

Craving Assemblages: Consciousness and Chocolate Desire



Ali Lara

THE GRADUATE CENTER, CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

In this paper, I use the case of a craving for chocolate to explain that a craving is a desire for food emerging from a process whose components exceed conscious awareness, and thus the idea that desire is something that can always be consciously controlled and resisted must be overcome. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of assemblage, I propose that understanding desire requires considering the distribution and heterogeneity of agencies participating in the event of the production of desire. I will suggest that the role of the brain in the production and reproduction of desire is crucial if we want to develop more sophisticated ways to consciously deal with our desire for food. I will introduce the difference between molar and molecular strata of organization operating within the assemblage of the craving to understand what kind of process should be triggered in order to deal with our desire for food. I end the paper by suggesting that focusing on the aesthetic properties of food in the generation of pleasure can be a powerful conscious resource for producing what Malabou calls brain plasticity.

KEYWORDS

affect, chocolate, desire, brain plasticity craving

Affect Studies has prompted scholarly attention to turn to the non-conscious processes at play in experience. By exploring domains other than consciousness, we have been lured to delve into the processes that occur at small scales in both organic and material/non-human becomings alike, mediating and participating in complex entanglements with embodied human experience (Gregg & Seigworth 2010; Clough, 2012). In that vein, Affect Studies has re-encountered scientific expressions and some of the so-called process philosophies (Blackman and Venn 2010; Lara 2015a). Particularly, encounters with the neurosciences, mainly the works of Damasio and LeDoux, have brought enthusiasts and critics alike (Damasio 2003; LeDoux 1998).¹ However, Affect Studies' insights on non-discursive, non-representational, non-conscious activity still need to be understood in relation to other conscious and cultural processes, or at least, such a relation requires further exploration to comprehend complex processes emerging out of the concatenation of events at different scales of the reality. In what follows I take the case of food craving, understood as a sudden desire for specific food, to explore how desire production emerges from an assemblage made from multiple agents and events, where conscious activity is but one among other, sometimes stronger capacities. I give special attention to the restrictive capacities of consciousness commonly executed in the event of the craving, and I ask: other than exercising a restrictive capacity, what influence does consciousness have on cravings?

In nutritional science, Annemarie Mol's study of food cravings contrasts two different approaches that are concerned with weight loss and obesity. On the one hand are dieting techniques of control in which the main idea is that you should "mind your plate", and on the other, are dieting techniques of care in which the main idea is that of "enjoy your food" (Mol 2012, 2013; Vogel & Mol 2014). As Mol suggests, "mind your plate" approaches always involve the idea that "a person who wants to lose weight needs to overrule the desires of her craving body. Her mind has to put itself in a sovereign position and make 'good choices' about what to eat" (Mol 2012, p. 379). Such a model encourages a sort of "homeostatic eating" that allows the body to stay the same (see also Turner 1996; Jallinoja et.al. 2010). In opposition, "enjoy your food" approaches believe that from propitiating pleasure emerges the possibility of "a body that when it 'feels that it has eaten' stops eating without having been told to do so. It no longer craves for more, as it is satisfied" (Mol 2012 p. 388). This model encourages what she calls a "hedonistic eating" where the priority is creating pleasure (see for example, Rozin 1999; Willson 2005). Mol recognizes also that social sciences have adopted this tension

between health and pleasure and have taken it for granted: “While these views are in opposition to one another, a similar scheme is at work in both: rationality and control are disentangled from, and contrasted with, desire and excess” (Mol 2014, p. 306). Such a strongly defined division leaves no space to think about the production of pleasure as a powerful resource in manage desire production by means other than the repression of such a desire.

For Krause (2015), the idea of personal sovereignty involves at the same time the rational capacity for self-control and a normative claim about the right of such control. In a similar vein, Lavin (2013) uses the term “ontopolitical fiction” to refer to the illusion of a boundary defined by the organism and regulated through conscious deliberation.

Such an ontopolitical fiction allows us to ignore relational processes beyond organic and conscious organization. In light of processes that bypass human consciousness, such as cravings, we need to question human consciousness as the epicenter of sovereignty. We should look into the relations at stake in the production of desire to see how we might better construe the function of conscious deliberation. Panagia (2009) has pointed out the political potential of the mouth, not for its capacity to talk but for its capacity to reconfigure the organolepsis of the body, which is to say, the qualities of the encounters between subject and food. Thus, behind my interests in looking for other conscious possibilities within the craving assemblage lies the political project of challenging the sovereign status of human consciousness, and particularly its status as control device.

I evoke Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory to explain the configuration of the chocolate craving, and in the final part of this paper I will bring Malabou's ideas of brain plasticity as a conscious resource in order to diversify the experience of desire. Consciousness, I argue, can act as a disobedience device: a device more capable of using pleasure to diversify the production of desire rather than avoiding pleasure to resist desire. It then becomes clear that pleasure and control are not be in opposition after all. Elsewhere (Lara 2017), I have argued the speculative potential of experimental writing and how it is particularly good for building theoretical arguments in affect studies. As such, I also include fragments of field notes from one of my own experiences of chocolate craving in order to illustrate my theoretical argument.

Chocolate-Craving Assemblage

I am taking a walk through my neighborhood in Brooklyn. With my mind in my own affairs, I fail to notice a chocolate store along my path. Yet, just as I pass, the aroma of the fresh chocolate billows into the street, and wafts in my direction, or so my nose is telling me. I feel the smell of chocolate. No longer my affairs, it is chocolate on my mind, a familiar scent, to be sure, but no less intoxicating. I turn my head, and for the first time, the chocolate store is in my sight. I enter and just as quickly I'm eating free samples and looking at their products. After taking a look, I finally get a bar of tangy dark chocolate and some spicy chocolate powder to prepare drinkable chocolate, as I foresee a cold night. This was not on my day's agenda, but with a sudden desire, my plans have diverged. I have eaten chocolate, and gotten more to eat and drink afterwards. As I leave the store I get rid of the chocolate bar wrapper, so I can keep eating as I walk away. . .

Consider this anecdote. Experiencing such an innocent chocolate craving becomes complicated if, as was the case, I am trying to lose weight. Why didn't I at least deliberate: to eat or not to eat? In light of cravings, how might one make sound decisions when one is suddenly invaded by desire? What forces, other than "willpower," are pushing and pulling on this event? To understand this chocolate craving, it is necessary to recognize that desire is not something that lies in consciousness, and so cannot be managed exclusively from there. Instead, desire is an event arising from the productive relations between heterogeneous agents with different natures, functions, and capacities. In the chocolate craving example, it is possible to recognize at least some of the agencies at stake: the smell, my nose, the store, free samples, my plans, Brooklyn's chocolate topography, and of course the chocolate itself. Each of these must do its part for the event to emerge. Deleuze and Guattari (1977, 1987) coined the term "assemblage" to describe those events in which different agents, human and other-than-human, experience encounters and affect one another. From such encounters emerges a force of production that is the agency of the assemblage, this is to say, what this event can do.

Desire, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest, is the production of assemblages, and it produces assemblages in which consciousness is just one element among many. It follows that the advantage of understanding craving as an assemblage is that doing so allows us to see that it has no center of control. As Bennett has

argued, within the assemblage, “no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group” (2010, p. 24). This means that the agencies entangled in the assemblage participate in the production of desire but are also always exceeded by it.

While cravings can be triggered by different causes, my craving in the anecdote starts with smelling chocolate. Shepherd (2013) has suggested that smell is more important for feeling a taste than taste itself. In his theory of neurogastronomy, flavor is not something that a substance possesses; instead, it is the complex outcome of what he calls the 'Human Brain Flavor System'. This system is a machinist assemblage connecting molecules of smell, retronasal smell functions, and brain activity to generate a state within a body, which Shepherd recognizes as the sensation of a specific flavor. When we smell, the environment and human body get in touch by the interactions between receptor molecules and molecules of smell. Such interaction is often explained in molecular biology using the metaphor of “lock-and-key,” that supposes that smell molecules are like keys which “open” specific receptor molecules. According to this logic, when the key turns the lock, the molecule changes its internal structure. The interaction between smell molecules and receptor molecules, understood in terms of the “lock-and-key” system, has prompted consideration of how the information carried in a sensory stimulus is translated into a representation in the nervous system, and therefore how it is presented in the brain itself. How does the smell become a craving? Shepherd argues that smell molecules are “represented” in the brain as spatial patterns of activity and that this fact supports the hypothesis of an analogy with the visual system, implying the existence of an “odor image” or “smell image” (2013 p. 82). It is noteworthy that Shepherd's analogy is a metaphorical one. This means that such a spatial pattern of activity in the brain could be thought of as an image in the sense that is made out of specific networks configured in specific forms; not because the subject produces mental images to represent the smell and then accumulates them, as if the story of desire could be storage in images somewhere in the brain. What we have is personal and neuronal experience adding states to our body's repertory. However, we have to remember that Deleuze was fairly allergic to the idea of brain as a device of images or representations (Deleuze & Guattari 1994).

This brain “image” would then also correspond with certain physiological states in the rest of the body. It follows that the anticipation of such physiological states would be a proto-state of the body mediated by the brain. Then, the body's

awareness of the forthcoming flavor is due to the brain reading our retronasal smell, so the body can anticipate and desire a potential state. Such an organic invocation can be explained through the so-called mirror neurons which are generally defined as neurons that fire both when an individual makes a motor action and when they see another actor performing the same action.² Victoria Pitts-Taylor (2013) explains that mirror neurons located in brain regions associated with motor action, facial recognition, and somatosensory processing are supposed to allow the brain to simulate certain body states, as if they were occurring in the one's own body. Through mirror neurons, Pitts-Taylor suggests, the human capacities for 'mind-reading,' or understanding another's intentions, and empathy, or feeling what another is feeling, are being rethought as inbuilt, automatic, and prelinguistic neural capacities. For Damasio (2010) the network in which mirror neurons are embedded achieves conceptually what he hypothesized as the "as-if body loop" system, "the simulation, in the brain's body maps, of a body state that is not actually taking place in the organism" (p. 110). But, what is even more interesting in Damasio's reading of mirror neuron theory is this suggestion: "If a complex brain can simulate someone else's body states, one assumes that it would be able to simulate its own body states" (2010, p. 110). A state that has previously occurred in the organism, like an encounter with chocolate, should be more easily simulated, since it has already been mapped by precisely the same somato-sensing structures that are now responsible for simulating it. However, because these "as-if body loops" are subtle and fleeting, they are less likely to enter conscious awareness (Cromby 2007). Damasio suggests that the "as-if system" as applied to others would not have developed had there not been an "as-if system" first applied to the brain's own organism.

Following Damasio's understanding of mirror neurons, we can speculate that my brain has mapped previous encounters between my body and chocolate, and that it is easy to evoke the potential sensation of chocolate. In the example of me walking by the chocolate store and feeling the smell, such a smell works as a physiological warning of the potential chocolate experience. This state of evocation, or not-yet-mapped-state, is what Damasio calls a proto-state of the body, understood as a sort of anticipation to whatever the body has felt and mapped before. The proto-state is then an expression of empathy with the past of one's own body. The importance of proposing smell as crucial to the configuration of flavor lies in the fact that molecular components evoking the brain images come before the food gets into the mouth, even before the food falls into our sight, as in the case of my chocolate craving. Proto-states of the body triggered by smell

are therefore a part of the assemblage that is clearly not fully controlled by conscious activity. This means that brain activity is modulated and dependent upon the social configuration from which the encounters between bodies occurs. As Pitts-Taylor suggests, brain activity is not indifferent to surroundings but rather highly vulnerable to it. Brain is always plastic, always becoming from encounters, so “brain plasticity is a work of culture, an imprint of collective human effort” (Pitts-Taylor 2016 p. 40).

Desires for food and its neuro-correlates are necessarily situated within the history of our previous encounters. This is because the maps that the brain creates, correspond with certain previous experiences of food and social events that occur within social environments that are also part of our assemblage. Body-brain is processual, plastic, and embedded in a context. We cannot talk about brain functions working homogeneously within those bodies. Nonetheless, some elements of the environment represent a condition of possibility for both molecular transmission and brain mapping, and are thus relevant to any account of the chocolate craving assemblage. Berlant (2011) has explained that obesity in the United States happens in the context of what she calls “cruel optimism,” meaning the desire for something that actually precludes your wellbeing. In that vein, she regards obesity and desire for food as a sort of slow death. For Berlant, desire is a cluster of promises, and it is a cruel optimism when those promises are far from being achieved, or achieved in excess and so become dangerous. In cases of repeated over eating the proto-states occur so frequently that craving becomes constant, resulting in a stable formation of desire rather than a plastic one. Oversupply of food does not necessarily trigger cravings, it might provoke other sensations, such as disgust. It is precisely because agency in the assemblage is distributed that social configurations are not the necessary causes of subjective events, but instead they work as conditions of possibilities for the development of tendencies and propensities for the subjects (Lara et al 2017). In the US context, it is useful to remember Bennett's claim that “we can call the assemblage formed by these human and nonhuman bodies 'American consumption' and name as one of its effects the 'crisis of obesity'” (2010, p. 39).

It is in this context, where people are constantly stimulated by thousands of smells (and a lot of other triggers), that they are going to find themselves in a situation of having to 'decide' what to do with their cravings. Meanwhile, an oversupply of food is going to modulate human bodies, as a result people may not have the desired agency to exercise will against the agency of matter, brain, and environment. In the field of nutritional epigenetics, food is starting to be understood as

information, such that there is a shift away from its biomedical meaning as a fuel or substrate. Instead of providing stuff to burn, in the information model, food plays a role in the construction of the metabolic system itself: it acts to set up metabolic systems at the outset (Landecker 2011). Of course, environmental conditions do not affect everybody in the same way. Analysis regarding the particularities of class, gender, and race have clearly shown that the right to choose—the right to neoliberal exercise of free will—is not equally distributed when it comes to food access or consumption management (see Probyn 2009; Berlant 2011; Guthman 2011; Julier 2013). It is precisely such inequality that makes it pertinent to look for alternative conscious strategies in a social configuration where not everyone can choose what to eat or crave.

As a food presented mostly in its sweet and solid version, chocolate partakes of the controversy around glucose and its effects in the body related to diabetes and numerous metabolic disorders (see O'Connell 2011). Notwithstanding, this has not always been the case, Coe and Coe (2013) trace the history of chocolate from the Aztecs' drink of the gods, all the way to the foundation of The Chocolate Society in UK, and the blooming of chocolatiers factories all around the world, especially in New York. As these authors explain, chocolate has just recently become a sweet and solid food widely spread and easily accessible. Capitalistic industrialization of chocolate has resulted in the commercialization of low quality chocolate high in sugar, containing less than 40% cacao solids, solid vegetable fat, and powdered milk. As Chantal Coady, owner of Rococo Chocolates and head of The Chocolate Society, has noted about so-called chocoholics: “These dietary villains . . . are responsible for chocolate's undeserved reputation as a fattening, tooth-rotting, addictive indulgence” (Coe & Coe 2013, p. 260).

It is after these environmental conditions that smell molecules and brain proto-states inaugurate the process of change in the course of action. Chocolate craving then is an affective assemblage, resulting from an emergent particular configuration of a set of agents. A craving is a bodily snapshot that maps a moment of connection of elements related to food. As Deleuze and Guattari put it “Affects are precisely these nonhuman becomings of man [sic]” (1994, p. 169). An assemblage of desire “is never either a 'natural' or 'spontaneous' determination . . . but [is] always historically attributable, . . . desire circulates in this agencement of heterogeneous elements, in this type of 'symbiosis' “ (Deleuze 1997, p. 185). If the concept of assemblage is welcome to Affect Studies, it is mainly because these environmental-organic configurations bypass conscious awareness of the

body's capacities to affect and be affected. It follows that any intentionality manifested in the craving emerges is a complex entanglement between conscious and pre-conscious activity. The conscious deliberation, the moment of decision-making, appears as the last consequence emerging from our assemblage. As Luciana Parisi puts it, "the subject is an appendix to the machine in desire, an accessory that does not determine ethical relations but only positions of will" (2004, p. 38).

Ruptures and Continuities

As I walk away from the chocolate store, I continue to eat my tangy dark chocolate, one bite after another as the world disappears throughout the clove and anise notes in my mouth. This chocolate is driving me crazy. Suddenly, I note that it is almost finished. Then I stop. An awkward combination of guilt and remorse infringe upon my mind. Only now do I remember that I'm trying to lose weight, and that I need to control the calories I eat, or so my dietician and this guy from the gym say. But chocolate is so good. It is just as if body and mind were on different sides, working for different purposes. Guilt gets worse as I remember that this is not the first time that I have indulged my cravings. I keep walking, thinking, and somehow knowing, that the spicy powder for the drinkable chocolate is still in my bag and the air temperature is decreasing. . .

For Deleuze and Guattari the production of desire in an assemblage occurs in the middle of two different forms of organization of encounters called molar and molecular strata. Molecular strata correspond to those encounters that happen without following a previously defined, specific direction; rather the direction exclusively emerges from the interaction between properties and capacities of the agents at stake. Just like the interaction between chocolate molecules and molecule receptors in my chocolate craving, the elements of this encounter do just what they can do: lock and unlock according to their shapes. These kinds of encounters produce unexpected new relations between the agencies, a 'rupture' with the prior organization of agencies: like a molecule changing its disposition. Molar strata refer to other encounters within the assemblage that might be following a specific course of action determined at a distance by other forces, non-local agents of the assemblage delimitating the organization of the local elements. Just as the encounter between my conscious self and the quasi-finished bar of chocolate is mediated by dietician discourses. These kinds of encounters work to reproduce certain kind of relations between the agencies, a 'continuity' of certain relations among the agencies.

For the organism, the sensation of craving can be molar formations; especially when it is repeatedly induced by social forces arranging the configuration of the environment. Assemblage formations can make the body do things, and it can also trigger tendencies in our subjective events. Not everybody craves or even likes chocolate, but in Brooklyn, the distribution and diversification of chocolate practices increases the possibility to be attracted to and crave them. From the one dollar little bar in the subway stall, to the international variety in the street delis; from drinkable chocolate in cafés to the sophisticated and expensive chocolatiers factories; from organic-vegan stores for desserts to all ethnic forms of chocolate like Jewish bakeries, Latino drinkable, tamales, Japanese wagashi, etc. A chocolate assemblage has so many nodes for you to connect to and thereby create a stable, recurrent desire—bringing your brain-body into multiple modes of attention, whereas your conscious agenda remains to restrict your pleasure. For instance, a particular chocolate cartography sets free an unexpected smell that redirects the organization of the body. A body knows it is chocolate and wants to perpetuate the organization of the proto-state. A body wants to continue the pleasure. However, for the cultural norms and the alleged discipline that the conscious subject is pursuing, such a craving sensation represents a molecularity: a rupture with, for example, the regime of three meals per day to be healthy. Thus, consciousness tries to break desire in order to control the course of action, to conform to what is socially expected for the body. We can say then that conscious control expected in the experience of craving is a form of molar use of conscious capacities.

As Massumi explains, in molar strata “powerful forces descend to assure that what the body wills is, on average, what 'society' wills for it” (1992, p. 75). But, if the game between molar and molecular strata of organization is about ruptures and continuities in the kind of relations among the elements of the assemblage, then we can assume that molarization should work in such a rhythm that a molecular line of escape is always possible. Moreover, it is a tendency towards a different rhythm: “the stronger the molar organization is, the more it induces a molecularization of its own elements, relations, and elementary apparatuses” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 215). This means that the restrictive character of the relation between certain elements of the assemblage is prone to be interrupted. For example, the more restrictive the diet is and the more it tries to resist cravings, the more people are likely to indulge their cravings. The tension between molar and molecular is a constant one, as Massumi explains “No body can really be molar. Bodies are made molar, with varying degrees of success” (1992, p. 64). As

Delanda (2016) explains, molar and molecular are not mutually exclusive binary categories, but rather phases of the same process that can be transformed into one another, and even coexist as mixtures.

Conscious activity acquires molar status just when it is committed to restrict pleasure. Let us not forget that for Deleuze, conscious needs a cause; in the Spinozist vein he argues that desire is an “appetite together with consciousness of the appetite. But he [Spinoza] specifies that this is only a nominal definition of desire . . . we need then to arrive at a real definition of desire, one that at the same time shows the 'cause' by which consciousness is hollowed out, as it were, in the appetitive process” (Deleuze 1988, p. 20–21). What is at stake in a chocolate craving within the social configuration described, is an assemblage where consciousness has been given the 'cause' of control device, and it emerges in this form within the production of desire Elsewhere Deleuze argued “pleasure seems to me to interrupt the immanent process of desire; pleasure seems to me to be on the side of strata and organization” (1997, p. 189). So, it is pleasure, not restrictive control, that has the capacity to rearrange the role of conscious within the assemblage. Deleuze's assemblage theory provides a system where conscious can be analyzed in terms of the strata from which it is being organized as a component of desire production. The capacity of conscious to receive directions and the organizational capacities of pleasure point to the necessary rethinking of the sovereign and restrictive capacities of consciousness in current neoliberalism.

Craving shows us how organisms are organized beyond mere biological evolutionary criteria, organisms, cells, neurons, and its activity have been acculturated. Cravings are relatively new forms of desire, aesthetic desires, as Gard (2009) would say. Cravings have been with us throughout history, even contributing to changes in food consumption, snacks and appetizers as cultural rituals are a good example of that. The French “*apéritif*,” Chilean “*once*,” American “snacking,” even the Mexican “*antojitos*” that literally means “little cravings,” are all examples of culturally established rituals more related to aesthetic desires than to the need for food. They are established and ritualized molecular investments into the molar aggregate, the rupture of desire producing a cultural continuity. Given this cultural and historical organization of desiring production we have to notice, as Damasio (2010) puts it, that what is meant by conscious deliberation has little to do with the ability to control actions in the moment and everything to do with the ability to plan ahead and decide which actions we want or do not want to carry out. Conscious deliberation is largely about decisions taken over extended periods of time, as much as days or weeks in the case of some decisions. Rarely

less than minutes, conscious deliberation is not about split-second decisions. In the case of feeling a craving there is usually little time to 'decide,' or better, to act with self-awareness and marshal self-control. You might recognize the craved food, but this acknowledgment is not yet a conscious activity as much as an automatic and "thoughtless" response. "Conscious deliberation is about reflection over knowledge" (Damasio 2010, p. 287, his italics). It follows that such a temporality of mind is more prone to be committed to forms of organization proper to its own temporality. This means, for conscious activity, it is easier to engage—to rationally understand—and deal with arguments about how the body should be, like socially desirable standards of the body. When diet advisors suggest avoiding consumption, their position is "Just say no." As Damasio (2010) sees it, "this strategy may be adequate when one has to preempt an innocuous finger movement, but not when one needs to stop an action urged by a strong desire or appetite, precisely the kind posed by any addiction to drugs, alcohol, attractive foods, or sex. Successful not-saying requires a lengthy conscious preparation" (p. 288–289).

Consciousness and pre-conscious activity work in different rhythms. This is why you can't apply conscious resources to pre-conscious battles, at least not as straightforwardly as has been assumed. The strategy must be more sophisticated than that. The management of desire cannot be reduced to the restrictive capacity of consciousness, and the possibility of applying it during the event of the craving, especially knowing that conscious molarization represents an alienation from other forces that are not precisely our own. We ought to consider opportunities for consciousness to operate within the possibilities of its own rhythm and in better attunement with one's own body. In other words, individual conscious management of desire must depart from a diversification of the function of conscious. Consciousness is capable of managing important decisions for long periods of time. But the fact of the spontaneous desire for food reveals the need for strategies of conscious management that respond to the event-ness: the time when the non-conscious drivers are in command.

Pleasure and Plasticity

The chocolate store I always pass by offers a huge variety of products. Nonetheless, ever since I moved to Brooklyn, I normally get the same tangy one, and the same spicy drinkable: these are my favorites. But my chocolate cravings are making a diet a complicated experience, more, I think, due to the emotional consequences than the actual pounds that I am—or that I am not—

losing. Indulgence feels good, but only as it lasts. Right after comes guilt. As I stir the drinkable chocolate with a wood spoon, I'm wishing that the fugitive pleasure that comes with it would last forever. I wish chocolate pleasure was not followed by guilt. . .

Following Spinoza, Deleuze (1988) explains that the encounters within an assemblage, the capacity of things might be increased (good passion) or decreased (bad passion). It must be noted that, when human consciousness is participating in an encounter, the effect of such an encounter depends on one's susceptibility to be distance-driven for the continuity of non-local purposes. Human consciousness might be thinking ideas that are not our own and thus working under a molar regime of activity. In terms of chocolate craving, if we please the craving without modifying anything in the way we eat it, indulgence will feel restrictive to our capacity to control and regulate our eating habits, taking power away from us. On the one hand, chocolate can make you feel guilty and frustrated if the project of conscious is that of restricting pleasure. On the other hand, if we indulge our cravings but invest in producing pleasure out of such an indulgence, then power is being added to our capacities, meaning increasing the capacity for pleasure.

The body-brain is exposed to the oversupply of food, lots of chocolate stores and products everywhere triggering cravings, but it is also exposed to health and beauty discourses about the body, like when my dietician suggested to me that I lose weight. The body-mind component of the assemblage is called on to invest in different capacities simultaneously: restrictive capacities on one hand, capacities for pleasure on the other. But consciousness can engage with a different project, and in doing so, it can modify the experience of the craving, even its biological and pre-conscious elements. Catherine Malabou (2008, 2012, 2015) has suggested the term "neuroplasticity," to refer to the brain's ability to biologically change and be changed.³ In a general sense, she suggests that "awakening a conscious of the brain [. . .] means awakening a conscious of the self, a consciousness of consciousness, if you will, which is also to say a comprehension of the transition from the neuronal to the mental, a comprehension of cerebral change" (2008, p.66). Malabou's idea of an appropriation of the material plasticity of the brain resonates in what Schwartz and Bagley (2002) refer to as "self-directed plasticity." Meaning that might it be more related to a sort of functional or synaptic plasticity caused by learning and cognitive activity. For Malabou, "If neuronal function is an event or should bring about events, this is so precisely because it is itself able to create events, to eventualize the program and thus, in a certain sense, to deprogram it" (2008, p.8). Such potential to create new forms of consciousness carries the political ambivalence of emancipation and control (Bhandar & Goldberg-Hiller 2015), but at very least offers the possibility of diversifying conscious commitments to include the concerns

of the body. The idea of consciously provoked brain plasticity to deprogram brain activity can be applied to the modification of the experience of cravings. And this idea represents an actual different way to use consciousness in the management of desire for food: the use of consciousness informed by its possibilities and attuned to the timing of the event of desire. Following Malabou's plastic vein, Sparrow has recently proposed aesthetic pleasure as the key to reach the plastic condition of human bodies. In what he calls his "principle of aesthetic individuation," Sparrow suggests, "since a body's sensory identity is determined by the sensory blueprint of its environment, that body's power to affect and be affected will only be as complex as the totality of its aesthetic experiences" (2015, 216).

Pleasure must be made. Consciousness deploys resources, like its capacity to focus, that can be used to intensify the aesthetic properties of the matter. When eating chocolate, for example, the affective sensation of chocolate properties throughout the body can be intensified by virtue of our conscious focus on it. The affective sensation of chocolate's properties throughout the body can be intensified by our conscious focus on it. Attention must be given to all the playful properties of the food such as smell, colors, temperature, sound, texture, aftertaste, how it makes your belly feel, to the energy you are absorbing, and so on. Mol encourages such attention to flavor when she claims "The very act of attending to what you eat . . . should increase your appreciation. More strongly still, it should increase your ability to appreciate" (Mol 2013, p.101). Focusing on the sweetness of chocolate, for example, is not going to make it sweeter, but it will give the body more information about its sweetness. The body will be more aware. If we get to experience the intensification of the properties of the food through a pleasurable experience, we are able to modify the state that the body produces when it gets in touch with such substance. What is more, pleasure has the possibility to re-arrange the way in which body-brain is affected and participates in the whole assemblage.

In order for the body to maintain a suppleness of composition, Sparrow suggests, "it must actively expose itself to percepts and affects that intensify its power by bolstering its tolerance, that enable it to radiate new sensations and pleasurable affects" (Sparrow 2015, p. 230); so, we should work on the productions of our own pleasure. The modification of brain formation by altering the history of brain encounters, is what Malabou recognizes as "the second field of plasticity," defined as "the modification of neuronal connections by means of the modulation of synaptic efficacy." It is at this level, she says, "that plasticity imposes itself with the greatest clarity and force in 'opening' its meaning" (Malabou 2008, p.21). A relation to certain food

might be rigidly mapped, the kind of food we always crave and in exactly the same way, maybe under the same circumstances, maybe from the same store: just like my favorite chocolates. These kind of stable relations trigger molarized components of the assemblage of desire, the body has learned a state and keeps reproducing it. Influenced by the social configuration of the assemblage, the brain-body can develop well-defined molar structures, but this kind of craving needs to be molecularized. In order to do that, we must generate an aesthetic consumption, a creative one centered on pleasure that could always be different. An aesthetics of pleasure, as a molecular device to generate plasticity, is our main conscious resource for diversifying the production of desire towards a better regulation of food consumption. As Bhandar and Goldberg-Hiller suggests, plasticity is “an agency of disobedience to every constituted form, a refusal to submit to a model” (2015, p.9). The disobedient quality of pleasure production in the event of a craving relies on a simple gesture: a more consciously produced desire now replacing distance-driven desire production. Moving from a desire as something that is being done to us (and to our brain), to something we are doing using the resource of our conscious brain.

One must be careful here, bringing in self-directed brain plasticity to claim its potential to diversify experience doesn't mean gaining sovereignty, at least not as a capacity to control. It means rather the possibility for a degree of freedom that understands the lack of such sovereignty, freedom beyond sovereignty as Krause (2015) would have it. The argument is not that through brain plasticity we would have more efficient control over ourselves; it is rather the claim that we might gain awareness about the impossibility of such control. We might gain accurate consciousness of what can we do with our brains, by understanding what can be done to them by the assemblage, and particularly by the molar forces playing within assemblage of desire production. The capacities of our body, including our brain, can't be fully managed by ourselves. Self-directed brain plasticity doesn't mean a synaptic-self taking over, it is rather a conscious subject knowing the limits and therefore the potentialities of brain consciousness. The environment has “some” power upon our brains and can do “certain” things to it—so can we. A subject whose only conscious resources are applied 'against' desire production in forms of restrictive capacity, or “in favor” of pleasing desire by overeating, are the kind of subjects resulting from the assemblages arranged by capitalism and involving the capture of some cognitive and neuronal capacities—like attention. This sort of assemblage is what Sampson (2017) have called “neurocapitalism,” featured by brain-directed arrangements that affect brain capacities.

Instead of encouraging fast conscious deliberation, focusing attention requires slowing ourselves down. We usually don't take the time to do this; we eat too fast, with too little attention in such a way that we are unaware of food properties. Environmental distribution of food contributes to the absence of pleasure in the moment of eating. As some scholars have pointed out, eating practices are commonly related to anxiety (Probyn 2000; Lara 2015b), stress (Berlant 2011), or guilt (Mol 2013). Pleasure is not something that the socio-cultural environment encourages in our relationship with food, at least not thoughtful pleasure. Pleasure must not be confused with other experiences like satisfaction produced by overeating or pleasure associated with only certain kind of (generally fast food) products. This kind of sensation have certainly been promoted by capitalism. Again, pleasure has to be made.

The idea of eating slowly and pleasurably requires some clarifications, a lot has been said in relation to the class, racial, and gendered blindness of this kind of discourses (see Berlant 2011; Guthman 2011; Julier 2013). Also, how perspectives suggesting any sort of individual action, like creating pleasure, might exclude those who, because of their socioeconomic conditions, do not have the necessary resources to attain this kind of pleasure. In Guthman's words, these perspectives "lead to a disproportionate focus on individual consumption choices about which people should be educated rather than, say, a focus on enacting policies that would enforce corporate accountability, or in mitigating the consequences for those most harmed" (2011, p. 8). Well, the answer to this sort of critique is rather a straightforward one: slowing down and creating pleasure cannot possibly constitute a politics of eating in a general sense. If it all was about individual choices, it would be a neoliberal politics of self-regulation neglecting social configurations and other political forces participating in desire production. Food's inequality is not a matter of personal responsibility, but social one. This paper is by no means trying to propose a general solution to all contingencies within the assemblage, the aim here is much more modest, just to explore the possibilities of human conscious in the moment of the event, especially given the social configuration that escapes full individual control and distributes agency unequally among subjects. In other words, creating pleasure will never modify the whole assemblage of desiring production, but it might diversify the role of human conscious within it.

In a general sense, this approach is exploring the resource of pleasure production as a plastic-organic device for political disobedience beyond the control-centered alternatives of desire repression. Such an approach might be useful given stable

and problematic expressions of the assemblage as molar cravings: like a recurrent chocolate craving producing guilt. My approach to the event of a craving has required us to consider craving through the notion of assemblage, to be aware of the heterogeneity involved in the relatedness of the event of the assemblage, and then to understand that conscious activity is not the center and, so, cannot fully exercise control over, the other components of the assemblage. In addition to this, there is always the possibility that some components of the assemblage act at a distance to propitiate ruptures and continuities among the relations of the elements within assemblages. It is crucial to understand that the human mind might be embedded in molar regimes or activity, subjected to other agencies: like discourses about health and about how our relation to pleasure should be. Conscious capacities might just as well be restricted by environmental conditions of food. Understanding that molar and molecular strata of organization are pulling and pushing within the assemblage, opens the possibility to think about a different usage of consciousness in our desire for food. I have offered the idea of pleasure as a consciously driven device to produce brain plasticity and to diversify the production of desire. This provides the body with the possibility of a broader spectrum of desire to be evoked in the future and, at the same time, represents a non-restrictive use of conscious deliberation. This essay is not about resisting cravings but about diversifying them.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank to Patricia Clough and Greg Seigworth for their generous comments on previous drafts of this paper. Also thanks to Tehseen Noorani for his help on editing my English.

Endnotes

1. For a discussion on the advantages and disadvantages on the arrival of neurosciences to affect studies and social sciences in general see Connolly *NeuroPolitics* (2002), and Papoulias & Callard (2010), "Biology's Gift" *Body & Society*, 16 (1), pp.29-56. For Deleuze and Guattari's warning on the brain as a relational device embedded in human experience see Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p.209).

2. For a review of the critiques of mirror neuron theory, particularly for its inattention to the cultural context in which bodily simulation occurs see Pitts-Taylor (2013), Leys (2012), Martin (2010).

3. In her review of the literature of neuroscience Malabou recognizes at least three different forms of brain plasticity: developmental, modulational, and reparative. For Malabou (2008) developmental plasticity refers to the morphological and structural modifications the brain goes through in the developmental process. Modulational plasticity is about the changes in neuronal connections resulting from one's relation with the environment as in learning processes of cognitive activity. Reparative plasticity refers to the brain's capacity to heal and recover from trauma or lessons. For a review of the literature on neuronal plasticity see Pitts-Taylor (2016), particularly chapter 1.

References

- Bhardar, B. and Goldberg-Hiller, J. (2015). *Plastic Materialities*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Berlant, L. (2011). *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Blackman, L. and Venn, C. (2010). Affect. *Body & Society*, 16 (1), pp. 7–28.
- Clough, P. (2012). Feminist Theory: Bodies, Science and Technology. In: Turner, B., ed., *Handbook of the Body*. London: Routledge, pp. 94–105.
- Coe, S. and Coe, M. (2013). *The True History of Chocolate*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Cromby, J. (2007). Integrating Social Science with Neuroscience: Potentials and Problems. *BioSocieties* 2 (2), pp. 149–169.
- Damasio, A. 2003. *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*. New York: Harvest.
- Damasio, A. (2010). *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*. New York: Vintage Books.
- LeDoux, J., 1998. *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Delanda, M. (2016). *Assemblage Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1997). Desire and Pleasure. In: Davidson, A., ed., *Foucault and his Interlocutors*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 183–192.
- Deleuze, G. (1988). *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1977). *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. New York: Penguin Classics.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1994). *What is Philosophy?* New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gard, M. (2009). Understanding obesity by understanding desire. In: Malson, H. and Burns, M., Eds., *Critical Feminist Approaches to Eating Dis/orders*. New York: Routledge, pp. 35–45.
- Gregg, M. and Seigworth, G. (2010). *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Guthman, J. (2011). *Weighing In, Obesity, Food Justice and the Limits of Capitalism*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Jallinoja, P., Pajari, P. and Absetz, P. (2010) Negotiated pleasures in health-seeking lifestyles of participants of a health promoting intervention. *Health*, 14 (2), p.115-130.
- Julier, A. (2013). The Political Economy of Obesity: The Fat Pay All. In Counihan, C. and Van Esterik, P. eds. *Food and Culture*. London: Routledge, pp. 546-562.
- Krause, S. (2015). *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*. London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Landecker, H. (2011). Food as exposure: Nutritional epigenetics and the new metabolism. *BioSocieties* 6 (2), pp. 167-194.
- Lara, A. (2015a). Teorias Afectivas Vintage. Apuntes sobre Deleuze, Bergson y Whitehead. *Cinta de Moebio*, 52, pp. 17-36.
- Lara, A. (2015b). Affect, Heat and Tacos. A Speculative Account of Thermoception. *The Senses and Society*, 10 (3), pp. 275-297.
- Lara, A. (2017). Wine's time: Duration, Attunement and Diffraction. *Subjectivity*, 10 (1), pp. 104-122
- Lara, A., Liu, W., Ashley, C., Nishida, A., Liebert, R., & Bilies, M. (2017). Affect & Subjectivity. *Subjectivity*, 10, 1, pp. 30-43.
- Lavin, C. (2013). *Eating Anxiety. The Perils of Food Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Malabou, C. (2008). *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* New York: Fordham University Press.
- Malabou, C. (2012). *Ontology of the Accident*. Malden: Polity.
- Malabou, C. (2015). Will Sovereignty Ever Be Deconstructed? In: Bhardar, B. and Goldberg- Hiller, J., eds., *Plastic Materialities*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 35-46.
- Massumi, B. (1992). *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Mol, A. (2012) Mind your plate! The ontonorms of Dutch dieting. *Social Studies of Science*, 43 (3), pp.379-396.
- Mol, A. (2013). Language Trails: 'Lekker' and Its Pleasures. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 3 (2/3), pp. 93-119.

- O'Connell, J. (2011). *Sugar Nation: The Hidden Truth Behind America's Deadliest Habit and the Simple Way to Beat It*. New York: Hachette Books.
- Panagia, D. (2009). *The Political Life of Sensation*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Parisi, L. (2004). *Abstract Sex: Philosophy, Biotechnology and the Mutations of Desire*. London & New York: Continuum.
- Pitts-Taylor, V. (2013). I Feel Your Pain: Embodied Knowledges and Situated Neurons. *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 28 (4), pp. 852-869
- Pitts-Taylor, V. (2016). *The Brain's Body*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Probyn, E. (2000). *Carnal Appetites: Food, Sex, Identities*. London: Routledge.
- Probyn, E. (2009). Fat, feelings, bodies: A critical approach to obesity. In: Malson, H. and Burns, M., Eds. *Critical Feminist Approaches to Eating Dis/orders*. New York: Routledge, 113-123.
- Rozin, P. (1999). Food is fundamental, fun, frightening, and far-reaching. *Social Research*, 66 (1), pp.9-30.
- Sampson, T. (2017). *The Assemblage Brain. Sense Making in Neuroculture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Schwartz, J. and Bagley, S. (2002). *The Mind and the Brain: Neuronal Plasticity and the Power of Mental Force*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Shepherd, G. (2013). *Neurogastronomy: How the Brain Creates Flavor and Why It Matters*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sparrow, T. (2015). *Plastic Bodies: Rebuilding Sensation After Phenomenology*. London: Open Humanities Press.
- Turner, B. (1996). *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory*. London: Sage.
- Vogel, E. and Mol, A. (2014). Enjoy your food: on losing weight and taking pleasure. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 36 (2), pp. 305-317.
- Willson, M. (2005). Indulgence. In: Kulik, D. & Menely, A. eds. *Fat*. New York: Tarcher/Penguin, pp. 153-167.