In a recent paper, I have reflected on the euphoric nature of contemporary class formations as well as considered the challenges faced by critical discourse analysts seeking to understand these formations (Thurlow, 2016). Quite patently, the study of class defies and exceeds language, and our usual methods struggle to account for the psychic, affective, material practices by which class status is organized and sustained. In this presentation, I will be taking up similar political-cum-methodological issues by focusing on food/meals in the Business Class services of international airlines. Drawing on a range of ethnographic discourse data, the analysis will consider the embodied performances of flight attendants, the materiality of menus, and the multimodal staging of the food itself. At the epicentre of inequality, these fleeting, frivolous enactments of privilege seed themselves well beyond the confines of the Business Class cabin. Indeed, we witness how the rhetorics of elite status slide not only across modalities but also across topographies, rippling out across the global semioscape.

Bio
Crispin Thurlow is Professor of Language and Communication in the Department of English at the University of Bern, Switzerland. With an interdisciplinary grounding in discourse studies, sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology and cultural studies, his research examines the social semiotics of “difference” in contemporary life, particularly in the contexts of global mobility and communication technologies. His books include the award-winning Tourism Discourse: Language and Global Mobility and a co-edited collection Digital Discourse: Language and the New Media. In 2014, he was co-editor of a special issue of the Journal of Sociolinguistics on Sociolinguistics and Tourism. Crispin Thurlow is on the editorial board of several international journals, including Critical Discourse Studies, Discourse, Context & Media, the Journal of Computer Mediated Communication, and the Journal of International and Intercultural Communication.

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Background paper: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17405904.2015.1122646