# Postmodern Dietetic:
## Reclaiming the Body through the Practice of Alimentary Freedom

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The National School Lunch Program (hereafter, NSLP) is a charitable and well-intentioned program that serves low-cost or free lunches each day to more than 31 million children in over 100,000 public schools, non-profit private schools, and residential childcare institutions ("National School Lunch Program," 2011). For most children living in poverty in major U.S. cities, it is the primary source of daily nutrition. In short, school lunch has become an immensely popular form of social welfare and a premiere poverty program in the United States (Levine, 2008).

Despite its pro-social intentions, NSLP has received quite a lot of criticism as of late. Professional organizations (e.g., Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, American Medical Association) have suggested that school lunches consist of too many processed foods, often ignore federal caloric guidelines, and contribute to childhood obesity. Likewise, popular media have entered the fray, underscoring the ostensible arbitrariness of school lunch standards through tasty bits of lunacy that are devoured by a voracious, if perhaps bemused, public. In one case, a preschooler at West Hoke Elementary in Raeford, North Carolina, had her homemade turkey sandwich confiscated by a school official, who reported that the sandwich did not meet state dietary guidelines, at which point the girl was made to eat the school's chicken nuggets as a suitable alternative (Burrows, 2012). Even celebrity chefs have become critics, with perhaps the prime example being Jamie Oliver, who once poured ammonia on beef trimmings in order to illustrate—in, I might add, a rather erroneous way—the production of Finely Textured Lean Beef, which is commonly known under its dysphemism, "Pink Slime" ("Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution: Pink Slime," 2011). School lunch has received scholarly criticism as well, with most studies focusing on the lack of nutritious foods being served to children and the deplorable consequences for health (see, for example, Briefel, Wilson, & Gleason, 2009; Condon, Crepinsek, & Fox, 2009; Gordon, Devaney, & Burghardt, 1995).

While such critiques and studies have merit, I believe when we focus on lunch through the phenomenological prisms of nutrition and health, we limit our ability to conceptualize lunch in new ways. As such, this work will seek to problematize different dimensions of lunch and to open up new theoretical spaces for the investigation of lunch. In particular, I will explore the lunchroom as a site of disciplinary power, seeking to evince technologies of force that effectuate obedient and efficient eaters, and examine the ontological status of school food as an epiphenomenon of our spectacularized foodscape. Finally, I will sketch the contours of an ameliorant—*alimentary freedom*, a rich and variegated project of the self that borrows liberally from the Greek concept of *sophrosyne*.

## Fields and Technologies of Power

Apposite to lunch we have many imbricated fields of power. We have, for example, a field of governmentality, which is a broad space of organizing practices that reveals itself, for example, in a rationalized school framework. Then, too, we have disciplining practices—those repetitive exercises that shape and normalize the body, mind, and soul of the subject. We even have a space for technologies of the self, those self-directed operations that enable the individual to engage in sundry sorts of self-transformations. In the present essay, I will concentrate primarily on the first two fields and the intentional deployment into them of ramified articulations of force—i.e., *technologies of power*—those strategic interventions "which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination" and effect an "objectivizing of the subject" (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). In this first section, I will attempt to unravel and denude these technologies, beginning in the field of governmentality.

Guillaume de La Perrière, whose *Miroire Politique* was one of the earliest texts on the art of governing, offered the following definition: "government is the right disposition of things, arranged so as to lead to a convenient end" (as cited in Foucault, 2000, p. 208). Government, then, is not primarily concerned with managing territory but rather with governing things, where things, as Foucault has clarified, is likely to connote a complex of things and people. One does not govern territory, according to La Perrière, but rather *things*—i.e., "men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those things that are wealth, resources, means of subsistence" (Foucault, 2000, pp. 208-209). One governs households, economies, schools, and children. As will become clear in a later section on disciplinary power, the *convenient end* of which La Perrière has written is, in our case, the obedient and efficient eating body. Before we can explore this in detail, however, we need to parse La Perrière's *right disposition of things*—that is, the arrangement of lunch in concrete and intellectual forms. It is in this disposition of things that we can begin to glimpse the emergence of the disciplinary project of school lunch.

School lunch is an important part of the school day and, as such, a crucial micro-apparatus of governing that functions through a rationalized *right disposition of things*—viz. architectonic specialization and systematization. This idea, which perhaps seems dubious at first blush, will not come as surprise to those with an understanding of the history of public schooling in the United States. Indeed, we have long known the relationship between public schooling, cultural homogenization, and control. For example, the "free schools" of the early nineteenth century, under the auspices of the New York Public School Society, represented a sort of paternalistic *noblesse oblige* that "provided a vehicle for the efforts of one class to civilize another and thereby ensure that society would remain tolerable, orderly, and safe" (Katz, 1971, p. 300). A few decades later, Horace Mann (1872) argued that universal education was so inextricably connected with governing that a functioning republic could not exist without it: "the establishment of a republican government," he wrote, "without well-appointed and efficient means for the universal education of the people, is the most rash and fool-hardy experiment ever tried by man" (p. 688). Then, during the progressive era of the early twentieth century, school lunch became an integral component of governing the school, a popular form of social welfare that continues to the present day (Levine, 2008, p. 2). While a full genealogy is beyond the scope and purpose of this essay, I offer these historical examples merely to hint at the complex historical connection between the pragmatic life of the school and an overriding ideology of governmentality. Specific to our purposes, this connection is most readily apparent in the rationalized architectonics of lunch and the lunchroom. As such, it is necessary to explore the architectonics of lunch in some detail—both in its relations to governing and as a bridge from a generalized program of governing to the specific disciplinary technologies through which control is realized.

Beginning in the eighteenth century, the western world began to see a centralization of architecture and design as an apparatus of government. As Foucault (2000) has remarked, "from the eighteen century on, every discussion of politics as the art of government of men necessarily includes a chapter or a series of chapters on urbanism, on collective facilities, on hygiene, and on private architecture" (p. 350). Foucault's analysis finds a compelling analogue in school design from the mid-nineteenth century on. Indeed, as Baughn (2012) has shown, writings from this period evince a concern with scientific planning, standardization, and hygiene, which she has defined as "a broad term encompassing all aspects of the school's physical environment" (p. 44). In other words, during this period of time we find a proliferation of discourses concerning school design, architectonics, and power. An early example was Henry Barnard's *School Architecture*, which evinced an emerging emphasis on how a problematic of control might be answered via architectonic specialization and standardization combined with hierarchical observation. To wit, Barnard (1850) warned of the pernicious consequences of poorly designed school rooms and admonished that they "be so arranged as to facilitate habits of attention, take away all temptation and encouragement to violate the rules of the school on the part of any scholar, and admit of the constant and complete supervision of the whole school by the teacher" (p. 54). At the turn of the 20th century, discourses began to focus more specifically on instrumentality and a scientific regulation of the body. The American educationalist and civic leader William George Bruce (1906) authored an authoritative text underscoring the importance of designing a school according to the mandates of economy and utility of space. His account was thorough, his prescriptions catholic—from the placement of water fountains to the dimensions of the classrooms, the proper number of rows, and the best colors for walls. And then, in 1921, John Donovan published a tome of some 700 pages, which has come to be known as "the bible" of school architecture (Caudill, 1954). Donovan's text is noteworthy because it included a chapter on the cafeteria, which was written by William R. Adams, an engineer of hotel equipment. One of Adams's (1921) directives for the lunchroom was that "the plant must be efficient; there must be no loss of labor, food, or fuel" (p. 513). He admonished that the cafeteria must be "rectangle or square" with access to serving counters regulated "by means of traffic aisles, leading directly from the entrance door, past the food, to the checker's station" (p. 513). Adams went as far as to specify that the traffic aisles should be four feet in width "and should, of course, be railed off from the dining-room proper" (p. 513). In the decades following Donovan's "bible," efforts to modernize lunch would only intensify, as social reformers and nutrition scientists began to encourage Americans to "eat right," and the federal government began to subsidize school lunch in 1935 (Baughn, 2012, p. 65). In the course of this project, we see the intensification and proliferation of discourses on diet—the growth of the idea that nutrition, as a field of scientific inquiry, could be employed for disciplining the body and ordering lifestyles, arenas tied to broader social reforms of the time, which emphasized efficiency and control (Levine, 2008, p. 14). The body, then, has entered the curriculum—first via architectonic dictates concerned with monitoring and control, and then as a site of nutritive education. As Baughn (2012) has written, "Good nutrition and regimented exercise became keystones for health education, and broadened the original consolidated school goal of educating 'mind and hands' to 'mind, body, and hands'" (p. 65). With this pedagogical shift and the emergence of a federally subsidized lunch program in 1935, cafeterias became integral to the life of the school (Baughn, 2012; Levine, 2008).

This is, of course, to be expected, for progressive era politics were dominated by an unswerving belief in progress, rationalization, the apotheosis of science, and a utilization of the principles of scientific management to maximize efficiency (Callahan, 1962). The acme was reached in 1947, when Congress created the NSLP and the government began to buy surplus food and send it to schools. This historical wellspring—a pastiche of architectural responses to the problematic of governing, scientific discourses regarding health and hygiene, and incunabular market-based models of food service—manifests in at least two ways in the modern school. The first, which is beyond the scope of this work, is that of a scientizing and corporatizing of lunch—a teleological process of rationalization bound up with broader neoliberal reforms that seek to widen the influence of private interests, mine previously untapped arenas of capital accumulation, and increase governmental control over the citizenry (Harvey, 2005; McChesney, 2001). The second manifestation, which we need to investigate closely, involves an articulation of segmented power directly onto space and movement.

Social spaces—and the cafeteria, to be sure, is a social space—specify and encode the forms of reciprocal relations that occur therein. A space which dictates that I sit across from you is distinct from one that enables me to sit next to you; a space for one is distinct from a space for 50. As such, cafeterias (many of which, in keeping with Donovan's prescriptions, are large enclosures containerized by four walls, devoid of fenestration, traversed by traffic aisles, and populated by long, rectangular tables with stools lacking back support) are social spaces that localize and control the circulation of bodies, define the contours of movement, social discourse, and subjectivity. Stated another way, the lunchroom is a social site for a *spacialization* and *ramification* of power and, to borrow a term from Foucault (2000), a *canalization* of bodies (p. 361). The architectonics of this space is not the sole apparatus at play, but rather an impetus for the functional organization of space as an analytic unit—a disciplinary site where micro-techniques of control are chosen, refined, and articulated upon the eating body.

As Foucault (1975/1995) has demonstrated, discipline in institutionalized contexts "proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space" (p. 141). But how exactly is this effected? One technique is to enclose a space, setting it off from other areas and, thereby, ensuring it as "protected place of disciplinary monotony" (p. 141). Recall William Adams's suggestion for "the plant" where students would eat: it would be rectangle or square, set off from the school proper, with clearly defined functional spaces. Recall, too, your own experience in school lunchrooms: the repetitive exercise of receiving and consuming food, the disciplinary monotony of eating in a hermetically sealed area. It is insufficient, however, to simply cordon off a space for eating: the space must, moreover, be partitioned so each individual has a place and each place an individual. That is, locations must be specified and standardized, and then expectations must be mapped onto them. One does not eat in the line, or stand stock still in the serving area, or stand at the table. The tacit purpose here is "to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual" (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 143). All this is tantamount to the articulation of power onto the space of eating—an engineering of technologies that establish a precise, analytic grid of space, and locate bodies within said grid, thus arranging a bulwark against a spontaneous, and potentially disorderly, distribution of bodies. To state it bluntly, a lunchroom must produce obedient, docile bodies.

Having enclosed and partitioned a space, a disciplinary institution must then code its space in a functional way—that is, it must define a place in such a way that it not only localizes bodies in space but also ensures their efficiency (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 144). In the present case, we find a spatial arrangement that encourages a dining experience that is quick, efficient, and relatively waste free. Think of the way the body is directed. First, it is moved through the serving line, where food is placed onto compartmentalized trays. There are no choices to slow the movement of the line; the choice of which foods will nourish the body has already been made. The space is linear and narrow to discourage dallying. Next the student is led to a spot, often assigned, along a long, rectangular table. The tables parallel one another so that the central aisles between them are of sufficient space for an onlooker to walk them—up and down—making certain that children are eating quickly and correctly. Here, then, we have clear disciplining of the body, creating a limpid grid of intelligibility—a differentiated unit of parts that can be deciphered and, if necessary, corrected quickly.

A second component of disciplinary power is the control of time and activity. First, we have the time-table—the meat and potatoes, so to speak, of the school day. The small sliver of time peeled away for lunch is one part of this table, which regulates and imposes order on the day. Moreover, the table expresses clearly the forms of work that fill its parts: it is thus a mechanism of both obedience and efficiency. It articulates, through a detailed sequence of prescriptions, a field of permissible behavior for specific slots of time. Hence we have alimentary routines and expectations for lining up, tray-carrying, eating with utensils and napkins, keeping both feet anchored to the floor, and so on. This coordination of the body with not only its gestures but also with time aggrandizes, indeed exhausts, its utility. Lunch is denuded of all auxiliary activities—a dining experience reduced to a mass feeding—and we have unadulterated time that is, for the sake of maximum efficiency, elaborated and interpolated at predetermined moments by prefigured movements. As Foucault (1975/1995) has written, “Time measured and paid must also be a time without impurities or defects; a time of quality, throughout which the body is constantly applied to its exercise” (p. 151). In short, the disciplined body—obedient and industrious—is a prerequisite for an efficient feeding. As an example of this process, take the veritable gymnastics of self (a detailed series of body maneuvers and gestures that accrete as a daily disciplinary exercise) involved in the following set of prescriptions from Head Start, detailing how a child should set her place at the lunch table:

- Child will touch only his own place setting
- Child will place a napkin on the top plate in the stack
- Child will place a knife, fork and spoon on the plate on top of the napkin
- Child will place a glass on the plate laying down
- Child will pick up the place setting, putting his thumb inside the glass to stabilize it and move to his assigned place
- Child will carry his place setting to his assigned seat
- Child will set up his place setting using the table template as a guide
- Child’s glass will remain on the glass circle when not in use. (“Policy and Procedure, Family Style Dining,” n.d.)

This before a bite has been taken! Admittedly, this degree of specialization and coordination is not seen in many lunchrooms. All lunchrooms, however, discipline the body through a coordination of the body, its alimentary gestures, and time.

Hierarchical observation and surveillance are the mechanisms by which the disciplinary apparatus functions. Here one finds an extremely fascinating combinatory relationship between disciplinary exercise, surveillance, and architectonic specialization. Recall that the design of the school was responsive to a need for obedience and control. That is, in its design—a large rectangular enclosure—it was an architectural response to the general problematic of what to do with a mass of congregating students. It was an architecture that made possible a series of disciplinary strategies—e.g., the localizations of bodies, the articulation of power onto time—and also facilitated a gaze to maintain it. The gaze, then, individuates the mass: it seeks out and differentiates; it gathers, records, and analyzes information; it creates bodies of knowledge of eaters and eating bodies. And—this is the critical component—it offers corrective guidance for misbehavior. In the 18th century, the École Militaire in Paris constructed a dining room with a "raised platform for the tables of the inspectors of studies, so that they may see all the tables of the pupils of their divisions during meals" (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 173). In our day, we have mostly replaced the platform with the roving eye—the moving monitor whose gaze records and whose voice corrects:

> At my school, like many schools, kids are expected to sit still and be quiet at lunch. And it's not the lunch ladies who are telling the kids to be quiet, but the teachers and administrators yelling at the kids to sit down and be quiet during lunchtime. (Wu, 2011, p. 86)

This gaze, a trained eye, spots misbehavior quickly. It is an eye that normalizes and maintains the disciplinary power of the lunchroom.

We should not mistake all of this to be a deterministic process: students are not automata, and bodies do not become sites of discipline and surveillance without response. As an example, we might underscore the panic that spread throughout Europe in the eighteenth century at the shocking realization that children masturbate. Almost immediately, the body became a locus of surveillance, control, and struggle between parents and their children. This intensification of control over the body engendered a desire to control one's own body and, ultimately, galvanized a "revolt of the sexual body" (Foucault, 1980, p. 57) As we have seen, the eating body, like the sexual body, is a site of surveillance and control: the eating body is spatialized, subjected to temporal constrains, coordinated, and so on during lunchtime; children are not deemed competent to regulate the space, time, content, or sociality of eating. If the body will respond in revolt remains to be seen, but I believe we can ascertain the incunabular marks of such a revolt in present cultural apertures and contradictions. For example, Michael Pollan (2006) has underscored the American paradox concerning food and the body—that Americans are obsessed with being thin, as evidenced by the abundance of eating disorders and faddish diets, while at the same time suffering from an obesity epidemic. Forty-two percent of girls between the ages of six and nine would like to be thinner than they currently are (Collins, 1991). More than one-half of teenage girls have employed self-destructive strategies (skipping meals, fasting, smoking, vomiting, taking laxatives, etc.) in the name of losing weight (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005). And while the diet industry reaps annual revenues of up to 50 billion dollars (Olmsted & McFarlane, 2004), 20 percent of Americans are obese (Mokdad et al., 2003). It would seem, then, that corporeal extremism and contradiction is bound up with the struggle over the eating body. In short, we are seeing the inchoate phases of the revolt of the eating body in self-induced pathologies of the flesh. In order to understand how these effects present in school contexts, we need to move beyond the eating body to a direct examination of school food.

## Spectacular Foodscapes

The eating of school lunch, which nearly all of us have, at one time or another, experienced, is a constitutive element of our current foodscape—a foodscape defined by rupture, hybridity, contestation, irony, and, most important of all, simulation. I will argue that within this foodscape the eater has transformed from food agent to passive spectator of simulated food—the suffering invalid, stricken with gastrovertigo, sensing her senescence in the incessant march of Frankenfood—who is unable to manage, at our current moment, true alimentary revolt and freedom. Following an exploration of this pernicious foodscape, I will begin to theorize a liberating form of practice that I have termed *alimentary freedom*.

These arguments are anchored in the thought of radical Marxist Guy Debord, who in 1967 published a cogent screed contra the social effects of late capitalism. At a basic level, Debord argued that over-production in what he termed the "abundant economy" had transmogrified commodities, separating them from their use and meaning. In Debord's view, production is tantamount to a general accretion of things without referents—a vast repository of images that are valued not for what they do or mean but for how they appear—resulting in the spectacularization of society, where the image reigns supreme. As Debord (1983) wrote, "Considered in its own terms, the spectacle is *affirmation of appearance and affirmation of all human life, namely social life, as mere appearance* [emphasis added]" (Separation Perfected section, para. 10). Let Debord's argument here not be mistaken: the spectacle is not a supplementary world mapped onto that which we take to be real; rather, it is a phenomenological simulation that has expurgated and then masqueraded as the *real world itself*. Baudrillard (1994), who has advanced a similar argument, articulated the supplanting of the real as follows:

> It is all of metaphysics that is lost. No more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept. No more imaginary coextensivity: it is genetic miniaturization that is the dimension of simulation. The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control—and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these…It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal… (p. 2)

Debord's statement was decidedly more pithy and playful: "In a world which *really is topsy-turvy*, the truth is a moment of the false" (Separation Perfected section, para. 9). Stated in distinct ways, these two writers approach a similar argument—viz. that that which we had previously taken to be real (truth) has been usurped by that which we had previously taken to be unreal (false), but which we now take to be real (false-cum-truth). The real has been reconstituted.

To add a final stroke to this background, I think it germane to underscore that within the spectacular society, the morphology of specific commodities (image-objects) has been liquefied—that is, they are prefigured as good before they reach the hands of the consumer. In that way, they are both fungible and hegemonic. So, for example, we are witnessing the ineluctable charge of technocracy: the personal computer, the iPad, the iPhone, and so on. In the words of Debord,

> The spectacle presents itself as something enormously positive, indisputable and inaccessible. It says nothing more than 'that which appears is good, that which is good appears.' The attitude which it demands in principle is passive acceptance which in fact it already obtained by its manner of appearing without reply, by its monopoly of appearance. (Separation Perfected section, para. 12)

This "monopoly of appearance"—stemming from the autonomous economy of production—has at least three corollaries: (1) commodities, to rephrase Debord, are good because they appear and appear because they are good (the tautology here obviates easy contestation or popular resistance); (2) given their pre-interpreted form, their ubiquity, and their status as "real," they are forms of domination; and (3) given their importance to reproducing social life and maintaining control, they must be constantly monitored and regulated; thus the worker, who previously could find respite from the means of production during her off-hours, now is ensnared in forms of spectacular leisure. As such we watch corporatized movies, read books interpolated by advertisements, and even live in parallel worlds, where, in a phrase tumescent with unintended Debordian irony, "everyone you see is a *real person* and every place you visit is built by *people just like you* [emphasis added]" ("What is Second Life?, 2009).

The "monopoly of appearances" and the hegemony of the spectacle find their imprimatur in two related strategies. The first is the construction of pseudo-needs and the logic of equivalency. That is, this regime relies upon directed, spectator consumption of a concatenation of surfaces; criticism and differentiation are averse to this project. Second, is the death of history, a collective amnesia. Remember, the commodity is sanctioned by its pre-interpretation as good in the perpetual present—by its appearance in such a space. History, insofar as it is a veritable warehouse of alternatives, is a danger to this agenda.

So, then, if we live in a world where "Everything that was directly lived has moved away into representation" (Debord, 1983, Separation Perfected section, para. 1), where images have become "murders of the real" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 5), what is the ontological status of our food? To understand, we must venture into the world of signs and recognize that the meaning of food, as well as our subjective experiences of it, has fundamentally changed. If we compare the food of a bygone era (e.g., a chicken slaughtered, prepared, and eaten on a family farm) with the commercial food of our present moment (e.g., chicken nuggets purchased from a drive-through window), we have different fields of meaning. Both, of course, are bound up in systems of signs that afford their intelligibility. That is, the chicken is nested (pun intended) within multiple signs upon which it relies in order to signify—e.g., the feeding, the slaughter, the dinner table, and so on—just as the nuggets are nested (perhaps here I should say *boxed*) within multiple signs—e.g., jingles, commercials, billboards, and so on. Despite these similarities, the subjective experience of eating these foods is distinct. One might even suggest that commercial food does not necessitate a subjective *eating* experience, albeit it certainly presupposes an experience of a sort. Subway does not rely on its food and the experience of eating it—the taste, smell, etc. It relies on "Subway—Eat Fresh!" and Jared Fogel, who only in a world of appearances, could advise us to consume a diet of processed meats and industrial vegetables in the name of health, without even a hint of irony. Ultimately, then, food is entangled in interconnected webs of equivalent signs, which, taken together, are constitutive of our foodscape. The chicken has vanished and been replaced by nuggets and arches and fun, all of which are bound together via the logic of equivalency. We inhabit a foodscape in which "the billboards and the products themselves act as equivalent and successive signs" (Baudrillard, 1994, 75). Or, as writer and farmer Wendell Berry (1990/2010) has suggested, the foodscape of the industrial eater, "who does not know that eating is an agricultural act, who no longer knows or imagines the connections between eating and the land, and who is therefore necessarily passive and uncritical—in short, a victim" (p. 146).

I believe we must resist the urge to understand these issues as abstract and disconnected from our daily eating practices. Rather, I would argue that they are of great practical import and, further, that the general public is keenly aware of them. Our current foodscape is replete with examples of the spectacle and the hyperreal. The pellucid gap between appearance and reality is found, for example, in an "authentic" tortilla factory at Disney's California Adventure (Lind and Barham, 2004), in specialty coffees that create new memories to supplant cultural amnesia (Roseberry, 1996), and in "traditional" Chesapeake Bay crab cakes formed of pasteurized crabmeat from the far East (Paolisso, 2007). The nostalgia industry suggests that we all intuit that something is amiss. As Baudrillard (1994) has succinctly stated, "When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning" (p. 6).

The school and its lunchroom are not immune to these influences. Debord (1983) has written that, "The spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the *total occupation of social life* [emphasis added]" (The Commodity as Spectacle section, para. 42). Concretely, we see these changes in the lunchroom via the deployment of privatization strategies, fast-food, and national brands that have "dramatically altered the atmosphere in school lunchrooms" (Levine, 2008, p. 186). These trends seem to be on the rise. To provide but a few examples, Rhode Island has relinquished all food-service duties to corporations, and the Houston Independent School District has welcomed Pizza Hut into its cafeterias (pp. 184-185). In addition, 83 percent of the food consumed in NSLP districts during the 1996-97 school year was obtained from commercial sources, with another four percent consisting of donated, processed commodities (Arcos et al., 1998). More recently, the following foods were among the top 50 purchased foods in NSLP districts: chips, cookie dough, ice cream, hot pockets, pop tarts, ten distinct kinds of processed meats, and tortilla chips. Only two vegetables made the list (lettuce salad mix and chopped lettuce), or three, if you count, as they do, French fries (Young et al., 2012). These figures might seem misplaced given the nature of my argument, but they afford an unassailable conclusion in support of my case—viz. that our nation's school children are eating commercialized foods, foods that are liquefied via the logic of equivalency and fungible in the broader pastiche of our current foodscape.

Let us explore the argument in greater depth via a theoretical investigation of the chicken nugget—a ubiquitous, evocative, and baleful element of school lunch. The chicken nugget, it seems, has died a double death. First, in the abundant economy, it has become a tendril of the diffuse spectacle: it has been over-produced, severed from its former signified, transmogrified, and, ultimately, made fungible and inert. Moreover, it has died of suffocation via representation. If McDonaldization (Ritzer 1994/2008) is the force by which McDonalds exerts its productive influence in industry, then McDonaldcide is the expression of the thanatos principle inherent in the hyperreal. The interpolation of the chicken nugget into our lives is a concrete example of the valorization and passive acceptance of a pre-interpreted, equivalent thing. It is good because it appears; it appears because it is good. And thus the second death of the chicken nugget—or, if one were inclined to articulate it in this manner—its rebirth as simulacrum. The chicken nugget, of course, is both an extreme and arbitrary example, but in a spectacularized foodscape, wherein food operates via surfaces and the logic of equivalency, all foods are extreme and arbitrary. Is the packaged, Smucker's peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich any different? What about the rib, with its particle-board assemblage and spurious grill marks? These questions could continue *ad infinitum*.

Perhaps the question still remains of how these processes are related to the revolts of the body with which I concluded the prior section. To state it simply, self-induced pathologies of the flesh are the predictable result of a spectacular foodscape which anticipates and obviates, though the tautological confluence of appearance and goodness, forms of revolt that would be, perhaps, more productive and lasting, and certainly less destructive. We continue to pathologize our bodies by ingesting the dead. It matters not if one runs ten miles each day or remains stationary in a chair: our bodies are moribund. And, at least for the moment, it seems as though we are unable to see beyond the current arrangement of things.

## Alimentary Freedom

Despite the critical nature of my argument, I believe we can reclaim and liberate our bodies. In the remainder of this essay, I will offer a few prescriptions for *alimentary freedom*, a project of body emancipation that subsumes many related tactical maneuvers.

First, we must acknowledge that an interruptive movement has begun. That is, there are extant practices that interrupt the micro-powers that have inhered in school eating. A personal favorite is The Edible Schoolyard program at Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School in

Berkeley, California, which contests the sort of hegemonic food policies that have been under scrutiny in this essay. In this program,

> … children join their science teachers in growing and harvesting Brandywine tomatoes and golden raspberries along the way to learning about biology, ecology, and chemistry. Inside its working kitchen, a teacher might explain ancient history through the hand of grinding wheat berries into flour, and the baking of bread. And it has a communal dining table where many of our students eat the only shared meal of the day, and where the civilizing rituals of the table have become part of the larger curriculum. By the time a young girl has finished a delicious meal and returned her table scraps to the garden soil, and gone back to planting and harvesting with her science class, she is well on her way to understanding the cycle of life, from seed to table and back again—absorbing almost by osmosis the relationship between the health of our bodies, our communities, and the natural world. (Waters, 2008, p. 10)

To my way of thinking this is redolent of Dewey's (1938/1997) suggestion that school experiences might follow and recapitulate the historical development of humankind. To be sure, the children taking part in the Edible Schoolyard are approximating the sort of small-scale agriculture that actuated the Neolithic revolution some 10,000 years ago. As such, they are rejuvenating a history that has been under attack by spectacular foods, reclaiming their bodies from disciplinary control, and establishing new orientations towards food and eating. Unfortunately, such programs, albeit on the rise, are still the exception rather than the rule. Nevertheless, these programs open a space for new interruptive possibilities and galvanize salutary contestations that do not pathologize the flesh. They do not, however, go far enough.

To take such projects further, I believe we need a new dietetic. In sketching the contours for this dietetic, I will draw upon several sources in the Socratic tradition, for as Foucault (1985/1990) has noted, the Greeks had an alimentary regimen that can be rightly conceptualized as "a whole art of living" (p. 101). Let there be no mistake, however, for I do not advocate simply overlaying our current foodscape with an ancient discourse on eating and drinking. Rather, I would suggest that we may use these discourses as inspiration for actuating *alimentary freedom*.

Foucault's delineation of the Greek dietetic as an "art of living," rests on three interrelated ideas: (1) that alimentary practices were pleasures that were provided by the gods; (2) that the proper use of alimentary pleasures involved self-mastery and moderation, not submission to external taboos or prohibitions; and (3) that learning to use pleasure properly would prepare the individual for various future circumstances (in this way the dietetic was unquestionably an educative program). Let us explore each of these components, beginning with the idea that food was conceptualized as a pleasure to increase happiness.

The ancients were in agreement that bodily pleasure was a good that could lead to happiness, provided that it was used in the proper way. On this first point, Aristotle wrote, "feeling pleasure is among the things related to the soul, and there is pleasure for each person in connection with whatever he is said to be a lover of" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 8). Moreover, Aristotle believed alimentary pleasures were "the first and greatest of necessities" and the "condition of life and existence" (*NE*, VII, 4). Of course, there were clear ideas for how these corporeal pleasures ought to be controlled. Indeed, both Plato and Aristotle agreed that bodily pleasures were a force that would lead to excess unless brought under the more rational parts of the soul. Aristotle could not have been more perspicuous in the following apothegm on the precarious relationship between alimentary pleasure and excess: "people are blamed, not for undergoing them [bodily pleasures], desiring them, and loving them, but rather for doing so in a certain way, namely, in excess" (*NE*, VII, 4). A critical point here is that an inability to control the natural tendency of alimentary pleasures to lean toward excess led to moral and ethical evaluations of the person. Aristotle suggested that "a person is base because he pursues that excess, but not because he pursues the necessary pleasures—for all in some ways enjoy refined foods, wines, and sex, but not all do so as they ought" (*NE*, VII, 14). Xenophon echoed these sentiments, suggesting alimentary practices were pleasurable insofar as they met the criterion of need—that is, they were consumed under conditions of hunger, not in a surfeited state (*Memorabilia*, III, 12-13). The Hippocratic tradition went even further, deriding excess as a form of oppression (*On Regimen in Acute Diseases*, IX), whereas Plato argued that pleasure in excess did not accord with virtue (*Republic*, III). Here, I would underscore a seminal point: while these prescriptions for using pleasure were promulgated by official discourses—viz. those of philosophy and medicine—they never took the form of juridical interdictions about how one should live in relation to alimentary concerns. Rather, they were a component of a broad body aesthetic that enabled the individual to constitute herself as an ethical being vis-à-vis food and drink.

What sorts of implications follow from this first part of the Greek dietetic? First, I would suggest that we must reconceptualize school lunch reform. Although many reasonable programs are having some positive impacts, most are still mired in instrumentalist ideas about how to transform school food. That is, programs advocating more vegetables and lean meats for children are fine, but they still find their raison d'être in the scientific measurement of food, in the idea that lunch is ultimately reducible to caloric intakes and purchase invoices. Instead of such approaches, why not advance a more holistic conception of food—one that will prepare students for future circumstances and dining opportunities—and encourage a more educative rendering of school lunch? Here, I can anticipate an objection. What you say is all fine and well, but what of the child who, left to her own devices, cannot control her consumptive impulses? Let us examine how the Greeks approached this dilemma before returning to this question.

The Greeks approached the problem of alimentary profligacy through the lens of *sophrosyne*, a concept that, as Dewey (1906/1960) has noted, does not translate well into English. While we typically denote it with approximations such as "temperance" or "moderation," it is more productively conceived of as "an artistic idea" that entailed "a harmonious blending of affections into a beautiful whole" (p. 130). We find this idea in many ancient texts, often in the form of a balance between competing affections and desires. Aristotle, for example, noted that "the self-restrained person is such as to do nothing, on account of the bodily pleasures, that is contrary to reason, and so too is the moderate person" (*NE*, VII, 9). A few words regarding the relationship between passion and reason are warranted, for this relationship occupied a central place in the thought of both Plato and Aristotle. To begin, the relationship was defined by an internal agonism, a tug-of-war between passion and reason. Plato made this point well when he trifurcated the soul into its appetitive, passionate, and rational parts. Aristotle, too, delineated an agonistic relationship between parts of the soul, between desires and longings (nonrational forces) and reason. In particular, he wrote that there existed in the soul a drive towards pleasure, which is "contrary to reason that opposes and blocks it," and that the self-restrained person was "obedient to the commands of reason" (*NE*, VII, 13). This agonistic relationship between the drive for pleasure and the constraining force of reason is perhaps best illustrated by the tropes the ancients used in delineating the struggle. Aristotle repeated many times that the self-strained individual was one who had "overpowered" and "conquered" the desire for excessive pleasure (*NE*, VII, 2-7). Plato's tropes regarding alimentary agonism were benevolent with respect to the moderate man, whose self-restraint freed him "to contemplate and aspire to the knowledge of the unknown, whether in past, present, or future"; but trenchant with respect to the profligate individual, whose soul was "poor and insatiable" and entangled "in a fury of passions and desires" (*Rep*, IX). Indeed, Plato's truculence went farther, delineating the immoderate as a tyrant, a slave, and as the truly poor. A critical point must here be brought to light, namely, that the use of pleasure through alimentary choice was not circumscribed by codified prohibition or taboo. Rather, it was realized through a bodily aesthetic constituted by self-knowledge and victory over the appetitive components of one's soul, through a combative, but elegant, balance. As Xenophon wrote,

> Everyone should watch himself throughout this life, and notice what sort of meat and drink and what form of exercise suit his constitution, and how he should regulate them in order to enjoy good health. For by such attention to yourselves you can discover better than any doctor what suits your constitution. (*Mem*, IV, 7)

Both the Hippocratic tradition and Plato agreed on this general point. The author of *On Regimen in Acute Diseases* admonished that patients should not deter from customary eating habits—that the choice to take two or three meals each day was less important than the routine that a given individual had established. Plato argued for an idiosyncratic dietetic, suggesting that guardians, above all others, should develop a "habit of body" that suited their particular needs (*Rep*, III). The Greek dietetic, then, was a stylized art of eating and existing that afforded primary authority to the eating subject. The ethical individual was one who was able to subdue the appetitive urges of his soul through reasons, thus becoming "king over himself" and "the best and…happiest" man (*Rep*, IX).

To return, then, to the prior question: *What of the immoderate child?* To begin, I believe we must introduce the twin ideas of pleasure and struggle into education. In our haste to modify and tailor all learning experiences to individual children, we are coming dangerously close to excoriating our schools of productive struggle, and indeed there are some pleasures that can only be had following prolonged struggle. Indeed, we would do well to recall the example of Aeschylus in the *Agamemnon*, and the great and lasting lesson that to learn is to struggle. With respect to lunch, we need to eschew nutritional guidelines and circumscribed food choices, which position the eater as object of nutritive management, and reconceptualize lunch as an educative moment. Why not teach children, first and foremost, that foods are a source of pleasure and, secondly, a pleasure that must be managed? These two simple suggestions would have the effect of transmogrifying food from an instrument to a pleasure and shifting the locus of power from external authorities to the properly educated and empowered alimentary subject.

The final component of the Greek dietetic suggested that learning to use alimentary pleasure in an ethical way prepared the individual to confront future situations. Plato, for example, recommended dietary prescription for preparing guardians:

> . . . a finer sort of training will be required for our warrior athletes, who are to be like wakeful dogs, and to see and hear with the utmost keen-

> ness; amid the many changes of water and also of food, of summer heat and winter cold, which they will have to endure when on a campaign, they must not be liable to break down in health. (*Rep*, III)

Foucault (1985/1990), too, summarized the dietetic as a preparatory program:

> Regimen should not be understood as a corpus of universal and uniform rules; it was more in the nature of a manual for reacting to situations in which one might find oneself, a treatise for adjusting one's behavior to fit the circumstances. (p. 106)

As these passages suggest, the Greek dietetic was neither a body of rules nor nutritive education, but a manner of ordering existence—an aesthetic of self that not only limned the contours of sophrosyne, but also prepared the individual for future life. There were, however, a few guidelines.

One guideline was that the individual should eschew luxuriating in extravagant meals. At first blush, this would seem to be an external prohibition, but in actuality it was a key component to crafting a moderate alimentary aesthetic. In the *Memorabilia*, Socrates admonished Euthydemus:

> There's another drawback, too, attaching to the habit of eating many things together. For if many dishes are not provided, one seems to go short because one misses the usual variety: whereas he who is accustomed to take one kind of meat along with one bit of bread can make the best of one dish when more are not forthcoming. (III, 14)

The point is further articulated in *The Republic*, wherein Socrates expounds on the regimen of the guardian, listing a series of foods—viz. sweet sauces, Sicilian cookery, and confectionary—as verboten to someone in his position. In short, an abstemious diet was not a dictate from above, but rather a part of crafting an art of living in relation to food, drink, and one's social position.

A second guideline was that all alimentary pleasure should be governed by the criterion of need. Aristotle addressed this criterion, arguing that "to eat random things or to drink until one is overfull is to exceed the quality that accords with nature, since the natural desire is for the satisfaction of need" (NE, III, 11). The *Memorabilia*, too, contains passages on the importance of need—for example, the following apothegm: "The sweetest meats, you see, if served before they are wanted, seem sour, and to those who have had enough they are positively nauseating; but even poor fare is very welcome when offered to a hungry man" (III, 11). Here I would underscore the fact that it is the body—its natural desire for food and drink—that determines when one ought to dine, rather than the external imposition of time.

The implication of this final component for school lunch is quite simple. In fact, it is more a corollary of the prior two suggestions than a suggestion in and of itself. It implies that a reconceptualization and reorganization of lunch according *alimentary freedom* will bear fruit not only in present conduct and habits of eating but in future situations in which students find themselves. Given the foodscape students will come to occupy, this is doubtless a good thing.

## Conclusions and Future Directions

To follow the suggestions of *alimentary freedom* would require something of seismic shift in how we organize school lunch. However, I believe it is a feasible project; indeed, as I mentioned earlier in this essay, it is a project that has already begun in some places. As a way of concluding this piece, then, allow me to recapitulated and concretize a few basic suggestions that I have offered above. To begin, I believe we need to reconstitute the semiosis of food. As we have seen, food at our present moment has acquired a spectacular ontology and been position in a concatenation of commodities that are pre-interpreted for the consumer—they are good because they appear, they appear because they are good. We must interrupt this tautology, wherein food is an instrument, and reformulate a program in which food is a pleasure that leads to happiness. The optimist in me believes that the mechanism for realizing this shift is education—education that begins at the earliest levels of school.

After we have re-interpreted food as a pleasure that can lead to happiness, we must facilitate the development of moderation and self-control. As I have argued, I do not believe this can result from dietary guidelines, fitness campaigns, and other well-intentioned liberal campaigns. I believe that we must honor the intelligence of the child and reintroduce the idea of struggle to education. In my estimation, children would do well to understand that their relationships with food are ultimately personal and, with the proper amount of guidance and knowledge, potentially liberating. This would, by its very nature, necessitate choices in the lunchroom—not only food and drink choices that interrupt the thingification of food, but also choices of movement (where to eat) and time (when to eat) that halt disciplinary control. It would, in other words, reintroduced the *will* into the lunchroom (James, 1899/1962). In this way, we might craft a new dietetic—a form alimentation rooted in ethical habits of eating and a freedom of the eating self.

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