A MASS CONSPIRACY TO FEED PEOPLE: GLOBALIZING CITIES, WORLD-CLASS WASTE, AND THE BIOPOLITICS OF FOOD NOT BOMBS [1]


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This is an ethnography of waste, cities, and social movements. Primarily one social movement in particular, Food Not Bombs, which recovers and freely redistributes wasted food in the public spaces of hundreds of cities, in dozens of countries, on every continent except Antarctica. In the process, chapters contest highly polarised geographies of hunger, homelessness, and public space in these places. This dissertation explores three aspects of Food Not Bombs' context and cultural logic: (1) the ways in which waste is made and moved about in cities; (2) the ways in which those cities are becoming global in the process of waste-making (and vice versa); and (3) the ways in which this globalised waste-making cultivates globalised forms of social organisation and political resistance. This research has consisted of extensive participant-observation within Food Not Bombs chapters and some of the larger political and cultural communities in which they are embedded--Dumpster-divers, squatters, homeless advocates, punks, anarchists, and so on--in Seattle, New York City, San Francisco, Boston, Melbourne, Australia, and several other cities. It describes the link between urban globalisation and the proliferation of Food Not Bombs chapters, many of which have been located in "global" cities whose post-industrial economies are intimately entangled in global circuits of elite business investment, high-end consumption, and tourism. Each of these cities generates a wealth of world-class waste: food wasted in the interests of commodity aesthetics, buildings left empty for the sake of property speculation and gentrification, and so on. This waste, and the disparities and deprivations that correspond to it (hunger, homelessness, etcetera), are the material and political preconditions of Food Not Bombs' work. Broadly speaking, then, this dissertation describes a sort of abject symbiosis between the development of such globalised cities and the politically resistant work of Food Not Bombs.