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Between food and flesh: how animals are made to matter (and not matter) within food consumption practices

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Abstract. **Contemporary European consumers find themselves at an interesting point in history with regards to their relationships with animals. On the one hand there has been a growth in the acknowledgement of animal sentience, yet on the other hand, largely unabated, we continue to farm, kill, and eat animals for food. In this paper we contend that these ambiguities are played out within everyday embodied practices of preparing, eating, and shopping for food. We begin our account by outlining a novel performative approach to food consumption practices, which we have termed 'foodsensing', and we contend that every act of sensing food is always already an act of making sense of food. This approach allows us to examine the complex interplay between material and symbolic dimensions of food consumption practices. Throughout the paper we draw on this notion of foodsensing, in conjunction with empirical material taken from forty-eight focus group discussions conducted across seven European countries, to shed new light on the ways in which farm animals are made to matter (and not matter) within food consumption practices.**

> "And the waiters set a leg of mutton before Alice, who looked at it rather anxiously, as she had never had to carve a joint before. 'You look a little shy: let me introduce you to that leg of mutton,' said the Red Queen. 'Alice----Mutton: Mutton----Alice.' The leg of mutton got up in the dish and made a little bow to Alice: and Alice returned the bow, not knowing whether to be frightened or amused. 'May I give you a slice?' she said, taking up the knife and fork, and looking from one Queen to the other. 'Certainly not,' the Red Queen said, very decidedly: 'it isn't etiquette to cut any one you've been introduced to.'"
>
> Carroll (1998, pages 229 – 230)

1 Introduction

In a recent BBC3 television series, entitled *Kill it*, *Cook it*, *Eat it* a studio audience is invited to witness in overlit detail all the processes of slaughter and butchery which transform a living, breathing animal into firstly dead meat and ultimately into edible, even appetising, food. Throughout the process the audience is encouraged to reflect upon what is unfolding before their eyes, and at the end, like Alice, they have the 'opportunity' to eat the animal to whom they had previously been introduced. For many the experience is intense: they are shocked and overwhelmed. It would seem that meat and animal foods are somewhat taken-for-granted in certain affluent Western societies. Many of us regularly consume meat, and we are even aware of what must happen before animal foods can arrive on our plates, and yet to actually witness these processes, to be confronted by their visceral and material nature, is shocking.

Of course, part of the reason why this experience is so shocking is precisely because it stands in direct contrast to the ways in which animals are presented (or in many cases 'absented') within contemporary Western food practices (see Franklin, 1999;

Serpell, 1996; Vialles, 1994). If *Kill it*, *Cook it*, *Eat it* lies at one end of the scale of animal presence–absence, then heavily processed foods, such as the now iconic 'turkey twizzler', occupy the other extreme. Turkey Twizzlers are spiral strips of processed meat that were made infamous by the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver in his attempts to improve school dinners. It is rumoured that they came into existence by chance, as someone noticed that a machine producing imitation drumsticks from sheets of reconstituted turkey meat left behind strips that curled when heated. What is interesting for us in the context of this paper is not so much their dubious health credentials but rather the ways in which the animal origins of the Turkey Twizzler are both alluded to and effaced within the final product. Indeed, whilst the name of the product refers back to its animal origin, almost every other material attribute has been reconstituted, with the result (intended or otherwise) that the food is disconnected from the animal. Or to put it another way, the animal is made invisible—the animal is made to not 'matter' within the physicality of the food. In between these two extreme examples of animal presence and absence lie a multitude of more ordinary animal foods, all of which evoke and evade their origins in various ways. Whilst Levi-Strauss (1983) posited a clear distinction between the raw (nature) and the cooked (culture), we would contend that in the case of the contemporary Western consumption of animal foods, things are far more complex and messy than this formulation allows.

The account that follows attempts to illustrate some of this complexity by focusing attention on how animals are made to matter and not matter within food consumption practices. In order to achieve this, we draw on empirical material taken from forty-eight focus group discussions conducted across seven European countries. These focus groups were conducted as part of the Welfare Quality Project to investigate consumers' views and concerns about the welfare of farmed animals (see Evans and Miele, 2008; Miele et al, 2011).[1] In particular, we draw upon those parts of the focus group discussions in which consumers seamlessly mixed talk about their embodied, sensual interactions with animal foods with more explicit concerns about farm animal welfare.

Whilst the paper attempts to make some contribution to broader literatures on animal ethics and to debates around food politics, our primary goal is to contribute to literatures on embodied practices of food consumption. In particular, our key contention is that adopting an embodied approach to consumption practices, which highlights their aesthetic and visceral natures, need not inhibit us from researching the symbolic, linguistic, and ethical dimensions of these practices. In short, we believe that adopting an embodied approach prompts us to rethink rather than reject these dimensions of practice. Thus, for example, in our account food ethics are refigured in terms of basic material–semiotic connections and disconnections rather than in terms of disembodied Cartesian reflections, and food representations are refigured as active forces which intervene with materials rather than simply describe them. We hope that these theoretical contentions will have broader relevance outside of animal food consumption practices and that they will be of some use to geographers who have an interest in exploring alternative nonrepresentational ethics of practice.

The paper is organised as follows: we begin by outlining a new conceptual understanding of animal food consumption practices which we have termed 'foodsensing'. This notion builds on previous theoretical understandings of consumption practices but it also draws on empirical insights from our focus group discussions to offer a novel

[1] The authors coordinated this research, conducted the comparative analysis, and wrote the comparative report. The focus groups were undertaken by national research teams (see acknowledgements). Seven focus groups were carried out in each country with homogeneous groups of consumers, including, urban mothers, rural women, empty nesters, seniors, young singles, politically active or vegetarian consumers, and a country-specific group.

approach to understanding the complex links between reflexive and embodied – sensual consumption. We then use this concept of foodsensing to shed new light on the ways in which farmed animals are made to matter (and not matter) within food consumption practices. Finally, we discuss the ways in which food labels can affect the sensual – material dimensions of food consumption, and we draw some conclusions about the broader implications of adopting this approach to animal food consumption practices.

2 Sensing and making sense of food

Food is good for thinking with, especially in relation to debates about nature – culture and materiality – meaning. Eating is a deeply material and visceral affair, a basic intermixing of bodies (Probyn, 2000; 2004), and yet foods and the practices of cooking, eating, and sociability that surround them adopt central symbolic roles in many cultures (Counihan and van Esterik, 1997). Food straddles Lévi-Strauss's (1983) famous distinction between nature and culture, the raw and the cooked, not only in the practical sense that no amount of cooking can remove the rawness of food (its history) but also in the philosophical sense that food (like all 'raw materials') can animate and inspire thoughts. After all, it was the taste of a little piece of madeleine cake which inspired Proust's famous novel *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (In Search of Lost Time).

Over the course of this section we tentatively outline our own theoretical approach to food consumption, which we have termed foodsensing. This approach enables us to attend to the complex interactions between the material and symbolic elements of food consumption practices, and ultimately it allows us to draw new insights into the ways in which animals can be made to matter and not matter with food consumption practices. Our account draws inspiration from different academic sources. Firstly, it builds on the insights offered by theorists of consumption. In particular, it draws on the work of authors such as Gronow and Warde (2001), who have tried to move scholarly inquiry towards a focus on 'ordinary' consumption practices, and the work of Probyn (2000), who has drawn attention to the materiality of food consumption practices and consumers' raw and visceral engagements with the world (see also Roe, 2006; Valentine, 2002). Furthermore, it draws on the work of consumption theorists who have attempted to understand consumption as a hybrid practice, which contains both material and meaningful dimensions (see, for example, Campbell, 1995; Glennie and Thrift, 1992; Miller et al, 1998).[(2)] Secondly, it draws inspiration from broader theoretical ideas about performativity, embodiment, sensuality and the material impact/power of language, all of which we hope will help to open up new possibilities in both consumption and food research.

We would like to begin by defining the concept of foodsensing as the hybrid process through which consumers simultaneously sense and make sense of food. This definition emphasises both the material and symbolic dimensions of food consumption practices and hints at their deep interconnections. We believe that food consumption is a deeply sensorial and sensuous affair, and as such, the starting point for our approach is to conceptualise food consumption practices in a way that draws attention to their underlying material and visceral natures (Probyn, 2000). We believe that much of what occurs when we eat, prepare, and even purchase foods is played out within the realm of embodied sensation. Our relationship with food is deeply visceral: we all taste and

[(2)] Campbell (1995) focuses attention on the pleasure-seeking elements of consumption which are at once physiological (grounded in bodily practice) and which enable the construction of imagined scenarios, while Miller et al (1998) have sought to theorise consumption as a hybrid embodied practice, which is simultaneously repetitive and inventive, practical and moral.

ingest foods, we incorporate them into our bodies, they sustain us and provide us with pleasure, and yet they can subject us to ill health and disease. We do not merely contemplate foods; rather, we taste them, we smell them, we feel their textures with our hands and our tongues—we enter into an embodied relationship with them.

Following on from this (and central to our concept of foodsensing) is the contention that acts of consuming (or more broadly, acts of 'sensing') objects should be viewed as lively processes, where most of the action occurs in between the consumer and the consumed—the sensor and the sensed (see also Hennion, 2007; Latour, 2004). Instead of viewing foodsensing in a naïve realist fashion (as the passive reading of the intrinsic physical properties of a food), we believe that foodsensing is best viewed in a performative fashion. In other words, we believe that foodsensing is a potentially creative process through which novel 'realities' emerge as different food attributes (or better still 'virtualities') are attuned to and 'made to matter'. As Hennion (2007, page 101) states:

> "Taste is not an attribute, it is not a property (of a thing or of a person), it is an activity. You have to do something in order to listen to music, drink a wine, appreciate an object. Tastes are not given or determined, and their objects are not either; one has to make them appear together, through repeated experiments, progressively adjusted."

Foods infuse our bodies and our bodies in turn infuse foods, and it is through this process that new smells, tastes, textures, sounds, and sights are coproduced.

As a direct result, if we view sensing as a process, then sensing is always already a 'making sense' because it always involves an act of creation/ordering. Something new emerges in between subject and object that wasn't there before. Seen in this light, every act of sensing is simultaneously one of *making* sense. Connections and engagements between worlds and bodies are not trivial; nor are they an afterthought (superimposed upon something that is already there in a fixed form). Rather, they are the very processes through which worlds, bodies, and thoughts are made. The sensual consumer exists in an embodied relationship to the world and to objects; she senses them and in doing so makes sense of them. Sensing is always already a making sense and making sense is always already a sensing—they exist in a relationship of reciprocal pre-supposition (see figure 1).

Following on from this, if we focus on sensing as a 'reaching out to the world' and making sense as an 'ordering of the world', then it also allows us to radically reconsider the relationship between bodies and concepts, eating and thinking. Firstly, it allows us

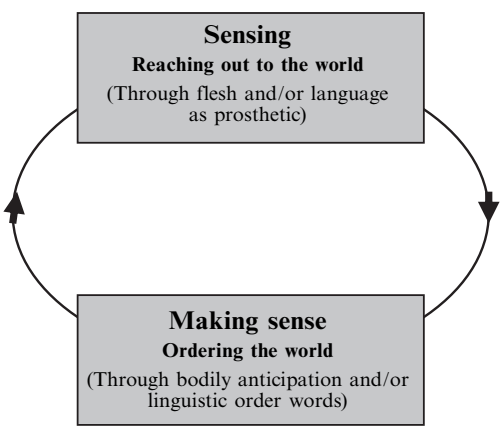

Figure 1. The intimate relationship between sensing and making sense.

to champion the notion of 'intelligent bodies', as 'making sense of the world' within this model could be just as much about 'gut instinct' as about cognition. This approach has strong affinities with other theorisers of embodiment; for example, Thrift (2000, page 36) states:

> "we can conceive of non-cognitive thought as a set of embodied dispositions ('instincts' if you like) which have been biologically wired in or culturally sedimented ... action-oriented 'representations' which simultaneously describe aspects of the world and prescribe possible actions."

Similarly, many other authors have drawn attention to the 'intelligent' nature of bodily sensing. For example, Lingis (1998) talks of the 'sense of things' not in terms of conceptual categories but in relation to positions and orientations, which our postures address. Furthermore, Gil (1998) refers to a 'recording body', which gathers up, brings together, unites, dislocates, spreads, and separates things. Add to these Despret's (2004) notion of 'bodily attunement', Grosz's (1994) notion of 'volatile bodies', Varela's (1999) notion of 'micro-identities', Merleau-Ponty's (1962) notion of "the flesh" and Connolly's (1999) notion of the "half-second delay" between bodily action and cognition, all of which testify to the intelligence of bodies.

Secondly, it allows us to think of language (or more generally symbolism) in a radically new light. Rather than viewing language as a free-floating passive signifier of an already fixed and static reality (as in certain representationalist accounts), it enables us to view language as an active force which is at once embedded within the world and has the ability to intervene within the world.[3] This approach of viewing language as both a reaching out to the world and an ordering of the world has strong affinities with the works of others. For example, Shotter (1993) has drawn attention to the fact that in addition to functioning as a 'text', language can also function as a 'tool' that is capable of 'shaping' and 'moving' other speakers. He has also coined the notion of language as a 'prosthetic'—a tool for actively reaching out to the world rather than a passive regime of signifiers. He states, "people 'see' and 'act' through their use of words, just as much as through their use of their eyes and limbs" (Shotter, 1993, page 15). Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari (1988, page 87) have developed the concept of 'order words' to emphasise their contention that language does not merely reflect the world but rather intervenes within it. They state:

> "An assemblage of enunciation does not speak 'of' things; it speaks on the same level as states of things and states of content ... a segment of one always forms a relay with a segment of the other, slips into, introduces itself into the other. We constantly pass from order-words to the silent order of things, as Foucault puts it, and vice versa."

Thirdly, it allows us to replace the unhelpful dualism of bodies/materials versus minds/meanings with the folded duality of sensing and making sense. This is because sensing need not be seen purely in terms of embodied perception (taste, hearing, feeling, smelling, seeing) but can also be seen as a linguistic or conceptual reaching out to the world (as in Shotter's notion of language as a prosthetic). Similarly, making sense need not be seen in purely conceptual/linguistic terms. One can either make sense of the world through language (when language is treated strictly in terms of 'order words' rather than representation) or one can make sense of the world through bodily

[3] We believe that nonrepresentational accounts of language use, such as those discussed in this section, amount to a significant departure from certain representationalist approaches. However, we must note that there is a long history (eg, within semiotics) of approaches which are attentive to the active nature of signs, and the ways in which language can shape the worlds we live in. The aim of this discussion is not to make a straw man out of previous theories of representation but simply to discuss different and interesting ways of attending to language.

disposition/anticipation. Seen in this light, the relationship between bodies and concepts is marked by a new flatness; they operate through the same registers and via similar mechanisms. Language can function like an additional sense (a new prosthetic), and our senses can function like a distributed neural network helping us not just to feel but also to know and shape our worlds.

If we conceive of consumption in terms of the sensing and making sense model outlined above, then it can provide us with new insights into the ways in which animals are made to matter (and not matter) within food consumption practices. Firstly, it highlights the fact that animals can be made to matter both through language/concepts/symbols and through more visceral/sensual/embodied interactions with animal foods. As we shall see, intelligent bodies can make material connections/disconnections between animal foods and animal lives and, more specifically, between food quality and farm animal welfare. Furthermore, food concepts and food labels can function to 'make animals matter', not only in a cognitive fashion but also in the very literal sense of intervening with the material and sensual qualities of animal food consumption practices.

Secondly, it points towards a new embodied and symbolic politics of connections and disconnections: a new topological ethics. For perhaps the most frightening but also the most reassuring implications of performative approaches are that we are not simply passive observers of a reality that stands before us; rather, we are actively implicated in fashioning, making, and remaking innumerable microrealities through our multiple, contingent engagements and attunements with the world. Each reality should not be taken for granted, but rather it comes at a cost; work has to be done to make certain things visible and certain things invisible (see Mol, 2002). As Law argues, visibility, recognition, and respect are fashioned and cultivated within sociomaterial networks and within everyday (caring) practices (Law, 2004).

Throughout the remainder of this paper we explore these topological ethics in more detail, as we examine the multiple ways in which the spacings, sayings, moods, and ambiences of animal food consumption practices function to make animals present or absent, visible or invisible, recognised or ignored.

3 Disconnections: food is food

> "I once heard an intelligent boy say, it was an 8-year-old-boy, he told me that they used to slaughter animals for meat and now you just go to the supermarket. Nice story, isn't it? But if you see all that meat in the supermarket, you do not think about the fact that it comes from an animal."
>
> (Vegetarian, politically active, the Netherlands)

In this section we address the crucial issue of disconnection: how animals are made absent (literally made to not physically matter) within food consumption practices. In one very important way certain animal foods are always disconnected from the animals from which they originated: a once sentient being capable of joy and sadness must be killed before it can be eaten. The greatest possible sacrifice must be made, demanding the greatest possible respect, and yet increasingly this very fact goes unrecognised and unnoticed—food is simply food, meat is simply meat, and animals simply do not figure or physically matter within many of our consumption practices. Whilst others have dealt with this issue at some length, many (but not all) have tended to view this disconnection between animals and animal foods as a form of wilful denial on the part of consumers rather than something that occurs at a more tacit–embodied level (see, for example, Serpell, 1996). In contrast, we believe that this mechanism of explicit denial is only one small part of the broader tacit–embodied practices through

which animal foods become disconnected from their animal origins. In particular, on the basis of the focus group discussions, we identified several practical–material ways in which disconnections between animals and foods can occur, including the timing of shopping practices, the material presentation of animal foods, the backgrounding of animal origins, and the use of everyday food vocabularies.

Firstly, in relation to the timing of shopping practices, the focus group discussions indicate that many European consumers (across all study countries) believed that the speed at which they undertook their food shopping strongly influenced the types of purchases they made. Many focus group participants talked about "shopping in a hurry" or "never having the chance to go for a leisurely shop". This in turn affected their attentiveness to food labels; as one participant stated, "I don't check or read anything actually, I just grab what I need and leave fast" (rural woman, Hungary). Furthermore, the fast pace of many modern European shopping practices seemed to be influencing consumers' abilities to reflect upon the (animal) origins of their foods. As another participant stated, "I don't think about animal welfare when I do food shopping, I do shopping in a hurry. I think about it in other moments, for example discussing it with friends" (gourmet, Italy). It is clear that speed can affect the nature of (shopping) practices in profound ways. In the introduction to her book *Not on the Label* Lawrence (2004) eloquently describes two modes of shopping practice which she believes correspond to two different "mental states" of shoppers. She states, "everyone was either in an inexplicable rush, trolley primed in front like a weapon, or in a slow motion daze, trolley drifting to the side in a defensive arc" (Lawrence, 2004, page xi). The impact of speed upon practice, politics, and freedom of action has also been well documented, albeit in a more abstract fashion, by the French scholar Paul Virilio. He argues that the logic of speed, or 'dromology', has become a key organising feature of modern societies. Furthermore, he contends that the (military–industrial) privileging of speed as a goal in its own right has led to a reduction in the freedom or 'space' of action available to human subjects. He contends that this lust for speed inevitably results in either the replacement or the 'endo-colonisation' of the human body by technology, as unaided or nonenhanced human bodies simply become incapable of action at the required speeds:

> "What happens in the example of the racecar driver, who is no more than a worried look-out for the catastrophic probabilities of his movement, is reproduced on the political level as soon as conditions require an action in real time" (Virilio, 1986, page 142).

Virilio also contends that an unfettered privileging of speed has functioned to dissolve previous territorial connections (eg, with land, economy, culture) and, instead, replaced them with the abstract speed vectors of consumer culture. Here, again, we can make useful parallels with a European food industry that tends to favour abstract notions of quality over terroir, just-in-time global provisioning over local supply networks, and, on the whole, fast food over slow food.

Secondly, in relation to the material presentation of animal foods, it would seem that the ways in which animal foods are staged and presented deeply affect consumers' sensual–visceral connections with these foods. Moreover, this staging exerts a strong influence over the extent to which the animal origins of food products are recognised or reflected upon by consumers (see also Franklin, 1999). Indeed, whilst the material forms of certain animal foods (especially highly processed foods, such as chicken nuggets) provoked little reaction in consumers, the material forms/features of others (especially recognisable 'living' features, such as faces, bones, and legs) 'invited' or 'forced' certain consumers to engage with the animal origins of their foods. This is

illustrated in the following exchange, which occurred during a focus group discussion in Norway:

Participant 1: "If I think of the animal that I'm eating, I start to feel sorry for it. I don't like to eat food that I can see the face of while I'm eating. I could never have eaten that kind of a pig for Christmas, a glazed pig head with an apple in the mouth ... . I can't eat fish that has a head. I have to eat fish that has pure pieces so that it does not remind me of the animal that it is coming from. Because then I kind of feel that it is not from a living thing. I don't like to see what I'm eating. It becomes kind of wrong."

Participant 2: "You are fooling yourself then."

Participant 1: "Yes, of course ... but I don't like to have those eyes staring at me while I'm eating. That is when I get a bad conscience."

(young singles, Norway)

Thirdly, in relation to the backgrounding of animal origins, the focus groups indicate that many mundane, nonreflexive food choices always already embody a range of ethical concerns, such as nurturing infants, caring for family, providing hospitality and conviviality, maintaining traditions, making do on a tight budget, and seeking high-quality, good-tasting products (see also Barnett et al, 2005; Miele and Evans, 2010; Miller et al, 1998).[4] When animal origin is seen in this light, certain consumers' failure to connect with the animal origins of their foods might not be the result of a strategy of wilful denial but rather simply the result of the presence of an alternative sociomaterial network of caring (see Law, 2004), which functions to highlight different (ethical) properties of animal foods. In other words, alternative, and possibly equally valid, ethical imperatives can function to 'matter' foods in different ways and to highlight alternative physical characteristics, such as appearance, quality, taste, and nutritional value. Consumers in turn can become accustomed to noticing/recognising certain features of foods, whilst others, such as signs of animal origin and animal well-being, can fade into the background.

Finally, in relation to the use of everyday food vocabularies, we would contend that certain commonplace and routinely used food terms and descriptions can function to disconnect foods from their animal origins. As we made clear in the theoretical section of this paper, language use does not only reflect (or represent) the material world; it also intervenes within it: to speed it up or slow it down, to highlight certain features whilst downplaying others. In the case of animal food vocabularies there is an interesting organisation of terminology within the English language which frequently, though not always, furnishes us with different terms for animals and the meat that they produce. For example, pig meat is termed pork, cow meat is termed beef, and sheep meat is termed mutton. The origins of these differences can in part be attributed to the fact that animals are frequently described by Anglo-Saxon words and the meat by Norman words, which in turn reflects an historical division of labour between Anglo-Saxon farmers and Norman food consumers. What is interesting is that this historical division of labour and disconnection between meat consumers and animals has been enshrined in and perpetuated through language use. Indeed, we would contend that these taken-for-granted food vocabularies exert a significant impact over

[4] Barnett et al (2005, pages 19 – 20) contend that "[i]f ethical is taken in a Foucauldian sense, to refer to the activity of constructing a life by negotiating practical choices about personal conduct, then the very basics of routine consumption—a concern for value for money, quality and so on—can be understood to presuppose a set of specific learned ethical competencies." Similarly, Miller (1998) contends that everyday shopping practices are often used as a medium for expressing love and care for family members.

how we, as contemporary consumers, actually experience and feel about eating animals (see Serpell, 1996). Flesh is precious. Pigs are animals. Pork is delicious. Yet, like Foucault and Borges's Chinese dictionary, there is a certain arbitrariness about these categorisations—things could have been said rather differently.(5)

Thus, one can see that if we view food consumption practices at the more practical embodied level of sensing and making sense, it is possible to gain new insights into the ways in which foods can become disconnected from their animal origins. In contrast to the notion of wilful denial, we have argued that disconnections between foods and animals result from the distributed agency of everyday sociomaterial practices, and we have proposed a variety of different material–practical mechanisms through which disconnections can occur. These disconnections can in turn have a significant impact on the ethical treatment of farm animals (see, Singer, 1995; Foer, 2009).

All the processes of disconnection outlined above vary across space and time and in relation to different networks of food provision. For example, there are important linguistic differences in food and animal vocabularies across the countries we researched (eg, in countries such as France there is no direct translation of the term 'animal welfare' as the concept of 'welfare' tends to be reserved solely for humans). Furthermore, it is clear that both the speed of the shop and the presentation of animal food products will vary greatly between different types of stores (eg, between traditional butchers and supermarkets). Moreover, there are significant differences in the organisation of food supply chains between countries where local provisioning (and in turn a more direct connection with farm animals) is still significant, such as Hungary, and countries which are heavily reliant on nonlocal food supply chains, such as the UK and the Netherlands. In short, the types of disconnect between people and animal foods that we describe are far from uniform across Europe and far from ubiquitous across the world.

In the next section we move beyond this focus on disconnection to address the practical–embodied ways in which consumers can make modest connections between the foods on their plates and the animals from which these foods originated.

4 Connections: from food to flesh

> "Average people go after their eyes and not their minds when they do their shopping, I usually buy things that look good to me. From several years of experience, I know at once which meat is good, which one has the right colour. It has to be the right colour for me to buy it."
>
> (Senior, Hungary)

> "There is a criteria: when we take out the meat, there is the bone which speaks."
>
> (Vegetarian, politically active, France)

In this section we explore the ways in which consumers attempt to make connections between the foods on their plates and the animals from which these foods originated. We contend that, in addition to the explicit economy of animal-welfare-friendly labelled foods, there is a practical–aesthetic economy through which consumers attempt (not always successfully) to sense and make sense of the farm animal welfare credentials of their foods. However, rather than uncritically championing these types of connections, we are primarily concerned with uncovering some of the complex and occasionally contradictory logics of this sensual realm. In particular, we ask what should one make of these sensual–material connections in a context where, firstly, there are often

(5) Whilst many food names conceal their animal origins, some do not. For example, there is no alternative name for rabbit or for chicken. It would be interesting to explore the affect that these names have on food consumption practices, but this is beyond the scope of the current paper.

numerous intermediaries between farm animals and final food products (which can function to mask any meaningful connections between farm animal welfare and food 'quality') and, secondly, any consideration of animal ethics is already limited to an animal welfare position rather than an animal rights position; indeed, to even talk of animal ethics from the starting point of food is highly problematic.

Participants in our focus group discussions frequently made links between the practical–aesthetic properties of their foods and the lives of the animals from which these foods originated. In particular, everyday embodied practices of handling, cooking, observing, and tasting foods seemed to provide certain participants with an alternative practical-aesthetic means of evaluating the animal welfare credentials of different foods. For example, certain participants believed that the way their meat tasted reflected how the animals had been raised, and many believed that products with higher animal welfare actually tasted better. Said one member of the politically active focus group vegetarian from Italy:

"[W]hen I go back to Sicily, where I was born, milk and cheese taste more strongly, also the meat has more flavour, maybe it's harder, yet more tasty, because the animals are kept more naturally, more outside, in the grazing meadows. So the life in the open is fundamental."

The texture of the meat was also frequently viewed as being a reliable indicator of the lives experienced by farm animals. In particular, many consumers felt that tougher meats with more texture reflected the fact that the animals had been able to exercise and develop muscles during their lifetimes, whereas softer, more fatty meats were viewed as being the likely outcome of a more confined and sedentary life, in which the animals were given fewer opportunities to exercise.

"I have already eaten both free-range chicken and factory-produced chicken. One is so tender that it simply falls apart in your mouth and has no taste. The other you really have to chew! So the difference is that the freely raised chicken has more muscles, so it has to be cooked longer! The other just has no taste. So there is a big difference between the two" (empty nester, Hungary).

However, the perceived connection between meat texture and animal welfare was by no means uniform, as other consumers believed that tough meat reflected muscle stiffening during a stressful slaughter:

"It's also very important the way of dying, otherwise muscles stiffen and later the meat is a disaster" (gourmet, Italy).

Focus group participants also made connections between the visual appearance of meat and animal welfare. In particular, blemishes or unnatural colours were often viewed as potential signs of animal maltreatment:

"Once I was at a fresh butchers and he gave me meat from a big pile. I have gone back because you could see that there were stains in the meat. The animal had just been beaten" (empty nester, Holland).

The colour of egg yolks was also viewed as a good indicator of both the living conditions and the diet of laying hens.

Finally, there were several comments relating to features observed during the cooking and preparation of meat. In particular, many focus group participants expressed concern about the way in which certain joints of meat shrunk considerably during cooking and some even felt that this reflected problems with animal welfare, particularly with either the use of poor-quality animal feeds or the use of artificial growth supplements:

"My father was there when they fried it and said that it didn't seem right, because it made foam as it was fried and you could really feel that the taste was different, you could feel the taste of the artificial feed the pig had been kept on" (rural woman, Hungary).

Thus, one can see that in addition to an intellectualised economy concerned with the reflexive – rational contemplation of farm animal welfare (often prompted through the medium of food labels), there is also a sensual – practical economy through which certain consumers sense and in turn make sense of the foods on their plates. On the one hand, the connections that focus group participants made between foods and animals can be viewed in a very positive light, as they indicate that certain consumers, on certain occasions, are at least recognising and 'attuning' to these material signs of animal origins rather than failing to engage with them. On the other hand, these types of connections can be complex and contradictory and can confuse any genuine links between the welfare of farmed animals and food quality. For example, in relation to the shrinkage of meat when cooked, it is quite possible that this was occurring due to the way in which the food had been processed (eg, substances added to bulk out the meat) rather than due to the way in which the animal had been treated or fed. Similarly, quotes concerning the links between farm animal welfare and the texture of food products indicate how a given physical property of a food can be 'interpreted' in contradictory fashions: for one consumer stiffness in the meat was an indicator of pain and stress at slaughter, whereas for another tougher meat was taken to be an indicator of better muscle growth and hence a healthier life in which the animal would have been able to take regular exercise. In other words, different consumers can potentially make different types of connections depending on their ethical – aesthetic expertise and experience. Taste (including in this case the preferred flavours, textures, colours, and aromas, of food) is neither universal nor static; rather, tastes, and in particular the ability to sense and make sense of objects (the ability to reach out to and make connections with previously latent 'qualities'), have to be cultivated through experiment and practice (see Hennion, 2007; Latour, 2004). Furthermore, the focus group discussions indicated that there were significant national differences both in the extent to which participants made these types of aesthetic connections and in the types of qualities that they associated with good animal welfare. In the UK and the Netherlands, whilst participants did make some links between food quality and farm animal welfare these tended to be expressed in very general terms, such as quality, taste, and appearance.[6] This was also the case in Norway and Sweden, although a few more specific connections were made in relation to egg colour and the 'juiciness' of meat. In contrast, in Hungary, France, and especially Italy participants made both a greater number and a broader range of these types of connections. For example, participants from these countries talked in terms of the links between food colour, feel, texture, leanness, and farm animal welfare. It is very likely that these differences reflect significant differences in the food cultures and the nature of food supply chains across these different countries. In particular, as a first hypothesis, one could speculate that these types of aesthetic food knowledges are more prevalent, more highly valued, and more useful in countries which have shorter, more local food supply chains and which have more traditional food cultures. In contrast to these large national differences, there seemed to be less marked differences in these types of aesthetic knowledges between sociocultural groups. This uniformity is itself interesting, and it was particularly striking that groups such as young singles and seniors seemed to be equally willing and able to make a range of aesthetic speculations about the links between animal foods and animal farming.

[6] There were some exceptions: for example, see the previous quote earlier in this section in which a Dutch focus group participant linked marks found on his meat to the maltreatment of animals.

In addition to the contextual nuances outlined above, there are also complex and dynamic links between consumers' aesthetic appreciation of foods and their explicit ethical reflections about these foods. In certain cases food aesthetics and (animal) ethics are aligned (Miele and Murdoch, 2002), whereas in other cases embodied tastes can run counter to more explicit ethical concerns. For example, many focus group participants claimed that they preferred softer, more succulent meats, despite their fears that this could be indicative of low welfare. However, as we have argued throughout this paper, there are intimate connections between sensing and making sense, and over time food aesthetics and (animal) ethics can realign. For example, foods that are perceived to be ethically sound at a reflexive level can in turn become aesthetically pleasing (one could argue that the success of organic foods in the UK required a reconfiguration of food aesthetics). Similarly, foods that are perceived to be ethically bad at a reflexive level can also begin literally to leave a bad taste in your mouth.

To summarise, one can see that whilst many sociomaterial practices and settings can function to disconnect foods from their animal origins, this is not the whole story. Indeed, certain everyday embodied practices—such as observing, preparing, cooking, and eating foods—can, on occasion, provide certain consumers with an alternative sensual register for making connections between the foods on their plates and the lives of the animals from which these foods originated. These connections are often complex and occasionally contradictory; furthermore, embodied tastes are biologically, historically, and culturally contingent. However, we would contend that this material–practical realm through which connections (between animals and foods) are made and unmade is of vital and often overlooked importance. In the next section we continue to explore these embodied dimensions of food consumption practices by briefly examining the ways in which food labels do not only operate on a rationalreflexive level but can also intervene with the sensual–material properties of foods.

5 Eating words: the physical impacts of food labels

> "And yet, the fact of not knowing its name makes the food seem somehow abnormal ... . It would be too much to say that knowing the name changes the taste. But it definitely does alter our attitude towards the taste, our way of considering it ... . Our appetite is as much linguistic as gastric. The tongue that tastes is not just in our mouths. It is in our dictionaries."
>
> Droit (2002, page 64)

Throughout the paper we have argued that paying attention to the more practical–sensual properties of food consumption practices does not mean that we have to leave behind a consideration of food languages, food labels, and food thoughts. Instead, we have tried to develop an account which highlights some of the complex interactions between these realms. For example, we have illustrated how sensual interactions with foods can evoke implicit feelings (as well as more articulated reflections) about farm animal welfare, as every act of sensing food is always already an act of making sense of food. Furthermore, we have shown how everyday food vocabularies, and especially terms which disguise the animal origins of foods, can intervene with the sensual-aesthetic appreciation of animal foods. In this section we want, briefly, to expand this account of the interaction between food languages and food practices by considering the ways in which animal-welfare-friendly food labels can have an impact on not only consumers' explicit understandings of different products but also on consumers' practical-sensual experiences of different products.[7] In particular, we argue that

[7] See Miele (2011) for a discussion about the visibility of animals' emotions in food adverts, and an analysis of the links suggested between positive animal emotions and food taste.

labelling a product as 'animal welfare friendly' can alter the range of practical-material expectations that consumers have about that product.[8]

Before we elaborate on these contentions we must note that the topic of food labelling has already received a great deal of academic attention, especially from those interested in food and consumer politics more generally. For example, Nestle (2003) outlines how the American food industry labels and markets its products to make them more appealing to consumers. She also discusses how certain food companies resisted the imposition of labels indicating healthy eating, such as the American Heart Association's HeartCheck label. Furthermore, various authors (such as Cook et al, 2004; Lawrence, 2004; Weis, 2007) have highlighted the power relations present within certain food chains and have drawn attention to a range of important issues that are not recorded on food labels. These authors advocate the reconnection of Western consumers with the lives of the distant strangers who produce their goods. This is most clearly illustrated in Cook et al's work which follows the commodity chain of the papaya, from the plant itself to farmers, importers, packers, and consumers. Our aims in this section are much more specific and limited than those of the authors described above. We simply want, very briefly, to reenforce our previous arguments that product labels do not only have an impact on cerebral responses to commodities, but they can also affect sensual, emotional, and experiential responses. This, of course, suggests in turn that we need to pay even more attention to the broader politics of what does and does not make it onto the label; unfortunately, however, this is beyond the scope of the current paper.

From the focus group discussions it was clear that participants throughout different European countries and across many different sociocultural groups did indeed make a range of assumptions about the physical properties of foods based on their (labelled) animal welfare credentials. In particular, many participants assumed that higher animal welfare would also imply better food quality. For example, one participant chose animal-welfare-friendly eggs because he believed that they tasted better:

> "So I go to supermarkets and the eggs, I buy those on which it is written 'open air' because I already believe, I don't know if it is better, but there is the taste already" (senior, France).

Similarly, the following extract taken from a UK focus group provides a very poignant illustration of how explicit food labels, such as 'free-range' or 'organic', can work to conjure different sensorial expectations and, ultimately, different sensorial experiences:

Participant 1: "I have to say that it would probably be because, not so much because of the animal welfare side, but the aspect that if it's organic or free range or whatever, it's probably going to taste better."
Participant 2: "You hope it's going to taste better."
Participant 1: "Yes, probably."
Participant 2: "And because it says organic on the thing, your mind thinks it does taste better."
Participant 3: "That's a good point, I specifically veer away from anything that's got organic on it."
Facilitator: "For what reasons?"
Participant 3: "Because I think it's probably a way of getting the price up rather than anything else."

(seniors, UK)

[8] Many previous authors have commented on the deep interconnections between language and food, eating and talking [see, for example, Eagleton (1997)]. However, here we are making a rather specific contention. We are not saying that eating is like writing in a metaphorical sense, although it may well be. Rather, we are contending in line with Deleuze and Guattari (1988) that assemblages of enunciation operate on the same level as, and intervene with, material assemblages.

Participant 1 expresses a preference for animal-welfare-friendly foods not because he has an interest in animal welfare but rather because he expects that these types of foods will taste better. This is immediately challenged by the second participant, who highlights the ways in which hopes and expectations about taste can be self-fulfilling. The conversation is then joined by a third participant, who declares his deep suspicion of these types of labels.

Thus, one can see that just as consumers make inferences about the animal welfare credentials of products based on their sensorial qualities, so they also make assumptions about the sensorial qualities of products based on their animal welfare credentials. Yet again we can see that sensing and making sense are deeply intertwined. Food labels have the potential not only to influence how we think about certain foods but also to influence how we experience them, how they taste to us.

6 Conclusions

Throughout this account we have drawn attention to the ways in which animals are made to matter or not matter within food consumption practices. Many Europeans consume large quantities of meat and animal products, and as such, animal food consumption remains a vital, if potentially highly fraught, arena through which at least certain aspects of our relationships (and nonrelationships) with animals are played out. On the one hand, food consumption and the practices which surround it can function to disconnect foods from their animal origins, and this, of course, demands our critical attention. On the other hand, for certain consumers on certain occasions (rightly or wrongly) it is through embodied practices of food consumption that ethical uncertainties and fears about the ways in which we treat animals are played out and made real.

In order to do justice to these embodied practices of animal food consumption and in order to understand the ways in which animals are made to matter through both material and semiotic means, we developed the hybrid concept of 'foodsensing'. This concept highlighted the importance of embodiment and performativity in shaping and articulating both food experiences and food knowledges, and it highlighted the deep interconnections between the 'sensing' and the 'making sense' of foods. We argued that much of what occurs when animal foods are consumed takes place not at the level of reflection and cognition but rather at a more practical – emotional – sensual – aesthetic level. However, this sensual realm is far from mundane, as every act of sensing food is always already an act of making sense of food; there is a kind of emotional – practical intelligence in our everyday dealings and alignments with the world. This conceptual approach enabled us to shed new light on some of the more practical – material ways in which animals are disconnected from food consumers, including the *timing* of shopping practices, the material presentation of animal foods, the backgrounding of animal origins, and the use of everyday food vocabularies. It also enabled us to explore the ways in which consumers can make links between practical – sensual properties of foods (such as taste, texture, and colour) and farm animal welfare. Finally, it enabled us to explore how food labels have the potential to intervene with both explicit – rational and more embodied – sensual dimensions of food products and food consumption practices.

If this paper has achieved anything, we hope that it has highlighted some of the deep (ethical) ambiguities that are played out through the (aesthetic) medium of animal food consumption. Despite a growth in the acknowledgement of animal sentience many Western consumers continue to eat large quantities of meat and animal products, many of which have been produced by modern intensive farming methods.

For certain members of society, most notably vegans, vegetarians, and animal rights activists, this situation is simply intolerable, and yet for others the act of eating an animal is an astonishingly smooth and unremarkable practice. In this paper we have argued that in order to maintain this smoothness, work needs to be done: foods have to be presented in certain ways, slaughterhouses have to be located out of sight, and certain vocabularies have to be used to describe what we are eating.[9] Furthermore, we have argued that these processes of disconnection do not always prevail and that certain consumers on certain occasions can make connections between the aesthetic properties of the foods they eat and the animals from which these foods originated. Sometimes these connections seem to be motivated by little more than self-interest—a desire to know about the animal's existence to ensure that we can eat well. However, on other occasions they seem to reflect a deep emotional uneasiness about animal killing and suffering, as the unethical becomes unpalatable.

On the basis of the focus group research alone, it is very difficult to assess the relative importance of processes of disconnection and processes of connection or the relative significance of aesthetic signs integral to the product compared with appended labels. However, from our research it was clear that the importance of these processes varied in relation to different national, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts. For example, focus group participants from Hungary seemed to be less disconnected from farm animals than their UK counterparts. Furthermore, and conforming to clichés, participants from France and Italy seemed to have a more developed aesthetic sensibility for animal foods and, in turn, a greater skill in linking food aesthetics to animal ethics than many of their counterparts from other European countries. It is fair to say that more research is needed in this area to tease out some of the empirical complexities contained within the broad trends that we have outlined.

What is absolutely clear is that if we want to address the issue of farm animal suffering through the medium of food consumption, then (whilst very desirable) it is simply not sufficient to rely solely on explicit, rational strategies, such as food labelling, as standalone mechanisms for influencing consumer behaviour (see Miele and Evans, 2010). Instead, one must also be attentive to the broader practical–sensual influences which function to make animals matter and not matter within food consumption practices. We do not know what the future will hold for animal food consumption, especially in the context of wider environmental concerns; however, we can be sure that any consumer-driven change will owe as much to edibility, and the tacit sensing and making sense of food, as to reflexivity.

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[9] Many authors have commented at length on the ways in which changing methods, practices, and locations of animal slaughter have impacted upon human–animal relationships, and in particular how they have functioned to disconnect animals from humans in certain Western industrialised countries (Serpell, 1996; Vialles, 1994). Traverso (2003) in his book *The Origins of Nazi Violence* also comments on how factors such as the renaming of slaughterhouses to abattoirs, their relocation outside of city areas, and the development of scientific notions of humane-killing (death without pain) have functioned to affect not only human–animal power relations but also human-to-human violence.

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