

Mobilising bodies: visceral identification in the Slow Food movement

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This paper introduces a *visceral* take on the role of identity in social movement mobilisation. The authors emphasise how identity goes beyond cognitive labels to implicate the entire minded-body. It is suggested that political ideas, beliefs and self definitions require a bodily kind of resonance in order to activate various kinds of environmental and social activism. The authors refer to this bodily resonance as 'visceral processes of identification' and, through empirical investigation with the Slow Food (SF) movement, they reveal specific instances of such processes at work. Examining SF in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, and Berkeley, California, USA, the authors ask how SF comes to *feel* in the bodies of members and non-members and they interrogate the role that feelings play in the development of activism(s). Bodies are shown to both align with movements' socio-political aims and (re)create them. The account provides a means for shifting recent social theoretical attention to bodied/material life to a broad application in political geography, political ecology and social movement theory.

key words body food social movements sensory-based methods Slow Food movement visceral geographies

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revised manuscript received 14 November 2009

Introduction

Matters of mobilisation have long interested scholars of social movements in and outside of geography. Over the past four decades, social movement theory has valuably considered ideological, organisational and identity-based explanations for mobilisation. Recently a number of scholars, building upon earlier identity-based studies, are advancing new understandings of identity and self-definition in order to account for some of the diffuse forms of movement participation and social activism that have been witnessed in civic and political life during the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Escobar 2004; Holland *et al.* 2008; Kurzman 2008; Laraña *et al.* 1994; Polletta and Jasper 2001). We find such work helpful for clarifying motivations and want to expand on it by offering an account of the role of identity in social movements that considers bodies and biology as well as minds and meanings in the mobilisation of participants. What spurred

us to approach identity in this way was the recent broad call, made by geographers and non-geographers alike, to 'take the body seriously' (Hall 2000; also Anderson 2005; Bakker and Bridge 2006; Colls 2007; Grosz 1994; Malins 2004; Probyn 2001; Saldanha 2005). Such scholars have urged a move beyond the depiction of bodily matter as passive material upon which discursive, representational regimes act, to come to see it instead as an active agent in the unfolding of social activity (also see Crouch and Desforges 2003; Hetherington 2003).

In order to take the body seriously in research on identity and mobilisation, we use this paper to develop what we call a *visceral* account of activism. We choose the word 'visceral' because the term is increasingly being used to signal a non-dualistic approach to reality that emphasises the capacity of mind and body to judge, think and perform (Lorraine 1999; Probyn 2001). Throughout the paper the visceral realm broadly refers to the (ever-changeable) sites of the human body in/through which

feelings, sensations, moods, states, and so on are experienced. Since the human body is always a minded-body (McWhorter 1999), the visceral realm necessarily includes the cognitive mind and biological brain, but should not be understood as exclusively mediated through the brain; the visceral is an internal relation of mind and body, not sequential from one to the other. We detail the theoretical underpinnings of the term visceral below. We seek to express that (political) identity is made and remade in the visceral realm and, furthermore, that such relations generate the energy necessary for social movement mobilisation. We speak of 'visceral feelings' and, more broadly, 'visceral processes of identification' in order to underline how becoming part of a movement entails fitting with that movement in corporeal as well as cognitive terms. Our quest is similar to Longhurst *et al.* (2009) who examine how the visceral shapes and is shaped by an array of socio-political relations. This effort might be thought of as a rereading and expansion of the notion of 'frame alignment' wherein a social movement organisation attempts to join the cognitive orientation of individuals with that of the movement (McAdam 1994).

We explore the visceral realm in activism through an examination of the food-based social movement Slow Food (SF). SF is a particularly appropriate movement with which to investigate the visceral because bodies and sensations are already at the forefront of their stated mission. As such, researchers and participants alike can explicitly identify and invoke viscerality, offering insights that we then can apply to other movements. SF is a member-supported movement consisting of farmers, food producers, chefs, other professionals, educators and consumers in over 100 countries, both developed and developing. In developed countries, SF members tend to be middle-class adults, who can afford the membership fees that support members in developing countries. The movement in Europe, USA and Canada is largely Caucasian/European-origin. In their own words, SF is interested in the protection and enjoyment of food that *tastes good* (a highly subjective visceral judgement), is *clean* (environmentally sound) and *fair* (just to producers). While SF practices differ among its local chapters, or 'convivia' as the group calls them, the movement is generally premised upon the idea that developing a bodily relationship with food is not only a vital human-environment relation, but also a political endeavour (Petrini

et al. 2007). As the term *convivia* suggests, the group also adheres to a philosophy of *conviviality*, emphasising that the enjoyment of food can and should be shared.

SF's political take on food is probably more diffuse, more centred in everyday life than the traditional social movements studied a few decades ago (e.g. workers movements, political parties). Despite SF's Italian Marxist beginnings in the 1980s, its politics today are highly varied and in many ways congruent with dominant social and economic systems (see Guthman 2007; Leitch 2003; Murdoch and Miele 2002; Pietrykowski 2004). Nevertheless, SF is a particular attempt to establish a certain order in food systems and organise human coexistence. With parallels to the women's movement, SF largely acts by raising awareness and offering hands-on experiences of the kinds of foods, farming practices and distribution arrangements that the movement seeks to work towards. Such actions become important not only because they educate and influence voters on critical issues such as the farm bill and food safety regulations, but because they help to create a growing, though often elite public that is keen to offer economic, emotional and logistical support to change the tide of current food systems toward local, small-scale farming/production/distribution practices that are thought to minimise environmental impacts and provide fair wages.

We examine chapters of SF in and around Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, and Berkeley, California, USA, in order to demonstrate how the movement both evolves through and encourages certain visceral feelings in relation to food and food spaces/environments (farms, gardens, farmers markets, restaurants and so on). These two locales were chosen for high levels of activism in alternative food systems, within and beyond the Slow Food movement. While Berkeley is well known as the 1970s breeding ground for organic and local food ideologies, Nova Scotia is rapidly growing as a destination for local, heritage and 'slow' foods. Considering both locations we ask: how is SF viscerally experienced and what are the connections between this viscerality and mobilisation towards specific human-environment relations and thus particular forms of environmental and social activism? In doing so we also ask how SF might be constraining its political possibilities by compelling or restricting certain tendencies of feeling. While we certainly hint here at some of the ways in

which boundaries of social difference, such as race, class and gender, are *felt* through SF, we address detailed discussion of race and class in another paper, which explores identity intersections and clashes at the boundaries of SF and other forms of food activism (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2009). Below, we focus on identity *within* the bounds of the knowingly Eurocentric, middle-class SF movement. Our account provides a means for shifting social theoretical engagements with identity to a body-attentive approach in political geography, political ecology and social movement theory.

Visceral identities

Meanings and understandings of movement mobilisation have shifted over the past four decades. An early focus on ideology allowed scholars to understand mobilisation as a consequence of shared beliefs that specified grievances or perceived injustices of groups (Laraña *et al.* 1994). While valuable, this focus overlooked organisational affairs, and was later appended by Resource Mobilisation theory (RM), which stressed the ability of organisations to gather resources and plan actions (Jenkins 1983; Zald and McCarthy 1977). Motivation to participate in a movement was then seen in terms of logic and opportunity. Still, scholars struggled to explain movements that did not seem to fit under the RM paradigm. Thus, a third major strand of social movement scholarship, New Social Movement (NSM) theory, sought to offer alternative accounts of mobilisation and political action (Habermas 1981; Laraña *et al.* 1994; Plotke 1990). NSM theorists have given more attention to the question of cultural identity and, herein, they stress the role of self image and the social construction of meanings as central to mobilisation.

NSM also has expanded scholarly understanding of political action to the civil dimensions of society; scholars argue that movements can be 'acted out' in everyday life, and both mobilisation and social change are seen to come, in part, through processes of social interrelation in which people rework self-definitions and behaviour in accordance with a movement (Laraña *et al.* 1994). Perhaps the best-known example of such a movement is the women's movement; others include peace movements, student movements, gay rights, alternative medicine/food and religious fundamentalist movements. Since this shift in understandings of activism

and mobilisation it has become more common to discuss social movements in unorthodox terms. For instance, it is now not unusual to see movements conveyed as ambiguous, hybrid, heterogeneous, emotive, chaotic, de-centred or self-organising both within the discipline of geography (Amin and Thrift 2007; Bosco 2007; Chatterdon 2006; Marston *et al.* 2005; Paddison *et al.* 2000; Pickerill and Chatterton 2006), and outside (Chesters and Welsh 2005; Fuchs 2006; Holland *et al.* 2008; Olesen 2005).

It is within this broad evolution of thought that we situate our argument. We understand self-definition and identity as strong motivating factors in movement participation, perhaps especially in the more diffuse movements such as SF that invite action in the everyday/civil dimensions of society. Yet, in pushing for 'taking the body seriously' we see the need to understand identity differently and in relation to other social identities and power relations. What makes identity powerful? How does identity function as an activating force within the body? These questions echo recent work on emotions in social movements (e.g. Bosco 2006 2007; Cadena-Roa 2002; Goodwin *et al.* 2000; Jasper 1998) yet take a different direction to directly interrogate how the 'power' of emotions is varied and embodied. A handful of scholars have also indicated the political importance of affect, feeling and sensation, albeit using varied terminology (e.g. Dewsbury 2005; Gibson-Graham 2003; Jenkins 2005; Thrift 2004). For example, Gibson-Graham (2003, 61), drawing on Connolly (1999), suggests a need to examine the biological body/brain for 'factors that dispose us negatively' to new (e.g. ecological or non-hierarchical) ways of being. Gibson-Graham encourages scholars to place (political/social/ecological) identity within the context of an active biological body; an individual's embrace of any kind of social structure or any given movement entails the (re)creation of how his/her body *feels* in particular situations.

Thus, the question of how bodies come to *feel good* (or bad) in and through certain forms of acting emerges as fundamental to our aim to understand mobilisation. The terms 'good' and 'bad' are, clearly, highly subjective, and act as place-holders for more substantial, detailed depictions and portrayals of feelings and sensations. In this paper, we unpack and explore 'good' and 'bad' feelings around SF, in order to recognise such feelings as central to the processes of identification whereby

the ideological frames and material spaces of a movement find resonance with people. We express identification as far more than a cognitive endeavour implicating numerous chemical and molecular procedures of the human body in order to help to solidify a personal agreement or disagreement with the beliefs, intensions and material spaces a movement provides. Thus, our visceral approach understands identity as always already wound up in the ideas, meanings and discourses that help to represent individuals, groups and desires, yet it centres on understanding these representations vis-à-vis an analysis of *feelings* that work to satisfy the always embodied process we know as identification. We want to be sure to emphasise that while our visceral approach seeks to include the (minded) body in social research, the approach does not exclude the power relations that privilege some bodies over others, but rather holistically integrates them *into* the body. A visceral approach is a way to see social difference operating *in* the body alongside other processes more often recognised as cellular, molecular or bodily. Issues of race, gender and class are not outside the visceral.

It should be helpful to clarify the origins and meanings of this 'visceral' label with five specifications. First, the visceral is about the ways that the human body *experiences* the world. We are interested in what the body feels like when it does certain activities like eat, garden or (otherwise) participate in social actions. In describing such feelings colloquially, we tend to privilege the internal body – 'gut reactions', 'heart-felt' and so on. Yet visceral identification is also, second, a *biosocial* process, reflecting the interaction of biological and social forces. Biosocial theorists play with the tension between biology and society in a variety of ways. For some, the term biosocial is meant as a disruption to the nature/society binary, and thus effectively to the mind/body binary (e.g. Mansfield 2008; Pollard and Hyatt 1999). What this means in analysis is that we privilege neither the physiological/body nor the social/mind in creating feelings (visceral sensations) but rather see them as a result of a relation between the two. We are interested in the mind/body as it *becomes* and thrives within broader social processes that help to create visceral sensations. Our understanding of biosocial highlights multivalent relations producing visceral sensations.

Third, visceral identification as biosocial means it is inherently *relational*, whereby relations are seen

as the foundation of everything, including matter. Such relational thinking, or relational materialism, cements the view that neither ideas nor matter are immutable, passive or pre-known.¹ For instance, Colls (2007) expresses how bodily matter acts in its own right *through* its relationship to the social. Accordingly, the ways that bodies come to feel the world are reducible neither to cellular/chemical processes nor to discursive/intellectual processes; they are manifest in the catalytic relationship of the two.

Fourth, the visceral is *developmental*. The human body develops – physiologically, emotionally, intellectually – through life. The feelings of the human body often have much to do with past experiences and lessons of feeling and judging that the minded-body has learned (e.g. Alcoff 2006; Brison 2003). Thus, the ways that the biological and the social relate in the visceral realm can become patterned, or in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) terms, can 'sediment', leading to tendencies to feel certain ways about various material goods, ideas, people or places.

Finally, this developmental component means that visceral tendencies are by no means fixed; they are *heterogeneous*. Visceral identification is constantly developing, changing, diversifying. Indeed, the visceral is perhaps the ultimate 'space of heterogeneous association' (Murdoch 2006, 56). That is, the visceral realm is one in which each day's particular amalgamation of new circumstances – a headache, a spoken word, the weather, a memory, a pat on the back – brings the possibility of something different, some unexpected ways of feeling.²

As noted, this characterisation of the visceral was inspired by feminist theory, affect geography and relational social philosophy. Indeed, our interest in the role of visceral experience in mobilisation grows from a long tradition of feminist scholarship on embodied politics, which leads us closer to specifying how the activist body works (Beasley and Bacci 2007; Richardson and Harper 2006). Likewise, scholars of affect and non-representational theory, drawing from relational thinkers like Deleuze and Guattari (1989), Latour (1993) and Massumi (2002), help to interrogate the relations between bodies and other things as a catalytic process whereby various social/environmental actions are enabled/disabled (e.g. Dewsbury 2005; Latham and McCormack 2004; Lorimer 2005; Rose 2002). All of such work invites an examination of the mechanisms through which activists are motivated.

Furthermore, by combining these sources we get a sense of the need to specify how it is that bodies come to feel and judge their surroundings, and to integrate these judgements with other social messages, such as those that define bodies as raced, classed and gendered.

The remainder of this paper examines the experiences of food activists as they take part in, inform and generate SF. After briefly explaining our site choices and methods, we survey narratives of how SF feels in the bodies of its members. We use these as a springboard for expressing how various forms of ecosocial acting emerge amidst SF's strategies of positive politics and taste education. We finally discuss some critical implications of this visceral story for understanding and conceptualising activism.

Slow Food in context

We argue that our visceral account of identity is potentially applicable to *all* social movements; after all, all movements have a material presence and are sensorially experienced by those who encounter them. For instance, a 1970s anti-war activist recently recounted to us how his bodily feelings, as he woke on brisk mornings to drive to planning meetings, gathered with other anti-war activists, and formed canoe blockades against battleships, were central to his activism. His minded-body today remembers those moments, holds on to them, not in a static way, yet in a way that causes him still to crave the bodily sensations that those days provided. His activist state, we could argue, was a biosocial one. By finding visceral resonance with various movement time-spaces, he was moved to carry on his anti-war activism.

Such visceral processes are perhaps even easier to witness in movements such as SF, which offer an everyday, multifaceted kind of 'resistance'. In focusing resistance around food habits, SF not only calls attention to ways of living in the world, but also insists on recognising bodily sensations (especially gustatory pleasures) as the core of the movement. SF attempts to resist environmental and social injustices of conventional food systems through public workshops and events, celebrations, family meals, gardens, conversations and connections made between producers and consumers. Through all of this, not only are specific issues and ideas passed on, but so too is the imagery of an alternative approach to living. Embracing SF as a bodied (mind/body) practice means engaging

corporeally and mentally with regional landscapes, experiencing and caring for local agro-ecosystems and economies, and of course, savouring a variety of local and imported foods that SF upholds (for various reasons) as 'good, clean and fair'. Those who practise such ecosocial actions through SF have ostensibly come to *feel good* in/through such circumstances.

But what does *feeling good* actually mean? 'Good' in this sense is a subjective bodily judgement, defined by each body in the moment of action. Following Anderson's (2005) cyclical portrayal of bodily practices of judgement, what allows certain circumstances, such as protest events or slow food dinners, to feel 'good' or 'bad' is the impression that such a bodily judgement is 'right'. Anderson writes,

What underpins the making of a judgement is, in rather circular terms, a visceral, non-cognitive, belief in the veracity of that judgement: put simply our expression of taste is not only felt but it is also felt to be natural. (2005, 646)

In other words, what determines the bodily judgement of 'good' seems to be a kind of visceral resonance with that which is being judged. While Anderson (2005) explores such bodily practices of judgement in relation to choices in music – why at certain times a person will prefer this song over that – we explore them here in relation to food activism. In both cases, focus is on the production of believed visceral feelings, rather than on the content of what is chosen (a type of music or a type of activism) in order to draw out the processes through which these feelings become operative.

Opportunities for eco-social action in SF differ greatly from location to location. As a locally-driven organisation, SF's chapters make their own priorities. Paying members of SF all support the projects of the international organisation but localised experiences of SF vary greatly. Author Michael Pollen comments:

In some [SF] groups it's really just an eating club, people who like to have dinner and ... every time a course is served stand up and take a picture of their plate – aestheticising the whole thing and not thinking about farmers or the environment or biodiversity; so in a way [SF has] kind of let people go their own way and you can read that as a very positive thing; successful projects will come forward in time. (MP, personal interview 2007)

Noting this diversity, we chose two sites for fieldwork where SF activities were known to have

content in regard to environmental and social objectives: Nova Scotia, Canada (NS) and Berkeley, California (CA).

The first author engaged in ethnographic, participatory and sensory-driven fieldwork with participating SF members – 34 in CA and 21 in NS – as well as other foods activists (six in CA, four in NS). All but two participating SF members were white (all but one quoted here were white). The vast majority were middle class, college-educated and left-leaning politically. The age range of participants varied, but the majority were older than 45. Fieldwork centred on a variety of ‘intentionally designed experiences’ created by SF members to be shared by researcher(s) and participant(s). These experiences ranged from quiet dinners, cooking, gardening and shopping to large celebrations, restaurant work, farm chores and trips to food production sites. In-depth, conversational interviews were also a part of the research encounter with SF, often simultaneously occurring with designed experiences (for more on methods see Hayes-Conroy forthcoming). At all times, our research interest in how SF *feels* was made explicit. We allowed for verbal and non-verbal exchange such that through talking, showing, tasting, smelling, trying and otherwise *participating* together, participants and researchers found a range of ways to communicate visceral feelings in relation to the ideas and spaces created by SF. Offering varied kinds of communication was vital because, as we learned, visceral matters are rarely verbalised. One SF organiser explains:

When people tell you that they want to belong to [SF], what they are telling you is that a lot of things that SF sort of stands for has *resonance* in their life but they couldn't [name it], they couldn't write a book about it; they just know. (Robert, NS)

Through engaging directly with the *matter* of the movement – food itself, in various forms – participants were able to show us examples and offer stories about how SF resonates with them and motivates them to bring SF practices into their lives.

Feeling food

One of the most common kinds of stories we encountered were anecdotes recounting visceral feelings associated with specific food items. In California, the first author enjoyed a meandering lunchtime

conversation in the sprawling home garden of a professional woman in her mid 30s. Our exchange, and the delight we shared in seeing her garden's nearly-ripe red strawberries, led to her avowal of a variety of local grapes:

To me it's amazing ... like, I had forgotten about this one variety of grapes that this grower brings to the market, and it came around again a month ago and I was like Oh {gasps} the grapes! They are beautiful! They are delicious! (Karen, CA)

Similarly, while touring the successful Nova Scotia restaurant of a single professional woman in her 50s, she expressed what animated her:

We just found this mussel guy. We are getting these Nova Scotia pink oyster mussels from this local guy ... I mean they're just ... I got goosebumps [laughs]. (Liz, NS)

Both of these anecdotes discuss feelings – self-described good or positive feelings – engendered through an encounter with a specific food. The quotes are verbal ways that these women found to express what SF felt like to them; yet, put in context, they are much more than just *talk* about feelings. These women chose particular sensorial and convivial backdrops – Karen's home garden and Liz's bustling restaurant – to convey what it was about SF that *moved* them. Through our encounters in these spaces, seeing, sensing, sharing, the described feelings were actually brought into motion. Karen and Liz's facial expressions, gestures and words established the complex visceral relationship these women have with food. These elements of our encounter made clear that the flavour and feeling of satiation offered by food are not the only aspects of foods that they enjoy and feel; foods that are local heritage varieties, uncommon and more endangered as agricultural species, produced on a small scale by producers that were knowable to them, all of such 'slow food' characteristics within and beyond 'taste' work to establish how foods feel in the bodies of these women. Liz's goosebumps were the manifestation of a number of biological and socio-political factors coming into her body – the localness of the mussels and personal connection with the supplier, the rarity of the variety, their rich flavour and aroma, *and* importantly for us, the chance to relate her success finding them with us as we toured her restaurant.

One more example is telling. Over French roast coffee in a European-style coffee house that served

omelettes made with 'pastured' eggs and artisan-made salamis, the first author met with a middle class, male leader in SF. He explained how particular artisan-produced cured meats, sanctioned by SF, drew him in:

The way that I've been really involved and passionate about food is through taste of Slow Food 'arc' products directly. I mean once you taste a [xyz] prosciutto, you know, you get sort of enlightened. (Ernest, CA)³

Ernest chuckled bashfully at his use of the word enlightened, but his eyes and grand gestures simultaneously told of the sincerity of his declaration; foods literally, materially power his activism. The particularities of the prosciutto's flavour mix with his detection of an artisan-produced, eco-socially acceptable product, in such a way that it becomes inappropriate to ask whether it's the 'taste' or the 'knowledge' of the origins of the food that resonate with him. Thus, our encounter with Ernest clarifies a point that we have been trying to make through the above examples; that is, 'slow' foods of various kinds are working as an impetus for mobilisation in SF. As these individuals engage with slow-type foods, they come to feel 'good' in/through these relations and they hence come to identify with the SF movement in a manifestly bodied way; each physical/intellectual encounter with slow foods allows them to *become* the movement in ways that shape their future food experiences. In this way, visceral engagement with food (in all of its biological and social aspects) helps to form a basis for commitment to SF as a means to foster similar future food engagements. SF organisers seem to be aware of this power of food. In the next section we describe how the movement both builds from and attempts to guide the visceral feelings of members and prospective members.

Engendering feelings

Early on SF was described to us as 'stealth activism', akin to 'a good starter drug' in that it could reel in those who had negative associations with contentious politics and/or didn't follow environmental or social justice concerns. Such ease of attraction seems to come from a trio of factors that we dub *positive politics*: SF's focus on gustatory and convivial pleasures, its soft-handed political messaging, and its locally defined intentions. With 'loose' activism, a pliable motto, and much food

and wine, chances are SF will *feel good* (in the self-defined, seemingly 'natural' sense we described earlier) to many people most of the time, or so the strategy seems. One NS member, a married, retired professional man, comments:

We are using an approach [which is] on the side of the individual to take a light message and craft it into their own ... You go to an event and experience a new taste or meet a farmer ... It's not a message that asks you to do anything particularly. (Robert, NS)

Another food professional in CA, a young woman, a few years out of college, makes a similar appraisal of the movement's sanguinity:

They are actively trying to avoid guilty feelings, and using positive language is something that SF has picked up on. Everything has to be positive ... [There is little] language that alludes to negativity towards our current food system. They don't say, 'This is bad, we need to do this instead.' It's more like, 'Enjoy this!' (Ann, CA)

Indeed, focusing on feelings may be SF's primary method of mobilisation. Central to that focus is finding ways for people to feel connected to each other and food in ways that are 'pleasurable' as Alice Waters, Vice President of SF International comments:

I like to think of Slow Food as a perfume, that when the ideas of Slow Food come into the room, they, [*she sniffs*] bring people together; it's really about bringing people to all of these ideas through pleasure. (Alice Waters, personal interview, December 2007)

Such focus on pleasure begs the question, what is pleasurable? After all, positing SF as pleasurable only works as an organising strategy if (and for whom) concrete SF 'pleasures' (e.g. eating certain foods, linking with farmers) are felt (viscerally resonant) and are perceived as positive. For SF, the cyclical answer to 'what is pleasurable?' often seems to be whatever minded-bodies can find pleasure in. This answer works for SF precisely because in trying to keep everything positive, the organisation does not want to pin pleasure down. They do not require adherence with any food guidelines, attendance at events, nor direct action of any sort in order to be considered a part of the movement.⁴ In theory, then, members are largely free to 'make it their own' in that they are encouraged to eat, believe and generally live in ways that feel good to them while celebrating whichever aspects of the broad SF agenda they find pleasing.

Still, the pleasures of SF are not as open to interpretation as some may suggest. Through planned events and convivia projects, the pleasures of SF inevitably come to be regulated and policed in specific ways. Some convivia emphasise casual get-togethers in the homes of members where unfamiliar culinary techniques might be tried out (e.g. learning how to dry persimmons). Other convivia emphasise more grandiose fundraising dinners, often over \$100 a plate. Still others emphasise 'funky' events for younger crowds or film screenings and academic debates. In each case, a particular version of SF is being presented as pleasurable – and specifically as shareable 'convivial' pleasure. Yet despite the emphasis on shared pleasure, all minded bodies attending such events come to *feel* them in particular and often differing ways. These feelings work to set precedents for participation.

We learned that some members try out the fundraising events to find that they don't resonate – these feel 'ostentatious', 'exclusive' or otherwise 'bad'. Such feelings are obviously relevant to other social processes and identities like class, race, gender, residential location, and so on. The fact that other participants told us that they find the atmosphere of the fundraisers 'satisfying', 'enjoyable' or otherwise resonant signals the intersectionality and heterogeneity of visceral identification, as various minded bodies are able to absorb social relations, food–body relations and (semi-fluid) categories to feel as though they fit in. Feelings engendered in/through these SF practices stem from the ways in which an entire minded-body has come to relate to and respond to its social, material environment.

In addition to simply regulating which pleasures might be found at events, SF convivia also *actively* try to shape feelings about food. Among SF's key projects, its emphasis on 'taste education' provides clear illustration of how visceral feelings and sensations come to work in and for the movement. Convivia frequently put together workshops, tasting events and other instructive projects where the objective is to awaken and train the senses, as well as the intellect, to prefer slow foods, often heritage breeds or heirloom varieties that get lost in corporate-industrial food systems. Two SF members, both middle-class professional males in their 40s, one European-American the other Asian-American, comment on the idea of educating tastes through direct sensory experience:

You can really have a better food system if you [teach people to] taste the difference between a plasticised chicken and a free-range chicken. If you [call for small, local, clean and fair foods] only because you believe it, but you can't taste the difference between industrial plasticised chicken and the free range chicken, in the end, you won't be able to convince the people. (Ernest, CA)

[Our events, like our recent trip to an organic lamb operation, are] a very visceral experience. So when people are at the market you hope they will think about it and say, 'Oh this is that great lamb from Sonoma, let's not get that New Zealand lamb'. (Tristan, CA)

These comments are indicative of a central mechanism through which SF operates. Not only does SF try to capitalise on a wide variety of pleasures or sensory experiences that members or potential members may already tend towards in relation to food, but the movement also attempts to shape the development of members' visceral relationships with food. Left unexamined in such movement strategising, however, is how bodies *differentially* taste or feel food in light of other elements of their social context, race and class among them. SF largely fails to operate with cognisance that what is 'pleasurable' is complicated, shaped not simply by a granule landing on a taste bud, but simultaneously on social cues and sedimented experiences of social difference. Through its projects of taste education, SF approaches its members' minded-bodies as unproblematised sensors, meant to be trained to learn how to access 'pleasurable' feelings, broadly construed, in relation to specific varieties of food as well as specific landscapes, aesthetics, types of cultural/social experience, and means of connecting with agro-ecosystems. SF recognises that pleasurable feelings can be catalytic – they can provide energy or impetus for supporting, participating in, and advancing slow food projects and ideals. Yet, as the fundraiser example demonstrates, a deliberate focus on 'pleasure' will never be universal. Furthermore, as we will detail below, the ways in which 'pleasure' can work for mobilisation are not absolute.

The feel of politics

While SF leaders are clearly utilising and instructing good feelings in relation to various slow foods and SF experiences, less clear is how far their strategies can go in politicising food acts and food issues towards greater social change. Undoubtedly

SF leaders see value in the one person/body/tongue at-a-time approach to food system change. SF International Vice President Alice Waters comments:

Is having a refined palate or training it a political act? I hope so; politics is not just voting. Politics in Greek sense was about every interaction that you had with every other person on the planet, and learning to eat and appreciating the person who grew your food is [central to that]. (AW, personal interview, Dec 2007)

To Waters, the sensing/tasting of 'quality' alongside the ability to 'feel good' about partaking in a social and economic system that promotes 'good, clean and fair' foods seems like classic politics, yet the notion that daily, bodily events are political in nature is not always apparent in SF organising. The idea that *any* body can be trained, and that all bodies are the same, limits the reach of SF, and closes off an explicit link to more traditional forms of activism. Many SF participants contrast their sensations and actions around food with other kinds of 'politics', which seem to them to be less effective and accessible.

For instance, says Nancy, a middle-class food professional in her 30s:

For me, the turning point [in terms of my involvement in politics] was the 2004 presidential election. I was so crushed and depressed for a couple of months, and I came out of it thinking, 'It's all pointless, but one thing I could make a difference in is food.' It's not just about what I can buy but how can I support this with my wallet *and* get others interested ... [I thought], 'You can do something about this!' It's not like the war in Iraq; food is an empowering thing to me. It's easy to reach people with food ... It's a politics that transcends identity politics and partisan politics. It's about our earth and about supporting small farmers and keeping farms in the community. (Nancy, CA)

Similarly Robert, in NS expresses:

What is the definition of politics in SF? It's not an activist definition I don't think, it's more in line with ... conversation. The more people you engage in conversation, the more understanding occurs, the more possibilities for a range of [actions] that can be taken ... People go away and talk to others ... I don't know what comes out of that, but it is different from trying to influence a government cabinet minister to change a policy about blueberry marketing in NS. It's a much more conversation-oriented potential for action, potential for dialogue, potential for an understanding, potential for grasping and applying to other parts of your life, the sort of slow understanding of how the world works ...

I think the SF way of creating action is much different than the political action motivated by Greenpeace. (Robert, NS)

Finally, Sally, a middle-class professional researcher and mother in her 40s, comments:

Is it an activist group? I think it is, and it gives people an easy way in [to activism] ... People don't want to be called any kind of 'ist' for some reason, and it's almost like self activism. ... so, by making it accessible you can be an activist and not have to come face to face with that fact. (Sally, NS)

These three comments point to ways that SF becomes a comfortable kind of social action. Yet they also suggest that the enjoyment of food and focus on taste can be in conflict with traditional forms of activism. While SF may find it easy to bring in North American members from European-origin, left-leaning, college-educated, middle-class segments of the population (such as the above three members), through building upon the ways that they have been viscerally (bodily *and* intellectually) primed for identification with slow foods, the movement often encounters negative feelings in relation to conventional forms of political action. For this reason, some food activists (both within and outside of SF) have indicated dissatisfaction with SF's version of alternative food politics. If SF participants can be 'active' through altered palates, convivial conversations and restructured food habits, how do they rework these ways of feeling/living into transformations of the food economy?

One male SF member, a middle-class professional in his 50s, struggled with these contradictions:

SF originally was a gastronomic organisation ... then we realised we can't do any of this without becoming an activist organisation. ... [W]e are trying to change the world and the time is running out! With the farm bill and oil spills in [San Francisco] Bay we can't just sit back and enjoy breaking bread with friends. There has to be higher purpose and we are becoming more of an activist organisation. (Arnie, CA)

Arnie's comment points to the ways in which his own visceral processes of identification become mixed up in the political contradictions inherent to the movement. While the 'softening' of SF's projects makes the movement palatable to many, others find such softening objectionable; for them, SF does not *do enough* and this inaction *feels bad*. For

Arnie, this is true particularly in light of the largely middle-class make-up that he sees in SF convivia in CA. Part of Arnie's struggle with SF is an attempt to viscerally come to grips with his own economic privilege in the CA food systems in contrast to his neighbours, a family of struggling Mexican immigrants, seasonal agricultural workers who get paid very little within the system of conventional agriculture that he seeks to change.

Indeed, throughout our interviews and SF experiences we encountered many SF members as well as non-member food activists who worry that SF does not encourage people to find pleasure in the 'political side' of food. For example, in convivia that approach SF as an 'eating club', SF participants may not learn to interrogate their habits of feeling in regard to food and may instead sediment modes of visceral identification along lines of being a part of an elite that can appreciate and preserve good food. Briefly, while visceral feelings are central to the unfolding of SF, firmly sedimented feelings, or unquestioned modes of visceral identification, can impede the movement's chances to engender social and ecological change by stagnating relations with socio-space/environment along strictly uncritical and apolitical lines and preventing the formation of new/other body–environment relations. In recognising such barriers, SF could become more viscerally reflexive. Just as Connolly (1999) and Gibson-Graham (2003) propose intentionally cultivating particularly receptive parts of the biological body/brain, each SF convivium could use projects like taste education as opportunities to call 'pleasure' into question – asking if there are certain pleasures in which SF bodies have become too complacent, others which they have ignored, or ways that taste itself is constructed through social processes that are marked by racialisation and class processes.

Through such direct visceral interrogation, SF and other social movements could gain not only an understanding of how they physically mobilise and sustain their membership, but also what changes to events and organising might help them to move in new directions or achieve different objectives. After all, while bodies can develop dispositions to 'feel good' about particular ways of acting or doing, these dispositions never fully stagnate. Malins points out,

while bodies are themselves drawn to these reassuring modes of (organ)isation, they also simultaneously repel

them . . . For no identity category is ever entirely stable; no subject totally unified and consistent. (2004, 86)

As new experiences are forged, feelings shift and flow in new directions; from here emerges the possibility of 'revolutionary becomings' (2004, 86). Minded-bodies can become activist in new and more intentional ways; a SF 'eating club' enthusiast might turn towards more direct forms of political action if he/she were given opportunity to *feel* activism in new ways. Hence, SF, alongside other diffuse, everyday kinds of movements, could benefit from reflexive engagement with the processes of visceral identification upon which they build and are built.

Conclusions

This paper calls attention to the visceral ground of activism as a means of understanding how identity becomes powerful for mobilisation. We express how identity goes beyond cognitive labels like activist or foodie, educated or progressive, to implicate the entire minded body. Taking a non-dualistic mind/body approach, it becomes clear that ideas, beliefs and self definitions require a bodily kind of resonance in order to activate a person. We have referred to such resonance as 'visceral processes of identification' and through analysis of our empirical investigations have revealed specific instances of these processes at work. Our point is not to generalise these instances of visceral feeling into universal moments (as Grosz (1994) warns) but instead to recognise a multiplicity of ways in which minded-bodies are constantly developing, moving, shifting and working. In so doing bodies are both aligning with a movement's socio-political aims and (re)creating them. Finally, we have also discussed ways in which this visceral background of movement participation could be brought to the foreground; through reflexive attention to the tendencies and uncertainties of the minded-body as it encounters food/politics, movements could uncover possibilities of (re)forming habits of feeling as a political strategy.

In regard to the SF movement specifically, we expressed how the movement encourages celebration of one's tastes and bodily states not only in pursuit of what 'feels good', but also in favour of social and ecological changes that would make those feelings more possible (e.g. local food schemes, no-spray farming). SF does not demand

that people imagine themselves as political actors unless they find such a political imaginary pleasurable. Yet, by setting forth new opportunities for feeling (e.g. finding pleasure in a local heritage apple) without demanding that these occasions be named as political, SF could be creating opportunities in which bodies with varying levels of comfort with politics can be socio-politically active. In the SF convivia we studied, socio-political activity ranged from direct economic support of local farmers and fundraising for projects on agro-biodiversity to organising protections for heritage varieties and consciousness-raising about food legislation.

The SF movement is an opportunity to witness visceral processes that exist in less visible forms in other social movements. In much social movement literature, identity has been recognised as both a reason for and a consequence of movement mobilisation. Individuals may join a movement in search of identity or build new identities through movement participation (Kurzman 2008). We have sought to show how a focus on visceral processes of identification not only complicates our understandings of identity in movements but also encourages us to recognise mobilisation as a corporeal phenomenon. Furthermore, we have tried to emphasise that social identities – class, race, gender, sexuality – are part and parcel of visceral identification; all processes of identification are necessarily housed within a visceral frame through which life events are felt.

While food movements such as SF provide easy illustration of the activist body as it literally ingests/becomes the focal matter of the movement (food), our visceral account is applicable to other movements. This is so precisely because all movements create social and material spaces and environments – through protests, outreach, literature and so on – that bodies encounter and experience. The relations between a movement's spaces/environments and different minded bodies manifest particular feelings that can turn people 'on' or 'off' to a cause. By recognising the corporeal location(s) of these feelings, and specifying their power(s) scholars and activists ready themselves for a more complete understanding of the role of identity in mobilisation.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge Matt Huber, Susan Hanson, Ben Anderson and Jody

Emel for their helpful comments on earlier drafts, as well as editor Alison Blunt and three anonymous referees for their valuable suggestions.

Notes

- 1 This idea of 'relational' draws from many social philosophers including Deleuze and Guattari (1989) and Latour (1993). Geographers (Anderson and Wylie 2008; Thrift 1999; Whatmore 2002) and feminist scholars (Alcoff 2006; Haraway 1991) have used 'relational' in similar ways. Also see Castree (2003).
- 2 Latham and McCormack (2004), Anderson (2005) and Bakker and Bridge (2006) convey a parallel sense of heterogeneity in regard to matter, affect or bodies.
- 3 The Slow Food 'arc' is a project to identify, label and protect endangered agricultural species and/or culinary processes.
- 4 While SF requires payment for official membership, we encountered many who did not pay membership fees and were still active in the movement.

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