Networks of Desire: How Technology Increases Our Passion to Consume

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ABSTRACT

How is consumer desire transformed by contemporary technology? Most extant theory holds that technology rationalizes and reduces passion. In our investigation of networks of desire—complex open systems of machines, consumers, energy and objects—we find technology increasing the passion to consume. Effects depend upon participation in the network, which can be private, public, or professional. Private participation tends to discipline passion into interests reflecting established cultural categories. Public and professional participation build new connections between extant desires and a wider network, decentering ties and deterritorializing flows that limit hungers to emplaced bodies. Public and professional participation drive consumption passion to transgressive extremes. We use ethnography and netnography to study online food image sharing, a broad field that includes everything from friend networks to food bloggers. Using and extending Deleuze and Guattari's desire theory, we conceptualize desire as energetic, connective, systemic, and innovative. Critically examining the role of technocapitalism in the realm of consumption passion, we question the emancipatory possibilities of unfettered desire. Networks of desire create a passionate new universe of technologically enhanced desire, one that challenges the way we think about consumer collectives, capitalism, emancipation, and posthuman consumption.

Keywords: capitalism, desire, food, netnography, networks, technology

"Consumers of food porn find themselves visiting favoured food photography sites just to browse page after page of food. It is hypnotic. It is addictive. Like the stereotypical consumer, glued to the Internet's vast array of human sexual pornography, the consumer of food porn is helpless before the object of their visual addiction. Each photo delights, and yet it is never enough, they always want more."—McDonnell (2016, 255)

"We are all schizos! We are all perverts! We are all libidos that are too viscous and too fluid—and not by preference, but wherever we have been carried by deterritorialized flows."—Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 67)

Contemporary consumer culture is heaped to the brim with desirous cravings. Cravings for the latest news, for the next gadget, for a sexy selfie; those incessant urges are an inescapable part of our being alive today. Belk, Ger, and Askegaard (2003) see cravings as "desire steeped in embodied feelings" (327), a form of "passionate consumption" (333) and "self-seduction" (347) that underscores how desire is and must be a "central concept" in consumer research (332). Yet, for a central concept, the term has received relatively little re-examination and extension. In this paper, we reboot the concept of desire. Updating desire, we ask how it is changed by contemporary technology. What happens to desire when consumers collectively combine and connect their cravings through technology in new and unprecedented ways? How can we bring novel understanding to bear on this new reality?

Most past research tells us that technology dampens desire. As Winner (1978, 190) writes, the pre-Internet social theorists—a group that includes Weber, Mumford, Ellul, Marx and Marcuse—invariably linked technological development to an increase in "rationality,"

instrumentality and logic, where the "static designs of [the] intellect gradually conquer the charismatic, nonrational elements [of life]. . . and come to dominate all of human existence." Extant consumer research into the topic finds the same rationalizing effect on consumer desire. Even shopping and gaming sites, places of consumption and competition that we might assume to be filled with fiery passion, are not. Instead, these sites of "human-software interaction" turn "consumer desire into a task-orientated practice," "weaken the hold previously binding consumers to objects of desire" and transform the experience of desiring from an "enjoyable, pleasurable pursuit" into one that is "more functional [and] goal-orientated" (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2013, 1574-1575).

In this paper, we delve into this allegedly more functional and task-oriented realm of collective consumer desire through an examination of the general phenomenon of online food image sharing. We use netnography, ethnography, and depth interview approaches to collect and interpret online and embodied participant-observational and interview data, balancing our focus on intersubjective immediacy with attention to intersubjectivity's interrelation with technological, cultural, and institutional structures and processes (e.g., Askegaard and Linnet 2011; Moisander, Peñaloza, and Valtonen 2009; Thompson, Arnould and Giesler 2013). This combined focus situates our study in a new lineage of research showing how technological and material objects interrelate with historical and social circumstances to act upon, and be acted upon by, cultures and their bearers (e.g., Bettany 2007, Canniford and Bajde 2015, Dolbec and Fischer 2015, Epp and Price 2010, Giesler 2012, Kozinets 2008, Martin and Schouten 2014, Parmentier and Fischer 2015, Scaraboto 2015, Woermann and Kirschner 2015).

We introduce and foreground the notion of *networks of desire*, which are defined and explained later in the paper. Our orienting section now follows, which reconceptualizes

consumer desire using a contemporary consumer culture theoretic lens on Deleuze and Guattari's (1983, 1987) theory of desire. Then, preparing for our empirical embarkation, we use trend data and narrative to map the cartography of food studies, food image studies, and food photo sharing before describing our data collection and analysis procedures. We present three main findings that show how technology affects consumer desire by diverting and directing it, moving it to abstraction and pushing it to extremes. The final section details the implications of these findings for altering our understanding of how networks of desire affect consumer desire and how this changes the way we theorize consumer collectives, capitalism, emancipation, and posthuman consumption.

NETWORKS OF DESIRE

Extant Conceptions

Desire and Consumer Culture. According to many extant theories, desire is the energy that powers "the libidinal economy" (Lyotard 1974) at the very heart of consumer culture. As Berger (2010, 100) affirms, "the infinite extension of desire is one of the pre-conditions for consumer culture to work effectively." Similarly, Belk et al. (2003, 348) find that "capitalist markets and consumerist ideologies channel hope and desire onto consumer objects," fueling the market system.

The origin of the word *desire* links it, along with the idea of 'reaching for a star', to the "aspirant," to she who is constantly striving and always reaching (Linstead and Brewis 2007, 352). Belk et al.'s (2003, 329-332) overview of theories of desire includes those of Freud, Lacan, and Foucault (who all emphasize desire's link to libido and sexuality) as well as Veblen, Simmel, Bataille, Girard, and many others. Although many of these theories emphasize the

psychological, individual level at which desire is phenomenologically experienced, many, such as the mimetic desire theory of Girard (1977) and the envy-based theory of Douglas and Isherwood (1979) operate at a more collective level, emphasizing, for instance, social comparison and recognition (see also Veblen 1899; Wilk 1997). Belk at al. (2003) usefully broaden past conceptions, defining consumer desire as: (1) a type of imaginative individual process, "a passion born between consumption fantasies and social situational contexts" and (2) the product of a market economy and social milieu that stimulate fantasies using "advertising, retail displays, films, television programs, stories told by other people" and so on. The capitalist channeling of manufactured desire has underlain a range of influential cultural critical works, including those of Ewen and Ewen (1992; see also Featherstone 1991). However, the desire manufacture industry has changed radically in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The possibilities raised by new information and communication technologies open up brand new worlds of superdesirous possibility.

Desire in a Digital Age. Beginning with the dawn of the digital age, scholarly research began investigating how consumers connect using communication technology and how their individual and collective desire was altered by these changed conditions. Emphasizing the difference between physical bodies and virtual concepts and studying such early manifestations as phone sex and virtual reality, Stone (1991) examines how desire changes by virtue of it no longer being grounded in physicality. Investigating feminism and activism in the early Internet, Dean (2001, 33) finds that there is a "play of desire" invited by the arrays of ways to express identity online, and that it is possible that "multiple subjectivities are morphing into consuming subjectivities, that desiring subjects are becoming conspiring subjects." Contrary to views that

favor a rationalizing effect, these two early studies suggest that technology's effect on consumer desire will be to make it less bound to physical things, more fractured, and more rebellious. Reflecting a similar disembodiment perspective, Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2010, 113-114) suggest that the "economic imperatives" of contemporary capitalism encourage an "increasing emphasis on sustaining consumer desire through the gradual dematerialization or virtualization of consumption" and that, "more recently, there has been a further project to free consumer desire from the need for material actualization" through market colonization of virtual spaces in order "to sustain complex and unending wants."

On the one hand, a smattering of studies suggesting that technology will create a more disembodied desire for virtual images and fuel new types of rebellious consumer desire. On the other, a large body of work predicts a rationalization of consumer desire, where software automatically fulfils consumption quests and humans are left to stoically manage their affairs. Carefully examining the effects of networked communication technology on consumer desire might reveal nuanced new understanding adapted to contemporary consumer culture. In order to move to this enhanced theoretical view, we now turn to the controversial and influential works of Deleuze and Guattari.

A New Theory of Desire

Deleuze and Guattari's Theory of Desire. Gilles Deleuze was a French philosopher with a profound interest in history and metaphysics. Félix Guattari was a French psychotherapist, psychoanalyst, and lifelong militant political activist. Although it extends to some of their individual writings, our theoretical perspective is primarily informed by the theory of desire present in two major works that Deleuze and Guattari (hereinafter often abbreviated as D+G)

wrote together, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1983) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). These influential works are expansive combinations of metaphysical and ontological philosophy with psychoanalytic and political theory. They synthesize, extend, and respond to the ideas of Nietzsche, Liebniz, Kant, Spinoza, Freud, Lacan, Althusser, Bergson, Sartre, Sacher-Masoch, Lyotard, Derrida, Bataille, Laing, and Foucault, among others.

D+G's theory of desire is emancipatory. It unites a psychological philosophy of inner liberation with a political one of social revolution. D+G tell us that our inner repression of psychological desire and capitalism's outer oppression of social production are actually one and the same. This enormous repressive tension lies beneath the commonplace surface of every individual psyche as well as at the core of bureaucratic, rationalized society itself. To break the inner repression and to liberate our creative potential as a society, we must learn to become comfortable with unfettering our desire; we must experiment with unleashing the wild chaos of our passionate creative energy.

Our use of D+G is not an application, but an adaptation inspired by their thinking and shaped by our empirical encounter. We critically and reflexively focus on particular elements of their theory to suit the needs of this research project on consumer desire in a technologically networked age. In particular, we focus and expand upon four elements of D+G's theory of desire. These are that desire is energetic, connective, systemic, and innovative. We examine each of these elements in turn.

The Nature of Desire is not in Objects or Lack, but Energy. Theorists such as Lacan or Freud relate desire to lack, such as the lack of or an object, person, or even a lack of desire itself. In contrast, D+G conceive of desire as a type of free-flowing productive energy. In the field of

consumer research, Gould (1991, 194) insightfully explored and theorized the "pervasive" "perceived vital energy dimension of consumer behavior." D+G's theory broadens this energy focus beyond Gould's phenomenological one, emphasizing desire-energy as the key positive force of creative production in the social field.

Some might view this conception of a force that exists in a free-flowing state as an essentializing of desire. There is, indeed, some validity to the argument. It may seem a bit ridiculous to think that desire could flow free of human beings, bodies, and brains. But consider how often consumer research has introduced essentializing notions to explain attraction related consumer behaviors. Our literature is replete with desirable objects that are contaminated (Belk, Sherry and Wallendorf 1989) or contain extended selves (Belk 1988), or aura-possessing paintings and brands (Benjamin 1936/1968; Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry 2003). Fernandez and Lastovicka's (2011, 293) exploration of fetishization is packed with examples, such as the "Goldie guitar" that "carries the magical essence of rock and roll" which 'empowers' its owner. D+G offer a similarly metaphysical theory that separates the energetic essence of desire from its various manifestations.

According to D+G, our thinking consciousness "bathes in an unconscious . . .of drives, motives, and inclinations" (Smith 2011, 139) and it is this force, desire, not the particular interests or thoughts themselves, that actually motivates or animates behavior. Like a windmill that produces electricity from the wind flowing over its landscape, people and their capitalist system are charged by the free-flowing energies of desire moving through and being shaped by the infrastructures of the social and technological system.

This point about infrastructure leads to an important assertion about how the energy of desire both fuels and is captured by capitalism. As Neu, Everett, and Rahaman (2009, 346) state,

D+G specifically focus "on how capitalism transforms human drives and impulses – our desire – into 'interests'." Thus, although most theorists consider desire to have a focus or object, by placing the more primordial aspect of unchanneled desire at the center, D+G's theory draws our attention to desire itself, its blockages and flows and its transmutation into capitalist interests. Every element of consumption is influenced by desire's true nature, which is intimately related to connection.

Desire Functions by Connecting Different Things into Systems. Through connection, the energy of desire flows. Because of the flows of energetic desire, things connect and disconnect. In D+G's theory, the sites where desire's energetic connections and disconnections occur are called *desiring-machines*. The term *desiring-machine* encompasses actual machines such as smartphones, software programs, and tablet computers as well as human bodies, animals, and plants—each hungers to connect or disconnect in different ways with other desiring-machines and thus exchange flows of energy. One "machine is always coupled with another" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, 5) forming a type of whole which can also be part of a network, which interconnects with other networks into a larger (social, institutional, cultural) open complex system. The configuration of the networks is constantly in flux, and thus so is the system. In our extension of the theory, we relate flows of data, representation, meaning, and other complex cultural resources to these energetic flows of libidinal desire. The desire for connection mobilizes these culture-communicating resources, energizing and furnishing the interconnected network and the system into which it connects.

In the later works of D+G, the term *desiring-machines* was replaced with the "more neutral" French word "agencement," which was later translated into the English word

"assemblage," and also sometimes into "arrangement" (Massumi 1992, 82). In this paper, we

prefer the term *desiring-machine* for two reasons. First, we want to retain conceptual connection

of the theory with libidinal energy exchange. Second, we want to emphasize the deliberately

engineered elements of contemporary social experience in an age where an experience design

mentality underlies the intimate intertwining of information and communication technology,

capitalism, and consumer behaviors. In our field site, food desire is interconnected with

technologies and their meanings, from the most fundamental one of all (fire) to some of the most

complex (e.g., sophisticated home coffee machines, the Internet). These engineered and

libidinous elements are emphasized better with the desiring-machine than with

assemblage/agencement term.

Desire Connects Psychological and Social Levels of Experience. The operation of desire

working through desiring-machines is what links the individual body and psyche to the social

realm and its institutions and technological machines to the network. The way that this happens

is through a continuous process of connection and disconnection that D+G describe as

territorialization, *deterritorialization*, and *reterritorialization*. When a desiring-machine links to

one or more other desiring-machines and forms a system this is called *territorialization*, and it

relates both to changes in psychological fulfillment in the psyche and also alterations of political

power in society. *Deterritorialization* is an unlinking. It can be a destabilization in society, for

example, the Occupy Movement recently decoupling the desires of American youth from

capitalist ideologies and means of production. Deterritorialization can also refer to the

decontextualizing of a set of conceptual relations that renders them virtual or highly abstract and

liberates their libidinal psychic energy. *Reterritorialization* is the new linkage that either causes or results from deterritorialization, for the two always happen simultaneously.

An example of reterritorialization could be a new state forming after a political revolution, or a person reaching a new type of awareness after undergoing a hallucinogen-induced psychological break. What is crucial to realize about the idea is that self-transformation and social change are always connected. When people reterritorialize in their own consciousness, a social phenomenon occurs. When revolution happens in the social order, people's awareness is transformed. When a network's software is updated, the social system it creates is altered. Data, meaning, and other resources move through the network and are experienced energetically in desiring-machines. Desire connects desiring-machines into ever-changing networks, and networks into dynamic social systems.

Desire is Linked to Innovation. The Body without Organs (or BwO), one of the central concepts in D+G's theory, conceptualizes the creativity-liberating power of desire on the body, mind, and society. "Think of the body without organs as the body outside any terminate state, posed for any action in its repertory; this is the body from the point of view of its potential, or virtuality" (Massumi 1992, 70). Fueled by concepts from Prigogine and Stengers' (1984) popular work explaining complexity theory, D+G's desire theory—and Massumi's (1992) important extensions of it—uses the order-chaos tension in the notion of attractors to conceptualize how desire can realize individual or social creative potential.

Attractors are states towards which a system—whether social, technological, or psychological—tends. There are two distinct kinds of attractors in D+G's theory. Whole attractors draw systems towards being deterministic, conditioned by the past, or habitual. Fractal

attractors are more random fields that attract systems towards being chance-driven, liquid and porous, adaptive to new circumstances, and innovative. Whether we realize our potential in any moment is a function of the "cocausal tension" (Massumi 1992, 74) between the attractors in our system. The whole attractors are "limitative" (ibid) and draws the desires of bodies and societies towards habits, familiarity, and domestication. The fractal attractors are "nonlimitative" (ibid) and use desire to tempt the physical and social body into a more varied set of possibilities for satisfaction, moving it closer to the ideal of the Body without Organs.

The two tendencies are constantly at war, and the limitative usually wins. Momentary possibilities for change raised by our desire are channeled into memories, recognition, repetition, reproduction, rituals, and rules which keep most innovation at bay. The multiplicitous potentials of the baby body become in turn leashed and civilized, and eventually that body becomes "a respectable person with respectable [and predictable] satisfactions" (Massumi, 1992, 77). And yet the sublimated possibilities of desire are never still. To borrow a favorite metaphor of D+G, the repressed fractal possibilities of the BwO rot and fester like maggots within a zombie. Sometimes, desires burst free in "a line of escape" (ibid). The results are unpredictable. In an individual, tapping suddenly into desire's fractal forces could result in a nervous breakdown, astounding art, a vow of renunciation, or a murder. Shared among a group, it could produce a social movement, a destructive cult or a political revolution (Massumi 1992, 77).

D+G compare the BwO to "an egg" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 19), suggesting that each of us and our social world exist in an embryonic state of potential, charged with an immeasurable inventory of possible movements, habits, and ways of being. Ideally, individuals and societies would be able to master their desire-driven connections to take advantage of fractal attractors, adapting to change and overcoming constraint, freeing themselves from useless habit,

mindless repetition, and oppressive state apparatuses. The BwO undermines the "psychoanalyst's search for unitary selfhood" (ibid) as well as the political quest for a stable and hierarchical social order. A far more dynamic ideal is offered instead, one that Neu et al. (2009, 324) sees as "unquestionably anti-nihilistic and life affirming, though highly experimental."

With this liberatory notion, not unrelated to Firat and Venkatesh's (1995, 260) notions of "productive/creative" consumers, we can conclude a theory section that uses Deleuze and Guattari's (1983, 1987) theory to reconceptualize consumer desire as something which is: (a) energetic, rather than focused on lack; (b) connective in a way that include machines as well as bodies; (c) a co-causal link between different systemic levels; and (d) intimately related to innovation and creativity. Our paper now turns to method. We first explore the different contexts of our study—the field of food consumption studies, of food photos and image sharing, and the notion of food photography as pornographic. Data collection and analysis procedures conclude.

METHOD

Research Context

Food, Glorious Food. Food consumption is a topic of interest not only to consumer researchers but also to anthropologists and other scholars. From humankind's origins in roaming hunter-gather societies through to its settling into agrarian collectives, the production, acquisition, distribution, and consumption of food has been ritualized, sacralized, sanctified, and celebrated (see, e.g. Frazer 1890; Levy 1981). Naturally, at a bio-basic level, food performs an

essential function in maintaining human existence. Culturally, human beings have an endless appetite for the "symbols, myths, [and] fantasies" of food (Fischler 1988, 937). The primal drives surrounding food consumption are directed into a vast structure of attitudes, practices and rituals that Harris, Lyon and McLaughlin (2005, viii) claim provides "a window onto our most basic beliefs about our world and ourselves." Mintz and Du Bois (2002, 99) note that the anthropological study of food has been growing at a "staggering" pace since 1984 due to the influence of globalization and the rise of cosmopolitanism and consumer culture.

Presenting a comprehensive review all of the practices, roles, and rituals surrounding food consumption is beyond the scope of this paper, although consumer researchers have investigated many of them. We know about rituals and holidays of abundance thanks to the scholarship of Wallendorf and Arnould (1991), about the classed nature of food tastes thanks to Levy (1981), and about the market's encroachment upon the practices of family meals and eating homemade food thanks to Mosio et al. (2004). At this point in time, however, we still know very little about technology use and the visual consumption of food.

Representing Food in Photographs and Images. Historians note that paintings of attractive food can be found from the Renaissance period to present times (Yood 1992; Bendiner 2004). These paintings provide insight into the historical eating habits, class distinctions, and food trends of the day, yet they are almost nothing like today's image-intensive forms of social media where new images of ordinary food appear continuously. As Bendiner (2004, 8) notes, "there are almost no Italian paintings of spaghetti; or French paintings of bouillabaisse or boeuf bourguignon; and only a few pictures of American hotdogs before the 1960s."

Insert Figure 1 About Here

The contextual field we investigate is digital food photo, or image, sharing, both of the private and public variety. Figure 1 presents a screenshot of Reddit's so-called "food porn" page, showing a small sample of the range of activity emically encompassed by the term. The public display of food imagery is related to cultural capital and has been specifically labeled 'culinary capital' (Naccarato and Lebesco 2012), yet food image sharing is not exclusively the domain of professionals, or other public food exhibitionists such as bloggers. Food image sharing is a grassroots and widespread activity, and our study thus includes other practices beyond the public, such as friends privately sending photos of restaurant meals, people who look at images of others' food without ever posting, as well as lovers and family members who share virtual meals at a distance.

Although there is currently scant precise research on the topic, food image sharing appears to be a very popular activity worldwide. A 2014 Virgin Mobile study revealed that "food pictures are the second most common type of photo taken by Australians and third most common to be seen on social media news feeds (behind location shots and selfies) with seven in ten Australians admitting they have posted a food picture on their social channels" (Ozcomms 2014). More than 130 million photos have been tagged with #food (Mattson 2014), more than 54 million Instagram photos have been tagged with #foodporn (YPulse 2015), and over 90 new photos hashtagged #foodporn are uploaded to Instagram every minute. The selective sample poll conducted on our research web site found that 65% of respondents had posted a food photo to an

online network in the last month, which accords well with a survey by YPulse (2015) finding that 63% of all 13- to 32-year-olds had ever done so.

Foodporn at the Nexus of Food, Image, and Pornography. "Food porn" is a term originally employed to designate an unattainable and often extreme photographic food portrayal (McBride 2010). In 1977, reviewing 13 new cookbooks for the *New York Times Review of Books*, food critic Alexander Cockburn coined the closely related term "gastro-porn."

> "It turns out really that the book is not actually a guide to practical cooking but rather a costly exercise ($20.00) in gastro-porn. Now it cannot escape attention that there are curious parallels between manuals on sexual techniques and manuals on the preparation of food; the same studious emphasis on leisurely technique, the same apostrophes to the ultimate, heavenly delights. True gastro-porn heightens the excitement and also the sense of the unattainable by proffering colored photographs of various completed recipes. . . . . The delights offered in sexual pornography are equally unattainable." (Cockburn 1977, np)

The term "food porn" comes from public interest advocate Michael Jacobson's use of the term two years later, in 1979, to connote unhealthy foods that should be avoided ("food porn" was contrasted with "right stuff"; McBride 2010; Holmburg 2014). McDonnell (2016, 240) defines "food porn" as follows: "The term can refer to the food object – including its presentation and the production of still or video images – and also to the increasingly common practice of photographing food for social network or public sharing." As Figure 2 shows, using Google search data as our proxy for public interest, general interest worldwide in the term "foodporn" began shortly after 2009 and has been increasing at a dramatic rate ever since. In the

period of our study, 2010-2015, search interest in the term foodporn grew at a rate of approximately 500%. Although the term has gained recent currency and popularity, the connections between the production and consumption of food photography, social computer networks, pornography, and contemporary consumer culture are neither obvious nor trivial.

Insert Figure 2 About Here

Insert Figure 3 About Here

But is it Porn? Does it make conceptual sense to deem food photography such as the burgers, cookies, and hot dogs in Figure 3 pornographic? Van der Leun (2004) decries the use of the term "porn" to describe advertising and promotions for everything from kitchen appliances to fly fishing equipment. If we utilize the academic and legal meaning of pornography that casts it as that which is excessive, whether it is violence, sex, or politics, then the over-the-top portrayal of food, described as "gastro-porn" by Cockburn (1977) is, indeed, pornographic. It is also important to realize that porn itself has been dramatically democratized in the Internet age with the profusion of amateur and ama-pro (amateurs who self-brand and can make considerable amounts of money) talent. It is this post-Internet meaning of porn, where professional porn stars may set the stage for the industry, but must also share it within a complex ecosystem that encompasses amateurs and ama-pros, to which we refer. In the realm of foodporn—and in many

other social arenas as well—communication technology has collapsed Cockburn's (1977, np) binary distinction between "practical cooking" and "the unattainable" into many shades of participative possibility.

Yet, just as amateur porn exists in a particular relationship with the codes and production values of professional porn (Paul 2005), so does online food image sharing exist in a particular relationship with the deliberately posed and altered professional food photography of cookbooks, foodie magazines, and websites such as epicurious.com. In addition, the cultural and visual vocabulary of sexual porn structures the language not only of gastro-porn but of online food image sharing of all kinds. This similarity assumes a linguistic, visual, and even videographic form. The foodporn.com website, for example, "offers a wealth of tantalizing categories so foodies of every perversion can satisfy their own desires: Amateur, Asian, Barely Legal, Celebrities, Hardcore, Lebanese, Movies, Photos, Self-pleasuring, Table Dance, and, of course, Toys" (foodporn.com 2015). McDonnell (2016, 242), citing FoodTV as an example, asserts that "food videography borrows framing and timing techniques from sexual video pornography." She then proceeds to describe and illustrate an isomorphic "visual aesthetic" composed of zooming close-ups, tantalizing framing, exoticizing orientations, and intimate depth of field that produces "the pornographic gaze" in food porn (257-262).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures and Details

Ethnographic Engagement and Data Collection. Ethnographic engagement with the focal topic and its sites' cultural areas was prolonged and deep. Preparatory field research was conducted online and in person, in bursts and during focused periods, over the last sixteen years,

and encompassed participation in and observational lurking on food sites since 1998. As well,

three more recent years of additional intensive fieldwork ensued, encompassing food creating,

eating, photographing, posting and interacting. This engagement gave each of the three

researchers a detailed appreciation of the overall field. Research during the 2012-2015 period

focused on ethnographies and netnographies of active and more public food image sharing, with

17 personal interviews of food image posters and consumers (see Table 1 for interview details).

Pseudonyms are used to conceal the identity of these interviewees. Netnographic data collection

spanned blogs, forums, Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, Vine, and

Platter (an online food-oriented social network). Ethnographic fieldsites included food markets,

supper clubs, coffee shops and restaurants in the UK, Canada, and the United States.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Netnographic participation followed Kozinets (2015) and included active newsgroup

posting, the production of a food blog, and the use of a Facebook group dedicated to the topic,

wherein we contacted a range of self-selected and convenience sampled participants. Facebook

fan page contributors tended to be informed, observant, and descriptive. Following Kozinets'

(2015, 120-121) advice to attend to "sites of attention rather than actual bounded sites

themselves," we followed topics and consumers through the tangled terrain of food postings,

leading us to a rich array of sites, both online and off, as well as different types of sharing, from

occasional, private, and amateur to regular, public, and professional. Here, we draw inspiration

from Stone (1996, 87) who cites Strauss (1986, xxi) in focusing research on "cultural areas" of "common symbolic structure[s]" rather than on the people who might be held to constitute a particular subculture or group. As Strauss (ibid) wrote, "Group membership is thus a symbolic, not a physical, matter." The shared symbolic world of food image sharing constituted "membership" (ibid) in this group, even when there was little or no other interaction.

We therefore proceeded by considering that food images, their sites, sources, and related practices and meanings constituted the boundaries of the common sets of significant organizing symbols around which the activities of relevant cultural actors were organized. This set included technology platforms such as social media sites, apps, and other platforms, types of food, books, and much else. Hermeneutic, visual, and "inter-penetration" (Kozinets 2015, 199-204) data analysis techniques were used on the corpus of fieldnotes, transcriptions, archived texts and images that were created, co-created, and collected.

FOOD IMAGES ON THE NETWORK OF DESIRE

Defining Networks of Desire

We are now in a position to define our central concept. *Networks of desire are complex open systems of technologies, consumers, energized passion and virtual and physical objects interacting as an interconnected desiring-machine that produces consumption interest within the wider social system and among the interconnected actors*. The most fundamental unit of power in the network is attention, and attention triggers the investment of desire energy—machinic and bodily—into product, brand, lifestyle, and experience forms of consumption interest. Moreover,

the network and every actant in it produce consumption interests in the wider social system alongside consuming them in the network; the levels are interconnected and restlessly changing.

Disciplining, abstracting, and extremifying are the three ways that technology in the form of the network of desire lights and fuels the desire to consume. First, technology sits at the juncture of various social, cultural, economic, institutional and other forces involved in the disciplined channeling, direction, and successful transformation of raw passionate energy into a range of general and specific consumer interests. Second, technology provides an abstracting force that decenters and transgresses bodies with other desiring-machines in networks. Third, technology provides and rewards transgressive opportunities to gain attention that favor the promotion of energized extremes. These social forces are not evenly distributed, but used in conjunction with type of network participation. As desiring-machines move from more private forms of participation in the network to more public and professional forms, the network's disciplining, whole attractors give way to more nonlimitative, innovative, and fractal attractor-based desires. To fully elaborate this idea, we first explain the three forms of participation in the network and then elaborate the processes of disciplining, abstracting, and extremifying.

How People Participate in Networks of Desire: Three Forms

Private Network Participation. Private types of network participation include practices where comfortable, intimate images of meals or even acts of food preparation are shared between people who know one another such as friends (including Facebook friends), lovers, or family members using media such as Facebook, Snapchat, WhatsApp, or as a phone message. These image-sharing practices reflect a more "phatic" (Malinowski 1972) need to affirm and reinforce

existing intimate connections and relationships between already established social networks. Affirmations, requests for details, and information exchanges typify the responses to this sort of private and personal communication. The food and experience might be explained, or it might not be; it could simply be shared as an uncaptioned snapshot.

In her interview, "Miranda" relates a general desire to reach out, share, comment upon, and extend the immediate bodily and social experience of food consumption with others.

"We all go, 'Oh, what's that?' 'What have you got?' 'Is that nice?' 'Let's photograph that!' 'Oh, this is amazing!!' And, again, if one of us can't make it one month again we would photograph more, so that person feels like they can share the experience with you. It's got, it's built momentum again…I suppose it's got a life of its own, hasn't it? But it's because we know we are looking for recommendations for each other. . . I would tweet [someone] and say 'This is fantastic. This is what we are eating.' It's a communication. It's a shared interest." ("Miranda," Blogger).

Public Network Participation. The second category we identify is public network participation. In this participative mode, many degrees of amateurs—from newcomers to friends communicating to their online social networks to semi-professional prosumer "microcelebrities" (Senft 2013)—attempt to publicly display how healthy, impressive, or otherwise attention-worthy their food consumption or food-related experience might be on media such as Twitter, Instagram, or Pinterest. To display and share these images among a group that might include unfamiliar others, there is a vast range of different but interrelated media and categories to choose from. These particular media might require knowledge of particular hashtags in Twitter, or familiarity with certain Instagram tags or Pinterest boards. Sub-categories are variegated to a

high degree, containing all sorts of ethnic, regional, gourmet, dietary, and health care

taxonomies. Some interests focus on particular kinds of commercial outlets for food and eating

experiences. Others narrow in on certain categories of foods such as chocolate, fast food, or

ramen. In order to participate in them, whether as reading lurker or participating poster,

consumers must often limit and label their food experiences and desires into particular shared

categories.

Hashtags and interface-driven categories reflect accepted, constrained social interests and

differ by network medium. Although the desire for food may be multifarious, the interface's

particular configuration forces a conventional structuring upon much of it. Platform interfaces

each make visible their structuring of raw interest in ways more apparent and restrictive than

traditional face-to-face experiences of cultural categorization. More public and less intimate,

these communications become, of necessity, more structured into particular categories, aimed at

specific audiences, focused on distinct interests. These practices reflect a general need for

network building, connection, and cultural and subcultural capital building, as well as gaining

and exhibiting status.

"Rhianna" seems to have a realization about how, all along, she has been influenced to

structure her food image sharing by type of food experience and social media platform.

"As an avid food-pornographer, I pretty much take pictures of all and any food I eat. But

I guess the reasons differ - when I instagram my oatmeal I'm displaying a vastly different

set of capitals (health, culture) than when I share albums of elaborate dinners at The Fat

Duck or El Celler Can Roca (economic, and perhaps a bit of culture - especially

regarding the latter). Now that I think of it - the medium matters too. Mundane meals are

mostly instagrammed, while the more coherent experiences get their own albums on

Facebook" ("Rhianna," research web-page post, 2015).

Professional Network Participation. The third and final type of network participation is

the more professional type of sharing in which publicly accessible messages are posted on media

such as Wordpress blogs, YouTube channels, or Twitter microblogs. Among those who

participate publicly and professionally, a group which can include those who provide how-to

lessons, recipes, homemade videos, restaurant reviews, and food blogs (which may or may not

seem, at first blush, professional), are "megaphone"-wielding citizen-journalists (McQuarrie et

al. 2013), some of whom act as "institutional entrepreneurs" (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013)

expressing and seeking to influence "regimes of taste" (Arsel and Bean 2013). Many are

involved to greater or lesser extents in the food service and restaurant industries. As

professionals, they seek to find, build, and maintain an audience. Evident are a range of precise

categorization and targeting procedures that both follow and sometimes impose structures of

interest on the food experience, its photography, and its communication.

Participation and Technology Co-Causing Desirous Connections. As with other

technology-enabled labor such as citizen journalism, consumer-generated advertising, and

YouTube celebrity, the role of producer and consumer shade almost indistinguishably between

categories of amateur and pro. What the differences between private, public, and professional

categories reveal is an increasing need to structure passions into externally organized interests as

food image sharing taps into wider, more diverse, and less personal networks. As participation in

the network becomes more public and more professional, the need to attract attention plays a

larger role and the rules of mass marketing take effect. These norms twist the passion for food and the desire to share food images into an interest in creating posts that will be liked, commented on, shared, and otherwise engaged with. Attention and new connections, not the reinforcement or transformation of existing connections, become salient. The technological infrastructure imposes on that more free-flowing energy the experience of categorization and the categorization of experience. With these differences elaborated, we can now turn to our first finding that shows how private participation in the network disciplines consumer desire.

Disciplined Direction: Technology Channels Passion into Consumption Interests

Zeynep and Rita Participating Privately in the Network. Zeynep and Rita are consumers who share food images primarily with their own social networks on membership-limited platforms such as Facebook. As personal network participants, they respond to and reflect the collective desires of a relatively close and intimate social network. Allowing us a window into private participation's disciplining role, let us first consider Zeynep's photo sharing.

"I almost always posted homemade food from my kitchen, which usually were traditional and (so-called) difficult-to-make meals. My main motivation was to encourage others on my list to produce their own (healthy) food, showing that "even a working woman with kids and lots of other things to care about" can do that, and why not them? Yes, it definitely involved a great deal of bragging. I even used to have a special photo album for these on FB, with a title to inspire others to produce what they consume, mostly foodwise, traditional food such as asurah or stuffed vine leaves, the whole process of making sun dried tomato paste, cake decoration, veggies from the garden etc. (+some DIY projects). I think I should also note that the heyday of this album was when I was a

member of a big mommies group on FB, which later dissolved. Most of them were highly

engaged with that album, where I was also sharing recipes or details of the preparation

process on demand as well. I now do not post as much as I did in the past, particularly

due to the changing nature of my agenda on FB. In the midst of a national political

turmoil, encircling wars, and a migrant crisis for the last two years, my newsfeed is full

of tragic stories, bursts of anger towards people and events, and other heartbreaking

messages. There is a communal feeling (which I share as well) that posting food photos,

or photos from the beach, or even photos of happy family time is something to be

ashamed of, because they depict moments of "enjoying life," which many others will

never have. From time to time I also come across explicit messages or graphics on my

newsfeed warning others to refrain from sharing food or holiday photos, and I can also

say that many of my friends stopped/limited sharing such photos as well." ("Zeynep,"

research web-page, 2015, all parenthetical comments in original post)

Zeynep cooks up a tale laced with politics, influence, ideology and voice. It demonstrates

how food image sharing in her Facebook social network links her passion for cooking and

healthy traditional food to her interest in education, in helping, in the group's social norms. It

also shows how the technology simultaneously empowers a certain kind of acceptable expression

and collective repression. At first, the wider network of other mothers responds to her healthy

traditional recipes, affirming her and her values. She becomes more deeply involved and

invested, writing professional headlines, preparing additional recipes and stories.

However, Zeynep's "agenda" shifted as her network's "newsfeed" turned tumultuous,

producing "a communal feeling" of tragedy, anger, and heartbreak. As Shukaitis (2009) explains,

there is a reactive force within us that quells, subjugates and destroys desire. In Zeynep's

narrative we see this powerful inner force externalized through the technology of Facebook's social network. A whole attractor seems to be at work in the network. "I can also say that many of my friends stopped / limited sharing such photos as well." Now, the whole attractor imposes stricter limits: no more depictions of enjoyment. First, passionately sharing and teaching; then, reacting and becoming subjugated; letting loose and bottling up: Zeynep is a desiring-machine linked into a network of other desiring-machines, pulsing and throbbing with energies that direct them, like a system, to engage and disengage, to share photos and to stop/limit and withhold them. A social and cultural repression of passionate joie de vivre is transmitted to the media, to the news, translated into food image sharing terms, then reinforced very effectively through Facebook, directly into Zeynep's private home space and her inner psychic state.

The point is not merely that the network reduced the sharing of food images and limited the possibilities for social and personal happiness, although in this instance it did. The point is that Zeynep's participation in the network subjected her to a dynamic and disciplining locus of interests which ebb and flow, wax and wane, as their connective energy spurts and recedes, mainly into familiar conditioned social and institutional patterns. Desires were released, directed into acceptable interest structures, and shared as food images. Yet, where possibilities could have expanded into newer, riskier, more creative forms, instead they contracted; society's external repression of its members and individuals' psychological repression of their internal state united. These are the repressive potentialities of the network of desire. Now, consider Rita's story.

> "Before I lost the weight, there was no way I'd ever mention food offline or online and I even hated to be seen eating an ice cream cone (I'd worry everyone was thinking - THAT'S why she's overweight). I was an unenthused and inexpert cook also and often declared "I am NOT Suzie Homemaker!" Now I am a more "normal" size (at least for a

middle aged woman who's had kids LOL), I have really gotten into cooking and love

having people over. I prefer making birthday and other celebrations at home. So the

photos signal something I am proud of as I never would have had the interest, ability or

energy to cook for friends before." ("Rita," research web-page, 2015).

Rita's relation with the network of desire may be more internalized that Zeynep's, but its

effects are no less limiting. In Rita's case, the image of a central desiring-machine, her body,

becomes the site of stabilizations and destabilizations, territorializations and reterritorializations.

At first, we learn of her desire for foods like ice cream, but these are highly private cravings she

refuses to connect to photo sharing activity on the network. Anticipation of the network's

potentially stifling reaction is a governing, subjugating force, again stopping, as in Zeynep's

case, food image sharing flows.

Photo sharing is a "signal," an external communication to society, to the network.

Through the network and through an anticipation of the network's responses, she also reflects the

signal back to herself: a self-monitoring of self-discipline. The network connects her newfound

confidence, her body image, and her internalized repression with technologies of photography, of

food preparation, and of networked digital communication. "The photos signal something I am

proud of": her own desiring-machine body, and its limitative potential for a certain kind of well-

disciplined food desire, a newfound passion for domestic labor, desires that are built into,

recapitulate and reinforce the structures and strictures of the libidinal and economic system.

For Personal Network Participants, the Network of Desire Focuses on Disciplining

Passion. In the diverse elements of international politics and braggadocio, Facebook group

pressures and weight loss, celebration and subjugation in Rita and Zeynep's accounts of food

sharing, we see a technological whole attractor at work, bottling and amplifying desire, channeling it and blocking it. Holding it in and letting it out, situated between the social and the psychological, the fluidity of the Facebook network disciplines the passion to connect. It encourages as it directs. It also obstructs connection with wider groups, maintaining a core group for most communications and providing the sense of community leading to signals of respect and belonging, but also creating external images to be rejected and despised. The network of desire disciplines thoughts and feelings in a way that can easily be seen as ideological, towards and away from particular kinds, brands and appearances of food, technology, other people, body sizes, emotions, and types of labors in ways that are quite structured and enculturated: "drives never exist in a free and unbound state, nor are they ever merely individual; they are always arranged and assembled by the social formation in which we find ourselves. . . each of which organizes and assembles the drives and impulses in different ways" (Smith 2011, 132).

In the examples we provide above, we see how it is not only society or the social formation which is organizing and channeling the drives, impulses, and desire—it is the software, hardware, data, and meanings of Facebook's social network and other forms of social media and communication technologies. Desire's expression and repression are now a product of technology connecting us into meaningful groupings, and those groupings meaningfully connecting to us. Moreover, we see how our desire for food, which was long ago abstracted from sustenance and eating, mutates farther from the material as it plays back through the computer network, becoming a desire for sharing, liking, browsing, and comments, inextricably part of a new capitalist landscape of Facebook, smartphones, telecommunications, web browsers, and concomitant realities of data surveillance and public relations. Facebook and other sites and platforms are not only new sites of territorialization, as Parmentier and Fischer (2015) astutely

assert, but also actual desiring-machines—extensions not only of Miranda, Rhianna, Rita, Zeynep, and the many other consumers they connect to with their photo sharing, but agents and actors that destabilize and re-stabilize, channeling desire into familiar capitalist social forms and interests, disciplining and directing its flows.

Abstracted Alimentation: Technology Decenters and Transgresses Bodies with Other Desiring-machines in Networks

Technology, Desire, Consumption, and Bodies. In this section, we explore how a more public participation in the network of desire alters the relationships between bodies, food, and consumption. We look at representations of the body in shared food images on the network and find a decentering of the individual consumer body, with bodies variously present and (mostly) absent. Developing an extended sense of desiring-machines as becoming-machines, we examine the way that the network deterritorializes the desires of physical bodies from their surroundings and reterritorializes them on the network.

Consumption without Consumers. Private food image sharers and some of the more amateurish one participating publicly will sometimes share photos that show their faces or upper bodies, posed with food as if with a special object or celebrity, or caught in the act of preparing to eat. Yet, almost without exception, professionals, ama-pros and semi-professionals decline to be pictured with the food that they show and share. It may be tempting to classify food photo sharing as part of a personal identity-making project, a means to market one's personal brand to the world. But this need for self-promotion renders the absence of a key aspect of the self, the body, perplexing.

"I don't see why my face needs to go on it. People are not there to look at my face. I'd rather they just looked at the food" ("Leonardo," Food Blogger).

"Well, I was thinking more along the lines of putting yourself in it kind of detracts from the point of glorifying the food. You know, talking about food porn, that kind of thing, if you put yourself in something, then hashtag food porn, that's weird" ("Mark," Restaurant Manager).

We must interrogate Mark's doxic sense that having a personal presence in food porn would be viewed as "weird." We must similarly acknowledge Leonardo's internalized sense of public norms and audience expectation that his face is unwelcome. There is a pattern of de-emphasis of the face, consumption and consumers, and a concomitant spotlighting, in Mark's words, a "glorifying" of the object of consumption over the consumer or indeed the act of consumption. The reason for the strangeness of the body's photographic inclusion lies in the body's status as a desiring-machine. Picturing food objects without people looks correct because they are objects of desires; food images pictured alone are, to use Deleuze and Guattari's (1983, 5) evocative term, "partial objects." Presenting food as alone and sing(u)l(ariz)e(d) indicates its need for us. Like a ready sexual partner, a delicious plate of food is more alluring when featured alone. This explanation also clarifies why the private participation of amateurs usually involves keeping their faces and partial bodies in the photos. Their food photos are intended for much smaller networks of family and friends. In these instances, the desired connection is as much or more about relating with the image of the person as it is about joining with the image of the food.

Food image sharing is a contemporary manifestation of the ancient impulse to break bread, eat and drink together to initiate, maintain, celebrate, and prolong communality and closeness. If any drive beyond the sexual is hardwired into our social being, it may be the drive

to share food. So perhaps it is not particularly astonishing that we find a strong new craving to be

the need to technologically share images with the network of desire. This sharing is a type of

generosity that provides a satisfaction linked—as we saw with Rita and Zeynep—to maternal

interests. Yet in its virtuality and disembodied need satisfaction it is actually very different from

its past material manifestations. In an interview moment steeped in self-revelation, Amelia seems

to surprise herself as she works out her answer to our probes about motivation.

> "I think what it is, is that I'm a frustrated feeder. I think that's what it comes down to.
>
> Because there is only two of us at home, there is only so much food I can feed my
>
> husband and only so much food I can feed the cats. So there is only so much I can throw
>
> at them. And so being able to go out and eat food and show people pictures of it, it's
>
> almost a way to get them going, 'Oh my God! I need to eat that!' and it's almost a sort of
>
> electronic feeding [of others] sort of thing! Isn't it?" ("Amelia," personal interview).

Amelia's voice rises with emotion as she pairs the sharing of food images with ideas of

excess and gift giving. 'Since I can love you limitlessly, but I cannot feed you (and the cats)

limitlessly, then I must feed others somehow based on this excess'. This desire is a novel

passion. It is exhibitionism performed for electric food voyeurs, undertaken gladly and with a

giving heart. Amelia fulfils her own desire by 'electronically feeding' "people" what they

crave—"pictures," images, and technologically enabled representations. She provides virtual

sustenance to the disembodied—and to the network itself.

Technology Simultaneously Distancing and Stimulating the Physical Body. We

repeatedly heard that one of the issues with participating in the food photo-sharing network is

that it tends to become all-consuming or addictive. The other members of the network offer you

seductive rewards of attention and status. The screen calls to you constantly. The images entrance and delight you, opening your world and reacting with your body. This creates a distinct tension between spending moments linked to the network versus attending to your immediate non-technological surroundings. In an interview, "Leondardo," a professional food blogger, states "I think it can distract you from real life." This distraction is welcome when he has nothing better in his surroundings, such as during a boring day at home. However, "if you're out with people" he finds that it can have negative effects on his social relationships, including those with his wife. "I have got[ten] a lot better," he states. "I would say that, the phone does go away more often than it used to. . . . I can still see how it might appear to other people for me just to be tapping away on the phone. You know, if I've got something to say, why not say it to the people that I'm there with?" ("Leonardo," Food Blogger, interview).

Retelling a narrative that was often told to us, Leonardo relates a restless and unrelenting drive to participate in the online food image network, a nagging need to keep (re)connecting with the source and focus of his attention. When talking about these tensions, participants describe their participation in the network as a balancing act between paying attention to an immediate embodied world and an equally, or perhaps even more, immediate and tempting reality. However, this sense of tension may not be the signal of a choice between two options, but an accurate perception of the actual expansion of what it now means to be human. It is not possible to choose an online versus offline existence in the modern world. Those differences have lost all meaning as the digital has become a part of real life, and real life a major focus of the digital. The person is radically decentered and relocated to the network. Once there, the desire of the network, offering connection choices between personal and private, public and increasingly professional extremes, diffuses rapidly into the desiring-machine's own energy flows.

Becoming-machines. Sociologist Slavoj Zizek (1997, np) relishes "the combination of the human mind with the computer" as "the future" of our species. Zizek (1997) proposes that digital interconnection leads us to a state in which we can embrace our fundamental existence as a technologically-mediated network of relationships. Leonardo seems aware of this possibility, but he is struggling with it. The apparent addiction may be a recognition that he—and by extension each one of us—is already a self spread across an array of social, material, and technological connections. According to Zizek (1997), it can be utterly terrifying to realize that our self, our precious "I," is a desiring-machine wired into an unspeakably vast matrix of other desiring-machines, other "I"s, as well as computers, software systems, corporations, institutions, and so on. This can lead to denial and repression, as it appears to with Leonardo. Zizek (1997, np) uses D+G's notions, suggesting that D+G's desiring-machine is now a "becoming-machine," offering a kind of empowerment similar to that of the Body without Organs (see also Belk 2013, Lévy 1997). The desire to consume and produce food images may be part of the desire to use technology to free ourselves from the constraints of the human body and mind; becoming-machine expresses the emancipatory urge to live more of our lives in networks of desire. Networks of desire channel and facilitate a deterritorialized, disembodied, and more unlimited form of consumption, providing a way for capital to harness consumers' 'boundless desire to consume' (Cova and Dalli 2009; Zwick, Bonsu, and Darmody 2008, 170), a topic we explore in further depth in the section following.

Energized Extremes: Technology Provides Transgressive Opportunities to Gain Attention

Transgressive Images in the Net. In this section, we analyze data from more public and professional participants in the network of desire. Our findings spotlight excessive, decadent, and sexually charged food images and videos that catalyze the network by appealing to primal desires such as gluttony or ideological manifestions of sexual objectification. More importantly, the images and videos served up on these networks also serve as examples of transgressions that cross taste boundaries, representing and introducing a certain chaotic randomness into the social system. These powerful images and videos destabilize by displaying a constant progression of food and its consumption pushed to spectacular, boundary-revealing extremes.

Gluttony and the Body without Organs. A prominent theme in our data, only hinted at thus far, is that of rampant, unchecked gluttony. This may be unsurprising given that we are investigating the consumption of food images. The physical body may respond to these images, just as it does to sexual pornography. The hunger and satisfaction that come from virtual images can be very real. Our informant Amelia, for instance, struggles with her love of non-virtual food. At one time, she ballooned 10 stone (140 pounds) above her normal weight; continually seeing, sharing, and desiring images of delectable treats does not make her struggle any easier. Amelia feels the tension between consuming the excessive and rich foods whose images are often shared online, and the social and medical fate that often befalls real bodies as a consequence of surrendering to this type of food's temptation.

Surrendering to gluttony is something to collectively celebrate in the results of public and especially professional forms of participation. The strapline that proudly sits atop the masthead of Darren's food blog puts it well: "Hungry like the wolf, thirsty as a camel, greedy as a pig," whereas Leonardo's blog simply declares "Always Hungry." This positioning seems intentional.

When we ask Amelia in an interview how readers of her blog would perceive her online identity, she bluntly states: "Greedy! That I like food a lot. That's it, really. I just like food an awful lot." To others, the self can be perceived as single-mindedly focused on their abiding passion: "that's it, really. I just like food…." Leonardo, Mark, Amelia, and Rita's comments suggest a concentrated state of pure consumption. Linked into the network, liberated from the constraints of organs, traditional bodies and normal consumption, one becomes a vaster and more powerful consumer, a networked consuming-machine. Unrestricted, the desiring-machine as unfettered consuming-machine passionately devours food not only with the mouth, but with eyes, through thumbs, with ears. It consumes food and images linked to other desiring-machines such as cameras, smartphones, Instagram photos, friends, bloggers, websites and corporations.

The physical body, the one with organs, has very real biological limits when it comes to consuming food. Yet, tapped into the network of desire, the immanent underlying reality of the body, the free entity that the body truly wants to be, has an almost infinitely greater consumption capacity. If Zizek (1997) is correct, it may be not only our consciousness or our intelligence that is quantitatively expanded and qualitatively transformed. It may also be our desires.

Insert Figure 4 About Here

The Spamela Anderson Burger. In early 2015, the pornburger web-site/blog posted photos of a burger called "Spamela Anderson," reproduced in Figure 4. The Spamela burger photo reveals not only food porn's trajectory towards excess and extremes, it also exposes the

links between food, porn, gender, and desire. Named for a Canadian Playboy model, actor, PETA activist, and vegetarian, the Spamela Anderson burger is a rich mélange of the tasty and the disgusting, full of abject associations and ironies. Its use of bacon—an extremely popular food porn ingredient, added to everything from ice cream to pastries—and beef ground with Spam is intended to signal membership in popular taste categories, but also their satirizing. It serves as a symbolic reminder of male dominance of females, transmuting the activist vegetarian sex bunny into a labiated pile of edible flesh, à la Adams' (1990) sexual politics of meat.

The Spamela Anderson burger is only one of a multitude of examples of food porn postings that move the network towards the ideological and the excessive. If we turn back to Figure 3, which depicts the top three foodporn results on Google Image search, we can see that they are all excessive, over-the-top foods. Outlandish food and eating also extends to the video format. YouTube hosts an extremely popular food sharing channel called *Epic Meal Time* which has over 7 million subscribers. *Epic Meal Time* originated when a friend filmed Harley Morenstein eating a Wendy's hamburger containing six beef patties and 18 bacon strips, accompanied by the theme song from *The Terminator* motion picture. After posting it on YouTube, the initial video garnered thousands of views and supportive comments. Inspired by its success, they filmed the first episode of *Epic Meal Time*, titled "The Worst Pizza Ever!" Their creation for that episode was a fast food pizza containing a cheese pizza accompanied by mainstream branded foods McDonald's Big Mac and Chicken McNuggets, Wendy's Baconator and french fries, A&W bacon cheeseburger with onion rings, KFC popcorn chicken, and a Taco Bell Crunchwrap Supreme taco. The meal contained 5,210 calories and 286 grams of fat and the video of its consumption became an Internet sensation.

The success story of *Epic Meal Time* suggests that, in a world of ever fickler and attention-deficient eyes, the need to transgress thresholds is the key to popularity. On the food image sharing network, these transgressive images include cream-laden cakes, multi-layer skyscraper burgers, hot dogs posed as uncircumcised phalluses, and bacon, bacon, everywhere. Consider the photograph of another, even more extreme burger, as portrayed in Figure 5, which inspired excessive attention from its audience on Facebook.

Insert Figure 5 About Here

Amelia elaborated in person on the spectacular nature of this memorable burger:

"I actually downloaded the picture to Facebook because I went 'Oh my God!' It was six burgers stacked. It was covered in bacon. It was pretty much covered in tinsel and jelly babies and gummy bears. It was just—it was about this high [gestures with hands], sparklers, completely ridiculous! But that was deliberate. That's what he is like, what his food is like. It's over the top! It is fantastic!" ("Amelia," personal interview).

The image and the burger transgress, crossing borders. Jelly and candy mix with burger meat and french fries, raising questions, provoking abject associations, spawning questions. Does such food need tinsel and sparklers, fire, wrapped candies? At what point does the hamburger no longer exist as food, but only as entertainment? OMG is, indeed, a common response to such postings, as Amelia earlier recounted when, in regards to electronic feeding, she wanted to elicit a response of "'Oh my God! I need to eat that!'" Other common responses to images of extreme

food are reposting, retweeting, downloading, commenting, and other forms of activating the network. Desire on the network is not merely for food or its images, but for something fantastic to notice, something exceptional which you can be the first to share, something to converse about, something to drag us out of our ordinary habits, practices, and lives into the chaos and unpredictability that we know is a part of our own deeper nature. Transgressive, excessive images such as these are rewarded with combinations of human attention and technological bandwidth. The Xmas burger inspired perverse and subversive comments ranging from the lustful "I'm drooling on my keyboard while buying my ticket to London" to the masochistic "I want to hurt my stomach," to the gluttonous "It looks gross and unhealthy. I want it!"

Amelia's breathless, admiring language underscores that she understands she is participating in a libidinal economy of accelerated aesthetics and self-promotion: "That's what he is like, what his food is like." "He" is a professional restaurateur who created this glory-drenched Christmas macroburger to promote himself and his business. When asked directly about it, professional food image makers readily acknowledge that the hyperbolization of the food is calculated and necessary, and then refer directly to the guiding principles of pornography to do so.

> "I think decadent, over the top, larger than life kind of stuff tends to get noticed, because porn is. . . more than just art or nudity, you could use any of those expressions. I mean, porn's gratuitous. And yeah, that's kind of how we tend to do stuff, over the top and in your face a little bit." ("Mark," Restaurant Owner)

> "Food porn is something that gets your juices flowing. . . And for me, it's something that makes you make that arrr arrr arrr noise sort of thing when you see it… because it's really impressive…I think for me, food porn is either something that is so wow and

impressive and outlandish, something that I would never attempt at home; or it could just be something really sloppy and wrong, but amazingly tasty, like some crazy, massive great big chilli dog or something, which you could probably make at home, but it's just so overloaded and disgusting and dirty and brilliant. That's food porn. You see, like the pictures from when we went to Bilbao are just beautiful, beautiful. That's not food porn for me, it's too beautiful. Food porn's got to be a bit dirty, a bit too much." ("Natalie," Food Blogger).

A restaurant owner and a food blogger celebrate the taboo, the gross, the transgressive and excessive in food images. It "gets your juices flowing," eliciting not an aesthetic, high cultural capital sense of admiration reminiscent of Cockburn's (1977) gastro-porn, but something lustier, 'dirtier', "overloaded," and "gratuitous" like actual "porn." Inspired to push language further than it normally goes, Natalie is almost at a loss for words: "Something that is so wow and impressive and outlandish. . . ." To evoke it, Natalie must revert to the preverbal, an "arr arr arr noise": primal energy, raw desire. Mark, whose restaurant is frequently featured by local food porn bloggers, feeds his clientele with food that transgresses the normal boundaries of ordinary and organized, offerings that are "in your face" and "over the top."

Food porn's extremes are ideological at their core and create moral panics (O'Rourke 2012). They stand in defiant, desire-drenched contradiction to the swell of medical and media narratives that declare that the world is getting fat, that governments should regulate sugar sales, that we should be counting calories, eating more nutritious and healthy foods. The online celebration of bacon, sugar, meat, cheese and fat is pornographic not only in its quantitative extremes but in its transgression of these self-disciplinary norms of regulated, beneficial, eating. We found little evidence, for example, of broccoli or salad porn. Instead, there is a carnivalesque

celebration of huge, fat-drenched burgers and sloppy desserts, edible equivalents of a bukkake party or gangbang video, images with intensities, "abject" visions that reveals forbidden boundaries (Kristeva 1982). Indeed, stories of people injuring themselves attempting to eat extreme food are fairly common. In our research, we verified one case of someone who acted like a superdesirious Body without Organs that tried to bite off more than it could chew. Inspired by food porn, this informant dislocated his jaw trying to eat a massive burger.

Evolving Extremes. Massive or sexualized burgers are certainly not the limits of food porn. Beautiful restaurant photos or homemade images which exist in a direct lineage to Cockburn's (1977) gastro-porn, are still widely shared and coveted. We can get an understanding of how food images move to these extremes from the story of Isobel. Isobel had followed Pinterest and noticed the popularity its food categories. From her experience working at a local restaurant, she had learned how to make cheesecakes. As she began posting her cheesecakes on Pinterest in the little spare time she had, she began to experiment. "I've made Rolo, Nutella and Oreo, [as well as] Toblerone [cheesecakes]. I've made Toblerone [cheesecakes] a few times. Every time I make it, I add more and more chocolate. The last one I think probably had 600g of Toblerone chocolate in it." She also makes brownies stuffed with Oreos or Reese's cups. According to her account, the creative aspect of her baking excites and motivates her the most: "The possibilities are endless. I mean, I could make something different every day of the year and probably still have something else that I haven't tried yet. I think it's the experimenting part that I like. That I can make something different all the time." (Isobel, personal interview).

As Isobel's story indicates, the creative possibilities of food porn as an expressive medium are attractive and endless. So too is the desire to experiment by pushing the boundaries

of taste: "Every time I make it, I add more chocolate." Sometimes, these creative extremes assume unexpected forms. A video form of food porn that has recently become very popular is called 'What I eat in a day'. This new form of sharing, which has a broad range of particular styles and formats, features consumers filming everything they consume in a particular day that day. Many of them highlight consumers on particular diets or at certain types of location, for example, at university, at home, or on vacation. One of these types of videos, by a YouTuber called Kalel has nearly 2 million subscribers, and is themed to be about being a "Cheap lazy vegan" (2016). This narrative opens one of the 'What I eat in a day' videos: "I thought that I would make this one a little more interesting by not just doing vegan recipes but by doing fast, easy, super super-lazy recipes" (Cheap Lazy Vegan 2016).

The extreme elements of the "super super-lazy recipes" and the "What I eat in a day" format may not at first be obvious. They relate to the transgressive laxity, sheer quantity, full public exposure, and utter mundaneness of the food videos. These qualities stand in stark contrast to the slick professionality of most of the cooking and food shows on sites like the Food Network. As consumers intentionally signal that their content is intentionally boring, sloppy, lazy, ugly, and ordinary—often by using these exact terms to describe it—they also send the message that they are doing so in a reflexive, even ironic, way. This reflexivity promises a type of very personal self-revelation, an extraordinary access that transgresses conventional boundaries between the public and the private. Flows of attention and desire follow.

Our findings build into a theory that locates contemporary consumer desire in networks whose interfaces discipline and direct the desirous cravings of private participation into limitative consumption interests for private participation. For those engaging in public and professional participation in the network, the technology's virtuality raises open-ended

possibilities for new experiences of body and passion, and its hunger for attention-grabbing images elicit transgressive extremes in order to build a liberated flow of energy. Our discussion section, which follows, explores the implications of these findings for our understanding of capitalism, desire, consumer collectives, emancipation, and the posthuman.

DISCUSSION

Nomological Networks of Desire

The food image sharing network of desire in this paper is product of our contemporary technological society—it depends upon computer networks, smartphones, social media sites, on the many elements of the technology industry. As such, it is firmly situated within the ideological fields of technocapitalism. In his book of the same name, Suarez-Villa (2009, 3) defines technocapitalism as "a new form of capitalism that is heavily grounded on corporate power and its exploitation of technological creativity." To further emphasize the intimate relationship between innovation and technocapitalism, Suarez-Villa (2009, 3, 7) proceeds to state that "creativity, an intangible human quality, is the most precious resource of the new incarnation of capitalism" and then to propose that "experimentalism" –the "subordination" of the research innovation "to corporate power and to its commercial ends"—is "the driving force of technocapitalism." Although filled with many examples of corporate R&D-style research, and some of espionage, Suarez-Villa's (2009) book and theory fail to notice the crucial role of marketing research, social media monitoring, and consumers' direct, networked interconnection with corporate decision-makers.

These new connections and new forms of desire are central to our understanding of technocapitalism. As Schneier (2015) tells us, we are all currently under near-constant surveillance and monitoring by corporations such as Google, Facebook, Apple and others. Thus, as consumers tap into these electric arteries of desire, they are both transfusing and mainlining technocapitalism. Networked together, "collective consumer innovation is taking on new forms that are transforming the nature of consumption and work and, with it, society and marketing" (Kozinets, Hemetsberger, and Schau 2008, 339). Information and communication technologies and the companies who provide them plug into consumers' lives, as those lives are constantly being made and unmade by data, meaning, consumption, and innovation.

Our investigation into networks of desire begins to map some of the complex, dynamic, and fertile feedback loops of this transformative territory. As consumers share their desire for a particular kind of food through sharing an image, other consumers react. Software records and tags. Algorithms kick in. New connections happen. Resources move around and a vast technocapitalist machine hums along behind and within the network: agribusiness, brand business, stock markets, supermarkets, transportation, communication, digitization, privatization, deterritorialization, detraditionalization. Rapidly building new ties into the webwork of culture and communication, companies search for innovation, using the results of their quest to drive change on specialty food stores shelves, in restaurant menus, and in consumers' kitchens.

D+G view this rapid change as emancipatory. Connecting body, self, and society to the infinitely malleable Body without Organs is a process that involves fracturing modern subjectivity into a type of schizophrenia, a type of destabilization that D+G find to be "inherent in capitalism" and potentially empowering (Sweeney 2013, 120). Yet we must wonder about the constrictive as well as constructive aspects of this passionate technocapitalist embrace. If D+G

are correct, and the transformation at the individual level echoes the one at the social, then perhaps the unending technocapitalist search for innovation has become both the new zeitgeist and the new consumer mindset, driving consumption more than ever before. Networks of desire may be key phenomena at work in these times, transmitting ever-increasing novelty-seeking from corporations to consumers, facilitating its movement between them, amplifying and activating it through images and words, then feeding the products of the desire back to corporations through ever-accelerating feedback loops. In this quest, the empowerment of corporations and consumers can seem to be tied together. D+G wrote their theory embracing decentralization and unrestricted flows of creativity in a different time, a time of social unrest and resistance to bureaucratic, centralized governments. It remains to be seen whether unleashing these flows of desire in a time of diminishing public power and ascendant technocapitalism is actually as emancipatory as they make it out to be.

Our exploration of online food photo sharing reveals it to be a site where consumers' private, public, and professional practices interact with technological interfaces and hungry networks to channel, discipline and unleash desire. The network reinforces capitalist and technocapitalist interests as it mutates and destabilizes, complicating relations between physical things and their images, the immediate and the distant, the real and the virtual, the ordinary and the outlandish. In the remainder of this discussion section we consider how the implications of our theory of networks of desire change the way we might understand: (1) desire, (2) consumer collectives, (3) emancipatory consumption, and (4) post-human consumption.

Reformulating Theories of Desire for a Networked Age

In their far-ranging and cross-cultural phenomenological inquiry, Belk et al. (2003) convincingly argue for the centrality of the topic of desire in consumer research and provide a valuable synthesis of extant work in consumer research. However, Belk et al. (2003) also puts forward a particular view of desire which excludes—apparently intentionally—the D+G perspective. An earlier work, Belk, Ger, and Askegaard (2000, 104) was dismissive of D+G's theory, claiming that the term "desiring-machine" (the original term for an assemblage) partakes of a mechanistic reductionism that is "fundamentally problematic." We obviously disagree, and suggest that D+G's theory offers a valuable alternate perspective on the topic.

The theory of desire that we offer in this paper differs from that in Belk et al.'s (2000, 2003) works in five essential ways. First, it embraces the view of desire not as a type of lack but as a type of productive energy, similar to the flows of energy which Gould (1991) described moving through his own body. Second, it sees desire as motivating the connection of actors into systems that realize some interaction or exchange and are therefore productive as well as consumptive. These things are not limited to the single objects and particular social relations of Belk et al.'s (2003) descriptions, but include entire systems themselves, for example, networks of desire. Third, contrasting with the more micro and individual-centered view of Belk et al. (2003), our perspective considers desire to be a co-production of entire systems alongside individuals; the two are intimately interlinked, and our theory focuses on the dynamics of desire's flow between them. Fourth, our theory emphasizes the connection between desire and innovation, in particular innovation in a capitalist and technocapitalist system; this is related to the theme of consumer creativity mentioned by Belk et al. (2003), but left largely undeveloped by them. Finally, our theory considers as a central question the way that contemporary technology changes consumer desire, a question left entirely undeveloped by Belk at al. (2000, 2003).

In respect to this last aspect of our theory, our research contrasts strongly with Denegri-Knott and Molesworth's (2013) finding that technology networks make consumer desire more task-oriented, manageable, functional, and goal-oriented, resulting in a "rationalization of consumer desire" (1573). Instead of the 'software desiring on behalf of [human] users' leading to a human 'delegation of affective investment' from living consumers to computer algorithms (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2013, 1573), we find a complex phenomenon in which desire is channeled through technology interfaces into particular interests, and often increased by the activity of the network to provide and promote extreme, even pornographic, images.

Our energetic theorization also offers a way to conceptualize the flows and linkages between virtual, digital virtual, and material consumption that Denegri-Knott and Molseworth (2010) problematize in ways that: (1) do not impose a linear and rational order on experiences that can be seen as their ontological opposite, and (2) do not necessarily locate them in a resistance to a Weberian iron cage of rationality, a stance shared by almost all classical technology theorists (Winner 1978). The analysis in both Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2010) and (2013) imbues technology platforms such as recommender systems with the agency to rationalize desire. In contrast, our account decenters technology. We conceptualize technology as one kind of actor operating among others in a system that territorializes desire's flows.

Expanding Conceptions of Consumer Collectives

It is, however, exactly this link between desire and particular capitalist and technocapitalist interests that we believe will benefit from further investigation. Through it, we can conceptualize how networks of desire relate to other established concepts within consumer

research. To begin, our conception of networks of desire as *complex open systems of technologies, consumers, energized passion and virtual and physical objects interacting as an interconnected desiring-machine that produces consumption interest within the wider social system and among the interconnected actors* is related to, but distinct from, notions such as subcultures of consumption, brand communities, brand publics, and virtual communities of consumption. In the remainder of this section, we explain these similarities and differences.

The consumption-related interests that focus networks of desire are closely related to the same 'shared commitments' to product use, consumption, or brand that are held by subgroups in Schouten and McAlexander's (1995, 43) subcultures of consumption, the 'brand admiration' of Muñiz and O'Guinn's (2001, 412) community members, and the explicit "consumption-related interests" of online community subgroups in "virtual communities of consumption" (Kozinets 1999, 254). What is different in the conception of networks of desire is, first, the explicit focus on the network itself as a part of the social system and also a diverse set of connections between potentially quite diverse desiring-machines.

In this regard, the concept shares with Arvidsson and Caliandro's (2016) notion of "brand publics" the idea that direct interaction and communication between members is not necessary for these networks to be consequential to consumption and our understanding of it. All that is required is connection, which can come, for example, from merely viewing an online photographic image of a luscious, chocolate-drenched banana. However, our conception of private, public, and professional participation makes out theory far broader than brand publics. Networks of desires embrace private network participation that includes various intimate, strong tie community and social network types, as well as more mainstream, weak tie, and anonymous formats.

A second major factor differentiating the conception of networks of desire from these other concepts (with the possible exception of virtual communities of consumption) is its consanguinity with information and communication technologies. In this conception, desire flows through and perhaps even within technology. The desirous connection propels an ever-changing and deterritorializing flow of data, meaning, and other complex cultural elements. Plus, the theory looks at systems, groups, and individual actors as co-constitutive and inextricably entwined. This co-constitution perspective partakes of an "after ANT" actor network theory sensibility (Law 1999) that seeks to embrace systemic, cultural, technological and theoretical complexity as well as the tensions between them.

Connecting to assemblage theoretic and ANT enabled work such as Epp and Price (2010), Parmentier and Fischer (2015) and Martin and Schouten (2014), networks of desire is a consumption-related concept that includes entities such as brands, physical objects, cell phones, and corporations in its conceptualization of potential network actors. Furthermore, the concept of networks of desire permits and invites the inclusion of machinic connections, such as those provided by software agents like web-page interfaces, bots, and AIs, by analysing them as agentic actors within the system (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2013, Latour 2005, Martin and Schouten 2014, Parmentier and Fischer 2015). Software programs and other technologies and systems might be construed, as they are in this paper, as types of consumers who partake as active partners in cultural, social, economic and other resource exchange processes.

This apprehension of networks of desire could enrich the findings of numerous extant studies of online consumption phenomenon. For instance, although they do not theorize using the concept of desire, the high levels of passionate consumer engagement, boundary-breaching, and innovation found in the online studies of Scaraboto and Fischer (2013), Dolbec and Fischer

(2015) and Scaraboto (2015), and in the aesthetic orchestration of taste found by Arsel and Bean (2013) relate to the core qualities of networks of desire explicated throughout this paper.

Third and finally, the concept centers on the rapid and continuous decenterings situated in the technological sphere of consumption. Subcultures of consumption, brand communities, virtual communities of consumption, consumer tribes, and brand publics are concepts which are focused on particular human actors at one point in time. Networks of desire are constituted of connections and various actors—human, machinic, and otherwise—that are constantly changing. Future understanding of networks of desire will require more nimble methods, models and theories to capture the dynamic, inclusive, and technology-centric connections and meaningful social, cultural, economic, institutional, ideological and technical relationships it provides.

Questioning Emancipation through Extreme Consumption

Past research such as Firat and Venkatesh (1995), Firat and Dholakia (1998), and Kozinets (2002) has certainly featured consumer emancipation pursued through the utilization of artistic or imaginative extremes, but in gatherings and circumstances that might be considered marginal to the mainstream of consumption. The marginality of the extreme of porn and food porn might make us wonder about the general applicability of the findings of this paper, its theory of desire, or its the notion of networks of desire. For not all products or services impassion all consumers all of the time, or even many customers much of the time.

Food and sex—the raw ingredients of our delectably superdesirous fieldsite—partake of deep primal drives, making them favorite topics for evolutionary psychologists and anthropologists. This also makes them excellent habitats for our investigation of the wildfires of

techno-desires. Yet, although such generalizing speculations are always suspect, we note in contemporary society many of the same tendencies towards amplification, acceleration, destabilization, and exacerbation that we find in the field.

We live in an age where sexting drives people to suicide, where augmented reality video games instantly gain legions of followers who storm publics places such as cemeteries, where Presidential candidates announce policy platforms on Twitter, and where fundamentalist-based international terrorist organizations successfully recruit using YouTube and WhatsApp. Indeed, it seems as if the news is getting nastier, celebrities are acting more outrageous, general language is sounding more crude, political positions are becoming more polarized, religious beliefs are more extreme, and on and on through culture and society. In social media, extreme acts, statements, and images seem to be the quickest way to draw attention and followers, the surest way to gain mass media attention, and the most solid foundation upon which to build a network. If this is true, then the actual effects of the growing social presence and influence of networks of desire in the era of technocapitalism might actually be understated in this paper.

Bataille (1988), whose work influenced D+G, theorized that societies need to keep desire flowing through sacrificing excess and excessive resources, which he called the *part maudite*, the "accursed share." This sacrifice takes place in hedonistic spectacles, festivals, orgies, concerts, potlatches, and gigantic bonfires. Bataille's (1988) theory gives us a guiding ritual format for emancipation. If we consume resources in a vast and regular-enough festal display, we liberate ourselves (see also Thompson 2007), at least 'locally and temporarily' (Kozinets 2002, 36). According to Bataille (1988), if we do not cathartically expend that flow of libidinal energy sexually and hedonistically, we will be forced to use it up through violence, aggression, and warfare—a point D+G also reinforce in their theory of nomadic war machines, and which seems

to appear in a much more benign and maternal form in the food image sharing behaviors of research participants such as Zeynep and Amelia.

Our findings suggest two additional insights. First, that the random qualities of these events are not only destructive, but also wildly creative. The chaotic vortices of desire, extreme images and outlandish acts formed by these events power not only liberation but a very useful (to technocapitalism) creativity—perhaps explaining why Burning Man has become a central part of many of Silicon Valley's innovation-seeking corporate cultures, particularly Google (Turner 2009). Second, in a world with nearly 7 billion cell phones, over 3 billion Internet users, and over 1 billion daily active Facebook users, access to networks of desire is nearly ubiquitous. Perhaps we no longer need orgiastic festal gatherings in distant locations; the gigantic bonfire of our desires is online, all the time. If our findings hold to be true, and these networks channel desire into certain interests, deterritorialize desire from bodies to technology networks, and amplify the expressive extremes that transgress normative boundaries, we should expect to see them playing an increasing role in the destabilization of our cultures, traditions, and other social systems. Whether this is liberatory in any but the most superficial sense remains very much a factor of weighing the novel social betterment they bring against the existing benefits they destroy, a matter ripe for further investigation, thought, and theory.

Energizing Theories of the Body, Cyborgs, and Posthuman Consumption

Bodies, body images, and consumption concerns have been interconnected and linked to media since well before the rise of consumer networks (Thompson and Hirschman 1995). However, building on Stone's (1995) arguments that technologies could transmit not just

information, but representations, of bodies, we assemble a theory that see networks of desire as places of consumption that reterritorialize desire from physical bodies to digital networks. These networks actively contribute to all aspects of a particular consumer culture—its meanings, values, identities, rituals, and so on. And just as light bends in the presence of a gigantic gravitational field, so too does collective consumer desire invariably bend to the interests and ideologies of technocapitalism.

If, as D+G hold and we believe, desire is, at its core, the ceaseless, energized drive to connect into different and perhaps better systems, then our current technological network is its most sophisticated realization yet. More than this, our contemporary digital interconnections are a deterritorialization factory, offering consumers the benefits of multitudinous plenitudes of new cultures, new lives, and even new desires, such as the passion for vicariously losing oneself in the flow of onscreen fantasy images, for exhibiting one's life to the network and witnessing their reactions, for consuming the displays of others' private worlds exhibited in real-time, for being the first person in your networks to post something new, just as it is about to go viral. These new desires are not the strange new cravings but some of the most familiar mainstream addictions of our time.

Belk (2013, 488) recognizes the possibilities of an "aggregate extended self" whose "self-transcendent possibilities are magnified in the digital world." Yet our conception, like D+G's and Zizek's, transcends and decenters the self from this self-centric self-transcendent one by notionally emplacing it as a desiring-machine alongside other desiring-machines in an interconnected desiring-machine network of desire connected to other networks and to a far more vast and complex social system. To consider, as Zizek (1997) does, that the very system that now constitutes and contains humanity is ontologically a Body without Organs is both thrilling and

terrifying. If conscious awareness and intelligence can be spread across an array of combined social, technological and material resources, then so too must be desire.

We must therefore question and explore the individual and social effects of such impassioned and commercially-directed collective connection. Society may change drastically when its citizenry is wired into endless overlapping networks of desires. Consumers, each micro-segmented into interface-driven categories of consumption desire, each deterritorializing ever more rapidly from their other interests and other connections, would diversify and metamorphosize as each speedily seeks to ascend the latest available peak of their passion. Consumers, networks, and consumer culture itself become nonlimitative Bodies without Organs, desiring-machines as being-machines as consuming-machines, malleable things whose hungers have no limits, whose capacity changes by the hour. Unleashing new abilities for us to couple with machine bodies, object bodies, branded bodies, the network may channel our desire to assemble into transgressions of increasingly nonhuman, inhuman, and posthuman configuration.

Perhaps what previously we might have called posthuman now must simply be called 'the current state of consumer culture'. As we have found, computer networks do not turn consumers into the more rational, objective calculative beings that Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2013), Giesler and Venkatesh (2005), and Simonson (2015) assert they are or will become. Rather than the cold dispassion and rationality of the cyborg posthuman, in food image sharing we find networks pulsating with the lustiness and vitality of consumer desire. And although they once did, and sometimes still seem to offer more democratic, authentic and grassroots places to commune and converse, it now appears equally likely that technologically enabled consumer networks also function as effective amplifiers of corporately monitored and sponsored desires. In the midst of this social schizophrenia, what we term networks of desire

seem to be a critically important product, if not a central project, of technocapitalism. If we are to understand them, we who practice consumer research must keep our eyes wide open, and courageously gaze into this gaping ontological and axiological abyss. Directed by the technocapitalist collective, deterritorialized beyond belief, pushed to posthuman extremes, what will become of our fragile humanity? Connected into networks of desire, where will we be carried by deterritorialized flows?

DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

Ethnographic engagement with the focal topic and its sites' cultural areas was prolonged and deep. Preparatory field research was conducted online and in person, in bursts and during focused periods, over the last sixteen years by the first author, and encompassed participation in online food sharing activities and observational lurking on food sites since 1998. During 2012-2015, the third author engaged in three years of additional intensive online and offline fieldwork, encompassing food creating, eating, photographing, posting, interacting and interviewing. With close guidance from the first author, the third author conducted the seventeen personal interviews with professional food bloggers, restaurateurs and others involved in public and professional food image sharing during the 2012-2015 (see Table 1 for details). The second author acted as a confidante and theoretical sounding board during the latter years of the data collection and throughout the analysis process.

Netnographic data collection spanned blogs, forums, Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, Vine, and Platter. Ethnographic fieldsites included food markets, supper clubs, coffee shops and restaurants in the UK, Canada, and the United States. Netnographic participation followed Kozinets (2015) and included active newsgroup posting and the production of a food blog by the third author, and the use of a Facebook group dedicated to the topic, wherein we contacted a range of self-selected and convenience sampled participants and invited them to participate in our netnographic research project. Full disclosure was present on the private, members-only data collection page, which was owned and moderated by the first author and stated "This is a Page dedicated to my current netnographic research project on understanding food porn, or more generally the sharing of food photographs, stories, recipes, and descriptions online and through mobile applications." Facebook fan page contributors tended to

be informed, observant, and descriptive, and were a selective snowball sample drawn mainly from the educated and high cultural capital social connections of the first author.

Data were discussed and analyzed on multiple occasions in person and through Skype by all three authors using the first and third author's interview transcripts, field notes, web page collected data, collected video, and netnographic data in text and image files and screen shots.

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TABLE 1: INTERVIEW DETAILS

Respondent/Pseudonym	Number of Meetings	Role	Location	Description of Interview
Darren	2	Food Blogger	Manchester	First Restaurant Visit/Interview Second Restaurant Visit/Interview
Samantha	3	Consumer/ Keen Home Cook	Manchester	First Interview Second Interview Restaurant Visit
Brooklyn	1	Food Blogger	Manchester	Interview
Amelia	2	Food and Wine Blogger	Manchester	First Interview Second Restaurant Visit
Natalie	1	Consumer	Manchester	Interview
Mark	1	Restaurant Manager	Manchester	Interview/Restaurant Visit
Zoey	1	Consumer/ Keen Home Cook	Manchester	Interview
Leonardo	1	Food Blogger	Manchester	Interview
Lily	1	Food Stylist	Toronto	Interview
Miranda	1	Consumer	Manchester	Interview
Alice	1	Food Blogger	Liverpool	Interview
Isobel	1	Fashion Blogger	Manchester	Interview

FIGURE 1: TYPICAL REDDIT FOOD PORN PAGE

Screenshot of https://www.reddit.com/r/FoodPorn/, circa April 2016

FIGURE 2: GROWTH IN USE OF THE "FOODPORN" SEARCH TERM
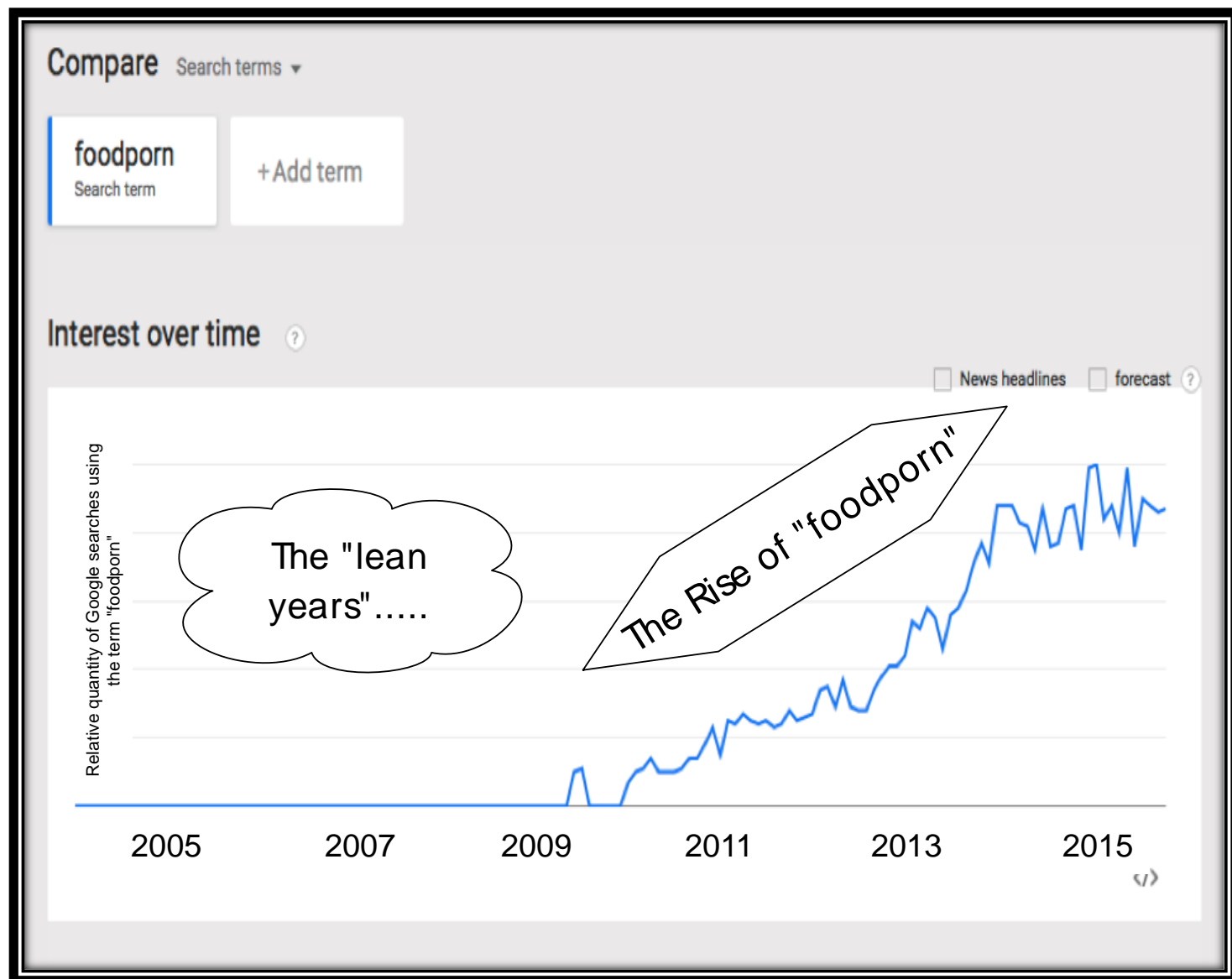
Source: Altered screen shot from Google Trends search,

https://www.google.ca/trends/explore

FIGURE 3: TOP THREE FOODPORN RESULTS

Source: Results of a Search of "Google Images" Search Engine conducted on 27 April 2016 by

the first author

FIGURE 4: THE SPAMELA ANDERSON BURGER

Source: Research annotated image created from food image posted on PornBurger.me,

http://pornburger.me/2015/01/31/the-spamela-anderson-burger/

FIGURE 5: ALMOST FAMOUS EXTRAVAGANT XMAS BURGER

Source: (c) Almost Famous, 2012 (permission to use image granted by Beautiful Drinks Ltd.)

Headings List

1) NETWORKS OF DESIRE
2) Extant Conceptions
3) Desire and Consumer Culture
3) Desire in a Digital Age
2) A New Theory of Desire
3) Deleuze and Guattari's Theory of Desire
3) The Nature of Desire is not in Objects or Lack, but Energy
3) Desire Functions by Connecting Different Things into Systems
3) Desire Connects Psychological and Social Levels of Experience
3) Desire is Linked to Innovation
1) METHOD
2) Research Context
3) Food, Glorious Food
3) Representing Food in Photographs and Images
3) Food Porn at the Nexus of Food Image and Pornography
3) But is it Porn?
2) Data Collection and Analysis Procedures and Details
1) FOOD IMAGES ON THE NETWORK OF DESIRE
2) Defining Networks of Desire
2) How People Participate in Networks of Desire: Three Forms
3) Private Network Participation
3) Public Network Participation
3) Professional Network Participation
3) Participation and Technology Co-causing Desirous Connections
2) Disciplined Direction: Technology Channels Passion into Consumption Interests
3) Zeynep and Rita Participating Privately in the Network
3) For Personal Network Participants, the Network of Desire Focused on Disciplining Passion
2) Abstracted Alimentation: Technology decenters and Transgresses Bodies with Other Desiring-
	machines in Networks
3) Technology, desire, Consumption and Bodies
3) Consumption without Consumers
3) Technology Simultaneously Distancing and Stimulating the Physical Body
3) Becoming-machines
2) Energizing Extremes: Technology Provides Transgressive Opportunities to Gain Attention
3) Transgressive Images in the Net
3) Gluttony and the Body without Organs
3) Evolving Extremes
1) DISCUSSION
2) Nomological Networks of Desire
2) Reformulating Theories of Desire for a Networked Age
2) Expanding Conceptions of Consumer Collectives
2) Questioning Emancipation through Extreme Consumption
2) Energizing Theories of the Body, Cyborgs, and Posthuman Consumption