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Michaela DeSoucey, *Contested Tastes. Foie Gras and the Politics of Food* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2016)

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Michaela DeSoucey's *Contested Tastes: Foie Gras and the Politics of Food* is an illuminating study of the moral and political dynamics of taste. In her impressively comprehensive study, DeSoucey draws on a variety of data sources, including ethnographic observation of *foie gras* production in agricultural France, interviews with lawmakers, chefs, and animal rights activists in the United States, and detailed analysis of the media coverage of legal battles surrounding the production, sale, and consumption of *foie gras* in the European Union and the United States. This multi-faceted, detailed comparative study of the discourses surrounding *foie gras* production, sale, and consumption in two national contexts provides a rich analysis of how culture, politics, and commerce interact. She illuminates how these interactions and the debates that characterize them create different kinds of consumers related to the moral choices we make about what we eat, where we eat it, how we produce it, and where we sell it, explaining what those choices represent for individuals, communities, and nations. In so doing, DeSoucey expands the theoretical concept of *gastropolitics*, to explore how food becomes enmeshed in symbolic conflicts and social problems. She examines the everyday practices and legal and governmental battles around the categorization and meaning-making of one contested culinary product and, in so doing, presents a compelling case for why food is an important site for studying broader theories in cultural, social, political, and economic sociology.

*Foie gras* is the focus of political and moral debate primarily because of its process of production. The luxury product is made by enlarging and fattening a goose or duck liver through the process of *gavage*. *Gavage* involves the use of a specialized tube or pipe that is inserted into the bird's throat and used to pour increasing amounts of grain (most often corn) into the bird for 12 to 21 days. The animal's liver grows 6 to 10 times in size and accumulates significantly more fat (from 18% to 60%) than a non-force-fed liver. This process and the resulting product are both celebrated by gourmands, who consecrate

the product for its artisanal production, unique texture, and indulgent taste, and reviled by animal rights activists, who label the process of gavage as cruel, disgusting, and inhumane. This tension serves as the motivating site of inquiry for DeSoucey's book.

DeSoucey begins her empirical analysis with the introduction of her concept of *gastronationalism*. For DeSoucey, gastronationalism is a particular version of gastropolitics by which culinary products (in her case, *foie gras*) come to represent nations' politics, culture, and distinctive identities. Here, the author illuminates the process by which *foie gras* came to represent French national culture in part because it is a contentious product elsewhere. She articulates how industry, culture, and the state construct a narrative of *foie gras* that poses the product as a marker of French cultural heritage, distinction, and pride and replaces or challenges discourses of *foie gras* production and cruelty with narratives of *foie gras* as a representation of French national character. Thus, she argues, *foie gras*, as a cultural product that is legitimated through industry, culture, and politics in France, becomes a symbol of France itself. As such, attacks on *foie gras*, including those that center around moral narratives of cruelty and animal rights, come to symbolize attacks on French culture itself, bolstering support for and national pride around the distinctively French product of *foie gras*.

In the second empirical chapter, DeSoucey enters the field as an ethnographer to consider how gastronationalism plays out in the spaces of *foie gras* production in agricultural France. Here, she shifts her analysis of gastropolitics from the macro focus on national discourses to micro processes by which gastronationalism and gastropolitics generally inform the daily-lived realities of artisanal *foie gras* producers. By visiting and touring many of the small producers' facilities in France, DeSoucey argues that *foie gras* producers capitalize on the national narrative of cultural heritage to market idealized images of French culture for tourists. The performances in which these artisans engage challenge discourses of cruelty, disgust, and morality around *foie gras* production by showing the historically celebrated and small-scale production processes producers used, at least performatively. The author argues that producers provide visitors with performances that focus on *terroir* (a concept associated with locality and natural environments), the past, and an agrarian lifestyle, using these idealized images associated with a distant but celebrated past to demonstrate the embodied daily performances of gastronationalism. She shows, for example, how some small *foie gras*

producers may own industrialized mechanisms for gavage and may use these machines when producing *foie gras* when unobserved. However, when visitors tour the facility, producers demonstrate the gavage process by hand, employing historical techniques in service of performing the national narrative of the significance of *foie gras* in French culture. These idealized performances are executed in direct response to animal rights activists' rejection of *foie gras* based on charges of mistreatment, pain, and cruelty on behalf of the ducks and geese; these public performances then push the moral discussions surrounding *foie gras* beyond just conversations about animal rights and production to include a discourse about changing French culture, modernization, and French distinction in the European political universe.

DeSoucey then turns her analysis to the comparative case of the United States. Because the United States as a nation does not have the same institutionalized cultural narrative or shared meaning-making around *foie gras*, DeSoucey explores the gastropolitics of *foie gras* in the United States at the metro level. DeSoucey uses the 2006 ban on the selling of *foie gras* in Chicago to explore how controversial narratives around a culinary product inform shared meaning-making around that product, a sense of moral politics, and consumer behavior. She finds that the debates and response surrounding the sale of *foie gras* in Chicago are focused not on shared national narratives of cultural heritage but instead around which actors have the power to decide what consumers can eat and why. The discourse surrounding Chicago's ban on the sale of *foie gras* was about the role of state actors, activists, chefs, and other taste-makers, and their capacity to police the gastronomic consumption of the city's diners. As Chicago made national news for its ban, the city was mocked, and the gastropolitics of *foie gras* became about the comedic reputation and identity of a city that focused government resources and attention on a product and social problem with an arguably small impact (*foie gras* is consumed in much smaller quantities in the United States than in France; DeSoucey cites studies that suggest that a very small percentage of Chicagoans "regularly consume" the product, and that most, in fact, did not even know what *foie gras* was). DeSoucey shows how reputational concerns in part inform the 2008 repeal of the ban. The author uses this case of metro-level gastropolitics to argue that, unlike the cultural narratives that create a sense of gastronationalism for *foie gras* in France focused on national identity, unity, and heritage as symbolized by the production and consumption of *foie gras*,

gastropolitics in the United States and Chicago are specifically concerned with cultural authority and consumer choice.

Finally, DeSoucey uses interviews with, and ethnographic observation of, the various taste-making stakeholders engaged in debates about the moral meaning of *foie gras* in the American context. She talks to animal rights activists, chefs, American producers of *foie gras*, and consumers to examine how these actors develop and institutionalize relational boundaries between other actors engaged with *foie gras* consumption and production, and the morality narratives that inform these processes of boundary construction. DeSoucey seriously engages the multiple actors who establish these moral boundaries for themselves and others to explore the nuances, rhetorics, gastropolitics, and differential stakes with regard to cultural meaning, personal morality, commerce, and political authority that inform the discourse and decisions around *foie gras*'s production, consumption, and meaning in the American context. DeSoucey explicates the connection between morality, consumption, and culinary production, and considers how moral boundaries are constituted through discourse, social movements, political action, and culture by carefully analyzing the moral narratives characterizing *foie gras* in the United States.

DeSoucey's book makes meaningful contributions to several literatures. The book extends the literature in the sociology of consumption by explicating the processes by which moral politics and commercial, political, and cultural narratives (and the various actors who originate and enact these narratives) create different categories of consumption and inform consumer choices in distinct national contexts. Her concept of gastronationalism builds on the theory of gastropolitics to address how national identity is politically, economically, and culturally invested in and represented by emblematic, but contested, culinary products. The book also contributes to the sociology of culture literature by considering how different actors, including those invested in activism, politics, and industry, enact the cultural processes of categorization and evaluation to draw moral boundaries around the cultural meaning and consumption and production of contested products. In so doing DeSoucey engages theories of organizational sociology in dialogue with those of cultural sociology in exciting and novel ways. Finally, the book contributes to the burgeoning sociology of food literature by illuminating how a culinary product that could be viewed as an insignificant or trivial

cultural product of elite consumption serves as a very serious site of inquiry and analysis of broader social problems.

While this book covers considerable substantive ground and offers several significant substantive and theoretical contributions to the field, there are some limitations or opportunities for further explanation. While DeSoucey engages in some discussion of her positionality when describing field work, especially with regard to gaining trust from French *foie gras* producers as an American researcher, the text could benefit from a more detailed description of research design and data collection, perhaps in a methodological appendix. The book draws from a variety of data sources and, at times, it is unclear how the evidence was sampled, collected, and then analyzed in relation to other sources. When building arguments, while it is clear that DeSoucey has collected exhaustive data on the cases she presents, the source and significance of the evidence she provides for her arguments is not explicated in detail in the text. Additionally, while the conclusion of the book suggests other contentious food items for which this argument might be true beyond the case of *foie gras*, including shark fin soup, the text's focus on an arguable niche (at least in the American context) food item invites questions of generalizability. How might the processes of boundary construction and moral debate translate to other cultural products? How do gastropolitics inform consumer behaviors and narratives of national unity for uncontested culinary products? DeSoucey's text establishes an excellent basis that inspires a potential research agenda for the future engaging these and other questions at the intersection of organizational, cultural, political, and economic sociology.

This text is an exciting and well-executed study of a contentious food product as a site for analysis of consumption, culture, politics, and morality. The text makes meaningful substantive and theoretical contributions to the field at large and paves the way for potential future work in these subfields. DeSoucey's useful contribution of gastro-nationalism and compelling argument for food as a space for this kind of serious theoretical inquiry encourages us to think through the complexities embedded in the relationship between culture, commerce, the state, and food. The text represents an important contribution to the sociology of consumption and the sociology of food canons, and is an excellent text for teaching undergraduates who are studying the sociology of culture, food, organizations, and economy.

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