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**The Critical Rumble**  
Marinetti, Benjamin, and the Politics of Gastroaesthetics in Modernity

A Thesis Presented

by

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This paper initiates an investigation into the aesthetic spaces surrounding comestibility and potability. Throughout the Western philosophic tradition, eating and drinking have been subject to dismissal on the grounds of the corporeality, subjectivity, and temporality implicit in the consumptive act. After briefly tracing the systematic marginalization of both the properties and pleasures of food and drink throughout the development of art discourse, this paper will turn to two unlikely contemporaries, F.T. Marinetti and Walter Benjamin, who shared an interest in the potential revolutionary ramifications of food to expand the category of aesthetic experience and to radically thrust corporeality and temporality into the practice and theory of art. Both Marinetti and Benjamin deploy the phenomenological, nutritional, and material qualities of food to critique contemporary ontologies of private and political bodies. However, their strategies reflect two very different conceptions of modern subjectivity. Marinetti promotes dietetics, cookbooks, and collective meals to corporatize and mechanize the body. Benjamin, on the other hand, embraces organicity and somaticity as a bodily technique of resistance to totalizing effects of both capitalist and totalitarian technotactics. This paper will investigate modern approaches to taste and edibility through the aesthetic theories of these two figures.

“If the smoke from the tip of my cigarette and the ink from the nib of my pen flowed with equal ease, I would be in the Arcadia of my writing.”

Walter Benjamin

For J.M.W, who taught me how to eat well, drink better, and smoke worse. Thank you for both inspiring this subject and inhibiting its progress through terribly enjoyable means.

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## Chapter 1 Initial Remarks

The Body's direct confrontation with material reality gastroaesthetics defeats all attempts at a purely discursive, analytical elucidation of the subject/object relationship. Foregrounding the fluidity of form, it also points to the inherent instability of the subject as body, begging us to ask ourselves...how can the self possibly account for- and position itself towards- the precariousness of the digestive process, especially when it is perceived as an assumption of our failure to control our body's natural rhythms?

Michel Delville, *Food, Poetry, and Consumption: Eating the Avant-Garde*

In the later stages of the twentieth century French philosopher Michel Serres published an elusive, delicate, yet staggering work, *Le Cinq Sens*. Through veils, boxes, and tables, objects predisposed toward prepositions, things defined through the acts of covering, containing, and supporting more than inherent qualities, he calls forth a "mingled body." It is a body whose subjectivity seeps, pools, and ebbs in constant flows between sensible encounters, attaches and detaches to and from itself. In the simple act of cutting one's nails, Serres argues, subjectivity asymmetrically orients itself alongside the sharpened tool. One hand cuts the Other. In 1985 Serres pronounced the age of language finished. Serres foresaw the grasp of linguistic structures on the body loosen (and with it sight, which shares a functional affinity with language) and the proliferation of algorithms and codes (genetic and otherwise) restore greater mutability and plurality to sensible constructions of subjectivity. "The mind sees, language sees, the body visits."<sup>1</sup> Taste (and smell), he argued, suffered historical negation due to share occupancy with speech in the mouth. The word subsumed the swallow. However, "Knowledge cannot come to those who have neither tasted nor smelled. Speaking is not sapience, the first tongue needs the second."<sup>2</sup>

Such dualistic distinctions fell into increased obsolescence in the twentieth century as gender, race, sexuality, and health fore grounded a new understanding of the body not as a singular entity fixed by attributes, but as a heterogeneous confluence of chemical, physical, cultural, and psychological inputs and affects and called into question language as the primary structure of apprehension. Serres' book is at the forefront of a shift that has occurred over the past thirty years. Taste and food has garnered more attention than perhaps any other moment of history. Larger variety and quantity of food is The industrialization of the food industry is central to environmental science, and individuals and collectives such as Michael Pollan and Slow Food promoted a correspondence between ethically sourced food and aesthetic enjoyment in popular imagination. Dietary practices are aligned with identity (one pronounces I *am* vegan rather than I *eat* vegan) constructions, as well as the affect of diets- weight and body image pervade sociological, psychological, and medical fields as well as nearly all aspects of pop culture. Myriad cookbooks, cooking shows, food blogs, photography sites and restaurant reviews have built an imagistic cornucopia. However, tensions between novelty and tradition, ethnicity and exploitation, access and lack are all but indiscernible

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*. (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008) 306.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

when teeth tear apart medium veal tenderloin with black truffle, Asian pear and spinach-fines herbes puree. “There has never been a document of culture which is not simultaneously one of barbarism.”<sup>3</sup> Neither has there been a dish.

Walter Benjamin understood material to bears the trace of the historical conditions that engendered it. Food, drink, and drugs are unique in that they penetrate the body at its physical and cellular boundaries and the body bears their trace. This paper initiates a brief survey into how edible material, as well as the sensory encounter with taste and the act of eating, while remaining integral to personal and cultural embodiment, has been historically absented from philosophic inquiry into aesthetic experience, focusing primarily on potential socio-political interest in distancing digestion from discourse. This will serve as a general contextualization to explore the first conscious incorporation of comestibles by the European avant-garde as an integral part of both their artistic and political strategy by examining how F.T. Marinetti and the Italian Futurists utilized extant beliefs and practices surrounding food in order to refute tradition and attack political and aesthetic institutions. It will begin to examine how this movement, which ultimately aligned itself with totalitarianism, negotiated their own politicization through nourishment. Finally, this thesis will examine the larger possibilities for an aesthetics of consumption through the work of Walter Benjamin, who identified the political possibility of food to organize and overpower the body, but also to resist the historical politicization of the sensorium.

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<sup>3</sup> Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, trans. Dennis Redmond, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm> (accessed October 5, 2011).



## Chapter 2

### A Brief History of the Cultural Politics of Taste and Appetite

Western philosophy has betrayed the body; it has actively participated in the great process of metaphorization that has abandoned the body; and it has denied the body. The living body, being at once “subject” and “object,” cannot tolerate such conceptual division, and consequently philosophical concepts fall into the category of the “signs of non-body.”<sup>4</sup>

Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*

One day before Socrates ends his life by drinking a lethal potion derived from hemlock, he ruminates on the divide between the soul and the body. He asks his disciple Simmias, “Do you think that the philosopher ought to care about the pleasures- if they are to be called pleasures- of eating and drinking?” His young follower replies “Certainly not.”<sup>5</sup>

Socrates possesses full knowledge that hemlock contains the power to determine boundaries of his mortality in its delicately formed but wildly toxic leaves. Hemlocks’ taxonomic kin includes cumin, dill, and fennel, herbs favored in ancient Greek cuisine.<sup>6</sup> The selection of this lethal member of aromatics as the agent of Socrates’ death lends Simmias’ prompted dismissal of food and drink a strange dissonance. In Jacques-Louis David’s famous painting, *Death of Socrates*, Socrates’ left hand cuts into the broad expanse brooding over the entire upper third of the canvas and gestures towards invisible realms that transcend the representational space of the painting. This is juxtaposed with his right hand, which hovers intimately over the chalice. The space between his fingertips and the deadly concoction flexes under the weight of his imminent touch and taste.

Classical medical practice, grounded in humoral theory, conceived of bodies and nourishments as porous and co-constitutive. The subject’s cambium composition- phlegm, blood, or bile- influences the affective quality of ingestible matter. In turn, substances impress themselves on the physical and psychic formation of the subject through these affects. This viscous ontology was incommensurate with classical metaphysics, which tends to affix permanence and stability to the valuation of “being.” Seeded into the foundations of Western philosophy is forced stratification of the body, relegating the mercurial and absorptive impulses of corporeal conscience below the provinces of thought.

The part of the soul which desires meats and drinks and other things of which it has need by reason of the bodily nature, [the gods] placed between the midriff and the boundary of the navel... there they bound it down like a wild animal which was chained up with man... making as little noise and disturbance as

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<sup>4</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, Editions Anthropos, 1991) 407.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin Jowett, trans., *Phaedo* (New York: Echo Library) 67. Plato characterizes appetite in *The Republic* as a necessary but monstrous other, “secured... like a wild beast... as far as possible from the ‘seat of deliberation.’”

<sup>6</sup> Paul Freedman, ed., *Food: The History of Taste* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) 95.

possible, and permitting the best part to advise quietly for the good for the whole and the individual.<sup>7</sup>

Metaphysics is not for the hungry.

*To eat blindly... is... to profane a holy thing... There is a state of mind at meals, a clear-sightedness, from which nobility arises: then we understand where life originates and where it is going. The loss of that essential faith, almost a kind of intelligence, is a fatal sign of mindlessness... At the table where [the guests] are about to sit down, a noble rite is about to take place, creating a kinship between blood brothers and strangers, through the living communion of matter itself. The veins of our ancestor, Earth, will open and distribute into various reunited bodies a more homogenous blood... Eat! Drink! Thus gain access to the perceptible forms of Divine Will!*

V. Poucel, *In Defense of the Body*

Concurrent with the dissemination of Socrates' dialogue through Plato's written account are early efforts to gather and codify the oral traditions of Judaism into a sacred text. Pagan antiquity and Judaic doctrine become important antecedents for Western Christian thought, which wrestled continually with the relationship between flesh and spirit. The palpable and prevalent experience of hunger is mapped across doctrinal debate. The Biblical account of humanity does not exclude the hungering body, but rather positions it as central to the account of Christian epistemology. The raw form of the transgressive act in Christian thought is incorporation of prohibited knowledge. A piece of fruit forces the chasm of moral ambiguity to open up before the first humans, and the story of creation ends with a bite.

Salvation begins with one. Transubstantiation is one of the most unique solutions to the question of how to manifest eternal and invisible truth (as it was understood) in the temporal and corporeal registers of the individual Christian subject. Christian texts abound with the alimentary; Christ demonstrates moral purity through exacting hunger on his own body (fasting in the desert), and satisfying the needs and desires of others (multiplying fish and bread and turning water into wine). An almost pulpy sensuousness permeates the language of books like Song of Solomon and depictions of the woman who poured perfume over Jesus and wiped her tears with her hair.

Tension between a highly material aesthetic (exemplified by elaborately crafted codices, reliquaries, and liturgical implements, as well as the architectural program of Abbot Sugar) and dogmatic dismissal of temporal matter weaves through the writings of nearly every school of medieval thought. Prohibitions against gluttony coexist with a vigorous literary tradition of carnivalesque banquets, and liturgical days of feasts and fasts provided the primary index for the experience of time. As discussed in Norman Bryson's explication of Pieter Brueghel the Elder's *The Battle between Carnival and Lent*, in the medieval world, appetite offered a qualitative matrix for socio-economic distribution and differentiation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., *Plato: Collected Dialogues* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) 70e-71. Quoted by Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Cornell, Cornell University Press, 1999) 14.

<sup>8</sup> Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked* (London: Reaktion Books, Ltd., 1990) 97.

*For Kant, aesthetics becomes paradoxically a castrated hedonism, desire without desire. An equal injustice is done both to artistic experience, in which liking is by no means the whole of it but plays a subordinate role, and to sensual interest, the suppressed and unsatisfied needs that resonate in their aesthetic negation and make artworks more than empty patterns.*

*Theodor Adorno, Aesthetic Theory*

This explication in *Looking at the Overlooked* initiates Bryson's argument that visual culture in the seventeenth century was vexed by a new problematic engendered by the shifting socio-economic landscape of Europe on the eve of modernity: surplus goods. According to Bryson *The Battle between Carnival and Lent* reveals a representational shift (the elevated perspective and derisive caricature of agrarian society entreat a decidedly classed spectator) concurrent with the rise of mercantilism and capitalist culture. He turns his lens on the Netherlands; an emerging nation uniquely and critically engaged in the religious, political, and economic conversions of Early Modern Europe.<sup>9</sup> Bryson argues the preponderance of still life (specifically food laden displays known as pronk) is an exemplary means of consuming material abundance. Burghers in 17<sup>th</sup> century Netherlands experienced unprecedented affluence. The influx of surfeit capital within the Dutch middle class necessitated new vehicles for spending, and the representational space of the canvas provided the ideal conduit. Bryson wrote "Affluence'... transfers the phenomenon of surplus wealth from ethics to aesthetics... [it] assumes that expenditure is not a matter of morals but of style." This necessitates "recycl[ing] surplus wealth back into the economy through a manipulation of desire... their aim the harnessing of pleasure to consumption."<sup>10</sup>

Medieval artistic production congregated ideologically under the sign of God and materially under the authority of the church. No further principle of valuation was needed. Formal aesthetic hierarchies remained pliable, and the table operated as a central organizing principal of artistic creation. Feasts incorporated all arts- gustation, performance, edible sculpture, even pyrotechnics into holistic and immersive compositions that prefigure both Bellini's *bel composto* and Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* by several centuries.<sup>11</sup> The feast (far more than the fast) withstood the secularization of culture across the western world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by retreating into the ceremonial aesthetics of sovereignty, but it lost formal currency in early modern aesthetic discourse. The effort to separate art from craft- liberal profession from labor- taxonomically extracted visual effects and qualities of formal arrangement from the banquet admixture and domesticated them into painting.

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<sup>9</sup> The Dutch Republic fought successfully for independence from the Spanish throne. They were culturally protestant and politically republican. Their economy was depended heavily on colonialism, giving them a strong international and maritime presence. These factors lent the Dutch Republic a unique status and visibility during this period of economic growth, church reform, and the rise of the nation-state.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>11</sup> For extended descriptions of elaborate feasts, see Allen Weiss, *Feast and Folly: Cuisine, Intoxication, and the Poetics of the Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

For the majority of modern Europeans, food functioned primarily within the spaces of personal property and domestic economies.<sup>12</sup> The Dutch still life, typically displayed within a private home, extended an ideal image of the banquet to the individual bourgeoisie spectator. They are notable for their “drilling clarity” and exacting particularity; they relentlessly reproduce the material present for *constant* consumption unconstrained by appetite, agriculture or need. They reflect and perfect every minutia of everyday nourishment, filtering creaturely necessity through the cultural forms of luxury, and sublimating commodity fetishism into the auratic artwork. The Dutch still life allocates authority to viewer, whose gaze perpetually consumes but never eats up the object of its consumption. “Disincarnated still lifes, in their inaccessible and ‘untouchable’ two-dimensionality...neutralize the sense of taste by deprogramming the viewers appetite.”<sup>13</sup> The consumer is necessarily absent from the table, and the table becomes a space for visual form rather than taste sensation.

This removal of food from feast and its submission to visuality parallels early work in 17<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics developed by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten and others, who borrowed the term “taste” from physiological taste (this holds true for all the romantic languages), but immediately dismissed taste as too subjective to determine a concept for aesthetic value. Seventeenth century aesthetics, particularly those of Kant, sought to determine a “subjective universal” standard by which to judge beauty, and taste lacked the structural language of vision. It was too subjective, too singular to reveal a universal form. “The interest in the aesthetic totality wanted to be, objectively, an interest in a correct organization of the whole.”<sup>14</sup>

The philosophical sense of distinction is another form of the visceral disgust at vulgarity which defines pure taste as an internalized social relationship, a social relationship made flesh; and a philosophically distinguished reading of the Critique of Judgment cannot be expected to uncover the social relationship of distinction at the heart of a work that is rightly regarded as the very symbol of philosophical distinction.<sup>15</sup>

In Pierre Bourdieu’s *A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*,<sup>16</sup> he argues that Immanuel Kant’s concept of taste, while claiming universality, is conditioned by the

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<sup>12</sup> That is, at least in terms of daily experience. The tendency to picture food within domestic spaces in modern art masks production with product, trade with production. There is a thriving genre of Market place paintings that painted a fiction of food in local public exchange, but images of colonialization and the industrialization of agriculture (farming and agriculture are typically filtered through Acadian landscape imagery) appear only as surreptitious subversions of representational ruptures.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Delville, *Food Poetry, and the Aesthetics of Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 2007) 66.

<sup>14</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans., Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: Regents of the University of Minnesota, 1997) 12.

<sup>15</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press, 1987) 494.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 494. I acknowledge this as a rather reductive and socio-economically biased reading of both Kant and Bourdieu’s critique of Kant. Bourdieu acknowledges that excluding the philosophic is no less fallacious than excluding the social: “the naively reductive reading... would reduce Kant’s test to the social relationship that is disguised and transfigured within it, would be no less false than the ordinary reading

culture that controls capital. Assumptive statements such as “we regard as coarse and low the habits of thought of those who have no feeling for beautiful nature... and who devote themselves to the mere enjoyments of senses found in eating and drinking” reveal the extent to which taste, marked by bodily gratification, had been systematically excluded from philosophic consideration in favor of the analytical senses.<sup>17</sup>

The subject in Kant’s subjective universal is a seeing subject.<sup>18</sup> Like the other senses, sight permits pure play of the sensual faculties, discussed extensively in Immanuel Kant’s third critique. However, according to Kantian aesthetics, vision can best distinguish between pleasurable sensations that are disinterested (beautiful) from interested (agreeable) pleasure.

*More than the other senses, the eye objectifies and masters. It sets at a distance, maintains the distance. In our culture, predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch, hearing, has brought an impoverishment of bodily relations... The moment dominates; the body loses its materiality.*<sup>19</sup>

Luce Irigaray

Plato’s well-worn cave allegory is exclusively visual. Shadows and sunlight alternately obscure and illuminate the prisoner’s vision, but he never feels the warmth of fire or sunlight on his flesh. Plato writes, “[vision]... is the most sunlike of all the instruments of the sense.”<sup>20</sup> Only invisibility supersedes visibility, not the invisibility of immanent sensation, rather an invisible whose form exceeds sensible apperception. This attitude remains largely intact into the modern era, where it is strengthened by its utility for the sciences. René Descartes, skeptical of the senses’ capacity to grasp concepts, allowed, “sight is the noblest and most comprehensive of the senses.”<sup>21</sup>

Sight necessarily occurs in the interval between subject and object, it identifies and differentiates. It apprehends via finite perspective, but successive glances give the impression of cohesive comprehension.<sup>22</sup> Vision projects outward from the body,

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which would reduce it to the phenomenal truth in which it appears only in disguise.” I will attempt to redress this in a more extended discussion in the future.

<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, the dismissal of taste and cookery from art discourse coincides with a rise in popularity of derisive images of workers and peasants eating and drinking in excess. The very classes with the least access to comestible products (particularly rich foods) are the classes most frequently displayed as corpulent bodies and hearty eaters. The classes with “good taste” are rarely exhibited tasting. This tends to be the case in seventeenth and eighteenth century, but, as noted by Timothy Morton, there is a decided shift in the age of revolutions, when the aristocracy or ruling classes tended to be the represented as fat over-consumers, which is indicative of the changing attitudes in post-industrial democratizing societies.

<sup>18</sup> And, more generally, a white western male subject. This scope of this paper excludes the gendered and racial connotations of the privileging of vision over the more “primitive” somatic senses and these particular ramifications of the politicization of the sensorium.

<sup>19</sup> Luce Irigaray, quoted in Henry Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The America Avant Garde Since 1979* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 100.

<sup>20</sup> Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2007) 17.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>22</sup> The sublime accounts for the experience of objects or sights exceeding (either mathematically or dynamically) apperception. The sublime reveals greater oscillates between the subject’s power of sight

returned to the subject only as a reflection that renders one sensible to oneself as an externally- an apparition comprehended more than felt.<sup>23</sup> Vision is associated with cognition, analysis, abstraction, and thus instrumental to abstracting lasting concepts from immediate sensations. That these qualities are a priori the most ennobling, useful, or valuable functions the sensate can perform, and that vision mediates commerce between the senses and reason, are ancient assumptions that underscore emergent aesthetic discourses of early modern Europe are disrupted by social and economic conditions of the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

Gastronomy Concerns every state of society, for just as it directs the banquets of assembled kings, it dictates the number of minutes needed to make a perfectly boiled egg.  
Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste*

The much-analyzed historic conditions (which will not be recounted here) that facilitated radical transformations of representational space in nineteenth century art and the breakdown of the Academic hierarchy opened opportunities for creative and formal gestures to reterritorialize the designate domain of art. I will very briefly introduce the changing gastro-political culture of France, which produced the most prolific contemporary gastronomic criticism, as an example of radical changes in both theoretical and practical interactions with food across Europe that set the stage for the avant-garde's politicized gastronomic practices and the left's materialist gastronomic theory that commence in the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> Several factors shaped the modernization of European culinary culture. The French Revolution displaced the estate system and reallocated wealth and access to goods, making pertinent questions of taste as a new mode of social demarcation. This new edible sphere did not resemble the Dutch burgher table, however, for social stratification densified, making it increasingly difficult to categorically exclude the working class from the table. Fine dining fled French palaces and inhabited the consciousness of the greater French populace, as such it was both democratizing and codifying. The meal became a conflicted sight for enacting the political and social tension of the second empire as it acquired increased significance as cultural capital. Honoré Balzac observed this, writing in *La Cousine Bette* (1847) "the table is the surest thermometer for gauging the income of a Parisian family."<sup>26</sup>

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and material reality, but it ultimately lodges the power in the spectator, who, despite feeling awe at the might of nature, finds in viewing the sublime "an ability to judge ourselves independent of nature, and reveals in us a superiority over nature that is the basis of a self-preservation." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Jackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1987) 121.

<sup>23</sup> This calls to mind Jacques Lacan's structural reading of the mirror stage, when a child recognizes itself as a whole being before it can execute control over the body's movements and functions. The external image of the self often exerts a certain control over the inhabited self.

<sup>24</sup> Sound has held a historical hierarchical superiority to the chemical senses, but not as valued as vision. One need only think of the historical primacy ascribed to writing over oral traditions.

<sup>25</sup> One factor that will be glossed is the importance of Imperialism colonial goods to shaping not only the tastes of European diners, but also the very structures of consumption. The opium wars, European involvement in the civil war, bread riots, and sugar boycotts all speak to the extent to which production, distribution, and consumption of pa

Timothy Morton, *Cultures of Taste/ Theories of Appetite: Eating Romanticism* (London: Palgrave: 2004)

Nineteenth century French cuisine developed along multiple distinct but interrelated trajectories. One attempted to mimic the structure of the French Art Academy. Just as academic art impressed *la grande peinture* as the marker of aesthetic taste over both elite and aspiring petite bourgeoisie alike, a hierarchic *cuisine française* impressed upon French palates an alimantal idealism. In the beginning of the century Alexandre-Blthazar-Laurent Grimod de la Reynière, author of *Almanach des gourmands*,<sup>27</sup> attempted to guide palates through this new social field, “having placed that wealth in new hands, and with the minds of most of today’s rich people turning towards purely animal pleasures, we have thought it might do them a service to offer a sure guide to the most solid of their most cherished affection.”<sup>28</sup>

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, among the first and most famous gastronomes,<sup>29</sup> attempted to legitimize taste as a sign of aesthetic cultivation. Brillat-Savarin applies contemporary thought from a variety of fields to food; he invented neologisms to lend linguistic structure to the stages of taste perception, he applies contemporary scientific methods to an investigation of the physiology of taste, and he models the bourgeoisie taster par excellence according to cultural standards of age. Brillat-Savarin posits gastronomy as the consummation of civilization. “From [dining] is born political gastronomy. Meals have become a means of governing, and the fate of whole peoples is decided at a banquet.”<sup>30</sup> Although Brillat-Savarin attributes equal (if not greater) significance to taste (and smell) as to vision and hearing,<sup>31</sup> his interest by and large is still bound by the same parameters that frame still-life: the ideal table in the moment of ideal consumption. Cultivation, preparation, and digestion are systematically absented from his discourse. Patricia Parkhurst Ferguson notes in *Accounting for Taste*, “The social distinction that really counted in contemporary France was the one drawn between cooks and dinners.”<sup>32</sup> Like the licked surface of Academic painting, the gastronome’s palate bears no trace of labor.

The Salon regulated the cultural tastes of France through highly public spectatorship. So too, the restaurant emerges as an entirely new public sphere of

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204.2007) 276.

<sup>27</sup> Until the late eighteenth century, the term gourmand had a decidedly negative connotation, associated with gluttony and greed. The very notion of a professional palate or the specialization of the field of culinary critique is an invention of the nineteenth century.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Freedman, *Food: The History of Taste* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2007) 276.

<sup>29</sup> Alexandre Dumas considered himself first a foremost a gourmand, and believed his writings on food not his novels, would be his legacy. J. Weintraub, “Talking about Cooking,” *Gastronomica* 11.2 (Summer 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste, or Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy* (New York: Everyman’s Library, 2009) 64.

<sup>31</sup> He also argued that there is a sixth sense, which refers to bodily response to sexual arousal.

<sup>32</sup> Ferguson, 87. She notes, however, that the burgeoning field of gastronomy did play a role in equalizing society. Prior to the nineteenth century and the public atmosphere of restaurants and professional chefs, cooking was considered women’s vocation, and thus largely ignored. This shifts when women begin to assert themselves in the public domain. Ferguson notes, “The connection between gastronomy and suffrage became something of a cliché. Both phenomena were taken as signs of modern times of the (very relative) democratization of French society.”

consumption.<sup>33</sup> Restaurants such as La Grande Taverne de Londres, with their innate disposition towards spectacle, became bastions of the French public's culinary taste. However, while the Salon was largely complicit with the State's cultural program, the restaurant is the offspring of capital. This fundamental distinction allowed the restaurant the particular ability to adapt to the systemic shifts in French culture during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When Napoleon III declared himself emperor, he solicited Baron von Haussmann to revolutionize the infrastructure of Paris, rendering the most basic fabric of the city friendly to commercial traffic and luxury activity and unfriendly to revolutionary barricades and unmonitored working class cafés.<sup>34</sup> As the new structure of the city redistributed socio-economic groups, the once highly local and socially homogenous cafés gave way to a larger network of restaurants, cafés, and concert-café that accommodated increasingly diverse patrons who were united in a shared attraction to public spaces outside the official channels of bureaucratic culture. Food and drink mingled prostitutes, businessmen, grisettes, and bohemians; the movements of the social body began to be dictated less by birth or occupation, but by choices of consumption. "Modernity was no longer characterized by a system of classification and control but, rather, by mixture, transgression, and ambiguity in the general conducts of life."<sup>35</sup>

The rise of advertisements, department stores, arcades, and markets (described with acute clarity by realist writer Émile Zola in the significantly titled *The Belly of Paris*) allowed society to present these new social realities to itself as never before. "To live at home, to think at home, to eat and drink at home, to love at home, to suffer at home, to die at home, we find this boring and inconvenient. We need publicity, daylight, the street, the cabaret, the café, the restaurant... we live to pose, to make a spectacle of ourselves to have a public, a gallery, a witnesses to our life."<sup>36</sup> The spectacle of consumption, no longer the province of painting, became its own performance.

"Impossible to define taste. Anyone who tries, fails... so what is taste? What is this strange thing which, as we have just seen, can and does exist beyond morality, reason, courtesy, progress, truth, reality, shame, consciousness, reconciles itself to savagery, consents to bestiality, accepts sodomy, and with all the power to be evil, forms part of the beautiful?"<sup>37</sup>

Victor Hugo

Brillat-Savarin predicted in 1825 that gastronomy would share academic standing with all other arts.<sup>38</sup> While vocational schools underground the culinary professions, gastronomy continued to be a marginal field practiced non-professionally

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<sup>33</sup> Although inn taverns and soup shops predate the restaurant, the notion of a dining local as a destination unto itself was popularized in the nineteenth century.

<sup>34</sup> Scott Haine, "'Café Friend': Friendship and Fraternity in Parisian Working-Class Cafes, 1850-1914," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27, 4 (October 1992) 61.

<sup>35</sup> Clark, 258.

<sup>36</sup> Clark, 207.

<sup>37</sup> Victor Hugo, quoted in Freedman (2007) 263.

<sup>38</sup> Brillat-Savarin, 64.



by men of means into the early twentieth century.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the industrialization and commercialization of comestibles made the act of selecting how, where, and what to eat, drink, swallow, or smoke as a conscious part of constructing individual, social, and national identity was integral to the experience of modernity. The notion of a national cuisine began in France in the nineteenth century, but by the beginning of the twentieth century the nationalization of cuisine acquires political signification. The newly formed countries of Germany and Italy (1871 and 1861 respectively) asserted their own culinary traditions as indicators of the extent of national cultural unification (diet became a way to homogenize regions that continued to promote individual languages, history, and ethnic identities).<sup>40</sup> At the same time, the First World War and economic collapse suddenly familiarized most of the continent with extreme hunger and subsequent terror of malnourishment. This highlighted with devastating clarity to leftist intellectuals and avant-garde artists revolution was not primarily ideological but material. It is against this backdrop that two oppositional figures, F.T. Marinetti and Walter Benjamin, attempt to interrogate somatic techniques that embody, in a very literal sense, the modern gastroaesthetics.

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<sup>39</sup> In the twentieth century the professionalization of journalism legitimized the profession of food criticism. Additionally, Michelin's rating system inspired an entire network of systemizing the field of gastronomic discourse. The history and historiography of food criticism has garnered considerable attention in the past twenty years, but still requires a great deal of scholarship.

<sup>40</sup> The German Food Fair analyzed by Walter Benjamin and the Italian pasta debate instigated by Marinetti discussed below both indicate the importance of establishing and promoting national cuisines.

### Chapter 3 The Futurist's Modern Dietetics

Men have fed themselves like ants, rats, cats, or oxen. Now with the Futurists the first human way of eating is born. We mean the art of self nourishment. Like all the arts, it eschews plagiarism and demands creative originality.<sup>41</sup>

F.T. Marinetti

On February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1909, the French newspaper *Figaro*<sup>42</sup> published a vehement manifesto penned by F.T. Marinetti, the founder of Futurism. The Futurist's veneration of mechanization is explicit, but Marinetti's declaration also reveals nascent interest in flesh, "the epidermic frontiers of our bodies,"<sup>43</sup> that germinates during the years of Futurism and Fascism's increasing complicity. Describing the instant of his epiphanic transformation into the champion of Futurism through crashing his racecar, Marinetti writes, "O maternal ditch, almost full of muddy water! Fair factory drain! I *gulped down your nourishing* sludge." His diction suggests the embeddedness of ingestion in the inception of Futurist ideology. He calls upon his readers to "leave wisdom behind as if it were some hideous shell, and cast ourselves, *like fruit*, flushed with pride, into the immense, twisting *jaws of the wind!*... *let's become food for the Unknown*, not out of desperation, but simply to fill up the deep wells of the Absurd to the very brim!"<sup>44</sup>

Having gorged himself on the mud and detritus of modern industry, Marinetti installed himself at the helm of the Futurist movement and their project to dismantle every institution, value and cultural relic of a world they believed to be bankrupt and passéist. To enact their assault, the Futurists armed themselves with art. Their poetry tore grammatical construction to shreds, leaving strewn bits of syllables and sounds heaving on the page. They hijacked modern art forms, wrenching the autonomous artwork from its auratic space of contemplative distance, and injecting it into the immediacy of mass media.

The Futurists promoted the seizure of all artistic institutions. However, their invasions into the spaces of language and visual art took place in familiar territory; it was, in a sense, aesthetic irredentism. Perhaps this explains why Futurist painting now appears "nostalgic...sweet, even pastoral to us. It no longer seems violent, aggressive, or chaotic; we're used to jittering, howling, interactive screens, not to silent linseed oil

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<sup>41</sup> Futurist Cookbook, ed. Lesley Chamberlain, trans. Suzanne Brill (San Francisco: Bedford Arts, 1989).

<sup>42</sup> Marinetti's father's close friend and noted epicure Pasha Mohammed el Rachi was a substantial shareholder in *Le Figaro*. This food lover and family friend helped secure the publication of the *Futurist Manifesto*. Maria Gough, "Manifesto Destiny: On Centenary Futurism Exhibitions." *Artforum* 48, no. 2 (October 2009): 109.

<sup>43</sup> F. T. Marinetti, *Critical Writings*, trans. by Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006) 379.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 11. Emphasis my own

and framed canvas.”<sup>45</sup> Ensclosed in an established historic discourse, painting and poetry proved susceptible to the reactionary aesthetics of Fascism in ways that Marinetti had not anticipated. The stylistic absorption of elements of Futurism into traditional modes of representation by the state eventually stalled the ‘avant’ of Italian avant-gardism. As such, investigating the ideological aims of Futurism necessitates examination of their more extreme invasions into territories outside the historical domain of art. The years of Italy’s most aggressive imperialist expansion coincides with the Futurists’ seizure of gastronomy, the first acknowledged attempt of modern art to colonize the territory of taste.<sup>46</sup>

The Italian Futurist’s interventions in the methods of production, presentation, and consumption of food have been treated as tangential to both artistic and political Futurism. However, the Futurist’s aggressive incorporation of the entire sensorium was essential to their project to destroy the traditional cultural apparatus of Italy and posit the modern State as a force capable of reorganizing the most fundamental corporeal registers of the Italian subject. For the Italian Futurists, food became a primary site to transfer the radical rhetoric of their political brand of avant-gardism from treatise to taste, from polemic to palate. In many ways this marked their most revolutionary gesture towards dismantling the work of art as a singular static object of contemplation and reconstituting it as an aggregate of affects that dislodge aesthetic apperception from its historic constitution. Nevertheless, the corporeal aesthetics of the Futurists ultimately failed to manufacture a new body for the anarchic revolutionary, but rather became fodder for the totalitarian body of the state. It is thus the domain of the culinary that yields some of the most fruitful exploration of Futurists’ aesthetization of politics.<sup>47</sup>

I formally declare the without Futurism there would never have been a fascist revolution  
Mussolini

Marinetti’s literary maturation coincided with the modernization of Italian industry, which hitherto remained largely agrarian and rural. This economic restructuring (largely confined to the north) did not effect concomitant cultural transformation.<sup>48</sup> Although he grew up in Egypt, Marinetti was unremittingly patriotic to the Italian state, and expressed a desire to revitalize Italian culture in his earliest writings. Marinetti believed ushering Italy to the forefront of modernity necessitated burning up the past in order to fuel the future. He was the mouthpiece of Futurism, and expressed their aim to dismantle every institution, value, and cultural relic of a world they believed to be bankrupt and passéist. They rejected marriage, family, morality, liberalism, socialism,

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<sup>45</sup> Bruce Sterling, “Don’t Look Back: On F.T. Marinetti,” *Artforum* 48, no. 2 (October 2009) 113. This may also explain why stylistic features of Futurism were able to be lifted from early futurism and lend the look of modernity to reactionary artworks and state propaganda.

<sup>46</sup> Marinetti was no stranger to imperialist attitudes. He was born in Egypt and traveled to Libya during the Libyan war, and vocally supported Italy’s imperialist program.

<sup>47</sup> Food developed into a prominent interest for the Futurists only after WWII and during the rise of Fascism as a dominant factor of Futurist politics.

<sup>48</sup> Günter Berghaus, “F.T. Marinetti (1876-1955): A Life Between Art and Politics,” *Critical Writings*, 2006, xvii.

parliamentarianism, clericalism, prisons, museums, universities, monumentomania, and “high” culture. In their place, they embraced war, technology, speed, mechanization, youth, misogyny, progress and mass media. They were jingoists; lead by their zealotry for the modern Italian State (cleansed of its Roman and Renaissance toxins) to support irredentism,<sup>49</sup> interventionism, and imperialism. Futurism envisioned a utopian world constructed anew, with Italy as its cultural locus.<sup>50</sup> Marinetti inaugurated himself into a number of leftist political movements, including Lombardy libertarians, the Socialist Party, and the anarcho-syndicalist movement, before he and fellow anarchic poets congregated into the Fasci Politici Futuristi party, during which time he began his longstanding but uneasy alliance with Benito Mussolini. Many of Marinetti’s writings condemn Mussolini’s tactics and express suspicion towards his reactionary tendencies. Nevertheless, the two spoke publically together while campaigning for the Fasci di Combattimentos in 1919. Marinetti resigned from the party the next year. According to Günter Berghaus, the next few years consisted of an attempt to re-ignite the revolutionary character of Futurism as an autonomous political movement. Failing that, Marinetti sought to expunge political affiliation from the artistic movement altogether, reportedly yelling at the editor of the futurist paper *Roma futurista* “No politics, no politics! Politics, what a fuck up!” Nevertheless, in 1923 Marinetti wrote *Manifesto to the Fascist Government*,<sup>51</sup> From this point on most sources agree that Marinetti’s overt loyalties, whatever his personal sentiment may have been, belonged to Mussolini’s government.

The cultural politics of Italian totalitarianism grew increasingly conservative, and neoclassical figuration represented by the Novecento Italiano movement signified the primary aesthetic thrust of 1920s Italian Fascist art.<sup>52</sup> Although Mussolini displayed greater tolerance for the avant-garde than Adolph Hitler, Marinetti’s return to the party has been interpreted in recent scholarship as a necessary move to protect Futurism by bringing it under the auspices of the state as “a kind of semi-official avant-garde of the regime”<sup>53</sup> rather than a reification of futurist aesthetics of aggressive force, industrialization, and urbanization into authoritarian violence and extreme nationalism.

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<sup>49</sup> Daniele Conversi points out that Futurist irredentism tended to focus only on weaker nations. While Italy demanded the return of territory from Austria, they did not demand the return of Corsica from France; Futurists were often more realistic and political than their radical rhetoric suggests.

<sup>50</sup> In this regard their sentiment aligned with fascism, which began after the first war to fill the void left behind Futurism’s destructive wake. Futurism and fascism were distinct and often contradicting, but they identified negatively through a mutual distaste for both liberal and socialist economics (seeing corporatization of the market as an alternative) while sharing a cultish veneration of the state, war, streamlined bureaucratic power. Increasingly, Futurism filled the cultural void of fascism.

<sup>51</sup> Marinetti allied with the institutions he once attacked. He joined the Italian Academy, and became the Secretary of the Writers’ and Journalists’ Union.

<sup>52</sup> “The Novecento movement in painting and literature is, in reality, two very moderate, practical Futurisms of the political Right.” Marinetti, “Manifesto of Futurist Cuisine,” 2006, 394. Marinetti’s Futurism ramified into a handful of futurisms that affiliated themselves with various movements, Marinetti was not himself authoritarian in his management of the art movement, and allowed for a multiplicity of Futurisms.

<sup>53</sup> Berghaus 2006, xxxvi.

Here scholarship begins to betray the schizophrenic character of artistic and political Futurism. Some posit Futurism as a cultural counterweight to fascism that maintained an uneasy autonomy from state politics, others as a movement whose hyperbolic rhetoric proved bankrupt and easily assimilable into fascism. In many ways they are fundamentally different- fascism is classist, hierarchical, authoritarian, and catholic- but these differences only highlight the extent to which Futurism elected self-deformation and adaptation over resistance. Marinetti's interest in the range of social and somatic exchanges that surface in the preparation, presentation, and consumption of food developed during the years of his most overt alliance with Mussolini, and it is in these compound sites of exchange that the complex ideology of Futurism traverses the body.

Civilization is a multiplicity of strategies, dazzling as precious gems inlaid in a golden crown, to obscure from human beings the sound of, the terrible meaning of, their jaws grinding.  
Joyce Carol Oats, "Food Mysteries"

In Trieste, young people never sleep. Theirs is a healthy insomnia, which made us devour the great Futurist feast offered us by our friends and wittily served in inverse order:

Coffee

Sweet memories on ice

Marmalade of dead glories

Mummy roast with professorial liver

Archeological salad

Goulash of the past, with explosive peas, served in a history sauce

Dead Sea fish

Clotted blood soup

Entrée of demolition

Vermouth.<sup>54</sup>

Marinetti penned this passage more than twenty years before he published *The Futurist Cookbook*, the most comprehensive record of the performative feasts staged by Marinetti, Filia (né Luigi Colombo), and affiliate artists and chefs.<sup>55</sup> The roots of gastronomic Futurism lie in literature. In *The Battles of Trieste* Marinetti recounts a meal served by friends in the city. In it, Marinetti intermingles manifesto and menu, two performative forms of writing that address themselves to the public- the manifesto to masses, the menu to small gatherings.<sup>56</sup> This dual orientation reflects the

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<sup>54</sup> Marinetti 2006, 164.

<sup>55</sup> Only one chef, Bulgheroni, is ever mentioned by name. This suggests that the Futurists themselves perpetuated the distinction between artists (who are named and celebrated) and chefs (who, until the age of the celebrity chef, remain by and large anonymous).

<sup>56</sup> Christine Poggi, "Folla/Follia: Futurism and the Crowd," *Critical Inquiry* 28.3 (Spring 2002). Through the act of naming, the menu represents concrete fodder that provokes the gustatory imagination and promises satiety. The menu functions at the nexus between the producer and consumer, facilitating the participatory act of the recipient through selection. The meal provides a model of direct engagement and individual

movement's interest in the national body and its relationship to the individual and the crowd. As Emilio Gentile notes,

The Futurist programme proposed a wide-ranging administrative decentralisation, streamlining of bureaucracy, government of young people, the abolition of prisons and voluntary military service, abolition of the family by means of free love and State education for all children. It wanted to guarantee all citizens an equal start in life, allowing the development of personality by the unleashing competitive spirit of individuals in an atmosphere of total freedom. In reality, Futurist democracy was no modern mass democracy of the era of great nation States: in spite of the pretensions to modernity, the ideal of political Futurism was a small anarchic and individualist community.<sup>57</sup>

Cecilia Novero argues in *Anti-Diets of the Avant-Garde* the Futurist's interest in dietetics, while couched in advancing a newly configured modern Italian subject, reflects an element of pre-bourgeoisie, even atavistic sensibility.<sup>58</sup> More significant to this discussion is that Marinetti suspends literal battle in Trieste, as well as the literary account of this battle, in order to both participate in and recount this feast. By figuratively consuming the past "served in a history sauce," Marinetti internalizes his poetics of destruction, and demonstrates coextensive tension between libertarian individualism and corporate nationalism within Futurism. The feast extends throughout history as both a social formalization of eating as well as a potent trope: The feast is a fast from fighting. To quote Margaret Visser at length

"Feasts, but means of structure and ritual, deliberately use the powerful connotations of food to recall origins and earlier times... change about in the animal-its death- is used to suggest endings of various kinds: the end of hostility, if impurity, of an earlier state of being. The subsequent eating then performs the function of moving forward, by incorporating the change into the life of the group. For this is the theme that underlies all table manners: we may be slicing and chewing; we may have killed or sacrificed to supply our feast; we may be attending to the most animal of our needs; but we do so with control, order, and regularity, and with a clear understanding of who is who and what is what... we do not treat people as though they were the swine or the oxen slaughtered for the feast: we do not get the guests mixed up with the dishes. For the point is that we so easily could. At table we are both armed and vulnerable; we are at such close quarters."<sup>59</sup>

The feast engenders a civics from destruction. The table acts as tableau where primitive relations between predator and prey are communally negotiated. Civilization forms in the social matrix of host and guest over cooked carcasses and fermented spirits. Visser notes this is not a relationship of equality; the host solidifies authority

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<sup>57</sup> The utopia of small artist run states was fuelled by Gabriele d'Annunzio's power takeover of Fiume and founding of a new (Fascist-like) state in 1919.

<sup>58</sup> Cecilia Novero, *Antidiets of the Avant Garde: From Futurist Cooking to Eat Art* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) 11.

<sup>59</sup> Margaret Visser, *Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners* (Canada: HarperCollins, 2008) 93.

through a demonstration of deference to the guest.<sup>60</sup> Etymologically, host and guest are both rooted in “stranger, enemy- hostile;”<sup>61</sup> the feast sublimates violence through the palate and savor renegotiate necessity and pleasure in ritual of dining. David Kunze writes in “The Missing Guest: The Twisted Topology of Hospitality,”

With hospitality comes escape, mobility, polity among strangers, the real life of cities- then and now. Hermetic boundary crossing and the role of the stranger open up cuisine to sophistication, theatricality, a relation to an audience. The fractal relationships that guided this historical development continue as a latent, renewable potential, fleshed out in new form whenever political and cultural conditions allow.<sup>62</sup>

Enrico Cesaretti argued that Marinetti’s dietetics are motivated in part by latent socialist idealism similar to nineteenth century philosopher Charles Fourier’s utopian vision of liberating desire from need. Fourier believed that allowing unrestricted desire and pleasure to drive society’s culinary activity would naturally cultivate greater attention and care to grow satisfying and nourishing foods and bodies that escape repressive powers from the inside out. “The indulgence of taste (the most universal form of pleasure) is seen as the surest way to achieve industrial harmony.”<sup>63</sup> Marinetti’s recipes do express reverence for hedonism as negotiation of collective desire, but they are far removed from nineteenth century responses to industrialized production and utopian strategies for urbanization. Marinetti’s conception of social organization and structures of authority can be understood as integral to his worship of the triumph of predatory (in only slightly metaphorical sense) politics. Futurists meals reproduce traditional power dynamics even as they purport to encourage radical liberation of sensual, gastronomic, and sexual subjectivity. In “Springtime Meal of the Word-In-Liberty”, men demand in frenetic and nonsensical language (Marinetti calls this language “words-in-liberty”) that a woman<sup>64</sup> feed them strawberries floating in wine. Overcome by their collective desire, the woman pours the dishes over the men, who “end up eating, licking, mopping themselves up, fighting each other across the table... abstract noises and animal cries which seduce all the breasts of springtime, as the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. This inequality that equalizes the social ordering of the table is important

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Donald Kunze “The Missing Guest: The Twisted Topology of Hospitality.” Jamie Horwitz and Paulette Singley, eds. *Eating Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press) 185.

<sup>63</sup> Daniel Sipe, “Social Gastronomy: Fourier and Brillat-Savarin,” *French Cultural Studies* (2009) 226.

<sup>64</sup> I do not include a discussion of the role of women in Futurist recipes, but it is worth briefly mentioning that the Futurist cookbook makes frequent overt references to an eroticized cannibalism of the female body. One dish, “Italian Breast in the Sunshine,” consists of two half spheres of almond paste with a black pepper sprinkled strawberry in the center of each. “Synthesis of Italy Dinner” uses the female body as a serving dish upon which a topographical map is constructed out of food. In “Geographic Dinner” a woman is wrapped in a map of colonial Africa. Guests select dishes that reference those regions (through metaphor. They make use of some ingredients from the geographic regions but ignore regional cuisines. The dishes are controlled entirely by Italian palates) by touching countries on her body. In touching her body, her body is both objectified and dematerialized. It becomes text- a menu for selection and procession, and a map to be traversed and dominated.

ruminate, snore, grumble, whistle, bray and chirrup in turn.”<sup>65</sup> The woman in “Springtime Meal” appears to participate as an equal, but in reality she functions as cook, servant, submissive, and site for the men to assert territorial dominance over one another. While Fourier shares Marinetti’s zeal for innovation and edible variety, he is critical of industry and corporate power, and advocates a radical program of gender equality. Cesaretti seems more accurate when he says Marinetti’s gastroaesthetics” coincides with an elitist and aristocratic culinary aesthetic.”<sup>66</sup> Or mirrors most closely Ancient Rome aesthetics of power. Although Marinetti wishes to mobilized the Italian populace, the dynamics of feeder and fed in the most primal sense remain intact; the crowds must continue to hunger, if only metaphorically, in order to share the table with the sovereign/host. Marinetti wishes to mobilize the Italian populace, but the direction of this mobility is vertical. As Cesaretti notes, there is a certain “aristocratization of the crowd” or, in Marinetti’s words, a “proletariat [made of] men of genius.”<sup>67</sup>

When feeling a piece of iron, we say, “This is iron,” and we are satisfied...Yet between the iron and the hand, there is a conflict involving less than conscious force-thought-feelings. Maybe there is more thought at the tips of the fingers and in the iron than in the brain that arrogantly observes the phenomenon.<sup>68</sup>

F.T. Marinetti

The Futurists “strove for a reassessment of the body’s global involvement in the operation of the senses and of how this involvement can lead to a reconsideration of the symbolic and cultural values of edible matter.”<sup>69</sup> Davide Panagia writes in *The Political Life of Sensation*, “the first political act is also an aesthetic one, a partitioning of sensation that divides the body and its organs of sense perception and assigns to them corresponding capacities for the making of sense.”<sup>70</sup> Thus the first revolutionary act is equally aesthetic, a “Risorgimento” of the senses. The Futurists abolished the fork and knife in order to encourage an immediate and tactile relationship with food, and staged synaesthetic meals that collectively engaged all the senses. The recipe for “Aerofood” instructs diners to stroke sandpaper while eating an olive, followed by pairings of fennel and velvet, kumquat and silk. This is accompanied by the scent of carnations sprayed on the neck, a blasting giant fan, and Wagner (the cookbook also called for innovative visual presentation of food). In a similar vein, Fillia held a “Tactile Dinner Party,” in which the guests wore pajamas covered with “different tactile material such as sponge, cork, sandpaper, felt, aluminum sheeting, bristles, steel wool, cardboard, silk, velvet,

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<sup>65</sup> Marinetti 1996.

<sup>66</sup> Enrico Cesaretti, “Recipes for the Future: Traces of Past Utopias in *The Futurist Cookbook*.” *The European Legacy* 14.7 (2009) 845.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 846.

<sup>68</sup> Marinetti 2006, 378.

<sup>69</sup> Delville, 104.

<sup>70</sup> Panagia, 9.



etc.” As they ate, they “let their fingertips feast uninterruptedly on their neighbor’s pajamas.”<sup>71</sup>

Marinetti positioned touch at the nexus of the senses. The haptic character of taste is axiomatic, but the discursive affinity between tactility and visibility developed largely out of modern art. The desire to get ever closer to things, so close as to confuse boundaries between the sensible objects and its perception, it is an ongoing thrust of the avant-garde.<sup>72</sup> Marinetti considered Renaissance perspectival illusionism yet another retrograde institution wholly inadequate to the task of capturing the lived experience of modernity. Instead of taking the eyes as the automatic vantage point of subjectivity, he proposes

An intervisionary sense...some people can already see inside their bodies.

Others dimly perceive the interiors of nearby bodies. Everyone feels that sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste are but modifications of one very active sense, namely that of touch, split in different ways and localized at different points.<sup>73</sup>

This passage, from “Tactilism, Towards a Discovery of New Senses,” stems from public panels Marinetti held in the early 1920s to promote ‘tactilism,’ a series of haptic experiments and exercises intended to “intensify communication” and “achieve greater material well-being.” Marinetti believed these tactile interventions could improve education, communication, and medical practice.<sup>74</sup> The encroachment of the individual body by mutual touching in Filia’s “Tactile Dinner” is indicative of an important undercurrent in the Futurist restoration of the total self through sensual engagement: the absorption of the individual by the collective, a necessity of any totalitarian social order.

The entire Futurist project is informed by the dynamics of eruption and consolidation; the drive to expand the self beyond the natural and social boundaries exists simultaneously with the effort to bind and overcode the individual and society. Both strategies share an ultimate aim: the totalizing affirmation of the self, as a response to the modern breakdown of rationalist/realist notions of the autonomous, bounded subject.<sup>75</sup>

Futurism is rife with rhetoric exalting the supremacy of the individual and encouraging non-conformity,<sup>76</sup> yet Futurism has never been friendly to deviance, and its involvement with fascism necessitates homogeneity. While Marinetti asserts that the tactile arts open the subject to a more diverse and enriched epistemology, he also

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<sup>71</sup> Marinetti 1989, 103.

<sup>72</sup> This is a major thrust of Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility,” (378) which will be developed further below.

<sup>73</sup> Marinetti 2006, 378. Benjamin understands the pervasiveness of haptic sensations in all sensory encounter. He writes, “All disgust is originally disgust at touching. Even when the feeling is mastered, it is only by a drastic gesture that overleaps epidermal contact remains taboo.” Benjamin 1996, 448.

<sup>74</sup> The total body- health

<sup>75</sup> Roger Shattuck, *Candor and Perversion: Literature, Education, and the Arts* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999) 47.

<sup>76</sup> Marinetti felt compelled to declare the uniqueness, non-conformity, and “risk [of] non-popularity,” in the opening paragraph of the Manifesto of Futurist Cuisine.” He writes this just after he argues that novecento is a gentle form of Futurism.

councils people to give up “illusory paradises” such as Communism, Agrarianism, and Hedonism, and to “be on your guard against condemning the higher forces in society and the wonders of speed.” Marinetti’s passage on tactilism shifts from the poetic style his manifestos into a more prescriptive voice, increasingly assuming the tonality of a public health initiative rather than an attempt to radically reorient the body in relation to the plastic arts.

Man has extended his capacity for empathy to mechanical values. They are for him no longer dead abstractions but rather vital movements of force.

Wilhelm Worringer, *Form in Gothic*

The Futurists “aimed to transform every aspect of individual and collective life- to change mentality and habit, to create the New Man, the Italina of the modern era.”<sup>77</sup> The *Futurist Cookbook* denies the individual, using “stomach” as a synecdoche to approximate the human.<sup>78</sup> The stomach is no longer an organ within a singular living body; it is universally objectified into an “organic canvas” for “free-form arabesques of whipped cream sprinkled with lime-tree charcoal.”<sup>79</sup>

Marinetti called upon his countrymen make their own bodies into material progress itself, to build “Italian bodies agile and ready for the featherweight aluminum trains which will replace the present heavy ones of wood, iron, and steel.”<sup>80</sup> The aesthetic ideal of “agile” Italian bodies scarcely masks the very real investment of fascism in public health. Colonial conflicts and war necessitated a constant replenishing of manpower, underscoring the need for a “dynamic” diet. Marinetti introduced the bite-size portion to the culinary arts (an attack on large sustenance dining patterns of rural agrarian passióst Italy), now ubiquitous in fine dining, as a way to isolate and appreciate each particular taste<sup>81</sup>. At the same time, these small bites provided a formal means of aestheticizing appetite control. The *Futurist Cookbook* calls for food that is light and airy to replace “opaque” high-caloric foods they believed had little aesthetic merit.<sup>82</sup> Futurist menus, while ideologically hedonistic, tended towards the acetic, including the “Extremist Banquet” in which guests were sequestered in a villa for two days and “fed vaporizing food sculptures,” that is to say, perfumes. The pangs of hunger and “feverish chewing of the emptiness” were part of the art.<sup>83</sup> The ability to abstain was a prevalent theme in futurism, which saw liberalism as lazy and socialism as “based on the

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<sup>77</sup> Gunter Berghaus, *International Futurism in Arts and Literature* (New York: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2000) 3.

<sup>78</sup> No individual who participated in any Futurist meal is ever named. The dinner is always treated as one in an anonymous collective.

<sup>79</sup> Marinetti 1989, 97. One could argue that the Futurists attempted to reposition the auratic space of the of the pure modernist painting to the body’s interior and metaphorically digest the “theology of art.”

<sup>80</sup> Birnbaum, 111.

<sup>81</sup> Benjamin 2002, 117. This can be understood in a manner somewhat analogous to the way in which slowed film can isolate and highlight the optical unconsciousness in the act of lifting a spoon, as identified by Benjamin.

<sup>82</sup> Delville, 107.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

satisfaction of base appetites rather than higher spiritual goals.” According to Marinetti, “the modern man must have a flat stomach, under the sun, to think clearly.”<sup>84</sup>

Marinetti anticipated this increasing mechanization of the organic, and somewhat prophetically, envisioned a world in which nourishment would be provided synthetically. He dreamt of state-sponsored pills (so that “when a real banquet is spread it may be appreciated aesthetically”)<sup>85</sup> containing albumins, fats and vitamins (accounting for his invocation of “economical”)<sup>86</sup>, cast the kitchen as a “cooking laboratory” equipped with “ozonizers (to give food the smell of ozone), electrolyzers (to decompose items into new forms and properties), colloidal mills (to pulverize food), ultraviolet lamps, autoclaves, dialyzers, and tools to measure chemical properties.”<sup>87</sup> He even speculated that the radio could one day emit “nutritious radio waves.”<sup>88</sup> He conceived of the body as a machine perfected by the fuel used to power it.

Although Marinetti (revealingly) never actually engaged engineers or scientists to actualize his imagined machines, he frequently employed Futurist gastronomy in the service of technology, particularly technology that served Fascist Italy. When Alfonso Bialetti designed the espresso coffee maker in 1933,<sup>89</sup> Futurist artists helped market the machine and Marinetti dutifully promoted caffeine as the drink of the strong and virile patriot, even incorporating it into recipes. The dish “The Excited Pig” consists of an entire salami sans casing, cooked in espresso and not-so-subtly placed erect on the plate, an illustration of the masculine virility caused by caffeine. The Tavern of the Holy Palate opened serving “Pollo Fiat,” a chicken dish and allusion to the car manufacturer Fiat.<sup>90</sup>

Fascism’s corporatist orientation encouraged the growth of industry, and Mussolini encouraged exploiting Italy’s abundant bauxite reservoirs during the depression (and an embargo on Italian steel), naming aluminum the national metal. Futurism responded by incorporating aluminum into every aspect of the artistic meal. They built elaborate eating environments (including the Holy Palate Restaurant, which was plated floor to ceiling with aluminum) that mimicked airplane cockpits, described courses on aluminum cards, touched aluminum at tactile parties, wore aluminum neckties, and ate chicken stuffed with ball bearings “mechanized by aluminum-colored bonbons.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>85</sup> Marinetti 2006, 57.

<sup>86</sup> Marinetti believed that if nutrition were state run (production, transportation, etc.) eventually a totally mechanized production would relieve humankind of labor altogether, allowing leisure to eat as a purely aesthetic enterprise.

<sup>87</sup> Charlotte Birnbaum, “Alimentary School: On Ferran Adrià and Futurist Cooking,” *Artforum* 48, no. 2 (October 2009): 111.

<sup>88</sup> Marinetti 2006, 67.

<sup>89</sup> This is constructed with aluminum, an important material to the Futurists, as will be demonstrated later.

<sup>90</sup> Novero, 15. Novero points out that “fiat” is a Latin word that appears in the fascist statement “Fiat ars-pereat mundus,” quoted by Benjamin in “The Work of Art in its Age of Technological Reproducibility.”

<sup>91</sup> Delville, 70.

Our past is like our rhetoric, only good for filling up our mouths; its enjoyment lies entirely in the way it forces the jaws wide open, the way it demands voluptuous self-abandonment, the way it sticks to the palate and the intestines, the way the eater feels he had become one with it, knotted into a sticky ball and re-fashioned.

F.T. Marinetti, *Futurist Cookbook*

“History captures men through their mouths,” observed Giulia Sissa. “The appetite not only determines the origin of transformation, the mutation of the ideal imaginary city, but also provokes the transformation of one type of regime into another.”<sup>92</sup> For Marinetti, food was both literal capture, but also means of potential release from the grip of history. The inherent instability and insistent insistantaneity of food matter and taste sensation mimics the infinite immanence of Marinetti’s imagined utopia, a state where “hygienic forgetfulness” continually purges the modern subject of the “putrescence city... carbuncle from the past” and asserts the body in a place of eternal presentences. Italian culture was deeply rooted to their cuisine, and the culinary climate of Italy appeared to Marinetti not as mere symptom, but as essential to Italian passióism.

Marinetti advocates for the utter dismantling of any and all determinate historical apparatus. The literal ramifications of his anti-historicism are demonstrated in his vitriolic attack on pasta. The ambition to initiate Italy, still largely rural,<sup>93</sup> into the industrial theater of Europe became paramount to Futurism’s vision of the modern Italian state. The Futurists measured Italian progress less in relation to the national economies of Western Europe, against which it could not yet compete aggressively, than through degrees of departure driven between northern production and the agrarian economy of the south, which was perceived as economically obsolete and culturally retrogressive. Benito Mussolini actively promoted rice, cultivated in Northern Italy<sup>94</sup>, as an alternative to southern-bound and economically arduous pasta.

In *The Futurist Cinema* (1909), Marinetti and his Futurist accomplices describe how they will symbolically represent anguish on the cinema screen as

A hero who has lost his faith and lapsed into a dead neutral skepticism: We show the hero in the act of making an inspired speech to a great crowd; suddenly we bring on (Italian Statesman) Giovanni Giolitti, who treasonably stuffs a thick forkful of macaroni into the hero’s mouth, drowning his winged words in tomato sauce.<sup>95</sup>

In 1931 Marinetti declared in the *Gazetta del Popolo* (reprinted in the *Futurist Cookbook*) that pastasciutta was the “bane of Italy” and made people “skeptical, lethargic, and pessimistic.”<sup>96</sup> Marinetti argues that “spaghetti is no food for fighters” and claims that it makes men impotent. Marinetti turned to a number of doctors to boost his credibility. Professor Signorelli wrote, “Such starchy food should mainly be

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<sup>92</sup> Giulia Sissa, trans. by Davide Panagia, *Il piacere e il male: Sesso, droga, filosofia*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999) 2.

<sup>93</sup> Approximately 70% of Italy was rural during WWI. Novero, 3.

<sup>94</sup> The depression forced Italy to find ways to lesson their dependence on the foreign market. Rice was an indigenous resource, whereas wheat had to be imported.

<sup>95</sup> Christine Poggi and Laura Wittman, *Futurism: An Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) 52.

<sup>96</sup> Marinetti 2006, 76.

digested in the mouth... but in this case...is carried out by the pancreas and liver. This leads to an interrupted equilibrium in these organs. From such disturbances derive lassitude, pessimism, nostalgic inactivity and neutralism.”<sup>97</sup> Professor Nicola Pende echoes him, stating that pasta makes people “forget the lofty dynamic obligations of the race and the searing speed and most violent contradictory forces that constitute the agonizing rush of modern life... it does not undergo sufficient preparation through mastication.”<sup>98</sup>

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Although the doctors’ statements presume to speak about health, their language suggests that their issues with pasta are ideological, not scientific. The Futurists, who had sought the attention of the entire nation through poetry, painting, cinema, and newspaper, with pasta “finally hit on the one realm of the quotidian that affected every single Italian.”<sup>102</sup> Italians drew lines, diverting their attention from questioning larger issues of Fascism, making the pasta debate an act of highly effective public management. Famous chefs refused to cook pasta, fights broke out between Italian restaurants as far as San Francisco, Pro and Anti-Pasta movements grew, and the mayor of Naples (the home of the 17<sup>th</sup> century gastronomic revolution that gave rise to pasta) fought back, saying, “the angels in Paradise eat nothing but vermicelli al pomodoro.” Marinetti quipped that this confirmed his suspicion that heaven must be a very dull place.<sup>103</sup>

Marinetti’s pasta war, while predicated on the Futurists’ promotion of a rather romantic, even Arcadian image of holistic correspondence between body and mind, was less forthcoming about its complicity with Fascist policy. The depression forced Italy to find ways to lesson their dependence on the foreign market, and Mussolini actively promoted rice, cultivated in Northern Italy, as an alternative to southern-bound and economically arduous pasta, thus maintaining the traditional economic divide between

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>98</sup> Poggi and Wittman 2009, 52.

<sup>99</sup> Marinetti 1989, 76.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>101</sup> Poggi and Wittman, 2009, 52.

<sup>102</sup> Romy Golan, “Ingestion/Anti-Pasta,” *Cabinet* 10 (Spring 2003).

<sup>103</sup> Poggi 2008, 42.

southern and northern Italy and revealing that the revolutionary abolition was in reality pasta quite reactionary.

Prampolini and Fillia disfigured [the edible female nude sculpture]: slender *high speed* 'barbs' of soft dough, synthesis of cars hungry for outside curves and *swiftness of flight*, offered to staring mouths  
29 feminine silver ankles of hub caps and propeller blades formed of soft risen dough.  
Marinetti, *A Meal that Prevents a Suicide*

The Futurist's fusion of artistic and culinary institutions culminated in the opening of the first Futurist restaurant, The Tavern of the Holy Palate, in 1929. Three years later, Marinetti and Fillia published the *Futurist Cookbook*. In it they declare

The Futurist culinary revolution... has the lofty, noble and universally expedient aim of changing radically the eating habits of our race, strengthening it, dynamizing it, and spiritualizing it with brand-new food combinations in which experiment, intelligence and imagination will economically take the place of quantity, banality, repetition and expense.<sup>104</sup>

Marinetti's use of the word "spiritualized" suggests a certain deification of the material body that was in the process of being inserted in the abandoned space of religion and idealism.

Denouncing the Victorian synthesis of political, artistic and scientific realism as insufficient to either describe or control a modernity that was experienced as inherently a-historical, revolutionary, ambiguous and ambivalent, the intellectual-artistic front that we have come to call modernist can be identified with a search for a way to re-articulate the relationship between the secular and the sacred (religious, spiritual, mystical) before the metaphoric Death of God, first, and the very real death of nearly a whole generation of European men in the Great War<sup>105</sup>

Marinetti wished to "vanquish the apparently irreducible hostility that separates our human flesh from the metal of motors." He substitutes flesh with a technosomatic body that can respond to the culture of war and jingoism with the uniformity and reproducibility of a machine. The technosomatic body, inorganic and metallurgic, is unaffected by the grim realities of war, disfigured faces and torn limbs, "as if the only way for the body to survive in the military-industrial epoch of capitalism was for it to be already dead, in fact deader than dead."<sup>106</sup> The meal "Heroic Winter Dinner" (a meal for soldiers), which included a course of "Raw Meat Torn by Trumpet Blasts." Beef is cut into cubes with militaristic precision, connected to an electric current, then shocked and marinated for twenty-four hours in rum, cognac and white vermouth. It is served on a bed of red pepper, black pepper, and snow. Each cube must be chewed for a minute, and the eater separates each bite by sounding a trumpet. Once the beef cubes are depleted, the soldiers are served persimmons, pomegranates and blood oranges and

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<sup>104</sup> Marinetti 1989, 13.

<sup>105</sup> Claudio Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University Toronto Press, 2003) 124.

<sup>106</sup> Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004) 123.

offered perfumes of rose, jasmine, honeysuckle and acacia, which they reject (because soldiers are above these sentimental scents), opting instead to don their gas masks, consume the “Throat –Explosion” (a liquid-solid parmesan pellet steeped in Marsala), and depart into the frigid night.<sup>107</sup>

“Heroic Winter Dinner’s” suggestive end lies at the culmination point of “all efforts to aestheticize politics... war.”<sup>108</sup> The meal immediately precedes battle; the soldier consumes the meal with the same force of will with which he consumes the bullet and with which the state consumes the soldier. “War is beautiful because it inaugurates the dreamed-of metallization of the human body.”<sup>109</sup> Marinetti’s metalized body, in which the organic, messy, violent act of tearing, chewing, swallowing, digesting, and defecating are sublimated into the clean, shiny order of the machine represents the ultimate submission of food to aesthetic, and of aesthetic to war.

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<sup>107</sup> Marinetti 2006, 52.

<sup>108</sup> Benjamin 2002, 122.

<sup>109</sup> Marinetti 2006, 20.

## Chapter 4

### Technosomaticity and the Politics of Figs

It is as though philosophy suddenly wakes up to the fact that there is a dense, swarming territory beyond its own mental enclave, threatening to fall utterly outside its sway. That territory is nothing less than the whole of our sensate life- the business of affections and aversion, of how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces, of what takes root in the guts and the gaze and all that arises from our most banal, biological insertion into the world. This aesthetic concerns this most gross and palpable dimension of the human...It is thus the first stirrings of a primitive materialism...

Terry Eagleton *Ideology of the Aesthetic*

Walter Benjamin, Marinetti's contemporary and, in his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," his critic, parallels Marinetti's interest in the ramifications of ingestion as an articulation of the political-aesthetic conditions of modernity, but toward a very different end. Futurists instrumentalized taste in the service of politics, resulting in the eventual subsumption of their gastroaesthetics to totalitarian dietetics, Benjamin, on the other hand, turned to taste not as tool to manipulate the collective body, but rather as a site of critical engagement between the individual body and its political environment.

Benjamin finds in the sensuous, fungible, and transgressive nature of food's movement between bodily borders an investigatory tool for his unique concern with the ways in which subjects perceive the phenomena of production and how objects of production prepare the senses for their own reception. Benjamin perceived through the effects of extreme hunger, intoxication, and satiety on his own sensory faculties the realization that criticism is a bodily act.

*Warmth is ebbing from things. Objects of daily use gently but insistently repel us. Day by day, in overcoming the sum of secret resistances- not only the overt ones- that they put in our way, we have an immense labor to perform. We must compensate for their coldness with our warmth if they are not to freeze us to death, and handle their spiny forms with infinite dexterity if we are not to bleed to death. From our fellow men we should expect no succor... And in the denaturing of things- a denaturing with which, emulating human decay, they punish humanity- the country itself conspires.*

Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street*

Marinetti's gastroaesthetics demands constant innovation, synthetics, and novelty. It denounces culinary tradition (at least rhetorically), and rural diets, characterized by repetition (based on seasonal availability), simplicity, and naturalism. He goes so far as to diagnose "tedious" diets as symptomatic of suicide.<sup>110</sup> Benjamin, however, finds revolutionary potential within ordinary constructs of daily life. "When we take hold of the banal, we take hold of the good along with it- the good that is there (open your eyes) right before you."<sup>111</sup> Benjamin understands the revolutionary gesture as an articulation of the body responding to contact with the given material conditions of the world. Wandering through Rome one day, Benjamin recounts an episode of extreme hunger. He determined to "unleash [his] senses in the folds and gorges of the *most unassuming* raw fruit and vegetables... so as to identify a scent I had never before

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<sup>110</sup> Marinetti, 2006

<sup>111</sup> Benjamin Ibid, 2005, 4.



known.”<sup>112</sup> The extremity of Benjamin’s sensuous deprivation, which recalls Futurist meals wherein diners would be sequestered and starved for three days and “fed” only on the scent of foods that were pumped into the room, is exactly what attunes him to detecting an original olfactory effect from the basest of foods, raw ingredients that escape the cultural logic of cuisine, commodity, and culture. Here, Benjamin’s gastronomic tactics parallel those of the surrealists.

Breton and Nadja are the lovers who convert everything we have experienced on mournful railway journeys, on God-forsaken Sunday afternoon in the proletarian quarters of great cities, in the first glance through the rain-blurred window of a new apartment, into revolutionary experience, if not action. They bring the immense forces of ‘atmosphere’ concealed in these things to the point of explosion... to win the energies of intoxication for the revolution.<sup>113</sup>

In the phantasmagoria of commodities, “the world of things advances on the human being; it yields to his uncertain grasp and ultimately fashions its figures *in his interior*.”<sup>114</sup> The subject need not ingest the commodity for it to “fashion” the consumer; once grasped the commodity ingests the consumer. The culture industry is a consumptive automaton, a cyborgcarnality<sup>115</sup> that constantly devours commodities and excretes images of the objects it consumes. These images evoke desire for the singular reason that they are predigested- the interpretative work of the image has been done for us. Benjamin asks “What in the end makes advertisements so superior to criticism? Not what the moving neon sign say- but the fiery red pool reflecting it in the asphalt.” cyborgcarnality replaces the things it consumes with semblances, and in doing so alters the city into an urban cockaigne wherein “a narcotic [is] made out of reality itself.”<sup>116</sup>

The hegemonic power of this system lies in instantaneous replacement of surfeit with desire and desire with surfeit. Benjamin proposes the strategy for resistance is “to win the energies of intoxication for the revolution.” Benjamin uses consumption to implode it. In “Fresh Figs,” Benjamin describes the first time he utterly abandons himself to appetite. He purchases figs from a street vendor, but she has run out of paper to package them, so he stuffs the figs into his pockets and mouth. He is then seized with a need to obliterate the figs with his own body.

No one who has never eaten a food to excess has ever really experience it, or fully exposed himself to it. Unless you do this, you at best enjoy it, but never come to lust after it, or make the acquaintance of that diversion from the straight and narrow road of the appetite which leads to the primeval forest of greed.... but that could not be described as eating...it was more like a bath, so powerful was the smell of resin that penetrated me, clung to my hands, and impregnated the air through which I carried my small burden. And then, after satiety and revulsion- the final bends in the path- had been surmounted, came

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<sup>112</sup> Benjamin 1996, 362.

<sup>113</sup> Benjamin 2005, 216.

<sup>114</sup> Benjamin 2008, 200. Emphasis my own

<sup>115</sup> I am indebted to Eduardo Mendieta, Professor of Philosophy at Stony Brook University, for his invention of this term.

<sup>116</sup> Buck-Morss, 22.

the ultimate mountain peak of taste. A vista over an unsuspected landscape of the palate spread out before my eyes—an insipid, undifferentiated, greenish flood of greed that could distinguish nothing but the stringy, fibrous waves of the flesh of the open fruit, the utter transformation of enjoyment into habit, of habit into vice. A hatred of those figs welled up inside me; I was desperate to finish them, to liberate myself, to rid myself of all this overripe, bursting fruit. I ate it to destroy it. Biting had rediscovered its most ancient purpose.<sup>117</sup>

Benjamin's gluttonous violence towards the banal street figs ruptures the fictive desirability and specialness of the commodity. In "One-Way Street" Benjamin describes breakfast as a small intoxication. "You sacrifice your morning sobriety in order to have a little something."<sup>118</sup> This little something provides a critical "rupture between the nocturnal and the daytime worlds" and through "vital rhythms" distinguishes between "the spell of dreams" and daily matter. So too, intoxication smashes the novel veneer of commodities, revealing their fundamental banality. No homogenizing authority can utilize the animal abandon with which Benjamin demolishes the figs. By drowning himself in appetite, he "succumbs to...great purification."<sup>119</sup> The intoxication of the body cleanses it of intoxication with the image-world. It pierces the body and individuates it from the crowd. Benjamin's interest in intoxication, his personal records on his use of drugs, alcohol, and food to alter his physical and chemical perceptions, operate as part of both counter-capitalist and counter-fascist strategy.

This marks a key distinction from the Futurists, who originally opened up their bodies to heterogeneous sensations enacted on the tastebuds, but whose actions ultimately became scripts [The Cookbook]<sup>120</sup> that lent dictatorial diets a perverse performative power and the *illusion of participatory politics*. Despite their incorporation of the corporeal senses, the Futurists ultimately reproduced aesthetics that cleansed sensation of the instinctual, concrete, and tangible. Benjamin's aesthetics resist totalitarianism, historicism, and mechanization because, "He is demanding of art a task far more difficult- that is, to *undo* the alienation of the corporeal sensorium, to *restore the instinctual power of the human bodily senses for the sake of humanity's self-preservation*, and to do this, not by avoiding the new technologies, but by *passing through them*."<sup>121</sup>

The room itself became more velvety, more aflame, darker. I uttered the name of Delacroix.  
Walter Benjamin, "Main Features of my Second Impression of Hashish

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 358.

<sup>118</sup> Benjamin 1999, 360.

<sup>119</sup> Marinetti suggests that intoxication and consumption can purify the body. In "A Meal that Prevents a Suicide" Marinetti and Fillia aid a broken-hearted and self-destructive friend by constructing an edible image of a beautiful woman (like the one that destroyed his heart) that he can in turn devour and destroy and becomes "cleansed, free, empty. While the misogyny of Marinetti's

<sup>120</sup> The Cookbook as another institution- analogous to the museum?

<sup>121</sup> "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," *October* 62 (Fall 1992) 5.

Benjamin's poetics of intoxication derives less from twentieth century modernism than the nineteenth century avant-garde. Benjamin reverses Kant's aesthetics of disinterested enjoyment and asserts "mere enjoyment" as the foundation of meaningful aesthetic engagement. He argues, "Gormandizing means above all else to devour one thing to the very last crumb. There is no doubt that it enters more deeply into what you eat than mere enjoyment... Bury your face in a melon as if it were a pillow, or gorge yourself on caviar out of crackling paper."<sup>122</sup>

Benjamin's intoxication incorporates Baudelaire aesthetics, which operate to dislodge progressive temporality, promote immanence over transcendence, and destabilize language from nominalization to a poetics of inexactitude.<sup>123</sup>

Benjamin writes of marijuana,

The Hashish eater's demands on time and space come into force... For anyone who has taken hashish, Versailles is not too large, nor eternity too long. Against the background of these immense dimensions of inner experience, of absolute duration and immeasurable space, a wonderful beatific humor dwells all the more fondly on the limitless contingencies of all existence.

The traces of Baudelaire are evident:

"Wine, opium, and certain music create an ecstatic temporality that overcomes the quotidian irreversibility of time and the partition of the senses; henceforth, art is no longer a function of expressing states of the soul, but rather of creating metamorphoses, establishing correspondences, seeking infinity."<sup>124</sup>

Baudelaire writes, "The profound joys of wine... mysterious god hidden in the fibers of the vine. How great are the spectacles of wine, illuminated by the inner sun!"<sup>125</sup> As mentioned previously Plato and Descartes celebrated vision for its ability to cast clarity on forms and offer a glimpse of what lies beyond the terrestrial grasp. Baudelaire reverses this. He locates illumination in the immanent plane of ingestion and sensory manipulation. Intoxication stretches the boundaries of experience such that language elasticizes to accommodate the confusion of sensations.

Before your tongue captures the spoon...long before your intestines have pricked up their ears and your blood has become a wave which cleanses your body with that perfumed foam, they [your eyes] are blind for all that which is not borscht or its reverberation on the eyes of the dinner guests... I have eaten it in the Moscow winter and all I know is one thing: Snow is this soup, molten red flakes, the meal of clouds that is akin to Manna, that also fell from the sky one day.<sup>126</sup>

The richly synesthesiac language of "Borscht" reveals the acuteness with which Benjamin encountered taste on an elemental level. The borscht blinds him, asserting savor over sight in aesthetic encounter. In early passages about the nature of art, Benjamin argues that within the presentation of any work of art there contains an

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<sup>122</sup> Benjamin 1999, 358.

<sup>123</sup> Weiss, 23.

<sup>124</sup> Charles Baudelaire, "Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris," quoted in Allen Weiss, 22.

<sup>125</sup> Baudelaire, *Paradis artificiels*, quoted in Allen Weiss, *Feast and Folly: Cuisine, Intoxication, and the Poetics of the Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002) 19.

<sup>126</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, translation slightly altered by Cecilia Novero

instant of the Expressionless, a silent stillness that “violates” the semblance of a work of art and arrests the truth of its content held within. In describing borscht, Benjamin enacts this instant. Language falters and dissipates into metaphor and the eater detects in the soup alimentary divinity, manna, the *ursprung* taste.

It is a story of disenchantment of nature induced by the increasing dominance of technical rationality in human life, the ever-ramifying “administration” of the world that captures sensuous particularity within a grid of disembodied forms of general equivalence (scientific formalization, commodity exchange, bureaucratic organization). It is a process that in the same stroke anesthetizes and overstimulates, virtualizes and reins, isolates and aggregates.<sup>127</sup>

Eric Santner, *The Royal Remains*

Benjamin understood eating as both socio-political and aesthetic, but he does not attempt to formalize dietetics or impose a general order of consumption on bodies. Rather, he cultivates his gastroaesthetics through specific immersions in foods, drink, and drugs in local instances of encounter. He conceives of eating as forming a constellation necessary for productive revolution. “Marx did not let himself be hungry enough along with the masses he described. His intellectual posturing barred him from taking the analysis to the next level: intoxication.”<sup>128</sup> Richard Wolin take up this point in *The Aesthetics of Redemption*, arguing that the revolutionary intelligentsia failed to connect to the proletariat because “this task cannot be performed contemplatively.”<sup>129</sup> The spaces of revolution are not classrooms but be ale-houses, which Benjamin recognizes as “the key to every town.” In “One Way Street” and “Paris Diary” Benjamin notes how restaurants and bars influences the way streets and traffic forms cities and build community. “Eating alone tends to make one hard and coarse. For it is only in company that eating is done justice; food must be divided and distributed if it is to be well received.”<sup>130</sup> The majority of his ruminations on food and drink find their locus in the spaces of urban community- the café, the restaurant, and the street.

In his essay “Falernian Wine and Stockfish,” Benjamin recalls an evening when he wandered the streets of Rome. As his appetite grows, so does his dissatisfaction with all the offerings of the various shops and restaurants, until he is suddenly compelled to enter a lower-middle class *osteria*. A single diner departs, and Benjamin recounts, “it suddenly occurred to me that I had to take his place.”<sup>131</sup> By assuming the seat at the bar Benjamin contributes to the social body, to bring his own appetite into the collective space. The restaurant serves one thing only, which all the workers eat together at the end of a workday. Benjamin becomes aware of his the distinction drawn by his bourgeoisie dress. He puts his pen in his pocket,<sup>132</sup> picks up a local Fascist newspaper

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<sup>127</sup> Santler, 115.

<sup>128</sup> Maribel Alvarez, “Food, Poetry, and Borderlands Materiality: Walter Benjamin at the *taqueria*,” *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 10.1 (2006) 205-230.

<sup>129</sup> Wolin, Richard, *Walter Benjamin: And Aesthetic of Redemption* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>130</sup> Benjamin 1996, 452.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>132</sup> Benjamin acknowledges the limitations and even dangers of authoritative written word in this place of

and “wrapped myself up in the dirty cloak it provided...like the Madonna cloaked herself in the mantle of the stars.”<sup>133</sup>

Benjamin disguises himself as an icon of the workers with the material iconic to their political condition: the fascist media. Ingesting media and food is a fundamental part of these workers daily ritual; they are defined through diets and dailies. Marinetti embraces contemporary media from a standpoint of production; Benjamin remains more critical towards mass media as he incorporates the perspective of consumption. He criticizes leftism that “does not ask the question of how its products affect workers... It wishes to perceive only the progression of the exploitation of nature, not the regression of society. It already bears the technocratic traces which would later be found in Fascism.”<sup>134</sup>

Through investigating the mass consumption of comestibles, Benjamin develops a potential model for the affective possibilities of media consumption. In “Epilogue to the Berlin Food Exhibition,” Benjamin discusses the Food Festival held in Berlin in 1928. He likens exhibition to advertising, and sees this event as thinly veiled propaganda promoting German successes in food industrialization. Diets are served up as their own spectacle. At the fair, “Food performs its somersaults and does all its other tricks.”<sup>135</sup> An edible *Triumph of the Will*, entertainment, education, and propaganda are passed out of booths like steins of beer.

Benjamin remarks that the image of the Fair, trash and bottles left behind, reminds him of William Hogarth’s *Tailpiece*. In Hogarth’s print Saturn lies draped over allegories of human endeavors (painting, poetry, etc.) that lie in ruin. It is an apocalyptic representation, and Benjamin suggests, “The end of the food exhibition would be no bad model of the place where the world gets boarded up and nailed shut.”<sup>136</sup> Like T.S. Eliot, Benjamin imagines the world ending “Not in a bang- but a whimper,” or, instead, in an overfed gulp. Benjamin asks

Why are people who in a few short hours have become veritable connoisseurs of food denied the opportunity to experience the greatest artistic gratification of all- the chance to see how the circle is completed and how the mysterious serpent of the eating instinct bites its own tail?<sup>137</sup>

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proletariat solidarity. Marinetti never makes a similar gesture. Rather, language often takes the place of other aesthetic forms. “The group pronouncement, sufficiently aestheticized, can, in the eyes of the mass audience, all but take the place of the promised work.” Ann Bowler “Politics as Art: Italian Futurism and Fascism,” *Theory and Society* 20, 6 (Dec. 1991) 785.

<sup>133</sup> Benjamin makes a similar reference in his essay on Moscow, in which he observes, “Bolshevism has abolished private life.” He refers to an image of a street seller as “the Soviet ‘Madonna with the Cigarettes.’” Benjamin 1999, 34.

<sup>134</sup> Benjamin, *On the Concept of History* (Frankfurt: Gesammelten Schriften 1: 2 Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974) 12.

<sup>135</sup> Benjamin 1999, 138.

<sup>136</sup> Benjamin 1999, 139.

<sup>137</sup> Benjamin 1999, 139.

"The moment of taking a cigarette allows one to open a parenthesis in the time of ordinary experience, a space and a time of heightened attention ... evoked through the ritual of fire, smoke, cinder connecting to hand, lungs, breath, and mouth. It procures a little rush of infinity that alters perspectives, however slightly, and permits, albeit briefly, an ecstatic standing outside of oneself."<sup>138</sup>

Richard Klein, *Cigarettes are Sublime*

The Food-fair presents an image of progress, but it is bankrupt. Historical progress subsists only on its own momentum, excreting all that does not factor into its internal logic. Historicism, the traditional image of history that disregards that which does not fit into its logic and essentializes that which does, "offers a mass of facts in order to fill up a homogenous and empty time."<sup>139</sup> Benjamin articulates his desire to "root out every trace of 'development' from the image of history"<sup>140</sup> by rethinking history "as an emulsion"- a strategy not unlike the bodily technique of digestion which immanently reconstitutes alteriority within the spatial-temporal fabric of the subject. "In the act of eating, the dialectical image is born as the actualization of both the subject and the food in the now-time of their reciprocal encounter."<sup>141</sup>

In his essay "Clock Time/Stomach Time," Raymond Boisvert chronicles how the mechanization of time "that abstract construct so crucial for efficiency, power, and control," overcodes local and organic exchanges between body and environment governed by cyclical rhythms of both appetite that govern the actual experience of temporality. "While the mind can divide things in various ways, the results of such mental abstractions should not uncritically be read back into reality as if they were its primordial and thus ultimately real constituents."<sup>142</sup> Boisvert's call for a corporeal temporality echoes Benjamin's conception of time as durational rather than directional, "Instead of moments escaping, temporality comes to be understood as opportunities surging forward. Time no longer need be considered one-dimensionally as an ever-escaping sequence of standard units. Practices associated with the stomach, far from being problematic, become emblematic of the human condition." Benjamin is by no means a-historical. Rather, he understands history as immanently fulfilled and constantly reconstituted. Time, loosed from Historicism, offers "a revolutionary chance in the struggle for the suppressed past. He [the material historicist] perceives it [the messianic moment or "zero-hour"] in order to explode a specific epoch out of the homogenous course of history; thus exploding a specific life out of the epoch."<sup>143</sup> For Benjamin, we are neither removed nor unaccountable for the past, but rather reach into

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<sup>138</sup> Richard Klein, *Cigarettes are Sublime* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993) 16.

<sup>139</sup> Benjamin, 1974, 12.

<sup>140</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and others. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008) 16.

<sup>141</sup> Cecilia Novero, *Antidiets of the Avant-Garde: From Futurist Cooking to Eat Art*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) xi.

<sup>142</sup> Boisvert, Raymond. "Clock Time/Stomach Time." *Gastronomica* 6.2 (Spring 2006):43. Benjamin observes the instability of temporality in the dislocation that arises from eating *pranzo caprese*. "To taste it [Pranzo Caprese] was of no importance. It was nothing but the decisive yet imperceptible *transition between two moments*: first between the moment of smelling it, and then of being overwhelmed, utterly bowled over and kneaded, by this food, gripped by it...squeezed, and having the juice rubbed into me" Benjamin 1999, 362 [emphasis my own].

<sup>143</sup> Benjamin 1974, 12.

the past and break it, like the breaking of bread that signifies the shared meal, and nourish ourselves.

Benjamin orients “Café Crème” which he opens with the assertion that “no one” who has not experienced coffee and rolls framed by a silver platter in a Parisian hotel “can know anything about it.”<sup>144</sup> By consuming the breakfast, it transforms “itself [into] a concave mirror in which a minute image of this city is reflected.” Benjamin’s sips of coffee amass not only the whole of Paris, but

the entire morning, the morning of this day, and sometimes also the missed mornings of life. If you had sat at this table as a child, countless ships would have sailed across the frozen sea of the marble table-top.... With your gaze fixed on an iceberg or a sail, you would have swallowed one mouthful for your father and one for your uncle and one for your brother, until slowly the cream would have come floating up to the thick rim of your cup.”<sup>145</sup>

Benjamin comprehends the deep interconnection between sense and memory and how the senses bring the past into the perceptions of the now-moment. Rarely can the mind create memory outside of a sensory apparatus, for the past presents itself to us through the smell of jasmine or the face of someone caught in another’s glance. The senses are the stewards of the past, even the collective past, which is why the sensorial registers figures so heavily in spiritual experience and ritual. Taste perhaps more than any other sense confuses distinctions between the past, present and future, for it is transpires as immediately as the sensation of touch or vision, but it initiates a digestive processes in which some matter of the taste will take on the longevity of the consuming body. The way in which food holds time has even been formalized into its own aesthetic. The age of wine changes its quality, but it also changes our perception of the value of drinking it in. The making of stocks, pickles, and infusions are all ways of capturing temporal processes and distilling them into an instant. Benjamin concludes, “You sleepily reach out to the breadbasket for a Madeleine, break it in two, and do not even notice how sad it makes you not to be able to share it.”<sup>146</sup>

Benjamin’s desire to share the Madeleine is invested in his desire for shared history, a complete picture in which we are neither removed nor unaccountable for the past, but rather reach into the past and break it, like the breaking of bread that signifies the shared meal, and nourish ourselves. Susan Buck-Morss writes of Benjamin’s history, “Without the depth of memory, experience is impoverished. The problem is that under the conditions of modern shock- response to stimuli without thinking has become necessary for survival.”<sup>147</sup> Benjamin’s sadness evokes the angel of history, who cannot wake the dead of the past despite the desire to do so. It is necessary to note the sadness, and necessary to break the madeleine in two parts,

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<sup>144</sup> Walter Benjamin, Eiland, Howard and others, eds. *Selected Writings Volume 2, Part 1, 1927-1930*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and others (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005) 358.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>147</sup> Buck-Morss, 15.

even in solitude, The simple movements and acts incorporated into the tasting of food provide some shelter from the “storm of progress.”<sup>148</sup>

Prior to being a system of tools, the world is an ensemble of nourishments. Human life in the world does not go beyond the objects that fulfill it.  
Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*

The title of this paper steams from Futurist painter Fillia’s designation of the audible effects of digestion during an ‘aropoetic dinner.’ Through its deployment, Fillia reassigns this instantiation of aesthetic judgment from its historical basis in visual perception to that of bodily function. The image framed and held fast by veneer, along with a particular type of spectator whose tastes such images both reflect and constitute, began to fracture with the proliferation of entirely different sorts of images- images that flicker- whose potency lie in their constant displacement.

Walter Benjamin identifies in Dadaist techniques of collage and material degradation strategies to dismember the model of “contemplative immersion” denigrated by prevailing bourgeoisie culture.<sup>149</sup> However, Benjamin believes these moments of affective rupture can emerge outside Dada efforts to spark moral indignation. For example, they surface in film. Benjamin argues in “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility” that the tactile mode of perceiving architecture, or the mode of habit (distracted reception) instead of contemplation, prepared the faculties for the affects of film.<sup>150</sup> While Benjamin does not mention nourishment, a need as ancient and constant as shelter, in this essay, he makes the connection between tactility and edibility explicit in his ode to everyday material received in distraction, one way street “all disgust is originally disgust at touching. Even when the feeling is mastered, it is only by drastic gesture that overleaps its mark: the nauseating is violently engulfed, eaten, while the zone of finest epidermal contact remains taboo.”<sup>151</sup> Benjamin identifies years earlier what Michel Serres identifies in 1985: that touch, taste and all the senses participate in and unground historical subjectivity and open possibilities for a voluptuous visceral political subject.

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<sup>148</sup> Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*.

<sup>149</sup> (Benjamin, 2008) 39.

<sup>150</sup> Benjamin 2008, 40. The discourse on the relationship between architecture and food are among the most robust in contemporary gastro-theory. See *Eating Architecture* and *The Architect, the Cook and Good Taste*.

<sup>151</sup> Benjamin 1996, 448.



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