *Reassembling* 254).

In his well-known declaration that we have never been modern, Latour elaborates on a compositionist orientation to the world by developing the view shared by Marx and Engels that the distinction between nature and culture is untenable. As thinkers and doers, Latour maintains, we cannot isolate human and nonhuman realms of reality, but rather must engage them in their complex entanglements. As he argues in “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?” the practice of critique thus far has failed to do so, instead falling into two tired and impotent critical gestures: one that situates certain objects as “fairies,” mere phantasms invented by a powerful human imagination, and another that declares particular objects to be “facts,” hard-and-fast determinants of the world and human being (237). Echoing Marx, Latour argues that both gestures diminish rich, worldly *things* into mere *objects* exerting or receiving a brute, deterministic force. The consequent worldview, Latour maintains, is particularly ill-fitted for addressing contemporary problems, such as global warming.

In place of these critical habits, Latour calls for a “second empiricism,” a “return to the realist attitude,” that would not distance us from objects, but bring us closer to them—so close that they become no longer isolated, recalcitrant matters of *fact*, but rather complex, vibrant matters of *concern*—matters which gather a complex array of associations and admit of participatory intervention (232). The new critical intimacy that

Latour envisions recalls Marx's practical materialism in that it would be generative rather than negative. It would involve "multiplication, not subtraction" (248), not exposing or debunking, but assembling "arenas in which to gather" (246). Such a critical practice, in short, would be a compositionist one, amounting to the continual construction and care of a political space, rather than the continual destruction of possibilities for political action.

Latour offers his text, *Reassembling the Social*, as a guidebook for this new, compositionist style of critique as he sees it embodied in actor-network theory (ANT).⁴ Here he choreographs a reconception of the "social" notably reminiscent of that offered by Marx and explicated above: in Latour's view, the social sciences have fallen into a bad habit of generating "social" explanations as a way of "owning" objects of study, protecting them from the encroachment of the natural sciences. But in all-too-common appeals to "larger" social forces, from oppression to capitalism, the specific activity of the social is never actually explained. Meanwhile, complex phenomena such as global warming are artificially split into two parts—a social or human part and a natural or material one (83-4). To avoid this bifurcation and better register the contingent and changeable character of the world, Latour proposes we abandon a conception of the social as "a special domain, a specific realm, or a particular sort of thing"—such as the realm of human relations, for instance (7). Rather, he proposes we retrieve the term's older sense, which indicates "a very peculiar *movement* of re-association and reassembling" (7, emphasis added). For Latour, the social is not a preexistent substance, item, or power whose presence explains a given phenomenon, but rather an associating activity that demands description and explanation in its own right. Like Marx, then, Latour urges attention to how sociability pervades and composes people's concrete

engagements with things in ways richer than simple determinism, so that those relations may be questioned and recomposed.

Tracing the social—what Latour terms “network tracing”—requires a commitment to a flat ontology. To explain an object of interest, rather than gesturing toward “larger” social forces, the investigator must simply follow actors as they associate and reassociate, generating new actors, associations, and assemblies. In Latour’s view, actor-network theory’s project of tracing associations not only entails greater knowledge of them, but also performs an associating or assembling function of its own. This is because any description of associations is always also an affirmation and enactment of them—as Latour puts it, “to study is always to do politics in the sense that it collects or composes what the common world is made of” (256). The academic disciplines each have a role to play in examining and thereby reassembling the common world, just as “different professions—electricians, carpenters, masons, architects, and plumbers—work . . . on the same building” (254). Because it engages the social as an activity of associating or assembling into collectives, network tracing can return scholars to the “mission of collecting” that was abandoned when the social came to be seen as an already assembled thing (a society). It can also overcome the bifurcation of nature and culture by attuning us to nonhuman entities in a new way—not as simply passive objects onto which human power is projected or as brute, deterministic forces (holdovers from certain interpretations of Marx), but rather as complex gatherings, continually evolving and exercising a range of generative effects in the world.

Recalling Marx and Engels’ suggestion that one must perceive and inhabit the world critically in order to change it, for Latour, this new practice of critique is immanent

rather than transcendent (“Compositionist” 475). As such, it demands a certain readjustment and refinement of sensation. Critique that tends to divide the world into a field of objects either passive or oppressive is accompanied by a wide-angle, long distance, and removed gaze—the sort of gaze that Marx and Engels attribute to Feuerbach, that Foucault expresses in the figure of the panopticon and that Kant figures in the sublime gaze. The alternative sensory disposition solicited in Latour’s version of ANT, on the contrary, supports an immersive, intimate kind of perception—one embodied in the figure of the ant itself. As Latour puts it, the antlike network tracer is “a blind, myopic, workaholic, trail-sniffing, and collective traveler” (*Reassembling* 9). The blindness of the network tracer is not an outright lack of vision, but rather a myopia, a narrowness and shortness of sight that demands a close engagement with one’s object—or more to the point, that demands engagement with only those objects that are close. Myopia likewise draws out the more intimate sensory modalities of smell and touch: the network tracer “sniffs” out a trail of associations, seeking to maintain an “empirical *grasp*” of them in their fleeting, transformative becoming (*Reassembling* 118, 159).⁵

For the work of network tracing, then, myopia marks an enhanced sensory ability rather than a disability. The myopic sensorium allows the network tracer to inhabit the world as constructed—to register things not as complete, self-present, and independent entities, but quite the contrary, as actor-networks. The network tracer’s sensory apparatus is thus calibrated to change—a crucial concern of network tracing, since the social, being a movement and not a thing, is “visible *only* when new associations are being made” (*Reassembling* 79). At the same time that it enables the network tracer to perceive the world as constructed, myopia enables her to participate in the construction of the world.

A narrow and shortsighted style of vision enables one, like an ant, to forge what Latour terms a “flat ontology”—a single, continuous trail—rather than leaping to new, “larger,” levels of explanation. As such, the myopic sensorium is generative, not passively receptive: receiving and generating come together in the act of tracing, which both follows and forges a path. The perception of the network tracer is an action-based perception—one that is grounded in a mobile, constitutive engagement with the world, rather than a removed gaze from afar.

The myopic sensorium also means a new kind of attunement to power. To build new kinds of collectives, collectives that better represent the human and nonhuman agencies of the social world, we must attune our senses to a kind of agency that the entire “modern” era has taught us to filter out. This is a task that Latour often codes in terms of audibility. From Latour’s perspective, the modern turn and Kant specifically have conducted “a process of desensitization to the *call* of nonhumans,” (“Morality” 313, emphasis added) that we are now challenged to reverse. As he concludes *Reassembling the Social*, “So many other entities are now knocking on the door of our collectives. Is it absurd to want to retool our disciplines to become sensitive again to the noise they make and to try to find a place for them?” (262).

Marx and Latour, then, gesture toward a style of critical activity that is intimate, immersive, and generative. Both see sensation as a site for harboring this sort of critique and for recomposing the world. Both also hope for a decline in a limited perceptual field wherein humans and nonhumans encounter one another as isolated, alienated entities merely interacting, rather than as mutually constitutive entities engaged in what Karen Barad terms intra-action. They envision an alternative world where the generative,

evolving, intra-active relations between humans and nonhumans are continually registered, embraced, and reassembled. Whereas Marx ultimately dreamt of a total revolution conducted by systematic economic transformation, Latour puts more stake in the local power of patient, myopic compositionist critique to slowly reassemble the world.

In Latour's view, constitutive debate about what composes and ought to compose the world should not be limited to academics, but be opened to broader publics—publics that might have significant nonhuman members (257). He helps to build such an opening in public art exhibitions (see, e.g., *Making Things Public, Iconoclash*). Latour also notes that, in a promising new development, the *objects* of public attention are increasingly being transformed into *things* (“Why Has Critique”). The remainder of this chapter will explore how contemporary food writing is not only participating in the critical transformation Latour notices and encourages, but also developing a broader, compositionist style of critique in distinctly sensory terms. In the next two sections, I will argue that in its genealogy and diagnosis of fast food, *Fast Food Nation* at once elaborates the rhetoricity of the sensory-material form of fast food and models an instructive compositionist critique of that form, following out a wealth of associations between fast food and other worldly formations. I will then take stock of what new assemblies of human-nonhuman publics Schlosser and other food documentarians have forged in their evolving articulations of the exposé and of compositionist critique more broadly. I will also return to the question of the standard of taste that concerned the previous two chapters.

Genealogy

In *Fast Food Nation*, Schlosser is concerned to make sensible—to make visible, audible, touchable, smellable, and of course, tasteable—the rapid changes that have characterized the American food system over the last half century. In this he evokes Latour’s and Marx’s views that the most promising political analyses track the “social” as a movement of associations. Also in line with Latour’s warning away from appeals to “larger” social forces to explain the composition of reality, Schlosser’s critique does not focus on a single entity, such as “corporate power,” neoliberalism, or even fast food itself, as the driving agent of damaging change, but rather on the complex sensory-material networks in which these and many other formations co-emerge in harmful ways. Although he highlights taste and sensation to a lesser extent than subsequent food writers and activists will, his investigation does much to establish fast food as an historical form that is at once sensory and material. At the same time that he takes on what we can recognize as a new materialist project of network tracing, then, he demonstrates how attention to the ontological connections Marx made between sensory and material form can help us understand sensory rhetoric in an ambient sense. As such, *Fast Food Nation* offers a stage for elaborating, tracking, and critiquing sensation as a rhetorical, world-building power.

Echoing Marx and Engels, *Fast Food Nation* establishes sensory and material forms as emergent from historical forces rather than being natural and fixed. Eliciting this “compositionist” perspective, Schlosser’s opening image is not of McDonald’s, but Cheyenne Mountain, a peak of Colorado’s Front Range that appears beautiful and untouched from a distance, but is in fact hollowed out within, the site of a 4.5-acre, high-

security combat operations complex for the U.S. Air Force. Like Cheyenne Mountain, the reporter implies, today's food may *appear* natural: "Fast food is now so commonplace," he notes, "that it has acquired an air of inevitability" (7). And yet, his investigation will invite us to re-see fast food, like Cheyenne Mountain (and like Marx and Engels' cherry tree), as nothing fixed and pristine, but rather an emergent historical outcome of a contingent play of forces, from Reagan-era economic policy to the form of the automobile—an historical outcome that now reproduces and reinvents many of those forces at least as much as it is composed by them. In Latourian terms, then, Schlosser emphasizes fast food not as a final product but as something constructed—something whose origin is traceable, whose sturdiness is remarkable, and whose composition admits of reassembly.

In the genealogical spirit, Schlosser narrates the origins of fast food not as a discrete birth but an emergence in a complex ecology. For instance, he establishes early in the book, that the sensory-material form of fast food co-emerged with the form of automobility—with both the automobile itself and the built environments prompted by the automobile. In the 1920s and 30s, cars became more affordable, and new federal support for road building was prompted by oil and automobile interests. Helping literally to forge the way for the automobile, General Motors purchased trolley systems in cities across the country, tearing up the tracks and establishing GM-supplied bus systems. The result of these and other developments was a pervasive spread of automobility throughout the habits and physical structures of everyday life. The shift toward automobility was particularly notable in southern California, where, in distinction from major Midwestern and Eastern cities, urban development was occurring in conjunction with the automobile

rather than public transit systems. “By 1940,” Schlosser reports, “there were about a million cars in Los Angeles, more than in forty-one states” (16). As automobility spread, inspiring the country’s first motels and drive-in banks, so also “a new form of eating place emerged”—the drive-in restaurant with its flashy, eye-catching exteriors and attractive, costumed carhops (16).

The material form of the drive-in restaurant would eventually take a significant turn, evolving into the drive-*thru* restaurant that is today paradigmatic of fast food. As Schlosser narrates it, this development involved a reassembly of material relations, one that McDonald’s itself took on: in 1948, the McDonald Brothers Burger Bar Drive-In “fired all their carhops” and revamped their wares: “they got rid of everything that had to be eaten with a knife, spoon, or fork. The only sandwiches now sold were hamburgers or cheeseburgers. The brothers got rid of their dishes and glassware, replacing them with paper cups, paper bags, and paper plates” (20). Fast food, then, emerged as a new form of eating, one that gathered things and was gathered by them in a novel way. Schlosser’s genealogy demonstrates the intra-active character of the sensory-material form of fast food, which both emerged from and helped feed new articulations of transportation and resource use.

As Schlosser traces the marketing of this new form, sensation emerges as rhetorical in several capacities. The large scale marketing of McDonald’s, he reports, began during the Baby Boom years. Ray Kroc, who had taken over from the McDonald brothers, developed the company’s existing family focus with a specific concentration on children. With television and Hollywood on the rise, Kroc “liked to tell people that he was really in show business, not the restaurant business” (41). And the company did

embrace show business, developing the Ronald McDonald mascot for their TV commercials, a personality who eventually rivaled Mickey Mouse in recognition value. As one children's advertising expert notes, "The key is getting children to see a firm . . . in much the same way as [they see] mom or dad, grandma or grandpa" (44). Such an accomplishment can mean a longtime customer—as Schlosser explains, "the growth in children's advertising has been driven by efforts to increase not just current, but also future, consumption. Hoping that nostalgic childhood memories of a brand will lead to a lifetime of purchases, companies plan 'cradle-to-grave' advertising strategies" (43).

McDonald's established its child-friendly ethos and its nostalgic allure not only in the spectacle of commercials and mascots, but also in the materiality of play. Kroc, an admirer and friend of Walt Disney, once envisioned a Disneyesque theme park dubbed "McDonaldsland," a dream that transmuted into a sea of restaurant playgrounds across the country—with McDonald's alone operating over 8 thousand playgrounds at the time of *Fast Food Nation's* publication: "Every month about 90 percent of American children between the ages of three and nine visit a McDonald's. The seesaw, slides, and pits full of plastic balls have proven to be an effective lure" (47). However, "when it gets down to brass tacks," as Schlosser relates from a *Brandweek* article on fast food marketing, "the key to attracting kids is toys, toys, toys" (47). Partnering with major toy brands to create collectibles, fast food companies have lured in children and adults alike, provoking the major "toy crazes" of recent years, including Pokemon cards, Cabbage Patch Kids, Tamagotchis, Furby, and Teenie Beenie Babies (47). A 1997 Teenie Beenie Baby giveaway, indeed, skyrocketed McDonald's Happy Meal sales from its typical 10 million

per week to 100 million Happy Meals in ten days—packaging food and fun for child and adult collectors alike.

All of these rhetorical efforts are cemented by the food product itself. As Schlosser notes, “During the two years I spent researching this book, I ate an enormous amount of fast food. Most of it tasted pretty good. That is one of the main reasons people buy fast food; it has been carefully designed to taste good” (9). Evident in Schlosser’s visit to the flavorist discussed in chapter 1, the sensory allure of fast food is indeed carefully designed—in fact, it is in a sense co-designed by consumer and marketer: the flavorist does not simply conjure new sensory experiences out of whole cloth, but rather develops flavors in conjunction with consumer research. The child consumers targeted by fast food form the primary target market, and children’s marketing techniques include shopping mall surveys, focus groups with children as young as 2, observation, child development literature, dream research, and internet surveys (44-5).

Key to cultivating lifetime consumers is not only the visual brand recognition enabled by consistent store appearances and mascots, but also a commitment to uniformity of flavor. Schlosser’s investigation elaborates on the tremendous efforts of the fast food industry to maintain sensory uniformity in their products. Potatoes, for instance, are sweetened in the fall and desweetened in the spring, to “correct” for seasonal variation (131). In such manner, carefully designed food products available for purchase across the globe go on to remain a part of a consumer’s sensorium for years, possibly a lifetime.

Marketing also seeps into lived environments, with fast food chains “now gaining access to the last advertising-free outposts of American life”: public schools (51).

Schlosser captures the spirit of this move in its own rhetoric. As one marketer put it, “Influencing elementary school students is very important to soft drink marketers . . . because children are still establishing their tastes and habits” (53-4). Another marketing text urged:

Discover your own river of revenue at the schoolhouse gates. . . .Whether it’s first-graders learning to read or teenagers shopping for their first car, we can guarantee an introduction of your product and your company to these students in the traditional setting of the classroom. (52)

As this rhetoric suggests, public schools serve a powerful locale for sensory rhetoric not only because they are where those who “are still establishing their tastes and habits” spend most of their day, but also because they are material sites of authority and education, offering an ideal environment for the interested sensory pedagogies of food corporations. And decreased public support for education is creating just the opening marketers need. Schlosser traces the growing number of marketing deals being established between fast food marketers and school districts strapped for cash—deals which include advertisements on school news stations, corporate-sponsored teaching materials, and annual sales quotas. Speaking to this last point, Schlosser relates that when Colorado Springs District 11 fell short of its sales quota of 70 thousand cases of Coca-Cola products, selling only 21 thousand, a memorandum was sent threatening school revenues and urging that Coke machines be made more readily accessible and students be allowed to bring Coke products into class. “Research shows that vendor purchases are closely linked to availability,” the memo advised. “Location, location, location is the key” (57).

As Schlosser implies, through larger built environments, fast food has a rhetorical power in that it helps to *invent* location as much as it simply exploits it:

The fast food chains feed off the sprawl of Colorado Springs, accelerate it, and help set its visual tone. They build large signs to attract motorists and look at cars the way predators view herds of prey. The chains thrive on traffic, lots of it, and put new restaurants at intersections where traffic is likely to increase. . . . Fast food restaurants often serve as the shock troops of sprawl, landing early and pointing the way. (65)

Fast food restaurants are militant in their ambient marketing, planning their stores with GIS technologies that one marketing publication touted as means to “spy on . . . customers with the same equipment once used to fight the Cold War” (66). The careful, high-tech selection of restaurant locations marks a further manipulation of the material world as a vehicle of persuasion and identification. But like food products, playgrounds, and schools, built environments do not simply *conduct* rhetorical forces, but also generate them. Here Thomas Rickert’s view of rhetoric as “not just played out in an environment but embedded complexly in and through it” (254) resonates. Elaborating on an example of the speed bump offered by Latour, Rickert argues that the speed bump does not simply *persuade* the driver to slow down in a more-than-symbolic way; it calls for a response in a way that helps invent the world—inviting some actions and ways of being and foreclosing others. The rhetoricity of the speed bump, then, is not locatable in the speed bump itself, but emergent from the worlds it enables and disables as it comes into contact with other things. Like the speed bump, the fast food restaurant does not simply persuade drivers to stop and purchase fast food, but shapes driving so that purchasing fast food is a

fitting and welcome part of it. Like the speed bump, fast food also does not do this of its own: as Latour notes, “the speed bump is ultimately not made of matter” but rather “full of engineers and chancellors and lawmakers, commingling their wills and their story lines with those of gravel, concrete, pain, and standard calculations” (208). In tracing the roadways, cars, subdivisions, sprawl, and marketing efforts that come together to make up fast food, Schlosser affirms this networked view. Rather than figuring the form of fast food as some centralized, domineering force that alone effects the mingling of eating and driving, he forges a flat ontology, tracing how multiple actors call each other into being and becoming, thereby inventing the world.⁶

Schlosser’s genealogy of fast food also demonstrates how sensory-material form can be implicated in invention not as a concentrated site of power, but rather as a qualitative field of being and becoming. In rhetorical terms, the sensory form of fast food invents not through its discrete location and physical properties—a level of invention connected with *topoi*—but instead through a generative field prior to location—a level of invention connected with *chora*. As Rickert explicates it, *chora* can be understood not as place itself (like *topoi*), but instead as either the material and matrix which gives rise to place (resonating with the ancient connection to the countryside surrounding the polis) or the operations of place-making (resonating with *chora*’s ancient connection to dance).⁷

In Schlosser’s genealogy, then, fast food is a sensory-material form characterized by its connection to childhood, car culture, speed, uniformity, and “readymade” consumables (to evoke Adorno). In the course of tracing what composes fast food, Schlosser also unpacks rhetoric in a sensory key. As fast food marketing suggests, sensory discernment or recognition marks a sort of bodily remembrance that may reach

back as far as childhood (indeed, that may be intimately connected with childhood), rendering sensory rhetoric a modality of human-nonhuman identification that shapes affect, desire, and craving. Exceeding the individual body of the perceiver, sensory rhetoric acts as a generative persuasive and ontological power emergent from and constitutive of food products, eating environments, built landscapes, and even cars and roadways.

Schlosser's genealogy of fast food also suggests that as a choric field not locatable in any one place, but itself giving rise to place, we cannot *point* to sensory rhetoric, assess and judge it as a discrete object with a removed, uninvolved gaze, but can only sense it in a myopic, immersive, and involved way. As such, sensory rhetoric poses a host of challenges, especially when it comes to seeking a standard of critical evaluation. Rising to these challenges, Schlosser's focus on fast food is not an attempt to point at a source or concentration of power, but rather an opening for tracing out a path—indeed, many paths—with results that are not merely descriptive, but also evaluative, interventionist, and compositionist. Unlike Enlightenment thinkers who tended to locate value in the object or subject alone, Schlosser sees subject and object as co-generators of value, operating not as independent powerhouses, but rather in intra-action with one another. Since he does not conceive of fast food as a self-present, isolated, and fixed identity, Schlosser evaluates fast food by tracing its effects and associations, rather than highlighting its internal flaws. Schlosser's focus on sensory-material form, moreover, offers an instructive guide for a practice of network tracing, evoking the diagnostic spirit of genealogy while grounding the immersive, sensory inquiry of compositionist critique.

Diagnostics

As Schlosser's initial genealogy indicates, the form of fast food has articulated with the forms of automobility and disposability in ways that pose a threat to human-nonhuman thriving, shifting sensory-material formations away from the more sustainable worlds invited by, for instance, public transportation and reusable dinnerware. In what follows, I isolate a number of additional connections Schlosser traces out from fast food in an investigative journey across the country—one that literally performs the myopic, trail-sniffing work of the network tracer, composing a map of fast food's questionable and harmful entanglements. Specifically, I consider the associations Schlosser's journey draws between the sensory-material form of fast food and altered forms of business, labor, production, bacteria, and animality. If taste is to be evaluated not for its internal properties (as many Enlightenment standards would suggest) but in terms of the generative ecologies it enters, the worlds it invites or composes (as post-Enlightenment standards suggest), the evaluation process will be necessarily detailed and slow. In the slow work of network tracing, Schlosser trains the reader to perceive fast food in the compositionist modality unpacked above, and an instructive sensory-material style of critique is modeled.

Uniformity

For Schlosser, fast food epitomizes the triumph of a certain aesthetic of uniformity, and this triumph proceeds ambiently, in the sensory-material environment that extends beyond food per se. Like the taste of food, the American landscape is increasingly mechanized and homogenized, as evident in Schlosser's drive through Colorado Springs:

The houses seem not to have been constructed by hand but manufactured by some gigantic machine, cast in the same mold and somehow dropped here fully made Every few miles, clusters of fast food joints seem to repeat themselves, Burger Kings, Wendy's and McDonald's, Subways, Pizza Huts, and Taco Bells, they keep appearing along the road, the same buildings and signage replaying like a tape loop. (60)

Here, the often separated aesthetic domains of beauty and flavor come together, with Americans' tastes for food reflecting the same appreciation of familiarity and comfort as evident in their taste for residential landscapes.

Like Schlosser's Cheyenne Mountain or Marx and Engel's cherry tree, there is a sensory critique at work here—Schlosser asks us to see uniformity and sprawl as something both constructed (rather than natural) and problematic, inviting reassembly. Closely echoing Marx and the Frankfurt School, Schlosser is concerned that the sensory-aesthetic impact of fast food mitigates against a more diverse, inventive, and mutually vibrant relations between people and things. But the trouble with uniformity is not merely a decline in vibrancy and sociability. The aesthetic of uniformity attendant to fast food has also characterized a business model that Schlosser connects to a resurgence of monopolistic power: “The basic thinking behind fast food has become the operating system of today's retail economy, wiping out small businesses, obliterating regional differences, and spreading identical stores throughout the country like a self-replicating code” (5). Whereas in the late 1960s, for instance, McDonald's purchased its beef from 175 suppliers, “a few years later, seeking to achieve greater product uniformity as it expanded, McDonald's reduced the number of beef suppliers to five” (136). As these and

other moves toward uniformity took root in business, the anti-trust measures that had been in play during most of the twentieth century were steadily undone. As Schlosser notes, “in 1970 the top four meatpacking firms slaughtered only 21 percent of the nation’s cattle” (137). After Reagan-era mergers, that figure has risen to 84 percent. With the revival of corporate enterprise of this scale, big business gains influence over government as well as governing powers of its own. Smaller competitors are pushed out, and a friendlier environment is created for the problematic forms of production, labor, contagion, and animality that Schlosser will gesture toward.

Production

As on the distribution side, the production of fast food typically involves a dearth of vibrant relations between humans and nonhumans, as demonstrated by Schlosser’s visit to another Latourian “construction site”: a massive potato processing facility. The pure size of the operation has a sublimely alienating effect for the reporter:

On the top floor, the staircase led to a catwalk, and beneath my feet I saw a mound of potatoes that was twenty feet deep and a hundred feet wide and almost as long as two football fields. . . . In the dim light the potatoes looked like grains of sand on a beach. This was one of seven storage buildings on the property. (130)

Schlosser explores the massive operation not only from the sublime and alienating gaze afforded by the catwalk, but also in the more myopic attitude of the network tracer, sniffing out the lively path of the potatoes through the facility. Here, Schlosser begins to echo Marx’s concerns about the “fetishism” of commodities:

Outside, tractor-trailers arrived from the field, carrying potatoes that had just been harvested. . . . Conveyer belts took the wet, clean potatoes into a machine that

blasted them with steam for twelve seconds, boiled the water under their skins, and exploded their skins off. Then the potatoes were pumped into a preheated tank and shot through a Lamb Water Gun Knife. They emerged as shoestring fries. Four video cameras scrutinized them from different angles, looking for flaws. When a french fry with a blemish was detected, an optical sorting machine time-sequenced a single burst of compressed air that knocked the bad fry off the production line and onto a separate conveyer belt, which carried it to a machine that precisely removed the blemish. And then the fry was returned to the main production line.

Sprays of hot water blanched the fries, gusts of hot air dried them, and 25,000 pounds of boiling oil fried them to a slight crisp. Air cooled by compressed ammonia gas quickly froze them, a computerized sorter divided them into six-pound batches, and a device that spun like an out-of-control lazy Susan used centrifugal force to align the french fries so they all pointed in the same direction. The fries were sealed in brown bags, then the bags were loaded by robots into cardboard boxes, and the boxes were stacked by robots onto wooden pallets. Forklifts driven by human beings took the pallets to a freezer for storage. . . . Near the freezer was a laboratory where women in white coats analyzed french fries day and night, measuring their sugar content, the starch content, their color.

(130-1)

Recalling Marx's table standing upon its head and thinking, the choreography of things here is eerily human, while lacking visible human agents except at the first and last steps of the process. At the same time, recalling Latour, Bennett, and Rickert, Schlosser's

description calls attention to a vibrant agency of things. To this extent it highlights a new set of actors in the collective of taste, inviting the reader to attune to the heating, wetting, slicing, inspecting, blemish-removing, and aligning that characterizes the specific, dynamic associations between the mobile, evolving potato and its constellation of encounters. While things are recognized as having a life and agency of their own, that life is characterized by a certain violence. Tracing the (re)assembly of the potato into the french fry highlights the fry as something constructed rather than given, and the particular tenor of the construction—of the associations among actants—is called into question: commodities are not here “standing on their heads and thinking,” but rather proceeding through a series of rapid, urgent, and even brutal transformations, fully objectified by the relentless, churning machinery of their transformation.⁸

Still, at the end of the potato’s path, as in his visit to the flavorist lab, Schlosser’s taste experience is once again full of wonder and ambivalence:

A middle-aged woman in a lab coat handed me a paper plate full of premium extra longs, the type of French fries sold at McDonald’s, and a salt shaker, and some ketchup. The fries on the plate looked wildly out of place in this laboratory setting, this surreal food factory with its computer screens, digital readouts, shiny steel platforms, and evacuation plans in case of ammonia gas leaks. The French fries were delicious—crisp and golden brown, made from potatoes that had been in the ground that morning. (131)

Despite the alienated and even angry choreographies that gave rise to it, the industrial french fry has an undeniable aesthetic allure. Isolated as it may be in production,

distribution, and consumption, it “has been carefully designed to taste good,” to express its vitality to the human eater.

Labor

In Schlosser’s narration, not only did car culture create a material space for highway-side and drive-thru dining, but the very production model of the automobile inspired the workplace design of early fast food restaurants. “For the first time, the guiding principles of a factory assembly line were applied to a commercial kitchen,” Schlosser remarks: “to fill a typical order, one person grilled the hamburger; another ‘dressed’ and wrapped it; another prepared the milk shake; another made the fries; and another worked the counter” (20). In food’s transformation from drive-in to drive-thru, tasks such as carhopping were offloaded to customers, who adjusted to waiting in line to receive their food at counters and drive-thru lanes; many cleaning tasks were eliminated with the turn to disposable materials; and the need for skilled labor in the restaurant itself was drastically reduced. Even for the restaurant manager, Schlosser reports, “the job offers little opportunity for independent decision-making. Computer programs, training manuals, and the machines in the kitchen determine how just about everything must be done” (74).

As in the potato facility, Schlosser directs us toward a certain commodity fetishism. Describing a particularly cutting edge, “postmodern” McDonald’s in Colorado Springs, he reports:

The drive-thru lanes had automatic sensors buried in the asphalt to monitor the traffic. Robotic drink machines selected the proper cups, filled them with ice, and then filled them with soda. Dispensers powered by compressed carbon dioxide

shot out uniform spurts of ketchup and mustard. An elaborate unit emptied frozen French fries from a white plastic bin into wire-mesh baskets for frying, lowered the baskets into hot oil, lifted them a few minutes later and gave them a brief shake, put them back into the oil until the fries were perfectly cooked, and then dumped the fries underneath heat lamps, crispy and ready to be served. Television monitors in the kitchen instantly displayed the customer's order. Advanced computer software essentially ran the kitchen, assigning tasks to various workers for maximum efficiency, predicting future orders on the basis of ongoing customer flow. (66)

As for Marx, the material (and temporal) arrangement that Schlosser critiques here is problematic not in that machines have appropriated human tasks, but in that generative human engagements with other human and nonhuman entities have been foreclosed. In the postmodern McDonald's, human laborers are robbed of the chance to work more intimately and creatively with the foods, machines, and techniques of their labor, while finding increasingly less interaction with customers as well. While laborers become less skilled and more alienated from people and things, the labor process is increasingly standardized and narrowed. As a Burger King executive put it, "there are many different ways today that employees can abuse our product, mess up the flow," but this danger can be attenuated: "We can develop equipment that only works one way. . . . If the equipment only allows one process, there's very little to train" (71-2). The unskilled character of the labor force, then, is linked to a static relationship with the technologies of labor—in stark contrast to the flavorists, for instance, whose status as elite artist-scientists rests on their interesting, experimental, compositionist engagements with the technologies of flavor.

A general lack of leverage also characterizes the new forms of labor emergent with the form of fast food, emanating in part from the high turnover rate of fast food restaurants. “The typical fast food worker quits or is fired every three to four months,” Schlosser reports (73). Fast food laborers have little momentum or leverage to organize, and when they do, they are threatened, subjected to lie detector tests, or let go. While this story is a familiar one that Marx himself tells, the networks by which worker organization is resisted are notably different with the rise of fast food and the decentralized corporation more broadly. For instance, because individual restaurant locations are nearly as disposable as individual laborers, fast food can easily resist workers’ organizing efforts: if a given store begins to organize, companies will simply close that location and reopen elsewhere, neglecting to rehire those suspected of participating in union efforts. In this manner, when Schlosser published *Fast Food Nation*, no McDonald’s worker in North America had union representation (77).

A similar but still more unsettling situation holds for meatpacking jobs after the rise of fast food. As Schlosser relates it, after the publication of *The Jungle* and a subsequent 30-year struggle for union representation, meatpacking was established as a stable, middle class job, one requiring a good deal of skill. As meatpacking became more consolidated with food’s growing uniformity, however, those companies vying to be at the top took measures to deskill the workforce. In place of the mix of tasks established in unionized facilities, now “each worker stood in one spot along the line, performing the same simple task over and over again, making the same knife cut thousands of times during an eight-hour shift” (153). As one official bragged, “we’ve tried to take the skill out of every step,” (154). Meatpacking has since abandoned its historic home of Chicago,

relocating from urban centers to poor rural towns, cutting wages roughly in half, and adopting some of the same transitory spirit of fast food. Meatpackers, Schlosser relates, “have successfully pitted one economically depressed region against another, using the threat of plant closures and the promise of future investment to obtain lucrative government subsidies. No longer locally owned, they feel no allegiance to any one place” (163).

Whereas Chicago meatpacking after the reform years eventually helped immigrant families establish new lives as middle class Americans, the laborers recruited for meatpacking today are impoverished citizens, illegal immigrants, homeless individuals, and refugees—people who are targeted for their vulnerable status, and whose vulnerability is more often worsened than improved by the job. As one meatpacking executive quipped, “If they’ve got a pulse, we’ll take an application” (162). And meatpacking jobs rarely help workers acquire anything other than a pulse—quite the contrary, meatpacking, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, is today “the most dangerous job in the United States” (172). Despite efforts to deskill it as much as possible, the job of meatpacking does not admit of the mechanization possible in fast food restaurants, potato processing plants, or even poultry processors. As Schlosser notes, whereas the poultry chicken’s body has been standardized and thus admits of being “killed, plucked, gutted, beheaded, and sliced into cutlets by robots and machines,” cattle bodies resist such mechanization, coming “in all shapes and sizes, varying in weight by hundreds of pounds” (172). As such, “in one crucial respect” meatpacking work has not been altered with the rise of fast food: still today, “the most important tool in a modern slaughterhouse is a sharp knife” (173). Meatpacking, then, continues to demand a fair

amount of skill, even when divided into discrete steps. Companies' concerns to deskill the job and speed up the line are thus closely connected to a range of acute and progressive ailments among workers, from knife wounds to advanced carpal tunnel syndrome, slipped disks to amputations (173; 175). Despite meatpacking's documented status as the most dangerous job in the country, injuries are systematically and grossly underreported. For workers at the bottom of the ladder, Schlosser notes, injuries are more than physically debilitating—they can ruin one's means for survival, especially among widespread company resistance to providing health insurance and worker's compensation.

The sensory-material form of fast food, then, thrives on and cultivates an increasingly contingent laborer: unskilled, obedient, employed "at-will," underpaid, temporary, replaceable, and economically, legally, and culturally vulnerable. This laborer, of course, shares much in common with many post-industrial laborers, but Schlosser shows how the sensory-material form of fast food has shaped the particular decline of certain contemporary forms of labor.

Bacteria

The sensory-material form of fast food has also helped to cultivate a dangerous new form of bacteria, undergirding what Schlosser figures as a new era of widespread food contamination:

A generation ago, the typical outbreak of food poisoning involved a church supper, a family picnic, a wedding reception. Improper food handling or storage would cause a small group of people in one local area to get sick. Such traditional outbreaks still take place. But the nation's industrialized and centralized system of

food processing has created a whole new sort of outbreak, one that can potentially sicken millions of people. (195)

While many pathogens thrive in the new environments of food growing, processing, and handling, Schlosser focuses on one that is particularly ominous: *E. coli* 0157:H7.

E. coli 0157:H7 is a mutated version of a bacterium found abundantly in the human digestive system. Most *E. coli* bacteria help us digest food, synthesize vitamins, and guard against dangerous organisms. *E. coli* 0157:H7, on the other hand, can release a powerful toxin—called a “verotoxin” or “Shiga toxin”—that attacks the lining of the intestine. (199)

Those infected range from being asymptomatic to developing life-threatening “hemolytic uremic syndrome.” About 4 percent of reported cases take the latter path, and about 5 percent of the children who develop the syndrome die from it, with *E. coli* 0157:H7 constituting the leading cause of kidney failure among American children.

E. coli 0157:H7 is a powerful pathogen. Antibiotics are ineffective in treating it, and it requires a remarkably low amount of exposure to have an effect: “To be infected by most food borne pathogens, such as Salmonella, you have to consume a fairly large dose—at least a million organisms. An infection with *E. coli* 0157:H7 can be caused by as few as five organisms” (201). This makes the pathogen particularly threatening in conjunction with the massive size of major growers and meatpackers. As Schlosser relates,

The cattle now packed into feedlots get little exercise and live amid pools of manure. . . . Feedlots have become an extremely efficient mechanism for

“recirculating the manure,” which is unfortunate, since *E. coli* 0157:H7 can replicate in cattle troughs and survive in manure for up to ninety days (202). *E. coli* 0157:H7 is also invited by contemporary meatpacking practices, whose commitments to minimal training and maximal line speed support ongoing gut spillage, the major cause of infectious bacterial spread. By Schlosser’s calculations, “a single animal containing *E. coli* 0157:H7 can contaminate 32,000 pounds of [a large processing plant’s] ground beef” (204). “Three or four cattle bearing the microbe are eviscerated at a large slaughterhouse every hour. . . . At the IBP slaughterhouse in Lexington, Nebraska, the hourly spillage rate at the gut table has run as high as 20 percent, with stomach contents splattering one out of five carcasses.” (203). That gut spillage is commonplace in large-scale meatpacking operations is strongly suggested by the findings of a 1996 USDA study concluding that 79 percent of “ground beef samples taken at processing plants” contained microbes “spread primarily by fecal matter” (197).

In any scenario, of course, the handling and consumption of raw meat involves contact with potentially harmful pathogens. What Schlosser highlights is not a new onset of pathogens, but a new material network that significantly changes the forms and scale by which they are spread: “*E. coli* 0157:H7 was most likely responsible for some human illnesses thirty of forty years ago. But the rise of huge feedlots, slaughterhouses, and hamburger grinders seems to have provided the means for this pathogen to become widely dispersed in the nation’s food supply” (196).

Animality

The constellating, world-composing force of fast food is perhaps most evident in Schlosser’s discussion of a particular form of fast food: the Chicken McNugget. As the

president of ConAgra Poultry remarked, “the impact of McNuggets was so huge that it changed the industry. . . . Twenty years ago, most chicken was sold whole; today about 90 percent of the chicken sold in the United States has been cut into pieces, cutlets, or nuggets” (139). And as Schlosser notes,

Although many factors helped revolutionize the poultry industry and increase the power of the larger processors, one innovation played an especially important role. The Chicken McNugget turned a bird that once had to be carved at a table into something that could easily be eaten behind the wheel of a car. It turned a bulk agricultural commodity into a manufactured, value-added product. And it encouraged a system of production that has turned many chicken farmers into little more than serfs. (139)

And the Chicken McNugget keeps turning: it also “helped turn Tyson Foods into the world’s largest chicken processor,” a development which has had a major impact on the life of the poultry chicken (139). What’s more, the Chicken McNugget has turned out an altogether new form of poultry chicken—a new breed of large-breasted chicken nicknamed “Mr. McDonald.”

Schlosser here subtly attends to an operation that well characterizes the rhetorical power of sensory-material form: the turn. Embodied as trope, strophe, or figure, the turn has been connected with rhetoric since the classical period as a turning of meaning, thought, conviction, or word. Schlosser (elaborating George Kennedy) suggests how rhetoric’s turning can proceed at a sensory-material level. Here, the Chicken McNugget does not simply “turn” in a semantic or pathetic sense, but also in a broader ontological sense—the Chicken McNugget turns a bird into a thing, a bulk commodity into a

readymade product, farming into serfdom. In the development of this seductive menu item, one form of being gives way to another, more problematic one. Implied but (perhaps strategically) sidelined in Schlosser's treatment is that the form of fast food has ushered in new modalities of animal mistreatment and animal suffering. Indeed, since the publication of *Fast Food Nation*, the violent turnings of poultry and livestock animals have been well-documented.

Turning Toward Taste

As the figure of the turn emphasizes, the connections Schlosser traces between the sensory-material form of fast food and new kinds of harm are not necessary ones, but they are strong ones. Indeed, the ecology that Schlosser traces is a vibrant one. The sensory-material form of fast food, he demonstrates, has emerged and thrived in conjunction with new forms of labor, politics, and corporate power. This is a healthy, thriving ecology, but one whose welfare is premised on an array of problematic harms. This returns us, then, to the questions posed in the previous chapter. Marx and the Frankfurt School pointed us toward vibrancy as a standard by which to measure the health of human-nonhuman entanglements, and their suggestion that vibrancy is needed for a healthy, emancipated world seems convincing. But Schlosser has pointed us toward contemporary articulations of vibrancy that seem problematic. Food technologies, he has shown, can inspire vibrant relations among some things that cause harm to others. This suggests that vibrancy alone may not be enough to make a given instance of sensory rhetoric desirable. What is vibrant for the hamburger and human taste may not be vibrant for glucose systems and cattle. It is the vibrant connections between McDonald's and people, many experts believe, that support diabetes, animal suffering, and environmental

pollution. It is exactly that vibrancy, primarily manufactured and sustained by ingenious marketing and production practices, that makes these formations of suffering so entrenched. What this tells us is that vibrancy is not a sufficient standard of taste, even if it is a necessary one. Adorno's attention to suffering as a further means of evaluation, at the very least, is needed to supplement it.

Schlosser's investigations also seem to call into question Marx's assessment that the sense of having has come to rule among consumers, displacing the joys of tasting with the mere transaction of eating. On the contrary, the marketing and development of fast food, as it has churned out new flavors and eating environments, has enabled rich new sensory experiences. The thriving of fast food is premised on the fact that food has been carefully designed to taste good. At the same time that Marx's diagnostics seem to fall short, perhaps Adorno's elaborations are of assistance. As discussed in the previous chapter, for Adorno, the proliferation of readymade consumables—a category to which fast food certainly deserves membership—has rendered consumption a passive activity on the part of the eater. In Adorno's terms, enjoyment is replaced by mere recognition. Likewise in Schlosser's narration, the sort of taste cultivated among consumers is removed and passive—the object exercises an agency, to be sure, but the eater is little invited into the co-composition of what Donna Haraway terms a “contact zone” between eater and eaten (to be further discussed in the next chapter). Taking Haraway and Adorno's perspectives to heart, what we need is a compositionist modality not only of critique, but also of everyday sensory practice, everyday involvement with the human-nonhuman world. Schlosser has suggested that fast food might thwart the rhetorical powers of the senses, even if it has not “dulled” them to the extent that Marx believed.

In the attitude of the network tracer, Schlosser highlights what Latour terms the *durability* of these harmful formations, and yet, as for Latour, this durability is not a given—there is room for better intra-actions of business, labor, bacteria, and animal welfare even working within the basic arrangements of mass production, distribution, and consumption that characterize fast food. *Fast Food Nation* thus is not purely oppositional in its orientation to its object of fast food, but rather points the way toward an affirmative reworking of this form that might mitigate the harms currently associated with it. For instance, even if feedlots and slaughterhouses continue to operate at large scales, *E. coli* 0157:H7 levels need not be so high. Indeed, as Schlosser reports, these levels have been successfully lowered by fast food companies motivated to protect their reputations. Following major outbreaks, companies such as Jack in the Box have begun pressuring their meatpacking suppliers to raise health standards, thereby indirectly improving working conditions. Yet these limited improvements do not trickle down to the individual consumer or even the federal school lunch program, who continue to receive a far lower grade of meat than demanding fast food companies.

The disparity has to do with the fact that fast food companies have a power in relation to meatpackers that the federal government and the individual consumer lack, but it is also crucially related to the complexities of *traceability*. As Schlosser documents, “According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than a quarter of the American population suffers a bout of food poisoning each year. Most of these cases are never reported to authorities or properly diagnosed” (195). In cases where a certain bacterial infection is diagnosed, authorities are rarely able to trace an individual’s affliction back to a particular food item—a crucial step in providing

incentive for fast food companies like Jack in the Box to seek safer meat. When outbreaks are traced to a food item, a different traceability problem emerges: that of connecting a given food item to a processor of origin—let alone a grower. If this is achieved, traceability to the contaminated lot and its likely contact with other lots depends on how good the internal record keeping of the supplier has been. Massive amounts of uncontaminated product may require recall, depending on how good those records are. But even in cases where a product has been traced back successfully enough for a recall, the federal government does not have the authority to require processors to participate (or it did not at the time of *Fast Food Nation*'s publication). Instead, companies have the option to conduct voluntary recalls. And these, when they occur, typically come too late. When *E. coli* 0157:H7 was associated with a Hudson foods frozen hamburger patty, for instance, the sluggish recall that began with 20 thousand pounds of ground beef eventually extended to 35 million pounds—“most of which had already been eaten” (211). As Schlosser relates via his interviews with experts, this problem is fixable, or at least manageable, even in conjunction with the mass production model of fast food.

In a similar spirit, Thomas Rickert has argued that while automobiles have participated in composing an unsustainable world, we must recognize that the form of automobility is not *necessarily* unsustainable—to assume it is to forget that things are never fully present to human intellect or sensoriums, but always have withdrawn affordances and potentials. Schlosser's treatment of fast food parallels Rickert's treatment of the automobility. In withholding appeals to larger forces exercising top-down power, in doing the patient work of network tracing, Schlosser opens the space for

exploring and experimenting with alternative sensory and material articulations of fast food. Efforts to improve food traceability, for instance, perhaps open up the more positive affordances of fast food, such as its low cost or appealing taste. A sensory re-orientation to fast food that registers its constructed and changeable character, meanwhile, potentially enables fast food itself to participate in more critical publics.

Fast food, then, is not interpolated as an eternal enemy, but critiqued in a compositionist manner, as a gathering force that co-emerges with other formations, often but not necessarily in problematic ways. But just because it only has its impact in concert with other formations, this does not mean Schlosser's choice of focus is arbitrary. In choosing to center his study on this new form of food rather than, say, new forms of bacteria, Schlosser situates sensation as a potential site of intervention—a site where the world might be intimately recognized as something contingent and continually composed, and where affective, bodily, and physical fields might invite its re-composition. It is exactly because sensation is rhetorically powerful in the ways revealed by the marketing of fast food that it marks a prime modality of intervention. And indeed, many food writers and documentarians since Schlosser have taken up taste as a domain for the reassembly of the world—including Michael Pollan, Barbara Kingsolver, Morgan Spurlock, Alice Waters, Barry Estabrook, and Michael Moss. These and many others have continued with a compositionist activity of network tracing centered on sensory-material form. In tracking how sensation fields or zones worldly associations, these writers show how it might participate in a different composition of the world. With their efforts, sensation is increasingly emerging as an ambient, rhetorical, world-building force. Publics are becoming ever more sensible to the agencies and vitalities of the plants,

animals, technologies, and things that participate in foodways, opening—rather, assembling—the space for new kinds of politics as well as new kinds of ethics. These food writers develop on the aesthetic interventions of the Frankfurt School and even, in some ways, Latour, by embracing a reworking of taste that is at once sensory and material, subjective and ambient—one in which food products and food environments, along with many other things and environments, are invited to participate. They turn to taste for many of the reasons that Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers did—for its affective and pathetic powers. But they supplement this work by further recognizing and inviting the participation of nonhuman agents in reworking the world.

Sensory (Re)Exposure

Schlosser and many who follow him present their project in the traditional garb of the exposé, whose role in the critique of industrial food reaches back to Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. Schlosser, for instance, declares "I've written this book out of a belief that people should know what lies behind the shiny, happy surface of every fast food transaction" (10). Meanwhile, reporter Barry Estabrook suggests his 2012 *Tomatoland* will reveal a "parallel world unto itself, a place where many of the assumptions I had taken for granted about living in the United States are turned on their heads" (xx). The revelation of the origins of American food is implicated in a unveiling of the nation itself, also apparent in Schlosser's subtitle, "The Dark Side of the All-American Meal." But as my study of *Fast Food Nation* suggests, the exposures of the industrial food exposé exceed a modernist epistemological intervention—what Latour terms an effort to reveal "powerful agents hidden in the dark acting always consistently, continuously, relentlessly" (229). Rather than exposing the truth (as they claim to), these exposés expose the body of the reader to

new ways of sensing, new response-abilities. The exposé, in other words, like rhetoric itself, always remains at the level of appearance. Schlosser asks us to notice how fast food normally appears, and to perceive it differently. Contrary to Schlosser's exposé-style promise to reveal "what lies behind the shiny, happy surface of every food transaction" (10), the rhetorical power of fast food cannot be reworked by a simple exposure *to* reality, but rather a re-exposure *of* reality—a movement that Schlosser and the many taste-oriented food writers who follow him indeed make, often without highlighting it. Schlosser's investigation demonstrates that the sensory rhetorical power of fast food—operating as it does in concert with technologies, bodies, desires, aesthetics, things, and built environments—is an *immersive* rhetorical power. Any intervention into it will be necessarily immanent, rather than transcendent. The "fast food nation" that Schlosser traces cannot be overturned, overcome, but only sensed, inhabited, and composed differently. As for the Scottish Enlightenment, then, attention to taste (and now food) troubles what we typically see as Enlightenment logics.

In the end, and recalling Socrates, Schlosser is closer to the flavorist, closer to the sophist, than he would like to admit. It is, after all, Schlosser's own rhetorical magic that renders the flavorist so queer. Schlosser, ultimately, engages in the very sorcery that he is suspicious of—he seeks to effect not just conscious knowledge, but certain kinds of affectabilities and knacks in his audience; he intuitively, myopically, shifts the realm of appearances, (re)assembling sensory worlds. Schlosser, in short, acts as a rhetorical educator, intervening in the response-ability of his audience at extra-rational, extra-conscious levels as well as rational and conscious ones.

The reworking of the exposé is not unique to Schlosser, but at work in many industrial food exposés. Indeed, Sinclair famously lamented that readers disgusted by the meatpacking scenes in *The Jungle* responded not out of a concern for the workers, whose terrible plight he sought to communicate in the style of the sentimental novel, but rather out of concern for their own food: “I aimed at the public’s heart,” he regrets, “and by accident I hit it in the stomach” (xiii). The misfire perhaps emerged from the fact that Sinclair’s object involved food, which is of course the site of some of the subject’s most intimate sensory experiences with the “outside.” But what Sinclair hit upon in his poor aim was the power of sensory rhetoric—a power that exceeded both that of the heart and that of representational knowledge. Though it took time, the re-sensing of food that Sinclair effected in his exposé sparked concrete change—change that slowly but eventually revolutionized the conditions of meatpacking—at least until the developments that Schlosser connects with the rise of fast food. Sinclair then demonstrated Bennett’s view that a modernist style of intervention into representational knowledge, where “truth” is supposedly unveiled, indeed is not sufficient to “reliably produce moral outrage,” or “inspire ameliorative action” (xv). But at the same time, *The Jungle* demonstrated that the exposé exceeds its own modernist frame, not simply reworking representational beliefs, but altering entire sensoriums.

The sensory-rhetorical potential of the exposé is perhaps best demonstrated in a recent activist performance, documented in Morgan Spurlock’s 2004 blockbuster film, *Super Size Me*. In what we can recognize as a performative articulation of the exposé (and of affirmative critique), Spurlock commits himself to a month-long, McDonald’s-only diet. In the documentary, he introduces his project as an intervention into

knowledge, but not of the modernist sort, suggesting that we know fast food is bad for us, but we don't *really* know that—not well enough to prompt needed change. Spurlock's project will be to encode that knowledge not at a cognitive, conscious level alone, but rather (also) at a visceral, bodily level which he hopes will offer more potential for change. Sacrificing his own body to the powers of fast food, Spurlock performs an intervention into his audience's sensorium that, not unlike Sinclair's and at times Schlosser's, operates at the level of disgust.

At the same time, however, Spurlock's sacrificial gesture problematically others those who are imagined to indulge in fast food, and alongside this, problematically stigmatizes weight. Enlightenment elitism, then, re-emerges in this sensory exposé, this performative form of immanent critique, but there is a potential for the exposé to unwork such elitism as it develops and embraces its sensory-rhetorical powers. This Spurlock demonstrates in modeling the incredible allure of fast food—emphasizing food's vitality, he craves and delights in it, even though it makes him feel bad, suggesting how the “cruel optimism” described by Lauren Berlant manifests today at a sensory level. Spurlock's performative demonstration of how sensation shapes desire ultimately complicates, rather than answers, one of the questions with which he frames his documentary: “Where does personal responsibility stop, and corporate responsibility begin?” Spurlock suggests, in fact, that the question of *responsibility* cannot be precisely answered, since fast food penetrates desire and interferes with personal agency. In line with Bennett, he points us away from a negative focus on responsibility to a positive, compositionist focus on response-ability.

Spurlock's performance also intensifies the affirmative potential I noted in *Fast Food Nation*. In his performance, Spurlock fully embraces the sensory-material form of fast food according to its own logics (e.g., its nutritional claims, its suggestion to "super size," etc.), surrendering to the force of fast food and performing as the ideal consumer, to see what would happen. Spurlock experiments in particular with how fast food can be prompted to rework itself—indeed, as *Super Size Me* notes, soon after the film's release, McDonald's quietly removed the "Super Size" option from its menu. To this extent, Spurlock may be understood to have conducted an affirmative, sensory critique, and one that reworked fast food, and supersizing specifically, from within its own logics.⁹

The exposé then has the potential to relay us not only to a sensuous and immanent modality of critique, but also toward the investment in response-ability and affirmative repetition of contemporary rhetorical theory. The evolution of the exposé also reminds us that these investments do not free us from the problem of elitism that haunts taste. Considered and enacted in sensory terms, the exposé asks us to reckon with how the projects of new materialist and affective approaches to rhetoric (that is, their concern to seek worldly intervention at the level of response-ability to human and nonhuman others) bring us back to the very problems of elitism associated with Enlightenment taste (and the problems of paternalism associated with Frankfurt School critique). It also points us toward how the exposé, at a sensory level, might reckon with and move *through* those obstacles.

As such, popular exposés of industrial foods such as Schlosser's, Estabrook's, and Spurlock's complicate recent critiques of "conscientious consumption." These exposés, and the slow food and organic movements in which they participate, have surely played a

role in the rise of what social theorists have called “cultural” or “lifestyle” capitalism in the post-Civil Rights era. In this new phase of late capitalism, consumption has become not merely a matter of acquiring a material product, but of making a lifestyle choice— associating oneself with an ideal, a community, or an identity. Schlosser rhetorically embraces just this sort of consumerism in his epilogue, “Have It Your Way,” issuing a motivational call for consumers to recover their agency and exercise what has been termed the “dollar vote.” He says:

Nobody in the United States is forced to buy fast food. The first step toward meaningful change is by far the easiest: stop buying it. The executives who run the fast food industry are not bad men. They are businessmen. They will sell free-range, organic, grass-fed hamburgers if you demand it. They will sell whatever sells at a profit. The usefulness of the market, its effectiveness as a tool, cuts both ways. The real power of the American consumer has not yet been unleashed.

(269)

The sensory exposure of Schlosser’s text, then, has culminated in a call to change the system from within by exercising the kinds of agency it admits. Yet on closer consideration, this sort of agency—the liberal subject that Schlosser here addresses—is only available if one has knowledge of the origins of potential food purchases. The reason “the real power of the American consumer has not yet been unleashed” is that consumers are not well informed, at intellectual and sensorial levels alike. A book like Schlosser’s certainly helps to temper consumer ignorance on some level, and for some consumers. At a general level, the affluent reading public likely to complete Schlosser’s book may be better able to exercise a dollar vote by declining to buy fast food

altogether—a trend which indeed seems to be taking root as a gap widens between food cultures in this country. But the amount of ignorance *Fast Food Nation* has revealed disturbs any richer form of lifestyle capitalism. To exercise a dollar vote with any sort of precision, a consumer would require specific knowledge of the origins of each product they encounter. As I have suggested, Schlosser’s investigation emphasizes that such knowledge is at best difficult to obtain, and often fundamentally impossible. Even improved traceability along the lines implicated above would not necessarily assist a dollar vote—and in any case would not do much to make that vote accessible to those with limited dollars.¹⁰

Another objection to dollar voting arises from a more systematic condemnation of cultural capitalism. Slavoj Žižek has criticized the transformation to cultural capitalism as one which attempts to ameliorate social problems in capitalist gestures, such that buying a cup of coffee can at one and the same time be an act of consumption and an act of charity. For Žižek, pursuing this kind of consumer choice merely cultivates the ills of late capitalism by reinforcing the systems that cause poverty to begin with. “It is immoral,” he declares, “to use private property to alleviate the horrible evils that result from the institution of private property.”¹¹ Žižek calls for a certain type of misanthropy, a “soft apocalypticism” which would ask how to reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty would be impossible.

Whether one believes that this sort of revolution is possible or desirable, Žižek’s critique of cultural capitalism resonates, highlighting a significant danger zone for popular food critique. However, my suggestion is that popular food critique has been evolving *through* neoliberal “conscientious consumer” models to a far more contagious

and far more potent reconfiguration of human-nonhuman relations. Returning to the apparent contradiction in Schlosser's conclusion, I suggest that the tension it taps is more productive than damaging. Schlosser opens his book remarking "no other industry offers, both literally and figuratively, so much insight into the nature of mass consumption" (10). But *Fast Food Nation* leaves ambiguous whether the problem with mass consumption is a problem with the system or with the particular *manifestation* of the system—a little question that has been quite troublesome to scholars for the past several decades.¹² Leaving that dilemma in its proper place, then, his provocation works at both levels—as any instance of food activism that hopes to be effective probably should.

The really potent force, I suggest, is not Schlosser's address of the American consumer, but his address of sensation more broadly. In his final paragraph, Schlosser continues his call to citizenship by offering his readers a choice—while at the same time asking them to surrender to affective work that prefigures choice:

Pull open the glass door, feel the rush of cool air, walk inside, get in line, and look around you, look at the kids working in the kitchen, at the customers in their seats, at the ads for the latest toys, study the backlit color photographs above the counter, think about where the food came from, about how and where it was made, about what is set in motion by every single fast food purchase, the ripple effect near and far, think about it. Then place your order. Or turn and walk out the door. It's not too late. Even in this fast food nation, you can still have it your way. (269-270).

On one level, this is clearly a call for consumers to exercise the dollar vote by choosing to buy or not to buy fast food. However, this paragraph carefully circumscribes the choice it

offers its reader: in this hypothetical scenario, whether or not the reader chooses to order fast food, her sensibilities have been reattuned. The experience of walking into a fast food restaurant, let alone of eating a burger, has been re-assembled for readers of *Fast Food Nation*—the sensorium of fast food has been altered. And that sensorium is not solely the province of the reader. Indeed, if sensation has been addressed—and I believe it has—then an alternative agency to that of the discrete individual has been addressed. Unlike the liberal subject, *Fast Food Nation* has demonstrated, taste is the province of a whole host of individuals and factors, a rhetorical ecology in and of itself. A politics operating in the contact zone of taste operates at a collective level that transcends—or rather reworks—the individualism of cultural capitalism.

As such, my comparison of Schlosser to the flavorist is not accidental, but central to my assessment of sensory rhetoric. Like Latour's exhibitions, *Fast Food Nation* helps to assemble new publics of human and nonhuman entities by cultivating a new, more intimate and immersive sensorium. Its attention to eating in particular—which is, in a sense, the most intimate of sensory activities—helps to further articulate an immersive, bodily mode of compositionist critique. And like Latour's exhibits, it does so by displaying the nonhuman *things* that participate in composing our worlds. As such, *Fast Food Nation* and the exposés that follow, in their address of sensation as an ambient contact zone, enable new kinds of publics to form, publics that include actors both human and nonhuman. In so doing, they also demonstrate the value of Marx's focus on sensory-material form for the environmentalist aims of new materialism.

Conclusion

I have focused on Schlosser's mostly negative critique of the food industry in part to draw out how we might discover the generative work of composition even in critique that objects to the status quo or, as I portrayed it in the opening of this project, that takes on a suspicious attitude. But the food activism that has followed *Fast Food Nation* has involved a considerable portion of still more affirmative, positive performances of critique as well, pointing toward promising new sensory-material forms and practices that might enable more vibrant, healthy collectives of taste. The most prominent example is the work of Michael Pollan, which turns away from the classic tropes of the exposé form more fully, even while more actively embracing the task of re-exposing the reader to the world. Pollan's bestselling texts, *Omnivore's Dilemma* and *Botany of Desire* (the latter of which was made into a documentary) in particular quite explicitly invite a new materialist sense-ability, training audiences in a perspective shift by which, for instance, the affordances of corn, rather than the choices of people, explain our current economic conditions. Pollan invites his readers to attune to how foods—through their tastes, economic values, portability, and so on—prompt us to do the things we do. To this extent he more affirmatively experiments with Marx's emancipatory standard, exploring how we might take up richer co-articulations with food.

Beyond the page and the screen, the sensory enactment of critique and intervention that I have here located in *Fast Food Nation* has been developed still more explicitly in recent food movements that actively reassemble taste through interventions in both sensory and material formations. Through these efforts, publics are primed to move away from a neoliberal logic and, through taste, to rework the world in an ambient

way. These initiatives are far from perfect, with perhaps the least developed aspect of this new rhetoric of taste being a sensitivity to differences in class and opportunity. Taste, in short, continues to pull in an elitist direction. But today's mobilization of taste is a start toward a new political sensibility that could mitigate against neoliberal attitudes and worlds in an immanent, immersive way, turning them toward new forms and assemblies. My final chapter will elaborate and evaluate this potential where it has become most explicit—in on-the-ground (and *with*-the-ground) interventions into human-nonhuman collectives of taste.

Chapter 4 Notes

¹ <http://corporate.univision.com/2014/12/millennials-the-foodie-generation/>

² <https://blogs.technomic.com/whats-healthy-at-restaurants/>

³ From 1992-2007, direct-to-consumer food sales through farmers markets and other venues tripled, growing twice as fast as overall agricultural sales. (USDA 2007 Census of Agriculture.)

⁴ Latour has been read to disavow critique altogether in this piece. In my reading, however, he calls for a reworking of critique into what we might term a “compositionist critique.”

⁵ As Latour puts it, “The definition of a social science I have proposed here by building on the sociology of science should be able to reclaim an empirical grasp, since it travels wherever new associations go rather than stopping short at the limit of the former social” (251).

⁶ This is not to say that explicit marketing efforts do not play a role in enhancing the sensory pull of fast food, but only that nonhuman things and environments also play a role that exceeds human intention, that nonhuman entities participate in the dominance of the fast food sensorium and in ways that exceed explicit planning. For instance, fast food executives have a role to play, but so also do Cold War information technologies—it is a network of forces that come together to compose and sustain the sensory-rhetorical space of fast food. Schlosser’s origin narrative offers perhaps the best example: GM did not anticipate the rise of fast food, but the landscapes it shaped came to exercise a rhetoricity of their own, welcoming fast food while being less hospitable to other forms of eating, such as the sit-down or even drive-in restaurant.

⁷ As Rickert notes, the grounds of place being less stable and identifiable than place itself, *chora* is often repressed, approachable only in brief glimpses through “bastard discourses” (and here Rickert cites Kristeva). As opposed to topical invention, which relies on preexisting ideas as generative sites, choric invention embraces the originary, affective realm that precedes topics and language, where place is not stable, but still coming to be. As I am suggesting in this chapter, *Fast Food Nation* helps to situate sensation as a bastardized access point for intuiting the choric invention that undergirds problematic worldly arrangements.

⁸ Schlosser’s tour of a meatpacking operation (169-72) raises interesting contrasts—he moves from the sliced and processed meat product backwards through the line, whose similar brutality to the potato plant is exacerbated by the carnival of blood, manure, and grey-matter Schlosser sees on the floor, the machinery, and the hands and faces of the workers. Whereas Schlosser was able to trace the potato along a coherent path, in the meatpacking facility his efforts break down.

⁹ Indeed, Spurlock generates from the logics of fast food itself a number of “rules” for his experimental performance.

¹⁰ Economist Amartya Sen has made an argument along these lines.

¹¹ <https://www.thersa.org/discover/videos/event-videos/2009/11/first-as-tragedy-then-as-farce/>

¹² For a clear overview of the question and a sense of one strategy at a “third,” Deleuzian response, see Christine Harold’s *Ourspace*.

CHAPTER 5

(RE)ZONING ETHICS

In *Inessential Solidarity*, Diane Davis calls our attention to a subterranean, onto-ethical realm of rhetoric. Whereas rhetoric is traditionally thought in terms of a subject's acts of meaning, persuasion, or identification, Davis points us to a rhetoricity that comes before all of these, and even before the subject. Following Martin Heidegger, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Emmanuel Levinas, Davis notes that a subject's being is first and foremost relational—"I" am only insofar as I respond to an other. My identity is not something I bring my relations with others, but rather something given me in those relations. In Davis's Heideggerian rendering, "there is no being that is not already being-with" (4)—a view that echoes Marx's anti-humanism. As such, being and becoming are premised on "an affectability or persuadability . . . that is the condition for symbolic action" (2). It is this "originary" affectability, this constitutive capacity for response, where Davis locates rhetoric at its most basic. Rhetoric, then, is not only or first an art of persuasion or identification, but also comes before these, as the existential condition that grants their very possibility: "By definition, communication can only take place among existents who are given over to an 'outside,' exposed, open to the other's affection and effraction" (2). With Nancy, Davis understands community not as something composed among individuals, but rather a fundamental condition of exposure that precedes the articulation of any individual or group. Rhetoricity, in her framework, is that very exposure.

This presubjective view of rhetoric has significant implications for rhetoric's relation to ethics. Following Levinas, Davis sees the subject's ontological and rhetorical debt to the other as an ethical debt as well: "the existent (the 'subject') emerges as such only in *response* to alterity and therefore exists for-the-other (nonindifference) before it ever gets the chance to exist for-itself (indifference)" (14). Subjects are, in their very ontologies, at once response-able and responsible to others. This means that ethics, like rhetoric, abides neither with the individual nor with the other. In the realm of ethics, "it's always already too late for *my* spontaneity, *my* choices, *my* heroism. Will, initiative, interpretation . . . all trail behind my being-*for*-the-other, which is not a decision I make but a predicament that gives me to be" (111). Rather than being a matter of the subject's choice, character, or actions, ethics lives before the subject and inheres immediately with her (rhetorical) relation to the other, her self-constitutive response to alterity.

Davis, then, draws out the ethical implications of what Hawhee describes as "invention in the middle," situating rhetoricity as a kind of ethical potency that operates between and before consciousness and identity. In Rickert's terms, Davis attunes us to ethics and rhetoric as a choric realm of emergent energies, the "matrix of all becoming" (Rickert 55). Her focus on an originary sociality echoes Marx's treatment of society, for whom human being was also always relational—though Marx emphasized the nonhuman things and technologies that called subjects into being as well as the people. We can also hear resonance with Latour's view of the social as not a glue that binds individuals together, but rather a movement of associations. Davis focuses on how any associative movement is premised on a fundamental, rhetorical, "associability" that situates emergent agents in ethical relation.

While Davis concentrates on affectability in the abstract, as the ontological condition of ethical being, my project has emphasized the historicity of that affectability—how the ability for existents to affect and thus compose one another, the range of possible affectations, varies across times and cultures. Following Davis (and recalling Scottish Enlightenment thought), this contingent, variable, affectability circumscribes not only a culture’s possible ontologies, but also its possible ethics. As my treatment of taste has suggested, if we are, as Levinas suggests, fundamentally beholden to the other, or as Nancy says, characterized by exposure, we are always beholden and exposed within a particular, sensorially and materially circumscribed field of affectability. Sensing beings can only see the world in so many colors, register so many smells and sound frequencies, and this sensory range varies with times and cultures. As such, certain fields of response-ability and responsibility are invited by our particular sensory world, and other possible ethical fields are withdrawn. Davis, then, opens the way for developing on the instinct of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers that sensory, rhetorical, and ethical capacity are closely linked, and she develops the move they begin to make toward an understanding of this linkage as a presubjective one, one where the divide between subject and object is blurred.

In addition to departing from Davis in my attention to the historicity of affectability, I have also focused on a particular dimension of affectability: while Davis examines affectability in a general sense, my focus has been how affectability and response-ability manifest in a sensory key specifically. Davis’s view that a presubjective rhetorical response-ability comprises or hosts ethics can, I believe, guide a more specific inquiry into how *sense*-ability precedes subjective and objective identities and composes

ethics. This demands an understanding of sense-ability/sensibility, like affectability more broadly, as a rhetorical capacity or vulnerability that is not only or fundamentally the province of the sensing subject, but rather inheres between and before the subject and the sensuous object that emerge in the sensory event. Such an understanding, I argued in chapters 2 and 3, was under development during Scottish Enlightenment and Marxist treatments of taste and sensation, and it can be further developed via Davis's notion of affectability.

The previous chapter, "Reassembling the Senses," articulated a practice of compositionist critique that intervened in affectabilities understood in these terms. Journalist Eric Schlosser, I argued, demonstrated an instructive reassembly of the senses in his genealogy of fast food. In keeping with Latour's vision of compositionist critique, Schlosser approached fast food as a construction site—as a thing not natural and inevitable, as it may sometimes seem, but rather painstakingly assembled over time and space, and admitting of reassembly. Through genealogy and other practices of network tracing and exposure, Schlosser associated the sensory-material form of fast food with a host of problematic contemporary forms, inviting and inaugurating its reassembly.

This chapter, "(Re)Zoning Ethics," explores food activism from a slightly different angle. Rather than attending to the practice of network tracing, I attend to a somewhat different critical-compositionist practice, whereby sensation is explicitly engaged as a modality of ethico-rhetorical contact among people and things. In the next section, I frame this inquiry with a consideration of how we might think the ethical realm of rhetoric Davis describes in the arena of sensation specifically. A collective's sense-ability, I will propose, hosts or "zones" ethics, and it inheres not with the individual but

with evolving zones of contact among emergent sensing and sensuous beings. I then turn to two food movements growing today at a national and multinational level—the “slow food” and “farm to school” movements. I offer a consideration of how these interventions enact rhetoric and ethics at a sensory-material level, at the level of the contact zone.

Finally, I return to the problem of immanence to draw some overall conclusions.

Toward A Sensory Ethics

If, as Davis has it, ethics consists in a fundamental, presubjective capacity for response, a basic ability to be affected, this means that an era’s sensibilities are crucial to its ethical theories and practices. This point is underscored in Emilie Hache and Bruno Latour’s essay “Morality or Moralism?: An Exercise in Sensitization.” Like Davis, Hache and Latour understand ethics in terms of the practice and imperative of response. For them, this makes rethinking or revamping ethics an inherently *sensory* project, one that requires reworking existing fields of sensibility, of sensory affectability. According to Hache and Latour, modern(ist) ethical sensibility has been heavily conditioned by Kant, who, through the concept of the sublime, took on the laborious task of desensitizing humans to the clamor of both external and internal nature. For Kant, a sublime attitude, where the enormity of nature could be appreciated via a safe, distant gaze, was necessary in order to attend to “the little music of morality within us” (325). Kant’s humanist ethics, then, was premised on a dulling or suspension of our sensory connection to the nonhuman, and a sharpening of a different, supposedly human, inner sense.

However, Hache and Latour argue, the “glass” that Kant was able to insert between sensing humans and sensuous nonhumans has been shattered as the earth’s health has come more perceptibly to implicate human health. With this, diverse thinkers

from the philosopher Michel Serres to the scientist James Lovelock have opened up a space for reversing the Kantian desensitization of modern and modernist ethics and ushering in an ethics based on a sensitivity to all classes of things, human and nonhuman. This sensitivity is solicited, for instance, in Serres' rereading (or, more properly, *reseeing*) of the Myth of Sisyphus to focus not on the man but on the rock: "For Serres, the falling rock is active, repulsed but each time returning; whereas the rest of us see a man with a rock that *does* nothing, that is passively displaced, and that falls by itself without reason" (319). From Serres' perspective, it is not Sisyphus in his labor who is the primary figure of absurdity, but rather the rock in its perpetual return. In his reading of the myth, Serres "become[s] the eyes and voice of a rock," reversing the perceptual distancing from nature demanded by Kant and modern ethics (319). This performative intervention into modern(ist) sensibilities—our sense-abilities in relation to rocks—marks an intervention into the fields of response-ability that enable and disable potential environmental ethics.

Lovelock likewise develops on the tools we have to effect a resensitization to the nonhuman in his metaphorical personification of the earth as Gaia. As he asserts, "unless we see the Earth as a planet that behaves as if it were alive, at least to the extent of regulating its climate and chemistry, we will lack the will to change our way of life and to understand that we have made it our greatest enemy" (cf. Hache and Latour 322). Even while Lovelock takes care to emphasize that he is not figuring the earth "as alive in a sentient way, or even like an animal or bacterium" (cf. Hache and Latour 321), he does invite what Hache and Latour take to be a productive anthropomorphism—one that can resist the dangers of anthropocentrism. The personification of earth, that is, stages what

Lovelock terms a “promising misunderstanding” of the earth as a person that could counteract the Kantian desensitization to nature. For Hache and Latour, “the inducement to treat Gaia as a person may . . . commit us to take an interest in it, to think of ourselves—of her and us—in terms of interaction and reaction” (322).

Lovelock’s “promising misunderstanding” surely has its limits. Still, Hache and Latour, in conjunction with Davis, help us to track the rhetoricity of ethics at a sensory level. As Hache and Latour tell us (recalling Marx), modern ethical thought and practice has been limited by a decline in our sense-ability, our response-ability, to the call of the nonhuman. Davis’s framework allows us to see this as a rhetorical decline. From this perspective, the reworking of modern(ist) ethics for which Hache and Latour call demands an experimentation with new kinds of rhetoricities, richer and more nuanced response-abilities that engage the nonhuman. In applauding and encouraging this shift, Hache and Latour suggest how Davis’s rhetorical affectability can live and evolve at a sensory level. They also, like Davis, invite an expansion of the “with” of being-with. Davis extends the notion of a prior rhetoricity to nonhuman animals whose being is, like that of humans, chiefly communal, emergent only in response to others. Following Hache and Latour (and likewise Thomas Rickert and Graham Harman), we might further extend this sort of prior rhetoricity to nonhuman things—to tomato plants, hamburgers, restaurants and so on—which also have their being only in response to others. Through such an expansion, ethics emerges as a play of call and response across a field of affectability or sense-ability.

While Hache and Latour situate us to build on Davis in asking after the ethical dimensions of sensory rhetoric, I want to note a certain limitation in their brief critical

history of ethics. In Kant, as Hache and Latour argue, the nonhuman became insensible in a certain way—it was silenced behind glass. Yet in this selfsame gesture, we might note, nonhuman vitality was also made overwhelmingly vivid. Indeed, the extraordinary amount of cultural energy that went into developing the possibility of sublime experience both before and after Kant made nonhuman vitality not just visible, but brilliantly, even blindingly, so. As such, the sublime acted as a kind of sensory form that enabled an intensification of our visual experience of nature—and, concomitantly, Marx would remind us, an intensification of nature’s visibility. Kant, then, offered the sublime as a sensory form even when he wanted to situate it as an affectability that transcended sensation and penetrated into the realm of reason. Moreover, literary and artistic enactments of the sublime both before and after Kant would in fact seem to shatter the Kantian “glass” that Hache and Latour trouble—enabling the natural world to manifest, for instance, in loud and vertiginous and visceral ways as well as in bright ones. My point is not at all that Kant’s (extra)sensory form of the sublime is sufficient for an environmentalist ethic, but merely that it offers a certain rich modality of human-nonhuman contact, a certain realm of environmentalist affectability, that we must appreciate even as we object to its limitations, note what kinds of affectabilities and sensitivities it closes off.

If Hache and Latour neglect a more balanced treatment of the Kantian sublime, their sensory treatment of ethics is also limited by a fairly subjective approach to sensation and sensitization. In their short essay, sensation is at times treated in a modern framework that Hache and Latour would ultimately like to undermine: as a pre-composed subject’s reception of objective information or stimuli, rather than a transformative

engagement among co-constitutive actors. (In this they echo a common relegation of rhetoric to the transmission of information or meaning.) As my project has suggested, the work of diverse thinkers, including Hume, Marx, Bennett, and Latour himself, urges us to attend to how the (emergent) sensuous object participates in the constitutive movements of sensation and the realm of the sense-able. As we think the rhetoricity of ethics in sensory terms, we must consider not only the sensitivity of the human subject, but also the sensuous vitality of human and nonhuman “objects” of sensation—a vitality that is enabled or disabled by an era’s available sensory and material forms (the sublime being a case in point). Davis offers an opening onto such a project in her emphasis on the betweenness and beforeness of affectability, her view that affectability—and by implication rhetoric and ethics—precedes and gives rise to individuals, groups, objects, and meanings.

In her notion of the “contact zone,” Donna Haraway offers a useful heuristic for tracking, at a sensory level, the betweenness and beforeness that Davis connects to ethics. Haraway unpacks the notion of the contact zone in discussing her and her dog Cayenne’s sport of “agility.” Premised on many of the conventions of horse training, agility is an occupation where practiced, human-dog partners work through an acrobatic course complete with various jumps, tunnels, weave poles, and “contact obstacles.” Haraway began attending to the contact zone as a concept when she and Cayenne ran up against failure in one such obstacle—the “A-frame.” In this exercise, the competing dog is tasked with scaling a jump of about 6 feet and landing on the other side with her two rear feet in an area painted yellow (a color easily recognizable by dogs). Failing to land in the zone brings a significant penalty, one that long kept Haraway and Cayenne from advancing

beyond beginner competitions. The painted yellow zone, then, initially *barred* contact between Haraway and Cayenne:

The problem was simple: we did not understand each other. We were not communicating; we did not yet *have* a contact zone entangling each other. The result was that she regularly leapt over the down contact, not touching the yellow area with so much as a toepad before she raced to the next part of the course, much less holding the lovely two-rear-feet on the zone, two-frontfeet on the ground until I gave the agreed-on release words (*all right*) for her to go on to the next obstacle in the run. I could not figure out what she did not understand; she could not figure out what my ambiguous and ever-changing cues and criteria of performance meant. Faced with my incoherence, she leapt gracefully over the charged area as if it were electrified. It was; it repelled us both. (215-6)

Haraway and Cayenne “did not yet *have* a contact zone entangling each other,” and they needed to compose one. This initial communicative impasse, however, is also what made the contact zone a contact zone—as distinct from, say, a *comfort* zone (a contrast Haraway suggests, 217). The contact zone is eminently rhetorical in Davis’s sense, marking a generative arena of affectability. Resonating with Hawhee’s discussion of *metis*, for Haraway, a contact zone is a provisional, inventional space that demands “shape-shifting skill” (217) as entities come in and out of being-in-relation to one another. It is at once limited and electrified by misunderstandings, misdirections, and power imbalances. Evoking Lovelock’s notion of the “promising misunderstanding” we might want to embrace in reworking our environmental ethic, it is this potent mix of communication and miscommunication, power and vulnerability, that enables

invention—the contact zone is where “most of the transformative things in life happen,” (219).

And Haraway means transformations of all sorts. Genealogizing the concept of the contact zone beyond the agility course, she notes Mary Pratt’s original use of the term in *Imperial Eyes*, which explored the cultural arenas where people come into linguistic and extra-linguistic contact, where “subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other . . . often within radically asymmetrical relations of power” (cf. Haraway 216). Contact zones also emerge in science fiction, where “aliens meet up in bars off-planet and redo one another molecule by molecule” (217). But contact zones are not limited to humans, animals, and aliens. Beyond these parties, Haraway notes, they can be found in countless areas of scientific study, such as “ecotones,” areas of high biodiversity and complexity where ecologies of different regions intermix. Co-developmental relations among “taxonomically distinct organisms” also form a kind of contact zone, as in the fact that “human gut tissue cannot develop normally without colonization by its bacterial flora” (220). The contact zone, then, is not merely an arena for intra-action among human and nonhuman animals, as in the example of Haraway and Cayenne. This example, rather, is instructive as we think the generative sensory modalities of contact among humans, things, and environments as well. In their various investigations of the contact zone, the humanities and sciences alike tell us that “co-constitutive companion species and coevolution are the rule, not the exception” (220).

As the realm wherein organisms and ecologies call upon each other for a response, the contact zone stages potential ethical relations among co-emergent, contacting bodies, and admits of their reworking. As Haraway learns through the

troubling yellow area dividing herself and Cayenne, authority in contact zones is “asymmetrical but often directionally surprising” (225), demanding that the human surrender her instinct to control and mistrust her nonhuman partner, allow that partner a space to contribute to mutual becoming. Haraway discovers this with the help of a fellow agility trainer, who encourages her to take a step back from the A-frame competition with Cayenne and to embrace more rigorous training. In this, Haraway and Cayenne forge a new arena of contact. And yet not without some loss. After their more intensive training, Haraway notes,

I had to face the need for many more “I pay attention to you; you pay attention to me” games to fill Cayenne’s and my not-so-leisure hours. I had to deal with my sense of paradise lost when Cayenne became steadily and vastly more interested in me than in other dogs. The price of the intensifying bond between us was, well, a bond. I still notice this; it still feels like a loss as well as an achievement of large spiritual and physical joy for both Cayenne and me. Ours is not an innocent, unconditional love; the love that ties us is a naturalcultural practice that has redone us molecule by molecule. (227-8)

The contact zone thus is not to be confused with some utopic space among co-constituting others. The emergence and cultivation of a contact zone is not a good thing in and of itself; it does not get us out of many of the most recalcitrant problems of ethics and power.

However, an ethic *attentive* to contact zones as a particular realm of responsibility, as a generative space for ethical and unethical relations, can be quite productive.

For one thing, it poises us to reckon with problematic limitations of the realm of communication and ethics:

To claim not to be able to communicate with and to know one another and other critters, however imperfectly, is a denial of mortal entanglements (the open) for which we are responsible and in which we respond. Technique, calculation, method—all are indispensable and exacting. But they are not response, which is irreducible to calculation. Response is comprehending that subject-making connection is real. Response is face-to-face in the contact zone of an entangled relationship. Response is in the open. (226-7)

In exploring how the face-to-face of response is enabled (and disabled) by emergent zones of contact, Haraway helps direct us toward an ethic of the contact zone. Here, the fundamental arena of affectability preceding ethics is not a given, wide open space of infinite potential. Quite the contrary, it is a highly particularized, qualitative field that is *built*, painstakingly, and with sacrifice, among intra-acting agents—a field that hosts and welcomes a certain range of responses, scorning, prohibiting, and displacing others (Cayenne’s contact zone with other dogs, for instance). Read with Davis, then, Haraway helps us see that an ethico-rhetorical field, a field of evolving response-abilities and affect-abilities, is staged not at the site of, say, the sensing human (as Hache and Latour sometimes suggest) or the site of solely human intra-action (as Levinas insists), but rather unfolds as a dynamic zone where human-nonhuman comforts and contacts succeed and fail, are enabled and disabled.

Although Haraway does not emphasize it, there is more than just herself and Cayenne who are invested and transformed in the contact zone. The strange sort of

“naturalcultural,” cross-species connections that Haraway and Cayenne are able to make are made in a lively engagement with the obstacles of the agility course as well. Recalling Serres’ attention to the rock that keeps returning, the painted yellow contact zone, for instance, participates in their play/work—initially as an “electrified,” repellent realm, and later re-emerging as a welcoming realm of joy and success. Haraway, Cayenne, and the painted zone all make transformative contact, contact that re-fields ethics.

The figure of the contact zone, then, helps us to rethink sensation as a modality of mutual relation and co-constitution among actors, rather than only a subjective reception of bodily or mental information. And it helps us think affectability in a material, ecological key, as a capacity, disposition, or *dynamis* of human-nonhuman ecologies. As a generative space preceding ontological and semiotic differentiation, contact zones share much in common with the choric realm discussed in chapter 4, and yet invite us to think about how sensation participates in the emergence and energy of a choric space.

Haraway, for instance, gestures toward the sensory register in which contact zones might emerge in discussing the phenomenon of “isopraxis,” by which skilled horses and horseback riders enter a “zone” wherein “homologous muscles fire and contract in both horse and human at precisely the same time” (229). In the process, “Both, human and horse, are cause and effect of each other’s movements. Both induce and are induced, affect and are affected” (Barrey, cf. 229). The contact zone offers a way to inquire after the fields of sensory intra-actions that exist or could exist among human and nonhuman participants.

Both Davis and Haraway explore how response-ability emerges between and before human and nonhuman animals, expanding the realm of ethics beyond the human.

In attending to food activism, we can extend such explorations to consider the response-abilities that inhere between eater and eaten. Eating offers a notably dynamic example of a contact zone where life is at various stages of becoming—where plant and animal have become or are becoming not typically recognizable life forms, but objects, and then not objects, but sugars and fats and proteins. Eating is also perhaps the paradigm of appropriation—of the sort of miscommunications and power imbalances that Davis, Hache and Latour, and Haraway all trouble. To ask after sensory contact zones emergent among eater and eaten is to ask after the field of affective or responsive relations that are or might become possible—it is, in short, to ask after the zone of rhetoricity that grounds environmental and animal ethics. I am, then, inquiring into how nonhuman plants and animals and things participate in the realm of ethics—or, more precisely, in the pre-originary, sensory, rhetorical response-ability that zones ethics.

If agility training marks a space where relations of response can be developed and enriched in mutually beneficial ways, where others can come to (mis)communicate productively, today's activist efforts to train taste offer a similar opening. In these, response-ability and responsibility become a matter of co-operative play/work and (mis)communication between eater and eaten. As the next two sections will consider, recent food activist efforts, in addition to creating new publics (as discussed in chapter 4), also participate in cultivating ethics at the sensory level, at the level of the contact zone—and in ways that hearken back to the Enlightenment connections of taste and ethics. As we will see, these projects continually run up against the sort of elitisms and paternalisms that plagued the Scottish Enlightenment, but they also offer some promising openings for avoiding and reworking those power imbalances.

Sensory Activism and Slow Food International

As the origin myth goes, Slow Food International was born in Rome in 1986 when Italy's first McDonald's was planning to open near the Spanish Steps in the Piazza di Spagna (Pietrykowski, 310). This threat brought protestors together who chanted in favor of slow food over fast, and who instead of holding up signs, held out bowls of penne pasta to passersby. Slow Food's founder, Carlo Petrini, was an Italian leftist who, opposed to the violence of 1970s radical politics, endorsed an alternative politics based on pleasure (Pietrykowski 311). The organization does not explicitly reference Marx, but Marx's vision of sensory emancipation is alive and well in their founding, 1989 manifesto, which opens as such:

Born and nurtured under the sign of Industrialization, this century first invented the machine and then modeled its lifestyle after it. Speed became our shackles.

We fell prey to the same virus: 'the fast life' that fractures our customs and assails us even in our own homes, forcing us to ingest "fast-food." (n.p.)

Echoing Marx's diagnosis of sensory alienation, for Slow Food "the fast life" is to blame for the impoverishment of the co-implicated realms of custom, sensation, and environmental well-being. Emancipation, meanwhile, is envisioned as a sensuous reconnection with nonhuman vitality: for Slow Food, the cure for the virus of the fast life is "the vaccine of an adequate portion of sensual gourmandize pleasures, to be taken with slow and prolonged enjoyment" (n.p.). The manifesto also evokes elements of Frankfurt School Marxism, insofar as the culprit and the cure are cultural, and Slow Food figures itself specifically as "the avant-garde's riposte" (n.p.).

Of course, not unlike the avant garde politics with which Slow Food identifies, the organization's vision of a "real culture" shielded from the presumably "false" culture of the masses is dangerously elitist. In a further conservatism, Slow Food's manifesto situates "the machine" as the counterpart to the human, with the "true" mark of humanity connected to "old-fashioned food traditions" (n.p.). This gives way to the rather un-Marx-like suggestion that there is a separate, natural realm that traditional food traditions, slow food, somehow fails to sully. As this section will argue, as for Marx and the Frankfurt School, attention to the senses brings Slow Food into tension with some of its own problematic assumptions, in a way that the organization itself has not yet realized. Still, the slow food movement is instructive as we think the ethics and politics of sensory rhetoric. Slow Food, I will show, develops Marx's vision of sensory emancipation to cast the senses as a distinctly rhetorical power, one that situates sensation as a rhetorical capacity or response-ability that "zones" a space for a rich and vibrant environmental ethics. As such, Slow Food offers an instructive example of both the powers and the dangers of rhetorical mobilizations of the senses.

Sensory Education

To establish how Slow Food situates taste as a rhetorical capacity, I will begin with an activist approach the organization terms "sensory education," and a look at one of the online curriculum materials Slow Food provides for sensory education efforts targeting children—a 76-page document entitled "In What Sense? A Short Guide to Sensory Education." Recalling Marx's diagnosis of sensory alienation, this curriculum guide charges that the senses have become dulled by industrialization and urban development—it cites, for instance, research suggesting that city pollution has weakened

the sense of smell and that the use of artificial flavors has overstimulated and dulled the sense of taste (4-5). All this, the guide charges, has “transform[ed] us into ‘robot’ consumers, guided by senses which are increasingly unable to distinguish and select” (5). As an “invitation to eat with enjoyment and consciousness,” (n.p.), the guide outlines a series of so-called “experiences” for instructors, where children learn to express, reflect on, and, develop their sensory experience in relation to food.¹ The course is divided into units that engage each of the five senses, with initial and concluding units addressing all the senses together.

Slow Food’s curriculum casts children’s sensory capacity as a rhetorical capacity on several levels. First, there is a verbal dimension to children’s developing sensory acuity. For instance, the guide offers a vocabulary-building prompt for each of the five senses. As the prompt in the vision unit suggests, a food, in interacting with light, can look “*opaque* like a grape, *glossy* and *bright* like a cherry” (21), and so on, and a food’s color can be not just white, but “milk, ivory, straw, cream” (21), and so on. In addition to the vocabulary given children, the instructor is encouraged to note and re-use the strong vocabulary that children themselves introduce. Through these exercises in sensory vocabulary, children are situated as a community of rhetoricians zoning out a realm of environmental ethics, composing a zone of response-ability between themselves and the food they encounter. As such, verbal skill feeds into what Davis identifies as a more fundamental rhetoricity. Children’s developing lexical literacy, that is, presumably supports a sensory literacy as well—a nuance in children’s response-ability, say, to a cheese’s straw or cream color. If, as Davis puts it, communication (and by implication, ethics) “can only take place among existents who are given over to an ‘outside’” (2), this

lexical task nuances how eaters are given over to that outside, enriches the possible range of responses in which eater and eaten might participate.

In other “experiences,” this range of response-ability is enriched as children are challenged to rely on their senses without systematic verbal expressions. For instance, in the smell unit, the instructor puts local herbs into containers and children are charged with identifying them by smell, and in the sound unit, children are blindfolded and tasked with identifying foods by their sound when other children bite into them. Here, response-ability is invited to an attunement not circumscribed by language, which, while opening some potential modalities of contact between eater and eaten, potentially closes others. If the act of eating is run through with appropriation, then, Slow Food’s intermixture of verbal and nonverbal practices at least keeps that appropriation dynamic.

While Slow Food’s sensory education curriculum places much emphasis on a playful exploration of sensation and sensory pleasure, many “experiences” also challenge children to connect sensation with more reflective domains of cognition. For instance, several tasks connect sensation and memory. Recalling the Scottish Enlightenment’s connections of taste and imagination, such tasks expand sensory capacity by encouraging students to conjure the sensuality of food even when they are not immediately experiencing it. Other exercises ask children to explore or reflect critically on sensory features of “industrial” compared to “natural” products. Here, recalling Marx and resonating with Marxian conceptions of rhetoric and composition as a critical activity, taste is educated as a site for questioning the state of reality and imagining alternatives. Yet there is a posthumanist twist to the critical capacities evoked here, where sensation gives way to a Latourian practice of compositionist critique: the children are not just

receiving sensory experiences, but actively composing and questioning them together, with one another and with the foods themselves. So here, critique moves from a focus on negativity and discernment, which could have a distancing effect, to generative, immanent practices of judgment and response that enrich children's intimacy with the foods they eat.

The Ark of Taste

Slow Food does not stop at direct sensory interventions, but also intervenes in material form, with important implications from the perspective of ethics and politics. Thus, in one of its projects, Slow Food identifies threatened food products and seeks to preserve them in a true Biblical spirit—by including them in what the organization terms the “Ark of Taste.” The Ark is an online, networked catalog of endangered food products that have been carefully evaluated to qualify as foods that at once conserve biological, sensory, and cultural diversity. There are currently over 2 thousand food products “on board” the Ark, as Slow Food puts it. Two hundred of them are grown in the United States. And if you visit the U.S. site for the Ark of Taste, you can search for a product by name, region, or type. For instance, the Datil Pepper, “St. Augustine’s most beloved treasure,” can be traced back to the area’s “original Minorcan settlers.”² Usually a featured food product has some description of its taste—the Datil Pepper, for example, has a “bright, fruity flavor well-suited to hot sauces and spice mixes.”³ On the Ark interface, one can also click on a link to see where to buy the pepper, or do a map search.

The Datil Pepper has gone far since it “boarded” the Ark of Taste. In the 1980s, it was grown only in St. Augustine and its seed was unavailable in national seed catalogs. But because of the combined efforts of a chef, a horticultural instructor, a technical

college, and its Ark status, the pepper has been recovered and is now grown across the country. Since its Ark status has made the Datil Pepper more recognizable in its home community of St. Augustine, an annual Datil Pepper Festival has begun, complete with a Datil Pepper Cook-Off—with judges tasting a variety of dishes, including boiled peanuts, citrus jam, and even smoothies made with Datil Peppers. Meanwhile, a host of Datil Pepper recipes circulate online, including David’s Datil Pepper Relish (which reminds the cook to use gloves when working with the peppers) and, for the adventurous eater, Tropical Datil Cupcakes. Artisanal product lines using the Datil Pepper have also proliferated—for instance, one product line has expanded from the original “Dat’l Do It” Datil Pepper Hot Sauce, to include Hellish Relish, Devil Drops, and also a Datil Pepper Mustard. On top of this, the food franchise Firehouse Subs now sources 20 thousand pounds of the pepper from St. Augustine for their Captain Sorensen’s® Datil Pepper Hot Sauce (*Conservation You Can Taste*, 2013).⁴

There are several things that I want to point out with the example of the Datil Pepper. First, Slow Food’s efforts are in many ways a contemporary enactment of Marx’s sensory articulation of biodiversity: as for Marx, sensory and material forms are understood as being imperiled together, together in need of protection—an assumption evident in the Ark of Taste’s slogan, “conservation you can taste.” Slow Food’s focus on taste, then, invites a treatment of food as what Latour and Serres would term a “quasi-object,” a site where traditionally separated realms of nature and culture come together. Second, Slow Food’s address of a material-sensory *form*—the Datil Pepper and its taste profile—has given way to a larger material-sensory *network*, bringing quite a variety of parties into concrete material relation. By contrast, Slow Food’s taste education

curriculum engages taste at a more circumscribed level—the aim of Slow Food’s sensory curriculum is to attune response-ability primarily from the perspective of the eater. The Ark of Taste, for instance, intervenes into a larger and more complex zone of contact between eater and eaten, more explicitly soliciting the involvement of the *eaten* by conserving it and inviting it into foodways. In short, the Ark engages taste as a rhetorical capacity, a response-ability, of entire human-nonhuman ecologies. In this sense Edbauer Rice’s notion of the rhetorical ecology mingles with Davis’s notion of rhetoric as an ethical capacity for response.

A final important point that the Datil Pepper example illuminates is that insofar as Slow Food calls rhetorical ecologies into being, the organization sacrifices a little bit of its own agency. The generative rhetorical ecologies that the Ark enables have a life of their own, and one that can come to complicate some of the more problematic aspects we can identify in Slow Food’s founding manifesto. For instance, Slow Food’s rhetoric, not the least its choice to reference Noah’s Ark, often forwards a naturalism by which food cultures, products, and traditions are to be preserved in all their original, pure, God-given glory. But insofar as the Ark cultivates new communities of human-nonhuman being, it does not simply *preserve* food cultures and products and traditions, but also zones the space for new ones, new kinds of sensory-material intimacies between humans and things. The ethico-rhetorical ecologies that the Ark calls into being can also come into tension with another of the problematic dimensions we have noted in Slow Food’s verbal rhetoric—its resistance to the machine and its concern that we are all being transformed into “robot” consumers by corporate interest. This founding stance against industrialization and corporate power is complicated, for instance, when the Datil Pepper

finds its way into the corporate economy of Firehouse Subs. This complication in turn gives Slow Food as an organization the potential to break with the sorts of conservatisms and simplistic naturalisms that have long been associated with the concept of taste.

In this manner, Slow Food' operations are not purely oppositional (despite their explicit positioning against fast food)—they have the potential to work with existing foodways rather than outright rejecting them. This potential is even further apparent in Slow Food USA's recent \$500,000 partnership with Chipotle, which will fund "100 school gardens in 10 metropolitan areas across the country."⁵ As such, Slow Food offers an instructive example of how a thorough and committed intervention into taste as a rhetorical capacity pushes past the sort of conservatism and rigidity that we often connect with the very concept of taste reaching back to the Enlightenment.

To the extent that Slow Food offers material and sensory interventions into the co-constituting response-abilities of eater and eaten, it also offers a promising step toward the sort of reattunement to nonhuman vitality for which Hache and Latour call. However, this potential is not always realized. In fact, at the same time that Slow Food offers an important lesson in the power of sensory-rhetorical interventions, it also illustrates certain crucial drawbacks. Most notably, while Slow Food benefits many chefs, consumers, smaller producers, and threatened networks of vital human-nonhuman entwinement, thus far, the smaller cultures of taste that the organization inspires are primarily elite cultures of consumption. Even where the Ark foods are available through affordable farmer's markets and CSAs or even fast food franchises, it is typically only an educated group of consumers who enjoy access to them.

The lingering elitism of taste seemed strongest in the recent deposal/resignation of the president of Slow Food USA, Josh Viertel. Taking over leadership in 2008, Viertel attempted to build on the organization's commitment to food justice, organizing, for instance, a "\$5 Lunch Challenge" where individuals and organizers across the country pledged to make "slow food" lunches available for under \$5. With similar spirit, Viertel turned the organization's focus to farm bill advocacy. But initiatives like these received significant resistance from the group. Some felt that the \$5 challenge violated the organization's commitment to champion farms and secure a fair market price for their goods. Others felt that Viertel was taking the organization away from its identity as a grassroots group, moving it in a policy direction that conflicted with its core spirit. Private support for the group declined during Viertel's leadership.⁶ And yet, when Viertel announced his resignation in 2012, the organization had just been awarded a \$1.2 million grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, "whose food-related financing generally goes toward improving the diet of poor Americans, especially children."⁷

Slow Food's resistance to making "good, clean, and fair" food more accessible to the general public is disappointing. Still, to my mind, we shouldn't fault Slow Food for the particular realm of food justice in which they have chosen to intervene. Slow Food is not wholly uninterested in food justice, but rather angled to focus on food justice at the level of production more than consumption. Although the group neglects and even outright resists focusing on eaters and food access, Slow Food rigorously champions farmers struggling to make ends meet by helping them carry on sustainable growing and eating practices. Where Slow Food goes wrong is not their explicit arena of intervention,

but rather their failure, even their refusal, to recognize and question the new cultures their work composes—both the promising new cultures and the problematic ones.

This resistance to self-criticism became perhaps most evident in a 2006 comment by Alice Waters, famed San Francisco chef and current vice president of Slow Food International. Strolling through a farmer’s market during a *60 Minutes* interview, Waters remarked: “We make decisions every day about what we’re going to eat And some people want to buy Nike shoes—two pairs—and other people want to eat Bronx grapes, and nourish themselves. I pay a little extra, but this is what I want to do.”⁸ In the worldview evident here, “some” people make good choices, and “other” people make poor ones, and these choices can be corrected through cultural interventions that educate the “others” into the good choices. In this position, Waters fails to realize that Slow Food offers the potential to move past the Enlightenment assumption that a standard of taste can and should be discovered and enforced. A more nuanced understanding of Slow Food’s rhetorical power would remind us that good taste is not something that is “out there” to be discovered or imposed, but it is something to be invented and co-composed in human-nonhuman communities of being. As the example of the Datil Pepper suggests, when it is recognized as an ongoing, self-inventing, rhetorical ecology, taste is always situated to be questioned and to be re-composed. Those who have focused on immanent modes of critique confirm this. As discussed earlier, Marx calls for an emancipatory practice whose future we cannot predict. For Adorno, “we cannot know or even imagine what the good, reconciliation, utopia, or a free society would look like (Freyenhagen 178). For Latour, we must experimentally attempt to compose better worlds. Waters,

along with many others at the heart of the Slow Food movement, fails to recognize the very rhetorical powers and promise of the international organization that she helps to run.

The shortcomings of Slow Food represent a challenge that sensory-rhetorical interventions indeed must face, but it is not an insurmountable challenge. Slow Food has not done a good job of tapping in to the very rhetorical powers that their efforts enable. But the possibility of doing so, and thus of mitigating their harmful side effects, remains.

Sensory Activism and Farm to School

Ironically, promise for a more self-critical, compositionist approach to taste lies in a movement that Alice Waters helped to start in her “Edible Schoolyard” (ESY) Project. As the ESY website narrates it,

Twenty years ago, Alice Waters was quoted in a local newspaper, claiming that the school she passed every day looked like no one cared about it. Neil Smith, then principal of Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School, contacted Alice with the acre of blighted land on the school’s grounds firmly in mind. He wanted her to see the school and perhaps find a way to help. It was clear to Alice: she wanted to start a garden and build a teaching kitchen that could become tools for enriching the curriculum and life of the school community. Neil and Alice met with the faculty and the idea slowly began to take form.⁹

Within two years, garden construction began, and within three years, the school’s abandoned cafeteria was transformed into a kitchen classroom. “By year five, ESY Berkeley taught ten 90-minute classes a week in both the garden and kitchen.” Since then, edible education has been thoroughly integrated into the King Middle School curriculum, thanks to the assistance of a now 9-person ESY staff. The school grounds

now host chickens and ducks, and the one-acre garden features “more than 100 varieties of seasonal vegetables, herbs, vines, berries, flowers, and fruit trees.”¹⁰ The efforts have been fully supported by the Edible Schoolyard Project, and have expanded well beyond the 7 thousand King Middle School students the project reports having served. Today, a new dining facility “serves as the central kitchen for all 16 schools in the district, providing 10,000 meals per day, made with wholesome, fresh, and mostly organic ingredients.”¹¹

ESY’s own extensive curriculum is available through its website, which includes a total of 62 lessons for middle schoolers, a detailed documentation of the Edible Education Teaching Standards, video clips of lessons, and many other materials.¹² The edible education curriculum at King Middle School is multidisciplinary, including experiential study of culture, history, language, chemistry, and geography.¹³ To take just one example, sixth graders meet a California common core requirement in studying the Han Dynasty’s “Silk Road” while preparing relating foods. In preparing steamed dumplings, for instance, students learn that steaming was a cooking technique originating in China. Another Silk Road activity has students trade for regionally arranged ingredients needed to complete their recipe, giving them experiential instruction in the cultural and economic dimensions of Silk Road trade.

While recognizing its home location in Berkeley as the gold standard of what edible education can do, ESY’s vision is much wider: “The mission of the Edible Schoolyard Project is to build and share a national edible education curriculum for pre-kindergarten through high school. We envision gardens and kitchens as interactive classrooms for all academic subjects, and a free, nutritious, organic lunch for every

student.”¹⁴ With Waters’ efforts and inspiration, as of 2002, more than 2 thousand of California’s 9 thousand schools had established edible gardens (Hinman). Beyond Berkeley, ESY supports six other model schools (what they term “founding programs”) across the country. A yearly Edible Schoolyard Academy, meanwhile, “trains leading educators to create powerful and sustainable edible education programs in their schools and communities.”¹⁵ Perhaps most valuable for schools seeking to follow in ESY’s footsteps, the organization hosts an extensive online network connecting similar initiatives around the world, currently indexing over 4,500 garden classrooms, over 4,300 of which are in the United States. Interested parties can search not only for program information, but also for resources, with some 340 hits in a search of “Lessons” alone.¹⁶

Waters’ Edible Schoolyard project has been both a model and a key participant in the emergence of what is often termed the “farm to school” movement. Like “slow food,” “farm to school” efforts are increasingly being discussed and enacted not as the effort of a single organization, but rather as a larger food movement. That “farm to school” names a movement and not just an organization is thanks in part to the similarly loose and large umbrella network that anchors the term: the National Farm to School Network (NFSN). Like ESY, the NFSN serves an important connective for activists, acting as “an information, advocacy and networking hub for communities working to bring local food sourcing and food and agriculture education into school systems and preschools.”¹⁷ The NFSN itself is widely dispersed, including, in addition to a national staff and advisory board, 51 state and 8 regional “lead organizations” (nonprofits, state agencies, and university bodies selected by the national network to support farm to school efforts in their areas). On its website, NFSN also includes “more than 8,000 farm to school

practitioners and supporters.”¹⁸ As such, “farm to school” extends well beyond the confines of the governmental organization itself.

Farm to school efforts are dedicated to connecting schoolchildren to local, healthy foods. As NFSN describes it, these efforts take three main approaches:

- Procurement: Local foods are purchased, promoted and served in the cafeteria or as a snack or taste-test;
- Education: Students participate in education activities related to agriculture, food, health or nutrition; and
- School gardens: Students engage in hands-on learning through gardening.¹⁹

Though all three elements are not always present in NFSN-supported initiatives, efforts are made to this end. South Carolina Farm to School, for instance, which has supported some one hundred public schools, requires schools that implement school gardens with their funding to likewise implement NFSN-sponsored procurement and education programs, including taste education curriculum.²⁰ Training materials for farm to school practitioners divide education into two further categories: “food and agriculture curriculum,” and “experiential education such as farm tours, cooking demonstrations, and taste tests” (“Best Practices”). In a note to presenters, the materials urge, “The Farm to School approach—when taken in its entirety—is the *holistic approach we need to promote*. Not just one of these strategies, *but all of them together* to enable lasting change” (“Best Practices”).

A government-funded program, the National Farm to School Network began in the 1990s as the work of initiatives like Waters’ Edible Schoolyard Project. It first received federal funding and recognition in 2004. In 2010, an annual \$5 million was

allocated by Congress to help support farm to school programming. According to NFSN, today the “demand for the program is more than five times higher than available funding.”²¹ Accordingly, the network has introduced the Farm to School Act of 2015 to Congress, which would increase the allocation for farm to school programming to \$15 million annually. Farm to school programming is also supported by several other USDA sources (“USDA Grants and Loans”), and many public and private sources beyond the USDA.²² Currently, NFSN boasts that over 40 thousand U.S. schools have farm to school programming.

Farm to school efforts include tasting curricula similar to those of Slow Food (indeed, the slow food and farm to school movements have notable overlaps, and the two “parent” organizations regularly collaborate). One New Mexico program, for instance, offers extensive, bilingual Spanish-English teaching materials for grades K-6 available for purchase or download.²³ A sample lesson plan for a “Salad Tasting.” demoed in a 45-minute video available online, invites students to work with salad greens at many sensory levels. Students, for instance, draw pictures of various lettuces before tasting them, and write down descriptive words from a provided bilingual list. When they finally taste the lettuces, they generate more descriptive vocabulary as a class, and then vote on their favorite green. Each student makes a colorful bar graph to represent the class preferences. Finally, students prepare, describe, draw, and eat their own salad.²⁴ Like Slow Food, then, this curriculum invites students to compose new contact zones at verbal and nonverbal levels.

But, due to their integration with the institution of the school, the sensory and material interventions of farm to school efforts also often depart in significant ways from

the typical efforts of Slow Food. As suggested by Waters' Edible Schoolyard model, for instance, education about foods and their taste is ideally integrated across curriculum. In similar spirit, 2014 training materials issued by the NFSN trace a wealth of ways that the carrot alone can be integrated across school subjects. A suggested math project, for instance, has students planting carrots while calculating the soil volume of their pot, the needed distance between seeds, estimated class yields, the cost of production, and so on. In social studies, suggested lessons have students research the carrot's origins in present-day Afghanistan; in art, students may paint their carrot planting pots; in language arts, they may journal about their carrot growing activities; and so on ("Best Practices"). Likewise supporting curricular integration, some available farm to school curricular materials are aligned to state educational standards and common core requirements.²⁵ This integrative approach has the advantage of making farm to school programming easier to work into existing curriculum and making attentiveness to sensory practice and material form a more seamless part of students' education. Not unlike the corporate advertising that Schlosser tracks in schools, then, farm to school efforts benefit from their embrace of the school as an institutional site of authority and education.

School-based sensory interventions are shaped not only by the institution's curricular demands and affordances, but also by the materiality of school foodways. On the one hand, this makes farm to school interventions extraordinarily difficult. For a school to source food locally is a labor-intensive process with no pre-established protocol, as it involves making unprecedented arrangements with small farmers who have less reliable food supplies than government-sponsored sources. While the food service director can easily complete an order through established lines of purchasing, it takes

considerable, often prohibitive work to find, make, and maintain new and less systematizable purchasing connections with small local farmers. Schools also face substantial challenges keeping school lunch below cost, when many of the less healthy foods they are replacing are pre-prepared and available for free or at a subsidized rate. Even more of a challenge are schools whose food purchasing has been outsourced through a third party buyer. In this case, assigned representatives find it difficult or impossible to purchase foods outside of existing arrangements with large-scale national providers (“Going Local”). Likewise, food service staff must calculate and meet strict nutritional guidelines—easy to do with the standard suppliers, but an additional labor cost for unstandardized bulk foods. Finally, many schools face the material obstacle of lacking basic kitchen equipment and cooking staff training, since the foods provided by the national school food program require little beyond the ability to microwave and serve.

On the other hand, the materiality of school foodways enables sensation to play an interesting and powerful role in farm to school initiatives. This is most clear in the fact that participating schools often host a particular kind of tasting, one regularly figured not as “sensory education” or “edible education,” but as a “taste test.” Quite in contrast to Slow Food’s recommendation that tastings avoid discussion of students’ likes and dislikes and focus instead on exploration, discrimination, and description, farm to school tastings often quite explicitly invite students to evaluate foods. There is a pressing practical reason for this: school lunch programs attempting to make healthy dishes from local sources and school gardens quite literally need to figure out what students will eat. For example, Vermont’s Calais Elementary holds a monthly “Taste Test Day” featuring a dish prepared with local, in-season ingredients, such as Corn Chowder, Winter Vegetable

Pot Pie, or Sweet Potato Fries. On this day, trained parent volunteers prepare the foods, roll them in on snack carts, and lead a tasting. The interest in discrimination, description, and multisensory awareness characteristic of Slow Food is evident at Calais: “When directed, all students taste [the dish] at once, using their senses to discuss flavors, textures, smells, and recognizable ingredients” (“Vermont” 18). Likewise, in Vermont’s Rumney Memorial School’s locally-sourced “Healthy Snack Day,” where “children spend 10 minutes talking about the food, guessing its ingredients, discussing textures and smells, making connections with their own family foods, and trying the food together” (“Vermont” 20). Yet veering away from Slow Food’s protocol, students in these tastings rate the food: at Rumney, “after the snack has been tested, students vote on whether they tried it, liked it, and would try it again or buy it for lunch” (“Vermont” 20). At Rumney, after a food excels in several tastings, it is offered on the school lunch or breakfast menu (“Vermont” 20). Rumney found success, for instance, with roasted root vegetables, roasted delicata squash smiles, edamame beans, corn-on-the-cob, granola parfaits with fresh local fruit, and apple-cheese quesadillas. (“Vermont” 20)

Other “taste tests” extend beyond the individual classroom, moving even more in the direction of survey and evaluation. Vermont’s Sharon Elementary School, for instance, holds monthly taste tests in the cafeteria. Each taste test is organized by a single class after a brainstorm among teacher, students, and the school’s food service director regarding what food the class will prepare with local ingredients. The class then takes on the sourcing, preparation, advertising, and serving duties required to coordinate the tasting. Students also collect and analyze tasters’ feedback. Vermont’s Ferrisburgh Central School takes a somewhat different approach, with food service staff staging

regular “Try-Its.” In these tastings, students waiting in the lunch line are offered a sample of a food available in the line. Those who bring their lunch are also invited to “Try It,” as teachers are tasked with bringing samples to students at the lunch tables. In “Try-Its,” students are surveyed as to whether the featured food fell into the category “Good,” “OK,” or “No Thank You.”

In these efforts, tasting invites and shapes children’s response-abilities to otherness. After one tasting where a student loved a winter root salad, her father was surprised at her enthusiasm for beets. The student replied that the salad had raw beets; the beets were always cooked at home (“Vermont” 23). In another tasting at a school in Oregon, several students had strawberries for the first time and declared them to be their favorite food (“Going Local” 24), while in another, a student persuaded his parents to purchase and prepare jicama at home. While these interventions are admittedly circumscribed, they have the power to seep into the student’s lifelong affectabilities. Whether any particular healthy food stays with a student’s palate is less the issue. More valuable is the potential for tastings and “Try-Its” to cultivate an attitude of sensory experimentation and exploration, one that situates the student and her sensory experience as an active, involved part of eating.

Farm to school practices of taste education and taste testing are also part and parcel of a larger transition in the school foodway and its associated zone of affectability. Participating schools, for instance, often have new or expanding school gardens. Tastings work in tandem with these gardens as a way for students to make or experience prepared versions of foods that they helped to grow. If sensory response-ability grounds an environmental ethic, then, farm to school efforts can be understood to build that ethic

through the large, human-nonhuman collective of the school foodway. Because sensory interventions are linked to the specific, evolving material foodways of the school—the cafeterias, farmers, school gardens, snack carts, and so on that move food onto students' plates and palates—novel ecologies of response-ability are composed. In this, farm to school enables new contact zones among human parties who do not always engage one another. As farm to school curriculum guides constantly repeat, forging partnerships across the whole range of potential participants and stakeholders, from children to parents to maintenance staff to farmers, is crucial for lasting change.

As such, farm to school's sensory interventions shed much of the elitism of Slow Food. More than Slow Food, farm to school initiatives often explicitly target underserved communities and NFSN itself has expanded to support related work with American Indian cultures, Farm to Prison, and Farm to Hospital efforts. Because farm to school efforts are tied to school meal programs, including free and reduced lunch programs, they are well-situated to engage low income students. Even in better served schools, farm to school's imbrication in the institution of the school marks an important difference from Slow Food's more nomadic approach: with farm to school, the compositionist enactments of sensation shared by both approaches do not operate in a utopic or alternative space peripheral to dominant flows of power, but rather alongside and with them. To this extent they effect an affirmative queering of the norm, and not an affront to it—a re-articulation of existing infrastructure rather than a dissolution of it. As such, sensory intervention finds a way out of some of the elitism in the commitment to a standard of taste epitomized in Waters' *60 Minutes* comment. In the efforts of farm to school, the world is not divided, as Waters divides it, into "some people" and "other people." Rather, the

world emerges from a zone of response-ability that is called into being by many human and nonhuman agents, themselves in transformation. This is perhaps most evident in the fact that many of the individuals that spearhead and enable local farm to school efforts are not world-class chefs but rather middle and working class school staff—food service managers most especially.

That farm to school offers promise is not to say that it has broken fully with elitist notions of a standard of taste. Indeed, the notion of “healthy” foods, and of what counts as healthy, seems to be little interrogated in farm to school’s rhetoric. Likewise, farm to school efforts sometimes evoke uncritical discourse about the “obesity crisis” that risks inviting weight stigma, drawing overly strong connections between eating and obesity and obesity and disease. Another significant limitation to farm to school is the recent rise in school funding cuts—which, as we saw in the last chapter, have led some schools not in the direction of farm to school programming, but rather toward corporate food marketing. Given even more severe cuts of late, schools might seem the very last place to hang our activist hats. But, especially as farm to school successes have skyrocketed over the past two decades, perhaps this makes them the best.

Zones of Response-ability

For Davis,

the challenge today, the social, ethical, and political challenge is to learn to think the sharing of community without effacing precisely this sharing by conceptualizing it, turning it into an object to be grasped and put to work. How to think a community, without essence or project, shaped by the eruption of an inappropriate outside . . . ? (8)

This chapter has suggested that sensory approaches to activism, like those of the slow food and farm to school movements, mark a step toward both thinking and doing “community, without essence or project,” an embrace of a fundamental exposure, an affectability, that is grappled with, reworked, and rezoned. The “community” of sensory activism, when it is at its best, is not bound together by some social glue or essence or project, but is rather embraced as the zone of exposure that precedes and enables being. Community in this more prior sense is continually recomposed, reassembled, rezoned, around (sensory) objects of concern that are themselves perpetually becoming. The human-nonhuman collectives of farm to school and slow food attend to sensation as a rhetorical practice—a practice of signification and persuasion, but also of an originary response-ability, one that not only imbues (sensory) worlds with value, but also builds those worlds.

This work, then, continues the project of the exposé considered in chapter 4. “In place of conceptualization and appropriation,” Davis relates, “Nancy calls for *exposition*, the exposition of exposedness: ‘[w]e must expose ourselves to what has gone unheard in community’ (IOC 26)” (8). Our task, more generally, “its to expose exposedness,” (8). Each of the contemporary interventions I have considered in this project, from the exposé to the urban garden, attempts, at a sensory register, to “expose ourselves to what has gone unheard,” to “expose exposedness.” In so doing they invite people to attend to the vital others—more accurately, the vital *otherness*—that inextricably constitutes our being, that calls upon us for a response. If Marx, Bennett, Latour, and Haraway are at all correct that we have seen a waning of response-ability to the nonhuman, a waning of our self-understanding as fundamentally prosthetic, cyborgian beings, then the farm to school and

slow food movements represent a counteracting intensification of response-ability. And this is rhetorical intervention at its most fundamental, its most choric. Such intervention moreover does not and cannot occur at solely the level of the sensing individual, merely as a shift in an individual's response-ability. Rather, things (strawberries, gardens, snack carts) are recognized and engaged as a vital part of a collective's response-ability, a constitutive part of the contact zones that call entities into being and becoming. In keeping with Latour's vision of a *Dingpolitik*, things are invited to participate in collective (sensory) life, and they are invited not merely via a politics of representation (as Latour sometimes seems to suggest), but rather via a politics of sensation, a politics of the contact zone. In these movements, human comes into sensuous contact with nonhuman, nature with culture, ethics with politics.

My opening chapter promised that a rhetorical theory of sensation could inform the problem of immanence that concerns both new and traditional materialist approaches to rhetoric. Representing the inability of the critic, the activist, and even the object to get outside of an existing realm of practices, this problem has guided what has been characterized (and criticized) as an immanent turn in rhetorical studies. Thus in their essay, "W(h)ither Ideology?" Dana Cloud and Joshua Gunn connect the field's turn to immanence with a decline in ideology critique. The authors locate the beginnings of this turn in Raymie McKerrow's influential 1989 essay, "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Practice" discussed in chapter 1. For McKerrow following Foucault, they note, "discourse is material, and critical praxis must attend to its effects without resort to a position of epistemological privilege" (412). As such, McKerrow "sought to remedy the troubles of transcendence with a tempering immanence" (412). Cloud and Gunn trace the

development of the immanent turn in terms of the embrace of a logic of articulation to replace the logics of influence and representation that they connect with traditional ideology critique, a development they map to both Barbara Biesecker and Ronald Greene. As discussed in chapter 1, a logic of articulation, subsequently developed in a more posthumanist key by Nate Stormer, attends us to rhetoric neither as a mere vehicle for information nor as having a merely epistemic function. Rather, a logic of articulation situates rhetoric as something that articulates or composes in its very operation.

The discussion of articulation offered by communication studies scholars aligns with the emphasis of rhetoric's inventive, compositionist function on the English studies side of the field. Davis, for instance, can be understood to attend to how an originary, rhetorical response-ability articulates individuals as ethical beings. Hawhee's notion of invention-in-the-middle attends us to the always prior dispersal of energies out of which any "I" articulates. For Rickert and other "new" materialists, the process of articulation extends throughout human-nonhuman agencies, making certain world possible and preempting others. In this sense, both corporeal and "new" materialist approaches attune us to the perplexing immanence of rhetorical power and agency, to the fact that arenas of affectability always precede meaning, subjectivity, and choice. A concern for immanence likewise has run through discussions of both critical pedagogy and critical methodologies (e.g., McHendry et al), with authors suggesting that we cannot and should not separate scholarship from worldly interventions, criticism from composition.

My project has demonstrated how attention to sensation offers a way in to both immanent critique and immanent political intervention—from the perspective of rhetorical scholarship and public rhetoric alike. Power's immanence, I have suggested,

manifests sensually. Immanent critique and intervention, then, might proceed with attention to the sense-abilities, the sensory contact zones, that enable certain kinds of constitutive contact and debar others. For instance, Foucault calls us to attend to “local centers” of power-knowledge, offering the example of “the body of the child, under surveillance, surrounded in his cradle, his bed, or his room by an entire watch-crew of parents, nurses, servants, educators, and doctors, all attentive to the least manifestations of his sex” (98). The figure of the child’s body, for Foucault, attunes us to the everyday constitution of categories, such as gender or sexuality, that in turn might shape and constrain political change. Here, sensory form is just as important as material or bodily forms: it is a certain kind of surveillance, a certain set of gendering sensibilities, that compose the body of the child, that codes its sex, just as much as it is a certain reigning set of material forms (e.g., male and female).

My project suggests how rhetorical studies can attune to sensory-material forms as “local centers” of power-knowledge that operate on several planes of rhetoricity. To do so, I have reengaged the Scottish Enlightenment’s connections between rhetoric and aesthetic taste and Marx’s ontological connections between sensation and materiality. From the Scottish Enlightenment through the contemporary “new” material turn, I have demonstrated, sensation has been thought and practiced not only as the experience of an individual subject, but also as a qualitative realm of contact among human and nonhuman participants. Hume and Marx alike, I suggest, offer a way in to the practices of immanent critique further elaborated by Latour and today’s food activists. As contemporary food activism demonstrates, immanent critique and activism might proceed by experimentally exploring and intervening in sensory contact zones as fields of rhetorical affectability,

zones that invite certain qualities of human-nonhuman contact and prohibit others. This in turn points us toward a range of immanent loci of critique and intervention, including the experimentation with everyday sensory practices the analysis of an era's sensory and material forms (from large scale forms like the form of private property to micro-forms, like squash smiles or Big Macs) and.

The rhetorical theory of sensation I have begun to compose in these pages deploys and develops rhetoric's multiple materialisms. Resonating with traditional materialist approaches to rhetoric, my project has figured sensation as a site where problematic social and environmental relations may be either reinforced or re-composed. It opens us onto an understanding of sensation as a rhetorical, world-building practice that zones ethical being, offering a sensory and material elaboration of affective approaches to rhetoric. Finally, this rhetoricity of sensation—its affective, ethical, and political powers and vulnerabilities—has emerged as something that abides not in the individual alone, but in contingent and generative sensory ecologies of humans, things, and environments. When we understand sensation as a rhetorical response-ability that is continually composed in human-nonhuman ecologies, this opens a new way to both map and intervene in the flow of corporate power and the materialization of injustices for people, animals, and environments. As Marx and Slow Food help us see, our powers to compose and recompose the relations of capital, the world's peppers and people, can be found in the sensory and material forms that we compose in vital partnership with the world as it is and the world as it might be.

Chapter 5 Notes

¹ http://slowfood.com/convivia-in-action/pagine/eng/pagina.lasso?-id_pg=10

² <https://www.slowfoodusa.org/ark-item/datil-pepper>

³ <https://www.slowfoodusa.org/ark-item/datil-pepper>

⁴ Slow Food has not stopped at the site of material form, either. The Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity also uses the Ark of Taste products as a springboard into supporting what they term “Presidia.” The Slow Food Presidia are committees of people who come together to forge the material pathways needed to conserve a traditional product, production practice, or ecosystem at risk of extinction. This could be a small project involving creating a social network of producers and marketing an endangered product, or it could be a project with specific material goals—as Slow Food USA puts it, “building a slaughterhouse, an oven, or reconstructing crumbling farmhouse walls.”⁴

There are about two hundred Presidia globally; four of them are in the United States. For instance, the Makah Ozette Potato was “boarded” to the Ark of Taste in 2005; in 2006 Slow Food Seattle put 500 pounds of seed into circulation; and in 2008 a Presidium was formed around the potato. This officially brought together Slow Food Seattle, Chefs Collaborative Seattle, the Makah Indian Nation, a network of farmers and elementary school gardens, a potato seed laboratory, and a local USDA Agricultural Research Station. I offer this list to point out how Slow Food’s address of a sensory-material *form*—the Makah Ozette Potato and its taste profile—has given way to a larger sensory-material *network*, bringing quite a variety of parties into concrete material relation.

⁵ <http://insidescoopsf.sfgate.com/blog/2014/10/09/why-is-slow-food-usa-partnering-with-chipotle/>

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- ⁶ <http://www.chow.com/food-news/101027/slow-food-usa/>
- ⁷ http://dinersjournal.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/01/after-turmoil-departure-of-slow-food-leader/?_r=0
- ⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1hU2w0a0HQ>, accessed June 13, 2015.
- ⁹ <http://edibleschoolyard.org/our-story>
- ¹⁰ <http://edibleschoolyard.org/our-story>
- ¹¹ <http://edibleschoolyard.org/our-story>
- ¹² <http://edibleschoolyard.org/program/edible-schoolyard-berkeley>
- ¹³ <http://edibleschoolyard.org/Berkeley>
- ¹⁴ <http://edibleschoolyard.org/node/16248>
- ¹⁵ <http://edibleschoolyard.org/node/16248>
- ¹⁶ [http://edibleschoolyard.org/resources-tools?search=&type\[\]=3&x=55&y=13](http://edibleschoolyard.org/resources-tools?search=&type[]=3&x=55&y=13), accessed June 12, 2015.
- ¹⁷ <http://www.farmentoschool.org/about>
- ¹⁸ <http://www.farmentoschool.org/about>
- ¹⁹ <http://www.farmentoschool.org/learn>
- ²⁰ Informal conversation with Sydney Daigle, Farm to School & Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Coordinator, Office of Nutrition Programs, South Carolina Department of Education; Fall 2013.
- ²¹ <http://www.farmentoschool.org/cnr2015>
- ²² Additional USDA funding sources for farm to school efforts include the Food and Nutrition Service, Agricultural Marketing Service, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Rural Development, and the Farm Service Agency.

²³ cookingwithkids.org/for-educators/

²⁴ <http://cookingwithkids.org/>

²⁵ See, e.g., the Edible Schoolyard lesson plans

(<http://edibleschoolyard.org/program/edible-schoolyard-berkeley>) and lesson plans from

Oklahoma State University <http://www.clover.okstate.edu/fourh/aitc/index.html>

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