

Chewing things

Comparative cultures of consumption

A workshop to be held at St Antony's College, Oxford

3rd December 2004

Like most bodily processes, chewing can elicit powerful responses. In the UK, anything other than discreet chewing of foods during meals is often treated with disgust. For example, chewing tobacco is now seen by many as a repulsive and dangerous habit. At the same time, chewing gum has become associated with dental hygiene. In other cultural settings, however, chewing can be viewed far more favourably: in Yemen, khat chewers show off their distended cheeks with pride. By focusing on the process of chewing, this workshop aims to elucidate the formation of such perceptions, elucidating the meanings and associations of chewing in particular cultural contexts. Topics raised in the course of the workshop could include: the universality or otherwise of 'disgust'; the cultural associations of chewing with specific products and brands, fears of contagion from the discarded remnants of chewing; the disposal of these products the association of chewing with spitting; associations of chewing and aggression; the aesthetics of chewing (cheek distention, the red saliva of betel chewers, the discoloured teeth of betel, tobacco and khat chewers); the health dangers posed by chewing certain substances; the rhythm of chewing as an aid to concentration; pejorative comparisons between chewers and ruminant animals; the link of rumination and thought processes; the ritualized nature of some chewing sessions...

The workshop will consist of three sessions to consider such issues, and will take place in the Dahrendorf room at St Antony's. Lunch will be available for purchase in the college dining hall. Tea and coffee will be served in breaks. Of course, chewable items will be available to participants to ensure maximum rumination.

The occasion is kindly sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Arts and Humanities Research Board as part of their 'Cultures of Consumption' research programme.

Programme:

10.00am-10.45: Registration and coffee in the foyer of the Hilda Besse building.

10.45-11.00am: Introductory remarks by Professor Michael Redclift and Dr David M. Anderson

1st Session: 11:00am-12:30pm

- Neil Carrier (St Antony's College, Oxford): 'The Art of Chewing: verbal and visual representations of tobacco and khat chewers'.
- Sayo Ferro (St Cross College, Oxford): 'Chewing coca as a way of processing thought and spirit in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, North-Eastern Coast of Colombia'.

Guest commentator: Stephen Hugh-Jones (University of Cambridge)

12:30pm-1.30pm: Lunch (available in the St Antony's cafeteria)

1.30pm-2.30pm: Brian Moser (independent film-maker) will present footage of coca chewing filmed in South America.

2nd Session: 2:30-4:00pm

- Saman Warnakulasuriya (Kings College London): 'Areca nut (betel) chewing: global use, dependence and carcinogenicity to humans'.
- David Anderson (St Antony's College, Oxford): 'Chewing the Salad: Is Khat Cool?'

Guest commentator: Peter Geschiere (University of Leiden)

4.00pm-4.30pm: Tea and coffee break.

3rd Session: 4:30-6:00pm

- Deborah Schimberg (Managing-Director of Glee Gum) will talk on chewing gum and education.
- Oscar Forero & Michael Redclift (Kings College London): 'An historical overview of the ethics and aesthetics of chewing-gum'.

Guest commentator: Richard Fardon (SOAS, University of London)

To register for the workshop, please complete and send the below form either electronically to african.studies@sant.ox.ac.uk, or by post to Kate Rogers, Centre for African Studies, St Antony's College, Oxford, OX2 6JF. **The deadline for registrations is Friday, November 26, 2004.** Late registrations will be accepted on the day, subject to space availability. For more information please contact either Neil Carrier (neil.carrier@sant.ox.ac.uk) or Oscar Forero (oscar.forero@kcl.ac.uk).

Registration Form: Chewing Things
St Antony's College
December 3rd, 2004

Name:

Institution:

Contact details (telephone or email):