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The Politics of Food

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The Pumpkin – A Case for Anthropological Investigation

The case for the anthropological investigation of the humble pumpkin is an interesting and engaging one, as fundamentally, this particular topic is noticeably under researched. The pumpkin has shared a long and involved history with humanity, through which it has exhibited a truly multifaceted materiality, appearing in many different guises and having many interpretations. Humanities relationship with food is more than a mere vehicle to obtain sustenance and perpetuate survival, as it encompasses a deep and rich ontology, one that is far more than the outright act of eating itself. Consequently, this investigation aims to explore features of humans complex relationship with food, through uncovering the rich social journey that this particular plant has undergone, transforming itself along with its human relationships throughout many thousands of years.

This project aims to bridge that gap in knowledge regarding the important cultural relationship this plant has shared with humans, beginning by exploring the ancestry and origins of the pumpkin in the Americas, and the foundations of its ancient relation with humanity. Cultivation by early humans would be the first step in the series of transformations that this plant will endure, and this project will show how the pumpkin, emerging as a cultural magnet, has repeatedly travelled between the American and European continents, acquiring a wealth of evolving human contexts along the way. The pumpkin holds a rare position as an item of food that has truly transcended its principle function, becoming a cultural icon and also an item of high artistic exhibit. The pumpkin

has also had a direct effect on certain cultural rituals themselves, transforming the way in which contemporary cultures celebrate the festival of Halloween.

Highlighting the lack of anthropological literature regarding the pumpkins cultural impact, and thus strengthening the case for its examination, investigative material regarding the cultural impact of the pumpkin is thin. Therefore this project will document the pumpkins historic journey, with the intention of developing a historical framework on which to base further anthropological examination in the future. As such, this investigation will draw from a variety of different sources in order to build a comprehensive framework surrounding the pumpkins social journey. This multidisciplinary approach will therefore utilise various academic accounts including historic, anthropological, and the contemporary arts.

Altogether, the cultural significance of the pumpkin presents a remarkable and under researched area of cultural anthropology, and this project aims to demonstrate the value that investigation into this particular avenue of study can bring. For and item of food to share such a significant part of cultural history, as well as contemporary festive celebrations, without definitive representation of anthropological investigation, highlights the true worth of this particular analysis. The pumpkin has become a cultural icon, the very face of Halloween itself, however, very few seem to be asking the important and obvious question. How did this come to be? From obscure plant to worldwide symbol, this project aims to uncover the reasons, the intrigue, and the journey, that led the pumpkin to where it is today.