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<b>DM</b>	<b>FADE</b>	<b>WASHING DISHES</b>			<b>COLAN- DER</b>
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# Introduction

Alexandra Alisauskas

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In 2006, Documenta 12 director Roger Buergel announced Ferran Adrià's inclusion in the 2008 fair. Best known as an avant-garde chef specializing in sensory-challenging, conceptual cuisine at his restaurant El Bulli, Adrià's place on the roster of artists marked the first time that Documenta had invited a professional chef. Adrià's practice has never been far from concerns of the art world, however. Beginning in 2001, he began creating a visual catalogue of all of the dishes conceived at El Bulli, as well as at its experimental culinary laboratory workshop, El Taller. In 2008, Phaidon, best known for producing glossy, coffee table art books, published *A Day in the Life of El Bulli*, which tracks the operations of the restaurant through 600 pages of lush photographs of dishes, the kitchen, and food-stained, handwritten recipes. Adrià had also previously made visual contributions to art exhibitions. These include photographs and thought-boards for an exhibition about chefs and their creative processes at the Palau Robert in Barcelona, and designing a series of specialized kitchen tools for an exhibition about industrial design at the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

Food and art critics alike have likened Adrià's conceptualization of dishes and scientific culinary methods to artistic genius.<sup>1</sup> Documenta was no different in acclaiming Adrià as an artist-genius. Buergel writes: "[Adrià] almost single-handedly . . . managed to transform the way in which we perceive food. . . . His lesson is a straightforward one, a fact reflected by the strong interest his creativity arouses."<sup>2</sup> Pop Artist Richard Hamilton has been similarly effusive in his words, citing Adrià's "poetic sensibility" and continuing to praise the "lyrical quality in what he does."<sup>3</sup> Many had anticipated that Adrià's participation in Documenta, due to cuisine being a non-traditional medium for art, would stir up controversy

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<sup>1</sup> See the recently published book *Food for Thought, Thought for Food*, eds. Richard Hamilton and Vicente Todolí (New York, NY: Actar, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, "One Artist," in *Food for Thought, Thought for Food*, 77.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Hamilton, "Thought for Food," in *Food for Thought, Thought for Food*, 50.

and encourage a dialogue about the fluidity of disciplinary categories in contemporary art. However, few questioned the boundaries of the art fair, or of the chef's own culinary practice, and, more importantly, little was done to concretely bring the two fields into conversation.

Rather than conceiving of a new project for the art fair, Adrià's contribution was to reserve a table for two at El Bulli in Spain, whose seats would be filled nightly by attendees of the art fair in Kassel, Germany. Every night, two different randomly selected diners were flown to Spain for the evening to eat a multicourse, conceptual meal. During the course of Documenta 12, this table served as one of the art fair's pavilions: the offsite Pavillion G. According to descriptions by the visiting Documenta diners, it was difficult to characterize what exactly was happening. One described the experience as "something beyond words," and some produced photographs or drawings to attempt to visually describe their experience.<sup>4</sup> While the art-goers were not sure how to engage with the El Bulli meal *as art*, Marta Arzak and Josep Maria Pinto point out that Adrià was likewise surprised by the "general lack of knowledge within the art world for the world of avant-garde cuisine."<sup>5</sup>

Adrià's inclusion in Documenta 12 specifically highlighted the role of food as a mediator in aesthetic experience and the disciplines into which it intervenes, but it also revealed the lack of a shared and sustained vocabulary with which to describe this experience. The coming together of art and food at Documenta speaks to a confluence of concerns in the art world and the world of cuisine—namely the paramount role of food beyond a biological imperative. This issue of *Invisible Culture*, "Aesthetes and Eaters: Food and Artistry," takes food to be a multifaceted practice that includes the production and consumption of food, as well as modes of sociality specific to cooking and eating. We seek to situate these practices outside of strict disciplinary boundaries, and in many cases to disrupt them.

The history of food in art is rich and varied. Pop artists such as Andy Warhol and Claes Oldenburg often used food products (and food brands) to comment on popular culture and consumerism. In the same period, food products were also used as materials for sculptural works. Piero Manzoni's "Achrome" paintings often featured organic items such as bread or eggs. In his "snare pictures," Daniel Spoerri glued the leftovers of a meal to the tabletop, and then

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<sup>4</sup> Juan Dávila and Graeme Smith, "Feedback," in *Food for Thought, Thought for Food*, 137.

<sup>5</sup> Marta Arzak and Josep Maria Pinto, "Ferran Adrià's Participation in Documenta 12," in *Food for Thought, Thought for Food*, 108.

mounted it at 90 degrees on a gallery wall; he would also eventually open his own restaurant, Restaurant de la Galerie J, in the space of an art gallery. Tom Marioni similarly created a bar inside an art gallery, and the Fluxus movement often organized conceptual meals. In the early 1970s, the artist Gordon Matta-Clark co-owned and worked in the SoHo restaurant "FOOD," which was frequented by many of the artists who lived or worked in the neighborhood and which often hosted elaborate, conceptually-themed dinners with artists serving as guest chefs.

Art historians have acknowledged the food-themed or food-based works by artists better known for other kinds of work; however, little scholarship has been done on the qualities and meanings particular to the use of food, its preparation, and its spaces as an *artistic medium*. Instead, food has often served as only a symbol of other cultural or aesthetic themes. One prominent example of this practice is Nicolas Bourriaud's classic study on 1990s art, *Relational Aesthetics*. For Bourriaud, the Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija's gallery feasts, in which the artist prepares curry for gallery or museum visitors, are representative of a new form of sociality and artistic participation in the art space. However, he does not examine the specific practice of food in Tiravanija's staged social relations.

Food production and the theorization of food preparation as a form of artistry share with the art projects discussed above a concern with the formal characteristics of the food object. Philosophers such as Elizabeth Telfer, Carolyn Korsmeyer, and Allen S. Weiss have variously attempted to define and explore the aesthetic nature of food and eating in terms of other theoretical or philosophical models of experience, such as the sublime. In his essay, "How Can Food Be Art?", Kuehn uses the philosophy of John Dewey to argue for a transformative potential of aesthetic experience, and, more broadly, for the potential of aesthetic experience to occur in daily encounters. As an aesthetic object, the various ephemeral properties of food—its temporality, its necessary destruction through consumption, its usually non-mimetic nature, and its general inutility as a medium to express or record its creator's emotion—might be seen as negating food from the context of art; Kuehn argues instead that "an aesthetics of food shows another way in which primal aspects of valuing how we live can be expressed through articulate modes of experience."<sup>6</sup> While food, and the artistry involved in it, may not conform to a strict

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<sup>6</sup> Glenn Kuehn, "How Can Food Be Art?", in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, eds. Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), 210.

philosophical aesthetics, it does perhaps lead to a different mode of aesthetics in which our experiences in the social and everyday world become the site of artful meaning-making. Sociologists Jonathan Murdoch and Mara Miele have examined alternative food movements such as Slow Food and Locavorism in terms of sensory and reflexive experience, conceiving of food as both an aesthetic and ethical practice.

The study of food, through an examination of its properties beyond purely biological or functional ones, might contribute to a theorization of everyday life that takes aesthetics into account. The tools and language used to enact this examination share much with art historical discourse and criticism in terms of definitions of what constitutes an art object, and might also be used to elucidate the specific role of food in works of art. Our goal for this issue is to undertake an exploration of food and art that includes and interrelates both social and art historical theories. Part of this involves the creation of a multisensory platform to fit the multisensory dimensions of food in, and as, art. To do so, we have included peer-reviewed academic essays, experimental writings, art projects, videos, and sounds to challenge not only what might be considered a work of art, but also to explore under-analyzed sensory forms that a work of art can take.

The first section of the issue, "Eating Words," contains propositions for written and sensory vocabularies that might be used to discuss food in the arts and food as an art.<sup>7</sup> Yael Raviv's essay "Eating My Words" examines a series of artistic, performance-based projects mounted at the 2008 Umami: food and art festival in New York. Charting the ways we discuss food as a medium in both artistic and culinary practices, Raviv uses the work of aesthetic philosophers to consider different critical terminologies with which to discuss the experience of food and eating. Raviv's argument, as well as her position as a performance studies scholar and producer of the Umami: food and art festival, demonstrate the potential of food to help us rethink our ideas of artistic value, and points to the need for a new language that takes account of its multidisciplinary and multisensory meanings as performance, art, craft, and cultural production. Mimi Oka and Doug Fitch, an artist group discussed in Raviv's article, have contributed photographic documentation of

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<sup>7</sup> The following refers to the structure and thematic layout of the online version of this issue. See: [http://www.rochester.edu/in\\_visible\\_culture/Issue\\_14/index.html](http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/Issue_14/index.html).

their work “Orphic Memory Sausage,” a performance in which any and all items were ritualistically combined into a large sausage link and distributed among the audience-participants. In their companion essay, Oka and Fitch redefine “edibility” and the ways in which their artistic practice challenges traditional notions of what it means to consume. In “How to Cook a Heart with Butcher Mario Ribaud: Dialogues of 4 Heart Recipes,” Annie Rachele Lanzillotto collaborates with the Arthur Avenue Retail Market in the Bronx to create visual and narrative descriptions of family traditions and recipes. Francisco M. Palma-Dias’s “Liquefied Lusitania: A Paradoxical Country” explores the natural and gastronomic richness of Portugal and the recently renewed interest in centuries-old agricultural practices. We are excited to publish it here in partial-translation for the first time as an example of the potential of experimental writing practices to encapsulate the meanings of a particular food ecology and its itinerant meanings and politics.

Our second section, “Kitchen Paraphernalia,” collects together projects that examine the potentially non-culinary uses and meanings of kitchen and eating utensils. One of the most elaborate explorations of this theme occurs in the work of the musical composer and performer Fast Forward, whose instruments in the work “Musique à la Mode (MALMO)” are materials generally used for the preparation and consumption of food. We include here the visual score for MALMO, the video documentation of Fast Forward’s solo performance in New York, as well as the online premiere of two sound recordings of the newly-conceived quartet performance in Berlin (comprised of Fast Forward, David Moss, David Linton, and Michael Evans). Nicole Peyrafitte tests the sensory and spatial definitions of food and performance through her “mélange” work, “The Bi-Continental Chowder.” In this video documentation of the performance, Peyrafitte recounts poetry, dances, and narrates and cooks a chowder to impart to the audience a sensory connection of memory, culture, and place represented by her two homes—Albany, NY and Luchon, France. As a soundtrack to eating, Anthony Leslie has curated a musical playlist inspired by the sounds of food production and consumption. Kate Hanson’s article, “The Language of the Banquet: Reconsidering Paolo Veronese’s *Marriage at Cana*,” looks to renaissance rituals, and tools of the banquet to consider the contemporaneous reception of Veronese’s painting. Hanson also elucidates the value of a social history of food and eating to the field of art historical analysis.

Our third section, "Leftover Menus," explores the medium of the menu. The artist group EIDIA is best known for its video work "The Starving Artist Cookbook (1986-1991)," which documents, through 150 video segments, artists such as Lynda Benglis, Louise Bourgeois, Tony Conrad, Lawrence Weiner, Jonas Mekas, and John Cage (whose "Soup des Jours" is included on our website) cooking their favorite recipes from their personal menus. The work's aim was to explore the idea of an artist's actual relation to life practices, and as a final documentation of artistic communality—a form of artistic life that the artists perceived to be disappearing in the 1980s. Out of a discussion of this work with this issue's co-editor Paula Pinto, EIDIA has allowed *Invisible Culture* to host, for the first time online, three segments from their earlier work "The Chelsea Tapes (1983-1991)," one of which documents the initial conception of "The Starving Artist Cookbook." EIDIA's original textual contribution, "Eat me!," rethinks the historical moment of the work's production, and the specific use of food as a means of exploring artists and their social standing. Rebecca Federman, a librarian at the New York Public Library's culinary collection and author of the blog Cooked Books, shares a series of her favorite menus, historical and eccentric, from the online holdings of the NYPL's impressive repository, and considers the possibilities of this collection for future research. Artist Steve Dalachinsky's project playfully imagines what might have existed on the menu board if Kafka had owned a deli.

Changing perceptions of food, especially in terms of its various sensory apprehensions, frame the projects in our fourth section, "Do Fish Smell?" Barbara Philipp's video "La Belle Vue/The Great View," originally an installation piece but displayed here on its own as a video work, is an obscured video recording of a musty wine cellar that paradoxically emphasizes senses other than the visual. Cary Levine's article "You Are What (and How) You Eat: Paul McCarthy's Food-Flinging Frenzies" explores McCarthy's use of food products in his performances, in particular analyzing these works in relation to theoretical and cultural definitions of compulsive consumption in gustatory, sexual, and economic forms, themes relevant to 1960s American culture in which the works were produced. Most importantly, Levine's article demonstrates the power of food to serve as a demarcation of various types of social norms, as well as a clear signal of when these norms are crossed. While not dealing explicitly with food, Katie McGowan's experimental audio documentary "The Smell of Eddie Griggs' Dad Lying Next to the Christmas Tree After Pouring Concrete" takes on an expanded definition of aesthetic

experience by focusing on smell, bringing together narratives of memory through musings on the olfactory. Bioproduction and food manufacture have served as key political discussions in the public sphere, and the confusion and rhetoric around these issues informs “Free Range Grain” by Critical Art Ensemble, Beatriz da Costa, and Shyh-shiun Shyu. Building a food testing facility inside a museum, the project develops an immediate and public science in order to demystify the origins of food. *Invisible Culture* reproduces here the project statement and visual materials documenting the project.

Our final section, “On the Edge of the Table,” elaborates the potential of food’s surreal and uncanny qualities. Photographer Susana Reisman playfully recreates masterpieces of Minimalist and Conceptual art using food and serving ware, prompting Marusya Bociurkiw to examine their affective potential in her companion essay to the works. Janine Catalano looks to the underside of surrealism in her essay “Distasteful: An Investigation of Food’s Subversive Function in René Magritte’s *The Portrait* and Meret Oppenheim’s *Ma Gouvernante—My Nurse—Mein Kindermädchen*.” Using Georges Bataille’s theoretical writings on the eye and debasement, Catalano argues that the surrealist works she discusses challenge the viewer’s ideas about consumption in visual and physical terms, and thus provide a politics of eating. Julia Pine’s “Breaking Dalinian Bread: On Consuming the Anthropomorphic, Performative, Ferocious, and Eucharistic Loaves of Salvador Dalí” presents an alternative narrative of Dalí’s career, using his obsession with bread as its crux.

Taken as a piece, these writings and works emphasize the variety of forms and meanings that the coming together of food and art can take. They also reveal the critical potential of aesthetes and eaters to expand the parameters of artistic practice, art history, and cultural studies.



# Eating My Words: Talking About Food in Performance

Yael Raviv

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*Speech leaves no mark in space. . . . But writing contaminates;  
writing leaves its trace, a trace beyond the life of the body.*

—Susan Stewart, 1993

Following a recent presentation of Miwa Koizumi's installation *NY Ice Cream Flavors* at *Umami: food and art festival* (2008) I heard an audience member comment on Koizumi's lox ice cream: "this could use more acid." This remark, though insightful from a culinary point of view, seemed somehow irrelevant in this particular case. When I later tried to understand why the comment disturbed me, I realized it embodied many of the questions I had regarding the discussion and analysis of food in the context of artistic performance. The slippage between food as artistic medium and food as culinary medium is most pronounced in live performance, particularly performances involving actual consumption. This ambiguity calls into question the tools we currently use for the analysis of these performances: whether we use terminology borrowed from the culinary world or from the art world, we seem to lose an important part of the work in the process of description and analysis. By examining some of the projects presented at *Umami: food and art festival*, I would like to call into question the way we read and interpret these performances, considering the role of food as an artistic medium rather than as subject or material.

*Umami* brought together artists who use food in their work with food professionals. This two week long event, co-produced with Roulette in SoHo, was created in 2008 to promote a two-fold mission: to encourage non-commercial, time-based art, showing that art is an integral part of everyday life and accessible to a wide public, and to

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\* I would like to thank the following people who not only contributed greatly to *Umami: food and art festival*, but also to my thinking on food and art: Ame Gilbert, Annie Lanzillotto, Fast Forward, Einav Gefen, Judith Levin, Will Goldfarb, Anne McBride, and Caron Smith.

present food as a powerful, relevant medium. The festival focused on artistic creations that are multi-disciplinary, multi-sensory, and grounded in the everyday. By focusing on food, *Umami* was able to promote art that is accessible on a variety of levels (leading to a different notion of the “value” of art) and to draw attention to issues of consumption in our society. One of the main goals of the festival was to promote collaboration and dialog between artists and food professionals in order to possibly lead to new insights, new ideas, and to enhance both artistic production and culinary practice.

As the producer of *Umami*, I was privileged to work with some wonderful artists and food professionals, and benefited from the aid of several local organizations from both the art and the food worlds, including the James Beard Foundation, Franklin Furnace, the Fales Collection at NYU, and the Experimental Cuisine Collective, among others (as well as the generous support of several food and beverage manufactures and purveyors). I enjoyed the position of participant-observer: not one of the artists, yet intimately familiar with the work; not quite belonging to either world, but privy to the insights of thoughtful practitioners from both. In a way, my position embodies my project in this paper by straddling the worlds of both art and food.

In this paper I will explore the blurry boundaries between food in culinary settings and its use as an artistic medium. I want to suggest that food can serve as an example of the need to rethink our ideas about what constitutes art, how we assign value, and how we form a division between art and life, and between artistic medium and craft. Granted, the debate of “what is art” is long and extensive and, not being a philosopher or an art historian, I feel ill-prepared for tackling the full range of its related questions. However, I wish to come to this debate from a different viewpoint, focusing on what the notion of food as medium can add to this larger question.

This discussion seems particularly timely due to the recent changes in the food world and their impact on the way artists employ food in their work. Certain “conceptual” chefs, such as Ferran Adrià of El Bulli in Spain or Grant Achatz of Alinea Restaurant in Chicago, have contributed to a public perception of food as a creative medium by positing food as works of art as well as merely dinner. As the chef became more like an artist and the restaurant became a site for

unexpected surprises and multi-sensory experiences, artists who used food began exploring the medium with new insights and interests. Mimi Oka and Doug Fitch, for example, began their careers as “sustenance artists” by staging fantastic feasts inspired by F.T. Marinetti’s *Futurist Cookbook*. In such works, the audience dined in the middle of a pond or excavated their food out of baked clay sculptures. By working with food, Oka and Fitch examined questions of consumption, consumerism, and the value of art. Food provided a tool for the creation of time-based projects that force their audience to pause and think, to reexamine everyday objects and acts. In recent years, though still focused on consumption, Oka and Fitch have turned more and more towards inedible objects or refuse (what remains of food after it is digested). They are still interested in exploring similar questions, but their earlier work focused on the act of consumption and enjoyment, which seems redundant compared with the experience at certain restaurants today. Kelly Dobson is another example of an artist whose work with food blurs the boundaries between art and life, and forces the audience to look at everyday objects in a new light. Dobson’s work utilizes her engineering background to produce “talking” household machines.<sup>1</sup> Whereas Oka and Fitch move from actual consumption towards an exploration of inedible or refuse products, Dobson’s work circumvents the problem of working with food today: her interactive blender forces her audience to focus on the mode of production, on the process, and on sound, rather than on consumption of a product, or visual presentation. She thereby positions herself further away from the realm of actual culinary production and the restaurant world, a seeming necessity in order for her works to be deemed as art.

The change in the food world, as well as in these and other artists’ approaches to working with food, seems to demand a corresponding change in the language of speaking and writing about food as a medium. It implies that we must expand our view and definition of food as a creative medium. The range of responses, approaches, and multi-sensory experiences generated by artists working with food today not only emphasizes food’s power and range as a creative medium, but also forces us to reexamine the way

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly Dobson, 2003-2004, <http://web.media.mit.edu/~monster/blendie/>, last accessed January, 2010.

we view food in a culinary setting by putting it in the context of artistic creation.

### *MISE EN PLACE*

This paper focuses on artists who use food as a *medium*. I wish to distinguish these artists' works from those of artists who use food as their *subject*—for instance, a painting of peaches by Paul Cézanne, Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Can*, or Juzo Itami's movie *Tampopo*. The works I discuss here also differ from these examples in that they are performance-based. These live events emphasize all that is unique about food as a medium, amplifying some of specific characteristics relevant to this discussion. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has demonstrated, cooking techniques, dining rituals, and culinary codes are already highly elaborated, charged with meaning, and theatrical. Food, like performance, is "an art of the concrete . . . alive, fugitive and sensory."<sup>2</sup> She argues that in order for food to perform as art it must go through a series of dissociations: dissociation of food from eating and eating from nourishment.<sup>3</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett examines the work of performing artists who use food as their medium by dividing them into categories according to their relationship to the food system: to what part of the food cycle do they refer, do they work with it or against it? She refers to a previous survey by Linda Montano who also discussed artists who use food as a medium, dividing the work into categories such as "food as political statement," "feminist statement," or "sculptural material."<sup>4</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett questions Montano's system, stating that, while descriptively accurate, it is not instructive or illuminating regarding the relationship between different works. In light of the recent changes in the food world, it seems appropriate to review and perhaps add another layer to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's analysis.

Coming from the discipline of Performance Studies, which focuses on the study of temporal, multi-sensory, live events, I never

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Playing to the Senses: Food as a Performance Medium," in *Performance Research* 4:1 (Spring 1999), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Montano, "Food and Art," in *High Performance* 4:4 (Winter 1981-2), 46-55.

questioned food's legitimacy as an art form. Other scholars who contemplated food's relationship to art often began by considering the problem of a temporary medium to qualify as Art—a question that for someone engaged in the study of live performance has already been answered.<sup>5</sup> Other scholars who may follow the aesthetic theory that Art should offer an experience for its own sake, with no “instrumental” value, would also immediately discount food as a candidate for this category. Philosopher Noël Carroll's critique of the traditional Western notion of aesthetic experience examines the centrality of the idea of an aesthetic experience as one “valued for its own sake” in Western thought and questions its validity for defining and experiencing artwork.<sup>6</sup> I would suggest that the traditional Western concept of the artwork as having no instrumental value has hindered the viewing of culinary products as artistic creations.

When Carroll contemplates how to identify art, he states that “[c]lassifying a candidate as artwork . . . is integral to determining how we should respond to it.” Namely, should we interpret it or clean it up (or in this case, interpret or eat it up)? Carroll continues to suggest a way to define works of art, particularly in cases when, “the suspicion is abroad that it is not art (such as in Marcel Duchamp's readymades, Merce Cunningham's choreography, or Damien Hirst's work).” His suggestion can be useful here: “We classify a candidate as an artwork by placing it in a tradition.” We tell a historical narrative that places the work in relationship to previous, already agreed upon art objects (either as a development or as a revolt against a previous practice). One of Carroll's central assertions regarding this method of classification is that narrating rather than defining art stresses the important role of artistic aims, or intentions. It positions art as a social practice.<sup>7</sup>

The fact that food is transient and utilitarian has contributed to some scholars' positioning it as a “minor” or “low” art. The philosophical debate concerning the distinction between high and low art, or between traditional forms and new forms, “serious” art

<sup>5</sup> See: Glenn Kuehn, “How Can Food Be Art?”, in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, eds. A. Light and J.M. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 194-212.

<sup>6</sup> Noël Carroll, “Aesthetic Experience, Art and Artists,” in *Aesthetic Experience*, eds. R. Shusterman and A. Tomlin (London and NY: Routledge, 2008), 145-165.

<sup>7</sup> Noel Carroll, “Identifying Art,” in *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (NY: Routledge, 1999), 249-64.

and mass art or entertainment (film, photography, the internet, and many other new forms come under such scrutiny) is wide-ranging, but it is worth mentioning here, since the question of food's status as art is often related to it.<sup>8</sup> Glenn Kuehn's critique of Elizabeth Telfer's work on food examines Telfer's assertion that food is a "minor" art. Kuehn attempts to refute this point by using John Dewey's theory of aesthetic experience, asserting that an aesthetic experience is based on interaction and can be found in everyday experiences.<sup>9</sup> Dewey's assertion that ordinary experiences within everyday life could be appreciated as aesthetic experiences, and that traditional classifications of "Art" hinder our appreciation and understanding of new forms, is particularly useful here since the artists this paper describes make a point of working the blurry division between art and life, and, in fact, have chosen to work with food because of its relationship to both, allowing them to mine the slippage and ambiguity between the worlds of art and everyday life, between the categories of "high" and "low."<sup>10</sup>

Carolyn Korsmeyer's work on the concept of taste illuminates the implications of employing the word "taste" to the evaluation of art. "As a bodily sense, taste is inevitably linked with pleasure or displeasure [providing] a sensory response that tends to carry a positive or a negative balance."<sup>11</sup> In other words, objects are not only perceived, but also liked or disliked, emphasizing the subjectivity of the experience. Since taste is one of the five senses, it also implies the necessity of a first-hand experience (direct contact) for making an aesthetic judgment. Both the notion of the subjectivity of artistic experience and the need for direct contact play an important role in evaluating food-performances. The concept of taste, as analyzed by Korsmeyer, emphasizes the significant contribution that a discussion of food and performance may offer to the wider debate on the nature of art and the art experience.

In Korsmeyer's further work on food, she demonstrates that the most significant element in appreciating food as an aesthetic category lays in its "meaning-bearing qualities that give food its cognitive

<sup>8</sup> For example, see: John A. Fisher, "High Art vs. Low Art," in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, eds. B. Gaut and D. MaIver Lopes (London and NY: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Kuehn, "How Can Food Be Art?"

<sup>10</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigree, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Carolyn Korsmeyer, "Taste," in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, 269.

significance,” positioning the subjective pleasure we derive from food as secondary.<sup>12</sup> This argument is important in the context of this paper, since I propose that one of the innovations in the work of new or experimental chefs is that they are conscious of these “meaning-bearing” properties and employ them deliberately in their creations to give the diner pause and make her think. As stated above, the work of chefs like Ferran Adrià or Grant Achatz have influenced the way artists use food today, and should therefore also influence the way we think and write about food and art. Attending meetings of the Experimental Cuisine Collective, a collaboration between the Chemistry and Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health Departments at NYU and professional local chefs such as Will Goldfarb, I often witnessed discussions on the relationship between the “new” cookery or, as it is sometimes known, “Molecular Gastronomy” and science.<sup>13</sup> However, the more I learn about the thinking and influences behind this “new” cooking, the more I see its connection to the world of art. These chefs may employ new techniques, equipment, or substances borrowed from laboratories, but what they produce with these tools are culinary creations that are designed to surprise, to provoke, and to make us think. I want to emphasize that not everyone who uses gelling agents or creates foams is necessarily an artist, but some of these chefs attempt to make the diner stop and think, see a substance or a dish in a new light, and reevaluate her preconceptions. They do so by using food as a medium, by dissociating eating from nutrition, by blurring the boundaries between life and art. Ferran Adrià’s apple caviar or dried fish in cotton candy are not just playful, but also thought provoking.

This paper will focus on the work of Mimi Oka and Doug Fitch in *Orphic Memory Sausage*, and on Miwa Koizumi’s *New York Ice Cream Flavors*. Both were presented as part of *Umami: food and art festival*, 2008. These artists use food deliberately, as part of a larger project to alter our perception of the everyday, by blurring the distinction between art and life. By looking at these artists’ work, I

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<sup>12</sup> Carolyn Korsmeyer, “Taste, Food, and the limits of Pleasure,” in *Aesthetic Experience*, 128.

<sup>13</sup> Inspired by the work of Hervé This in France, the collective meets on a monthly basis to discuss issues at the intersection of food, science, and professional cookery, particularly exploring what is known as Molecular Gastronomy.

will highlight some of the distinctions between using food in a culinary setting and employing it as a medium for artistic expression. I argue that, because of its precarious position between art and life, the discussion of food as a medium lacks a more specialized language and tools. We have developed a sophisticated vocabulary for analyzing food in a restaurant or in culinary settings and we have complicated and subtle ways of talking and writing about art. We tend to borrow language from either realm for discussing food in the context of artistic performance—"It needs a little more acid," for example—but often what we need is some synthesis of the two. We need a vocabulary that can adequately refer to taste and smell sensations in an aesthetic context, and this will help us to narrate them into a (hi)story of art. These tools can serve not only toward a better understanding of artists' work, but also may be applied to the work of chefs who use food as a medium in a culinary context, helping enhance our understanding of what constitutes art.

### ***ORPHIC MEMORY SAUSAGE***

Mimi Oka and Doug Fitch describe themselves as "sustenance artists." They share a background in theater as well as having studied at the Cordon Bleu in Paris. Each one had independently been impressed with Marinetti's *Futurist Cookbook* and, after reconnecting in Japan, they joined forces to create work inspired by it. Beginning with edible objects and progressing over the past thirteen years to entire feasts, Oka and Fitch have created a series of events they refer to as "Orphic feasts." The word Orphic is derived from the art movement Orphism: painting for its own sake, not meant as a representation of anything else. In the same vein, Oka and Fitch wish to explore food as a medium for its own sake, calling their creations "art in edible media."<sup>14</sup> In other words, Oka and Fitch define themselves not as sculptors, or performers, or photographers that happen to focus on food in their work, but rather as artists whose medium *is* food. Whether they create an edible object, present it in a gallery and invite the audience to consume it as part of the exhibition, build an enormous sandwich with an entire village in France and

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.orph.us>, last accessed January, 2010.



consume it with the community, or offer their audience an elaborate meal around a floating table in the middle of a pond, Oka and Fitch use food to extend our perception of art. The fact that their medium is consumable in the most literal sense is central to their work. Oka and Fitch also exploit the communal nature and layers of meaning associated with different foodstuffs, but the edibility of their chosen medium was essential to their work until very recently—when the work of some current chefs made them feel that they needed to find new avenues of exploration.

For *Orphic Memory Sausage* (2008), Oka and Fitch invited the audience to bring objects that evoke a memory. This could be anything and everything from dried fish to shoes, computers to hair—any kind of souvenir that “you would like to turn into a sausage.” During the performance, the objects were pulverized, mashed, chopped, or ground by the artists, the audience members, and a few volunteer assistants. Everyone worked together using tools from hammers and wire cutters to food processors. The mashed objects were mixed with a kind of papier-mâché paste, stuffed into sausage skins (pork casings), and hung to dry. Different corners of the space, on the edge of the central area of activity, offered opportunities for people to speak about their objects on camera or write about them on a long scroll. At the end of the event, each audience member could take home a “link of collective memory sausage” signed by the artists.

*Memory Sausage* was a performance of conflicting impulses: violently breaking up objects that supposedly carry cherished memories; aggressive, loud actions like smashing, cutting, or grinding followed by a gentle act of mixing everything by hand into a soft paste and carefully stuffing it into the sausage skins; a communal action juxtaposed with the telling or writing of individual stories; turning personal, discrete objects into a communal mass and then back again into distinct objects that can be “owned” again by individual audience members (though signed by the artists). These incongruities complicate the relationship between individual and community, inside and outside, the personal and the public.

This performance used kitchen equipment and techniques, and some kitchen materials alongside other methods to create an *inedible*



food object. However, the influence of food as a medium was apparent in more than simply the technical process. Even though there was no actual consumption, the performance was very tactile and sensual, insisting that the audience interact with the material in an intimate way, using their hands to break, mix, stuff, and shape, always remaining close to the action, as well as smelling, hearing, and touching. The performance employed the community building aspect associated with many traditional food activities (bringing a group of people together to “cook” or manufacture or harvest). The use of the traditional sausage stuffing equipment that the artists brought from Portugal enhanced this aspect.<sup>15</sup> Insisting on signing these communally created objects raised interesting questions of authorship: Who was responsible for this product? Is there room for communal work in today’s art market? What makes a product into a work of art? What gives it its value?

In *Memory Sausage*, Oka and Fitch continue their exploration of themes such as consumption, the value of art, and the relationship between art and the everyday, which they had examined in previous

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<sup>15</sup> This performance was originally devised and performed in Portugal as a free, outdoor event (2006) and was adapted to New York for the Umami festival.

works. In an earlier project *Good Taste in Art, pasta paintings* (1999 and 2000), the artists created hand-made, colorful pasta that was then composed into framed pictures. The paintings were displayed in a gallery where the audience could purchase them and then choose whether they would rather take their new acquisition home to hang on their wall, or whether they would rather take it next door, where chef Daniel Boulud would cook and sauce it for them to consume on the spot.<sup>16</sup>

In this project, Oka and Fitch did not only create a piece of visual art made of pasta, they also proceeded to involve their audience in the work, forcing them to make decisions that highlight their culpability in the process of consumption. The edibility of their medium was essential to the project. Their audience could not contemplate the work from afar, but was rather directly involved with the piece and the consequences of its consumption in the most intimate way. The artists did not try to transform food into art by making it “last,” by using pasta instead of paint or clay, but rather the nature of their medium, its “reason for being,” its edibility, was essential to the project.

*Memory Sausage* inverts some of these ideas, seeming at first glance to be radically different from the earlier work in its inedible nature, but in fact posing similar questions. Their move away from a celebrity chef and a fine dining setting to rely on a communal project and a “lowly” food product (traditionally made from “scraps”) emphasizes the power of food as a medium in any setting; i.e., the “art” is not located in the work of the professional chef, but rather can be found in the most common object, and in the work of lay-people. This is another example of Oka and Fitch’s reaction to current trends in the culinary world: a move from staging events that echo high-cuisine and fine dining to events based on traditional cooking and communal work. The fact that a sausage should be edible is not incidental; the fact that it is made to be un-edible and lasting is a powerful comment: were the artists to grind together these “souvenirs” and shape them into a communal book or picture or chair, the project would not carry the same layers of meaning. The transformation of a transitory, perishable, time-bound object into a lasting, constant artifact speaks to the nature of memory and of art,

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<sup>16</sup> More information and images from this project can be seen on the artists’ website <http://www.orph.us>.





and to the place and status of transitory products in the art-world. The fact that sausages should be edible and that they are traditionally created as a group (not individual) endeavor is essential to the project. Their nature as a communal product draws attention to the absurd nature of the individual artist's signature on the final product.



Chef Ferran Adrià's work has been publicly marked as art by his inclusion in the 2007 Documenta art fair in Germany. This change in high-end dining (both in the chef's approach and in its perception and classification by the public) has forced artists who work with food in a similar way to rethink their use of food.<sup>17</sup> In an interview, Oka pointed to the recent changes within the food world pushing the

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<sup>17</sup> A few random examples of dishes served at Ferran Adrià's El Bulli restaurant as part of the 2007 Documenta event: capsules of virgin olive oil or apple that look, feel, and are served like caviar; a single bite of a perfect quail egg yolk enclosed in caramel; a spring of virgin olive oil caramel served in a jewelry box, Tai pink grapefruit risotto with coconut and white sesame; frozen parmesan air with muesli. These examples and a detailed examination of Adrià's work at Documenta can be found in *Food for Thought, Thought for Food*, eds. Richard Hamilton and Vicente Todoli (Barcelona and New York: Actar, 2009).

dining experience in some restaurants in the direction of the work they used to present in their Orphic Feasts.<sup>18</sup> Creating small scale feasts for a limited audience, offering multi-sensory stimuli, presenting food that prompts the diners to rethink preconceptions and familiar notions, exploring the sense of taste and smell as well as texture, providing an interactive experience—all of these points aptly describe Oka and Fitch's Orphic Feasts, but could also be applied to the culinary work of Ferran Adrià, Grant Achatz, or several other chefs today who confound diners' expectations.

Fitch and Oka are still interested in taste and in consumption, but they are less interested in the type of event that involves an actual feast. The shift from creating "art in edible media (like the feasts or the pasta paintings)" to inedible art using culinary techniques and methods is part of a larger process for these artists. The shift in focus from product (a meal) to process (in this case, sausage making) in their most recent projects is partly an economic choice: creating elaborate feasts is expensive, time consuming, and can only accommodate a small audience; but these economic considerations reflect a broader concern with the exclusivity of these events.

Relying on the communal aspect of food preparation, on traditional methods, on creating art whose relationship with consumption is more complex, Fitch and Oka are moving away from small, "elitist" events to more inclusive projects.

In preparing for the performance, Oka and Fitch were very particular about structuring the space (originally, a white walled gallery space) as a clearly marked "performance space," i.e., black walls, focused lighting, accompanying live music, and costumes (white lab coats). Since the event is so close to an everyday cooking/sausage manufacturing event, it needs special markers to distance it from everyday life. The everyday actions and subject matter could take on additional meaning and function as artistic creations only if the audience perceives them clearly as an artistic endeavor. Creating an inedible object rather than a real meal also helps support the artists' intention framing the project more clearly as an "art event" rather than a culinary one.

Oka and Fitch strive to change the way we think about everyday experiences. They use food and taste as a way to retain the communal, collaborative interaction with the audience, and the

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<sup>18</sup> Phone interview with author, New York, July, 2008.

interdisciplinary and inclusive approach to everyday objects and actions. As food in high-end restaurants moves toward the performative, Oka and Fitch turn to traditional processes, exploring rural, communal based production of food—approaching the food chain from the reverse end.

### *NY ICE CREAM FLAVORS*

Miwa Koizumi, like Fitch and Oka, uses food as an artistic medium, but unlike Fitch and Oka's larger scale, communal performance events, Koizumi creates more intimate installations. For Koizumi, food is only one of the everyday materials she employs in her work: her projects range from sculptures made of plastic water bottles and kites made out of shopping bags to tasting flavored air and capturing images of taste experiences a few months after the event, when they have begun to deteriorate and decompose.<sup>19</sup> These materials, however, seem to be largely the least valued, marginal, or overlooked (plastic bags or bottles, rotting food)—like Oka and Fitch's sausages. Koizumi says she is drawn to food because it allows her to focus on the chemical senses (taste and smell) that she feels are generally overlooked in artistic experience (in line with her interest in the marginal), and to explore their relationship to memory. She is concerned with the traces of events, with the memory of temporary objects and actions. Food allows her to bridge these interests with a more recent concern in cultural diversity and difference, and immigrants' experiences. In a recent email conversation Koizumi remarked: "food has a way of both cutting through cultural differences and underlining them with a directness that is difficult to equal in another medium."<sup>20</sup> A generalized name for a dish such as fried chicken, chicken-noodle soup, or meatballs signifies a specific combination of ingredients, spices, and techniques within diverse cultures and cuisines. Not only does the makeup of the dish change, its context and meaning (home or professional cooking, holiday or everyday, upper or lower class, etc.) also shift. These tremendous

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<sup>19</sup> PET project, 2005, Kite Project, 2008, Spritz-Spirit, 2003, Gouttes à Goûts, 2000. <http://miwa.metm.org>, last accessed January, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Email interview with the author, September 2008.



variations within a seemingly familiar frame can offer unique insight into another culture.

In the project I would like to focus on here, *NY Ice Cream Flavors*, Koizumi not only explores taste and smell as triggers of memory, she also focuses on a particular kind of memory: on foods that are culturally specific, with unique ethnic associations which she frames deliberately in the context of immigration, rather than as an originary affiliation. While *Memory Sausage* mined the tension between fleeting, intangible memories and preserved, lasting products, between individual memories and communal property, *NY Ice Cream Flavors* focuses its investigation on the tension between the familiar and the other, and between concrete, sensual perception and ephemeral, conceptual response. While Fitch and Oka create temporary communities within their culinary performances, Koizumi's work speaks to the connection between her audience and a larger community, a community outside the realm of the specific performance. She creates a very intimate event that, through the use of food, links her audience with a specific ethnic community while simultaneously calling this connection into question.

In *NY Ice Cream Flavors*, Koizumi created ice cream flavors based on different New York neighborhoods. She presented the audience with two complementing flavors in each installation, serving the ice cream herself from a small ice cream cart. The cart itself is a nod toward many immigrants' start in the food business in New York as pushcart peddlers. The flavors presented at *Umami* were sour cream and borscht ice creams representing the East Village, and smoked salmon and bagel ice creams standing in for the Lower East Side on different evenings. Some of the other flavors Koizumi created in the past include goat cheese and fennel, congee, and curry. It is important to understand that Koizumi's ice cream is not a generic custard-based concoction with the addition of some odd flavors. Rather, they are very particular food items turned into ice cream form: not bagel-flavored ice cream, but bagel turned into ice cream. In this way, her work is evocative of the work of some current chefs playing on the audiences' preconceptions, substituting familiar textures and temperatures to give us pause, such as Nils Noren's French Onion Soup dessert (made with a pastry crust and ice cream) or Ferran Adrià's Textured Soup (made with chilled corn and cauliflower mousse, peach granita, almond ice cream, basil jelly, and beet foam). Each audience member, in turn, receives a small ice-



cream cup with two scoops, one of each flavor. The flavors are meant to be consumed together (bagel and lox, borscht and sour cream) and complement each other. The combination of the two flavors is meaningful within the cultural context (lox without bagel could be “read” differently perhaps), but are also important from a culinary perspective: the bagel toning down the fishiness of the lox ice cream, the sour cream gets a “kick” of flavor from the beet.

The link between food and immigrants’ experience has been a theme in both scholarly writing and fiction (see Krishnandu Ray, Hasia Diner, or Jumpa Lahiri to name just a few), and the sources that discuss food and culture are even more numerous and varied (from Roland Barthes and Arjun Appadurai to Amy Trubeck and Jefferey Pilcher). What does Koizumi’s work add to this conversation? How does her work with food fit into an exploration of the links between food and cultural difference, and food in a global context of change and migration?

The act of serving ice cream allows Koizumi to create a shared memory with each audience member.<sup>21</sup> Since she is literally feeding the audience, the exchange becomes very intimate. It requires a degree of trust since the flavors may seem foreign or out of context. Once on your tongue, a process of identification begins: is this ice cream? Is this a bagel? The addition of the second taste: where have I tasted this before? Where have I tasted something like this before? What happens when I taste this and think about the Lower East Side? Does it make sense (both intellectually and physically)? Does it evoke other senses and sensations?

Koizumi’s ice cream cart is an island of serenity. She distills a neighborhood into specific flavors, subtle tastes, and textures. The taste of each particular ice cream serves as a trigger, to conjure up the rest of the smells, sounds, and sights of a unique community. Koizumi’s ice cream allows her audience to “visit” ethnic communities, and to consume them, literally, but this experience is different than simply dining at an ethnic restaurant. Because the ice cream takes specific regional or national flavors out of their original context and presents them in a familiar guise, they serve as a sample or souvenir of a larger ethnic experience and community; they raise the question of what constitutes an “authentic” experience and blur the line between the original event and its traces.

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<sup>21</sup> Email interview with the author, September 2008.



In her work on nostalgia, Susan Stewart writes of the souvenir as an example of an object serving as a trace of an original, authentic experience. A souvenir, collected by an individual tourist, generates a narrative. The combination of the “sample” of the original experience and the personal narrative that accompanies it speaks to an event whose materiality escapes us; it generates nostalgia of an unattainable, original experience. A souvenir of an exotic location or experience signifies the tourist’s survival outside her familiar context, her ability to conquer or appropriate distance and the “other.” It speaks to the gap between the origin of the souvenir and that of its possessor. These objects allow tourists to appropriate and consume the cultural other.<sup>22</sup> Koizumi’s work speaks to the same logic of Stewart’s souvenir, but inverts the process, blurring the boundaries between “tourist” and other, original experience and souvenir. Unlike some other mediums, Koizumi’s work with food, much like Fitch and Oka’s, forces the audience to take an active part. They cannot remain observers, but must participate in the performance, literally consuming it (or, in Oka and Fitch’s case, even bring part of the performance with them as they leave). The very fact of this intimate participation in Koizumi’s work highlights its limitations: the distance between the audience and the ethnic groups represented in the project, the complexity of the interaction between them, the actual distance that remains despite the ability to consume the products of the “other.”

The focal point of Koizumi’s project is the tasting experience. The aesthetic experience is broader, comprised of the interaction with the artist, the ice creams as objects, and the relationship to the neighborhoods they represent, and, through them, to the larger communities. But the tasting is the most significant element in the work, the one that all of the other parts lead to and support. The dissonance between our preconception of what borscht and sour cream or bagel and lox should look, taste, and feel like, and their ice cream incarnation is what gives us pause: the taste, texture, and temperature are different from what we expect. Koizumi’s choices of dishes are easily identifiable, clearly marked ethnic foods. Her decision to recreate them in ice cream form stems from a wish to present them in a “friendly,” familiar guise, one that would

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<sup>22</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 133-139.

encourage people to experiment and engage with the products. Unlike the work of Ferran Adrià and other experimental chefs whose culinary creations might elicit similar responses, Koizumi's work is very approachable and accessible. It is not offered in the context of a high-end dining establishment, but rather served out of a pushcart. It might be presented within the space of a gallery, but it is very deliberately affordable and available to a wide public. Her target audience is not that of gastronomes or "foodies," or those with expense accounts: her work is approachable both in financial terms and in concept (familiar dishes, reconfigured as another familiar dish).

Koizumi's work also differs from these chefs' creations in another way: it is presented as art. It was created by an artist and offered in a gallery space as part of an art event. As such, the audience should be more willing to interpret it as an art piece, to "read" it as art and analyze it accordingly. How did the change in form and texture impact the view of the dish and all that it signifies? How successful was the piece in conjuring memories, associations, feelings, and thoughts about ethnic communities, culinary traditions, and their change over time and distance, or about the consumption of the "other" by the West (to name a few possibilities)? In her ice cream creations, Koizumi tries to present a good-tasting product; she is guided by certain culinary concerns in creating her ice cream, wanting to make them palatable, but their degree of deliciousness is not her central concern. Her first concern is how they speak to the overall context of the work, how the flavors trigger certain associations and memories, and raise particular social issues.

Koizumi uses food in a unique way. Her work, to me, is the ultimate example of using food *not* as a subject or a vehicle, a useful tool for a different goal, but as a medium for artistic creation. Koizumi's ice creams are obviously not your everyday vanilla, but they are not exciting culinary inventions either (like olive oil or yuzu ice cream). Their taste must not be off-putting, but they cannot simply be judged according the same criteria by which other ice creams are judged. Her innovation lies not in the culinary realm, but in the way she uses the sense of taste and the cultural affiliations and associations of food to transmit another message.

The performative element is indeed more pronounced and more common in the restaurant dining experience today—an open kitchen, an elaborate presentation on the plate, or a caviar tin miraculously full of green globules that explode in your mouth with



the most intense apple flavor. However, at the end of the day, we look for a restaurant meal to be delicious. A chef's philosophy might involve allowing simple, local ingredients to shine or coaxing surprising and multi-layered flavors out of exotic substances, but the ultimate goal in either case is that it tastes good. This must be the first consideration of a chef, even chefs whose culinary creations are meant to surprise the diner, to make her pause and think. This is not to say that an artist who works with food cannot create something delicious, but it is, in a manner of speaking, a difference in priorities. A chef's mission, a basic trait of the profession, is to create good food, the most delicious food (another reason for this difference, which I would be remiss not to mention, is that chefs run restaurants; they run a business that needs to support itself—to date, chefs cannot apply for grants and must rely on customers to survive). The same set of considerations does not apply to the artist. Whether or not the food tastes good is a secondary concern. Did the taste alter our perception? Did it add to our understanding of New York/community/ethnic groups/immigration/life? Those might be our primary concerns in evaluating Koizumi's piece. Despite this

difference, the fact that some chefs are able to do both—create delicious food that is also thought provoking (a more successful art piece?)—pushed some artists who are interested in food to explore other stages in the food cycle (as shown above in the discussion Oka and Fitch).

Reconfiguring tastes that are associated with particular social or ethnic groups and presenting them in an unexpected yet familiar culinary form, as Koizumi's ice creams do, forces the audience to pay attention to taste in a new way: taste is the central sense imbuing the piece with meaning. Because it is a chemical sense, i.e., ephemeral and subjective, it causes the focus of the piece to shift from the object to the immediate experience or sensation. Audience members have a unique, private experience inside their own mouths. The experience highlights the subjectivity of any performance event and the difficulty in documenting or analyzing this project using traditional tools. Koizumi's work is not about food, but takes food and does something deceptively simple with it: it forces us to rethink our perceptions of art and taste, and how they might both be recast in new ways.

Trying to describe Koizumi's work emphasizes our lack of useful vocabulary for talking about food in an aesthetic context. We have a highly developed vocabulary and tools for analyzing food in a restaurant, a tasting, or other cooking/eating contexts, but when it comes to discussing food as an artistic medium and taste as an aesthetic mode, we are woefully lacking. Although there is no lack of discussions of food in art, they focus on food as subject of the work and not on food as a medium, as a vehicle for meaning independent of the subject of the piece. The difficulty in writing about performance and about food (collaborative, interdisciplinary, ephemeral events) is compounded by our lack of analytic tools for the evaluation of food in an art context. Rendering the food inedible helps force us to treat it as any other art object (as in Oka and Fitch), but if the performance involves actual consumption, it appears very difficult to think about it in terms that are not concerned with its "deliciousness." We are accustomed to think about food in terms of flavor and aroma, and to evaluate it, as we would in a restaurant or tasting, on the merit of its flavors and aromas: Does it taste good? What would make it taste better? We are not usually called upon to think about food in other ways (with the obvious exception of nutritional analysis) and thus have not developed ways of thinking about food as we would of other aesthetic mediums. Returning to Noël Carroll: when we encounter food as a potential candidate for an



art object, do we interpret or eat it? I argue that in cases that call for both, we need some additional tools for analysis.

Writing about ephemeral events and about taste and smell in particular highlights the need for subjective, individual voices and new ways for describing and thinking about performance. Since our perception of these experiences is subjective, our senses of taste and smell unique, they render the very idea of an objective account suspect. The notion of “thick description” for the discussion of a performance event is problematic, since we are lacking the proper vocabulary to make such a description meaningful. Leslie Vosshall’s work on smell, for example, shows us how individualized our sense perception is, how the same substance can smell sweet and floral to one person, and musty and revolting to another.<sup>23</sup> This is more than just a question of individual “taste”; it is a biological difference that forces us to rethink our ideas of an “objective” account.

When I began writing this essay, I thought my central argument would focus on the stakes for developing a new vocabulary for discussing food as an aesthetic medium and its implications regarding our need to develop more subjective and diverse voices within academic writing and performance analysis. However, thinking through these issues and these artists’ projects, I realized that developing tools for thinking about food as an aesthetic medium could also contribute greatly to our understanding of the work of some of the new chefs working in high end restaurants today. A variety of terms such as Molecular Gastronomy or scientific cooking was invented in the media to describe and categorize this new work, but, as the recent treatment of Adrià’s previously mentioned work implies, treating their work as performance might be more illuminating.

When appreciating art, we know that one can admire a painting’s beauty, color, or composition without any prior knowledge or training. We also know that our pleasure in experiencing a sculpture or a concert can be increased with greater learning and understanding. The same holds true for these chefs’ culinary creations. I am referring here specifically to chefs whose work is similar to that of other artists in that they wish to make us stop and think; they try not only to create delicious food, but also to do so in a way that alters our perception, confounds our existing notions, and expands the way we view the world. Preparing food is

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<sup>23</sup> Leslie Vosshall, “Different Smells for Different People: The Effect of Genetic Variation on Olfactory Perception,” lecture at the Experimental Cuisine Collective Annual Symposium, May 18, 2009.

most often a craft: sometimes a craftsman can be extremely skilled and produce breathtaking creations. The distinction here is between those who use food as material and those who use it as medium. The same distinction applies to artists: those who use food as a subject or material and those who use it as an aesthetic medium.

These chefs not only force visual or performance artists who use food as a medium to rethink their work, they also highlight the need to acknowledge food as an aesthetic medium and the importance of developing a way of thinking and interpreting projects in which taste, smell, and texture play the central role, of developing work that leaves no trace to be contemplated later, work that is perceived subjectively and unique to each audience member. We may be able to learn from other (non-Western) cultures, where the hierarchy of the senses differs from our own, and where food has been regarded as an aesthetic medium for centuries.

Because food performances are ephemeral, multi-sensory, closely related to everyday life, and consumable, they force us to contend with our notions of the value of art, and how we consider performance or time-based art in particular. They underscore the need to allow for a variety of subjective voices and perceptions in scholarly research and analysis. The stakes for developing a vocabulary for interpreting food-work is not restricted to a greater understanding of art, but also to a greater understanding of some of the work within the culinary world. By combining insights from both realms and creating tools for interpretation that meld the culinary with the performative, we can help the appreciation of taste, smell, and touch in Western society catch up with that of sight and sound.



# The Language of the Banquet: Reconsidering Paolo Veronese's *Wedding at Cana*

Kate H. Hanson

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British filmmaker Peter Greenaway's video installation during the 2009 Venice Biennale took Paolo Veronese's *Wedding at Cana* (1562-63) as its subject.<sup>1</sup> The installation, based on a digital reproduction of the painting recently placed in its original home of the San Giorgio refectory, used multiple screens as well as digital and audio effects to dissect the work's formal structures, highlight specific characters in the scene, and create dramatic effects with music and imagined conversations. Greenaway, in line with the scores of admiring artists preceding him, chose to highlight the more worldly aspects of the work: the gossip amongst guests, worries of servants about food supplies, and soaring music. The continued popularity of this sixteenth century painting clearly indicates that Veronese's work has the ability to speak to viewers in the twenty-first century as well as its original Renaissance audience [Figure 1]. Two years after Paolo Veronese (1528-88) completed the *Wedding at Cana* for the refectory of the monastery San Giorgio Maggiore, resident monk Benedetto Guidi recorded his admiration for the work in effusive, poetic verse.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, he noted that "[a]ll the sculptors come and the painters to admire it three, four, and six times . . . and PAOLO [*sic.*] is praised with eternal fame."<sup>3</sup> This poem stands among the earliest of scores of accolades that the *Wedding at Cana* has garnered and emphasizes the

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<sup>1</sup> Greenaway's multimedia installation at the original refectory of San Giorgio Maggiore (now the Fondazione Giorgio Cini) took place June 6-September 13, 2009 as part of the 2009 Venice Biennale. It forms part of a series of installations and films that re-imagine canonical paintings of Western art. See Greenaway's website: <http://www.petergreenaway.info/content/view/138/1>. See also: Alessio Antonini, "Così Greenaway fa rinascere «Le Nozze di Cana»," in *Corriere della Sera* (June 2, 2009), [http://corrieredelveneto.corriere.it/notizie/cultura\\_e\\_tempolibero/2009/2-giugno-2009/cosi-greenaway-fa-rinascere-le-nozze-cana-1501421042205.shtml](http://corrieredelveneto.corriere.it/notizie/cultura_e_tempolibero/2009/2-giugno-2009/cosi-greenaway-fa-rinascere-le-nozze-cana-1501421042205.shtml), and Roberta Smith, "Peter Greenaway Takes Veronese's Figures Out to Play," in *New York Times* (July 21, 2009), <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/22/arts/design/22greenaway.html>. A short video of the installation can be found on YouTube: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CB2\\_msTGvg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CB2_msTGvg).

<sup>2</sup> The work is now housed in the Louvre and underwent a major restoration in 1992. See the catalog for the restoration: *Les Noces de Cana de Véronèse: Une oeuvre et sa restauration*, ed. Jean Habert (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Qtd. in Richard Cocke, *Paolo Veronese: Piety and Display in an Age of Religious Reform* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 173.

painting's numerous visitors, indicating that its audience extended far outside the brotherhood of the monastery. Veronese's technical mastery and sumptuous detail effectively merge opposites—framing religious meaning with a most secular and lavish display—and he does so via what I am calling a “language of the banquet,” which would have been both legible and meaningful for sixteenth century audiences. I propose a reading of the painting that focuses on its sixteenth century creator, original location, and intended viewers, emphasizing the social forces that shaped their understanding of the politics and power of food, wine, and banqueting.

Depicting a biblical tale of Christ turning water into wine at a wedding, the large-scale painting imagines the scene in sixteenth century Venice. In the lower half of the composition, finely dressed guests chat, gesture, and eat at a banquet table attended by servers, entertainers, and musicians, while the miraculous wine is served at the far left and examined at the far right. Elevated on a second level, busily working servers, carvers, and cooks attend to the food and dishes for the meal. Above them, a cloudy blue sky is flanked with classicizing columns and architecture, with several spectators peering down at the activity below. The rich and varied colors and attention to the detail of costly goods—clothing, instruments, and serving vessels—give the work a distinctly sumptuous execution. Rather than interpreting the painting solely through symbolic means or as a window into Venetian aristocratic excess, I contend that Veronese's work must be understood through the subtleties of banqueting rituals as it unites seemingly contradictory themes of ostentation and modesty. I will analyze the ways that the details of the painting ultimately conveyed an impressive image of religious and secular power to both monastic and lay audiences. My investigation first focuses on the painting's original placement in the dining hall of the monastery and its symbiotic yet contrasting architectural framework. I will then evaluate this particular moment in Italian culinary history, exploring contemporary banqueting and dietary texts, and arguing that Veronese's arrangement of figures in the composition communicated the rising professionalization of culinary and service officials and exploited deeply held cultural beliefs about the nature of banqueting, food, health, and power.

The refectory of San Giorgio Maggiore is both classicizing and austere, contrasting greatly with the active and colorful composition of Veronese's work. In the sixteenth century, a vestibule with a large door and set of stairs led to a narrow antechamber, where two marble

lavabos flanked the door to the refectory.<sup>4</sup> Inside the refectory, the design and decoration of the space was a collaboration between artist and architect.<sup>5</sup> The Benedictine monks of the wealthy Venetian monastery commissioned Veronese to paint the wall of their refectory as part of a program of overall renovation and rebuilding. This was an important task, as the island monastery was one of the most storied in Venice, containing the relics of St. Stephen and operating independently from the Bishop of Venice.<sup>6</sup> San Giorgio Maggiore was also a major part of the local festive life, and its processions were often among the famous of those described by Venetian writers.<sup>7</sup> In order to expand and update its facilities, the monastery underwent a series of renovations in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Andrea Palladio (1508-80) was appointed in 1559 to complete the refectory, and Veronese was commissioned soon after, in 1562.<sup>8</sup> Veronese was both a prestigious and familiar choice, as he had gained a certain degree of fame in Venice and had previously worked with Palladio.<sup>9</sup> The surviving contract offers rare insight into the particulars of the commission, and traces the balance of creative force between artist and patron. Three monks signed the contract, which specified the subject matter: "the history of the banquet of Christ's miracle at Cana in Galilee, creating the number of figures that can be fully accommodated."<sup>10</sup> Veronese was to fill the allotted space, work with

<sup>4</sup> Peter Lauritzen, "The Architectural History of San Giorgio," in *Apollo* (1976), 8.

<sup>5</sup> See: <http://www.factum-arte.com/eng/conservacion/cana/default.asp> for images of a 2006-07 project to scan the painting, creating a digital reproduction that was installed in the refectory of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice.

<sup>6</sup> It was named San Giorgio Maggiore to distinguish it from San Giorgio in Alega, another Benedictine monastery. Lauritzen, "The Architectural History of San Giorgio," 4-11; see: n. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Irina Smirnova, "Le Cene Veronese: Problemi Iconografici," in *Nuovi studi su Paolo Veronese*, ed. Massimo Gemin (Venezia: Arsenale Editrice, 1990), 361.

<sup>8</sup> Tracy Cooper, "Un modo per 'la Riforma Cattolica'? La scelta di Paolo Veronese per il refettorio di San Giorgio Maggiore," in *Crisi e rinnovamenti nell'autunno del Rinascimento a Venezia*, eds. Vittore Branca and Carlo Ossola (Florence, 1991), 272, 283-88. Art historian Tracy Cooper believes that the selection of Veronese was largely due the fact that he and Palladio had already worked together, at the Villa Barbaro at Maser. She also cites his *Feast in the House of Simon*, for the Benedictine refectory at Santi Nazaro e Celso in Verona, 1556, as a potential influence on the commission. Veronese had already worked with the Benedictines, but he had also shown his capability to handle large-scale feast scenes.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Habert, "Il restauro delle 'Nozze di Cana' di Veronese: qualche osservazione," in *Arte Veneta* 44 (1993), 88.

<sup>10</sup> The monks were: Girolamo Scrocchetto (abbot from 1551-64, who oversaw this phase of rebuilding), Father Alessandro da Bergamo, and the cellarer Mauritio da Bergamo. Habert, "Il restauro delle 'Nozze di Cana' di Veronese: qualche osservazione," 89-90. ". . . la istoria della Cena del miracolo fatto da Cristo in Cana di Galilea, facendo quella quantita di figure che le potra intar acomodamente. . ."

the most costly and precious pigments, and complete the work for the “festa de la madona” in September 1563.<sup>11</sup>

Palladio’s design for the refectory, featuring a cornice, barrel and groin vaults, and rectangular windows, created a fitting frame for the *Wedding at Cana*, which completely covered the back wall and was placed above the head table of the abbot.<sup>12</sup> While Veronese’s work offered a marked contrast to the simple lines of the room, the actual and illusionistic architectural elements created the impression that the painting was in fact an extension of the space of the refectory.<sup>13</sup> The cornice provided a framing device for the top of Veronese’s work, which was unusual as he typically painted his own structure in similar scenes. This seemingly harmonious relationship between painting and architecture is of particular significance when we consider the function of the space itself. The refectory served as the dining room for the monks and, according to the Rule of St. Benedict, was where the monks would eat in silence and contemplate oral presentations of religious readings. The Benedictine Rule states: “But as for buffoonery and talk that is in vain and stirs to laughter, we condemn such things everywhere with a perpetual ban, and forbid the disciple to open his mouth for such conversation.”<sup>14</sup> At mealtime, it dictated that there should be complete silence, except for readings and the words of “the superior . . . [who] may say a few words for the edification of the brethren.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, if the Rule was followed appropriately, the silence of the meal would not be broken, even by asking for more food, as such a “thing [should] be asked for by means of some sign rather than by speech.”<sup>16</sup> Above the entrance, inside the refectory, Veronese painted two angels which, although now lost, are said to have held a card inscribed “SILENTIUM.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, Veronese’s angels indicating silence in preparation for the meal and reading were especially appropriate for the monastic viewers; they also serve as a revealing contrast to his dynamic painting within, that pictorially evoked the noise of music and conversation.

<sup>11</sup> Cooper, 273. He received 324 ducats, a barrel of wine, and food in the refectory in which he was at work. An English translation of the commission can be found in David Chambers, Brian Pullan, and Jennifer Fletcher, *Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Lauritzen, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Lauritzen, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Ambrose G. Wathen, *Silence: The Meaning of Silence in the Rule of St. Benedict* (Washington, DC: Consortium Press, Cistercian Publication, 1973), 25.

<sup>15</sup> Wathen, 46-7.

<sup>16</sup> Wathen, 46.

<sup>17</sup> Habert, “Il restauro delle ‘Nozze di Cana’ di Veronese: qualche osservazione,” 88-97. See also note 3 on page 88, which describes two angels that Paolo painted.

The monastery's choice of this sumptuously executed scene is initially somewhat puzzling; however, an investigation of previous refectory scenes and the commission for the work will show that the painting's iconography was in fact typical for a refectory setting. Creighton Gilbert has analyzed fifteenth century depictions of the Last Supper and their functions in refectories, relating them to Crucifixion scenes of the fourteenth century, and positing that they essentially served the same function: to symbolize the Eucharist, but in "everyday" rather than sacramental terms.<sup>18</sup> He writes: "the function of the painting is to give us a tool to imitate and resemble Christ and thereby to become virtuous, and the empirical realism of the paintings help in this aim."<sup>19</sup> At the time of the commission, the custom of adorning refectories with large-scale feast scenes was common in Italy, going back to the fifteenth century in Tuscany. Leonardo da Vinci famously brought the genre to Milan in 1495, but Venice did not see such scenes until the middle of the sixteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Veronese's *Feast in the House of Simon* introduced this theme to Venetian refectories (1556-60), while Tintoretto further popularized the subject with his *Marriage at Cana* in 1561.<sup>21</sup> The next decade or so saw numerous feast scenes produced for Venetian refectories by Veronese, Titian, Tintoretto, and the Bassano workshop.<sup>22</sup> Following Gilbert's model, the Venetian feast scenes are a part of the refectory tradition rather than a drastic break with it.

<sup>18</sup> Creighton Gilbert, "Last Suppers and Their Refectories," in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, eds. Charles Trinkhaus and Heiko A. Oberman (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 371-402. See also: Carolin C. Young, "Depictions of the Last Supper," in *Food in the Arts: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 1998*, ed. Harlan Walker (Totnes: Prospect Books, 1998), 223-236.

<sup>19</sup> Gilbert, 387.

<sup>20</sup> William R. Rearick, "Ad mensam," in *The Feast in the House of Simon: Veronese, History and Restoration of a Masterpiece* (Paris: Alain de Gourcuff, 1997), 43. For an exploration of the culinary context of Leonardo's work, see: John Varriano, "At Supper with Leonardo," in *Gastronomica* 8:1 (Winter 2008), 75-79. See also Varriano's extended treatment of food and art in Renaissance Italy, *Tastes and Temptations: Food and Art in Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Cocke, *Paolo Veronese: Piety and Display in an Age of Religious Reform*, 173. Cocke points to Francesco Salviati's *Marriage at Cana* as an important model for Veronese, a painting commissioned for the refectory of S. Salvatore in Rome. Salviati's work was completed by 1555 and Cocke argues that it has much in common with Veronese's San Giorgio canvas.

<sup>22</sup> Veronese's subsequent undertaking would be another version of the *Feast in the House of Simon*, completed for the San Sebastiano refectory in 1570, but it was a later work that perhaps brought him the most fame—or infamy. In 1573, Veronese painted a Last Supper scene (later renamed *Feast in the House of Levi*) for the refectory of SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice, but was called before the Inquisition for its perceived heretical subject matter. On the trial, see: Philipp Fehl, "Veronese and the Inquisition: A Study in the Subject Matter of the So-Called Feast in the House of Levi," in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 58 (1961), 348-54. For a compelling re-assessment of the issues raised by the trial, see: John Jeffries Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

Despite its location in a monastic cloister, monks were not the only viewers of the work; the monastery also hosted guests, and soon the fame of Veronese's work brought visitors from all across Europe.<sup>23</sup> As stated in Guidi's verses, painters and sculptors visited in considerable numbers to admire and copy the painting. Further evincing the popularity of this painting, travel books and guides to Venice listed the work in their itineraries.<sup>24</sup> The Benedictine monastery provided hospitality to many visitors (which perhaps prompted the renovations of its buildings in the sixteenth century) and, therefore, the viewers of the painting were not only monks but also painters and aristocratic guests.<sup>25</sup> As such, the painting was meant to not only inspire devotion but also to assert the power and wealth of the monastery—and Veronese satisfied these requirements with a careful balance of composition and meaning created by his engagement with practices of eating and drinking. The *San Giorgio Wedding at Cana* indeed symbolizes and prefigures the Eucharistic meal, and does so in the terms that would be familiar to both the noble guests and the monks. However, Gilbert's phrase "empirical realism" does not accurately capture the nuances of Veronese's work. Rather than a realistic depiction, Veronese constructs a highly artificial scene that conveyed religious meaning through the specific deployment of markers of realism related to banqueting and eating.

The biblical origin of the Cana story is found in John 2:1-11. In these verses, Christ attends a wedding where the host's supply of wine is depleted:

[7] Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. [8] He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." So they took it. [9] When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom [10] and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but

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The famous documents of this trial record Veronese defending the "profane" subject matter in his work, which included potentially objectionable figures such as dwarves and soldiers. However, I believe that interpretations of the *Wedding at Cana* have been overly colored by this trial (which occurred ten years later) and I consider the San Giorgio work in its own historical moment. The Council of Trent had just ended the same year that Veronese completed the work, in 1563, thus setting its creation in a Venice of a more tolerant religious tenor.

<sup>23</sup> Andreas Prieuer, *Paolo Caliari, called Veronese: 1528-1588*, trans. Paul Aston and Fiona Hulse (Cologne: Konemann, 2000), 81. The monastery eventually closed the refectory to visitors in 1705, as the disruptions were becoming too frequent.

<sup>24</sup> Pierre Rosenberg, "A Proposito delle 'Nozze di Cana' di Veronese," in *Arte Veneta* 44 (1993), 86.

<sup>25</sup> Cooper, 290.

you have kept the good wine until now.” [11] This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Veronese shows the moment at which the servants and wine steward of the feast are pouring and examining the miraculous wine on the far right of the painting, and presenting it to the bridegroom on the far left. In the biblical text, and seemingly in the painting, the only figures privy to the miracle are the servers—the guests remain unaware of the extraordinary origin of the wine. This emphasis on domestic service officials parallels changes in their profession during Veronese’s lifetime.

Art historian Philipp Fehl has explored an alternative source text for the inspiration of the depicted scene: Aretino’s *Humanity of Christ* (Venice, 1535). Fehl claims that Veronese not only based the work on his interpretation of the tale, but also included a portrait of Aretino on the left side of the work in homage. Indeed, Aretino’s text more directly captures the earthly pageantry of the painting:

In those days in Cana of Galilee they were celebrating a wedding where with royal pomp there appeared the most distinguished, noblest, and most elegant persons in the city. . . . The tables were laden with elaborate vessels of pure gold and silver.

He said: “Draw forth now and bear unto the governor of the feast.” And they drew it and took it to the head steward. As he smelled the bouquet of wine which was made from grapes gathered in the vineyards of Heaven he was revived like a man who awakens from a faint when his wrists are bathed in vinegar. Tasting the wine he felt the trickle of its sharp sweetness down to his very toes. In filling a glass of crystal, one could have sworn it was bubbling with distilled rubies.<sup>26</sup>

To be sure, these sensual descriptions seem apropos to Veronese’s work, and he filled the monumental canvas with equally lavish details of this banquet—such as the delicate glassware, shimmering gold and silver plates, and ornate costumes—all of which circulate around the primary axis of the work, with Christ at its center.

The Venetian Renaissance in particular was characterized by an influx of the consumption of extravagant goods, and thus the material luxury of the painting would have had specific meaning for

<sup>26</sup> Qtd. in Philipp Fehl, “Veronese’s Decorum: Notes on the Marriage at Cana,” in *Art in the Age of Nature: Studies in Honor of H.W. Janson*, ed. Barasch Moseed (New York: Abrams; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 345-6.

local audiences.<sup>27</sup> As Francesco Sansovino, a Venetian writer, described patrician homes in 1581: “the dressers displaying silverware, porcelain, pewter and brass or damascene bronze are innumerable.”<sup>28</sup> Veronese’s painting is a showpiece of luxury items, from the massive display of silver and gold plates to the sparkling wine glasses to the whimsically carved stone jugs. In Venice, increasing instabilities within the patriciate only encouraged the myth of opulence as a tool for disguising reality.<sup>29</sup> However, governmental concern for the excesses flaunted in clothing and entertainment continuously manifested itself throughout the sixteenth century through sumptuary legislation. This type of legislation can be traced back to the thirteenth century and was updated and revised frequently. In 1562, the Senate passed a new set of comprehensive sumptuary laws on women’s clothing, room decoration, and banquet fare:

. . . at nuptial feasts, at banquets for public and private parties, and indeed at any meal of meat, not more than one course of roast and one of boiled meat may be provided. . . . Banned from all banquets shall be trout from any place whatsoever, sturgeon, fish from the lake, pasties, confections and all other things made of sugar. . . . Oysters may be served only at private meals for twenty persons or less, and not at larger banquets or feasts; collations must be provided in the rooms, on the tables, and not otherwise, they must consist of modest confections, of the ordinary products of pastry cooks, and of simple fruits of any kind, according to the time of year.<sup>30</sup>

It seems that the table was one area of public display that might have followed the sumptuary laws more closely, since severe penalties were levied on cooks, stewards, and tailors whose services would have allowed wealthy families to flout the sumptuary laws.<sup>31</sup> Veronese’s feast seems to offer a nod to this stipulation, as the food depicted on the table is relatively austere and falls under these dictates. However harshly intended the laws were, they were rarely followed, and many families considered it a point of pride to disregard the regulations. The knowledge of this legislation pertains

<sup>27</sup> Patricia Fortini Brown, “Behind the Walls: The Material Culture of Venetian Elites,” in *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797*, ed. John Martin and Dennis Romano (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 295.

<sup>28</sup> Qtd. in Brown, “Behind the Walls: The Material Culture of Venetian Elites,” 296.

<sup>29</sup> Brown, “Behind the Walls: The Material Culture of Venetian Elites,” 297-8.

<sup>30</sup> Qtd. in *Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630*, eds. David Chambers and Brian Pullan (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 24.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, “Behind the Walls: The Material Culture of Venetian Elites,” 326.



to both the aristocratic guests and monks viewing this work. The monastery's commission of this particular painting acknowledges the social powers of banqueting rituals and material culture, and exploits their painted iterations to attest to both the earthly power of the monastery and Christ's divine deeds.

Veronese captured Christ's transformation of water into wine on an epic scale and in a manner that appealed to both a necessary sense of decorum as well as a desire for lavish feasting, linking his depiction of a divine miracle to the everyday world of sixteenth century viewers. He divided the banquet scene into two planes of activity, placing the guests, servants, and religious figures below a balustrade, while situating other servants, architectural features, and the sky above it. A U-shaped table, elevated on a pedestal, fills the lower part of the composition. There are four female and twenty-one male guests seated at the table. At the far left sit the bride and groom, elegantly attired in sixteenth century Venetian clothing, while at the middle of the table Christ, Mary, and several disciples are prominent due to their more subdued attire.<sup>32</sup> At the center of the table, attending servers, along with several jesters and four musicians, gesture and pose as they attend to their duties. On the right side are more guests, including a monk, who converse at the table.<sup>33</sup> Flanking the scene on either side are pink marble colonnades and stairs leading to the balustrade and upper plane of the canvas, which is dominated by the activities of the servants. At the left, they busily sort silver and gold plates and vessels, and in the center a carver prepares meat while other servants ferry the meat to and from the carver along the right side. The entire top half of the work is almost completely filled by a serene blue sky, framed with columns and balconies with spectators observing the dense activity in the lower half of the composition. Veronese's guests and servants seem to swirl around Christ and Mary, whose serene poses and gestures function as a quiet epicenter of the work. Veronese, who was given license by the commission to fill the canvas with as many figures as he deemed

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<sup>32</sup> The costumes display a noteworthy range of both historical and decorative elements—from the contemporary fashions, to exotic costumes *alla turca*, to the simplified garments of the religious figures. Patricia Fortini Brown noted that the variety of costume served a purpose similar to the inclusion of other contemporary details: "To Venetian eyes it would not have trivialized a religious mystery. Rather it ennobled it and imbued it with a meaning that was both timeless and also specific to the times." Patricia Fortini Brown, *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 106.

<sup>33</sup> In the eighteenth century, several identifications of the guests were made; however, as these remain unverified, I have chosen not to consider them for this article. See: Remigio Marini, *L'Opera completa del Veronese* (Milano: Rizzoli Editore, 1968).

necessary, crowded the lower half of the composition with activity while leaving the upper half more tranquil—perhaps to flaunt the costly pigments such as ultramarine that the monks requested. The dynamic yet orderly composition offers an overall frame for Veronese to merge restraint and excess.

In sixteenth century Venice, banquets and weddings served as primary vehicles for the articulation of both political and social power. Held in honor of visiting dignitaries, for coronations, festivals, and weddings, public and private banquets were a vital aspect of Venetian society. The banquet was a social function and ceremony as well as a fundamentally performative act—with the hosts, guests, and servants each enacting a set of rituals that attempted to confirm and advance their own social position. The specific details of the banquet—food, music, wine, tableware—all transformed the necessary task of the consumption of food into an aesthetic and ritualized experience.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, banqueting protocol came heavily loaded with symbolism and social meaning and it is clear that Veronese understood the highly subtle language of the banquet by his adept handling of its details. Historian Ken Albala indicates that, “[t]o a courtier, magnificent banquet dishes not only signify wealth, power, and sophistication but transfer those properties directly into the individual diner. An exquisite dish makes the diner exquisite.”<sup>35</sup>

The guests at the wedding sit before dishes of the final course: quince, grapes, dates, and sweetmeats.<sup>36</sup> They are attired in finely detailed, sumptuous clothing and lean towards one another to gesture and converse. In his *Book of the Courtier* (Venice, 1528), Baldassare Castiglione emphasized that “the courtier has to imbue with grace his movements, his gestures, his way of doing things and

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<sup>34</sup> Alberto Capatti and Massimo Montanari, *Italian Cuisine: A Cultural History*, trans. Aine O’Healy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 133. On the topic of banqueting, see: Ken Albala, *The Banquet: Dining in the Great Courts of Late Renaissance Europe* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Claudio Benporat, *Feste e banchetti: Convivialità Italiana fra tre e quattrocento* (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 2001); Michel Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words: Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance*, trans. Jeremy Whiteley and Emma Hughes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Roy Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals, 1450-1650* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1984); Roy Strong, *Feast: A History of Grand Eating* (London: Harcourt, Inc., 2002); and Valerie Taylor, “Banquet Plate and Renaissance Culture: A Day in the Life,” *Renaissance Studies* 19:5 (2005).

<sup>35</sup> Ken Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 184.

<sup>36</sup> Gillian Riley, *The Oxford Companion to Italian Food* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 570-572.

in short, his every action."<sup>37</sup> The guests at the banquet each "perform" an elegant motion in this constructed language of *sprezzatura*, or easy grace: using toothpicks, demonstrating forks, cutting food, tucking in napkins, or conversing. Not one figure is shown lifting even a morsel of food to her or his lips (a "crude" gesture reserved for satirical genre depictions of peasants), and even the toothpick-user performs her picking with a closed mouth.<sup>38</sup> Certainly the patrician, lay audience might have recognized (or imagined) themselves as the guests at the banquet, but the monastic audiences would have also identified with the depicted dining rituals. Though consumed in quiet, most monastic diets closely resembled those of the courts in their quality and quantity. In fact, contemporary dietary treatises more often warned the priesthood of the dangers of gluttony and excess than starvation.<sup>39</sup> Certainly, a wealthy and aristocratic monastery such as San Giorgio Maggiore would not suffer from overly austere meals. Like their diet, in this moment of sixteenth century Venice, the monks' lives did resemble the aristocratic world in many ways and thus Veronese's painting had to engage both audiences.

Veronese's painting emphasizes the skill of the banquet officials and servants, and places them at important points in the composition: the grouping of the steward (in green), the wine steward (in white), and Christ forms a triangular locus. The servants and stewards in the scene outnumber the guests that they serve by a ratio of nearly two to one, and this emphasis connects them to their central function in the biblical narrative. When Christ turns the water into wine, the servants are both the vehicles and recipients of his miracle, as he commands them to fill the water pots, and then draw the wine out of them. This action is placed in the right foreground of the painting—a server dressed in gold is shown in the act of pouring wine out of a stone water jug as the wine steward examines the miraculous substance. They are elegantly attired, underscoring the fact that such positions were politically and socially significant, often held by high-ranking courtiers. In courts and monasteries, kitchen

<sup>37</sup> Qtd. in Ronnie Mirkin, "Performing Selfhood: The Costumed Body as a Site of Meditation Between Life, Art and Theatre in the English Renaissance," in *Body Dressing*, eds. Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 155.

<sup>38</sup> This emphasized the Renaissance rhetoric of "closed bodies" over consuming, grotesque bodies in the terms of Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin characterized the open, carnivalesque bodies in contrast to upper class bodies, sealed against outside dangers and toxins. See: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968), 303-67.

<sup>39</sup> Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance*, 213.

staffs were hierarchically organized, and a successful body of literature emerged in the sixteenth century to provide guidelines and instructions for these highly ritualized positions.<sup>40</sup> Such persons were to be highly trained in the varying and extensive skills needed to properly manage a courtly household and kitchen, and previously had relied on apprenticeships or training by their superiors. These books on cookery, household management, banquet preparation, foodstuffs, and diets were extremely popular, enjoying decades of reprints and widespread circulation, and had a large audience far outside the kitchen. The publication of detailed treatises written by high-ranking household courtiers—*cuochi*, *scalchi*, and *trincianti* (cooks, stewards, and carvers)—paralleled the elevation of other professionals, both evincing and contributing to the rising status of these new-found masters. The texts are richly evocative and sometimes illustrated, describing in word and image a culture of conspicuous consumption through lavish descriptions of banquets, recipes for elaborate dishes, or images of costly kitchen tools. The authors use specific rhetorical devices that construct their identities as both noble and skilled, fit for ensuring the safety and pleasure of royal and aristocratic courts.<sup>41</sup> 1562, the year that Veronese began work on the painting, served as a particular moment when the publication of this specialized literature was gathering steam—and was only seven years before Bartolomeo Scappi would publish his quasi-definitive treatise.<sup>42</sup>

A most prominent early example in print is *On Right Pleasure and Good Health*, whose author Platina, or Bartolomeo Sacchi (1421-81), was a Vatican librarian.<sup>43</sup> The work, initially published around 1470, enjoyed great popularity and multiple reprints, although its rich recipes were later dismissed by dieticians.<sup>44</sup> It is among the first

<sup>40</sup> For an introductory gathering of excerpts of the culinary texts, see: Emilio Faccioli, *Arte della cucina: Libri di ricette* (Milano: Il Polifilo, 1966). See also: the introductory text in Terence Scully's translation of Bartolomeo Scappi's *Opera*. Terence Scully, *The Opera of Bartolomeo Scappi: L'arte et prudenza d'un maestro Cuoco* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 3-87.

<sup>41</sup> John Jeffries Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>42</sup> Bartolomeo Scappi, *Opera* (Venice, 1570; reprinted, Bologna: Arnaldo Forni, 1981). English translation: Scully, 2008.

<sup>43</sup> See: Platina, *Platina's on Right Pleasure and Good Health: A Renaissance Gentleman's Discourse on Food, Health, and the Physical Pleasures*, abridged edition, ed. Mary Ella Milham, trans. Mary Ella Milham (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1999); Platina, *Platina, on Right Pleasure and Good Health: A Critical Edition and Translation of De Honestæ Voluptate Et Valetudine*, trans. Mary Ella Milham (Tempe, AZ: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998); and Platina, *De honesta voluptate et valetudine*, Mss. 1475 (reprinted, Udine: Società filologica friulana, 1994).

<sup>44</sup> Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance*, 27.

to establish the “art” of eating pleasantly and aesthetically and is a foundational humanist work, articulating learned culinary philosophies to establish a new genre of literature.<sup>45</sup> Platina’s work draws upon both the work of ancient philosophers (Epicurus, Apicius, and Pliny) as well as his contemporary Maestro Martino.<sup>46</sup> In alluding to Epicurean philosophy, Platina attempts to relate Christian values of balance and well-being with pleasure, creating a humanist model for food and diet.<sup>47</sup>

The genre of the culinary how-to further blossomed in the sixteenth century, solidifying the skill, knowledge, and artistry required of the cooks and servers that Veronese depicted in such great detail. Cristoforo di Messisburgo, steward of the Este in Ferrara, completed *Banchetti compositioni di vivande, et apparecchio general* in 1549, with instructions on the materials needed to prepare elaborate meals, a listing of banquets that he had orchestrated, and around 300 recipes.<sup>48</sup> Messisbugo’s work was one of the first to be illustrated with woodcuts that demonstrate stewards and cooks at work in scenes of cooking and banqueting [Figure 2]. After Messisbugo, Domenico Romoli’s *La singolare dottrina* (1560) is indicative of the multifaceted nature of culinary treatises: it explains the responsibilities of the household staff, catalogs groups of foods with their natural humors, and offers recipes on how to prepare them.<sup>49</sup> Romoli, nicknamed *Il Panunto* (“oiled bread”), covers a variety of topics: tasks and behaviors of household professionals, seasons of meat and fishes, menus organized by month, recipes, exercise, as well as herbs, beans, fruits, and their properties. “I sometimes ponder how very important an individual is who is a personal officer of noble Princes since in the face of so many dangers they place their life in his hands,” he writes,

<sup>45</sup> Platina, *Platina’s on Right Pleasure and Good Health: A Renaissance Gentleman’s Discourse on Food, Health, and the Physical Pleasures*, xxxii; Simon Varey, “Medieval and Renaissance Italy, the Peninsula,” in *Regional Cuisines of Medieval Europe: A Book of Essays*, ed. Melitta Weiss Adamson (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Maestro Martino’s *Il Libro de arte coquinaria* is identified by many scholars, most recently Luigi Ballerini, as a foundation for Platina’s work and all subsequent Italian cooking. Martino, *The Art of Cooking: The First Modern Cookery Book*, ed. Luigi Ballerini, trans. Jeremy Parzen (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 2005), 2. Maestro Martino, *Libro de arte coquinaria*, Mss. 1450-60 (reprinted, Milan: Terziaria, 1990, and Udine: Società Filologica Friulana and Arti Grafiche Friulane, 1994).

<sup>47</sup> Martino, *The Art of Cooking*, 24. Martino’s work exists only in manuscript form (thought to be completed in the mid-fifteenth century), and thus the dissemination of its recipes occurred through Platina and others. However, it functioned as a pivotal moment in dietary literature. According to Ballerini, its most important contribution was the establishment of a “gastronomic lexicon.”

<sup>48</sup> Capatti and Montanari, 16. Messisbugo is noted as one of the first cooks of elevated status, and he was employed as both cook and steward for the Este court.

<sup>49</sup> Domenico Romoli, *La singolare dottrina* (Venice: Michele Tramezzino, 1560).

clearly expressing the growing sense of professionalization and pride amongst household officials.<sup>50</sup>

The steward, or *lo scalco*, was the banquet's principal organizer, who controlled all aspects of the event: food, wine, service, and tableware. In the *Wedding at Cana*, he is shown to the left of the musicians, dressed in green. The steward oversaw the production of food and the techniques of its presentation, supervising the cook, carver, and wine steward (in white). While the steward ultimately chose the wines and their order of presentation, he delegated their distribution to the wine steward and his assistants. The responsibilities of the wine steward involved storing, decanting, tasting, and adjusting the wine (and water), and finally dispatching wine servers to deliver it to the table. Overall, the meal was the opportunity for these service personnel to display their virtuosity, and by extension, the refinement, generosity, and stature of their patron.

The depiction of the biblical miracle reinforces dietary customs and beliefs of Veronese's time and employs specific details to underscore the value of Christ's miracle. Veronese's banquet, according to sixteenth century practice, was carefully balanced, reflecting the care and skill of the unseen cooks. While the food on the table seems less prominent than the displays of architectural and sartorial excess, it is nevertheless worthy of consideration. While numerous courses would have preceded this moment, the diners are eating the last one of fruit and nuts. The depiction of this final course evokes a sense of relative modesty while alluding to the previously consumed (and presumably abundant) dishes of meats, fish, pastries, and vegetables. According to Platina, the proper way to close a meal was often with fruits and nuts, accompanied by wine to help "seal" the stomach.<sup>51</sup> The balance of food and wines was essential for proper health in the prominent medical discourses of sixteenth century Italy. The positive effects created by the miraculous wine were therefore not merely for pleasure or merriment, but also perceived as necessary for good health and balance. Veronese's wine is appropriately red: in keeping with the recommendations provided by sixteenth century writers, the wines were to progress from the lightest white to the strongest, darkest red at the end of the meal.<sup>52</sup> Different types of wines were considered essential to good health and treatises devoted

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<sup>50</sup> Qtd. in Scully, 663. Text from Domenico Romoli, *La singolar dottrina* (Venice: Gio. Battista Bonfadino, 1593).

<sup>51</sup> Capatti and Montanari, 126.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

to them covered the entirety of their production and consumption, compiling agricultural, chemical, and medicinal discourses.<sup>53</sup>

Popular and learned dietary beliefs were based on Galen's writings from the second century A.D.; in turn, Galenic belief was based in humoral physiology: the notion that good health could only come from a balance of four humors: blood, choler, phlegm, and bile. Each humor had a unique combination of hot, cold, moist, and dry properties, and proper health could only be obtained through suitable humoral balance. In turn, each person's individual complexion was comprised of an arrangement of these humors, and diet was used as a medical tool to correct imbalances. Additionally, digestion was thought to be a process of "cooking" foods in the stomach, thus, all that entered the body had to be "corrected" in order to facilitate proper cooking.<sup>54</sup> The miracle of turning water into wine was therefore also a metaphor for health for the Renaissance audience, as the consumption of the final course without wine would lead to indigestion and the dreaded imbalance of humors that caused illness. The painting alludes to contemporary beliefs regarding the medicinal properties of wine, as well as its social necessity, in order to highlight the magnitude of the miraculous transformation.

As the painting marks a specific moment in Italian culinary history, along with a distinctly transitional one for the education and self-promotion of cooks, stewards, and carvers, the arrangement of key figures in Veronese's composition offers additional implications for notions of reserve and ostentation, creativity and control. In the upper middle plane of the work, above the balustrade and Christ's head, a carver busily chops lamb. This seemingly anachronistic event (as the guests are simultaneously eating dessert) is typically explained by the fact that it serves as an allusion to Christ's crucifixion. David Rosand has argued that a central axis of the carver, Christ's head, and an hourglass (on the musicians' table) alludes to

<sup>53</sup> See "Vini, medici e umanisti nel 500," in *et Coquatur ponendo. . . : Cultura della cucina e della tavola in Europa tra Medioevo ed età moderna* (Prato: Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "Francesco Datini," 1996). For further reference, see: Andrea Bacci, *De natvrali vinorum historia de vinis Italiae et de conuiuijs antiquorum libri septem Andreae Baccii. . .* (Rome: ex officina Nicholai Mutis, 1596); and Sante Lancerio, *I vini d'Italia giudicati da papa Paolo III Farnese e dal suo bottiglierie Sante Lancerio*, ed. Arturo Celentano (Napoli: La conchiglia, 2004), reprint of the edition edited by Giuseppe Ferraro, originally published: Livorno: Bastogi, 1890. See also: Cesare Biasini Selvaggi, *Degustazioni d'arte: Enologia mitica, spirituale, simbolica e metafiscica nelle collezioni pubbliche di Roma* (Rome: Gebart srl, 2003); and Giacomo Sormanni, *Catalogo ragionato delle opere di viticoltura ed enologia pubblicate in Italia o in italiano dal principio della stampa sino a tutto l'anno 1881* (Sala Bolognese: Arnaldo Forni, 1983).

<sup>54</sup> Albalá, *Eating Right in the Renaissance*, 244-45.

this future sacrifice.<sup>55</sup> The theme of the marriage at Cana is traditionally understood as a prefiguration of the Eucharistic meal (wine representing blood), and with the symbols of the lamb and hourglass, the artist further expands the religious significance of the scene. The complexity of the compositional structure is undeniable; however, I suggest that the figures comprising a more comprehensive central axis—the two restrained dogs, musicians, Christ, and the carver—underscore the painting's forging of the seemingly disparate worlds of secular banqueting and religious meaning. The two dogs in the immediate foreground, one sitting and one standing, are leashed together. Dogs served as a conventional symbol of fidelity, but comparing these canines to the other unrestrained animals present in the scene (such as the cat clawing the urn and the small dog prancing atop the table on the right side), I argue that these figures serve as further reminders of the importance of decorum—they echo the still poses of Christ and Mary, but in most secular terms.

Continuing upward, the four musicians have been identified as Veronese in white, with Tintoretto (both playing the *viola da braccio*), Jacopo Bassano (playing the flute), and Titian in red (playing the *viola da gamba*).<sup>56</sup> This self-portrait of Veronese occupies an especially prominent location in the composition, situated on the same axis as Christ. This homage to himself and his colleagues is an unusual inclusion on Veronese's part, and their rich dress certainly indicates a form of self-promotion. For Venetians in particular, music was especially important and was the major form of entertainment in private homes.<sup>57</sup> In this case, it also brings to mind the Benedictine viewers, eating their daily meals in strict silence while gazing at this painting; perhaps Veronese's telling self-portrait as a musician alludes to the visual symphony that he brought forth for the space of the silent meal. The importance of silence to the Benedictines was tantamount; however, this painting certainly does not evoke a sense of quiet or serenity. Indeed, it might be characterized as "noisy," with the hustle and bustle of the different actors in the performance of the banquet. The prominence of the musicians especially contributes to this sense of noise, sharply contrasting to the actual silence of the

<sup>55</sup> David Rosand, *Painting in Cinquecento Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 122. The hourglass refers to an earlier verse in John when Christ tells his mother: "mine hour is not yet come." Rosand has also aptly pointed out that Mary, seated at the right of Christ, is symbolic in her role as the bride of Christ. This signifies the union between the earthly and heavenly church, and their placement at the center of the canvas underscores the importance of this spiritual and celestial marriage.

<sup>56</sup> Prieuer, 181.

<sup>57</sup> Brown, *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice*, 123.



refectory space. Perhaps the painting was meant to fill the silence of that austere, quiet room and give the monks fodder for contemplation during their meals. Or it could be seen as a spiritual exercise, as the monks were meant to focus on the quiet and austere figures of Christ and Mary, learning how to block out the “noise” of the material world. Christ is at the epicenter of the composition, a serene point amidst the lively activities surrounding him. While the guests and servers are engaged in the performative gesturing of the banquet, Christ and Mary sit perfectly still, their gazes meeting those of the viewers. Their halos further differentiate them from the other guests and bustling activity around them, as does their markedly austere clothing. The monks might initially have been attracted to the luxury of the banquet but ultimately were to realize that their model was Christ; his iconic stillness would be an appropriately devotional image, and he serves as an exemplar by ignoring the worldly excess around him. With his erect body and direct gaze, the pose and bearing of Christ is like that of a Byzantine icon, a vehicle for meditation. Christ and his mother serve as symbols of both holiness and silence, offering a model for the corresponding behaviors expected of the Benedictine monks.

However, I contend that the figures making up this central axis produce meanings beyond religious symbolism. The carver, or *trinciante* (positioned directly above Christ and Mary), has additional implications, especially when viewed in conjunction with the musicians. A banquet carver’s basic task was to divide and distribute the food—bread, fruit, meat, and fish—and his ritualistic gestures of raising the meat and cutlery high into the air were perfected in the courts of Italy.<sup>58</sup> Like the other participants in the banquet, his actions were precisely choreographed. The carver was a polished, youthful, handsome man that could combine performance and food service in a most entertaining fashion; he was a central figure at the feast. Several years after the completion of this painting, the first text devoted exclusively to the artful carving of meats, fish, and vegetables was published in Venice. The illustrations included with Vincenzo Cervio’s 1581 text highlight the specialized nature of this position. One woodcut shows essential tools for the position, including a unique fork that grips an egg for carving in the air, and another depicts a turkey and peacock ready for carving [Figure 3]. In the composition of the *Wedding at Cana*, the figure of Veronese as a

<sup>58</sup> In 1581, the first text devoted exclusively to the artful carving of meats, fish, and vegetables was published in Venice: Vincenzo Cervio, *Il trinciante di Vincenzo Cervio* (Venice, 1581; reprinted, Sala Bolognese: A. Forni, 1980).

musician parallels the carver and his knife in wielding the bow of his viola, indicating a sense of kinship amongst. They are both active creators of the real and imagined banquet. The carver generates the substance of the banquet, while the musicians produce the atmosphere. Veronese certainly might have identified with the carver in his role as designer and master of this elaborate painted banquet, particularly considering the mid-sixteenth century impulse to elevate skills previously considered to be those of a craftsman or artisan to a level enjoyed by the liberal arts. The work of Messisbugo, Romoli, Scappi, and Cervio is paralleled by Giorgio Vasari's almost-simultaneous elevation of the artist, fashioning him as a master rather than artisan.<sup>59</sup> These authors were aware that paintings would likely be destroyed or lost (as those from antiquity had been), meals would be eaten or discarded, and thus the preservation of these newly elevated arts was of fundamental importance. As the self-appointed scribes recording art and cookery, they also strove to ensure their own eternal fame.

In the *Wedding at Cana*, these musician-artists and banquet officials in turn flank Christ at the center, presented as an iconic focus for the work as the creator and master of mankind. Where the leashed, restrained dogs in the foreground evoke a sense of decorum, the figures of Veronese, the musician, and the carver allude to the luxury of this feast and the professional, masterful skill needed to produce it. Christ and Mary's religious significance is further underscored by the inclusion of the carver who symbolizes sacrifice, but in decisively sixteenth century terms. The shifting dialogues inherent in the work both coalesce and collide in these figures comprising the central axis. Veronese's painting employs the language of banquets and their protocol to create a scene that balances the secular and the religious, the real and the symbolic, the luxurious and the restrained—it is an image that would appeal to a lay audience, yet also prove devotional for a monastic one. The refectory, through architecture and painting, ultimately expresses both the religious and secular power of the monastery. Especially when considered in its original social and architectural context, Veronese's painted banquet, eternally preserved in crisp detail and vivid color, was carefully designed to surpass the ephemeral banquets of the outside world.

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<sup>59</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). The first edition of Vasari's *Lives* was published in 1550; a revised and expanded version came in 1568.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

(See online version for illustrations)

Figure 1: Paolo Veronese, *The Wedding at Cana*, 1562-63. Oil on canvas. 6.77 x 9.94 m. The Louvre Museum, Paris, France.

Figure 2: Christofor Messisbugo, *Banchetti compositioni di vivande, et apparecchio generale*, 1539. Giovanni del Buglhat e Antonio Hucher Compagni, Ferrara, Italy.

Figure 3: Vincenzo Cervio, *Il trinciante di Vincenzo Cervio*, 1593. Giulio Burchioni e Tipografia Gabania, Rome, Italy.

# You Are What (and How) You Eat: Paul McCarthy's Food-Flinging Frenzies

Cary Levine

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Paul McCarthy's 1974 performance *Hot Dog* was an intimate affair, enacted before a small group of friends in his basement studio in Los Angeles. McCarthy began by methodically stripping down to his underwear and shaving most of the hair off his body. These opening routines, performed without acknowledging the spectators he had invited, served to immediately re-assert the privacy of his performance and its locale, leaving the audience in the awkward position of having gathered to witness someone consumed by his own personal habits. In what came next, McCarthy put his visitors' most fundamental standards of individual and social propriety to the test. Artist Barbara Smith later described the scene:

He stuffs his penis into a hot dog bun and tapes it on, then smears his ass with mustard. . . . He approaches the tables and sits nearby, drinking ketchup and stuffing his mouth with hot dogs. . . . Binding his head with gauze and adding more hot dogs, he finally tapes his bulging mouth closed so that the protruding mouth looks like a snout. . . . He stands alone struggling with himself, trying to prevent his own retching. It is apparent that he is about to vomit. . . . Should he vomit he might choke to death, since the vomit would have no place to go. And should any one of us vomit, we might trigger him to do likewise.<sup>1</sup>

McCarthy's actions were uncategorizable, a quality that has been central to the artist's oeuvre ever since. By blurring boundaries and mixing messages, such works effectively dislocate—and call into question—ideals and values that underlie some of society's most entrenched norms. *Hot Dog* was uniquely difficult to stomach, even within a mid-1970s California art scene teeming with provocative work.<sup>2</sup> In her survey of 1970s performance art, Linda Frye Burnham noted the abundance of frank sexuality, violence, death, cruelty, repulsion, masochism and masturbation, feces and dead fetuses; yet

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Ralph Rugoff, "Mr. McCarthy's Neighborhood," in *Paul McCarthy* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Smith's own contemporaneous performances—including *Mass Meal* (1969), *Celebration of the Holy Squash* (1971) and *Feed Me* (1973)—regularly involved both nudity and food.

she singled out McCarthy's misuse of condiments and meat as being "impossible for many performance audiences to watch." As Burnham observed, the artist had only performed three times for the general public, and each time his actions were stopped either by the authorities, the audience, or the sponsors of the event.<sup>3</sup> By the middle of the decade, Chris Burden's 1971 *Shoot* (in which the artist literally had himself shot) had become a performance art classic, but McCarthy's unrestrained gluttony was still too much for audiences to take.

*Hot Dog* marked an important transition in McCarthy's career. While earlier works (for example, studies in losing control, like running pell-mell down a hill and spinning until dizzy, or parodies of artistic practice, like painting with his face and penis) were engaged with the body and social impropriety, and showcased the artist's penchant for absurdity, with *Hot Dog* McCarthy's art turned noticeably darker, more confrontational and discomforting.<sup>4</sup> As he began to explore the ways in which American ideals of the body are instilled from infancy by social institutions, and how these ideals are reinforced through routine behavior, food became his medium, and a blatant, often childlike disregard for food rules became his primary tactic of subversion. In performances such as *Class Fool* (1976), *Grand Pop* (1977), *Doctor* (1978), *Contemporary Cure All* (1979) and *Monkey Man* (1980), McCarthy systematically soiled plastic dolls with a variety of condiments that stood for "dirty" body fluids. In *Baby Boy*, *Baby Magic* (1982), he dressed in a diaper and a giant baby-head mask and performed a host of infantile activities—spinning around until dizzy, banging his head into a wall and table, playing with dolls, rubbing his penis—as well as smashing his face in his food, eating with his hands, and "defecating" hamburger meat, all while limiting his vocabulary to grunts, groans, and gags.<sup>5</sup> In *Mother Pig* (1983), he simulated urination on a cuddly, bright-orange lion (squirting it with a ketchup bottle held at his crotch). In *Popeye*, *Judge and Jury* (1983), he fondled a floppy stuffed bunny, rubbing various food products into its increasingly grubby fur.

Such performances politicized both ingestion and the ingested. Or, more precisely, they exposed the already-present politics of food

<sup>3</sup> Linda Frye Burnham, "Performance Art in Southern California: An Overview" (1980), in *Performance Anthology: Source Book for a Decade of California Performance Art*, eds. Carl E. Loeffler and Darlene Tong (San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1980), 419.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of McCarthy's early development, see: Linda Burnham, "Paul McCarthy: the Evolution of a Performance Artist," in *High Performance* 8:1 (1985), pp. 37-41.

<sup>5</sup> For McCarthy's own description of this performance, see: *Paul McCarthy* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), pp. 123-25.

and food rules—the naturalized protocols that we instinctively follow, but which must be kept invisible in order to operate effectively. Self-restraint, especially with regard to food, is a hallmark of modern Western civilization. From the rites and prohibitions of Leviticus to modern standards of etiquette, food regulations have allowed individuals to distinguish themselves from the “primitive,” while basic table manners—maintaining control, not throwing food, using utensils, sitting properly—serve as important landmarks on the path from infancy to adulthood. Social success requires an instinctive, highly refined grasp of which foods can be eaten where, how much can be eaten, in what order, when and with what utensil.

The intense reaction triggered by McCarthy’s transgressions reveal just how off-putting the willful mistreatment of food can be. However, this acute sense of revulsion stemmed from more than simply hard-wired disapproval. As Mary Douglas points out, such transgressions can be profoundly threatening because food taboos comprise a subset of a fundamental symbolic system: a “total structure of thought” dependent on fixed categories essential to the conventions, institutions, and relations of a particular society. Boundaries and prohibitions must not only be established, but exaggerated in order to secure the proper classification of behaviors and substances. “Defilement is never an isolated event,” Douglas explains. “It cannot occur except in view of a systematic ordering of ideas.”<sup>6</sup> Eating the proper foods in the proper ways is therefore more than simply polite; it both expresses and ensures social stability. The intentional violation of this structure is disturbing because it denies the authority of the symbolic system itself, hinting at its artificiality and its fragility while revealing the crucial role such a system plays in maintaining order. McCarthy’s actions were so jolting because he foregrounded and relativized a system that must remain both invisible and naturalized to function properly.

In *Hot Dog*, this effect was amplified by the implication that McCarthy’s assertive, self-conscious act of regression was part of a highly deliberate, if eccentric, personal routine—suggesting an alternative order in which seemingly innate bodily norms do not apply. According to psychologist Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, this type of staged regression—a deliberate return to the “anal-sadistic phase,” in which basic categories of identity and distinctions between

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966), 41.

generations are dissolved—is the very essence of perversion.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Julia Kristeva argues that abject substances and acts activate a momentary return to a primal psychological state, threatening one's sense of self and the social-symbolic order that constitutes it.<sup>8</sup> Kristeva combines Douglas's approach to systems with Georges Bataille's notion of *l'informe*, which is also rooted in a disruption of order via the dissolution of categories—and, indeed, both Kristeva and Bataille are often linked to strategies of repulsion and debasement in contemporary art practice.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Bataille places particular significance on rituals of self-abuse, which he claims “have the power to liberate heterogeneous elements and to break the habitual homogeneity of the individual, in the same way that vomiting would be opposed to its opposite, the communal eating of food.”<sup>10</sup>

Whereas such theories certainly shed light on McCarthy's engagements with the psychosexual dynamics of disgust or *l'informe*, they do not account for the specificity of his references, particularly in the context of post-1960s America. If McCarthy's performances can be linked to a certain tradition of scatological art, they also belong to the lineage of Pop. His principal materials—hot dogs and hamburger meat; ketchup, mayonnaise, and yellow mustard—are patently American, the popular favorites of American children and staples of American cupboards, lunchboxes, and family barbecues. Like Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup can, the common foods that McCarthy features are emblematic of broad cultural values, edible icons of Americana that are not only mass produced, but symbolic of mass production and consumption themselves. Their symbolism both complements and complicates his work, allowing it to be understood as pointed social critique. Abjection is not only an end in and of itself, but a means of facilitating critique.<sup>11</sup> Performances such as *Hot Dog*

<sup>7</sup> Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Creativity and Perversion* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1984), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> Regarding Kristeva and contemporary art, see: Craig Houser, Leslie C. Jones, Simon Taylor, and Jack Ben-Levi, *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993). Regarding Bataille and contemporary art, see: Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Kruass, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Georges Bataille, “Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh,” in *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings 1927-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 70.

<sup>11</sup> McCarthy has consistently pointed out the sociological significances of his materials and the ways in which his work functions as social critique. In a 1993 interview, for example, he explains: “There are times when my work has been compared to the Viennese Actionist school, but I always thought there *was* this whole connection to Pop. The ketchup, the hamburger and

did more than simply upend ideals fundamental to Western civilization. They expressly identified American consumerism as the system sustained by those ideals. In this sense, ketchup, mustard, and mayonnaise are especially meaningful, for they make archetypal American foods more flavorful, easier to swallow. They are mediums of ingestion, lubricants for the mechanics of American consumption.

McCarthy's approach evokes two competing sociological theories of contemporary consumption—theories that informed, and continue to inform, the evaluation of Pop, but which also had particular resonance in the mid-1970s, when McCarthy first turned his attention to food. On the one hand, the explosion of mass production in the 1960s has been seen as having dissolved the rigidity and restrictiveness of consumption patterns, ushering in an age of individualization and informalization, of increased freedom and a loosening of class divisions via the surfeit of product choices available to virtually everyone in supermarkets everywhere.<sup>12</sup> As Warhol famously observed:

What's great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too."<sup>13</sup>

Though such statements can hardly be taken at face value (and a work like Warhol's 1963 *Tuna Fish Disaster* certainly suggests an alternative view), the cultural politics of Pop generally involved an affirmation of mass production and consumption, at least in terms of their standardizing potential, their ability to level hierarchies, and thus contest the status of (high) art.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, this leveling effect has been dismissed as a grand illusion. Mass production and consumption are here seen as generators of extreme homogenization, of uniformity and social control under the guise of democratization—

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also the movie world. I was really fascinated with Hollywood and Hollywood Boulevard. I started using masks I'd bought on Hollywood Boulevard. One I titled *Grand Pop* intentionally, 'grand Pop'" (Paul McCarthy, "There's a Big Difference Between Ketchup and Blood," interview with Marc Selwyn, reprinted in *Paul McCarthy* [London: Phaidon Press, 1996], 128).

<sup>12</sup> Alan Warde, *Consumption, Food and Taste: Culinary Antinomies and Commodity Culture* (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), 13.

<sup>13</sup> Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: (From A to B and Back Again)* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 100.

<sup>14</sup> Andreas Huyssen, "The Cultural Politics of Pop," in *Post-Pop Art*, ed. Paul Taylor (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 46-47.



what George Ritzer has called the “McDonaldization of society.”<sup>15</sup> As Zygmunt Bauman has argued, consumer society is founded upon this illusory “freedom of choice,” which compensates for new constraints. “The search for freedom,” Bauman contends, “is reinterpreted as the effort to satisfy consumer needs through appropriation of marketable goods.” Yet this satisfaction is always fleeting: appetites must remain insatiable for the system to perpetuate itself; consumers must always want more. The endless quest for freedom through consumption not only ensures continued economic growth, but imprisons the individual within the system, within his or her own desires. Overconsumption is therefore the key to social stability, achieved through unceasing individual crisis. For Bauman, this impossible but inescapable condition “is the major structural fault generative of an ever increasing scale of contradictions which ultimately this kind of society is incapable of solving.”<sup>16</sup>

Bauman’s view is particularly relevant to McCarthy’s performances, in which eating is always compulsive, excessive, and perverse. Eroticized force-feeding in his work is a metaphor not only for American (over)consumption in the general, economic-materialist sense, but for the imprisonment of the individual, for the forcible inculcation of consumer values by a society in which such consumption is so often equated with sexual satisfaction.<sup>17</sup> Food is especially suited to explore the darker aspects of consumerism, since not only is eating a universal, mundane, and polyvalent activity, but unlike the kinds of purchases typically marked with social significance—cars, clothes, and so on—food consumption is largely inconspicuous. And yet, as sociologist Alan Warde explains, “it concerns physical and emotional needs, is a site of domestic conflict and a key aspect of family formation.”<sup>18</sup> Whereas Pop Art embraced, and often accentuated, the shiny new industrial surfaces of American commodity culture, McCarthy has repeatedly torn open its packaging to reveal the vulgar, hazardous mess lurking inside. In *Hot Dog*, the

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<sup>15</sup> George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society: An Investigation into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, “Industrialism, Consumerism, Power” (1983), reprinted in *The Consumption Reader*, eds. David B. Clarke, Marcus A. Doel, and Kate M. L. Housiaux (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 58-59.

<sup>17</sup> As John D’Emilio and Estelle Friedman point out in *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, the entanglement of material consumption and sexual satisfaction has been central to American consumerism since the 1960s. This alignment has, they explain, “placed the weight of capitalist institutions on the side of visible public presence for the erotic” (John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Friedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* [New York: Harper and Row, 1988], 358).

<sup>18</sup> Warde, 180.

mass-produced embodiments of this culture were not only rammed down the throat, but sealed in: he could not vomit them out if he needed to.

Such works followed a defining period in the history of US food production and consumption—which also explains Pop’s persistent focus on the subject in the 1960s. By the mid-1970s, cooking schools were springing up all over country, cooking shows had made celebrities out of chefs like Graham Kerr (the Galloping Gourmet) and Julia Child, gourmet shops had proliferated, and the American restaurant scene had exploded. Dining and grocery shopping seemed ever more consequential too, as activists aligned mass-produced food with worker exploitation and imperialism, and consumers became more aware of the dangers of pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and fillers.<sup>19</sup> In 1969, Ralph Nader appeared before the US Senate’s Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs to draw attention to the “manipulative strategies” of a food industry that, in his estimation, prioritized profit over nutritional value. Nader cast mass-produced food as an agent of bodily violence and death—and he specifically called out the hot dog, or “fatfurter,” claiming it to be “among America’s deadliest missiles.”<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, non-corporate food markets and macrobiotic, organic, and vegetarian diets became popular forms of counterculture resistance. As Harvey Levenstein points out in *Paradox of Plenty*, his history of eating in the United States, this move toward alternative modes of eating was bound up with America’s more general obsession with food and filth. “A constant theme in counterculture thinking about food,” Levenstein explains, “was the necessity to purge oneself of the dirty things modern eating put[s] into one’s system.”<sup>21</sup> Mainstream Americans were also focusing more on nutrition and dieting at this time, and appetite control increasingly became a sign of cultivation. Where food is especially abundant, “bad” eating is that which is done solely for pleasure, in excess. With the exception of designated times and places in which stuffing oneself is acceptable—Thanksgiving, for example—overeating is a primary taboo, enforced through a ratcheting up of self-regulation and social pressure seemingly at odds with the American capitalist compulsion to over-consume. By the early 1970s, this antimony between self-control and indulgence was

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<sup>19</sup> Jeremy Iggers, *The Garden of Eating: Food, Sex and the Hunger for Meaning* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 23-24.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 171.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

set; since then, it has only expanded and intensified.<sup>22</sup> Normalcy has become a state of perpetual conflict, as individuals are torn between the ceaseless drive to consume, perpetuated by ever more invasive and unrelenting marketing strategies, and the need for restraint, imposed by ever more intricate social norms. Eat as much as you can, but never eat too much.

Playing the buffoon, the enlightening ignoramus, McCarthy has routinely underscored this contemporary conundrum by acting like someone without the ability (or the inclination) to manage his own cravings. It is as though his characters took too literally the unyielding bombardment of advertisements urging us to consume all that we can, as quickly as we can. Again, McCarthy's choice of unmistakably American foods is especially significant: founded as it is upon an improbable mix of capitalist consumption and puritan moderation, American culture is arguably more contradictory in this regard than any other.<sup>23</sup> (To Bauman, the clearest reflection of this crisis is the fact that the two types of books most likely to make it onto bestseller lists in the US are cookbooks, which encourage consumption, and diet books, which prohibit it.)<sup>24</sup> And, as Mary Douglas makes clear, the greater the internal contradiction within a particular social system, the more sacred its rules become—and the more dangerous their violation.<sup>25</sup>

With *Hot Dog* and several other contemporaneous performances, McCarthy rendered explicit the erotic undertones of consumption, and the implicit correlation between material and sexual fulfillment. In *Tubbing* (1975), he sat in a bathtub and performed oral sex on a sausage; in *Meat Cake* (1974), he used mayonnaise and margarine as masturbatory lubricants; in *Heinz Ketchup Sauce* (1974), he performed an extraordinary range of sexual activities with a bottle of ketchup. These works culminated in McCarthy's 1975 video *Sailor's Meat*. Here, the artist performs as the female protagonist of Russ Meyer's soft-porn film, *Europe in the Raw!* (1963).<sup>26</sup> Done up in black lace lingerie, heavy makeup, and a seductive expression, he meanders across the room, methodically exposing different body parts, accentuated by cropped close-ups. Yet

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<sup>22</sup> Warde, 92.

<sup>23</sup> Carole M. Counihan, *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 119.

<sup>24</sup> Bauman, 61.

<sup>25</sup> Douglas, 157.

<sup>26</sup> As noted by Eva Meyer-Hermann, the character is specifically based on a publicity still from *Europe in the Raw* (Eva Meyer-Hermann, ed., *Paul McCarthy: Brain Box Dream Box* [Eindhoven, The Netherlands: Van Abbemuseum, 2004], 70).

the work quickly deviates from standard realms of sexual fantasy, devolving into something unexpectedly abnormal. Having thrust a hot dog up his ass and smeared himself with ketchup, he positions himself on all fours and “goes down” on a slab of glistening raw meat, burying his face in it, taking it in his teeth, drooling and spitting on it, and finally rubbing it over his body. He then adds ground beef to the mix, spreading it across the bed along with the steak, hot dogs, and ketchup and thrusting his body back and forth with increasing agitation, as if simultaneously humping and being humped by it. Such antics continue for nearly 45 minutes.

Though instituted in the 1960s, the use of overt sexual imagery and innuendo to sell products fully flowered in the 1970s.<sup>27</sup> It also became increasingly nuanced. For example, overeating or eating the wrong (i.e. fattening) foods—already established as generally bad—began to be represented in advertisements as risqué or “naughty,” as an occasional (sexually) satisfying indulgence.<sup>28</sup> Complementing this sexualization of commerce was an equally intense commercialization of sex at this time, fueled by a series of Supreme Court rulings against censorship that proved a boon to producers and distributors of pornographic material.<sup>29</sup> By the mid-1970s, middle-class Americans were consuming their version of “free love” via a deluge of sex-advice books, erotic novels, sexually explicit theater, and soft-porn films, as sexual “liberation” became a sign of bourgeois urbanity much like food erudition did. (Alex Comfort capitalized on this convergence, modeling his 1972 bestseller *The Joy of Sex: A Cordon Bleu Guide to Lovemaking* on the cookbook form, naming its chapters “Starters,” “Main Courses,” and “Sauces and Pickles.”)<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, proponents of social constructionist theory were challenging the Freudian opposition between “natural” desire and “cultural” repression upon which the so-called sexual revolution was founded. In 1973, sociologists John H. Gagnon and William Simon examined “the ways in which the physical activities of sex are learned, and the ways in which these activities are integrated into larger social scripts and social arrangements where meaning and sexual behavior come together to create sexual conduct.”<sup>31</sup> Their approach was reinforced

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<sup>27</sup> D’Emilio and Freedman, 328-29.

<sup>28</sup> Warde, 90.

<sup>29</sup> Jeffrey Escoffier, “Introduction,” in *Sexual Revolution*, ed. Jeffrey Escoffier (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2003), xxiv-v.

<sup>30</sup> Alex Comfort, *The Joy of Sex: A Cordon Blue Guide to Lovemaking* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972).

<sup>31</sup> John H. Gagnon and William Simon, *Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1973), 4.

by the later, more broadly influential work of Michel Foucault, who linked such arrangements to entrenched power structures and biopolitical systems of control.<sup>32</sup> Like the abundance of food now offered in supermarkets, the expansion of sexual choice and access was seen as enhancing, not challenging, such systems of control.

*Sailor's Meat* collapses food consumption and sex consumption, sexualized commerce and commercialized sex, literalizing a pervasive underpinning of post-1960s consumer culture and thus rendering it perverse. Both sex and eating are circumscribed by an elaborate array of protocols that determine appropriate times, places, and persons. Both depend on self-regulated, invisible, symbolic, and contradictory sets of rules, and both are controlled by a marketing industry that stimulates desires which are then restrained by the limits of propriety. Crucial to the proper functioning of each social system is the sense that such protocols, rules and limits are absolute. Food and sex can tolerably be mixed, but only under certain conditions and in certain contexts, which explains why eroticized food advertisements—or cookbook-style sex guides—are perceived as not only acceptable but ordinary, while McCarthy's food-fucking is almost unbearably offensive.

Taking the established metaphors of routine advertising at face value—not by binging, as he did in *Hot Dog*, but by actually having sex with his groceries—McCarthy exposes the precariousness of these metaphors, the instability and fluidity of the seemingly eternal and unambiguous categories that allow marketers to safely align material satisfaction with sexual satisfaction. His conversion of meats and condiments into fetishistic body parts and grossly sexualized fluids prompts a destabilization of signs, as mainstream materials are rendered marginal. Ketchup becomes blood, mayonnaise semen, and meat genitalia through processes of simple displacement. *Sailor's Meat* disrupts the process of placing meaning upon particular substances, exemplifying Douglas's contention that "dirtiness" is not some intrinsic state of being, but rather a condition entirely dependent upon context. As she explains:

Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining-table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing. . . . In short, our

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<sup>32</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

pollution behavior is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications.<sup>33</sup>

Rather than simply “leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing,” McCarthy’s grotesque confections reflect a twofold strategy of dislocation and relocation, by which he coaxes viewers to draw lines and make distinctions that are then rendered problematic. The quotidian foods work to desexualize the performance, while the explicit sexual acts render those same foods disgusting. *Sailor’s Meat* evokes both the supermarket aisle and the porn shop, but is at home in neither. As in all of his performances and videos, McCarthy renders the true identities of his materials obvious—the ketchup is taken directly from its bottle, the mayo from its jar, the meat from its shrink-wrapped packaging—and consequently viewers must oscillate between mutually exclusive readings: mayo as cum, mayo as mayo; deviant sexuality on the one hand, wholesome Americana on the other.

McCarthy’s performances suggest the intractability of a social order sustained to a large extent by the intricacies of food rules and sex rules, a message with particular relevance in the wake of the 1960s, when both material and sexual consumption were seen by some as liberating. His protagonists appear so utterly possessed by their sexual and gastronomic compulsions that all other concerns, including their own physical well-being, fall by the wayside. These characters are eternally trapped by their uncontrollable hungers, generated by a system of indoctrination that often runs counter to one’s self-interests. Indeed, consumers must be trained to participate in a system that cannot be sustained solely by “natural” desires; one must acquire the need for excess, for the enhanced sensations and “freedoms” promised by commodities.<sup>34</sup>

In more recent performances and videos, McCarthy has focused on the nuclear family and the media as perpetrators of this conditioning, which he always represents as either sadistic or masochistic. Physical imprisonment connotes psychological captivity, as his characters desperately try to escape their situations, but to no avail. Yet, arguably, McCarthy’s scenes of force-feeding himself are even more harrowing, since such works locate responsibility in the individual: we stuff ourselves; we submit to acculturation willingly and enthusiastically. As Bauman concludes, the power of Western

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<sup>33</sup> Douglas, 35-36.

<sup>34</sup> Bauman, 60.

culture's system of social control is that its abusive constraints are self-administered:

Consumerist freedom drags behind it a huge shadow of its slave origin. To satisfy itself it does not need to break the manacles. It satisfies itself by locking the manacles with its own key. . . . On the whole, it is a condition of consumption that the body is trained into a capacity to will and absorb more marketable goods, and that routines are instilled, through self-inflicted drill, which make possible just that.<sup>35</sup>

In the twenty-first century, McCarthy's work is more relevant than ever. The recent economic collapse—and the highly publicized “crisis in consumer confidence” that accompanied it—has revealed how crucial overconsumption is to the American system, and how precarious that system may actually be. Meanwhile, American culture today is obsessed with both what we eat and how we eat, from the latest diet fads and health trends to the ethics of genetic modification and the politics of globalized food production. As the balance between consumption and moderation grows more elusive, our increasingly intricate eating standards help convince us that we are in control of our bodies and our surroundings. Acting like someone who has not learned the rules, or has simply chosen to ignore them, McCarthy smashes the double illusion of control—self and social. The reaction that audiences have had to his work confirms just how unsettling such a realization can be, made especially disconcerting by the suggestion that there is nothing much we can do about it. It is certainly enough to make one nauseated. Yet, just as often, the queasiness and categorical confusion produced by these performances and videos elicit another visceral response: laughter. They are very funny. Though seemingly at odds with each other, both vomiting and laughing are convulsive reflexes caused by internal conflict. Both are involuntary, uncontrollable, and potentially dangerous outbursts. And both remind us just how little power we have over ourselves and our world.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

# Distasteful: An Investigation of Food's Subversive Function in René Magritte's *The Portrait* and Meret Oppenheim's *Ma Gouvernante—My Nurse—Mein Kindermädchen*

Janine Catalano

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*People ask me: Why do you write about food, and eating and drinking? . . . They ask it accusingly, as if I were somehow gross, unfaithful to the honor of my craft. . . . [I]t happens that when I write of hunger, I am really writing about love and the hunger for it . . . and warmth and richness and fine reality of hunger satisfied . . . and it is all one. . . . There is a communion of more than our bodies when bread is broken and wine drunk.*<sup>1</sup>

Despite its daily importance—necessity, even—food has often been glossed over, taken for granted, not seen as appropriate fodder for those working in the arts, and certainly not for those studying the arts. Legendary food writer M.F.K. Fisher's above words, written in 1943, suggest this general attitude to be the case among writers between and during the world wars, contrasting the "honor" of writing with an implied humility, unworthiness, and even disparagement attributed to food. Kenneth Bendiner suggests that the same fate has befallen food in the visual arts: "We recognize the social role of meals. . . . But the utter commonness of food in every single person's life every day of the year makes it unexceptional, mundane, not worth extensive consideration."<sup>2</sup> There is a history of

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<sup>1</sup> M.F.K. Fisher, "Forward," in *The Gastronomical Me* (1943); reprinted in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, eds. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterick (London: Routledge, 1997), vii.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Bendiner, *Food in Painting: From the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 23. This has very much changed in the contemporary art world. An emblematic example of the use of food in postmodern art is Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, which, in its place settings of vaginas dedicated to important women in history, very much evokes "impassioned responses testify[ing] to the important . . . question of defining subjectivities and sexualities, of political agency, of women's desires and erotic experiences, of strategies of representation, of how or whether to attempt to define positive female identities, and what these might be—to ongoing discussions about contemporary culture in general." Amelia Jones, "Sexual Politics: Feminist Strategies, Feminist Conflicts, Feminist Histories," in *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History*, ed. Amelia Jones (London: University of California Press, 1996), 22. For a diverse exploration of food's usages in a variety of more contemporary art media, including Elaine Tin Nyo's performance art piece *Egg Curry* (1997), which enacts Asian-



still life painting, to be sure, but further probing into food's role in art seems relatively minimal and superficial in comparison to, say, that of religious iconography. In particular, it seems that food-related art in the first half of the twentieth century, and in surrealism in particular, has been largely uninvestigated; Bendiner goes so far as to make the unqualified generalization that, for many artists of this era, "the joyous spirit of most food subjects destroys the psychological gravity needed for serious . . . investigations."<sup>3</sup>

In this essay, I hope to counter Bendiner's claim that food is inherently joyous, and therefore eschewed by artists in this period, by investigating the presentation and implication of food in two nearly contemporaneous but very different works of art: René Magritte's oil painting *The Portrait* (1935) (Figure 1) and Meret Oppenheim's recontextualized "found" object *Ma Gouvernante—My Nurse—Mein Kindermädchen* (1936) (Figure 2). For these two artists, food is not something that is satisfying and comforting, but rather a familiar entity that can be exploited to challenge basic cultural assumptions, as part of a larger movement.

Indeed, these two works are both products of the surrealist movement of the 1920s and 30s, which ushered in a new kind of rebellion against society.<sup>4</sup> The surrealists were radical in both their artistic practices and their lifestyle choices, seeking to enact what Salvador Dalí deemed their "colossal nutritive and cultural responsibility" in the face of patriotism and conservatism that dominated France and other nearby countries at this time.<sup>5</sup> While surrealist sexual experimentation and gender boundary-blurring has been well-discussed in both the art and lives of the movement's artists, their approach to the daily routines of food and eating, though lesser-known, was illuminatingly atypical in its own right. A picnic staged by Caresse Crosby in 1932 saw such figures as Max

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American recipes; Felix Gonzalez-Torres's participatory *Untitled (A Corner of Baci)* (1990); and Dough Hammett's *Finger Licks* (1994), cake frosting covered picture frames, see: *Tasting Identities and Geographies in Art*, ed. Barbara Fischer (Toronto: YYZ Books, 1999), a collection of essays which accompanied an exhibition of the same name at ArtLab, The University of Western Ontario.

<sup>3</sup> Bendiner, *Food in Painting*, 215.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this essay, I will use the term "surrealism," with a lower-case "s." This decision reflects the fact René Magritte and Meret Oppenheim, as well as many of the other artists in question, had ambivalent and often ambiguous relationships with the "official" Surrealist movements. However, more importantly for this paper, both were also directly involved with thinkers who did voluntarily adopt the title, and the works in question were all decidedly influenced by the tenets of the movement.

<sup>5</sup> Salvador Dalí, *La conquête de l'irrationnel* (Paris: Editions surréalistes, 1935); reprinted as "The Conquest of the Irrational," in Salvador Dalí, *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, ed. and trans. Haim Finkelstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 263.

Ernst and Julian Levy creating an impromptu safari-themed film and partaking in perhaps the most infamous surrealist food: lobsters.<sup>6</sup> Leonora Carrington, at the home she shared with Ernst, her lover, was a notorious food prankster. According to Marina Warner: “she might cook an omelet with hair cut from the head of a guest while he slept and serve it to him, or dye sago black [with] squid’s ink and dish it up with cracked ice and lemon as caviare [*sic.*] for a collector.”<sup>7</sup>

Like Carrington’s antics in particular, it is through just such clever manipulation of this familiar and usually uncontroversial daily entity that Magritte and Oppenheim’s works evoke very contentious and complex questions. However, unlike Carrington’s jokes on friends, food’s subversion in the painted medium shifts the act from the realm of the personal prank and brings it in direct confrontation with the artistic canon, preserving it in such a way that it becomes a decontextualized statement with which any unrelated viewer can interact. Most immediately and effectively, these two pieces play on the viewer’s visceral reaction to food. Anyone looking at these works will recognize the tropes of food prepared and presented for consumption, which would normally immediately arouse hunger; however, the simultaneous undermining of edibility immediately compounds the appetite with disgust. In this prioritization of the fundamental, instinctive bodily reaction over the cerebral contemplations that might follow, these works lend themselves to an examination not through the eyes of surrealism’s founder André Breton, but instead through the framework of Georges Bataille, the champion of “undercover” or “dissident” surrealism. Breton’s foundational tenets of surrealism are historically linked to the emotive and the cerebral, particularly to the poetic concept of “love” which he prioritized in poetry, art, and life. In contrast, Bataille found Breton’s rebellion to be insufficiently extreme, and venerated what he termed *la bassesse*—a base, vulgar materialism, akin to Freud’s instinctually aggressive individualism in its rejection of civility.<sup>8</sup> And indeed, despite all of food’s fancy trappings, there is perhaps no

<sup>6</sup> See: Carolin C. Young, “Shocking the World: Caresse Crosby’s Surrealist Picnic, The Moulin de Soleil, Forest of Ermenonville, Early July 1932,” in *Apples in Gold in Settings of Silver: Stories of Dinner as a Work of Art* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 273-295.

<sup>7</sup> Marina Warner, “Introduction,” in Leonora Carrington, *The House of Fear: Notes from Down Below*, ed. Marina Warner (London: Virago Press, 1989), 15.

<sup>8</sup> See: Georges Bataille, “Le Bas Matérialisme et la Gnose,” in *Documents 1*, Paris, 1930; reprinted in Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, trans. and ed. Allan Stoekl (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 45-52. For more on Freud’s uncivilized individualism, see: Sigmund Freud, “Civilization and its Discontents,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21, trans. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), 95.

more base an instinct than the drive to eat. Moreover, in constructing a Bataillan frame of reference, we must also investigate his notion of “heterogeneity”; that is, a mode of interaction with one’s world that does not seek to assimilate it, or be assimilated into it, but which rather strives to combine diverse components while retaining their individual identities to create dramatic, often startling, results. He extolled actions that “have the power to liberate heterogenous elements and to break the habitual homogeneity of the individual,” believing this less normative state of disruption to be a source of greater individual and societal freedom.<sup>9</sup>

Viewed in the light of heterogeneity, then, food’s interest lies not in its routine application as an entity to be consumed and absorbed for survival, but rather as a source of otherness, a cause of disruption to the body’s equilibrium. Bataille himself addresses this quality of food in his discussion of the heterogenous byproducts of consumption:

Excretion presents itself as the result of a heterogeneity, and can move in the direction of an ever greater heterogeneity, liberating impulses whose ambivalence is more and more pronounced.<sup>10</sup>

In the two examples I will look at, however, it is the inherent inedibility of the food portrayed that underpins this otherness. By employing recognizable culinary tropes of their day, these pieces allow viewers a route into the works that is ostensibly familiar, but then posit them in the realm of humans rather than of foodstuffs, and as artistic material rather than edible matter. As such, the works evoke yet undermine the “habitual” nature of food. In these uncanny renderings, which make the familiar foreign, but familiar in a different way, Oppenheim and Magritte present their own witty experiments in heterogeneity.<sup>11</sup> These works make the mundane extraordinary, the serious funny, the satisfying insatiable, and the overlooked inescapable, in ways that uphold rather than resolve a myriad of tensions in interwar European society, from bodily taboos related to sexuality and consumption to intellectual and emotional concerns such as gender roles and familial relationships. In short, they challenge the viewer to find a taste for the distasteful.

<sup>9</sup> Bataille, “Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh” in *Visions of Excess*, 70.

<sup>10</sup> Bataille, “The Use Value of D.A.F de Sade” in *Visions of Excess*, 95.

<sup>11</sup> For more on the relationship between familiarity and foreignness in the uncanny, see: Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

## YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT: RENÉ MAGRITTE'S *THE PORTRAIT*

*[The eye is] the object of such anxiety that we will never bite into it.*<sup>12</sup>

*Eye: cannibal delicacy. . . . [A] young man who by chance holding in his hand a coffee spoon, suddenly wanted to take an eye in that spoon.*<sup>13</sup>

Both of the above quotes are from Bataille's "Dictionnaire Critique" entry on "Eye," published in the surrealist journal *Documents* in 1930. Though seemingly contradictory, the tension between these two ideas is in keeping with the typical Bataillan veneration of all things uncomfortable, and the consumption of eyes is a recurrent allusion in his 1928 novella *Story of the Eye*.<sup>14</sup> Here, however, I wish to examine how this interplay between the repulsion and attraction to ocular consumption is manifested in René Magritte's 1935 painting *The Portrait*, and how this piece embodies Magritte's own belief in surrealism as "the indomitable foe of all the bourgeois ideological values that are keeping the world in its present appalling condition."<sup>15</sup>

At first glance, *The Portrait* certainly evokes more traditional food-related artworks, particularly the still life. This is partially due to the piece's austerity and anonymity of style, deriving from the simplicity of the pared-down presentation.<sup>16</sup> The sparseness of the

<sup>12</sup> Georges Bataille, "L'oeil," in *Documents* 4, 1929, 216; reprinted as "Eye" in Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> It is not entirely unheard of for eyes to be consumed; Outer Mongolians, for instance, are thought to have ingested pickled sheep's eyes to cure hangovers. See: Alex Williams, "Hangover Helpers: Beyond Sheep Eyes," in *New York Times* (January 1 2006), New York edition, Fashion section. However, the Bataillan phrasing of the eye as a "cannibal delicacy," and the titling of the piece as a portrait, make the eye in Magritte's painting undeniably human, taking it once again out of the realm of the consumption of animals and back into the sphere of the discomfort surrounding consuming another person, be it their eyes or otherwise.

<sup>15</sup> René Magritte, "The Lifeline," Lecture given on 20 November 1938, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp; quoted in Harry Torczyner, *Magritte: The True Art of Painting*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979), 120.

<sup>16</sup> This characteristic is fairly typical of Magritte and his fellow Belgian surrealists. The Belgian surrealist group was less outlandish in their practices, both artistically and publicly, than the Parisian surrealists; rather, "The distinctive mark of Brussels surrealism is the apparent modesty of its ambitions and a certain neutrality of tone." See: Jose Pierre, "Belgium," in *A Dictionary of Surrealism*, trans. W.J. Strachan (London: Eyre Methuen, 1974), 25. However, Magritte was clearly in contact with and influenced by the Parisian group, through his contributions to surrealist publications, his friendship with Salvador Dalí, and his connection to Belgian art dealer Camille Goemans, who settled in Paris in 1927 and whose gallery became a prominent site of surrealist exhibitions. See: Sarah Whitfield, "Chronology," in *Magritte* (London:

composition makes it a far cry from the cautionary tales of excess sometimes seen in artworks, such as in Hieronymous Bosch's 1490 *Allegory of Gluttony and Lust* (Figure 3). Far from being abstracted entities, the relative verisimilitude of the glass, the ham, the cutlery, and the wine make them seem as though, in a different context, they could be found in a conventional painting of a dining table, or indeed on a dining room table in an average family's home in 1930s France or Belgium. Yet in keeping with Magritte's own rebellion against typicality—and consequently upholding a Bataillan veneration of heterogeneity—*The Portrait* is, very immediately, anything but a typical meal. The setting is completely removed from any context; these objects are not situated within a larger room, but are instead presented on a surface against a plain blue background.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the scene exists in a quasi-dreamlike, potentially fictitious environment that is simultaneous nowhere and anywhere. Moreover, there is virtually no sense of recession into space, and the objects almost appear to be stacked vertically on top of one another rather than being placed on a horizontal surface, removing it from the tradition of the locatable still life setting.<sup>18</sup>

And then—or more accurately, first of all—there is the staring eye, agape in the center of the slice of ham. Eyes are commonly depicted throughout Magritte's oeuvre, perhaps most famously in his 1929 painting *The False Mirror*, which depicts an enlarged eye with a cloudy blue sky replacing the monochromatic iris. Some have argued that Magritte's painted eyes, removed from their facial setting and

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The South Bank Centre, 1992), 303, 305. In fact, *The Portrait* was painted during a period of exceptionally good relations between the two groups, shortly after what Whitfield describes as their period of closest collaboration since 1929 (307).

<sup>17</sup> This dislocation may owe largely to Magritte's familiarity with Giorgio de Chirico, who had a tremendous influence on Magritte since his discovery of *The Song of Love* in 1925. See: Richard Calvocoressi, *Magritte* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1984), 14. De Chirico himself incorporated food in a variety of his pictures, many of which may have been familiar to Magritte, such as his 1913 painting *The Square*, owned by Paul Eluard, which depicts two large artichokes in one of his typically ambiguous classicized locales.

<sup>18</sup> Magritte is not the first to manipulate the conventions of the still life table in painting. In the early twentieth century, the advent of cubism relied heavily on the manipulation of café and still life elements, as in Juan Gris's *Still life with Checked Tablecloth* (1915). However, as Christopher Green argues, the cubist use of food here is not meant to draw attention to the social ramifications of the comestibles on the table, but rather to distill the formal essence of the subjects as objects. According to Green: "It allows [the objects], indeed, to signify as objects either of objectivity or of subjectivity. But the stress on both sides of the divide is not on the objects as such; it is on the process of their translation (analysis or synthesis) and the 'purity' of the result." Christopher Green, *Juan Gris* (London: Whitechapel, 1992), 148.

divorced from their partners, act as omnipotent entities, which recalls the Judeo-Christian tradition of the eye that wards off evil, or the all-seeing eye of Christ.<sup>19</sup> I am here more interested in *The Portrait's* transformation of the eye into an object for potential but thwarted consumption, in a complex rendering of suggested cannibalism in an inherently impenetrable and irreconcilable medium of paint on canvas.

The sheer absurdity of the eye in an otherwise recognizable and very familiar scene makes it quite humorous on first viewing.<sup>20</sup> However, I would argue that it is at the same time, and more pervasively, deeply disquieting. To again invoke Bataille, ocular mutilation was considered by the surrealist thinker to be “the most horrifying form of sacrifice”—quite a superlative declaration for such an extremist, and a statement which says a great deal about the disturbing potency of this action.<sup>21</sup> In spite of, or more likely because of, its squeamish potency, the theme was frequently revisited by the surrealists, perhaps most infamously in the scene of a woman's eyeball being sliced in Dalí and Luis Buñuel's 1929 film *Un Chien andalou* (Figures 4, 5).<sup>22</sup> *The Portrait*, like its cinematic predecessor, is particularly disturbing in its portrayal of a *human* eye, here not only being presented for mutilation but for consumption. Indeed, the eye in this painting, despite its porcine surroundings, certainly appears human in its recognizable shape and light-colored iris. Magritte himself proclaimed that “a painter is mediocre if he doesn't give

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Whitfield makes this observation as well, relating the eye in *The Portrait* to that depicted in Jacopo Pontormo's *Supper at Emmaus* (1525). See: Whitfield, *Magritte*, 64.

<sup>20</sup> This humorous element might be interpreted as a release of a repressed Freudian id, which seeks to somewhat alleviate the anxieties created by this uncomfortable image. For more on Freud's theories on humor, see: Sigmund Freud, “Humor,” in *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 9 (1928), 1-6.

<sup>21</sup> Georges Bataille, “Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh,” in *Visions of Excess*, 67.

<sup>22</sup> According to David Sylvester, Magritte met Dalí for the first time in the spring of 1929, when Dalí was in Paris “for the making of *Un Chien andalou*.” *René Magritte Catalogue Raisonné, Vol. I: Oil Paintings 1916-1930*, ed. David Sylvester (Antwerp: Philip Wilson Publishers, 1993), 100. Later that summer, “the Magrilles spent August in Cadaques, at the suggestion of Dalí, who was staying there at his family's summer house; others there at his instigation were Goemans and his girlfriend, who shared a rented house with the Magrilles, Luis Buñuel, Joan Miro and Paul and Gala Eluard,” underscoring Magritte's connections with Parisian surrealism (*ibid.*, 105). Dalí, in turn, refers to Magritte as “one of the most ‘mysteriously equivocal’ painters of the moment” in his quasi-fictional autobiography *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*. Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, trans. Haakon M. Chevalier (London: Vision Press Ltd., 1961), 208.

special consideration to the importance of his spectator's eyes," and he wryly rises to his own challenge here.<sup>23</sup>

It is this confrontation between the painted eye and the viewer's eye that poses a particularly troubling blurring of boundaries. In addressing the eye's unwavering stare *with* his own eye, the viewer simultaneously draws a connection with the painted image *as* his own eye—a quality only underscored by the painting's titling as a portrait, but one without a specific nominal identification. If, as Norman Bryson claims, "still life negates the whole process of constructing and asserting human beings as the primary focus of depiction,"<sup>24</sup> Magritte has successfully turned this academic tradition on its head, bringing about a disturbing revival of the medieval term "fleshmeat."<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the inverse of this supposition must be considered. If the painted eye can be equated with the viewer on some level, then the viewer can equally identify himself with the painted eye, substituting his own face for the piece of ham on the plate. In this way, Magritte further complicates academic conventions, here undermining any idealization associated with portraiture. Instead, we have not merely flesh, but specifically a face made meat, turned bestial, perishable, and even potentially edible. This troublesome mutual identification adds not only cannibalism but self-mutilation to Bataille's complex tension surrounding ocular consumption.

If Magritte is posing an ethical question of "to eat or not to eat?", it is ultimately rendered purely hypothetical, for *The Portrait* is, fundamentally, paint on a canvas surface available for visual consumption but nothing further.<sup>26</sup> Magritte frequently explored this

<sup>23</sup> René Magritte, "The True Art of Painting"; reprinted in Torczyner, *Magritte*, 126.

<sup>24</sup> Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), 60.

<sup>25</sup> C. Anne Wilson uses this term throughout her essay "Ritual, Form and Color in Mediaeval Food Tradition" to refer generally to the meat of four-legged animals. She goes on to cite recipes for medieval pottages which call for "ground-up 'great flesh,' a term which translated from the French *grosse char* and denotes the fleshmeat of the larger beasts, either pork, mutton or beef." C. Anne Wilson, "Ritual, Form and Color in Mediaeval Food Tradition," in *The Appetite and the Eye: Visual Aspects of Food and their Presentation within their Historic Context*, ed. C. Anne Wilson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1987), 22.

<sup>26</sup> In 1945, Magritte did translate this piece into a three-dimensional work, literally inviting the audience to sit down at the table. According to David Sylvester, the piece was shown at Brussels Boétie in 1945, where it was listed in the catalogue as "Le portrait (1945)." However, as he writes, "The piece was presumably dismantled when the exhibition closed," and no further details are known about the composition of the work, nor the extent to which the audience could literally partake in the meal in front of them. See: Sylvester, *Catalogue Raisonné, Vol. II: Oil Paintings and Objects 1931-1948*, 455.

distance between representation and object in his work. From early in his career, his famous painting *The Treachery of Images* (1929) (Figure 6) presents a realistic painting of a pipe, but then declares that “This is not a pipe,” leaving viewers to determine how to classify what they see before them. In a more culinary context, his 1936 piece *This is a Piece of Cheese* (Figure 7) makes an inverse declaration. It consists of a painting of gruyere placed under a glass cheese dome, which thus takes on qualities of cheese, yet no one would mistake it for an edible product. In these examples, Magritte highlights the disjunction between, rather than the merging of, signified and signifier; while the audience is free to partake visually, there is an inherent inability for them to literally consume or subsume these painted and sculptural objects. In *The Portrait*, the artifice and impossibility of consummating any suggested act is even further underscored by the idiosyncrasy of the few other objects: the upside-down fork sits on the wrong side of the plate; the butter knife is not the expected implement for cutting meat; the wine bottle, with no wine glass, sits next to an empty water glass.

While *The Portrait* conjures up all of the Bataillian anxiety of eating eyes, compounded by the viewer’s self-identification with the eye made edible on the plate, the piece’s integrity simultaneously implicates and incapacitates viewers who must reckon with its tensions. For though the picture deals with issues of consumption, Magritte has incapacitated the spectator’s mouth through his painted medium. Instead, we are forced to ingest the piece at a purely visual level, dealing with the staring eye’s challenge to consider what it is we are viewing and the uneasiness this evokes. We must address this eye; but however we interpret it—as threatening, as trapped, as parodic, as omnipotent, or any combination thereof—we are unable to dominate or alter this static, unwavering scene, reliant on little more than the work’s hints of humor to temper its uneasiness. As I hope to now show, it is a similar upholding of the irreconcilable and indomitable—once again through the viewer’s intimate encounter with highly recognizable food imagery—that makes Meret Oppenheim’s *My Nurse* such an enigmatic piece of surrealist sculpture, and another potent example of Bataillian heterogeneity.



## THE RIGHT TO SHOES: MERET OPPENHEIM'S *MA GOUVERNANTE—MY NURSE—MEIN KINDERMÄDCHEN*

*No communication is more profound; two creatures are lost in a convulsion that binds them together. But they communicate only through losing a portion of themselves. . . . [T]heir integrity disperse[s] in the heat of excitement.*<sup>27</sup>

Bataille's description of physical love is strikingly applicable to Meret Oppenheim's 1936 object *Ma Gouvernante—My Nurse—Mein Kindermädchen*. Two white high-heeled shoes are trussed together, topped with paper ruffles, and "served" to viewers on a silver platter, taking on, in their united state, the form of a kind of unappetizing poultry dish. In addition to the culinary milieu, however, *My Nurse* takes its place in a complex social and art historical tradition surrounding the objectification and availability of women's bodies. Although it can be read as a turkey, the piece's title, like Magritte's own, and its composition from decidedly feminine footwear also make it possible to view the work as a prostrate, headless woman, her legs suggestively akimbo.<sup>28</sup> These simultaneities result in a witty visual double-entendre that raises and challenges a variety of issues about visual, edible, and bodily modes of consumption, in ways both similar to and different from Magritte's painting of the previous year.

Taking as the starting point Oppenheim's position as a self-consciously active and empowered female member of the surrealist movement, we can first address *My Nurse* in relation to the most basic link between women and consumption—the act of breast-feeding.<sup>29</sup> As the most literal manifestation of woman's role as mother

<sup>27</sup> Georges Bataille, "The College of Sociology," in Bataille, *The College of Sociology*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 337.

<sup>28</sup> In its relationship to shoes, one cannot help but recall the Freudian foot fetish, and his claim that the shoe, as a quintessential fetish object, acts as a "corresponding symbol of the female genitals." Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on Sexuality," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 7, trans. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), 155.

<sup>29</sup> It is important to note that within the surrealism movement, women were often celebrated, but more often for their allure as *femmes-enfants* than for their abilities as autonomous artists, thinkers, or sexual beings. In addition to her own artistic production, Oppenheim acted as a model for male artists, perhaps most famously in Man Ray's 1933 photograph *Veiled Erotic*. In this image, her nude body is "captured" both by the printing press and by the frame of the image, causing some scholars such as Nancy Spector to comment that she was herself "colonized as a Surrealist object." Nancy Spector, "Meret Oppenheim: Performing Identities," in *Meret Oppenheim: Beyond the Teacup*, eds. Jacqueline Burckhardt and Bice Curiger (New York: Independent Curators Inc, 1996), 37. However, I would argue that Oppenheim was far from a passive figure in the surrealist sphere, as I will demonstrate through an examination of her art,

and nurturer, this connection has long historical precedents; in the medieval world, “woman was food because breast milk was the human being’s first nourishment—the one food essential for survival.”<sup>30</sup> The primacy and expectation that children would be breastfed was certainly still the sanctioned attitude in 1930s France, as “in the interwar years the Church [in collaboration with the state] was particularly active in encouraging women to stay home and raise families.”<sup>31</sup>

Yet to the young Oppenheim, one feels, this option was far from desirable, and Jennifer Mundy observes that many surrealists found the contemporary “ideological fetters on sexual behavior . . . sufficient to provoke in the surrealists hostility towards motherhood and the raising of children.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, this is an issue prominent in the psychoanalytic theories of the time as well, which inspired and were in turn inspired by surrealism. Though his is a contentious view, Freud very much associated breast-feeding with sexuality, claiming that for the infant, “the satisfaction of the erotogenic zone is associated, in the first instance, with the satisfaction of the need for nourishment.”<sup>33</sup> Melanie Klein, who furthers this connection, claims that “[The infant daughter’s] desire to suck or devour the penis is directly derived from her desire to do the same to her mother’s breast so that the frustration she suffers from the breast prepares the way for the feelings which her renewed frustration in regard to the penis arouses.”<sup>34</sup>

Through her art, Oppenheim herself links nutritive and sexual satisfaction, implying that if the former is denied, the latter will be as well—quite a contrast to the staunch separation between sexuality and mothering so prevalent at the time. In an early watercolor, *Votive Picture (Strangling Angel)* (1931) (Figure 8), the “angel” seems to be forcibly moving the child away from her breast; she is both strangling

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and that to view this piece as simply a projection of a self-perceived victimization and helplessness is far too simplistic, and indeed condescending, a reading.

<sup>30</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, “Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women,” in *Representation* 11 (Summer 1984); reprinted in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, eds. Carole Counihan and Penny van Esterik (London: Routledge, 1997), 150.

<sup>31</sup> Jennifer Mundy, “Letters of Desire,” in *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, ed. Jennifer Mundy (London: Tate Publishing, 2001), 44.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>33</sup> Freud, “Three Essays on Sexuality,” 181.

<sup>34</sup> Melanie Klein, *The Psychoanalysis of Children*, trans. Alix Strachey (London: Virago Press, 1989), 206-7. Though the link between breast-feeding and penis envy is not at the forefront of this discussion, Klein’s reading translates to the larger point of female sexual frustration within a male-dominated sphere of regulations.

the baby and being strangled by it.<sup>35</sup> Equally anti-maternal is her 1933 drawing *A Boy with Wings Sucks on the Udder-Shaped Breast of a Woman* (Figure 9). Here, both child and mother figures are demonized, the relationship between them seeming more parasitic than symbiotic. Following in this vein, *My Nurse* can be seen as a denial of breast-feeding, and, as such, female consumability. Alyce Mahon has commented that much of Oppenheim's work "merges the domestic and the erotic, and their compatibility in women," and this work brings those two together along with the edible.<sup>36</sup> The very title emphasizes the absence of the breast; the object is not a mother, but a nurse, or, more accurately according to the triplicate title, a governess—that is, a maternal figure who does not and did not perform the fundamental task of breast-feeding.<sup>37</sup> In further undermining any edibility of the piece, Oppenheim uses an object made of leather—itsself a product of a cow, situated within the realm of western consumption—but rendered utterly unpalatable. The cow is reduced merely to its tough, processed skin, its inedibility highlighted by equally unappetizing frivolous paper toppers typically used to decorate turkeys.

Additionally, further investigation calls the issue of the submissiveness of *My Nurse* into question. True, this womanly object is presented splayed on her back, but this position of helplessness is one that Oppenheim complicates in much of her work. In her 1938 painting *He Rocks His Wife* (Figure 10), a female armadillo lays on her back, at the mercy of the male armadillo. She appears incapacitated and infantilized, but the viewer might also wonder whether she is enjoying being serviced by her husband. The question of whether this is an act of force, a gesture of kindness, or even an instance of servitude on the part of the husband remains unresolved.

Moreover, the upended pose brings to the surface the shoes' soles. Contrary to the virginal white of the shoe leather, the soles are

<sup>35</sup> Bice Curiger very aptly describes this "votive picture against child-bearing" in the context of Oppenheim's surrealist connections: "The clawed angel, lustfully murdering little children in deference to an earth-bound rather than a heavenly order, personifies the negative image of woman that was communicated to Meret Oppenheim by her male peers. The black humor of this irritating candour is born of indignation at the multiple punishment that is the reward of women who choose to be free." Bice Curiger, *Meret Oppenheim: Defiance in the Face of Freedom*, (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1989), 13, 15. Curiger's description of the "lustful" murder very much posits sexuality in opposition to motherhood.

<sup>36</sup> Alyce Mahon, *Eroticism and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 137.

<sup>37</sup> While the English word "nurse" can be read as either a caretaker or a wet-nurse, the multilingual title underscores the fact that this is more the former. *Gouvernante* most directly translates to "governess," a figure who acts as a nanny rather than a breast-feeder; *gouvernante* also has no etymological similarities to the French word *allaiter*, meaning to breastfeed or to suckle. Similarly, *kindermädchen* translates most directly to the English word "nanny."

hardly pristine. Scuffed and worn, they reveal a tarnished, dirty underbelly that is generally hidden, but whose visibility here is highly significant. In addition to the fact that food and dirt are inherently incompatible entities, underscoring the object's inedibility even further, the presence of dirt becomes a further challenge to conventional social order. As anthropologist Mary Douglas contends, "As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder."<sup>38</sup> She further classifies the "dirty" as falling into "a residual category, rejected from our normal scheme of classifications"; in its otherness, she claims, dirt becomes transgressive—and "the danger which is risked by boundary transgression is power."<sup>39</sup> Though Douglas was writing several decades after *My Nurse's* creation, her ideas resonate both with Oppenheim's work and with other surrealists. Douglas echoes the earlier writings of Freud, well known within surrealist circles, who claimed in *Civilization and its Discontents*: "dirtiness of any kind seems to us incompatible with civilization."<sup>40</sup> Additionally, in his 1930 essay "Danger de pollution," Max Ernst used the image of dirt to condemn the Church's sexual codes.<sup>41</sup> According to Jennifer Mundy, "If 'pollution' was a common euphemism for masturbation, Ernst turned the tables . . . [to suggest] that if anything had perverted and 'polluting' attitudes towards sex, it was the Church."<sup>42</sup> This inversion is absolutely critical. If, as Denis Hollier proposes, the symbolism of the "stain" in religious terminology "designates the results of the fall, which for mankind is an indelible stain," Ernst, Bataille, and indeed Oppenheim have turned this concept on its head by citing enforced chastity and the rejection of natural corporeal lust and love as the true danger to humanity.<sup>43</sup> Dirt thus becomes a powerful declaration, an embrace of sexuality and a defiance of its classification as taboo.<sup>44</sup> If cleanliness is next to godliness, the surrealists preferred to worship in the church of mud puddles.

<sup>38</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 36, 161.

<sup>40</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 93.

<sup>41</sup> See: Max Ernst, "Danger de pollution," in *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 2, (Paris: October 1930); reprinted in *The Autobiography of Surrealism*, ed. and trans. Marcel Jean (New York: Viking Press, 1980), 264-5.

<sup>42</sup> Mundy, "Letters of Desire," 44.

<sup>43</sup> Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge: Mass. and London, MIT Press, 1989), 94.

<sup>44</sup> The worn soles also recall the shoes' controversial provenance. The original heels belonged to Marie-Berthe Ernst, Max's wife, and were given to Oppenheim by her lover, further relating the scuffed soles to a relationship outside the normative boundaries of society.

But importantly, despite the “rebellious” dirt, the shoes are tightly bound together, which raises further tensions between freedom and restraint—a recurrent theme throughout Oppenheim’s oeuvre. Depictions of binding and restraint are particularly prominent in her fashion designs: two clasped hands become a belt buckle, and two disembodied girl’s legs drape around the wearer’s neck to form an eerie necklace (1936) (Figures 11, 12). These objects evoke being strangled or squeezed; but simultaneously, the delicate hands and feet are, in their decorative capacity and ease of removability, rendered somewhat less threatening.<sup>45</sup>

In the case of *My Nurse*, it is the binding of the shoes which, in a brilliantly ironic twist that cannot help but invoke admiration at Oppenheim’s cleverness, upholds their irreconcilable, heterogeneous potency. Through Oppenheim’s presentation, two single shoes each lose a part of themselves—to use Bataillian terminology—and become one subversive object, a suggestive symbol of “deviant” sexuality. Indeed, *My Nurse*, in its dirty inversion, invites viewers to join in its tight embrace; in Oppenheim’s own words, “The thing . . . invokes . . . the association of thighs squeezed together in pleasure. In fact, almost a ‘proposition,’” thus compounding the suggestions of the dirty soles with the overall composition of the object.<sup>46</sup> However, like the inherent indomitability of Magritte’s painting, to literally partake in *My Nurse* would be to eliminate its identity, to undo the compelling spell of re-contextualization, to turn the enigmatic form back into two old dirty shoes. *My Nurse*, protected by the security measures at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm and by its status as a priceless art object more generally, evokes in viewers a complicated sexual and culinary appetite than can never be consummated, much as Magritte’s *Portrait* will forever remain staring at us in a defiant challenge. By viewing *My Nurse* in this context, we are left longing to answer this figure’s disturbing, silent siren song, which arouses so many of our base instincts, from hunger to humor to repulsion to desire. But ultimately we must walk away from the object still reckoning with these urges, “wholly other” from the entity before us, with more questions and quandaries aroused than answers.

<sup>45</sup> In the larger surrealist milieu, bound women imagery particularly recalls Hans Bellmer’s photographs of stringed women, such as the later example *Store in a Cool Dry Place* (1958), which in its title transforms the nude into an edible, perishable commodity.

<sup>46</sup> Meret Oppenheim, letter to Jean-Christophe Ammann, 8 June 1982; quoted in Jean-Christophe Ammann, “For Meret Oppenheim,” in Curiger, *Defiance in the Face of Freedom*, 116.

## DIGESTING THE DISCUSSION: AN INCONCLUSIVE CONCLUSION

One way of viewing both *The Portrait* and *My Nurse* is through their ultimate presentations of a deliberate, pronounced indistinctness of identification. On one level, this both invests the viewer's eye with a Bataillian role of consumption, while simultaneously, in upholding indistinctness, renders the eye's role inherently incomplete. Moreover, the irresolution of the conflicting arguments and emotions that they raise, merging familiar, disquieting, alluring and repellent, relates them to Bataille's notion of heterogeneity, as discussed throughout this paper. However, if we take this concession to Bataillian theory one step further, we can understand how these two works relate to the surrealists' concept of the "sacred." Both pieces engage with the "foreign and shocking," which are implicit in Bataille's definition of the sacred—but there is another important dimension of his consideration, one that is rooted in Freud.<sup>47</sup> In his analysis of the concepts of the "sacred" and the "high," Freud emphasizes their etymology, explaining: "In Latin, *altus* means both high and deep; *sacer*, holy and damned."<sup>48</sup> This conflation of perceived opposites directly informs Bataille's use of the term, in which the more basically instinctual an idea or action is, the more highly revered it becomes, with no apparent pinnacle of either concept. Denis Hollier's explanation of this belief system is critical in understanding its ramifications: if, as he proposes, the high/sacred and low/*bassesse* are each an "*absolute comparison*, a comparative with no referent, a comparative that in and of itself dissolves common measure," then "joining these two transgressions . . . results in dissolving the gap that would guarantee the distinction between high and low."<sup>49</sup>

Ultimately, it is precisely this dissolution of absolutes and, crucially, the maintenance thereof, that is of primary importance to these pieces' functioning. The instinctual reactions we have to these two works are indeed oppositional, but seem to lose their relative qualities of "positive" and "negative" as we find ourselves, through the manipulations of food, in this new realm of perverted familiarity.

<sup>47</sup> Neil Cox phrases this interest well, stating: "In general, Bataille regards the . . . sacred as moments of extreme awe or disgust, fundamentally linked by the presence of what is absolutely other to the subject." Neil Cox, "Critique of Pure Desire, or When the Surrealists Were Right," in *Desire Unbound*, 265.

<sup>48</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Essais de psychanalyse appliquée* (Paris: Gaillimard/Coll. Idées, 1978), 65; quoted in Hollier, *Against Architecture*, 132.

<sup>49</sup> Hollier, *Against Architecture*, 102, 133.

I have tried to make it clear throughout this paper that the larger surrealist goal of undermining rigid societal systems of classification very much informed and inspired the artists in question; both Magritte and Oppenheim, I believe, would support Bataille's statement that "it is high time that human nature cease being subjected to the autocrat's vile repression and to the morality that authorizes exploitation."<sup>50</sup> But I hope it equally has been demonstrated that it is neither my aim in this paper nor the artists' in their works to propose a unified, cohesive, or decisive solution to Bataille's autocratic enemy, but rather to provide a sampling of the various possible alternatives suggested by food's implementation as a tool in this larger surrealist endeavor. In addition to this macrocosmic project, however, these artists have called for a reassessment of one of the most daily and personal activities by complicating the base act of eating.

Indeed, if we draw upon the Bataillan project of the sacred, we can understand a fundamental point about these artists' rebellion: in disrupting existing boundaries of morality and immorality, vice and virtue, they sought not to redraw such classifications on their own terms, but to uphold the liminal state of destruction and underscore the artificiality of such categories in the first place. According to Lenore Malen, "In a Sadean universe of abolished differences, all things are returned to chaos—to excrement."<sup>51</sup> Or, returning to Bataille himself, "The identical nature . . . of God and excrement, should not shock the intellect of anyone."<sup>52</sup>

In this light, the counter for what Dalí saw as the "spiritual and symbolic nourishment that Catholicism has offered throughout the centuries for the appeasement of . . . moral and irrational hunger" is not a replacement of the force-fed doctrines of religion by a unified dogma of surrealism, but instead an exaltation of individual choices based on instinctual satisfaction and uninhibited (and often unanswerable) questioning—a combination that seeks to shatter our self-repressive superegos that have formed in response to civilization's mandates.<sup>53</sup> And it is, it seems, through such daily corporeal pleasures—very much including the act of eating—that the surrealists believed true change could be enacted.

What these works all demand, therefore, is a Bataillan "participation"—not just by artists, but equally by viewers, who must

<sup>50</sup> Bataille, "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade," 101.

<sup>51</sup> Lenore Malen, "Postscript: An Anal Universe," in *Art Journal* 52:3 (Fall 1993), 79.

<sup>52</sup> Bataille, "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade," 102n. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Dalí, "The Conquest of the Irrational," in *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, 263.

grapple with these contradictions without pre-approved schemas of affirmation and condemnation dictated by religion and society.<sup>54</sup> The Bataillan eye can therefore be equated with the viewer's eye, not just observing but also actively engaging with and challenging that which it consumes. As such, the broader roles of the artist and subject require reevaluation. Freud remarked that the appreciation of art was the epitome of vicarious satisfaction, calling it "an enjoyment which, by the agency of the artist, is made accessible even to those who are not themselves creative."<sup>55</sup> Yet by returning the ultimate decisions back to the viewer, the surrealist artist becomes not a definitive source of pleasure, but the fodder and nourishment with which to seek it, fueling viewers' determination to pose their own challenges to society in spite, or perhaps because of, their inability to reconcile their own anxieties about spectatorship, ingestion, and consumption. In this reframing, the artist engages with his or her audience in what Carter Ratcliff deems "ceremonies of mutual ingestion."<sup>56</sup> As Dalí saw it, the surrealists were there for the cannibalistic taking:

One might try and eat the Surrealists too; for we Surrealists are the kind of good-quality, decadent, stimulating, extravagant, and ambivalent food, which . . . proves suitable for the gamey, paradoxical, and succulently truculent state that is proper to, and characteristic of, the climate of ideological and moral confusion in which we have the honor and pleasure to live at this time.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, in consuming these surrealists, we participate in a new kind of communion—one that does not demand the swallowing or assimilation of a regimented set of beliefs, nor does it promise salvation or comfort; rather, in the reverence of a new kind of sacred, it implicates us to chew, digest, swallow, or spit out this otherness according to no one's tastes but our own.

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<sup>54</sup> Bataille, "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade," 101.

<sup>55</sup> Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents," 80-81.

<sup>56</sup> Carter Ratcliff, "Swallowing Dalí," in *Artforum*, 21:1 (September 1982), 36. Though this statement specifically refers to Dalí and his audience, the extrapolation to the other artists in question seems warranted.

<sup>57</sup> Dalí, "The Conquest of the Irrational," 264.



## ILLUSTRATIONS

(See online version for illustrations)

Figure 1: René Magritte, *The Portrait*, 1935. Oil on canvas. 73.3 x 50.2 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York City, USA.

Figure 2: Meret Oppenheim, *Ma Gouvernante—My Nurse—Mein Kindermädchen*, 1936. Metal, shoes, string, and paper. 14 x 21 x 33 cm. Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden.

Figure 3: Hieronymous Bosch, *Allegory of Gluttony and Lust*, 1490. Oil on panel. 36 x 32 cm. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT, USA.

Figures 4-5: Salvador Dali and Luis Buñue, stills from *Un chien andalou*, 1929. Film.

Figure 6: René Magritte, *The Treachery of Images*, 1929. Oil on canvas. 62.2 x 81 cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, USA.

Figure 7: René Magritte, *This is a piece of cheese*, 1936. Oil on canvas board. 10 x 16 cm, in gilded wooden frame; glass dome and pedestal, height 31 cm, diameter 25 cm. Menil Collection, Houston, TX, USA.

Figure 8: Meret Oppenheim, *Votive Picture (Strangling Angel)*, 1931. India ink and watercolor. 34 x 17.5 cm. Galerie Renée Ziegler, Zürich, Switzerland.

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Figure 11: Meret Oppenheim, sketch for a belt, n.d. Ink and gouache on paper. 8.4 x 14.9 cm. Location unknown.

Figure 12: Meret Oppenheim, design for necklace, 1936. Pencil, ink, and watercolor. 16 x 13 cm. Birgit and Burkhard Wenger, Basel, Switzerland.

# Breaking Dalinian Bread: On Consuming the Anthropomorphic, Performative, Ferocious, and Eucharistic Loaves of Salvador Dalí

Julia Pine

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*What man cannot do, bread can.*

—Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, 1942<sup>1</sup>

“Bread,” wrote Salvador Dalí in 1945, “has always been one of the oldest fetishistic and obsessive subjects in my work, the one to which I have remained the most faithful.”<sup>2</sup> Despite having been largely overlooked in Dalí’s work, bread—like the crutch, the lobster, and the detumescent clock—does in fact appear with remarkable frequency throughout the artist’s oeuvre.<sup>3</sup> This essay considers the presence and significance of bread in Dalí’s visual and literary production from the 1920s to the 1970s by reviewing his many bread-related writings and works of art; it also assesses the artist’s attempts to establish the image of bread as a personal device or “trademark” in terms of what media history scholar Paul Rutherford calls “the Dalí brand.”<sup>4</sup>

Dalí’s famous persona as artistic showman, exemplified by his mountebank’s moustache, was in large part established through the use of various images that were intended, like contemporary product branding, to reinforce his public profile and establish his cultural relevance. Bread, the object to which Dalí “remained most faithful” throughout his career, was a remarkably plastic one, rife with resonance and symbolic agency, and thus ideal for addressing and

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<sup>1</sup> Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí* (New York: Dover Publications, 1993), 337.

<sup>2</sup> Salvador Dalí, *Dalí* (New York: The Bignou Gallery, 1945), n.p.

<sup>3</sup> One exception is a short encyclopedia entry on the subject of bread in Dalí’s work in the catalogue for the 2004 centenary of his work. See: Dawn Ades, “Bread,” in *Dalí: The Centenary Retrospective*, ed. Dawn Ades (Venice, Philadelphia, and London: Palazzo Grassi/Philadelphia Museum of Art/Thames and Hudson, 2004), 426.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Rutherford, *A World Made Sexy: Freud to Madonna* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 82. In his discussion of Salvador Dalí’s autobiography *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, Rutherford describes the “Dalí brand” as being “a new kind of product that embodied the name and the style of one of the most notorious painters of the day.” That is, a media presence with all of the now-familiar contemporary trappings of visual reinforcement, self-promotion, or product placement.

contextualizing concerns and preoccupations germane to his art practice. The present study considers how Dalí remained faithful to the idea of bread, while deftly molding its significance to the conceptual and visual requirements of what are considered here to be the five distinct stages of his career. These include his pre-Surrealist experimental period, his tenure as a Surrealist in the late 1920s and '30s, his "classic" post-Surrealist period of the 1940s, his religiosity-based "Nuclear Mysticism" of the mid-century, and his embrace of Pop Art and other contemporary movements and styles in the last active decades of his career.

To survey the use of bread in Dalí's performed, assembled, painted, and written work is to acknowledge his continued use of the loaf of bread as an anthropomorphic surrogate of the primarily Dalinian body—an index of his self-styled role as "savior of modern art"—and in terms of contemporary politics and issues of cultural consumption. By proposing exegetical strategies to approach bread in Dalí's work, this paper posits the significance of this object in the artist's creative corpus, and in the process, assesses bread's effectiveness as both a conceptual and promotional element in his ongoing strategies of self-endorsement.

## BREAD AS DALINIAN DEVICE

During his early years within the Surrealist movement, Dalí evidently sought an object or symbol that embodied a number of the concepts and problematics that preoccupied him and other Surrealists, but also satisfied his specific requirement of being profoundly figurative rather than abstract. In his autobiography, the artist describes the moment when he claims he decided that bread was to become the primary "fetishistic and obsessive subject" in his work, and the launch of his subsequent campaign to make bread "his own," as a trope for what might be called the Dalí persona or construct. In characteristically eccentric and baroque prose, Dalí recounts this epiphany, which occurs after he has partaken of a particularly satisfying meal. "I had eaten my fill and was looking absentmindedly, though fixedly, at a piece of bread," he writes. "It was the heel of a long loaf, lying on its belly, and I could not cease looking at it. Finally I took it and kissed the very tip of it, then with my tongue I sucked it a little to soften it, after which I stuck the softened part on the table, where it remained standing." According to Dalí, at this moment, he had "just reinvented Columbus's egg: the

bread of Salvador Dalí. I had just discovered the enigma of bread: it could stand up without having to be eaten!" "This thing so atavistically and consubstantially welded to the idea of 'primary utility,'" he continues, "the elementary basis of continuity, the symbol of 'nutrition,' of sacred 'subsistence,' this thing . . . I was going to render useless and aesthetic."<sup>5</sup>

Throughout his extensive body of literary work, Dalí seldom addresses the symbolism of the many objects depicted or incorporated in his visual practice. With bread, however, he often articulates its iconography, and his association with it as a sort of device or trademark. In *The Secret Life*, for example, speaking of his return to Paris after two intensely industrious months at his home in Port Lligat in the Ampurdan region of Spain, the artist explains the rhetorical value that bread holds in what he describes as his "cosmogony," by which he indexes his "life system" of the period. "My bread was a ferociously anti-humanitarian bread," he claims, "it was the bread of the revenge of imaginative luxury on the utilitarianism of the rational practical world, it was the aristocratic, aesthetic, paranoiac, sophisticated, Jesuitical, phenomenal, paralyzing, hyper-evident bread." On the eve of his leaving for Paris, Dalí recounts the ecstasies and tortures of this productive time: "in the apparently insignificant gesture of putting the end of the loaf of bread upright on a table, the whole spiritual experience of this period."<sup>6</sup>

Dalí's insistence on *his* bread as a personal device in his public appearances, in his painting, sculptural endeavors, and performance work was so successful among the Paris *beau monde* and avant-garde, he claims, that, just as he had intended, Dalí and bread became inextricably linked in the mind of the forward-thinking Parisian. "Upon arriving in Paris," he writes, "I said to everyone who cared to listen, 'Bread, bread and more bread. Nothing but bread.'"<sup>7</sup> This project worked so well that at one point the artist describes himself sitting with a number of friends in a bistro, as the waiter delivered a basket of bread to the table. Everyone present, Dalí maintains, "exclaimed in astonishment, 'It's like a Dalí!'" According to the artist, "The bread of Paris was no longer the bread of Paris. It was my bread. Dalí's bread, Salvador's bread. The bakers were already beginning to imitate me!"<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dalí, *The Secret Life*, 306-7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 307

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 315.

That the artist chose bread as a sort of personal device or emblem, similar to his famous moustache, points to an acute awareness of the potential for art, and more importantly, the artist's personality, to become an object of mass consumption, to be "eaten" or "devoured" by the consumers of art and celebrity. Dalí described this phenomenon in terms of what he deemed the "cannibalism of objects," presumably pertaining to the perpetual cycle of consumption requisite to high capitalism. This does not necessarily imply, however, a critique of the mechanics of the capitalist system, nor that of popular culture, both of which Dalí participated in with gusto. In the later 1930s, in fact, Dalí often described himself as a painter for the masses,<sup>9</sup> writing in 1939, for instance, that "The masses have always known where to find true poetry."<sup>10</sup> Dalí champions what he cites as the preferences and preoccupations of the "masses": a hunger for a sort of moral and spiritual nourishment in spite of the pleasures yielded by the fruits of consumerism. Accordingly, his insistence upon the most basic staple of the western diet points to his populist approach to art-making, which began in the later 1930s, as he posits his own "Dalinian bread" as a sort of sustenance for the multitude.

This emphasis on mass consumption is plainly underscored in a 1933 essay entitled "Concerning the Terrifying and Edible Beauty of Art Nouveau Architecture." Using ruminations upon Art Nouveau style as a point of entry, Dalí outlines what he views as the advantages of the capitalist system, and pits the idea of mass consumption and the prevalence of his cited pan-cultural "moral hunger" against Surrealist leader André Breton's insistence upon the primacy of the erotic. "Erotic desire is the downfall of intellectual aesthetics," Dalí insists.

Beauty is none other than the sum total of the consciousness of our perversions. — Breton said: "Beauty will be convulsive or will cease to be." The new Surrealist age of "cannibalism of objects" equally justifies the following conclusion: Beauty will be edible or will cease to be.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "I paint for the masses, for the great common man, for the people," Dalí claimed in a 1939 interview in *The New Yorker*. See: Margaret Case Harriman, "Profiles: A Dream Walking, Salvador Dalí," in *The New Yorker* (July 1, 1939), 27.

<sup>10</sup> Salvador Dalí, *Declaration of the Independence of the Imagination and the Rights of Man to His Own Madness*, flyer, privately printed, 1939, reprinted in Salvador Dalí, *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, ed. and trans. Haim N. Finkelstein (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 334.

<sup>11</sup> Salvador Dalí, "Concerning the Terrifying and Edible Beauty of Art Nouveau Architecture," in Dalí, *The Collected Writings*, 200.

Dalí illustrates the idea that “beauty”—or the “true poetry of the masses”—will be edible, in the most literal of ways, through his insistence upon the western dietary staple of the loaf of bread. Bread, as a metaphor for the consumable object (including the artist himself) that is to be “cannibalized” by masses suffering from “moral hunger,” is one of the key problematics that Dalí employs in his engagement with the iconography of bread, and one which served him not just in his Surrealist period, but through the subsequent phases of his career. In this sense of “feeding the multitudes,” Dalí also self-consciously evokes Biblical references to bread, in particular the famous passage from Luke 9:16 in which Christ miraculously feeds five thousand people with a mere five loaves and two fish.

## BREAD AND THE SURREALIST OBJECT

Although Dalí had dabbled with bread imagery before he joined the Surrealists, after his alleged epiphany in *The Secret Life* about the significance of bread for his creative practice, the artist flatly concluded: “I was going to make Surrealist objects with bread.”<sup>12</sup> Here he is referring to what at the time was a novel art concept inspired by the Duchampian found object and Dada collage, that of constructing three dimensional articles in resonant and unsettling ways using often incongruous combinations of mostly commonplace materials. The idea for the Surrealist object was first introduced by Breton in the *Surrealist Manifesto* of 1924, wherein he proposed that objects that appeared in dreams could be given tangible form, thereby reifying the products of the unconscious mind and “making strange” articles in everyday use. Surrealist objects, Breton asserted, acquired agency through their “change of role” and it was important, he wrote, “to strengthen at all costs the defences which can resist the invasion of the feeling world by things used by men more out of habit than necessity.”<sup>13</sup>

While Breton’s criteria for the creation of Surrealist objects was relatively glib, a prime concern—although one left unarticulated by the poet—was the objects’ pointed, if not satiric references to Freudian symbolism, including the often grotesquely erotic and the comically anthropomorphic. Dalí immediately embraced the idea of the Surrealist object when he first joined the movement in 1929. He

<sup>12</sup> Dalí, *The Secret Life*, 307.

<sup>13</sup> André Breton, “The Crisis of the Object,” in Patrick Waldberg, *Surrealism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 86. The emphasis is the author’s.

particularly relished and often parodied certain Freudian concepts, mostly from Freud's *Three Essays on Sexuality*, which had gained tremendous notoriety at the time in its dealing with issues of castration, the genital symbolism of objects, and sexual fetishism. Dalí was also clearly taken with the idea of object animism, described by Freud in his 1919 essay "The Uncanny."<sup>14</sup>

In addition to producing a number of now famous assemblages, Dalí also wrote much on the Surrealist object in the early 1930s, such as his 1931 essay "Surrealist Objects," which appeared in the French vanguard journal *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*. In this essay, he creates a general catalogue of six types of objects, including "Objects Functioning Symbolically," "Objects to be Thrown," and "Objects-Machines." A year later, he produced a similar essay for *This Quarter* magazine, entitled "The Object Revealed in Surrealist Experiment," in which he adumbrates the conceptual growth of the object, and suggests that it had undergone four different phases. These apparently ranged from anthropomorphic items, to "dream-state articles," to kinetic or interactive pieces that Dalí describes as "articles functioning symbolically," to objects that tend to "bring about our fusion with [them] and makes us pursue the formation of a unity with [them] (hunger for an article and edible articles)." The latter, he writes, reflect a yearning to "form a whole" with them due to a "new hunger" from which "we" are suffering. "As we think it over," he explains, once again pointing to issues of consumption, "we find suddenly that it does not seem enough to devour things with our eyes, and our anxiety to join actively and effectively in their existence brings us to want to *eat them*."<sup>15</sup>

In 1932, Dalí exhibited two objects at the Pierre Colle gallery in Paris, one of which, entitled *Hypnagogic Clock*, embodied what might be described as his ethos of the edible. According to the artist, it "consisted of an enormous loaf of French bread posed on a luxurious pedestal." On the back of this loaf, Dalí notes that he "fastened a dozen ink-bottles in a row, filled with 'Pelican' ink and each bottle held a pen of a different colour."<sup>16</sup> Because of its ephemeral nature, this object did not survive, but like other of his Surrealist assemblages, such as his well-known shoe construction entitled

<sup>14</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" in *The Standard Edition of The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XVII, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 217-256.

<sup>15</sup> Salvador Dalí, "The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment," in Dalí, *The Collected Writings*, 242. The emphases are the author's.

<sup>16</sup> Dalí, *The Secret Life*, 21.



*Scatological Object Functioning Symbolically (The Surrealist Shoe)* of 1931, there is often somewhere in Dalí's writing an invariably obfuscatory or quixotic "explanation" for these works or how to "use" them. In this case, *The Secret Life* again sheds light on how one might presumably approach Dalí's bread constructions, facetiously or otherwise. Describing the production of an object similar to *Hypnagogic Clock* in his autobiography, Dalí writes:

One day I hollowed out entirely an end of a loaf of bread, and what do you think I put inside it? I put a bronze Buddha, whose metallic surface I completely covered with dead fleas which I wedged against one another so tightly that the Buddha appeared to be made entirely of fleas. What does that mean, eh? After putting the Buddha inside the bread I closed the opening with a little piece of wood, and I cemented the whole, including the bread, sealing it hermetically in such a way as to form a homogeneous whole which looked like a little urn, on which I wrote "Horse Jam." What does that mean, eh?<sup>17</sup>

"People were constantly asking me," Dalí writes, "What does that mean? What does that mean?," a question the artist ostensibly, through seemingly absurd or impracticable explanations or simply by bypassing the question, leaves open.<sup>18</sup> Further inquiries, however, continue to yield a rich variety of meanings that Dalí ascribes to bread, expressed in duly pointed, albeit cryptic, ways.

In considering the use of bread in his oeuvre, Dalí scholar Dawn Ades claims that "Dalí turns the idea of bread as 'the staff of life' on its head," which is precisely what the artist did with one of his most famous Surrealist objects, a 1933 work entitled, *Retrospective Bust of a Woman* (Figure 1).<sup>19</sup> This *bricolage* was comprised of a commercial *fin-de-siècle* porcelain display bust of a woman's torso and a head of the kind that would be used for displaying hats and wraps. Dalí embellished this found object in a sort of inverted parody of Parisian fashion, with ears of dried corn resembling a stole. Around the neck, he attached a collar made of a strip of paper from a nineteenth-century child's toy, a Zoetrope, printed with cartoon images of a dancing boy. The head of the figure swarms with the artist's trademark ants and sports a feathery skullcap which is itself graced with a large loaf of bread; in the loaf, the artist embedded a bronze inkwell featuring the French peasant couple from Jean-

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ades, "Bread," 426.

François Millet's renowned 1859 canvas *The Angelus* in their characteristic attitude of prayer.<sup>20</sup>

Thanks to the absurd juxtapositions of unlikely trappings, this object has immediate visual appeal and Dalí undermines any possible exegetical gravitas in a remark he makes in the caption to a photograph of the work in *The Secret Life*. While this object might be read as profoundly uncanny, or as a metaphor for consumption of the female image, or of fashion embodied in the mannequin's bizarre accoutrements, Dalí plays up its comic potential. Writing of the first time *Retrospective Bust of a Woman* was exhibited at the Salon des Surindépendants in Paris in 1933, he explains that Picasso had visited the exhibition with his dog. While Picasso's reaction to Dalí's work is not recorded, his dog, blissfully unaware of art gallery etiquette and devoid of reverence for the art object at hand, apparently "leaped at the loaf of bread and devoured it," effectively eliminating the distinction between art and the everyday object.<sup>21</sup>

## PAINTED BREAD

As he describes in his memoir, Dalí became intensely preoccupied with bread during his early Surrealist years, and in 1932, the same year *Hypnagogic Clock* was exhibited, he painted at least five canvases in which the primary signifier is bread. Or rather, considering the invariably anthropomorphic aspect of the said bread, and the narrative implications of the content, perhaps these works might more accurately be described as having bread as their protagonists. Indeed, the artist has transferred many of the incongruous, bizarre and, duly comedic aspects of the Surrealist object in his rendering of various loaves in oil on canvas, in which all of his baguettes have decided personalities. They are also, for the most part, unambiguously phallic, as Dalí plays up the long, thin shape of the bread, and even stages them in erotic scenarios.

The first of these is his *Anthropomorphic Bread*, circa 1932, which features a phallic and undeniably erect loaf swathed in a white, prepuce-like sac (Figure 2). This diminutive oil, rendered in a palette dominated by burnt orange and cerulean blue, beams a theatrical spotlight upon what might be described as the head of the bread "figure." Leaning against a wall, this aptly described "staff of life"

<sup>20</sup> Jean-François Millet's *The Angelus* (1857-59) is another image that is frequently referenced in Dalí's work.

<sup>21</sup> Dalí, *The Secret Life*, caption to photographic insert between pages 262 and 263.

appears to be ready to spring into action, and the title for the work, *Anthropomorphic Bread*, flatly explains the uncanny sentience of the loaf, iterating Dalí's trope of the "living" bread, or bread as surrogate for the human figure.

Dalí executed a second bread painting in 1932, *Anthropomorphic Bread—Catalonian Bread*, which features a similar loaf placed horizontally, drooping from one of the artist's trademark soft clocks, as well as the familiar inkwell and the white paper or blanket that appeared in *Anthropomorphic Bread*, drawn back here to allow a piece of string to restrain it on one side (Figure 3). Depicting a complex and highly resonant construction made, for the most part, of simple everyday materials, this work plainly suggests the Surrealist object rendered in two dimensions, and that Dalí was working with a similar idiom in a different medium. In this rendering the subject has become decidedly flaccid, and the erect pen in the inkwell serves as a foil for the detumescent loaf, which requires a string to hold it up. This assumption is reinforced by the presence of Dalí's soft watch, drooped over the fettered bread and swathed in a condom-like pocket. Compared to *Anthropomorphic Bread*, which features a rigid and energetic baguette, this work suggests the precise opposite, mobilizing various images of the flaccid in a metaphor of sexual impotence. That Dalí cites a specifically Catalan loaf also suggests that this work is self-referential, pointing to Dalí, a Catalanian, and expressing his own sexual fears and dysfunctions in a poignant, albeit caricatural way.

In a third bread painting of 1932, the phallicism of the loaf of bread is rendered even more comically blunt, and the painting's subject has notably surmounted any sexual dysfunction. The precise title perhaps precludes the need for a description: *Average French Bread with Two Eggs on the Plate without the Plate, on Horseback, Attempting to Sodomize a Crumb of Portuguese Bread* (Figure 4). As with the previous paintings mentioned, once again Dalí paints the work using a starkly atmospheric chiaroscuro, highlighting the bread with dramatic, self-consciously staged lighting, and employing a subdued palette evoking Dutch Old Master paintings. Dalí's French bread, with its duo of testicle-like eggs perched upon its lower quarter, bugging the crust of a Portuguese loaf, takes Dalí's phallic satire to the level of the pornographic. Most pointedly, here the artist also suggests nationalist rivalries, pitting the French baguette against the Portuguese bread, thereby indexing the phallic comparisons incumbent in cultural competitiveness, rendered graphically in sport

and politics, and likely, as was common throughout Dalí's creative corpus, referencing a specific event in current affairs of the period.

Following the image of an erect loaf, an impotent loaf, and two loaves of bread engaged in a sexual act, Dalí takes the erotic breadstick even deeper into phallic territory in yet another small oil of the same year, entitled *Woman and Catalan Bread*. This time the work is centered upon a more romantic vision of a disembodied Spanish loaf, which appears to fondle the breast of a topless blonde woman, apparently of its own volition (Figure 5). Roughly executed and with little detail, this small painting is likely an oil sketch rather than a finished work, although its grainy texture and uncharacteristically rough and rapid brushwork also suggest distorted vision, as if the viewer were a voyeur gazing through a glass window at this bizarre erotic scene. Placed this time in a more familiar context, interacting with a human being rather than merely focusing on an unsettling and isolated animism, this picture, perhaps more than the previous bread-related paintings of 1932, suggests the loaf as a surrogate for a human presence or perhaps the artist himself. This renders the work less a Surrealist exploration of the phallic object than an animated vignette.

The fifth and final painted work of what might be termed Dalí's Surrealist "year of the bread" is entitled *The Invisible Man*. This canvas shifts its focus from the sexual symbolism, colored by the contemporary interest in the writings of Freud, to that of science fiction, and is decidedly narrative in intent (Figure 6). Indeed, in keeping with his embrace of popular culture, the artist makes reference in the title of the work to H.G. Wells's famous and extremely popular science fiction novella of 1897, which would be made into a Universal Pictures film starring William Harrigan the following year. Here, three loaves of bread are the main subjects of the painting, which finds its setting in a close room with a tiny window. Once again, Dalí employs dramatic lighting, dominated by warm hues in a penumbral palette that emphasizes the theatrical nature of the event.

The first loaf is a sliced baguette sitting on a table; the second, a breadstick balanced on the back of a chair, while a third, upright loaf sits in the chair itself, which reveals the imprint of a human body. Regarding the latter, the artist may well have been inspired by Wells's assertion that when the invisible protagonist of his book ate, his food could be viewed through his stomach, and would remain so

until it was digested.<sup>22</sup> This gesture unambiguously transforms the bread into a signifier for an invisible sitter, and foregrounds, in a startlingly metalinguistic way, the very function of metaphor itself, where the presence of one thing indexes the existence of another. That this aspect of Wells's work, in which food can be viewed through the imperceptible man's body, would appeal to Dalí is clear, as it resonated with his own "epiphany" about the marvellous nature of bread: that "it could stand up without having to be eaten!" In this case, however, bread could stand up only after it *had* been eaten.

## THE PERFORMANCE OF BREAD

In Dalí's hands the loaf of bread could become unsettlingly anthropomorphic and decidedly uncanny, although it was perhaps bread's potential as a concrete and invariably displaced object that appealed most to the artist, particularly in terms of comedic possibilities, and especially as a prop in his endless cycle of performance and performativity. While loaves could nuzzle women's breasts, struggle with sexual dysfunction, recline in chairs, pose saucily on women's heads and energetically sodomize one another, Dalí too could harness the energy of bread for his own purposes, reified on the stage of his own masquerade as eccentric artist and consummate Surrealist. Indeed, for Dalí, the anthropomorphic elements ubiquitous among his Surrealist objects constructed with bread and the invariably sentient loaves in his paintings of 1932 segue directly into his own use of bread in the performative aspects of his work, where the artist himself becomes the catalyst for the animism of the object.

From the perspective of performance, loaves of bread appear throughout Dalí's oeuvre in films, staged photographs, and public appearances, primarily perched on people's heads, similar to *Retrospective Bust of a Woman*. An early example of Dalí's deployment of bread in this capacity in his own performative practice is described in his memoir. This episode commences with his description of the instructions he gave to two aides during a lecture he presented in the early 1930s "before a revolutionary group with predominantly anarchist leanings." Requesting a large loaf of bread and some leather straps, the artist directed his aides:

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<sup>22</sup> See: H.G. Wells, *The Invisible Man* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004).

At a certain point in my speech I shall make a gesture with my hand and say, "bring it!" Then two of you must come up on the stage while I am talking and tie the loaf of bread to my head with the straps, which are to be passed under each arm. Be sure to keep the loaf horizontal.

Finally, the artist insists, "This operation must be performed with utmost seriousness, and even with a touch of the sinister."<sup>23</sup>

During the speech, Dalí, who describes himself as dressed with "provocative elegance," alleges to have whipped the crowd into a frenzy as he pronounced the "crudest obscenities" which "no one had ever heard uttered in public." While the hall began to "roar like a lion," he waved his hand, and the aides approached and proceeded to strap the large loaf to his head, to the discernable amazement of the crowd. "When the bread was secured to my head," he continues, "I suddenly felt myself infected by the general hysteria, and with all the strength of my lungs I began to shout my famous poem on the "Rotten Donkey." At this point, an anarchist doctor in the audience, with a crimson face and a white beard was allegedly seized with "a fit of real madness," and finally,

After the tirade of my obscenities, which still rang in everyone's ears, the apparition of the loaf of bread on my head, and the fit of delirium tremens of the old doctor, the evening ended in an unimaginable general confusion.<sup>24</sup>

Dalí's absurdly ceremonious "crowing" with the loaf of bread served in this instance as a catalyst for confusion, exemplifying creative freedom and taking anarchy to an artistic extreme. To cite it solely as part of Dalí's so-called "conquest of the irrational," or characteristic insistence upon the absurd or the inconceivable is to deny the agency of this gesture in terms of Dalí's self-promotion or his attempts at social commentary. Indeed, spectacles such as these continued to establish the concept of "Dalinian bread" as Dalí's "brand" or device, as well as to resonate with post-depression discourses of abundance and poverty. This is perhaps more evident in another proposed bread project from the early 1930s which was later to blossom into an elaborate plan Dalí proposed to found a "secret society of bread." In the descriptive passage that follows, the artist delineates in elaborate detail his plan for a tremendous *avant-la-lettre* happening or work of performance or environmental art. The

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<sup>23</sup> Dalí, *The Secret Life*, 321.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 322-23.

idea was to bake colossal loaves of bread, fifteen to forty-five meters in length, and to leave them, anonymously, in various elite spots around the globe, such as the inner gardens of the Palais Royal, the court of Versailles, and in New York between the Savoy-Plaza and the Hotel St. Moritz. Dalí's description of the project, as he wrote about it in the early 1940s, was purely conjectural, although it should be noted that, in 1958, Dalí did manage to find a baker equipped to carry out part of this project. From him, the artist commissioned the baking of a twelve-meter baguette, which he used to illustrate his lecture on the theories of the physicist Werner Seisenberg at the Théâtre de l'Étoile in Paris.<sup>25</sup>

According to the artist, this type of operation was intended as a point of departure which,

in accordance with my principles of the imaginative hierarchical monarchy, one could subsequently try to ruin systematically the logical meaning of all the mechanisms of the rational practical world.<sup>26</sup>

Despite this abstruse rationalization of the project, and regardless of the fact that Dalí is seldom considered in terms of political activism or commentary, the proposed placement of these massive loaves in the most prominent centers of luxury reads as a conspicuous underscoring of the discrepancies between privilege and poverty, that is, between gross abundance enjoyed by the moneyed and the poor's lack of access to bread. For the latter, bread functioned in its broader, traditional sense, as a symbol of base sustenance. In this way, the "secret society of bread" raises a number of issues regarding access to, waste of, and the antipodes of distribution of food, bringing new meaning to Marie Antoinette's famous expression "let them eat cake."

As invested as Dalí was in Spanish politics and the events of the Spanish Civil War, he would have been well aware of a book that was a veritable Bible for the left-leaning faction leading up to and during the conflict. This was *The Conquest of Bread*, written by the Russian anarchist communist Peter Kropotkin and first published in 1892. In it, the author denounces capitalism and cites it as the primary cause of poverty, suggesting various socialist-centered solutions. While Dalí was to shift from ardent communist leanings in the early- to mid-1930s, to a decidedly reactionary, pro-Franco stance

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<sup>25</sup> Montse Aguer Teixidor, ed., *Salvador Dalí: An Illustrated Life* (Tate Publishing, London, 2007), 239.

<sup>26</sup> Dalí, *The Secret Life*, 311.

after the Spanish Civil War, the metaphor inherent in the phrase *The Conquest of Bread*, and its implied commentary on social inequity, was something that Dalí well knew would resonate with his bread project, suggesting his own personal “conquest of bread” in the domain of art practice and consumption.

## TWO BASKETS OF BREAD

While Dalí often employed the imagery of or actual loaves of bread in his visual practice, he likewise incorporated bread symbolism in his writing. This is most evident in his autobiography, in which the artist employs bread to index his Surrealist work, which, by the time of writing his memoir, he had rejected in favour of a new aesthetic. Calling it “classic,” Dalí based this new style on academic and renaissance models. In *The Secret Life*, the extent to which he associated the work of his Surrealist period with bread becomes clear when the artist discusses his attitude toward America and his first visit to the New World in 1934. “America!” he writes, “I wanted to go over there and see what it was like, to bring my bread, place my bread over there; say to the Americans, What does it mean, eh?”<sup>27</sup>

Consequently, it is no surprise that upon his first voyage to America, by ship, Dalí managed to coerce the baker on the *Champlain* to bake him a two and a half meter long loaf of bread. Bolstered with a wooden armature to prevent it from breaking, and wrapped in cellophane, the artist boasted to fellow passengers that he could not wait to speak to the reporters on shore. “I love getting publicity,” he announces, continuing—once again evoking Biblical imagery—“and if I am lucky enough to have the reporters know who I am, I will give them some of my own bread to eat, just as Saint Francis did with the birds.” Arriving on shore, Dalí is greeted by a throng of reporters, all of whom were, according to the artist, “amazingly well informed as to who I was.” In one of his comic turns, however, he in fact ends up immensely disappointed that while being interviewed, not a single reporter asked about the enormous baguette that he “held conspicuous during the whole interview either on my arm or resting on the ground as though it had been a large cane.”<sup>28</sup>

According to the narrative forwarded in his highly embellished and novelistic memoir, while Paris enthusiastically embraced Dalí’s

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<sup>27</sup> Dalí, *The Secret Life*, 324.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.



Surrealist work, and therefore his Surrealist “bread,” America clearly did not respond to this particular artistic fare. This despite what Dalí describes as his “most directly exhibitionistic way of showing my obsession with bread,” which involved parading his oversized baguette around the streets of New York until it was hopelessly dry and dented.<sup>29</sup> Dalí ceremoniously employs the symbolism of bread here once again; this time in order to signal his break with Surrealist practice in America.

With his loaf crumbling to bits on the sidewalk in front of the Waldorf Astoria, Dalí writes that at precisely twelve noon he decided to throw it away, although before he did he slipped and fell. This caused the bread to split in half, and slide away some distance. A policeman immediately arrived to help him off the ground, and when the artist looked about him, it was to discover that the two halves of the breadstick had completely vanished.<sup>30</sup> According to the trajectory of *The Secret Life*, which maps the shift from Dalí’s Paris-based Surrealist period to the beginning of his eight-year exile in America, the birthplace of his new “classic” phase as an artist, at this point bread, like Surrealism, disappears from *The Secret Life*. Dalí’s bread, as an emblem of his Surrealist aesthetic and career, evidently found no place in America and, dry, crumbling, and spent, it broke in half and disappeared, both literally, in the form of his evasive loaf, and symbolically, as a presence in his memoir.<sup>31</sup>

Collaterally with the writing of his autobiography in the early 1940s in America, a painting on the subject of bread that Dalí had executed some nineteen years before during his youthful, pre-Surrealist experimental phase suddenly took on renewed importance for the artist. This was *The Basket of Bread* of 1926, which depicts a rustic basket holding a few pieces of sliced bread. As with his bread paintings of 1932, here Dalí has once again employed striking chiaroscuro, setting the luminous central images against a stark black background to provide contrast for the basket and its contents, which have been placed reverentially upon a white cloth, resting atop a wooden table (Figure 7). This simple, unambiguous still life, executed in an Old Master style, was a showpiece for Dalí’s technical abilities, and an index of his proficiency at academic rendering and subject matter.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 337.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 336.

<sup>31</sup> This is purely a narrative ploy, as Dalí in fact enjoyed tremendous success with his Surrealist work throughout the 1930s.

*Basket of Bread* was painted when the artist was only twenty-two years of age, up to which point his oeuvre had been decidedly abstract, having already gone through Impressionist, New Objectivity, Cubist, Purist, and other stylistic phases before he was to join the Surrealist ranks in 1929. Following this line of inheritance, it might be presumed that at the time the artist executed *Basket of Bread*, he was testing the limits of his technical mastery, decidedly working in an Old Master technique that was reminiscent of any number of Italian or more specifically Dutch paintings from the Renaissance onward. However, the work of the seventeenth-century Spanish painter Francisco de Zurbarán, a great favourite of Dalí's, is the most immediate referent.<sup>32</sup>

This painting is nothing like any of Dalí's other works before or after the period in which it was painted, and is apparently devoid of irony, humor or contemporary influences of any kind. The artist shows undeniable technical mastery here, something that made a notable impression on the American press when it was exhibited at the Twenty-Seventh International Exhibition of Paintings, at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh in 1928—it was one of the first three works by Dalí to be exhibited in the United States.<sup>33</sup> While Dalí was not to set foot in the United States for the first time until four years later, the painting was, in fact, one that introduced the artist to the American public that was eventually to enthusiastically embrace him as a prolific and eccentric Surrealist in the following decade. However, at the time of his writing of *The Secret Life*, Dalí clearly sensed that Surrealism had run its course, and he even began referring to himself as an "anti-Surrealist."<sup>34</sup> At this point he evidently believed that he could capture a wider audience in the New World by returning to the kind of work exemplified in *The Basket of Bread*. "To become classic!" was his new battle cry in exhibition catalogues and his autobiography, and having done away with his "Surrealist bread," he now embraced a new kind of "bread," that is, a new artistic style: one in which he continued actively to explore bread as an artistic subject and medium.

It was under these auspices that Dalí began to experiment once again, almost two decades later, with Old Master, Renaissance, and

<sup>32</sup> Michael R. Taylor, "The Basket of Bread," in *Dalí: The Centenary Retrospective*, 87.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>34</sup> "I felt that I needed, among other things to have someone write a pamphlet on me bearing a title something like 'Anti-Surrealist Dalí.' For various reasons I needed this type of 'passport,' for I am myself too much of a diplomat to be the first to pronounce such a judgment" (Dalí, *The Secret Life*, 207n. 1).

academic styles, as he did in a 1945 oil painting entitled *Basket of Bread*, often published with the subtitle *Rather Death than Shame*, a work which self-consciously returns to his experiment of 1926 (Figure 8). That this canvas is intended to reference his earlier, and quite famous, *Basket of Bread* is established in a catalogue essay produced for an exhibition held in November and December of 1945 at the Bignou Gallery in New York. It is here that Dalí states his fascination with bread, as described at the beginning of this article, as the “oldest fetishistic and obsessive subject” in his work. “I painted the same subject nineteen years ago,” he explains. “In making an accurate comparison of the two pictures, one can study the entire history of painting, from the linear charm of primitivism to the stereoscopic hyper-aestheticism.”<sup>35</sup>

While Dalí’s assertion is characteristically abstruse, it is evident upon closer examination that the artist is not simply returning to the traditionalism of his first *Basket of Bread*. Despite the impressive and meticulous academic technique, this and other works of the “classic” phase, which began in approximately 1939, were in fact a sort of caricatural inversion of academic and Renaissance styles. These invariably referenced, with subtle and often menacing humor, subject matter relating primarily to current affairs, and most notably to the Spanish Civil War and World War II. This is evident in Dalí’s more recent *Basket of Bread*. In this work, the artist has bypassed the delicate white cloth and the implied reverential handling of the subject, and placed the new basket upon a stark, depression-era wooden table, where the basket, holding a heel of bread, has been shoved to the edge of the table. While this positioning might hardly seem notable in itself, the title of the work suggests that this is yet another animistic rendering of bread, in which Dalí has conflated his Zurberanesque style of 1926 with the anthropomorphic, “comedic” bread from his Surrealist period, and given this loaf a sort of “soul.” The subtitle of the work, *Rather Death than Shame*, refers to an “honor suicide,” and the bread—a mere heel, and therefore seemingly at the end of its usefulness and life—is perched on the edge of the table against a bleak black backdrop as if on the precipice of its own self-inflicted demise.

In the Bignou catalogue, Dalí writes that he painted this picture in two months, during which “the most staggering and sensational episodes of contemporary history took place.” The picture was

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<sup>35</sup> Dalí, *Dalí*, np.

finished, he maintains, "one day before the end of the war."<sup>36</sup> Consequently, the artist's insistence upon the political framework for the creation of this canvas, and upon the dates of its execution, clearly suggests that the "staggering and sensational episodes of contemporary history" must be factored in to any analysis of it. In terms of subject matter, then, the most immediate reference to an "honor suicide" occurring in the final two months of World War II, during the death throes of the Third Reich, was Adolf Hitler's.

The Nazi dictator, a subject of well-documented fascination for Dalí, had in fact chosen death rather than the inevitable shame of capture that awaited him at the hands of the Soviet army, which converged on his Bunker as it advanced through the streets of Berlin. As a result, Hitler made the decision to commit suicide on April 30th, 1945. That Dalí would portray Hitler as the heel of a loaf of bread refers back to the "moral hungers" to which he contends people are subject in the age of modernity. In one of his best-known essays, "The Conquest of the Irrational" of 1935, Dalí cites the German people as suffering from such a hunger, and argues that their resulting turn to Hitler and National Socialism fills a niche previously occupied by religion. Hitler's followers, he writes, "systematically cretinized by machinism" and "ideological disorder," among other ailments, "seek in vain to bite into the senile and triumphant softness of the plump, atavistic, tender, militaristic, and territorial back of any Hitlerian nursemaid." This "irrational hunger," he continues, "is placed before a cultural dining table on which are found only . . . cold and insubstantial leftovers."<sup>37</sup> As such, this interpretation dramatically underscores the degree to which Dalí stretches the simple iconography of the banal loaf of bread from the comedic, the phallic, and the anthropomorphic, to that of a metaphor for the self-inflicted demise of the most horrific and influential political leader of the twentieth century.

As if to further showcase the extraordinary versatility of his iconography, in the same catalogue for the Bignou Gallery exhibition, Dalí refers to bread once again, as metonymic of something that could not be further from the current events of the period. This is in regard to a painting he produced in 1944, of his beloved wife Gala, entitled *Galarina* (Figure 9). Once again in Dalí's meticulous "classic" style, referencing Renaissance and academic painting, this work depicts Gala against the now familiar stark black background. She is

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Salvador Dalí, "The Conquest of the Irrational," in Dalí, *The Collected Writings*, 263.

rendered from the waist up, with her arms folded, and her soft white cotton shirt has been left open to reveal one perfect naked breast.

In the catalogue, Dalí explains that the work is entitled *Galarina* in reference to Raphael's famous circa 1518 painting *La Fornarina*, which was a similar depiction of the Renaissance painter's mistress, Margherita Luti, a baker's daughter ("fornarina" referring to flour and baking). No other reference or depiction of bread appears in any overt way in the canvas, yet according to the artist, "without premeditation, here again is . . . bread!" In explanation of the work, he continues: "A rigorous and perspicacious analysis will bring to light the crossed arms of Gala, looking like the intertwinement of the basket, her breast like the end of the bread." Further, Dalí explains in an uncharacteristically glib interpretation of his own work his "subconscious desire to devour her," and thereby fuse with the object of his devotion, and be perpetually nourished by her love. "[N]ow that Gala has risen in the heraldic hierarchy of my nobility," he writes, "she has become my basket of bread."<sup>38</sup>

## BREAD AND THE SAVIOR'S BODY

After Dalí's "classic" stage, which lasted until approximately 1948 and was exemplified in *Basket of Bread—Rather Death than Shame*, the artist was to move on to a new phase of his career he dubbed "Nuclear Mysticism." This one-man movement conflated religious imagery, inspired by his conversion to Catholicism circa 1940 (he had previously been a lifelong atheist), with a sort of science-fiction aesthetic that was inspired by Dalí's interest in recent studies in nuclear physics and quantum mechanics, at the forefront of scientific research during the 1940s and early '50s.<sup>39</sup> At this point, bread re-emerges as a considerable presence in the Spanish artist's oeuvre, but this time in relation to his decidedly religious themes, where the animistic and "Old Master" bread was resurrected iconographically as the Eucharistic host.

This was a dualistic conceit for Dalí, representative not merely of the body of Christ the savior, but also with that of the painter himself, who announced in *The Secret Life* that he was to be the "savior of modern art," justified by the very fact of his own name,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Haim Finkelstein, introduction to "Later Writings on Art," in Dalí, *The Collected Writings*, 345-46.

Salvador, which means “savior” in Spanish.<sup>40</sup> In this sense, the artist’s early embrace of bread imagery in 1926 was remarkably prescient, as his turn toward religious art would have been unconscionable to the Surrealist Dalí, an atheist and leftist steeped in the religious skepticism of the avant-garde. Nevertheless, Dalí’s embrace of bread as a personal device or icon, following his “epiphany” in a Paris bistro, was to continue along a remarkably smooth trajectory of what might be termed bread praxis, from Renaissance still-life object to Surrealist displaced object to academic-style painterly still life to religious object of devotion.

The first of the images from Dalí’s Nuclear Mysticism period that takes bread as its primary subject is *The Madonna of Port Lligat (Second Version)* of 1950 (Figure 10). This immense oil, spanning approximately twelve feet by eight feet, is based on models of Renaissance religious paintings, and most notably Piero della Francesca’s *Madonna and Child with Saints and Duke of Urbino* of 1472, which features similar architecture and an ostrich egg suspended above the Madonna’s head as a symbol of purity. Equally, this work reflects the artist’s fascination at that period with molecular science and quantum physics. This is reflected in the beautifully rendered objects, mostly seashells and the suspended egg, and the central altar which forms the grid of the work, all of which float freely in space, as if gently pulled apart by the absence of gravity.

In the altar-like niche sits the artist’s beloved wife Gala as a mid-life Madonna, swathed in white robes, with a square of empty space carved out of her torso and stomach. Nestled within this space sits a naked, blond Christ child, inside of whose own chest and belly floats a heel of bread. In a press interview taken at the time of the first exhibition of this work, at the Carstairs Gallery in New York in November of 1950, Dalí explains that the existing version of the painting had changed dramatically from an earlier, 1949 rendering. He describes how he had altered the focus of the original conception from the Madonna to the Christ child in the center of whose body appeared the Eucharistic bread, symbolizing the body of Christ.<sup>41</sup> Dalí describes this image as nothing less than a “tabernacle ‘filled with Heaven.’”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Dalí, *The Secret Life*, 4.

<sup>41</sup> Judith Crist, “Dalí here with ‘Greatest’ Work, But It’s Too Big to Get in Gallery,” in *New York Herald Tribune* (November 11, 1950), 11; quoted in Michael R. Taylor, “The Madonna of Port Lligat,” in *Dalí: The Centenary Retrospective*, 350.

<sup>42</sup> “Toward Raphael,” in *Time* (April 17, 1950), 65; quoted in Taylor, “The Madonna of Port Lligat,” 350.

Dalí's use of imagery of the sacrament in his work is rendered even more schematically in the next few years, as in his *Eucharistic Still Life* of 1952, a grid-like representation of the enduring symbols of Christianity, the fish and the loaf of bread, and finally his stark and imposing *Nuclear Cross* of 1952 (Figure 11). Here, the painter has rendered the elements of the *Madonna of Port Lligat* down to its most simple syntax: that of reverence for faith, and of faith being at the center of all things, indexed by a round slice of sacramental bread representing the body of Christ. This host is surrounded by a grid-like cross composed of nine hundred and fifty tiny cubes which encircle the central wafer, which serves as the focal point for the work.<sup>43</sup> New to his oeuvre, this cubic aspect reflects Dalí's interest in contemporary experiments in geometric abstraction, although, characteristically, the artist has conflated this modular style with a meticulous, near *trompe-l'oeil* Renaissance technique captured in the exquisitely rendered fraying cloth of silk and gold, folded neatly as an altarpiece beneath the cross.

As part of his "nuclear mystic" interest in science, Dalí has also depicted the bread in a manner reminiscent of a moon or a planet, and the golden glow in which the entire canvas is bathed suggests the divine nature of this lustrous orb which, surrounded by its grid-like rays, seems to be floating in the dark and infinite cosmos. The overall image, with a planet-like round of bread at the center of a radiant and radiating cubic cross posits bread as the body of Christ, as the giver of light, the originary source of spiritual sustenance, and the center of all things.

*Nuclear Cross* marked a decline in the appearance of bread in Dalí's painted work, perhaps as the ultimate conclusion to a cycle that virtually exhausted a subject that Dalí employed liberally and with pronounced and versatile symbolism. While bread was to disappear, for the most part, from Dalí's painting around 1952, the artist occasionally resurrected the loaf of bread in his installations, constructions, and performance activities for the remaining three decades of his career. This was particularly evident in the 1960s and 1970s, when he embraced Pop Art, which led to his recreating works such as *Hypnagogic Clock* in 1964, and incorporating bread and images of it in various films and performances. Perhaps the most whimsical of these final bread "acts" was his commissioning of a number of bread sculptures from Paris' most famous baker, Pierre

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<sup>43</sup> Count courtesy of Elliott H. King, "Nuclear Cross," in *Dalí: The Centenary Retrospective*, 364.

Poilâne, including salon furniture, a chandelier, and a birdcage out of which the bird was presumed to be able to eat.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps one of the most poignant and enduring manifestations of bread executed during Dalí's later career is one that appears on the outside of the museum dedicated to his work that the artist founded in 1972 in his home town of Figueres, Spain. This is the Dalí Theatre Museum, designed by Dalí himself, and described in promotional literature as the "world's largest Surrealist object." Dalí embellished this building with dozens of giant concrete eggs and, as an architectural ornament, neatly spaced across the fascia of the red brick building, hundreds of identical ceramic loaves of Catalan bread, traditionally shaped like a matador's hat. As this building was a virtual monument to Dalí and his work, and today the locale that houses his tomb, it might be gauged that the artist wished to offer up the "sacrament" of his own body and creative spirit to those visiting a place where he could, as he stated in his autobiography, "appease for some hundred years the spiritual, imaginative, moral and ideological hunger of our epoch."<sup>45</sup> It also stands as a testament to Dalí's identification with bread itself, as an image of the Dalí spirit or "brand."

This final monument brings together only a few of the many themes Dalí explored in his embrace of bread as entity and image throughout the various phases of his work: as displaced and uncanny object, as animistic surrogate, as performance prop, as Christian/Dalinian sacrament, and as metonymic of the Dalinian body and body of work. As this essay has argued, to neglect the prevalence and relevance of bread imagery in Dalí's creative production is to overlook a highly loaded symbol that establishes the fundamental meaning of a number of his most important works. Nevertheless, despite Dalí's perpetual iteration of, and identification with, the image and object of bread, its complex and highly plastic signification largely continues to be disregarded in both scholarly and popular approaches to Dalí's creative corpus. As such, unlike his virtual monopoly of the crutch, lobster, and villain's mustache in the visual

<sup>44</sup> See: [http://www.poilane.fr/pages/en/company\\_univers\\_histoire.php](http://www.poilane.fr/pages/en/company_univers_histoire.php) (the official Poilâne website).

<sup>45</sup> Dalí, *The Secret Life*, 176. It should be noted that Dalí had originally intended to be buried in Púbol Castle, the Gothic-Renaissance fortress that he had bought for Gala in 1968. There is much debate as to whether or not Dalí had decided at the last minute to be buried in the Theatre Museum, or if this was a political decision made by others (see Ian Gibson, *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), 617-18). Nevertheless, in terms of public commemoration, Dalí undoubtedly intended the Theatre Museum to function as a form of posthumous memorial to himself and his work.



lexicon of western art, Dalí's attempt to reinforce the distinction and reach of the "Dalí brand" through the perpetual iteration of bread imagery was clearly unsuccessful. Only in retrospect, through a survey of the fluid iconography of bread in the artist's work, can one begin to break the code of the "Savior's" many loaves, and plumb the significance of what, in 1942, he called his "ferociously anti-humanitarian, aristocratic, aesthetic, paranoiac, sophisticated, Jesuitical, phenomenal, paralyzing, hyper-evident," and profoundly Dalinian bread.<sup>46</sup>

## ILLUSTRATIONS

(See online version of this issue for illustrations)

Figure 1: Salvador Dalí, *Retrospective Bust of a Woman*, 1933 (some elements reconstructed 1970). Painted porcelain, bread, corn, feathers, paint on paper, beads, ink stand, sand, and two pens. 73.9 x 69.2 x 32 cm (29 x 27.2 x 12.5"). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 2: Salvador Dalí, *Anthropomorphic Bread*, 1932. Oil on canvas. 24 x 33 cm (9.45" x 12.99"). The Salvador Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, Florida.

Figure 3: *Catalan Bread—Anthropomorphic Bread*, 1932. Oil on canvas. 24 x 16.5 cm (9.45" x 6.5"). Town Hall of Figueres, on permanent deposit at the Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres.

Figure 4: Salvador Dalí, *Average French Bread with Two Eggs on the Plate without the Plate, on Horseback, Attempting to Sodomize a Crumb of Portuguese Bread*, 1932. Oil on wood panel. 16 x 22 cm (6.29" x 8.66"). Toyota Municipal Museum of Art, Toyota Aichi.

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<sup>46</sup> Dalí, *The Secret Life*, 307.

Figure 5: Salvador Dalí, *Woman with Catalan Bread*, 1932. Oil on canvas. 16 x 22 cm (6.29 x 8.66"). Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres.

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Figure 8: Salvador Dalí, *The Basket of Bread—Rather Death than Shame*, 1945. Oil on panel, 34.7 x 43.5 cm (13.6 x 17.1"). Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres.

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Figure 11: Salvador Dalí, *Nuclear Cross*, 1952. Oil on canvas. 78 x 58 cm (30.70 x 22.83"). Private collection.

## Book Reviews

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**Amy Trubek.** *The Taste of Place: A Cultural Journey Into Terroir.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008. 250 Pages.

Amy Trubek's latest book is an engaging and thorough introduction to the notion of *terroir*, or the "taste of place," in the United States. Not only does Trubek study *terroir* as a concept in wine—the term's usual context—but she looks at the effects of place on our perception and understanding of food as well. Trubek's comparison of the French and American interpretations of *terroir* calls attention to the ways in which these two cultures try to give value to unique foods when so many products are being mass-produced around the globe. In addition to addressing the cultural history of the term *terroir*, she also raises an ethical discussion of its marketability, arguing that both countries seem to be walking a fine line between using *terroir* as a socially-engaged concept and as a profitable way of adding value to a product.

Trubek starts with a thorough history of the term *terroir* and how it developed in France, then continues with a discussion of its application in the United States. Although *terroir* is a descriptive word most commonly used in wine tastings, here Trubek uses the term to refer to foods and the sensory evidence of the plants, animals, and region from which they are produced. Since such traces transcend our most obvious means of perceiving food (through taste), in France, *terroir* encompasses a cultural knowledge that is passed down through generations (18). By contrast, the United States, which has only recently adopted the term, lacks this rich heritage. The result is a product of modern times: as French winemaker Daniel Ravier suggests, Americans have achieved *scientific* *terroir*, but not a cultural knowledge of it (105).

Trubek begins her section on French *terroir* by giving engaging descriptions of the potentially dry legal jargon surrounding the

creation of the Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) and the Institut National des Appellations d'Origine (INAO), which were turning points in French history that sought to recognize and protect regional differences in food. She also does an admirable job of introducing the heavyweights of French gastronomy, from Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin to Maurice Edmond Sailland, better known as Curnonsky. She spends a significant portion of her discussion on Curnonsky's anthology of French culinary regions, *Le trésor gastronomique de France*, and its influence in shaping the popular consciousness regarding food. Throughout the chapter, Trubek poses questions of the validity of terroir, asking if it may just be a recently developed nostalgia: a desire to return to cultural roots in order to preserve memory and identity during a time of modern, fast-paced livelihoods (51-53).

Trubek's chapter on wine acts as a bridge between the French conception of terroir and the American approach to marketing place. While she takes great pains to explain viticulture and viniculture and their effects on the taste of wine,<sup>1</sup> the level of detail in her description of the Mondavi Affair deserves a book contract of its own.<sup>2</sup> This chapter could be improved by retaining only the aspects necessary to convey the Mondavi story without detracting from her introduction of American terroir.

Despite this drawback, Trubek's analysis in the following chapters of the American interpretations and applications of terroir make it obvious that she has not only researched her topic in depth but is able to apply gracefully these abstract French theories to the American food industry. Her focus on Californian wine growers and the San Francisco Ferry Building Farmer's Market, L'Etoile restaurant in Wisconsin, the Vermont Fresh Network, and Vermont maple syrup producers provides case studies through which readers can better understand the philosophical questions she poses.

In her analysis of L'Etoile, for example, Trubek points out the duplicity of American eating habits: our celebration of "local" and "seasonal" ingredients even though many of us still shop at large, overstocked supermarkets (151). Two dominant worldviews, she argues, help to explain why we are still largely uneducated in terms of our foods' origins: 1. modernity by necessity creates an industrialized and global food supply system, and 2. in the past, the

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<sup>1</sup> The cultivation of the vine and grape, respectively, for wine production.

<sup>2</sup> The Mondavi Affair refers to a conflict during which French villagers fought to shut down the California-based winemaker, which tried to enter the wine-growing community in the south of France.

food supply system was transparent, community-oriented, and “purer” (141). Trubek argues that L’Etoile occupies a middle ground between these two perspectives: Odessa Piper, the owner, is running a modern food business while promoting a sustainable, local food system and cooking with local ingredients such as the Wisconsin hickory nut and other seasonal farmer’s market produce. However, such an effort (and its popularity) could also potentially be viewed as a form of “nostalgic” terroir. Many Americans reflect this notion, longing for a “return” to local, sustainable farming—the idea of a utopian agriculture that offers a safe, transparent food system in the face of the modern food industry. Even the French are not immune to nostalgic terroir, for in the region of the Dordogne, Trubek encountered residents who resented the tourist industry for catering to people who they claim “are searching for their *racines*, or roots, as an antidote to their increasingly fast lives” (236).

Although Trubek eloquently describes the role L’Etoile and other restaurants around the nation are playing in providing a platform to discuss these issues, she doesn’t address the possibility that her proposed set of worldviews may not be true to begin with. Does our globalized and industrialized food system really make it impossible for us to trace our food sources fully, or do we as a society simply choose not to? And when was our society ever “pure”?

After this discussion of the recent local food movement in Wisconsin, the reader is primed in Trubek’s concluding chapter for an easy triumph of terroir over marketing as the best means of furthering global industry. Yet instead she paints a picture of how the two today, in the United States as well as France, go hand in hand. In this chapter, Trubek describes her research (with colleagues John Elder and Jeff Munroe) in determining whether or not one could taste the origins of the tapped trees in Vermont maple syrup. Although Trubek, Elder, and Munroe eventually prove that syrups produced from different maple groves taste different, the fact that they had to use complex scientific technology to arrive at this conclusion makes the reader realize that terroir is constituted by more than cultural knowledge (228). Trubek’s study therefore supports Ravier’s point that the U.S. still depends on science to promote terroir in a market economy. Trubek, describing the complexity of this issue with regard to consumers, discusses the 2005 law that bans farmers from using “Vermont” on a syrup’s label if it is blended with contents from other regions. Steve Jones of Maple Grove Farms (a company that purchases its syrup from all over New England and Canada), remarks: “Most people, as long as it has sufficient contact with

Vermont, they consider it Vermont syrup. They do not care where the tree is" (221). With this quote, Jones reveals that placing a location associated with quality and tradition on a label is often enough to convince consumers to buy a product, and that marketers are not afraid to exploit this phenomenon. As Trubek points out, although terroir is even marketed to add value to products in addition to protecting a unique flavor, culture, and method of production in France, her interview with Jones speaks powerfully about where the US is in terms of terroir and its marketability.

By the end of the book, the question remains in my mind, and in Trubek's as well: do we really want to emulate the value the French place on the cultural aspect of the definition of terroir, or can science and marketing be acceptable facets to adopt in American society? She argues yes and no, and therefore seems to pose more questions than she answers in her epilogue. Perhaps this is indicative of the relatively new area of gastronomic research in the United States, and should be taken as a call for further study of the topic. *The Taste of Place* leaves the reader believing that Trubek and the rest of America are in the process of discovering something new and exciting, and it is up to all of us to determine how we will come to define terroir as a culture.

Kerstin McGaughey, Boston University

**Kenneth Hayes.** *Milk and Melancholy*. Toronto and Cambridge, MA: Prefix Press/MIT Press, 2008. 156 Pages.

Reading *Milk and Melancholy*, one imagines that architectural historian, critic, and curator Kenneth Hayes must have spent a great deal of time answering the question: "Why milk?" The result of more than a decade of research, Hayes's survey of the appearance and use of milk in contemporary, photo-based art from the 1960s through the 1980s might at first appear to be aimed at a niche market of food-obsessed art historians. As Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art Director Scott McLeod notes in his foreword to the volume, "[m]ilk is an unusual topic" to take up in a full-length publication (20). But to say that *Milk and Melancholy* is "about milk" is a bit misleading; Hayes's actual object of study is what he terms the "milk-splash

discourse" throughout the history of photography (23). From early scientific experiments and commercial photography, to West Coast photo-conceptualism and performance, and finally to the more recent staged photography of General Idea and Jeff Wall, Hayes's thorough study uses falling, thrown, and airborne milk as a fascinating and multifaceted subject through which to explore traces of the human body in conceptual art practices. Hayes writes of his investigation into the appearance of the milk-splash: "The most remarkable thing about these images was that milk was invariably the locus of a disturbance . . . [that] recurred with the regularity of a trauma" (22). The study is therefore not necessarily about the substance of milk per se, but about how artists charge it with symbolic meaning.

*Milk and Melancholy* is the first title in a new series co-published by Toronto's Prefix ICA and the MIT Press that aims to explore "the ways in which contemporary art intersects with architecture, history, urbanism, science and technology."<sup>3</sup> Although *Milk and Melancholy* began as a monographic study of Wall's 1984 photograph *Milk*, it eventually expanded to encompass more than 20 artists and 100 works of art. Laid out in four chapters and arranged in loosely chronological order, the greatest application of Hayes's analysis is its delineation of a methodological approach to unpacking art and visual culture that combines classical iconographic analysis with recent uses of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. As the author notes in his preface, the book's title derives both from Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl, and Raymond Kiblsansky's 1964 iconographic study *Saturn and Melancholy*, and Freud's landmark 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (23). The book therefore reexamines the usefulness of iconography in light of the "psychoanalytic turn" in academia that began in the 1980s and was driven largely by a renewed interest in Freud's writing. While these two approaches might seem incompatible, Hayes brings them together in compelling and often convincing ways that attest to their ongoing relevance.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> As McLeod notes in his foreword, the Prefix Press imprint also "situates Canadian artists and writers within critical and art-historical discourses" and will include book-length essays, artist monographs, and critical anthologies (20). The book series will not only complement *Prefix Photo*, the institute's biannual magazine, but will also provide a professional publishing venue outside the Canadian university presses.

<sup>4</sup> Hayes's integration of iconographic and psychoanalytic methodologies is unusual, especially due to the legacy of feminist art historians who have taken up psychoanalysis in an attempt to problematize the seemingly prescriptive and overdetermined readings produced by Panofsky's work on iconography. Jonathan Crary, for example, has critiqued Panofsky's models of iconography for ignoring the importance of the viewer's social and historical context in his book *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992). Meanwhile, Laurie Schneider Adams's *Art and Psychoanalysis* (New York:

*Milk and Melancholy* opens with “The Photogenics of Milk,” an essay that considers how the substance first became a photographic subject and how the milk-splash specifically became a widely recognized photographic image. Hayes attributes the originary milk-splash image to the optical experiments of A.M. Worthington, who used falling drops of milk to study liquid dynamics as early as 1875 because the substance was easier to observe than water or mercury (27). As Hayes observes, there may have been unconscious parallels between Worthington’s scientific interests and photography’s medium-specific capacities. Just as Worthington was concerned with phenomena that occurred too rapidly to be directly observed but could be perceived through their traces, “[p]hotography, the technique of traces par excellence, suspended these rapid phenomena in time, making it possible to inspect them, reduce them to theoretical knowledge and discover their potential for practical application” (36).

Hayes’s linking of ephemeral optical effects and the uses of photography as an instrument with which to represent them functions in many ways as a foundation for the whole book, which likewise isolates and formally analyzes appearances of the milk-splash in order to unpack their theoretical and psychoanalytic significance. This approach is evident in the following section of the book, which examines California Pop Art’s “romance” with the white liquid and presents work by various artists as case studies.<sup>5</sup> Yet Hayes’s twinning of iconography and psychoanalysis is most convincing when he moves from these close readings of specific artworks to a broader discussion of the motifs and strategies that characterize an aesthetic movement. For example, in his analysis of William Wegman’s 1970 photograph *Drinking Milk*, which depicts a man who appears to consume a glass of milk through a straw in his

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HarperCollins Publishers/Icon Editions, 1993) provides a detailed investigation of how psychoanalytic theory can be applied to art historical discourse, and her survey text, *The Methodologies of Art: An Introduction* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), offers critiques of iconography, formalist art history, and Roland Barthes’s use of structuralism by applying Freud and Lacan’s psychoanalytic approaches.

<sup>5</sup> For Hayes, Jackson Pollock’s use of a milk-based paint in *Composition (White, Black, Blue and Red on White)* (1948) becomes an allegory for the fate of the body in modernity (51); Ed Ruscha’s photograph of a glass of milk at the end of his book project *Various Small Fires and Milk* (1964) is a self-referential punch line in an otherwise dry conceptual project (65); Bruce Nauman’s inclusion of milk in the series *Eleven Color Photographs* (1966-67) signifies his Midwestern upbringing (75); and David LaMelas’s 16mm film *To Pour Milk Into a Glass* (1972), which graces the front cover of the book, uses milk as a stand-in for the very semiotic flow of visual information (99).



navel, Hayes draws upon Freud's articulation of regression in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), in which the subject experiences a move back in psychological time under the duress of trauma or stress. Hayes writes: "the resemblance of the straw to the umbilical cord [in Wegman's image] testifies to the infantile regression involved in the adult consumption of milk" (88). This psychoanalytic reading of Wegman's image not only draws attention to the symbolically-charged context in which most human subjects first encounter milk, but also connects the milk-splash discourse to Hayes's assertions about the concerns of California Pop artists more generally. For Hayes, these conceptual artists referenced the milk-splash in "a condition of heightened interiority"—a move to experimenting in the artist's studio rather than in the outside world—that was precipitated by the stresses incurred through the conditions of modern life (107).

While these elucidations of artists' varied engagements with the milk-splash provide a refreshing take on the history of contemporary art, it is not until the third and shortest chapter of the volume, "The Optical Unconscious in *extremis*" that Hayes fully addresses the question "Why milk?" Here, the author reveals that, behind Worthington's rhetoric of innocuous scientific experimentation in his photographs of falling and splashing milk, another motive drove his work: an instrumental interest in the study of ballistics, or impact theory, paid for by the Royal Naval Engineering College in Devonport, England (110). When seen in this context, Hayes argues, Worthington's near obsessive drive to document the perfect milk drop sequence takes on a violent and even morbid fascination with the moment of impact: "Worthington's milk drop is not a milk drop at all; it is the analogue of a bullet," and, as a result, all subsequent representations of the impact of milk must also be read as investigations of a sudden impact upon the human figure (110). Hayes's use of the term "optical unconscious," first laid out in Walter Benjamin's 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," is at the core of this connection between the milk-splash, the photographic image, and the spectacle of sudden death.<sup>6</sup> The realm of the optical unconscious, as Benjamin

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<sup>6</sup> See: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (second version)," in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, et al. (London and Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 37-38.

saw it, paralleled psychoanalysis' instinctual unconscious and included all those experiences that were ephemeral or extra-visual, and constantly on the verge of disappearance. Photography was the ideal tool to try to arrest, decipher, and make sense of these experiences. For Hayes, then, the photograph of the milk-splash can be conflated with spirit photography and other attempts at capturing the moment of death on film, lending all artistic uses of the milk-splash discourse an unforeseen sense of existential urgency (119).

If Hayes's chapter on the optical unconscious operates as the compelling climax in the narrative of *Milk and Melancholy*, the last essay in the book, "Energy Made Visible: Vital Fluids in the Street," functions as a denouement of the milk-splash in contemporary art. This section considers the "agoraphilic drive to move into the space of the street" through conceptual performances and staged photography (120), offering insight into Gilbert and George and General Idea's "(homo)sexual desublimation of the milk splash" in their photographic and video projects (140) and Mike Kelley and David Askevold's use of the milk spray to reference ectoplasm and spirit photography (158).<sup>7</sup> When Hayes finally returns to Jeff Wall's *Milk*, the image of a marginalized figure's sudden, violent gesture of splashing milk becomes analogous to the practice of photography itself—a medium that the artist fittingly defined as historical self-reflection achieved through the "liquid intelligence" of the developing process (181). In many ways, through Hayes's reading, Wall's figure becomes a symbol of the divergent conceptualizations of milk the book has delineated: the unnecessarily concealed carton of milk can be read as a forbidden substance such as alcohol, the sudden splash as blood in the fleeting moment of death, the spray of white liquid in a face-like pattern as ectoplasm, and the clenched fist as an unconscious gesture of oppression and psychic rage that has resulted from the conditions of modern life (177-184). Hayes claims that Wall's tidy self-referentiality effectively killed the milk-splash discourse (184). By loading *Milk* with so many potent symbolic and psychoanalytic readings, Wall evacuated the milk-splash sign of any other meanings, which for Hayes accounts for the subject's near disappearance in subsequent art projects (184).

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<sup>7</sup> While these contemporary projects share similar aesthetic strategies with the California Pop artists, they importantly move to the outside world for their experimentation, using the streetscape as film set in the case of Gilbert and George and General Idea, or as mode of dissemination, as in the finished poster projects of Kelley and Askevold.

Though Hayes's incorporation of iconography and psychoanalysis is convincing on the whole, there are moments in *Milk and Melancholy* when it feels as though the author is reaching too far for a compelling reading, thereby overlooking some of milk's more obvious connotations. Sometimes milk is just milk: a nutritional food rich in specific sensory associations including taste, touch, and smell. Hayes's failure to account for these possible readings is particularly striking in his account of Adrian Piper's landmark "Catalysis" series of street performances that used photography to document provocative altercations with the public. While he includes descriptions of Piper's *Catalysis III* and *IV* projects (1970-71)—in which the artist walked through a department store covered in white paint wearing a "Wet Paint" sign and rode the subway with a towel stuffed into her mouth, respectively—he completely ignores the first project in the series, *Catalysis I* (1970), in which Piper "impregnated her clothing with a concoction of vinegar, eggs, *milk*, and cod liver oil and then spent a week moving around New York in her smelly regalia."<sup>8</sup> The affective and visceral nature of the substance—particularly the potency of sour milk, upon which Piper's performance was so reliant—is never addressed in Hayes's book. While this seems like a missed opportunity within Hayes' study, it also underscores the inherent limitations of photography as a medium and its inability to convey details apprehended by all of the senses. Though this oversight by no means negates the rest of the interpretations in the book, it does raise questions about whether Hayes's investigation of milk's role in contemporary photography might be improved by considering how the use of milk by performance artists like Piper relates to other landmark, photo-documented events using food, such as Carolee Schneeman's *Meat Joy* (1964) or Marina Abramovich's *The Onion* (1996). Despite Hayes's efforts at being exhaustive, it seems there is room still for further studies of milk's symbolic and psychoanalytic import in contemporary uses of photography.

Gabrielle Moser, York University

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<sup>8</sup> Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 213. Emphasis added.

**Joy Adapon.** *Culinary Art and Anthropology*. Oxford: Berg, 2008. 160 pages.

Envisioning salsa made with spicy chilies makes my mouth water. So it was with some excitement to me that Joy Adapon, in her book *Culinary Art and Anthropology*, included recipes at the end of almost every chapter. I began with trying the tomato salsa recipe, playing with the flavors, and in the process embodying and digesting Adapon's thesis and ideas that were based on 24 months of fieldwork in Milpa Alta, the smallest municipality of Mexico City.

Adapon presents us with a unique contribution to anthropological food studies through her utilization of Alfred Gell's ideas of art as a technical practice—a system of actions embedded in a dynamic social matrix or a network of intentionalities.<sup>9</sup> In this framework, cooking is a creative process that requires technical expertise; such skill is not unique to trained chefs, Adapon argues, but can be found in the everyday culinary traditions of Mexican households. "Good" food, which is food with *sazón* (i.e. made with love), is an art form produced on a daily basis. The cook as artist creatively plays with and builds upon traditional recipes, but modifies them according to the dictates of personal taste, pragmatics (i.e. availability of particular food items), and intended recipient(s). Central to Gell's theory is both artists' and art's agency in the production of social relations. In Adapon's application of Gell, the cook is the artist, and conveys social meanings through the production of flavorful foods. The cook, then, deeply impacted by this artistic process, has "culinary agency," which constructs social and spatio-temporal relations within both the family and community. Thought of in this way, food has salience beyond the moment of ingestion. As Adapon argues, food itself, viewed as an art object, has social agency, affecting both producers and consumers.

Adapon provides several ethnographic examples to ground her theoretical understanding of cooking as an artistic practice and Mexican cuisine as a body of art. Her first example (chapter 3) describes the process of preparing *barbacoa*—a festive, pit-roasted meat that takes days to prepare—and how this activity structures social relations within the community. The preparation of *barbacoa* requires a team effort from husbands and wives of *barbacoieros*, or families that specialize in its making (from slaughtering the meat to

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<sup>9</sup> Alfred Gell, "Vogel's Net: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps," in *Journal of Material Culture* 1:1 (1996), 15-38; and Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).

readying the accompanying salsas). Using the model of cook as artist and food as an art object, the social meanings of *barbacoa* become evident: *barbacoa* is a special food, marked by its elaborate preparation and carefully crafted flavorings, and in turn *barbacoieros* attain a higher social status (a fact that is materially reflected in the size of *barbacoiero* family homes and the appliances therein). Thus, much like a work of art, *barbacoa* itself has social agency, defining the relations between people and families involved in its production and consumption.

Adapon's second example (chapter 4) focuses on women's culinary agency within the context of normative gender roles and ideals. Here, she examines power dynamics within the family and women's agency in creating and maintaining social relations through food. Through the use of Gell's concept of artistic traps, Adapon makes a case for considering food, particularly women's use of food, as a "culinary trap."<sup>10</sup> In other words, women's everyday cooking in the domestic realm can be viewed as a means of mediating social relations, including supporting or castigating spouses. Through cooking, women speak and create; by consuming women's culinary artworks, others respond. Although key to the audience's response is aesthetic appreciation (specifically admiration for the flavors that the cook has produced), once this relationship is established, women's culinary agency can "trap," punish, or coerce others to behave in socially acceptable ways.<sup>11</sup>

A strength of this chapter is its ability to highlight local meanings of womanhood and identify the power that comes with the role women play in the domestic realm. Adapon shows us how women communicate through their cooking, asserting their place in the family and community, and shaping the actions and behaviors of others. Key to this argument is that, by undertaking domestic tasks such as preparing meals, women are not necessarily subservient, but

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<sup>10</sup> In "Vogel's Net," Gell proposes that animal traps are artworks, for traps embody knowledge and behaviors of both the creator (hunter) and the prey, in addition to encompassing their relationship (constructed as a social one in many hunting communities) to each other (see also N. Bird-David, "The Giving Environment: Another Perspective on the Economic System of Hunters-Gatherers," in *Current Anthropology* 31:2 [1990], 198-196; T. Ingold, "Hunting and Gathering as a Way of Perceiving an Environment," in *Redefining Nature*, ed. R. Ellen and K. Fukui [London: Berg, 1996], 117-55; and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism," in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4 [September 1998], 469-88). Adapon theorizes in turn that food embodies elements of the cook and the intended recipients of the meal, in addition to the social relationships between these actors—eloquently demonstrated in Laura Esquivel's 1989 novel *Like Water for Chocolate*.

<sup>11</sup> See: pages 78-82, in which Adapon outlines a story of culinary revenge involving a woman who reproached a cheating husband via her cooking.

in a position of power—a contention that has also been made with regard to other cultural settings.<sup>12</sup> Adapon's observations build upon previous work conducted in Latin America, and implicitly critique the assumption that there is a global, uniform experience of women as family food providers. And yet, I found myself wanting further discussion on how Milpaltense women's experiences intersected with social class and other markers of identity. For example, how do women laborers (such as those who work in the fields), conceptualize cooking and serving? How is this similar or different from women performing other forms of paid work? Do ethnicity, age, and other aspects of identity intersect with social class, modifying Milpaltense women's perceptions of their gender roles, as well as of the role of food in constructing womanhood?

Another minor comment: Adapon asserts that "Cooking is a complex and artistic practice, different from other kinds of housework because of the creative component involved" (71). However, I wonder whether other kinds of women's work would not in fact be equivalent to Adapon's example of cooking, particularly the Milpaltense production of textiles.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, cooking does differ from some types of household work in that the product of one's labor is destroyed in the process of consumption. Comparisons of cooking with other kinds of domestic practice would be a fruitful area for future research. Since arguably, the meanings associated with women's work are dynamic, Gell's understanding of artwork might also be useful here.

Adapon's final example (chapter 5) examines feast foods in the context of hospitality and community celebrations. Here too, she provides examples of women's culinary agency and the coercive force of food in "trapping" and shaping social obligations. Key to this chapter is her analysis of cuisine as a "distributed object," made of

<sup>12</sup> See: Arjun Appadurai, "Gastro-politics in Hindu South Asia," in *American Ethnologist* 8:3 (August 1981), 494-511; Theresa W. Devasahayam, "Power and Pleasure Around the Stove: The Construction of Gendered Identity in Middle-Class South Indian Hindu Households in Urban Malaysia," in *Women's Studies International Forum* 28 (2005), 1-20.

<sup>13</sup> Much has been written on the lack of recognition of women's artistic skill in the production of textiles (see Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* [London: The Women's Press, 1984]; and Clare Wilkinson-Weber, "Women, Work and the Imagination of Craft in South Asia," in *Contemporary South Asia* 13:3 [September 2004], 287-306). Yet few of these studies have considered how such activities could also be a source of status and social recognition for both the creators and their families (see Helena Ahopelto, "Feminists Who Know How to Knit: Women & Crafts in Finland," in *Canadian Women's Studies* 9 [1988], 67-68; and Mary Jane Schneider, "Women's Work: An examination of Women's Roles in Plains Indian Arts and Crafts," in *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women*, eds. Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine [Washington: University Press of America, 1983], 101-121).

lineages of recipes that embody an indefinable “style.”<sup>14</sup> This idea sets the stage for understanding how specific foods, particularly *barbacoa*, have become equivalent with fiesta foods (such as mole). Adapon, building upon Gell’s concept of the “halo effect of technical difficulty,” argues that it is not just any dish that can be equated with mole, only ones that entail great technical skill (108-109). In this chapter, Adapon goes beyond an analysis of mole and *barbacoa*’s symbolism, using an understanding of cuisine as an art form to explain why and how *barbacoa* became marked as a fiesta food.

In sum, Adapon provides a distinctive addition to anthropological food studies in her analysis of food as an art form embedded in a particular social context. Pursuing such theoretical analysis and application in other places with similar complex cuisines will no doubt be fruitful. Adapon’s writing is excellent, evocatively describing abstract, complex ideas with ethnographic examples. I highly recommend this book for colleagues in food, art, and gender studies.

Helen Vallianatos, University of Alberta

**Kobena Mercer, ed. *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers*. Cambridge, MA: Institute of International Visual Arts/MIT Press, 2008. 224 Pages.**

If we consider Kobena Mercer’s latest anthology, *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers*, in relation to the title of the InIVA/MIT Press series “Annotating Art’s Histories” in which it appears, a potentially productive space opens up between annotation as a practice of adding notes to existing narratives, and annotation as a revisionist methodology that challenges the ground upon which these narratives have structured the histories of modern and contemporary art. In this volume, Mercer makes relevant the question of what happens to art history’s disciplinary frameworks when we take diaspora, exile, and movement as the basis for inquiry.<sup>15</sup> Contributors therefore reveal the

<sup>14</sup> Adapon uses Gell’s concept of art as a “distributed object,” in which a body of art is dispersed temporospatially, although each piece of art has its own micro-history reflecting social relations (*Art and Agency*, 221).

<sup>15</sup> Since the themes of migration and exile are fundamental to this volume’s framework, Mercer (and the contributors) often refers back to the scholarship of thinkers who have conceptualized subjectivity outside the boundaries of the nation-state, including Edward Said, Paul Gilroy, James Clifford, and Georg Simmel.

varying stakes, benefits, and limits involved in the ways we approach the art historical legacies of both modernism and diasporic art practices in light of contemporary forms of globalization.

*Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers* is the fourth and final publication in the series, which also includes *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (2005), *Discrepant Abstraction* (2006), and *Pop Art and Vernacular Cultures* (2007), each edited by Mercer. Like the other volumes, *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers* wants to use multicultural and postcolonial lenses in order to reconsider the historical and stylistic circumstances of modernism and its legacies. Unlike its predecessors, however, it explicitly foregrounds themes of displacement in an effort to open its field of inquiry to subjects, movements, and geographies often excluded from traditional studies. Far from an exhaustive account of the ways in which diaspora, exile, immigration, and emigration are manifested in the visual arts, this collection, according to Mercer, aims to demonstrate “the ‘slow time’ of interdisciplinary translation . . . a holistic practice of rewriting that . . . makes the best use of conceptual innovations originating from outside the field of art history without reducing the objects of study to an ‘illustration’ of theory as an end in itself” (20). The self-styled pace and ambition of the anthology attempts to integrate theory and practice, while using case studies to open dialogues toward future avenues of analysis.

Considered together, the essays indicate the potential advantages and pitfalls of grappling with the dominant narratives of modern art. Ikem Stanley Okoye’s essay “Unmapped Trajectories: Early Sculpture and Architecture of a ‘Nigerian’ Modernity” rejects center/periphery models that chart unidirectional lines of influence, and instead advocates for a “diagram of chaos” in mapping European and African visual practices at the turn of the nineteenth century. However, in his discussion of James Onwudinjo’s Adinembo House in Okrika, and the Igbo sculptural tradition of representing the deity Anyanwu, Okoye reintroduces the irresolvable question of who was more “modern” and who came first among these Nigerian artists and their European counterparts (such as Adolf Loos and Marcel Duchamp). As a result, Okoye upholds rather than upsets the dominant historical and cultural distinctions that have long defined the parameters of “the modern” in architecture and sculpture.

More curious in this vein is Sieglinde Lemke’s contribution “Diaspora Aesthetics: Exploring the African Diaspora in the Works of Aaron Douglas, Jacob Lawrence and Jean-Michel Basquiat.” Much of this anthology strives to demonstrate that the mutual entanglements of diasporas and homelands, minority and mainstream, and



modernism and nostalgia cannot produce a seamless narrative of diasporic or minority artists' varied styles and localized circumstances. Yet in her consideration of these three artists, Lemke invents a narrative case study for "diaspora aesthetics" that progresses from the "roots" of Douglas to the "routes" of Lawrence and the "riots" of Basquiat. In her effort to develop a cohesive aesthetic of diaspora and to chart its development over time, Lemke essentializes rather than seriously considers both the artwork and the scholarship that she cites in her discussion.<sup>16</sup>

I find the essays by Ruth B. Phillips ("The Turn of the Primitive: Modernism, the Stranger and the Indigenous Artist") and Steven A. Mansbach ("The Artifice of Modern[ist] Art History") to be more successful in the ways that each addresses the dominant tenets of modernist art history when faced with the realities of transnational movement and collaboration. Phillips mobilizes the figure of the "stranger artist"—European immigrants to North America in the early and middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—and the indigenous artists with whom they worked, providing an alternative to the European modernist-primitivist narrative by considering how the mutual deterritorialization of these two groups produced new points of contact and negotiation. With a similar aim, Mansbach historicizes the circumstances in which European émigrés founded the discipline of art history in the U.S. as one of rational iconography, iconology, and stylistic development toward a Hegelian unfolding of increasing abstraction.<sup>17</sup> By reframing art history's disciplinary methodologies, Mansbach reveals how particular experiences of trauma have come to determine what we value as well as what we exclude in modern art. Specifically, he focuses on the privileging of the Bauhaus by the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition program in the 1930s, which he argues came at the expense of other, more politically engaged modernisms such as the Central European avant-garde (104-105). Both of these essays exemplify Mansbach's stated desire to "unearth the lost richness of modern art's original creative complexity," something that becomes visible once we refocus our inquiry to the shifting ground of exile and immigration (107).

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<sup>16</sup> Namely, Clifford's formulation of roots and routes, Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space, and Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's "polycentric aesthetics."

<sup>17</sup> Mansbach draws on Hegel's dialectical model of history as an unfolding progression towards an end goal in order to make the claim for modern art's increasing abstraction and non-objectivity in dominant art historical narratives. This feature of modern art history, Mansbach argues, served as a method by which to avoid the ideological and political functions of art that were at work in Nazi Germany (101).

In his introduction, Mercer foregrounds the extent to which the terms *émigré* and immigrant are based on one's subjective position—or in whose view one comes or goes. Ian McLean's contribution, "Aboriginal Modernism in Central Australia," exemplifies this aspect of Mercer's project by considering the experience of modernism for Aborigines in central rural Australia. Rather than totalize the devastating impact of modernity and colonization on these populations, McLean nuances how we understand native adaptation during and after the colonial encounter by considering the ways in which traditional practices have coexisted with modernity in works by artists like Emily Kngwarrey and Albert Namatjira. McLean's efforts to conceptualize a theory of modernism that accounts for the apparent aesthetic and historical negotiations in Aboriginal painting lead him to claim that "Aboriginal modernism is as much about Aboriginalizing modernity as modernizing Aboriginality" (83).

Perhaps treading on more familiar ground with respect to much theoretical work on diaspora and exile, Amna Malik and Jean Fisher close the volume with essays on contemporary art in Britain. In "Conceptualizing 'Black' British Art Through the Lens of Exile," Malik discusses work by Gavin Jantjes, Mona Hatoum, and Mitra Tabrizian, charting how their visual practices of the 1970s and '80s functioned at the intersections of race, nationality, gender, and poststructuralism. In demonstrating this, Malik shows how structures of power, surveillance, and regulation functioned across multiple categories of displacement to reproduce the boundaries of the nation. In "Diaspora, Trauma and the Poetics of Remembrance," Fisher looks to work by Sonia Boyce, Keith Piper, and Everlyn Nicodemus to explore the ways in which trauma and memory manifest themselves in cultural practice, particularly in relation to testimony, witnessing, and the archive. Mercer's decision to place these essays at the end of the volume indicates the anthology's roughly chronological organization of objects and movements, while simultaneously drawing out larger thematic and methodological relationships between essays. As Fisher writes: "it is *from* the place of diaspora that a uniquely politicized, ethical and poetic language emerged that addresses the universally felt aporias of collective human existence, and in which memory and exile may found new narratives of hope. . . . Diasporic poetics demonstrate—contrary to the claims of modernism—that art never ceases to address the past for the future; it interprets history to disclose the deeper 'truths' of our world historical situation" (210). With this conclusion, she

illuminates the stakes in Mercer's larger project by emphasizing the value of diasporic perspectives and art practices for all audiences.

In addition to these particular essays, the real strength of Mercer's volume lies in his use of alternative, non-spatial forms of exile to suggest future areas of research. In his contribution "Adrian Piper, 1970-1975: Exiled on Main Street," Mercer frames the artist's marginality not in relation to her racial and gender identities, but to her adherence to a Kantian philosophy that metaphorically exiles her from the major trends in poststructuralist theory and contemporary art.<sup>18</sup> By examining Piper's philosophical practice in relation to her *Mythic Being* performances, Mercer seizes an opportunity to, in his words, "re-examine the break-up of modernism as a historical moment of crisis in which certain outcomes gained precedence over others" (148). In doing so, Mercer charts unexpected relationships between Piper's famous series, conceptual art discourse, and the ways in which her practice asks us to formulate links between self and other. This essay highlights key elements of Mercer's framework, encapsulating how the anthology—despite its flaws, and in conjunction with the others in the series—will continue to generate provocative research questions at the intersections of cultural studies and art history.

Amy L. Powell, University of Wisconsin-Madison

**Carrie Noland and Sally Ann Ness, eds. *Migrations of Gesture*.** Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2008. 296 pages.

For critics in the arts and humanities, the term "gesture" is a seductive one, suggesting a sensual affinity between aesthetic expression and the variability and subtlety of physical movement. If pressed to explain gesture, many of us would compare it to language, while perhaps qualifying the analogy by noting that gestures are more organic—and more ephemeral—than either speech or writing. *Migrations of Gesture*, a collection of nine essays that range in scope across the visual and performance arts, sets out to undo these

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<sup>18</sup> Specifically, Mercer quotes Piper regarding her interest in Kant's metaphysics and epistemology, and discusses her investment in the philosopher's belief in objective knowledge and reasoned truths. For Piper, as Mercer shows, poststructuralism takes away the rights of objectivity and rationality to which all subjects should be entitled (148).

assumptions. The volume offers several fresh approaches to thinking about movement as constituting individual identity as well as a social field that extends through bodies and cultures. While this transmission can happen gradually, the collection points out the more rapid ways that aesthetic forms are “co-opted” or extracted from their original bodies and locations, whether through commercial appropriation or geographical migration.

The term “gesture” almost inevitably invites a discussion of Derridean concepts such as “trace” and “inscription.” However, while several of the essays rely substantially on a theory-based vocabulary, most seek a balance between the abstract and concrete, making the collection a good illustration of how deconstruction’s attention to signs and signifiers can—and perhaps should—operate within culturally specific frameworks. Marc Franko voices the urgency of making theory tangible, observing that “deconstruction’s claim for an embodied writing suffered egregiously from a lack of actual bodies” (241).

Contributors Deidre Sklar and Sally Ann Ness both locate “actual bodies” at the center of their critiques. Sklar looks at how the native conversational gestures of Italian and Jewish immigrants change in their new locales, indicating that gesture is a flexible intermediary between the interior and social selves. Similarly, in her carefully reasoned essay, Ness challenges the belief that dance is an ephemeral form of communication by taking the analogy between dance and “inscription” literally. She examines the effects of years of technique and training on the anatomies of Balinese classical dancers, concluding that the “bones, ligaments and other tissues of the dancers are the host material for the inscription of a living quasi-argument . . . influencing virtually every element of Balinese life” (15). One has only to consider the startling sculptural form that is a ballerina’s foot to see the force of the internal inscription Ness describes (16).

Other essays in the collection begin with the body but move outward, studying the movement of gesture across time and place, and its impact on social identity. Ketu H. Katrak looks at how the expressive symbolism of the Indian dance Bharata Natyam altered as it traveled and took root in California. By considering how native cultural expression takes on new forms in diasporic communities, Katrak’s essay focuses on the body as the site from which aesthetic traditions emanate and evolve. In one of the volume’s most rewarding essays, Susan A. Phillips explores a related theme through a discussion of Crip Walking, or C-Walking, a dance form common

among gang members in Los Angeles that is used to mark loyalty to the dancer's neighborhoods and other gang members. With dancers treating their bodies as styluses, spelling out the names of people and places, the dance "rides the line between oral and literate cultures" (49). Phillips traces C-Walking back to the slavery-era tradition of cakewalking—a competitive dance practice involving fancy dress and strutting that slaves used as a form of mockery and resistance, but which masters routinely misinterpreted as expressing an aspiration to social gentility. Linking C-Walking to slavery's violent past, Phillips argues that when the dance finally made its migration into mainstream culture, its co-opted version was stripped of its playful, subversive origins and had become little more than a predictable "mime" of gang culture (62).

While Phillips shows that dance can act as both a bodily and socio-historical inscription, Carrie Nolan suggests that the gestures of writing can approximate dance. Nolan looks at the Belgian poet and painter Henri Michaux's alphabet-like signs, which were inspired by prehistoric cave markings, maintaining that while the artist may have begun his markings with the urge to craft a universal language, he was driven above all by a fascination with the "untapped gestural and graphic possibilities within the practice of inscription itself" (168).

The subject of film also emerges in the volume, with contributors regarding movement as part of a film's production process and as an aesthetic ingredient of the film itself. Lesley Stern examines director Hou Hsiao-Hsien's practice of treating the camera as a gestural device that mimics or "ghosts" the movement of bodies in space. Meanwhile, Akira Mizuta Lippit writes about experimental filmmakers who manipulate bodily movement in such a way as to distort meaning. In his view, Martin Arnold, for instance, uses techniques such as erasing actors from the frames of old Hollywood films and endlessly looping frames until mundane gestures—a head turning or a door opening—are "severed from the 'flow of life,'" thereby taking on a terrifying significance (123). In a similar manner, Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho*, the radically slowed down version of Hitchcock's classic film, has the effect, writes Lippit, of "annihilat[ing] movement" (120).

The static medium of photography may seem like a less likely place to encounter gesture, but Blake Stimson reveals the motion inherent in photographs by regarding them in constellation rather than in isolation. He goes on to claim that movement is also integral to the process of capturing an image, since the squeeze of the shutter

is a “complex” of bodily and technological gestures (78). In examining the various physical movements that go into picture-taking, Stimson draws a revealing contrast between Henri Cartier-Bresson’s perception of photography as a quest for decisive moments to be arranged and captured, and Robert Frank’s treatment of the camera as “a device for distancing, othering, abstracting, a device that throws photographer and beholder back on themselves” (80).

In *Migrations*, essays about film and dance sit side-by-side with those on photography and painting. It is clear that the editors of the volume deliberately chose not to classify the essays according to art form, though doing so perhaps would have helpfully underscored the similarities and differences between the various treatments of a given medium. Still, it is apparent that such a structure would have been too rigid for a series of essays devoted to exploring the diffusion of meanings among people, geographies, technologies, and artistic and cultural bounds. The collection and its organization reveal some of the many ways that embodied movement transmits cultural meanings, showing just how “place-like bodies can be, and how gesture-specific places can be” (278).

Jane Van Slembrouck, Fordham University

**Xiaobing Tang.** *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008. 318 pages.

Tang Xiaobing’s book is like a grand history painting that portrays its main subject—the woodcut movement that emerged in Republican China in the 1920s and 30s—against a complex backdrop of political upheavals, institutional changes, and competing discourses. Tang convincingly argues that the woodcut movement was truly avant-garde because it not only challenged the prevailing aesthetics, but also established the woodcut print as “an incomparably expedient and politically relevant” medium in modern China (218).

The book opens with the reform of art education in the 1910s, championed by Minister of Education Cai Yuanpei and realized by young art educators like Liu Haisu, Lin Fengmian, and Xu Beihong. Cai believed that *meiyu* (aesthetic education) would, as Tang claims, “foster cultural cohesion as well as social harmony in modern China”

(11). His agenda was to instill the liberal-humanist vision of the European Renaissance in the Chinese urban bourgeoisie. Although young woodcut artists later would depart from Cai's artistic taste and political alignment, his program nonetheless established two fundamental themes in twentieth century Chinese art: its inseparable link to the nation's political agenda and its unceasing struggle between western influences and Chinese traditions.

Chapter 2 focuses on the remarkable shift during the 1920s toward left-wing cultural politics in the art world. A series of radical essays published by members of the Creation Society between 1927 and 1930 cultivated the theoretical foundation for a proletarian art movement. Exposed to Marxist theory during their studies in Japan, Guo Moruo, Cheng Fangwu, and Feng Naichao, among others, consistently argued that the mission of an avant-garde cultural movement was to "join forces with the political movement" of the left (72). As Tang observes, the meaning of *biaoxian*, a key term in Chinese art theory, migrated during this time from "subjective consciousness to be expressed" to "external reality to be represented," thus creating an alignment between the discourse of avant-garde art and Marxist politics (67).

The next three chapters describe the birth, growth, and culmination of what Tang calls the "urban stage" of the woodcut movement, which progressed at lightening speed. In 1929, a student group at the National Art Academy in Hangzhou organized the first public exhibition of creative woodcut prints. Only six years later, the *National Joint Woodcut Exhibition* was staged in Beiping (as Beijing was called then), Shanghai, and several other major cities, presenting six hundred works to a national audience. A number of factors propelled the movement's rapid development. For instance, the increasingly grim social malaise and Japanese military threats at the time motivated young artists to expand the subject matter of their art to human suffering and contemporary events. As a result, many adopted representational realism as their primary visual language. The symbiosis between literary journals and black-and-white prints also allowed woodcut artists to realize the medium's potential for mass circulation. The lower strata of society thus became the main subjects and viewers of this art form, making woodcut prints one of the most popular mediums in the twentieth century.

As Tang demonstrates with abundant detail, the movement was a triumph of solidarity, both nationally and internationally. Across the country, a large number of woodcut societies united individual artists and formed an important organizational layer that

supported the production of exhibitions, publications, and manifestos. One exception was Lu Xun, who worked individually but played a pivotal role in linking young Chinese artists and the global woodcut movement. He translated theoretical texts, published foreign prints, and organized an important workshop in 1931 for Chinese art students to learn from a Japanese master. In 1934, he helped curate the exhibition *Painters and Printmakers from Revolutionary China*, which brought Chinese prints to Paris. Lu Xun's efforts thus exemplified the international solidarity of left-wing cultural politics in general and woodcut prints in particular.

The main chapters focus more on historical events and texts than woodcut prints, but Tang compensates for this imbalance with the conclusion's animated visual analysis of a single print: Li Hua's *Roar, China!*, published in 1935. As he claims, this print demonstrates that, "to visually render a voice, to project it, and then to elicit an expressive response from the viewer is a complex operation of evoking and calling forth subjectivity" (219). Thus, Cai Yuanpei's advocacy of art as part of a nation-building program—discussed in the very first chapter of the book—finds its reflection in this work. *Roar, China!* represents the powerful transformation of "national awakening" as a cultural metaphor into a "political imperative" (222). As Tang's reading asserts, the woodcut movement responded to China's historical condition and, in turn, contributed to the revolutionary course upon which the country would embark.

Many important themes of modern and contemporary Chinese art can be traced back to the woodcut movement. The very idea that a new form of art could be promoted as a movement through public exhibitions and discourse building was inherited by later artists and theorists, including those of the '85 New Wave. The debate between "art for art" and "art for life"—and variations such as art for nation-building, art for revolution, or art for public well-being—is still highly relevant today. Tang ends his book with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, an event that compelled young artists to migrate from urban centers to rural areas controlled by the Communist Party, and thereby leaves the second stage of the woodcut movement to a future study. A complete picture of the woodcut movement will further elucidate its historical consequences: how the revolution of a single medium affected not only art, but also larger cultural developments in China.



## Contributors

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**Alexandra Alisauskas** is a Ph.D. student in the Program in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester in Rochester, NY. She is currently researching for her dissertation on art collectives and theories of the body in the period of Soviet transition, particularly in Poland and Lithuania.

**Paula Pinto** is a Ph.D. candidate in the Program in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester. She is writing her dissertation on French nineteenth-century photographic reproductions of works of art: “Art Reproduction and the Origins of Photography as a Form of Visual Representation (France, 1816-1886).” She has a Masters Degree in Architecture and Urban Culture from the Polytechnic University of Catalonia, Spain. She is the former co-editor of the urban culture journal *InSi(s)tu* (2001-2006). Paula has worked as a researcher and a producer in the Museum of Fine Arts School of the University of Porto and the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art (Portugal). She is the co-producer of a documentary film about performance art in the Portuguese post-revolution of 1974. She has presented several public interventions in the urban fabric of her hometown, Porto (Portugal).

**Marusya Bociurkiw** is a media artist, writer, and assistant professor of media theory in the School of Radio and Television Arts at Ryerson University. Her videos and films have screened around the world. She is the author of four literary books, including, most recently, a food memoir, *Comfort Food for Breakups: The Memoir of a Hungry Girl*. Her monograph, *Feeling Canadian: Nationalism and Affect on Canadian Television*, is forthcoming in 2010 from Wilfred Laurier Press.

**Janine Catalano** is a food scholar and art historian interested in the interplay between these two fields in the first half of the twentieth century, particularly as it relates to surrealism and the subversive. She spoke on this topic at the Oxford Food Symposium in 2009. Catalano studied at the University of Pennsylvania and later at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, where she now works.

**Beatriz da Costa** is an interdisciplinary artist who works at the intersection of contemporary art, science, engineering and politics, and Associate Professor of Studio Art, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at the University of California, Irvine. Her work takes the form of public participatory interventions, locative media, conceptual tool building and critical writing. da Costa has also made frequent use of wetware in her projects and has recently become interested in the potential of interspecies co-production in promoting the responsible use of natural resources and environmental sustainability. Issues addressed in previous work include the politics of transgenic organisms, and the social repercussions of ubiquitous surveillance technologies. Through her work da Costa examines the role of the artist as a political actor engaged in technoscientific discourses. This topic is also addressed in *Tactical Biopolitics: Art, Activism, and Technoscience*, a recently published anthology from MIT Press she co-edited with her colleague Kavita Philip.

da Costa is a co-founder of Preemptive Media, an arts, activism and technology group, and a former collaborator of Critical Art Ensemble (2000-2005). She has exhibited and lectured both nationally and internationally at venues such as the Andy Warhol Museum, the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Sevilla (Spain), Zentrum fuer Kunst und Medien (Germany), Museum of Contemporary Art, (Serbia), Exit Art Gallery, Cornerhouse (UK), Saidye Bronfman Centre for the Arts (Montreal), and the Natural History Museum in London. Media coverage of her work has appeared in the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, Reuters, CBS Evening News, BBC, CBC and the New Scientist. da Costa is a current Creative Capital grantee, received support from the Durfee Foundation, the Inter-Society for Electronic Arts and the University of California Institute for the Research in the Arts. She has also received an Honorary Mention from the Adobe Emergent Artists Award, an Honorary Mention at the Prix Ars Electronica and been nominated twice for the Rockefeller New Media Arts grant. Together with Preemptive Media she received the Social Sculpture Commission from Eyebeam and the

Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, as well as funding from Franklin Furnace, Turbulence, the Experimental Television Center and the Beall Center for Art and Technology.

**Critical Art Ensemble** is a collective of five tactical media practitioners of various specializations including computer graphics and web design, film/video, photography, text art, book art, and performance.

Formed in 1987, CAE's focus has been on the exploration of the intersections between art, critical theory, technology, and political activism. The group has exhibited and performed at diverse venues internationally, ranging from the street, to the museum, to the internet. Museum exhibitions include the Whitney Museum and The New Museum in NYC; The Corcoran Museum in Washington D.C.; The ICA, London; The MCA, Chicago; Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; and The London Museum of Natural History.

The collective has written six books, and its writings have been translated into eighteen languages. Its book projects include: *The Electronic Disturbance* (1994), *Electronic Civil Disobedience & Other Unpopular Ideas* (1996), *Flesh Machine: Cyborgs, Designer Babies, Eugenic Consciousness* (1998), *Digital Resistance: Explorations in Tactical Media* (2001), *Molecular Invasion* (2002), and *Marching Plague* (2006).

**Steve Dalachinsky** was born in 1946, Brooklyn, New York. His work has appeared extensively in journals on and off line including: *Big Bridge*, *Milk*, *Unlikely Stories*, *Xpressed*, *Ratapallax*, *Evergreen Review*, *Long Shot*, *Alpha Beat Soup*, *Xtant*, *Blue Beat Jacket*, *N.Y. Arts Magazine*, 88, and *Lost and Found Times*. He is included in such anthologies as *Beat Indeed*, *The Haiku Moment*, and the esteemed *Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*. He has written liner notes for the CDs of many artists including Anthony Braxton, Charles Gayle, James "Blood" Ulmer, Rashied Ali, Roy Campbell, Matthew Shipp, and Roscoe Mitchell. His 1999 CD, *Incomplete Direction* (Knitting Factory Records), a collection of his poetry read in collaboration with various musicians, such as William Parker, Matthew Shipp, Daniel Carter, Sabir Mateen, Thurston Moore (Sonic Youth), Vernon Reid (Living Colour), has garnered much praise. His most recent chapbooks

include *Musicology* (Editions Pioche, Paris 2005), *Trial and Error in Paris* (Loudmouth Collective 2003), *Lautreamont's Laments* (Furniture Press 2005), *In Glorious Black and White* (Ugly Duckling Presse 2005), *St. Lucie* (King of Mice Press 2005), *Are We Not MEN* and *Fake Book* (2 books of collage, 8 Page Press 2005), and *Dream Book* (Avantcular Press 2005). His books include *A Superintendent's Eyes* (Hozomeen Press 2000) and his PEN Award winning book *The Final Nite* (complete notes from a Charles Gayle Notebook, Ugly Duckling Presse 2006).

His latest CD is *Phenomena of Interference*, a collaboration with pianist Matthew Shipp (Hopscotch Records 2005).

He has read throughout the New York area, the United States, Japan and Europe, including France and Germany.

**Eidia (Paul Lamarre and Melissa Wolf)** has been a working collaborative since 1986.

Paul Lamarre 1979 BFA Magna Cum Laude, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Melissa P. Wolf 1980 BFA Boston Museum School / Tufts University 1981-1983 MFA program Pratt Institute Brooklyn, New York.

Wolf and Lamarre live and work in New York City.

**Fast Forward** is a New York based English composer and performer who makes music with almost anything. He is probably best known for his in depth musical explorations of the Trinidadian steel pan and his music-theatre works for diverse instrumentation. *Feeding Frenzy*, a culinary concert for 5 musicians, 5 cooks, 5 waiters and the audience has been performed in many countries, for many occasions, including the 15 year celebration of Freunde Guter Musik at The Museum for Contemporary Art in Berlin and the Time of Music Festival in Finland. It ran for three seasons at the Kitchen Center in New York. For 3 years, he toured extensively as a guest composer and musician for The Merce Cunningham Dance Company and continues to work closely with them as a musician and composer. As a teacher, he teaches master classes in composition, improvisation, and

music/theater at various institutions including: Time of Music Festival (Viitassari, Finland), Bergen and Trondheim Art Academies (Norway), STEIM (Amsterdam, Holland), Wien University (Vienna), CNDO, (Amsterdam), Theatre pour Danse Contemporain (Paris), Podewil (Berlin), and New York University.

**Rebecca Federman** has been with the New York Public Library since 2003. She is currently NYPL's Electronic Resources Coordinator and Culinary Collections Librarian; her prior position was as the social sciences bibliographer for the Humanities and Social Sciences Library. Federman holds a B.A. from Vassar College, and an M.L.S. from Pratt Institute. She also co-teaches a class on ephemera at Pratt's School of Library and Information Sciences. Federman writes about the culinary collections at the Library in her blog <http://cookedbooks.blogspot.com>.

**Doug Fitch and Mimi Oka** have created multi-sensory experiences known as Orphic Feasts.

Mimi Oka's career has included financial arbitrage, professional cooking, writing, and theater production.

Doug Fitch's work has ranged from theater, opera design and direction to architecture and furniture. His book "Organs of Emotion" explores the notion of redesigning the human body based on emotional logic.

Doug and Mimi both went to cooking school in Paris. Together they emerged as the world's only sustenance artists, making works of art in edible media.

**Kate H. Hanson** is a Ph.D. candidate in Art History at the University of Southern California. She specializes in early modern Italian visual culture and her dissertation, "Visualizing Culinary Culture at the Medici and Farnese Courts," analyzes the relationships between culinary literature and texts of natural philosophy, the collecting of still life paintings of food, and archival documentation of gastronomic activities in Florence and Parma.

**Annie Rachele Lanzillotto** took to the stage in 1993 writing and performing *Confessions of a Bronx Tomboy*, which premiered at Manhattan Class Company's Performance Marathon and Under One Roof Theater. Theatrical highlights include her public art installation and performance *A Stickball Memoir*, curated by City Lore for the 2001 Smithsonian Folk life Festival; her play *Pocketing Garlic*, commissioned by Franklin Furnace in 1994; her one woman show *How To Wake Up a Marine in a Foxhole*, which premiered at The Kitchen Solo Voice's Series in 1998, and her two year site-specific work entitled, *a'Schapett! (the act of wiping your plate clean with the heel of the brea, and savoring the juices)* at The Arthur Avenue Retail Market in the Bronx, which garnered her inclusion in Franklin Furnace's "The History of the Future," a selection of best performance art works over the past 25 years, in the "Art & Life" category. This work was commissioned by *Dancing in the Streets* and funded by The Rockefeller Foundation MAP fund and The Puffin Foundation. Lanzillotto's poetry won the 1st annual Paolucci Award given by the Italian American Writers Association. Lanzillotto has taught at Sing Sing, Bedford Hills, and Bayview Correctional Facilities; Housing Works, Sarah Lawrence College, Naropa University, Pace University, and Liberty High School for New Immigrants. She served as Literature Curator at The Kitchen, and Curator of "Opera Vindaloo!" at Dixon Place. Lanzillotto holds a B.A. with honors from Brown University, M.F.A. from Sarah Lawrence College, and was a fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation Next Generation Leadership Program through which she led a healing circle for artists and activists working on Middle East issues, called "Aah: Artists and Activists Healing." Lanzillotto is currently a Writer in Residence at the Santa Fe Art Institute.

**Anthony Leslie** received a B.A. in English from UCLA in 2006. He currently lives in Los Angeles and works at the Southern Regional Library Facility. He is a writer, musician, and drag performer.

**Cary Levine** is an assistant professor of contemporary art history at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He received his Ph.D. from the Graduate Center, City University of New York, and is a recent recipient of a J. Paul Getty Postdoctoral Research Fellowship. He is currently completing a book on the work of Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, and Raymond Pettibon, to be published by the University of Chicago Press.

**Katie G. McGowan** is a writer and interdisciplinary artist working in the conceptual space between the social sciences and the visual and language arts. The Spectacle, Americana, and late Capitalist modes of living are all subjects at the forefront of her investigative practice.

She is engaged in genre bending performance, installation, creative non-fiction, and working as an amateur private eye. By conducting invisible theatre experiments—whether posing as the next cosmetic surgery victim or a hapless traveler looking for God—one is given entrée into cultures far removed from one's own. These inquiries are then processed in a variety of media.

Katie received M.A. and B.A. degrees from Wayne State University in Creative Writing and English, respectively. She is currently an M.F.A. candidate and teaching assistant at The University of Iowa in the Intermediate Area. Katie is recipient of a Wilhelm and Jane Bodine Fellowship, Virgil M. Beall Academic Fellowship; and a residency from *Udruga Filmaktiv*-Rijeka, Croatia.

**Francisco M. Palma-Dias** was born in 1942 in the south of Portugal, next to the Andalusian Spanish border. In Brussels he studied cinema, established the laboratory-theater *le clou dans la langue*, and co-founded the vegetarian restaurant of Mediterranean stamp *le paradoxe*. Between 1972 and 1992 practiced Tibetan Buddhism in Paris and Lisbon, traveling through Africa, India and Brazil. He has published three poetry books. Since 1992, he lives at *Fazenda S. Bartolomeu* in Castro Marim (Portugal), where he founded with the anthropologist Eglantina Monteiro the *Companhia das Culturas*.

**Nicole Peyrafitte** is a Pyrenean-born performance artist who sings, paints, films, writes, and cooks. She draws on her eclectic heritage to perform songs ranging from French cabaret to jazz standards and contemporary poetry. Her voice work is often integrated into multimedia stagings based on her visuals (paintings and/or videos) and writings, and involves the onstage preparation and cooking of a dish, to be shared with the audience. Her work addresses the experiences of negotiating her identity across two continents and four languages. She performs domestically and internationally. Nicole has two CD's out: *The Bi-Continental Chowder/La Garbure Transcontinentale* released in 2006 and *Whisk! Don't Churn!* (both released with Ta'wil productions).

**Barbara Philipp** is a visual artist working in Austria and the Netherlands. She studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna and Paris, at the Städelschule Frankfurt, and the Dutch Art Institute (DAI). The body in transition in our times and its abstractions are a key to her work; she explores the relationship of different formal and contextual languages. The artistic translation is located between words, images, and the imagination that point to an allegedly perfect world. Her mainly used media are painting, drawing and performance. Food is often used as subject and/or medium.

**Julia Pine** recently received her Ph.D. in Cultural Mediations, with a specialization in Visual Culture, at the Institute for Comparative Studies in Literature, Art and Culture at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. Her doctoral thesis was on the subject of Salvador Dalí's 1942 autobiography *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, and she is currently conducting research on Dalí's war-era paintings, as well as his society portraits of the 1930s, '40s, and '50s.

**Yael Raviv** is the Director of *Umami food and art festival*, a non-profit arts organization bringing together artists and food professionals. She is also an adjunct professor at NYU's Nutrition, Food a Studies and Public Health Department where she teaches courses on food and performance, combining her background in theater and the culinary arts.

**Susana Reisman** is a graduate from the School of Imaging Arts and Sciences from the Rochester Institute of Technology (Rochester, NY). Born and raised in Venezuela, Susana Reisman continues to live a nomadic life—currently dividing her time between Toronto and Caracas. Her artwork has been exhibited throughout the United States and Canada. She is represented by Peak Gallery (Toronto), Spazio Zero Gallery (Caracas), and offers limited editions of some of her work via Circuit Gallery.

**Shyh-shiun Shyu** is a molecular biologist currently living in Taiwan. At the time of his involvement in "Free Range Grain," he was a Ph.D. student in molecular biology at the University at Buffalo.



**Kerstin McGaughey** is a graduate student in the Gastronomy department at Boston University.

**Gabrielle Moser** is a Ph.D. student in the Art History and Visual Culture program at York University and an independent writer and curator.

**Amy L. Powell** is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Art History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

**Helen Vallianatos** is an assistant professor of Anthropology at the University of Alberta.

**Jane Van Slembrouck** is a Ph.D. candidate in Literature at Fordham University.

**Bo Zheng** is an artist and Ph.D. student in the Program in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester.