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Caveat Emptor! The Rhetoric of Choice in Food Politics

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This project is about a form of corporate predation that entails both policy influence and cultural legitimation. Neoliberal explanations of the inability of citizens to thrive in the current socio- economic condition typically rest on a combination of victim-blaming and appeals to the individualistic rhetoric that assumes we all enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom of choice. It is common for corporate lobbyists, and politicians under their influence, to argue against consumer protection on the grounds that such efforts are paternalistic, and that they therefore undermine consumer sovereignty. By this logic, illnesses that are highly correlated to diet are problems that consumers can avoid, and it is not the duty of food companies or government to prevent consumers from making "bad choices." Implicit in this moralistic narrative is that consumers have sufficient knowledge about the alternatives to enable them to make "good choices." Major food lobbies use their political influence to oppose government regulations of food, based on the reasoning that consumers deserve the right to choose. Food industry groups also will sometimes invest heavily to prevent legal requirements to disclose information that might enable consumers to make informed choices, creating a predatory double-bind. In this essay, I discuss how the rhetoric of choice is employed by the food industry, how it is formulated within the political context of the United States, and how that rhetoric poses threats to food systems globally.

> While we obsess about our individual choices, we may often fail to observe that they are hardly individual at all but are in fact highly influenced by the society in which we live.
>
> Renata Salecl, *The Tyranny of Choice*[1]

Introduction

The idea that consumer choice is an ultimate source of cultural and political power is deeply engrained in discourses used to justify the social relations of economic liberalism, more commonly referred to in the present time as neoliberal capitalism, or simply neoliberalism. The term "neoliberalism" has become a familiar catchphrase in critical theory, and with good reason, as its rise marks a fundamental shift in the dominant political imaginary of what is quaintly called liberal democracy.[2] Not surprisingly, political theorists insist on an idealized distinction between economic or neo- liberalism and political liberalism, given how opposed they seem to be. For example, Robert Dahl distinguishes economic liberty and political liberty by stating that the former subordinates self-government to the right to property, and the latter reverses this relationship.[3] Whether or to what extent this relationship between self-government and the right to property should be understood as meaningful, as if one can truly exist without the other, is a subject worthy of debate.[4] Moreover, neoliberal thought further complicates our understanding of consumer choice with the introduction of the concept of "consumer sovereignty," a term that idealizes a merger between *homo economicus* and *homo politicus*. By merging the two, what and how we buy can be understood as a meaningful, if not the ultimate, form of political expression. This idealized persona is now also an important creature in the realm of

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[1] Renata Salecl, *The Tyranny of Choice* (London: Profile Books, 2011), 13.

[2] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collége de France, 1978-1979,* trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Michel Senellart (New York: Picador, 2008); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[3] Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Economic Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 162-163. The most elaborate case for political liberalism in contemporary political philosophy was made by John Rawls. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

[4] Among the risks that liberalism allows for and generally fails to prevent is that, in the name of liberal tolerance, illiberal and intolerant political forces can emerge, gain power, and unravel the foundations of liberal institutions. Andrew Calabrese and Natalie Fenton, "A Symposium on Media, Communication and the Limits of Liberalism." Introduction to a special issue of the *European Journal of Communication* 30, no. 5 (October 2015): 517-521.

"commodity activism," a form of political agency that constitutes the core of the hybridized citizen-consumer.[5]

A belief in the real power of consumer sovereignty is essential to the idealization of the self-regulating market. In *The Great Transformation*, first published in 1944, Karl Polanyi critiques idealism about self-regulating markets and makes a compelling case for understanding laissez faire not as spontaneous, but as planned, whereas protective regulation is truly spontaneous, responding as it does to harmful social disruptions, and comprising what he terms a "double movement… personified as the action of two organizing principles in society":

> The one was the principle of economic liberalism, aiming at the establishment of a self-regulating market, relying on the support of the trading classes, and using largely laissez-faire and free trade as its methods; the other was the principle of social protection aiming at the conservation of man and nature as well as productive organization, relying on the varying support of those most immediately affected by the deleterious action of the market—primarily, but not exclusively, the working and the landed classes—and using protective legislation, restrictive associations, and other instruments of intervention as its methods.[6]

In his analysis of the deep threats posed by capitalism to humanity, nature, and productive organization, Polanyi also warns of the relationship between the anti-democratic removal of social protection and the rise of fascist political tendencies: "The fascist solution of the impasse reached by liberal capitalism can be described as a reform of market economy achieved at the price of the extirpation of all democratic institutions, both in the industrial and in the political realm."[7] Recently, critical theorists have demonstrated Polanyi's prescience and continued relevance in anticipating the dangers of a powerful and relentless ideological tilt against social protection.[8] That is the focus of this essay about food

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[5] Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser, eds., *Commodity Activism: Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

[6] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Times* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 138-139.

[7] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 245.

[8] See, for example, Fred Block, "Karl Polanyi and the Writing of *The Great Transformation*," *Theory and Society* 32, no. 3 (June 2003): 275-306; Fred Block, "Polanyi's Double Movement and the Reconstruction of Critical Theory," *Revue Interventions économiques,* 38 (2008). Accessed September 15, 2017. https://interventionseconomiques.revues.org/274; Nancy Fraser, "A Triple Movement?

politics, in which I argue that the rhetoric of choice is a principal means through which consumers are told that the regulation of the food industry on their behalf is how the state attempts to undermine their sovereign power. In essence, the rhetoric of choice can be understood as a "technology of citizenship," as Barbara Cruikshank uses the term (borrowing from Foucault), illustrating how "government works *through* rather than against the subjectivities of citizens."[9] In briefly exploring the seductive nature of consumer choice in neoliberal discourse, Matthew Eagleton-Pierce asks the simple question, "But is choice always as liberating as the advertisers claim?"[10] Putting a sharper edge to this view, Jeremy Fox raises the issue of whether in fact consumers actually are able to avail themselves of the information necessary to make rational choices:

> Critical to the idea of 'consumer choice' is that, in exercising their decisions, consumers have clear awareness of the options available. Misleading advertising doesn't exist in such an ideal world, patients can easily work out which hospital is safest for having their appendix removed, parents can select the best school for their progeny from a range of alternatives and, if they are sufficiently market savvy, can bag a place there before the "full up" sign appears on the gate.[11]

Naturally, class position makes for significant distinctions among those who are able to make more or less advantageous choices. And that logic extends into the political economy of food and the cultural discourses through which it is justified.

Food politics may at first glance seem a far cry from the focus of media and cultural studies, or from cultural policy studies. But food is deeply connected to these fields. As multiple disciplines demonstrate, including history, archaeology, and anthropology, the practices of producing, consuming, and governing what we eat are central to what we call "culture." This essay is about

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Parsing the Politics of Crisis after Polanyi," *New Left Review* 81 (May-June 2013): 119-132. On neoliberalism's connection to authoritarianism and fascism, see Henry A. Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism: Authoritarianism and the Eclipse of Democracy* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2004); Wendy Brown, "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization," *Political Theory* 34 no. 6 (2006), 690-714; Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution (*New York: Zone Books, 2015).

[9] Barbara Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 69.

[10] Matthew Eagleton-Pierce, *Neoliberalism: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 23.

[11] Jeremy Fox, "'Neoliberalism' is it?" *openDemocracyUK*, January 14, 2016, https://www.opendemocracy.net/uk/jeremy-fox/neoliberalism-is-it.

selected aspects of the politics and policies that are designed to influence the food we eat, and what we are able to know about our food, with particular emphasis on food as subject and object of cultural life. It begins with the premise that food should be understood as a valid and central subject in the study of the intersecting fields of media, communication and culture.[12] In this sense, I treat food policy and the rhetorical strategies used to justify it as manifestations of cultural policy.

Food politics and cultural policy

In neoliberal discourse, the individual subject-as-consumer is conceived as being empowered, and not enmeshed in a culture of dependency. With respect to the devolution of social safety nets, neoliberal subjects are politically, economically, and cognitively capable of fending for themselves, and thus an attitude of *caveat emptor* ("buyer beware") with respect to knowledge about consumer goods, including food, is naturalized. From this perspective, the rhetoric of choice presupposes the autonomous individual who is responsible for his/her own welfare, as if large and complex institutions do not engage in manipulative and deceptive practices that pose significant barriers to the fulfillment of the promise of individual autonomy. In this sense, civil society, and not the state, is responsible for fulfilling the political logic of "consumer protection," and state-imposed social safety nets, including consumer protection policies, are seen as dysfunctional and backward byproducts of the "nanny state." According to neoliberal logic, the inability of citizens to thrive is a moral deficiency or character flaw, a perspective that is grounded in individualistic terms that presume we all enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom of choice. The markings of this struggle are profoundly imprinted in the politics of food, for example, when an "obesity epidemic" is treated in moralistic terms, reducing issues such as the rise in Type-2 (also known as "adult onset") diabetes to a problem of bad choices.[13] That line of reasoning has been used to fight off initiatives to regulate, tax or

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[12] Janet M. Cramer, Carlnita P. Greene, and Lynn M. Walters, eds., *Food as Communication/Communication as Food* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011); Alan Warde, *The Practice of Eating* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016); Bob Ashley, Joanne Hollows, Steve Jones, and Ben Taylor, *Food and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 2004); and Joshua Frye and Michael Bruner, eds., *The Rhetoric of Food: Discourse, Materiality, and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2012). For a general introduction to many of the issues that fall under the heading of "food politics," see Marion Nestle, *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

[13] Julie Guthman, *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

otherwise limit the availability and consumption of foods associated with chronic illnesses. Simultaneously, a major battleground in food politics is over the question of the public's right to know about the safety and risks associated with the food they eat. For example, major agribusiness firms that produce and sell genetically engineered food have invested heavily in defeating ballot issues in states in which voters have been asked to decide whether to require GMO labeling.

This strategy by the major food lobbies – to oppose government regulation, justified by the argument that consumers deserve the right to choose; and then also to oppose efforts to require the disclosure of information that might enable consumers to make informed choices – creates a predatory double-bind. In this way, the food industry and elected and appointed officials who work on their behalf proselytize a disingenuous rhetoric of choice. The sense in which the term "disingenuous" is used here is to refer to how the state and corporations are ostensibly empowering individuals to make decisions about what is safe, nutritious, etc. in the absence of a social contract intended either to protect consumers from potential harm, or to ensure access to information that would be relevant to their choices. The rhetoric of choice is not a means of direct government control in the sense of formal policy making, but it is an essential means of cultivating acceptance of the neoliberal article of faith in the invisible hand of the self-regulating market, while also giving the impression that government plays no regulatory role in shaping the food choices available to consumers.

In arguing that food policy can and should be understood as a form of cultural policy, I first wish to establish what the object of policy-making is. Critical Cultural Policy Studies grew out of Cultural Studies, and owes a significant debt to the turn towards Foucault and the concept of *governmentality*,[14] although other critical-theoretical perspectives also are brought to bear.[15] And

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[14] Tony Bennett, "Putting Policy into Cultural Studies," in *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1991), 23-37; Stuart Cunningham, "Cultural Studies from the Viewpoint of Cultural Policy," in *Critical Cultural Policy Studies: A Reader*, eds. Justin Lewis and Toby Miller (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 13-22; and Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, trans. Rosi Braidotti and Colin Gordon, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87–104.

[15] See, for example, Jim McGuigan, "Cultural Policy Studies," in *Critical Cultural Policy Studies: A Reader*, ed. Justin Lewis and Toby Miller (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 23-38; and Jim McGuigan, *Culture and the Public Sphere* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

although there are scholars in the interdisciplinary field of Food Studies who focus on critical political-economic analyses of food policy, the overlap with Cultural Policy Studies is virtually nonexistent. Likewise, there is a small but growing overlap between scholars working in Cultural Studies and those in Food Studies who are grounded in similar literature in cultural theory, but there is little in the way of a policy orientation for members of either group. And although much can be gained from a critical cultural policy orientation for both groups, exploring such a possibility is not my principal aim below. Rather, it is to explore how food practices of production, representation, and consumption – that is, as an industrial complex – can be understood in relation to and in identity with the cultural and creative industries. And it is from that identity that I wish to argue for understanding food policy in terms of cultural policy.

Among the several disciplines that are centrally concerned with the cultural analysis of food, including archaeology, anthropology, history, geography, sociology, and media, communication and cultural studies, anthropology probably has provided the most complex, varied, and sustained analyses of food-related material culture and practices. The sub-discipline known as "food anthropology" treats food not only as a vital means of sustenance, but also as an anchor of social rituals and cultural identity formation.[16] Food serves as a marker of status, of taste, hierarchy, and belonging, and as a basis of ritual. Food is a means of cultural identity formation, both in its production and in its consumption. Observations about rituals involving food, favored foods, and foods that are taboo, provide insight into larger structures of belief, feeling, and power. Investigations into questions of what it means to eat food that is raw versus cooked, whether or not to eat pork or beef, to eat meat at all, or even to eat human flesh, have been subjects of sustained anthropological inquiry, interpretation, and speculation.

The fields of media and communication studies have made important contributions to food studies in a variety of ways, from empiricist and administrative types of research to cultural analyses of the meaning of food in everyday life. Schools and colleges of agriculture in the United States have long given attention to the importance of communication as a means of agricultural extension, of outreach to farming communities that rely increasingly on advanced technology for the production of food. U.S. rural sociologists and communication scholars have played central roles in exporting, in the name of modernization, many agricultural technologies and methods. Among the most influential books in the social sciences is Everett Rogers's *The Diffusion of Innovations*, first

[16] See, for example, the American Anthropological Association, "Society for the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition" (a section of the AAA), accessed September 20, 2017, https://foodanthro.com/.

published in 1962, which focuses on the processes by which technological and social innovations across a wide variety of human practice are communicated and adopted.[17] Most notably, Rogers gives significant attention to his own research for U.S. and international agencies that focuses on the diffusion of agricultural innovations, including hybrid seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. Rogers was a central figure in the field of "development communication," providing strategies for ushering the so-called "green revolution" through the global push for large-scale industrial agriculture based on advanced technologies developed in the United States.[18]

But the contributions from media and communication studies to food studies are not limited to administrative social science. Food as a subject of media and communication extends into cultural analysis of practices of eating, questions of taste, the mediatization of food, and the meaning of food in everyday life. Not surprisingly, the cultural turn in food studies has signaled new and important approaches to the politics of food consumption from within the humanities and social sciences,[19] and media and communication studies have become increasingly important in contributing to those discourses. As media and communication studies joined and led in the wider interdisciplinary critical-cultural turn, interpretations of food as a means of expression and as a subject of representation have become an important if somewhat peripheral focus of study.[20] Oddly, but not surprisingly, the literature on cultural and creative industries, and on cultural policy, does not include the food industries. Fashion and sport are included, but not food, despite the cultural importance of food and foodways. It seems like an unfortunate oversight that should be rectified.[21]

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[17] Ronald Rice, "Diffusion of Innovations," *Oxford Bibliographies Online*, accessed September 15, 2017, www.oxfordbibliographiesonline.com.

[18] Rogers, Everett M. *Diffusion of Innovations*, 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1983). For an excellent history of the Green Revolution by a leading critical food studies scholar, see Raj Patel "The Long Green Revolution," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 40 no. 1 (2013): 1-63.

[19] Alan Warde, *The Practice of Eating* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016).

[20] Kathleen LeBesco and Peter Naccarato, eds., *Edible Ideologies: Representing Food & Meaning* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008); Peter Naccarato and Kathleen LeBesco *Culinary Capital* (New York: Berg, 2012).

[21] See, for example, David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries*, 3rd edition (London: Sage, 2013); and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Creative Economy Report, 2013* Special Edition (New York and Paris: UNDP/UNESCO, 2013). To be fair, Bell and Oakley do mention food briefly along with tourism, and acknowledge that it would fit into a "broad" definition of what qualifies as an object of

The parallels and intersections between what are generally classified as the "creative industries" and the food industry are evident in many ways, including through the billions of dollars spent annually for food advertising in the United States alone. Food occupies more than one special place on television. It has long been a focus of how-to programs, especially in the wake of Julia Child's unique and powerful impact on the development of the "dump and stir" cooking show genre, and more recently in popular reality-TV cooking competitions. Food is the centerpiece of its own film subgenre that includes such critically acclaimed and/or popular films as *Who is Killing the Great Chefs of Europe?* (1973); *Babette's Feast* (1987); *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* (1989); *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992); *Big Night* (1996); *Ratatouille* (2007); and *Julie & Julia* (2009), among many others. Alongside these entertaining, instructive and generally aestheticizing forms of food media are more overtly political discourses, manifested, for example, in the subgenre of documentaries that highlight food controversies, e.g., *Super Size Me* (2004), *Food, Inc.* (2008) and *Forks Over Knives* (2011), and in journalism that appears in books, magazines, and social media that connects industrial food production, distribution and promotion, on the one hand, and risks and threats to public health and safety, on the other. The popular culinary and political writing of such authors as Michael Pollan, Michael Moss and Mark Bittman are a testament to rising consciousness, at least among a privileged social stratum, about food-related issues of health, safety, nutrition, and the environment. The lives, work, attitudes, and travels of celebrity chefs are a popular subject of documentary-style television series. The booming segments of the book and magazine industries that focus on food, and the proliferating social media about cooking and restaurants, are familiar to many home cooks and "foodies."

Stepping back from this swirl of food media, we can see that there is a meaningful connection to explore between food industries and media industries, which separately and together are subjects of cultural critique. The food-media connection is the focus of scholarly books, research articles, and academic conferences, and the subject of food production, distribution, and consumption is ripe for increased focus in critical media and communication research. Food is a cultural good, and it draws some attention from cultural studies. Food also satisfies the ongoing and non-negotiable human need for sustenance, making it an important subject for those who study the political economy of communication, particularly from the perspective of a critique of the cultural and creative industries, lending itself equally to critical cultural policy analysis.

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cultural policy, but elsewhere in the same book food is treated as categorically distinct from cultural industries. David Bell and Kate Oakley, *Cultural Policy* (London: Routledge, 2015).

Just as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno have reflected on the industrialization and commodification of culture, and demonstrated how instrumental reason governs and limits the aesthetic and political imagination, we can extend that logic of analysis to an examination of the role of food in everyday life.[22] It is a matter about which Wendell Berry warned in 1977, when he lamented how industrial agriculture and the green revolution had begun to overrun small-scale farming and, by extension, the cultural life of rural farm communities in the United States. Berry wrote well ahead of others about the social and cultural threats associated with industrial agriculture, and his critique has been echoed by many food activists ever since. Berry has argued in many of his writings that eating is a political act, and that the production and consumption of food are expressions of culture and place.[23] Berry also has offered his explanation of how and why "local soil and local culture are intimately related."[24]

The industrialization of agriculture has altered the nature, quality, and quantity of food that is produced and consumed in modern societies. Along with that transformation, the meaning of food and the means through which it reaches us in our everyday lives also has been transformed. Just as the industrialization of music recording and distribution led Adorno to critique the fetishization of

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[22] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1987).

[23] Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (New York: Avon, 1977).

[24] Wendell Berry, "The work of local culture," in *What Matters? Economics for a Renewed Commonwealth* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010), Kindle. Despite the reverence held towards Berry's views held by many food activists, he is not without critics, one of the most compelling of whom is Julie Guthman, who problematizes the uncritical agrarian populist discourse that idealizes the small-holder farm, which can just as easily be a place of labor exploitation and environmental hazard, if not more so than large farms. Guthman also rightly notes that the assertion of property rights of small farmers does not address underlying labor issues. Space limitations do not permit me to further explore these spot-on observations, but also the arguable implications, of Guthman's critique here, most notably the assumption that agrarian populism is necessarily "conservative," or more accurately, anti-socialist. It is meaningful to note that many Left-oriented social movements today, not least the food sovereignty movement led by La via Campesina, do in fact aim to conserve small holdings and rights to the land for peasants. The subject is vitally important, but it warrants a more thorough response than I can manage here. See Julie Guthman, *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California*, 2nd ed., (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014). See also Annette Aurélie Desmarais, *La via Campesina: Globalization and the Power of Peasants* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

listening,[25] a similar critique can and should be applied to the fetishization of food commodities. Moreover, if we accept that the food industry is a cultural industry, then we would have to recognize that policies governing the production and consumption of food are also cultural policies.

In their introduction to a book providing an overview of the field of critical cultural policy studies, Toby Miller and George Yudice make a useful distinction:

> Culture is connected to policy in two registers: the aesthetic and the anthropological. In the aesthetic register, artistic output emerges from creative people and is judged by aesthetic criteria… The anthropological register, on the other hand, takes culture as a marker of how we live our lives, the senses of place and person that make us human…[26]

These two registers, which represent an analytical distinction rather than empirically separable categories, clearly are manifested in food and the myriad forms of cultural experience involved in producing and consuming food. From this perspective, we can examine a concept such as *food justice* as one in which "the pleasures of the table" need not be understood as the preserve of the privileged. Aesthetic pleasure associated with food can be understood from an anthropological perspective, meaning we can understand cultural policies governing food from both registers. Food justice in an ideal world aims not at a sterile and ascetic experience, but at human flourishing, happiness, and well-being, which most certainly includes aesthetic pleasure. Therefore, food policy as cultural policy would, at its most just, embrace both the aesthetic and anthropological registers, since in a just world aesthetic pleasure would not be a matter of privilege, enjoyed by some and denied to others. A democratic and just food system also would necessitate sufficient access to public knowledge and public reason about food, as I argue below.

Public knowledge and public reason as policy goals

It is vital to examine assumptions about whether and how the public benefits from having access to knowledge about food, and to examine the implications of

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[25] Theodor Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (NY: Continuum, 1982), 288-317.

[26] Toby Miller and George Yudice, *Cultural Policy* (London: Sage, 2002), 1.

denying public access to such information. As well, it is important to reflect on the utility of advocating for access to knowledge about food safety and nutrition. Are investigative reporting and public information campaigns about food beneficial to the public, or do they simply function to train neoliberal consumers? Are public knowledge and public reason *public goods*, and are they essential to the fulfillment of any meaningful concept of democracy, or are they exhausted Enlightenment fantasies? Are they worth pursuing in the name of food justice?

In Horkheimer and Adorno's major postwar contribution to cultural theory, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and in other works that they published separately, they explored common themes that largely had been ignored within American social theory, namely, the relationship between Max Weber's critique of instrumental reason and Marx's critique of capitalist political economy, the latter particularly in relation to the commodification of culture. Horkheimer continued to follow Weber's trajectory with trenchant essays on the "eclipse of reason."[27] For Horkheimer, the loss he saw was the displacement of human activity that is grounded in ethical reasoning about the ends we pursue as a society – a reality reflected in the Kantian ideal of a "kingdom of ends," in which individuals treat relationships with one another as ends in themselves, not means to other ends – by instrumental reason about how to accomplish ends that themselves are not made subject to public discussion and debate.[28] The classic and horrifying example of the dark side of Enlightenment was the Holocaust, depicted by many social philosophers as an expression of how a preoccupation with reasoning about means eclipsed meaningful consideration of the routinized banality of evil.[29]

Kant, for whom an enlightened society depends on the "public use of reason,"[30] is more often understood today as the advocate of what ultimately has proved to be an oppressive and even terrorizing universalist impulse that fails to adequately recognize the patriarchy, racism, Eurocentrism, and class privilege underlying the Western Enlightenment project. These critiques are vital for putting the obstacles to Enlightenment into perspective, and related to these forms of exclusion is the fundamental challenge to the very assumption that the Kantian

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[27] Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (London: Continuum Press, 2004).

[28] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 45.

[29] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963); Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

[30] Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question 'What is Enlightenment?'" in *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 54-60.

ideal of public reason is something societies systematically embrace. On the contrary, behind the ideal of public reason as a basis for wielding power democratically resides a powerful impulse toward secrecy. In contrast to Kant's aspiration towards an open society in which the uses of power in a variety of settings should be the subject of public deliberation, Norberto Bobbio drew stark attention to *arcana imperii* – concealed or hidden power that is held, traded, and leveraged away from the spotlight of public awareness, scrutiny and participation – and which was "dominant in the age of absolute power."[31] Among noteworthy manifestations of hidden power are the uses and justifications of what are called "state secrets." Like Jürgen Habermas,[32] Bobbio acknowledges that the feudal model of publicity is one in which sovereign power was displayed but not subjected to public dispute, if indeed knowledge of its workings was known at all. As in the past, we are today witness to many instances of the leveraging of hidden power under the cover of national security. Controversies over the unauthorized release of classified U.S. government documents have done considerable damage to the moral authority of the United States in global politics and among U.S. citizens. Questions about the public's "right to know" about such matters as drone warfare and the sustained surveillance of average citizens now are the subject of debates and expressions of outrage on the street, by national leaders from many countries, and within the United Nations.

The notion that we have seen intensified movement away from the ideals of subjecting power to public reason is worthy of consideration in many contemporary contexts. Interestingly, the public revelations made by Chelsea Manning, Julian Assange, and Edward Snowden have become focal points in debates about whether and how democracy is served or if being troubled by the struggles between publicity and secrecy amounts to a distracting spectacle. Is the idea and principle of the "right to know," whether it is about nutrition, food safety, torture, or drone warfare, a farcical liberal ideal?[33] Interestingly, though not surprisingly, Slavoj Žižek advocates precisely for the value of exposing government secrecy as a means to achieve public reason. It is not surprising

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[31] Norberto Bobbio, "The Great Dichotomy: Public/Private," in *Democracy and Dictatorship: The Nature and Limits of State Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 1-21.

[32] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

[33] Thomas I. Emerson, "Legal Foundations of the Right to Know," *Washington University Law Quarterly* 1 (1976): 1-24.

because, on inspection, Žižek sees no alternative if we are to enable democratic rule.[34]

In contrast, Jodi Dean argues that revelations of secrets that ostensibly undermine power do not in fact do so. Instead, they edify the power structure by demonstrating its deep capacity to absorb, co-opt, appropriate, and neutralize threats posed by exposing secrets.[35] This may be true, and in that vein of reasoning we can look upon any exception to her argument as simply proof of what she claims is the rule. Kant's view of publicity and of the public is, first and foremost, a view that emphasizes the use of reason, i.e., of argumentation and debate over the good and the right. But Dean characterizes the Kantian notion of publicity as a function through which information is transferred. For Dean, the revelation of secrets is the principal function of publicity, which distorts what Kant articulates. Granted, Kant fails to problematize how inequality undermines public reason. But neither Kant nor those who follow his lead, such as Habermas and Bobbio, conflate revelation and reason. Dean focuses on challenging the value of revealing secrets, which she sees as the basis of spectacle and information overload, and there are valid grounds for such concerns. But her perspective also provokes the vital question of whether we are in less or graver danger by not having the means to access information that could prove vital to collective political resistance and change. Dean's analysis is conceptually abstract, but its actual political implication is to condone secrecy, and thereby deny people the means to reason, should they choose to do so. Because, in the end, in Dean's perspective, whether or not the state or corporations cause public ignorance doesn't matter. We're all helpless victims of spectacle and information overload. There is no reason to doubt Dean's assertion that the vast portion of the population cares little about the substance of publicly revealed secrets, save for the sheer spectacle of it. But for the sake of those who are able to find ways to use such revelations to further social solidarity, justice, and democratic and egalitarian ends, publicity matters. Alternatively, the thought that we live in a world in which such capabilities do not exist or should not matter is, I suggest, horrifying. The case of threats to public knowledge and, by extension, public reason, about genetically modified food offers a useful case to illustrate the stakes.

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[34] Slavoj Žižek, "Philosophy, the 'Unknown Knowns,' and the Public Use of Reason," *Topoi* 25 (2006): 137-142; Slavoj Žižek, "Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange: Our New Heroes." *The Guardian*, September 3, 2013. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/sep/03/snowden-manning-assange-new-heroes.

[35] Jodi. Dean, "Publicity's Secret: Democratic Ideals in Dispute," *Political Theory* 29 (2001): 624-650.

Producing ignorance as a cultural policy: The case of GMOs

In the United States, media and food industries have noteworthy parallels and intersections. They are deeply interdependent, due to the many billions of dollars spent annually to advertise food. Both industries also are highly concentrated, with a small number of corporations owning and controlling the bulk of the flow of food and media content consumed in the country. Also, local ownership and control in food and media production and distribution is an ongoing struggle, despite efforts of activists who advocate both for local production and for consumers to support local producers. And the size and market power of both industries enables them to have close ties to and exercise great influence on government policy through well-funded lobbying organizations. The Environmental Protection Agency, the Food and Drug Administration and the US Department of Agriculture are government agencies that are the principal focus of food industry lobbying efforts. As well, federal omnibus legislation that has been passed periodically since 1933, under the title of the "Farm Bill," the last version of which was passed in 2014, increasingly is a focus of concerted lobbying efforts. In the case of media and telecommunications, the primary focus of industry lobbyists is the Federal Communications Commission. And although major media and telecom legislation is not passed with nearly the same frequency as agricultural legislation, the powerful influence of industry lobbyists is widely recognized.

Not surprisingly, critics of food policy often focus their attention on the relationships between "big food" and "big media."[36] Many sectors of the food industry are highly resistant to supporting public knowledge about food issues – nutrition, processing ingredients, provenance, and production methods – especially when there are concerns about health and/or environmental risks involved in food production or consumption. The media and food industries also can be at odds when news organizations report on food-related consumer health and safety issues, the environmental threats posed by industrial agriculture, and the labor conditions of food industry workers. In a commercial media environment, the risks to news organizations and the public from investigative

[36] See, for example, Gary Ruskin, *Seedy Business: What Big Food is Hiding in its Slick Campaign on GMOs* (Oakland, CA: U.S. Right to Know, 2015); Vandana Shiva, "Food Meets Media" (Opening address of the IAMCR World Congress, "Media and Global Divides," Stockholm, 20-25 July 2008), *Nordicom Review* 30 (Jubilee Issue) (2009): 11-31; Vandana Shiva, "GMO: The Biggest Food Con," *Common Dreams*, February 3, 2014. https://www.commondreams.org/views/2014/02/03/gmo-biggest-food-con; Jeffrey M. Smith, *Seeds of Deception: Exposing Industry and Government Lies About the Safety of the Genetically Engineered Foods You're Eating.* Fairfield, IA: Yes! Books, 2003.

reporting about the food industry are related to self- or market censorship, due to the ongoing conflict of interest that news media face if they bite the hand that feeds them. In essence, media industries are structurally compromised because they stand to lose valuable advertising revenue if they call into question efforts by a major advertiser or advertising sector to make dubious claims, for example, about food safety, or possibly to conceal information from the public. Perhaps the most blatant and egregious threats to public knowledge about food arise from "food disparagement" or "food libel" statutes, also known as "Ag-gag" laws, which exist in many states to discourage criticism of or revelations about food industry practices that might result in jeopardizing an industry sector's economic success.[37] In states in which such laws exist, journalists and others who might otherwise blow the whistle about matters such as animal cruelty or health risks to consumers are discouraged from doing so because farmers and other food producers have been given encouragement by state lawmakers to be confident that courts will rule in their favor in any "food libel" case.

One noteworthy subject of controversial media coverage about the food industry pertains to agricultural practices that rely on genetic engineering. Human intervention into the manipulation of plant life has been happening since the dawn of agriculture. Plant and seed selection, and later, conventional plant breeding through hybridization, are means of creating crops with favored characteristics that pre-dated genetic engineering. What is unique about genetic engineering is that such manipulation is done at the molecular level, resulting in combinations of unrelated life forms through gene-splicing. Among the techniques that have been the most controversial is the breeding of plants with built-in pesticides, and plants that are given enzymes to resist broad-spectrum herbicides. There exists a significant number of books, films, and Internet-based material that are highly critical of the practices of genetic engineering. One of the highest profile critiques is Marie Monique-Robin's 2008 book that delves into the political, economic, health, and environmental issues arising from genetically engineered (GE) crops, *The World According to Monsanto*, which the author also made into a feature-length documentary film in the same year.[38] Perhaps the most prominent critic of agriculture based on genetic engineering is Vandana Shiva, who has drawn attention to the high rate of suicides among farmers in India who were dependent on the use of GE seeds. More generally, Shiva has been outspoken and controversial in challenging the legacy of "green revolution" farming

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[37] Ted Genoways, "Gagged by Big Ag," *Mother Jones,* July/August 2013, http://www.motherjones.com/environment/2013/06/ag-gag-laws-mowmar-farms/.

[38] Marie Monique-Robin, *The World According to Monsanto: Pollution, Corruption, and the Control of the World's Food Supply* (New York: New Press, 2008).

technologies and methods in the global South, including their contemporary manifestation in GE crops.[39]

Within the United States, public resistance to GE foods originates more from the perspective of consumer advocates than from farmers. This is manifested in fears about potential unknown effects of GE foods, including food that was grown in fields sprayed with the chemical glyphosate, the broad-spectrum herbicide found in Roundup, a weed killer that Monsanto markets along with seeds that are engineered to resist the effects of Roundup. The state of California has declared that glyphosate is a carcinogen, raising controversy and running counter to claims from the US Environmental Protection Agency.[40] Public resistance to GE foods also is evident in controversy surrounding efforts to label foods that contain genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

Controversy over GE foods exists on a global scale, and the reasons why there is opposition are numerous. The topic of the genetic engineering of food has been a thorny one. Whereas, in the European Union, genetically modified foods are highly regulated, in the United States there are no federal regulations.[41] And US companies and federal trade representatives aggressively press for trade policies, for example, in the World Trade Organization, that open new markets for the export of GMO seeds as well as for herbicides and other technologies that are

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[39] Vandana Shiva, *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000); Vandana Shiva, ed. *Seed Sovereignty, Food Security* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2016). See also Michael Specter, "Seeds of Doubt: An Activist's Controversial Crusade Against Genetically Modified Crops," *The New Yorker,* August 25, 2014, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/08/25/seeds-of-doubt.

[40] Emily Bohatch, "California to Add Glyphosate, an Ingredient in Roundup Weed Killer, to List of Cancer Causing Chemicals," *USA Today*, June 27, 2017, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2017/06/27/roundup-ingredient-cancerous-list-monsanto-california/103222928/. Interestingly, the World Health Organization declared in 2015 that glyphosate is "probably carcinogenic to humans," but then in 2016 stated that glyphosate is "unlikely to pose a carcinogenic risk to humans from exposure through the diet." Rebecca Trager, "WHO Clarifies Glyphosate Risks," *Chemistry World*, May 23, 2016, https://www.chemistryworld.com/news/who-clarifies-glyphosate-risks/1010208.article; See also Kate Kelland, "Cancer Agency Left in Dark Over Glyphosate Evidence," *Reuters Investigates,* June 14, 2017, http://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/glyphosate-cancer-data/.

[41] U.S. Library of Congress, "Restrictions on Genetically Modified Organisms: United States," accessed September 29, 2017, https://www.loc.gov/law/help/restrictions-on-gmos/usa.php; U.S. Library of Congress, "Restrictions on Genetically Modified Organisms: European Union," accessed September 29, 2017, https://www.loc.gov/law/help/restrictions-on-gmos/eu.php.

required for growing GMO crops. The reasons for controversy are numerous, and they include fears about possible harms to human health and the crowding out of crop diversity by domination of seed supplies by global firms. As well, genetically modified seeds are mostly treated as intellectual property, and "the world according to Monsanto" is one in which ideally no farmer is able to produce seed, because it must all be purchased from the owners of the property rights to patented seeds. Not surprisingly, activists from the food sovereignty movement are organized against the proliferation of genetically modified seed, due to their concerns about dependency and the loss of control over the diversity of crops they can grow. The global organization, *La via Campesina*, has been a leader in opposing the adoption of GE seeds for a variety of reasons, including concerns about the effects of glyphosate, but also, and perhaps more importantly, concerns about the political, economic, and cultural damage that can result from the loss of "food sovereignty." As the leading voice of the food sovereignty movement, *La via Campesina's* push to get the "WTO out of agriculture" has to do with small farmers particularly (but not exclusively) in the global South, fearing the imposition of crop monocultures, the increase in dependency on an oligopoly of private seed suppliers such as Monsanto, and the overall threats to the cultural life of rural farm communities. The issues that have been taken up by the food sovereignty movement are manifold, but perhaps the greatest is over the control of seeds. It is within that controversy that we see the struggle over the commons within global agriculture, as small farmers worldwide find themselves working as tenants who are involuntarily bound to a tributary system of seed dependency, because patented seeds are the intellectual property of global agribusiness firms. In turn, opponents of GMO seeds view the loss of seed sovereignty as a broader threat to cultural sovereignty.[42]

Importantly, the entire set of issues surrounding food sovereignty are mostly neglected in the construction of the GMO discourse inside the United States (and in Europe), where the primary concerns go towards the effects of GMOs on the health of consumers. This situation mirrors the public response to Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel, *The Jungle*, an exposé of the dangerous and dire working conditions of Chicago's meat-packing workers. Because Sinclair also revealed the unsanitary and hazardous conditions and ingredients used in meat-packing processes, the public response to the book was to call overwhelmingly for greater consumer protection, which did in fact occur, but the labor issues were neglected.[43] In 2017, the documentary, *Food Evolution*, produced by Scott Hamilton Kennedy and featuring science stars Neil de Grasse Tyson and Bill Nye,

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[42] Rosset, Peter M. *Food is Different: Why We Must Get the WTO Out of Agriculture* (London: Zed Books, 2006); Annette Aurélie Desmarais, *La via Campesina*.

[43] Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

reinforces the US preoccupation with the impact of GMOs on consumers rather than on workers, and in the process presents a case against what is characterized in the film as ignorance and hysteria about the risks involved in consuming genetically engineered food. But the film neglects the issues of class, race, and gender inequality that food sovereignty activists have raised about the threats posed by genetic engineering within the context of neoliberal capitalism. In a similar way as the public responded to Sinclair's exposé, Kennedy's film responds myopically to the range of problems worthy of robust public debate about the global threats posed by a capitalist model of a genetically engineered food supply.

It is not hard to see how and why the concerns over the impacts of GE food in the global North are of a different order than those in the South, and yet, there certainly is validity to the continued push for public awareness about the potential risks involved in consuming GE foods, as the unresolved concerns about the safety of glyphosate in the food supply illustrate. For that reason alone, activists who advocate for GMO labeling are justified in their cause. Food industry lobbying organizations routinely oppose legally mandated food labeling for fear that it will harm their profits. GMO labeling can be divided into two general categories: legally mandated and voluntary. This is an important distinction, but in either case, what is at stake is the question of whether consumers are in fact in a position to choose to decide whether or not to purchase GE foods. And underlying this question of choice is whether consumers have access to adequate knowledge of what it is they are buying. Controversy over public knowledge about whether a food is genetically modified is illustrated by systematic efforts by corporations, industry lobbies, and government officials to prevent consumers from having access to available knowledge about relevant environmental and health concerns.

To illustrate what is at stake in the United States over the future of GMO products, we can look at the ways in which activists have advocated for government-mandated labeling to indicate whether a package contains genetically modified food. In November 2014, residents of the states of Oregon and Colorado were offered the chance to vote on whether they wished to require that all foods containing genetically modified organisms (GMOs) have labeling that discloses that fact. In both states, the measures were defeated, but not without significant financing from corporations and corporate trade groups aimed at protecting GMOs from regulation. In Colorado, less than one month before the public referendum over GMO labeling, activists in favor of labeling had raised $729,000, whereas opponents to the measure, which included Monsanto, PepsiCo, Kraft, and

Coca Cola, raised $12.7 million.[44] In Oregon, the race and the money raised were closer, with those in favor of labeling having raised $11.3 million and those opposed, with Monsanto, DuPont, PepsiCo, and Coca Cola all making major contributions, raised $20.9 million.[45]

According to Gary Ruskin, agribusiness and food industry firms spent more than $100 million between 2012 and the end of 2014 on public relations, advertising, lobbying, and political campaigns to generate positive media coverage of and favorable public opinion about GMOs, and to limit or prevent the public from having knowledge about GE foods.[46] The rationale for preventing government-mandated GMO labeling is simple: Opponents of GMO labeling fear that consumers will opt for alternatives if they exist. Whereas, in Europe, where clear legally-mandated labeling enables consumers to choose whether or not to buy GMO products, in the United States there are no comparable federal requirements for labeling. Since, at best, we do not know what risks exist for consumers, the environment, and agricultural diversity, instilling public doubt in response to any calls for caution has been a means for challenging and defeating GMO opponents.

In the cases of the Colorado and Oregon initiatives, in the face of massive outspending by Monsanto and major corporations that are dependent on the supply of cheap genetically modified ingredients, including "big soda," with its heavy dependency on cheap high-fructose corn syrup, citizens were deprived of the opportunity to establish a social contract to ensure their right to know if they are consuming genetically modified foods. In the absence of government intervention into food labeling, Coloradans and Oregonians are left with voluntary labeling options. This case of voluntary versus democratically mandated policies and practices illustrates the distinction between "contract versus charity" that Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon describe.[47] The neoliberal turn in political-economic reasoning and policy making, particularly with respect to consumer protection, removes the state from a variety of roles involving consumer

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[44] "Colorado Mandatory Labeling of GMOs Initiative, Proposition 105 (2014)," *Ballotpedia*, accessed September 29, 2017, https://ballotpedia.org/Colorado_Mandatory_Labeling_of_GMOs_Initiative,_Proposition_105_(2014).

[45] "Oregon Mandatory Labeling of GMOs Initiative, Measure 92 (2014)," *Ballotpedia*, accessed September 29, 2017, https://ballotpedia.org/Oregon_Mandatory_Labeling_of_GMOs_Initiative,_Measure_92_(2014).

[46] Ruskin, *Seedy Business*, 4.

[47] Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "Contract versus Charity: Why Is There No Social Citizenship in the United States," *Socialist Review* 22 (1992): 45-68.

protection and safety nets, and leaves citizens to rely on voluntary organizations – NGOs, philanthropists, citizens' groups – that do not operate according to democratic mandates. This reality illustrates the predatory nature of contemporary capitalism, and the role of the state in fostering it.[48]

Among those who are identified with the view that democratic food choices are available to us all is the prominent food journalist and book author, Michael Pollan, and among Pollan's most popular ideas is that we can "vote" with our forks three times a day.[49] In other words, the democratic influence on food production and food policy and practices is within our reach by virtue of what we choose to consume. This notion underscores the idea that the consumer is sovereign, a commodity activist, and that his or her influence can change the practices of a massively concentrated food industry driven first and foremost by the profit motive. Moreover, not only can the consumer drive the directions of food production and the underlying priorities of the agricultural industries, but we have the power to push those industries to be ethically responsible and committed to priorities that preoccupy progressive food activists, such as concerns for nutritional benefits, food safety, sustainability, localism, and an overall consciousness of the importance of food to cultural well-being. In fairness to Pollan, he also is outspoken against capitalist excess, and he has consistently berated agribusiness firms and industry sectors when he finds their practices to be harmful to consumers, but the idea that we can vote with our forks arises from the premise that consumers are always able to make informed choices, as if there are few or no impediments to doing so.

Unfortunately, there are significant impediments. The food industry relies heavily on the circulation of claims about the benefits of certain foods, but it also relies on techniques to prevent the public from having access to accurate information about nutrition, food safety, and risk, including by means of massive advertising and PR budgets. The study of how ignorance is produced offers promise as a means for challenging predatory corporate practices that are hidden behind the flattering rhetoric of consumer empowerment through choice.[50]

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[48] James K. Galbraith. *The Predator State* (New York: Free Press, 2008).

[49] Michael Pollan, "Voting With Your Fork," *The New York Times*, May 7, 2006, https://pollan.blogs.nytimes.com/2006/05/07/voting-with-your-fork/?mcubz=0.

[50] Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger, eds., *Agnotology: The Making & Unmaking of Ignorance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); A.J. Angulo, ed., *Miseducation: A History of Ignorance-Making in America and Abroad* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016).

Conclusion

The case of public controversy over GMOs is instructive for a number of reasons. If we look only within the United States, which is the largest producer of GE seeds and related technologies, we can see that the stakes are high for agribusiness firms and large food producers. If we look beyond the United States, the stakes are even greater, as more of the arable land and food-eating population lives there. Through multilateral and bilateral trade agreements, and through the soft power of cultural exports (including food) the United States has been able to spread the neoliberal rhetoric of consumer choice. And although the GMO controversy illustrates that there is considerable resistance to the illusory and disingenuous promise of choice, it is an ongoing struggle. What we see happening inside the United States are concerted efforts by industrial agribusiness firms and large food producers to suppress public inquiry and knowledge about the domestic and international effects of GMOs on human health, the environment, and culture. Lacking such knowledge, U.S. citizens are at far greater risk of voting against their own interests, and the world's, both with their forks and at election time. In setting such precedents, U.S. citizens strengthen the hand of these global firms to export the neoliberal rhetoric of choice.

The availability of vital information about nutrition, food safety, and risk hardly ensures that the public will make good choices. But preventing the availability of such information, or engaging in systematic efforts to cause confusion about such matters, is by far the greater threat. The notion that government can be and is an active participant in predatory agendas of food corporations that promote public ignorance should concern everyone, both in terms of the threat to the health of our bodies and in terms of the threat to the body politic. Food policies that facilitate or aim to deceive, manipulate, or conceal are impediments to public knowledge and public reason. Polanyi warned about the threat that economic liberalism poses to democracy. Global efforts to impede public knowledge and public reason about the food we eat are a clear and dire manifestation of that threat.

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