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Food Porn

eds.

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1.
Foodporn
From Conviviality to Sharing

Gianfranco Marrone[1]

Companions in the Negative

We are used to talking and talking about food, anywhere and anyhow, while eating peculiar quantities of it *in souplesse*, both in excess or symmetrical insufficiency. Likewise, we are used to talking about pornography in unsuitable tones, ranging from the ashamed to the academic, which, in any case, hardly conceal ancestral pruderies that have never been kept under sufficient control. We do use pornography in contumacy, wherever humanly possible. It can be easily said that, by crossing these two practices, which are at the same time physical and discursive, through a pertinent Engelsian dialectic, a third one emerges. And that is – as should be clear at this point – *foodporn*.

What exactly do we talk about when we talk about pornography within the social and anthropological universe of nutrition? And what happens when – more or less tangibly – we practice it? The answers, obviously, are many, confusing and bleak. It should first of all be recalled that gastronomy and pornography, even though not willingly, have had something in common for a while, given that they are usually equated, in the negative, as patent metaphors of an artistic practice, regarded as degraded because delivered from the cultural industry, representing an enticing and explicit quest for a fatally demodé aesthetical pleasure. Much of the twentieth century has ruled that art without theory, being simply nice and pleasant, cannot be considered art but a commodity, just like gastronomy or pornography. Such comparisons are easily found in aesthetics texts of the last century – first of all in Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) and Theodor Adorno (1903-1969)[2] – and are apt to turn into stylistic clichés, stereotypes of themselves. The fact remains that art and gastronomy, as well as art and pornography, have been indicated as antithetical realities, although there have been attempts by culinary chefs

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[1] Translated by Francesco Mangiapane and Frank Jacob.

[2] For a general outlook on how the *liaison* between philosophy and gastronomy has been considered by philosophers, see Steven Shapin, "The Philopsopher and the Chicken," in *Science Incarnate: Historical Emodiments of Naturale Knowledge*, eds. Christopher Lawrence and Steven Shapin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

as well as pornographers to highlight the artistic relevance of food and pornography alike.

As a consequence of such a point of view, gastronomy and pornography are usually similarly displaced and declared to be pseudoartistic practices, addressing the obtaining of an immediate and banal sensory enjoyment.[3] The intellectualism in charge, indeed, has turned out to have a sophisticated taste but a superficial appetite. However, the currently massive returns of corporeality – more or less supported by sophisticated technologies which only apparently seem disembodied – overturn such positions. Cooking, on the one hand, and sexuality, on the other, go beyond the narrow enclosure of commodification, in order to impose themselves as practices dispensing with socially positive values. They do so by an amalgamation, a crossing of boundaries between the two forms of joy, expression, and, yes, even art. The result is obvious and quite well-known by now: *foodporn*.

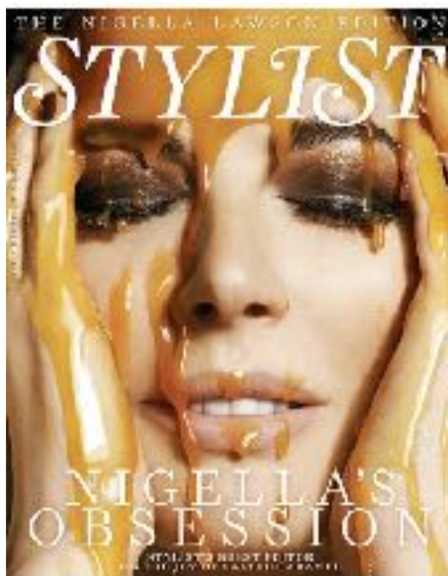

Fig. 1: Implicit Derivation of *Foodporn* on the Cover of *Stylist*, The Nigella Lawson Edition, December 2011.

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[3] Bruno Di Marino, *Hard Media: la pornografia nelle arti visive, nel cinema e nel web* (Milan: Johan & Levi, 2013); Nicola Perullo, *La cucina è arte: filosofia della passione culinaria* (Rome: Carocci, 2014).

In Theory

Definitions of *foodporn* – in academic writing and in the common sense – are far from concordant. Rosalind Coward[4] is often referred as the author of the term, having observed how in many media discourses – from cinema to photography, from fashion to advertising, from television entertainment to corporate magazines – the visual aesthetics of the dish became far more important than the act of cooking itself and, moreover, than the person who accomplished it. *Foodporn* could then be defined as a kind of symbolic annulment of the female figure, similar to that of pornography, who, according to a generalized social mandate, has been charged to cook for millennia. The closure of every recipe ("to place the dish on the plate and serve it") turns out to be an expression that synthesizes a much wider and more profound servitude: that of the woman as a cook (even more than as a wife and mother) for a man, thought of as greedy and unable to stand over the stove. Beyond these social outcomes, which may be considered a little bit stereotypical and probably to be blunt, archaic, *foodporn* has been gradually identified as an over-consideration of food, in short, as a *gastromania*,[5] especially with regard to exhibiting the pleasure experienced at the time of tasting or – reversing the point of view – appraising the visual aspect of the dish. Although the gastronomy is highly revered, media food is eaten, more than anything, with the eyes.

This is true of the food itself, which impertinently attracts camera lenses, phones and tablets at the time of its appearance at the table, and it is also true for everything that surrounds it, from people tossing pancakes everywhere on television to the tutorials about its preparation, from chefs' mythologies to the brochures pretending to be sexy while promoting wine and food tourism. This kind of generalized voyeurism – as it has also been described – gives rise to a series of concurrent practices, and to their valorizations and narratives. Think about so-called food design, which has ended in a series of creations that are as surprising as they are useless – e.g. chocolate-shaped earrings, earring-shaped chocolates – when they are not taking the form of a cartoon-themed pastry that is directly targeting children as their preferred customers.[6] Sometimes, however, *foodporn* has been meant as a sliding of the pleasure of the taste towards a kind of atavistic transgression that the food, who knows why, would carry with it.

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[4] Rosalind Coward, *Female Desire* (London: Granada Publ., 1985).

[5] Gianfranco Marrone, *Gastromania* (Milan: Bompiani, 2014).

[6] Dario Mangano, *Che cos'è il food design* (Rome: Carocci, 2014).

Here, then, is the whole pathetic mythology of aphrodisiac food – oysters, chili peppers, asparagus, chocolate, etc. –, the Viagra of the poor or, simply, natural exciters. These consequently take over the tongue and intensify the human taste experience of, for example, salty sauces, pastries, or scented honey. Here comes creamy stuff of any kind, slowly being wiped from faintly exhausted female faces – from the widespread and hardly humorous milk ads to the magazine covers that portray Nigella Lawson as more provocative than ever (Fig. 1). Transgression is often pretty trivial (eating with one's hands, licking one's fingers, splashing barbecue sauce on the table, getting one's shirt dirty with greasy fries), however, when properly dissected, it may end up becoming an institutional payoff for lucky worldwide fast food chains ("McDonald's – Hey, it could happen!"). *Foodporn* is, therefore, confused with junk food, if not even with trash, or with the inevitable disgust of any *bouffe*. In any case, according to many, *foodporn* seems to be mostly practicing an exclusive preference for the visual aspects of food, to the detriment of those other sensory channels, which, ultimately, should be concerned with it (taste, smell, touch) and, above all, in ignorance of its synesthetic aspects.

Food gets photographed rather than eaten; sharing online pictures of food takes the place of sharing food in a moment of a conviviality which nowadays emerges as irreparably fading. Furthermore, this hypertrophy of visuality in the field of food and nutrition at the disadvantage of the holistic experience of eating finds its greatest expression in the achievements of the medium of television, where a cooking personality who recommends this or that is always available to anyone at any moment or genre of the schedule. Still, others find it to be a 'nerd mysticism' of the *plating* that perhaps had its origins on the television, and which has invaded every pretentiously fancy restaurant and even dinners between self-styled gourmet friends. Today, a dish where the spaghetti are not perfectly 'nested' seems to be unpresentable, inedible. Not to mention the drops of balsamic vinegar that must be on every cut of beef, even in average cooking, and which are supposed to be worth respecting.

An Illustrious Precedent

Rather than dwelling on theories or general principles, which are clearly in difficulty, it is best to observe what is happening in practice a little more closely, focusing on the eminently problematic hub of *foodporn*, that is, the relationship between sight and taste or, better, the relationship between exposure and tasting. There is no lack of material. On Facebook, Flickr, and Instagram in particular, but all over the net in general, more and more

foodporn images are circulating (there is even a *metawebsite* that collects photographs of people who photograph the dishes). From these images, although there is an obvious variety, some common threads, both aesthetic and semiotic, appear to emerge.

To trace them, as an incitement to contrast, we may recall that Barthes[7] has already posed the question in a famous text about *Elle*'s 'ornamental cuisine', compared to the sober and verbal one of the *Express*. While the latter, a bourgeois weekly magazine, offers practical and economical dishes that are easily configurable like, for example, mixed salads, the women's magazine, destined for a bourgeois and economically disadvantaged public, chooses a very different path: that of dreams, fairy tales, and magic – in short, myth. And it does so by means of an eminently visual way, regularly publishing color photographs (something that was unusual in the press of the 1950s) of fanciful, intentionally surprising dishes: golden parchments dotted with cherries, red chicken fillet, cream charlotte decorated with candied fruit patterns, and so on. The covers of the magazine were dominated by frostings and the hypertrophic usage of sauces, everything that, in various ways, even when sometimes hiding the food, portrays it in a form that is considered chic.

The *rocailles* ornamentation of food, in these photos, proceeds with two seemingly contradictory movements. On the one hand, it works to erase any naturalness of food "thanks to a kind of delirious baroque"; on the other, it tries to rebuild it "through a shattered artifice."[8] And, then, here come the shrimps pinned on a lemon, but fed with béchamel so as to hide their bodies. It is, of course, a kitsch practice, which meanwhile is diffused in every knick-knack at hand and any small bourgeois tin. The horse-shaped ashtray and the meringue mushrooms arranged like a butcher's broom respond to a common aesthetic. A banally pop aesthetic that moves immediately from the visual plane to the intellectual one or, better, the intellectualist one. *Elle*'s cookery, says Barthes, is a cookery of ideas, never of flavor, where everything is garnish, a humorous find, decorative cunning. Dishes are photographed rigorously from high up so as to point out a distance of principle between food and the benefit of its ideal reproduction in photography.

Looking at the enormous amount of *foodporn* material that circulates on the net, things are not that dissimilar. But there are some significant differences that come, of course, from the temporal distance that

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[7] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957) [trans. *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979)].

[8] Ibid.

separates us from Barthes' text but, above all, from the communicative structure: whereas *Elle* used to propose to its readers an ideal and ready-made cookery that they were to accept more or less happily, the current mass of *foodporn* followers seems to act on the basis of subjective, idiosyncratic poetic desires. Regardless, however, they are following just as unknowingly and pedissequently common aesthetic models. We will, however, see that, while the formal procedures have remained quite similar, their meaning seems to have been almost completely overturned.

In Practice

The first observation to be made is that *foodporn* involves non-professional, amateur photographs. However, perhaps thanks to the common aesthetic model they realize, they act like they are over-skilled, euphorically showing off a lack of technique. Blurred pictures are, for example, more the result of inexperience than a stylistic choice, not to mention the hypertrophic use of filters on, for example, Instagram, which produce *vintage* effects with minimal effort. The second observation concerns the very obvious communicative purpose of these photos: they are supposed to stimulate appetite, anticipate the taste, or give the idea of a taste. They are often pavlovian, provocative, a simple salivation. So, in other words, they are not mimic but rather performative images: they are not the world but they create and let us create inside of it. More precisely, by representing something of the world, they intend to intervene in it. No preaching, no statement, no exclamation: what joy! Impressive and over-ambitiously effective images – which we observe fleetingly – in their accumulation end up generating the opposite outcomes: boredom and disgust (Figs. 2-5).

Figs. 2-5: Examples of *Foodporn*. Photos provided by Francesco Mangiapane.

In spite of this active presence, both invisible and obstinate, of the photographer and his spectator, or perhaps precisely because of this, there is nobody in most of these photos. No one is eating, no one is with him doing the same, chatting with him, or whatever. Not only is there a lack of conviviality, but the act itself of ingesting food, much less of enjoying it, is missing. The absence, however, is not just about people but also about things. The dish is alone, without context; there is no room, no dining set. On the rare occasion that a glass or a fork comes up, they seem to be viewed by chance; they are in the background, glimpsed, out of

focus. The contemporary myth of media cuisine rules, representing the maximum and minimum unit of culinary significance, neither breakable nor modular: the plate, without meal, without contextuality. Whereas paintings used to show banquet tables, *convivia*, still-life, pornographic culinary photography excludes and isolates, hypostatizes.

But what are the dishes mostly involved in such practice? Unlike *Elle*, which was offering a lot of improbable food, *foodporn* often seems to prefer a lot more traditional meals, everyday ones, nothing sought-after or factitious. At a glance, pizza prevails, but not even in its many national or international variants, just the most banal one with tomato and mozzarella, albeit extraordinarily appetizing and, above all, eternally melting. Just behind follow sandwiches, then meat, and, more rarely, fish, pasta or risotto. As well as this, there are certainly sweets, of any form and nature. They are the best fit for reproducing the highly attractive universe that is, ultimately, *foodporn*: crosts, meringues, *babas*, pastries, *bombette*, *bomboloni*, biscuits and so forth. It is not the food in itself but its color combinations, often bold but not incongruous, which catch the photographic lens. Thus, sandwiches are shown partly open so that one can peek inside, whereas burgers, strictly amaranth-colored, are covered with sauces or other multi-colored garnishes. With biscuits, what matters is the relationship between the dough and the chocolate drops. Tenderloin is surrounded by orange cloves. Steak is accompanied by emerald vegetables and pink potatoes. A snowy cream emerges from the puffs. Spaghetti drip with tomato sauce. A bit like in the photos of *Elle*, 'covering' is mandatory. The result is something in between humor and glamour, singular and superlative.

While the favorite foods in the world of *foodporn* are simple and daily, the eye that looks at it is factitious, and, hence, so is the formal composition of the photographic text, its purely visual aspect. What seems to be stressed more is, as mentioned above, the chromatic dimension and, in general, the light. The shades are dense and uniform, with very few internal shades, brilliant, translucent. Other times, pastel shades (celestial, pink, light green) dominate, while others are intensified by the contrast of light and shade. Exposure to light is, however, very high, creating stereotyped Caravaggesque tricks between totally shaded areas and brightened areas of glare.

The purpose is to point out some gastronomic details of the unit-dish that are indicated as essential, those aspects considered carriers of added flavor. The pseudo-nature of food rebuilt in *foodporn* is, therefore, not in the way the dish is set out to 'lay' in front of the lens, as was the case in *Elle*, but in the lens itself, which announces the hyper-sensitive qualities of food. Although the framing is often central, the shapes of the

object implicitly come out of the frame, from the edges of the photographic support, for the simple reason that the outlook, focusing on the material details and on their contrasts, is very close. This outlook could be properly said to be aptic, that is, tactile, synesthetically capable of making the supposed 'pure' substance of matter emerge, thanks to the hypertrophy of vision. We thus understand that the oppositions and differences that are actually relevant in these photographs are not so much in the colors, as they appeared to be at first. They are in the variety of substances that the framing – working at an intimate distance, that of the French *ici* rather than the *là*, and programmatically excluding whatever may take place *là-bas* from the perspective of the aspiring gourmet photographer – wants its observer to perceive. The naturalization of a meal is achieved through the exhibition of its substance, of that 'matter in itself' which, at the same time, is aimed at the aesthetic and ideological justification of *foodporn*. The notorious food raw[9] material comes as a result at the end of the path. It's a well learned sense effect, for which the most exemplary is pornography.

[9] Here, "raw" is considered an effect of sense rather than being the starting point of some alleged pureness of food.

2.
"Those Were Dirty Words"
Women, Pleasure, and the History of Food Porn

Rachel Hope Cleves

On a blustery chill winter day shortly after the end of World War II, a dispirited Englishwoman seeking to recover from a failed love affair sat down at the desk in her rented room and wrote an impassioned *cri de coeur*, under the watchful eye of Methodism's founder John Wesley (1703-1791), whose portrait stamped a frail white jug she had bought from a local jumble shop and placed upon her desk. Wesley had advocated a vegetarian diet of plain food, without spices, as a means to avoid stimulating the carnal appetites. "All pickled, or smoaked, or salted Food, and all high-season'd is unwholesome," Wesley wrote.[1] Elizabeth David (1913-1992) cast aside his moral teachings. Defying Wesley's dietetic strictures, she feverishly wrote out recipes calling for apricots, olives and butter, rice and lemons, oil and almonds. Later, David recalled, "I came to realize that in the England of 1947, those were dirty words that I was putting down."[2] For women, such open expressions of pleasure in eating were considered taboo.

American women of David's generation shared similar memories of the moral opprobrium once heaped on their enjoyment of food. The cookbook editor Judith Jones (1924-2017), who grew up during the 1930s, wrote that in her "waspy" East Coast family "one wasn't supposed to talk about food at the table (it was considered crude, like talking about sex)."[3] M. F. K. Fisher (1908-1992) experienced the same prohibition growing up in southern California during the early 1900s. "We and almost all American Anglo-Saxon children," she wrote, were "taught when we were young not to mention food or enjoy it publicly." Such a display "was unseemly."[4] Even half a century later, the cookbook writer Helen Evans Brown (1904-1964) found the situation in California to be little changed.

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[1] John Wesley, *Primitive Physick: Or an Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* (London: W. Strahan, 1761), xix.

[2] Elizabeth David, *An Omelette and a Glass of Wine*, ed. Jill Norman (Guildford [Ct.]: The Lyons Press, 1987), 21.

[3] Judith Jones, *The Tenth Muse: My Life in Food* (New York: Anchor Books, 2007), 5.

[4] M. F. K. Fisher, *The Art of Eating: M. F. K. Fisher's Five Most Famous Books in One Volume* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 320.

In 1958, Brown reported to her friend James Beard (1903-1985) that when she mentioned the word "gastronomy" at a food industry luncheon "there were a couple of giggles as if I had said something mildly dirty and then awful silence."[5] Descriptions of food that called attention to the pleasures of eating were considered to be titillating, or even obscene, within Anglo culture in Britain and the United States during the mid-twentieth century. Gastronomic texts were regarded as a mild form of pornography, especially if they were written by women.

Many genealogies of the term *food porn* in the popular and scholarly literature begin with a 1977 article by Alexander Cockburn (1941-2012) titled "Gastro-Porn," published in *The New York Review of Books*, which discussed thirteen significant new works on French cooking, including books by Richard Olney (1927-1999) and Paul Bocuse (1926-2018). Cockburn described Bocuse's recipes in particular as so excessive that they constituted a form of pornography, taking issue with a recipe that called for pounds of freshwater crayfish and black truffles.[6] Despite the implicit equivocation between French food and gastronomic obscenity, the terms *gastro-porn*, and its American equivalent *food porn*, were built on gendered cultural fixations that were specific to Anglo-American history. In fact, there is no equivalent French translation for gastro-porn. The term may be rendered as *pornographie culinaire*, or *pornographie alimentaire*, but most French sources describing the phenomenon simply import the term from English, as "le food porn." When French journalist Géraldine Malet explained the concept to French readers in a 2014 article titled "Le Food Porn, c'est quoi?", she invoked the same genealogy that had been recited in countless English sources, beginning her background with Alexander Cockburn.[7]

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[5] Helen Evans Brown to James Beard, June 6, 1958. James Beard Papers. Box 11. Folder 6. Fales Library. New York University.

[6] Alexander Cockburn, "Gastro-Porn," *The New York Review of Books*, December 8 1977. Cockburn is cited, for example, by Anne E. McBride, "Food Porn," *Gastronomica* 10, no. 1 (2010): 38-46. Yasmin Ibrahim, "Food Porn and the Invitation to Gaze: Ephemeral Consumption and the Digital Spectacle," *International Journal of E-Politics* 6, no. 3 (2015): 1-12. Erin Metz McDonnell, "Food Porn: The Conspicuous Consumption of Food in the Age of Digital Reproduction," in *Food, Media and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Peri Bradley (2016), 239-265.

[7] Géraldine Malet, "Le Food Porn, c'est quoi?", *Restoconnection*, Sept 15, 2014. Accessed August 20, 2018. https://www.restoconnection.fr/definition-food-porn-decryptage/

When did Anglo-American attitudes to the relationship between food and pleasure diverge from French attitudes? Both cultures shared a common religious heritage that problematized connections between the alimentary and sexual appetites. The Torah's Kosher laws were based on and designed to reproduce principles of sexual purity and order.[8] An apocryphal early Christian text known as the "Epistle of Barnabas," written in the first or second century C.E., claimed that Mosaic laws governing what could and could not be eaten had a sexual logic: the rule against eating hare signified a ban on anal sex; the rule against eating weasel prohibited oral sex; and the rule against eating hyena was directed against same-sex sex.[9] Although early Christianity rejected the Kosher laws, the new faith continued to warn against the linkages between alimentary and erotic excesses. According to Evagrius of Pontus (345-399), a fourth-century Christian monk, gluttony was the mother of lust. The pleasures of taste led directly to sexual desire. Like many early Christian fathers, Evagrius recommended fasting, even going so far as to discourage the drinking of water.[10] Strictures against gluttony and lust were common within Medieval Christianity as well. Saint Bonaventure (1221-1274), the thirteenth-century Franciscan monk, advised that "impurity is nourished by eating to excess."[11] And Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471), author of the devotional text *The Imitation of Christ,* warned that "when the belly is full to bursting with food and drink, debauchery knocks at the door."[12] Fasting served as a way to express chastity and religious devotion, especially for women. And yet Medieval Christianity was also notable for its feast days. The pleasures of eating were not anathema on either side of the channel, as court culture throughout western Europe shared in a highly spiced and flavorful cuisine.

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[8] Elspeth Probyn, "An Ethos with a Bite: Queer Appetites from Sex to Food," *Sexualities* 2, no. 4 (1999): 421-431, especially 426.

[9] John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 137-143.

[10] Theresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 129-147.

[11] Eugene Grimm, ed. *Dignity and Duties of the Priest* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1899) 260.

[12] Francine Prose, *Gluttony: The Seven Deadly Sins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 19.

Many writers have assumed that Anglo-American attitudes towards the enjoyment of food broke decisively from French attitudes during the early seventeenth century with the rise of Puritanism, which decried all sensuous indulgence of the appetites. According to David Hackett Fisher, New England's settlers and their descendants embraced a philosophy of "gastronomic Puritanism," preferring plain boiled meats to spiced foods.[13] But Stephen Mennell has challenged the argument that Puritanism was responsible for the twentieth-century Englishman's "indifference to food, or shame at his enjoyment of it."[14] In the first place, similar anti-sensualist tendencies were present within French Christianity during the seventeenth century and did not produce a lasting reaction against the pleasures of eating in that culture. Secondly, there is plentiful evidence that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English moralists viewed pleasure in eating as mostly innocent, as long as it was not accompanied by drunkenness or other wantonness of the flesh. The break between English and French attitudes towards the pleasures of eating should not be credited to the early modern era, according to Mennell, but later, to the nineteenth century.[15]

During the early nineteenth century, a revolution in technologies and markets led to a boom in culinary writing in France, while the Revolution's attack on Christianity produced a "liberation from religious prohibitions [and] diverted attention from negative to positive associations of gustatory pleasure." French writers like Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1755-1826) and Alexander Balthazar Grimod de la Reynière (1758-1837) promoted a new culinary ethics in praise of consumption. The words *gastronomie* and *gastronome* were coined to disassociate the pleasures of eating from the old negative connotations that clung to the words *gourmandise* and *gourmand*, which were equivalent to the English terms gluttony and glutton. Brillat-Savarin and Grimod de la Reynière redefined alimentary pleasure as "both morally admirable and socially beneficent," and even celebrated its associations with sexual pleasure. It is noteworthy that this literature was written almost exclusively by men. Sociologist Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson has argued that the unique textualization of

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[13] David Hackett Fisher, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[14] Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1985) 104.

[15] Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, 103-108.

food in nineteenth-century France explain how French cuisine became the culinary consciousness of the West.[16]

The parallel revolution of printing techniques in Britain and the United States did not result in a similar development of English gastronomic literature. New technologies and markets did generate a growing number of English-language cookbooks, but their women authors for the most part emphasized values like frugality and economy rather than pleasure and enjoyment.[17] *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management*, the bestselling cookbook of Victorian England, began its main section on cookery with a chapter on the "arrangement and economy of the kitchen."[18] The American writer Lydia Maria Child (1802-1880) titled her popular 1829 cookbook *The Frugal Housewife*, and dedicated it "to those who are not ashamed of economy." The title page included a quotation from Benjamin Franklin: "A fat kitchen maketh a lean will."[19] Beeton's and Child's approaches were representative of those taken by many less popular cookbook authors of the era. When the cookbook collector Elizabeth Robins Pennell (1855-1936) assessed the history of women's English language writing on food in her 1896 book *The Feasts of Autolycus*, she declared "the kitchen still waits its Sappho." Pennell, who was raised in the United States and spent much of her life living in Britain, argued that women in both countries thought "all too little of the joys of eating."[20] And if they did think of such joys, they did not write about them. Assessing the field a century later, the food historian Stephen Mennell agreed with Pennell. English women's domestic cookbooks in the nineteenth century were "above all lacking in any sense of the *enjoyment* of food."[21]

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[16] Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 89-91, 100.

[17] Alice L. McLean, *Aesthetic Pleasure in Twentieth-Century Women's Food Writing: The Innovative Appetites of M. F. K. Fisher, Alice B. Toklas, and Elizabeth David* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

[18] Isabella Beeton, *The Book of Household Management* (London: S. O. Beeton, 1861), 25.

[19] Lydia Maria Child, *The Frugal Housewife* (Boston: Marsh & Capen, 1829).

[20] Elizabeth Robins Pennell, *The Feasts of Autolycus: The Diary of a Greedy Woman* (Akron: The Saalfied Publishing Company, 1900), 5, 10.

[21] Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, 214.

It is no wonder that nineteenth-century women cookbook authors were hesitant to write about the pleasures of eating. Victorian etiquette treated the sight of women eating as shameful. As Lord Byron (1788-1824) put it, in a remark made famous by George Eliot (1819-1880), "a woman should never be seen eating." This prohibition reflected medical and cultural discourses in which "an active appetite or an appetite for particular foods was used as a trope for dangerous sexuality." Victorians regarded spiced foods and meats as particularly dangerous catalysts for sexual appetites. Women were encouraged to eat "delicate" foods and sweets instead. And in fact Byron's full quote was "a woman should never be seen eating or drinking, unless it be lobster salad and Champagne, the only true and becoming viands."[22] Of course, Byron was a hedonist. Many were not willing to go that far. The cultural anathema against women eating in public contributed to the exclusion of women from many restaurants in the United States and Britain well into the twentieth century. American and English travelers to France were often shocked by the sight of women and men dining together in Paris restaurants, and even more shocked by the sight of women dining together publicly without the company of men. Only prostitutes ate un-chaperoned in nineteenth-century English or American restaurants. Men in the United States and Britain did not eat publicly with their wives, unless they were travelling together.[23] Hotels maintained special ladies ordinaries where women could eat respectably. Or, in the second half of the nineteenth century, women could eat at "ice cream saloons" that served female customers light food in genteel alcohol-free spaces.[24]

Nineteenth-century novels and periodicals reinforced these social norms. Abba Goold Woolson (1838-1921), author of the 1873 feminist text *Woman in American Society*, observed that "the familiar heroines of our books, particularly if described by masculine pens, are … never to commit

[22] Joan Jacobs Brumberg, "The Appetite as Voice," in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, ed. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York: Routledge, 1997), 159-179.

[23] Paul Freedman, "American Restaurants and Cuisine in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *The New England Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (2011): 5-55, especially 32.

[24] Paul Freedman, "Women and Restaurants in the Nineteenth-Century United States," *Journal of Social History* 48, no. 1 (2014): 1-19.

the unpardonable sin of eating in the presence of a man."[25] A century later, feminist critic Helena Michie reiterated Woolson's observation. Victorian literature frequently featured meals, but "conspicuously absent, however, in novels and conduct books that deal so closely with dinners, tea, and other social gatherings is any mention of the heroine eating." Instead, the heroines presided over empty plates. Nineteenth-century literary heroines had waspish waists and anemic complexions. They wasted away from lack of nutrients. Even women writers like George Eliot stigmatized the female appetite. Some critics have claimed that this antagonism to eating could be used to represent a heroine's rejection of her confinement within the narrowly prescribed feminine roles of the era. Others have seen the literature as more reflective of, than antagonistic to, Victorian mores. Either way, according to Michie, "the issue of [women's] relation to food and to the desires it comes to represent is central to the understanding of Victorian sexual politics."[26]

Discourses prompt counter-discourses. And the stigma linking women's alimentary appetites and sexual appetites ultimately inspired a new literature in which women authors used depictions of female epicureanism as a metaphor for female empowerment. Elizabeth Pennell's *The Feasts of Autolycus* was perhaps the first English text written by a woman that focused on the "pleasure of eating." Pennell had already proven her *bona fides* as a New Woman by writing a biography of the early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, as well as travel books about her journeys by bicycle through England and the Continent. *The Feasts of Autolycus* was compiled from columns Pennell wrote about eating for *The Pall Mall Gazette*. One of her favorite words repeated throughout the book is *rapture*. She wrote about the "possibility of rapture" in a fricassee of mushrooms, and the "rapturous surprises" of the oyster. Pennell was self-conscious about the gendered significance of her book, which she subtitled "The Diary of a Greedy Woman." She acknowledged that the "great interest" of her essays lay "in the fact that they are written by a woman – a greedy woman." Pennell redefined that greed as a virtue, not a vice. "Gluttony," she wrote, "deserves nothing but praise and encouragement." She rejected the Christian asceticism that treated "a healthy appetite" as a "snare for the devil," and she bemoaned the fact that this ascetic tradition "lingered long among women," who saw

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25 Abba Goold Woolson, *Woman in American Society* (Boston: Roberts Brothers) 136.

26 Helena Michie, *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies* (New York: Oxford University Press), 12.

rejecting hunger as a form of feminine grace. Under this false supposition, women had come to look on food as a "mere necessity" and "the pleasure of eating she looked upon as a deep mystery, into which only man could be initiated." Pennell found inspiration for an alternative approach in the model of French gastronomy. "For all the best things in the gourmand's life – one journeys to France," she instructed readers. She liked French dishes like *bouillabaisse*, *tournedos aux champignons*, and *rognons d'agneau à l'epicurienne*. Her columns made references to the French gastronomes Grimod de la Reynière, Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870), and Brillat-Savarin, even quoting from the last in support of the claim that gluttony increased a woman's beauty. Yet the lingering public discomfort with the notion of a woman gastronome is evident in Pennell's very title, with its use of a male avatar – Autolycus, the grandfather of Odysseus. And the book itself was printed by a publisher, John Lane (1854-1925), who was known for his risqué list that included *The Yellow Book*, the primary journal of the Decadent movement, which printed the sexually-questionable works of Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) and Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898).[27] *The Feasts of Autolycus* was advertised in the back pages of *The Yellow Book* as suitable reading for an audience that enjoyed challenging conventions.[28] In 1896, being a woman gastronome still made one disreputable.

Several other women authors at the turn of the twentieth century joined Elizabeth Pennell in depicting female gastronomy as a means of rebellion against gendered subordination. In 1896, the year that *Feasts of Autolycus* came out, Pennell's publisher John Lane also printed a fiction collection by George Egerton, the penname of Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright (1859-1945), whose short stories used the metaphor of female hunger to represent feminine repression. The opening story in Egerton's *Keynotes*, titled "A Cross Line," featured a character named Gipsy who thwarted convention "in pursuit of bodily pleasure, both gastronomic and sexual."[29] Another of Egerton's contemporaries, Sarah Grand (1854-1943), repeatedly used the metaphor of gastronomic knowledge to represent the burgeoning power of the New Woman in her feminist fiction. In Grand's 1901 novel, *Babs the Impossible*, her title character revels in both good food and erotic misadventure. "What a delight it is to eat

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[27] Pennell, *The Feasts of Autolycus*, 10, 48, 78, 98, 105, 47, 209-210.

[28] *The Yellow Book: An Illustrated Quarterly*, Vol X, July 1896.

[29] S. Brooke Cameron, "George Egerton's *Keynotes*: Food and Feminism at the *Fin De Siècle*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 46(2018): 309-330, especially 311.

good things," she declares in one passage. And "how can one choose a husband until one knows which man one likes to kiss best" she asks in another. Babs' hearty embrace of her appetites caused consternation to critics of the book.[30] The dancer Isadora Duncan (1877-1927), born in California, brought the New Woman to the stage in the early twentieth century. Her memoir, *My Life*, rejected nineteenth-century norms by celebrating her boundless and interlinked appetites for food and sex. Take, for example, her account of her first sexual affair, conducted with the Hungarian-Jewish actor Oscar Beregi (1876-1965), during a trip to Budapest:

> the Hungarian goulasch, flavoured with paprika, and the heavy Hungarian wines - it was, indeed, the first time in my life that I was nourished, over-nourished and stimulated with an abundance of food – all brought about the first awareness of my body as something other than an instrument to express the sacred harmony of music. My breasts, which until then had been hardly perceptible, began to swell softly and astonish me with charming but embarrassing sensations. My hips, which had been like a boy's, took on another undulation, and through my whole being I felt one great surging, longing, unmistakable urge, so that I could no longer sleep at night.

Duncan refused to apologize for the sexual affairs that followed this transformation. To those who judged her for her appetites, she wrote "Blame Nature or God, that He has made this one moment to be worth more, and more desirable, than all else in the Universe that we, who know, can experience."[31]

New Women like Pennell, Grand, and Duncan, paved the way for the rise of a new generation of women food writers in the twentieth century who made careers from their unapologetic enjoyment of the pleasures of eating. The first and most prominent of these authors was M.F.K. Fisher, who published her first food writing, a collection of short essays titled *Serve It Forth*, in 1937. A reviewer for the *New York Times* claimed to be "charmed and shocked and entertained" by the book, although he did not explain what shocked him. Perhaps it was just the spectacle of a woman describing "the various pleasures of eating," as he

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[30] "'Nor Shall I Shirk My Food': The New Woman's Balanced Diet and Sarah Grand's *Babs the Impossible*," *Nineteenth-Century Feminisms* 4 (2001): 136–147.

[31] Isadora Duncan, *My Life by Isadora Duncan* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1927), 100, 105.

titled his review.[32] Fisher herself acknowledged in the book's fourth chapter that previous women's writing about food was often practical or sensible, but very rarely focused on pleasure. Fisher's second book, *Consider the Oyster*, published in 1941, was even more shocking, with its overtly eroticized treatment of a food long reputed to be an aphrodisiac. Take for example a chapter titled "Love Was the Pearl," in which Fisher mentioned a man in Mississippi who swore he had "cured seven frigid virgins by the judicious feeding of long brownish buck-oysters from near-by bayous."[33] A critic for the *New York Times*, perhaps unable to believe that a woman would write such material, addressed M.F.K. as "Mr. Fisher" throughout his review of the book.[34] But it was another review, of Fisher's third book *How to Cook a Wolf* (1942), that cemented her reputation as a *femme fatale*. In the *New Yorker*, Clifton Fadiman (1904-1999) wrote that "M.F.K. Fisher writes about food as others do about love, only better."[35] She was annoyed by Fadiman's treatment, but she only heightened her increasingly lascivious reputation when she returned to the subjects of oysters and sexuality in her memoir, *The Gastronomical Me*, published the following year. In a chapter titled "The First Oyster," Fisher described her first brush with lesbianism at age sixteen during a Christmas dance at her boarding school. [36] By the standards of the early 1940s, when obscenity laws still tightly restricted the publication of queer materials, Fisher's essay was scandalous.

Fisher's writings have earned her a reputation as a founding figure in the genre of food porn. This reputation came early, many years before Alexander Cockburn's review of Paul Bocuse's cookbook supposedly originated the concept. In 1970, an English newspaper described Fisher as the "past mistress of gastronomical pornography." She complained about this treatment the following year in an interview with *Publishers Weekly*. "I get pretty peeved about being called things like 'past mistress of

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[32] K. W., "About the Various Pleasures of Eating," *The New York Times*, June 20, 1937.

[33] Fisher, *The Art of Eating*, 175.

[34] Edward Larocque Tinker, "The Great Pleasures Inherent in Oysters," *The New York Times*, November 9, 1941. P.38.

[35] Quoted in Luke Barr, *Provence, 1970: M. F. K. Fisher, Julia Child, James Beard and the Reinvention of American Taste* (New York City: Random House, 2014).

[36] Fisher, *The Art of Eating*, 17-21, 368-377.

gastronomical pornography' and so on," she told the magazine.[37] Fisher saw the remark as rooted in an English Protestant tradition of rejecting the senses. "I think it is Puritanical rubbish to say that the enjoyment of freshly picked green peas cooked over hot coals on a hillside is 'pornographic,'" she told the interviewer. She also complained to her friend Eleanor Friede (1930-2008) about the circulating narrative of "Fisher as pornographer," and blamed it again on American Puritanism. "I just wish my fellow-countrymen were more relaxed. They have been conditioned to believe that there is something basically EVIL about physical and moral sensuality."[38] This series of exchanges undermines genealogies that attribute the term gastro-porn to Cockburn. Clearly the idea was already in circulation well before his review. Unfortunately, despite her annoyance, Fisher never shed her reputation as a founder of the genre. As recently as 2013, Anthony Bourdain (1956-2018) described Fisher's books as "rapturous food porn," suggesting Fisher is understood today not only as an originator of the genre, but as one of its finest interpreters.[39] She's not the only female food writer from the mid-century to be treated in this way.

Echoing descriptions of Fisher as the "past mistress of gastronomical pornography," the philosopher Elspeth Probyn has called Alice B. Toklas (1877-1967) one of her "favourite mistresses of the 'alimentary-sexual'."[40] Born in San Francisco, Toklas first became well-known in 1933, when she was the subject of a faux memoir by her lover Gertrude Stein (1874-1946), *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. The book told the story of Stein's friendships with artists, and of her famous Paris salon, from the point of view of her lover, Toklas, who performed the domestic labor that supported Stein's genius. Toklas's public reputation, in short, originated in her role in a sexually unconventional lesbian relationship. *The Autobiography* included numerous descriptive passages about food, since Toklas was renowned as a fine cook. "I do inevitably take my comparisons from the kitchen because I like food and cooking

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[37] David Lazar, ed. *Conversations with M.F.K. Fisher* (Jackson [Miss.]: University of Mississippi Press), 12.

[38] Quoted in Barr, *Provence, 1970*, 142-143.

[39] Anthony Bourdain, "Foreword," in Marilyn Hegarty, *Grand Forks: A History of American Dining in 128 Reviews* (New York: Ecco/Anthony Bourdain Books, 2013).

[40] Elspeth Probyn, "Beyond Food/Sex: Eating and an Ethics of Existence," *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, no. 2 (1999): 215-228, 224.

and know something about it," Stein had Toklas tell the reader. *The Autobiography* took care describing Madame Matisse's jugged hare and the *riz à la Valenciennes* recipe of Picasso's mistress Fernande.[41] After Stein's death, when an American publisher approached Toklas with the idea of publishing her own memoir, she offered to write a cookbook instead. Yet the cookbook she produced, published in 1954, was so filled with memories of her life with Stein, and with paeans to the life of the senses, that audiences read it as a work of autobiography after all. Many of the recipes called for an excess of ingredients that clearly demarcated the book from the frugal tradition of domestic cookbooks. Before Bocuse's recipe for crayfish and truffles, there was Toklas's recipe for "Steamed Chicken Mère Fillioux" which called for filling the cavity of a chicken with black truffles, and another recipe for filling a turkey in the same fashion. Toklas's fits of excess went beyond truffles. Her recipe for frogs' legs began with the instruction "Marinate for an hour 100 frogs' legs in 1 cup olive oil." The possibility of an American reader executing this instruction in 1954 was as unlikely as their filling a turkey with truffles. The purpose of these recipes was to generate sensations in readers, not meals on plates. The recipes were treasures, in Toklas's words, intended to evoke quite "vivid a feeling" for those readers who "feel that a way of cooking can produce something that approaches an aesthetic emotion."[42] The book was a memoir of desire.

The early works of Elizabeth David, also published in the 1950s, operated along similar principles and have been described by many critics as early food porn. The feminist writer Rosalind Coward described Elizabeth David's works as "erotica" in a 1982 article whose title, "Naughty but Nice: Food Pornography," many scholars have credited with originating the term "food pornography."[43] (In fact, Phillipa Pullar (1935-1977) first used the term "food pornography" even earlier, to

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[41] Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (Los Angeles: Green Light, 2012), locations 576, 90, 1517, 686.

[42] Alice Toklas, *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*, 1984 ed. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1954), 23, 59, 100.

[43] Rosalind Coward, "Naughty but Nice: Food Pornography," in *Female Desires: How They Are Sought, Brought and Packaged* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1985), 99-106. This piece first appeared in *The Guardian*, July 5, 1982.

describe Roman feasts in her 1970 history of English food.)[44] Despite living a sexually adventurous life, David never incorporated sexuality directly into her food writing. Her works were more in the vein of conventional cookbooks. Nonetheless, one scholar has argued that "the eating pleasures that saturate much of David's best food writing hold an undeniably erotic appeal."[45] Her ability to evoke the embodied pleasures of eating carried a sexual charge within British culture in the 1950s.

Several critics have argued that the gap between the sensual excess of David's recipes and the culinary deprivations of her British readers rendered her cookbooks a form of pornography. David's first book *Mediterranean Food* (1950) appeared at a moment when postwar rationing made many of the ingredients it called for inaccessible in the British marketplace. The novelist Julian Barnes claimed that Elizabeth David's early books were a variety of "light gastroporn," since none of her readers could buy the garlic, basil, and olive oil, needed for her recipes.[46] Gina Mallet (1938-2013), the restaurant reviewer for Canada's *National Post*, agreed with Barnes. "The fact that you couldn't buy olive oil easily, if at all, only made Elizabeth David's book more alluring" and "erotic" she wrote.[47] The *Sunday Times* restaurant reviewer Adrian Gill (1954-2016) saw this gap in a dimmer light. Gill called David's lists of ingredients in *Mediterranean Food*, "the first purple beginnings of food pornography." Reading David's cookbooks was no more than an exercise in "gluttony," Gill argued.[48] The journalist Diana Simmonds put it even more bluntly. David, she wrote, was "the first modern food porn writer. Her books are still the stuff of dreams, dribbles, and fantasy."[49] Simmonds' use of the

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[44] Philippa Pullar, *Consuming Passions: A History of English Food and Appetite* (New York: Little Brown, 1970), 241.

[45] Alice McLean, "Tasting Language," *Food, Culture & Society* 7, no. 1 (2004): 37-45, 41.

[46] Julian Barnes, "The Land without Brussels Sprouts," in *Something to Declare: Essays on France and French Culture* (New York: Random House, 2002), 46-55.

[47] Mallet is quoted in Chloë Taylor, "Foucault and the Ethics of Eating," in *Foucault and Animals*, ed. Matthew Chrulew and Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2017), 317-338, especially 323.

[48] A. A. Gill, "Elizabeth David," in *Table Talk: Sweet and Sour, Salt and Bitter* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2007) 152-158.

[49] "Diana Simmonds Samples Some Food Porn," *The Weekend Australian.*

word *dribbles* drew the connection, often made in critiques of food porn, between the visual appearance of bodily fluids and culinary sauces. It is a far grosser word than one can imagine being used by Elizabeth David, who presented herself with a certain reserve, no matter how un-reserved her life was.

Julia Child (1912-2004), who knew Fisher, David, and Toklas, has also been called an originator of the food porn genre. Her first book, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, was published in 1961, when American cookbooks were more likely to suggest casseroles constructed of canned soups and frozen vegetables than cassoulets made from seven cuts of meat. "She brought food porn to the people," as the food scholar Kyla Wazana Tompkins put it in an early newspaper article.[50] The figure of Julia Child bridges an older usage of the concept of gastronomic pornography, applied to pioneering women sensualists, to a more recent usage of the term, applied to an aesthetic style of food photography that "emphasizes the pleasurable, sensual dimensions of food."[51] Through her television shows, Child helped to establish many of the visual aesthetics now associated with food porn. Film reviewer Lisa Rosman has written that we "have Julia to thank for the glut of food porn, er, television that comprises an industry itself."[52] Close-ups of Child's hands massaging the flesh of bare-skinned chickens with butter in her episode on how to roast a chicken, for example, evoked the sensibility of pornographic films. Child's frequent sexual *double entendres* throughout the episode (calling a stewing chicken "beyond the age of consent, would you say," or describing a capon as a "eunuch") reinforced the parallel.[53]

The similarities between the aesthetic techniques of television cooking shows and pornography has been a subject of scholarship since

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[50] Kyla Wazana, "She Brought Food Porn to the People," *The Globe and Mail*, October 18, 1997. D14.

[51] McDonnell, "Food Porn: The Conspicuous Consumption of Food in the Age of Digital Reproduction," 239-265.

[52] Lisa Rosman, "Julia Child: Recipe for Culinary Revolution," *Signature: Making Well-Read Sense of the World*, Aug 11, 2014. Accessed October 10, 2018. http://www.signature-reads.com/2014/08/julia-child-recipe-culinary-revolution/

[53] Julia Child, "To Roast a Chicken," *The French Chef*, Season 7, Episode 14. First aired January 24, 1971.

the late 1990s.[54] Andrew Chan made this argument in a 2003 article in *Gastronomica* that opened with the declaration, "TV cooking shows today are, in a word, pornography."[55] Chan's article was followed two years later by Frederick Kaufman's influential *Harper's Magazine* essay "Debbie Does Salad," whose titled alluded to one of the most famous pornographic films of the 1970s, *Debbie Does Dallas*. Kaufman shadowed the cooking-show hostess Sarah Moulton during a day on set at the Food Network, and described the use of "money shots" and other pornographic techniques in the channel's production process.[56] It is no coincidence that Kaufman's article focused on a female hostess. His choice of subject speaks to the gendered dimensions of the perceived linkage between cooking shows and pornography. The legacy of Victorian proscriptions against the sight of women enjoying food remains buried in the current discourse of food porn applied against typically feminine-gendered genres such as cooking shows and food blogs. That linkage is amplified by the sexualization of women who host cooking shows, a dynamic that Kaufman noted in "Debbie Does Salad." Kaufman reported how stylists flocked to Moulton between shots to repaint her lips and fluff her straight blonde hair – a nod to the similarity of the hairstyles worn by Moulton and by Bambi Woods, the star of *Debbie Does Dallas*.

The sexual objectification of women gourmands did not start with food television. It can be traced all the way back to Brillat-Savarin, who wrote about the charming appearance of female epicures chewing daintily on partridge wings. Publicity photos of Fisher and David released when their books first came out presented both women as glamorous beauties. Child's great height and mature age when she reached public notice likely made it impossible to squeeze her into a similar role. But Child was the outlier for sensualist women food writers at the mid-century. Marketing campaigns that emphasized the desirability of women gastronomes served to tame the transgressive implications of their alimentary appetites. Depicting women's appetite for food as a metaphor for their sexual appetite for men made their hunger more acceptable. It also made it easier to dismiss their writing. When British food writer Josceline Dimbleby

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[54] Jane Hughes, "Food Is the New Pornography," *The Independent*, October 17, 1999.

[55] Andrew Chan, "'La Grande Bouffe': Cooking Shows as Pornography," *Gastronomica* 3, no. 4 (2003): 47.

[56] Frederick Kaufman, "Debbie Does Salad: The Food Network at the Frontiers of Pornography, *Harper's*, October 2005, 39-52.

appeared on the cover of her 1984 cookbook *Favourite Food* wearing a low-cut black dress, she was criticized for selling gastro-porn.[57] As women broke into the previously all-male ranks of gastronomy, the discourse of gastro-pornography threw them back out again.

The use of food porn discourse to defang the threat of the appetitive woman has reached new heights in recent decades with the presentation of female gourmands as not simply sexually desirable, but as themselves edible. In the western tradition, women's bodies have long been represented as consumable objects. Antje Lindenmeyer argues, "women themselves are what is eaten – they are metaphorically represented as food."[58] There is a short leap between this metaphorical tradition and the techniques of cooking shows that market their female hosts as edible. Applying this tradition to women gastronomes who make bold claims about their appetites reduces the threat they pose. Take for example the famous *Stylist* magazine cover image of cooking show hostess Nigella Lawson's face dripping with caramel sauce.[59] American food celebrity Giada De Laurentiis has been photographed for *Esquire* magazine in a tight white dress squeezing tomatoes with the juice running down her bare arms, pouring pureed tomatoes down her naked calves, and lounging in tomato juice while chewing on her own fingers.[60] Padma Lakshmi, the former model turned cooking show celebrity, has been depicted licking her fingers after eating a fast food hamburger in a Hardee's commercial, licking barbeque sauce off her fingers after a meal of pork ribs in an issue of *GQ*, and licking melted chocolate off her hand

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57 Ann Barr and Paul Levy, *The Official Foodie Handbook* (London: Ebury Press, 1984), 103.

58 Antje Lindenmeyer, "'Lesbian Appetites': Food, Sexuality and Community in Feminist Autobiography," *Sexualities* 9, no. 4 (2006): 469-485, especially 470.

59 Richard M. Magee, "Food Puritanism and Food Pornography: The Gourmet Semiotics of Martha and Nigella," *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture* 6, no. 2 (2007). Abigail Dennis, "From Apicius to Gastroporn: Form, Function, and Ideology in the History of Cookery Books," *Studies in Popular Culture* 31, no. 1 (2008): 1-17.

60 "What it Looks Like … the Total Quantity of Tomatoes Giada De Laurentiis Uses in a Day," *Esquire*, July 16, 2007.

in another image for *GQ*.[61] Television chef Katie Lee can be seen licking her finger while halfway through eating a chocolate croissant in a story for *New York Magazine*.[62] Male chefs like Jamie Oliver, who is often lumped into trend stories on food porn, are not marketed as edible objects themselves. Oliver's winsome appearance played an important role in his early celebrity, but he was not photographed licking his own flesh.

The mostly female genre of food blogging that has risen to prominence during the past couple decades is also routinely dismissed as food porn. Critics prove their intellectual mettle by expressing preference for masculine-coded food writing over the glossy food porn produced by supposedly image-obsessed young women on Instagram and other social media sites. Tisha Dejmanee has risen to the defense of women food bloggers as playful and creative innovators, and argues that "there is no moral opprobrium intended with the usage of "porn" as the shock value of this term has been diminished in the current sex-saturated, postfeminist context."[63] But this seems too sanguine an evaluation of the stigma attached to *porn* in my not-post-feminist opinion. I agree with feminist food studies scholar Julieta Flores Jurado's less rose-tinted assertion that the "image of the greedy woman remains controversial" today.[64] The gendered marker *porn* works to diminish the value of sensualist gastronomic media produced by women today, as it did when the idea first arose to describe the works of writers like M. F. K. Fisher and Elizabeth David. There is a reason that the entirely male panel of food professionals who participated in a roundtable on "food porn" for *Gastronomica* in 2010 reacted so negatively to the term. They saw it as a device to sell copy, which reduced their own work to something cheap and tawdry. Soft-focus photos that accompanied the article, depicting a young woman's open lips and extended tongue covered in pink sugar and silver pastilles, illustrated the gendered dimensions of the discussants' disdain

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[61] Accessed January 29, 2019. https://www.hardees.com/company/releases/supermodel-and-food-expert-stars-in-steamy-new-ad-for-hardees-and-carls-jr-burger; *GQ*, July 8, 2007.

[62] Helen Rosner, "Aspiring Novelist Katie Lee Leaves No Carb Behind," *New York Magazine*, August 13, 2010.

[63] Tisha Dejmanee, "'Food Porn' as Postfeminist Play: Digital Femininity and the Female Body on Food Blogs," *Television & New Media* 17, no. 5 (2015): 429-448.

[64] Julieta Flores Jurado, "From 'the Diary of a Greedy Woman' to Food Porn: Appetite and Pleasure in the Discourse of Women Gastronomes," *Genesis* XVI, no. 1 (2017): 1-16, especially 16.

for the terminology.[65] For women in the first decades of the twenty-first century, speech about the pleasures of eating continues to qualify as dirty words. And for many male gastronomes, food porn continues to be regarded as a feminized discourse that they must define themselves against.

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[65] McBride, "Food Porn."

3.
Photorealism and Food: Challenging Modern Aesthetics and Taste in Postwar Painting

Jody B. Cutler-Bittner

Photorealist painting, as art-historicized, emerged in the United States and then Europe through the 1970s, trending briefly on the contemporary art scene as an antidote to the then dominant, seemingly oppositional vanguard styles of Pop Art and Minimalism.[1] The former, with its casual brand chic, and the latter, with its obliteration of obvious referents, nonetheless share a literality in terms of content—what you see is what you see, to cite a famous quip by Minimalist, Frank Stella (b. 1936), or, on the other hand, the insistence of Pop Art star Andy Warhol (1928-1987) that there is nothing behind his imagery.

While the appearance of prosaic object-subjects and advertising that came to define Pop Art opened the art-world door for renewed interest in representational painting and Photorealism in particular, the latter departed from Pop's iconic simplicity as much as the voids of Minimalist painting by emphasizing labor-intensive techniques, complex compositions, and illusionistic detail. The conveyed goal was *mimesis*, a mirror-reflection slice of life, as handed down from Classical culture and persistent in Western art into the 20th century. The twist was that the direct source was a photographic image rather the empirical subject represented in the photographic image, which was to be apparent in the end result.[2]

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[1] Generally, the term, "Photo-realism" is attributed to Louis K. Meisel, who claims he first used it in 1968; it was first published in a catalogue for the exhibition, "22 Realists," 1970, at the Whitney Museum of American Art. A complete account, including Meisel's criteria and various other terms used by critics is given in Louis K. Meisel, *Photo-Realism* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1980), 12-24. In recent decades, the hyphen has generally been discarded (as here). Various, comparable descriptive terms are also given in Gregory Battcock, "Introduction," in *Super Realism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. idem (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), xxix. Work in a similar style by European artists, who have generally cited cognizance of immediate American precedents, has most often been referred to as "Hyperrealisme," coined by Belgian art dealer Isy Brachot in conjunction with a 1973 exhibition of that name as the Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels.

[2] Among five qualifying points in Meisel, "Introduction," is, No. 4: "The Photo-Realist must have the technical ability to make the finished work appear photographic," 13.

Beyond the photographic mediation, the Photorealist modality seemed very old hat to *au courant* critics—simplistically didactic in its resistance to avant-gardism, not to mention, too accessible to the hoi polloi to be consequential in the contemporary art sphere. Precisely, early Photorealist paintings pushed to the fore questions of artistic criteria, relevance, and the functions of art in society, climactic in a veritable sub-genre of food still life.

Like seventeenth-century Dutch banquet scenes that elevated still life to the (then) heights of religious and historical genre, Photorealist paintings of food not only simulate textures meticulously but also elicit social and metaphoric interpretations, intrinsically, and sometimes purposefully. A key difference is the hot-lit effect of the latter, informed by, if not specifically based on, new commercial food photography. Another difference, at least in Photorealism's early stage, is the devolution of gourmandize to more commonplace and/or standardized spreads that reflect common American postwar foods. These points will be fleshed out below in terms of how they undermine class-based art tastes and aesthetics going back to Immanuel Kant by embracing broad-based viewer appetites for familiarity and notions of time-consuming "mastery" in art.[3] Further in this vein, the lack of visible brushwork in Photorealist paintings gives them an all-at-once, seamless appearance that evokes Walter Benjamin's trope of the painter-magician in among the first major theoretical discourses on the development and potential influences of photography on art and society, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935).[4] In disrupting traditional boundaries between mediums and other ways, I will also argue that these Photorealist works flaunt an aesthetic decadence vis-à-vis modernism, following Donald Kuspit's related dialectical construction, and, in this sense, prefigure the instantiation of postmodern painting that substitutes, frequently, web imagery and Photoshop for the camera and projector.[5] When focused on food, with its inherent implication of pending decay, this dimension is amplified.

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[3] My source for interpretative commentary and relevant text excerpts is Hannah Ginsborg, "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta. Accessed January 29, 2019. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/kant-aesthetics/.

[4] Harry Zohn, trs.; in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 13-14.

[5] Donald Kuspit, *The Dialectic of Decadence* (New York: Stux Press, 1993).

I begin with a look at paintings by several Pop artists that led the way to Photorealist food still life, in terms of eliding advertising techniques, graphics, and explicit ad images into painting. I then focus on paintings by first generation American Photorealist Audrey Flack (b. 1931) to flesh out the terrain broadly, followed up with discussion on the work of two peers, Ben Schonzeit (b. 1942), and Don Eddy (b. 1944). Finally, I present two more recent, divergent incarnations of the style, in the work of Europeans, Luigi Benedicento (1948-2015) and Tjalf Sparnaay (b. 1954) using ideas and criteria laid out to consider its ongoing perpetuation. All artists mentioned have worked substantively with images of food at various points and to various degrees in their respective practices, from which my examples are culled, each suggesting with different intentions in conveying human relationships with representations of food (more than food itself). In a nutshell: Flack's related work taps both stereotypically feminine and staunch feminist associations with food; Schonzeit take us to the source and taps the back-to-nature food movement; Eddy's isolated edibles propose a sacramental aspect; Benedicento gives us analogic sexuality; and Sparnaay embraces the prosaic global familiarity of generic modern comfort foods.The respective oeuvre of the first generation artists discussed, each prolific and ongoing, cannot be reduced to food subjects; although several of the others are known primarily as "food painters." Speaking in broad terms, I am suggesting also that major elements of form and content across the works discussed are shared by other postwar painters to the present.

It should be mentioned that, like most (by no means all) art styles since the inception of modern art history in the nineteenth century, Photorealism was not named by one or more artists themselves, but, in this case, New York art dealer, Louis K. Meisel.[6] The artists grouped under the umbrella in its heyday by Meisel, including Flack, Schonzeit, and Eddy, developed independent of each other and only a handful of an original dozen or so knew each other at all before exposure through subsequent exhibitions. Subsequently, Meisel and Ivan Karp, another New York dealer, followed by a few other dealers (mainly) and curators, tapped into a stream of emerging painters in the United States and Europe drawn to the style, ongoing, in which food continues to provide central subject matter. Some associated artists have only reluctantly accepted, ignored, or resisted the terminology. Yet, Meisel's recognition of relatively straightforward, shared characteristics inhered in the imitation of photographic reality was astute at the time and now has historical

[6] As in note 1 above.

currency not least as grounding for considerations of the enduring popularity of highly illusionistic art among painters and "the public" and its frequent trivialization by cognoscenti. This critical tension is fleshed out via paintings of food as rejections of elite avant-gardism and direct appeals to the public for artistic validation. In my assessment, Photorealist painting challenges class-based art taste by indulging potential broad viewer appetites for illusionistic mastery in contemporary art, at high pitch in images of food paintings informed partly by changes in food marketing through the second half of the twentieth century. Finally, I clarify that, while television advertising heavily impacted the visualized "fancy food" boom and employed certain situational ideologies deviating from that of print, I limit discussion to the latter, more directly referenced and compatible, and also, often collected and more thoroughly digested by consumers. Younger Photorealist food painters weaned on web "food porn" both commercial and ostensibly "social," are onto a different kind of immediacy in translation.

From Supermarket to Table

While Pop Art brought foodstuffs, associated with historical still life, back into painting, it is arguable as to whether an isolated Campbell's soup or a generic hot dog, to cite well-known images repeated by Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997) respectively, can be linked to the traditional genre in any substantive way. Instead, objects in Pop Art painting, major branded or ubiquitously generic, take on the character of icons, singular and de-contextualized. Indeed, through the 1950s and accelerated in the 1960s, food and other product advertising saw a general shift in strategy from emphasis on figurative name-sake logos or spokespersons and narrative-based campaigns to emphasis on product, both in text and, increasingly photographic imagery.[7] Seemingly reaching beyond the art crowd to the masses with the instantaneous recognizability of their subjects, paintings of isolated prosaic objects nonetheless were unfamiliar in "art"—in other words, not popular in the way that, say, Norman Rockwell's anecdotal Realist paintings could be to a non-art crowd. Pop Art did not aspire to any art prototypes but rather the bold, graphic shorthand of advertising and popular illustration like comics, themselves produced with crowd-pleasing at the forefront.

Among those artists most closely associated with the emergence of Pop Art in the early 1960s, Tom Wesselmann (1931-2004) did construct

[7] Richard W. Pollay, "The Subsiding Sizzle: A Descriptive History of Print Advertising, 1900-1980," *Journal of Marketing,* 49, no. 3 (1985): 24-37, especially 32.

what can securely be described as food still life, with evocations of those loaded Dutch, as well as later Cubist, table tops, while emphasizing brand names by collaging actual labels, packages and magazine-picture clippings into colorfully blocked out domestic contexts. Often "modern" paintings (obvious takes on Pablo Picasso or Piet Mondrian, for example) are seen in the background, suggesting new lifestyle marketing based on upwardly mobile consumerism. Images of "denuded" foods, buttered, sliced, or otherwise ready-to-eat, are congruent with new attention in commercial food photography to tempting portioned servings and the use of non-food substances to enhance food textures, sheen and longevity.

Food imagery in the early work of Pop Artist, James Rosenquist (1933-1917), stands out in its close mimicking of photographic sources in a somewhat realistic style (as opposed to the print-technique-like duplications of Warhol and Lichtenstein or use of collaged elements). As in *White Frosting* (1964; fig. 1).

Fig. 1: James Rosenquist, *White Frosting*, 1961, 66x66 in, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.Copyright Estate of James Rosenquist/licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

Rosenquist's early use of food subjects taken from magazine ads, are cropped closely at the picture plane and partly delineated by an outside element such as the spatula tip here. Typically, his sources are blown up through a measured grid method traditionally used on sketches to create larger painting compositions, honed through his experience as a billboard sign painter. Rosenquist was generally dealing with ads a bit behind the times (mostly just before 1960) on the cusp of many changes in photographic technologies as well as advertising. The larger-than-life scale of this and other of Rosenquist's food and drink images, which sometimes appear as "floating signifiers" in collage-like paintings, echo the relatively new use of macrophotography for food ads by the late 1950s. Larger-than-life product images (to scale of packaging or the page) centralized consumer focus. The next step for macrophotography was extreme detail, with which Rosenquist was not concerned; but he was with transparent allusion to photography in his use of mechanical airbrush, previously a tool of commercial design, to create a similarly uniform image surface. Finally, the depicted uniform white batter suggests the reduplicative "perfect" (vanilla) flavor promised by surging food companies like Betty Crocker, a synaesthetic appeal that Rosenquist, thus, mimics. His approach and its potential would be exploited by the Photorealists.

White Frosting also deals with art insularity through a clever formal pun on abstraction in the tilted and flattened perspective, limited palette, and paintbrush-positioned spatula. For "progressive" critics, this art-about-art subtext might redeem representational art at time when most of it was generally denigrated carte blanche as passé, plebian, or even kitsch, under the influence particularly of Clement Greenberg.[8] Pop Art in general was charged with all three at first, but relatively quickly drew a wider audience and intriguingly mixed critiques that facilitated its relatively quick assimilation into the art museum/market-place complex and canon.

Famously, Greenberg advanced a base-line criterion for American painting in diametric opposition to both imitation of the past and catering to perceived tastes at all in art, as opposed to introspective engagement with art material and process. Anything else was "academicism"—essentially, copying models and effects, synonymous with kitsch in his lexicon. A central thesis of his work overall is that subject matter is entirely irrelevant in judgments of art, echoing Kant's investigation and

[8] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," (1939) in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989 [1961]), 3-21.

conclusion that to identify beauty in art—what we might update as "good" art or "engaging" art—we need be "distanced" and "disinterested" in the object (or subject depicted), and that the art be apprehended as non-goal-oriented.[9] Put in very simple terms: if I desire an apple and am attracted to a representation of one as a substitute, which is to say, a fetish, to mix in an apt Freudian metaphor, then I am not drawn to the *art* of the painting; likewise, if the artist appeals to me on the basis of that dynamic. According to Kant, beauty in art, like "free beauty" in nature, should appear self-evident, non-laborious, and non-purposeful; and appreciation of it should result primarily from its apprehended formal qualities. Yet, he recognized, the crucial differential lies precisely in the art object's *a priori* end in appreciation, so that its relative fulfillment of that intention—its "dependent beauty"—is a qualitative factor. Greenberg had a somewhat correlative dual exegesis, similarly seeming to privilege autonomous "free beauty," though essentially empirical rather than metaphysical. He conceded that concepts —or content—emerged in the process of working through the medium. For Greenberg engagement with a painting on the basis of a recognizable image was philosophically trite and disposable, increasingly, as painting moved forward in his view.

The food subjects in Pop Art, *qua* recognizably edible food as opposed to Paul Cézanne's or Picasso's geometricized fruits (for example) undergird the reticence with which Greenberg admitted the style as something other than the bright kitsch it seemed to accept if not celebrate. The inhered, strong reference to familiar taste transgresses Kant's disinterestedness, which Greenberg echoes in his admission of post-facto content. In addition, with its photographic and graphic-design techniques and appearance, Pop Art disregarded traditional between mediums, based on perceived expressive appropriateness going back to Aristotle's *Poetics*. Photography itself was still coming into its own as an

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[9] Condensing the summary of Ginsborg, *The Stanford Encyclopedia* on the opening paragraphs of Kant's section, "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment" ("First Moment," par. 1-5): judgment of the beautiful in art need be: "… disinterested, which means that it does not depend on the subject's having a desire for the object, nor does it generate such a desire ..."; and further along in the same general section ("Third Moment," par. 10-17): "Unlike judgments of the good, judgments of the beautiful do not presuppose an end or purpose [*Zweck*] which the object is taken to satisfy." My broad distillation, relevant to my discussion of a specific painting style, boils down to a favorable comparison (by Kant) of art to nature, which is apparent but without apparent reason. My synthesis of Kant and Greenberg is informed by Paul Crowther, "Kant and Greenberg's Variety of Aesthetic Formalism," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 2, no.4 (1984): 442-445.

acceptable medium for "fine art" in the 1960s and the elision with painting was pushing it.

At the top of his game when Pop Art came onto the scene, Greenberg did not exactly pan it, but simply gave it little attention, and Photorealism, which exacerbates his concerns mentioned, none. For him, the main value of Pop Art was as a reactionary provocation to watered-down abstraction that might elicit another "advance," and he placed it within lineage of backsliding, "literary" art (as Surrealism begot Abstract Expressionism in his view). He could also appreciate its emotional distance, but remained suspicious of its complete surrender to and easy assimilation into mass culture.[10] At the other extreme, Lawrence Alloway, the British critic credited with coining the term, Pop Art (1958), saw it as an encouraging bridge between outmoded categories of high and low arts, and positively contributing to viewer participation in contemporary art via the shared "ordinary," unlike intuitive, esoteric abstraction.[11] Donald Kuspit's take, a decade later, echoed Greenberg's trepidations, however, argued that the appropriation of media images in Pop Art was not conciliatory repetition but a strategic alternation of their meanings.[12] Like Greenberg, he claimed its reactionary iconicity as a kind of provocation, and would later champion a number of figurative styles partly on that basis, including some work by Photorealists.

Warhol's first solo exhibition (1961; Los Angeles; the set of original Campbell's Soup Cans canvases now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art) was a critical and financial failure. Yet, within two years his exhibitions were selling out on both coasts, along with Lichtenstein, Wesselmann, and Rosenquist (among others). This disrupted the dominance of abstraction substantially. By the early 1970s, Photorealist painting was represented in survey exhibitions at major venues that generally featured "cutting edge" work, like the Whitney Museum of American Art (1970) and Documenta 5 (1972; Kassel, Germany).

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[10] See notes and commentary on two unpublished lectures in James Meyer and Clement Greenberg, "Pop Art," *Artforum International* 10 (2004): 51-52, 55.

[11] See Nigel Whiteley and Lawrence Alloway, "Pop Since 1949," *Artforum International* 43, no. 2 (2004): 57-58, 61, 274, 276.

[12] Donald Kuspit, "Pop Art: A Reactionary Realism," *Art Journal* 36, no. 1 (1976): 31–38.

Whetting Pictorial Appetites

Flack, the first Photorealist, according to Meisel,[13] and the only woman affiliated with its early consolidation, began as an abstractionist and picked up on Pop Art in its formative stage, seen in realistic still life paintings of brand-name cosmetics and foods of the early 1960s that are based on photographic material but painted by hand. Two accessible examples are *Cover Girl* (1962, Ulrich Museum, Wichitat State University), which intrinsically pointed to gender difference from mainstream (male) peers, and *Matzo Meal* (1962, The Jewish Museum, New York), which also pointed to personal identity in a way uncharacteristic of male Pop artists (although other of Flack's early food still lifes do not).[14] By c. 1970, perhaps taking a cue from the direct transfer of photographic images to painting by Warhol and close cohorts, she began projecting and sizing up photographic slides directly onto large canvases, which facilitated compositional blocking and provided proximate visual information regarding lighting and reflective elements that particularly interested her. She also turned to airbrush, which eliminated signs of traditional brushwork. Like industrial spray-painting machines used to paint cars (for example), artist airbrushes are (typically) small, trigger-operated instruments that spray paint through nozzles to enable a seamless layering of saturated hues and highlights, useful in emulating the look of photographs that came to define Photorealism.[15] Upon mastering this mode, Flack created several paintings of pastries, including *Strawberry Tart Supreme* (1974, fig. 2), a reproduction of which cannot be differentiated securely from a reproduction of a either a photograph of or the actual subject items depicted.

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[13] Meisel, 271, attributes her 1964 painting, *Kennedy Motorcade* (Private Collection), as the first "true Photo-Realist painting."

[14] See Samantha Baskind, "'Everybody thought I was Catholic': Audrey Flack's Jewish Identity," *American Art* 23, no. 1 (2009): 104-115.

[15] A brief description of Flack's method is given in Manuela Hoelterhoff, "Strawberry Tarts Three Feet High," *Wall Street Journal*, April 21, 1976, 22.

Fig. 2: Audrey Flack, *Strawberry Tart Supreme*, 1974, acrylic on canvas, 54x60-1/4 in Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio. National Endowment for the Arts Museum Purchase Pland and Fund for Contemporary Art. Copyright Audrey Flack.

In real life, the most obvious deviation from the impression of a replicated photograph is the large scale of the painted pastry, which upon approach, draws painterly—that is, abstract—qualities out of an ostensible photographic print. Further, contrary to the rhetoric of its earliest advocates, most Photorealist paintings, including those of Flack, do not end up faithfully replicating unedited photographic sources, but reflect purposeful deviations and composites in ways that also distinguish among personal styles.[16] Photorealist painting is a deconstruction and reconstitution of photographic images as a kind of paradigm and challenge that Flack and others undertook with a relish that becomes, for viewers if not the artists literally, competitive.

Once hitting her artistic stride, Flack, like most Photorealists, including Schonzeit and Eddy, set up and photographed her own still life subjects, establishing a substantive dialog with photography that included continuing qualitative advances in film, color printing and commercial

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[16] See Craig J. Peariso, "Styleless Style? What Photorealism Can Tell Us about ‚The Sixties,'" *Journal of American Studies* 47, no. 3 (2013): 743-757.

accessibility. Kodachrome slide film through the 1960s and early 1970s was highly influential for popular visual culture (the title of a Paul Simon rock hit of 1973). Its high-saturation propensities tipped easily into artifice, seemingly informing Flack's intense palate, which itself (with that of other Photorealists) was criticized by some as kitsch.[17] In another trick of the Photorealist trade, Flack sometimes used black and white photographic references that she then credibly colored in paint adjusting for contrast and emphasis; however, clearly referencing the visual appeal of modern color photography.

Like the commercial food photographer, Flack's goal is to provoke an inter-sensory reaction as the point of contact with viewers, from the start of her process to the sticky, creamy, spongy textures of her results. Add to this her highly crafted mimetic dazzle and her artistic project falls far outside of Kantian/Greenbergerian aesthetic discourse. Apropos here, though formulated in another context, is Kuspit's explication of artistic decadence that underpins those earlier reified artistic parameters that linked (intentionally or not) certain art modes to a "decadent" aesthetic: "[To] be decadent is to forget what is intrinsic to art, out of concern to bring it to bear on what is extrinsic to it. Art becomes the handmaiden of extra-artistic concerns rather than a thing unto itself."[18] In *Strawberry Tart Supreme*, the crowded variety of overstuffed, saccharine-sweet goods, which suggests a commercial display context, seems so tied to advertising and even aspects of kitsch as to consciously taunt the prevailing (male) tastes to which Kuspit alludes. For his part, Kuspit does not dismiss decadent, or "neo-traditional" art, in which, "while remaining recognizable in principle, the tradition is used to modern purpose."[19] Photorealism was dealing with changing photographic potentialities in tandem with painting in ways that anticipate the digital realm of Photoshop, while retrieving from the past visceral and emotional art content, as well as the art morality (as it were), of apparent "hard work." Kuspit's "neo-traditional" also "assimilates the new art's advances, to stay in favor with the society that admires them," even if somewhat

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[17] In many interviews Flack has recalled harsh criticisms of her paintings of the 1970s, such as the work *Jolie Madam* (1972) being dubbed "the ugliest painting of decade"; in Audrey Flack and Achim Drucks, "Audrey Flack: Breaking the Rules," (2016) *ArtMag by Deutsche Bank*, https://db-artmag.com/en/54/feature/audrey-flack-breaking-the-rules/.

[18] Kuspit, *Dialectic of Decadence*, 31.

[19] Ibid., 29.

inadvertently, as Flack borrowed from Pop Art, but went about her own art business, namely, reinvesting its soulless surface impressions with substance.

Of course, in the peaking Mad Men advertising era and the cusp of Women's Lib, Flack had a different relationship with male-dominated food marketing than her male peers, specifically, as a single mother through the 1960s (as her first marriage dissolved) when media, including fictional television, as well as television and print ads linked a woman's worth to prowess as a homemaker. In addition, actual food display in supermarkets targeted stereotypes of women's physical desires and propensity for impulse buying.[20] Tie-ins in cook books and woman's magazine features from the mid-1950s increasingly included photographic illustrations of impossibly perfect culinary creations to be emulated, though not necessarily eaten by "new" women, along with the right ingredients and/or satisfying read-made substitutes. The very subject of food, along with cosmetics and jewelry that copiously populate her paintings of the 1970s aligned them with percolating "feminist art" in diverse, often experimental mediums and they were exhibited and covered in this context, sometimes negatively, as typically *feminine*.[21] While an early ardent feminist, Flack did not specifically think of her still lifes in that vein, but more so as very personal, transparent redos of copious Dutch still lifes that doubled as thematic, moralizing scenes of *vanitas* and *memento mori* – the fading of beauty and life; death and remembrance, which she developed in a series of the late 1970s, latent in *Strawberry Tart Supreme* and other of her previous pastry paintings.[22]

Flack's concurrent coverage in the almost exclusively male Photorealist critical realm generally minimized or noted as feminine, disparagingly, her subject matter; likewise, the vague art history references, although similar food themes were also prevalent seen in the work of male peers. Collectively, this commentary touts disciplined objectivity as its salient quality in attempts to "formalize" it—or bring it securely into

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[20] Adam Mack, "'Speaking of Tomatoes': Supermarkets, the Senses, and Sexual Fantasy in Modern American," *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 4 (2010): 815-842, 1127.

[21] See Katherine Hauser, "Audrey Flack's Still Lifes: Between Femininity and Feminism," *Woman's Art Journal* 22, no. 2 (2001): 1-26, which emphasizes the relation of cosmetics depicted in Flack's still lifes in the 1970s and commercial advertising spreads.

[22] A theme in Hauser, "Audrey Flack's Still Lifes."

the orbit of serious painting. Ivan Karp described it as "totally non-interpretive," despite the alteration of sources by most of the relevant painters, as discussed, and the iconographic triggers latent in explicit representational imagery.[23] Certainly, objectivity as a concept is addressed in Photorealist painting and, for some, has been an ideal in terms of self-assessment and technical range. Yet, that would be to deny the very mastery it also portends. If, "individual variation on it tend[s] to carry the individual out of the category," as one critic put it,[24] that denies and de-legitimizes identifiable shared premises and the possibility that Photorealism might be subversive in disrupting canonical narratives of postwar painting. At its crux, Photorealist painting bridges both camps in negotiating new photographic reality with comprehended empirical reality. Within this equation, highly realistically paintings of food offer a one-two punch—goading real (displaced) sensual appetite and then quashing it with optics.

One by-product of Pop Art was the resurrection of naturalistic drawing and painting skill traditionally associated with figurative art, later sometimes grouped under the rubric of "Contemporary American Realism" (Flack's still lifes of the 1960s mentioned would fit). In this milieu, Flack was reproached by peers when she first "admitted" using photographs as references. To do so was a crutch—less than "seeing," just as it was largely viewed by nineteenth-century cognoscenti (as discussed) even more so, the idea of a direct translation, such as tracing or projection which many still view as a kind of cheating and unoriginal compared to free-hand composition. In discussing a 1971 lecture on the new Photorealist style by advocate Karp, mainly attended by figurative artists, "the audience's outrage was clear and shocking," as an attendee reported, citing the overwhelming skepticism not only of Photorealist methods but any artistic pay-off in laboriously replicating photographs in paint..[25] However, as she countered, "the painting is not the photograph, precisely

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[23] Karp, "Rent is the Only Reality, or the Hotel instead of the Hymns," in *Super Realism*, ed. Gregory Battcock, 124.

[24] Gerrit Henry, "The Real Thing," (1972) in *Super Realism*, ed. Gregory Battcock, 3-20; 8.

[25] Linda Chase, "Existential vs. Humanist Realism," (1975), *Super Realism*, ed. Gregory Battcock, 82-84.

the point; the transitional process intensifies the metaphorical notion of seeing *precisely*.[26]

The discussion virtually ignored a long history of artists using various aids in effecting realistic imagery. Beyond schematic perspective grids that generated convincing scenes through basic principles of geometry, Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) probably used some sort of *camera obscura* (shadow boxes or dark rooms reflecting imagery through a pinhole; he wrote notes about its potential), and some later Renaissance artists definitely did. The paintings of Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675) have generated considerable hypotheses on his probable use of such a device as well as a *camera lucida* for tracing (whereby a prism reflects imagery onto a surface).[27] For centuries,the ideal was to obscure this kind of mechanical foundation and present seemingly fully-formed, mirror images of the world. Among the first myths of Western art involves the mythic founder of still life genre, Zeuxis, of the Greek Classical age, who painted grapes so realistically that birds tried to eat them, although he was ultimately tricked by a rival into pulling at a painted curtain. Photorealists were simply updating visual *mimesis* through the ages, including the contributions to Dutch still life of the microscope, by engaging the new science as well as the sociology of photography.[28]

Once the modern camera was available many artists experimented with it immediately, whether apart from or in conjunction with their painting practice; in the case of Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863), both.[29] Edgar Degas (1834-1917) and quite possibly also Claude Monet (1840-1926) used photographs as aids, despite their art identity as

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[26] Ibid., 95.

[27] Among the most interesting recent studies, the documentary film, *Tim's Vermeer* (2013, directed by Raymond Joseph Teller), in which inventor Tim Jenison attempts to recreate a Vermeer painting.

[28] Cindy Nemser, "The Closeup Vision," (1972) in *Super Realism*, ed. Gregory Battcock, 49-63; 52-54.

[29] Among the first comprehensive studies, which included a look at related practices by Delacroix, is Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994 [1968]). For a summary introduction on the scope of the topic see Philip McCouat, "Early Influences of Photography on Art," (2012-1018), *Journal of Art in Society*. Accessed January 29, 2019. http://www.artinsociety.com/early-influences-of-photography.html.

Impressionists—partly defined by spontaneity.[30] To cite just one more prescient example, Éduoard Manet (1832-1883) even prefigured Warhol in creating drawings through the tracing photographs on the verso as well as onto paper, then used to create prints.[31] On the other hand, the event of photography also freed painting from its historical tie to resemblance, which facilitated critical attention to subjective vision and the paint medium itself association with Impressionism. Walter Benjamin, in "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," recognized that photographic media would change traditional art irrevocably, although his focus was mainly socio-political and he did not entertain specific artistic changes. In a thoughtful analogy, he compares the photographer-surgeon, working with a clear scientific procedure, to the painter-magician, whose result obscures its genesis (as mentioned). Photorealism ends up with a chimera while transparent about its methodical fruition, mixing metaphors and crossing ontologies of photography and painting. Flack later exhibited photographs as "art photography," along with several other Photorealists including Schonzeit and Eddy, further implicating the conceptual underpinnings of Photorealist painting beyond technique. She continued to incorporate enticingly-rendered foods in complex still lifes until she turned to figurative sculpture almost exclusively by c. 1990.

Schonzeit also used airbrush and slide projection through the 1970s, and created photographs as painting sources from early on, which he has also exhibited. A repeated subject for Schonzeit in the 1970s was fresh produce in cropped close-up views that play obviously on abstraction, such as *Pepper Red* (1974; fig.3), with its large-scale monochromism, all-over composition, and modular repetition.

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[30] Relevant discussions on Degas include Kirk Varnedoe, "The Ideology of Time: Degas and Photography," *Art in America*, 68 no. 6 (1980): 96-101; and Carol Armstrong, "Reflections on the Mirror: Painting, Photography, and the Self-Portraits of Edgar Degas," *Representations* no. 22 (1988): 108–141. A relatively recent exhibition, "The Lens of Impressionism: Photography and Painting along the Normandy Coast, 1850–1874," at the University of Michigan Museum of Art included Monet in this potential relation; see the catalogue of the same title, by Carole McNamara, with essays by Sylvie Aubenas, Stephen Bann, Dominique de Font-Réaulx, and Dean MacCannell (University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, in association with Hudson Hills Press, Manchester and New York, 2010).

[31] See Carl Chiarenza, "Manet's Use of Photography in the Creation of a Drawing," *Master Drawings* 7, no. 1 (1969): 38–92.

Fig. 3: Ben Schonzeit, *Pepper Red*, 1974, acrylic on canvas, 72x72 in. Copyright Ben Schonzeit.

Yet the image remains apprehended first and foremost as a horde of red peppers, dusted with notably photographic-derived daubs of light. Where Flack's pastries in *Strawberry Tart Supreme* deliver a somewhat commodified but adequately satisfying alimentary indulgence, Schonzeit idealizes an unadulterated natural edible that signifies cooking at least as much as eating. This and related paintings of varied produce by Schonzeit bear trace of seventeenth century Flemish market scenes as much as continuing trends in commercial food photography in the view from slightly above and spillage out to the edge of the picture. Equally, though not readily apparent, the confusing indication of depth ("reality") in this and other Photorealist work by Schonzeit through photographic blurs are ultimately rooted in a vision disability, which complicates further his exploration of photography.

Schonzeit's produce paintings were created just as "health food" and organic and environmental movements came into wide public

consciousness.[32] Without tethering Schonzeit's inspirations to specific related visuals, the context is prescient for their reception at the time and in retrospect. A seminal magazine, *Organic Gardening and Farming* (founded 1942; now *Organic Gardening*) nearly tripled in circulation through the 1960s in tandem with increasing photographic content (ads and features), while its sister publication, *Prevention* (founded 1950) and related other start-ups, which were not copiously illustrated helped make health food topical. In-store produce displays also beefed up waxing and lighting (begun before WWII) to entice shoppers visually and encourage touch, providing a sensual experience.

Also through the 1960s, produce was increasingly featured in ads for food storage products, new condiments, and popular canned foods like Campbell's Soup, which includes images of vegetable ingredients in several ad campaigns, *pace* Warhol's label flavors. Roland Barthes's analysis of fresh produce in an ad for packaged foods in his famous essay, "*Rhetorique de l'image*," is relevant.[33] Barthes argues that a foreground tomato (especially) bolsters the cultural authenticity signified by the Italian-sounding name of the company, which might extend to images of peak fresh food in general providing a gloss on the marketing of relatively homogenous processed products. Shifted back to an art scenario, Schoenzeit's idealization adds to the punning take on purity in abstraction and shares, inversely, with Flack's decadent pastry veiled art parody and double-entendre.

After extending his painting practice to other subjects and styles for several decades Schonzeit returned to Photorealist food in the mid-2000s, inspired by reviewing some of his earlier works in exhibitions in the light of post-millennial high-resolution digital imaging across commercial and social media platforms. A recent repeated subject has been artisanal pastries in undisturbed rigid arrangements—unlike Flack's treats, "too good to eat"; as well as ever-more minutely crinkled piles of produce on a new polyester-fabric painting surface that helps achieve ultimate smoothness—very much a continuation of his earliest visual inspirations that are immensely popular with the public, but draw mainly specialized collectors—those enthusiastically dedicated to Photorealism or representational painting more broadly rather than more catholic

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[32] See Jeffrey Haydu, "Cultural Modeling in Two Eras of U.S. Food Protest: Grahamites (1830s) and Organic Advocates (1960s–70s)," *Social Problems* 58, no. 3 (2011): 461-487, especially 467.

[33] Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in idem, *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trs. Steven Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 32-51.

contemporary collections typified in major museums. The "anti-taste" or link to kitsch attached by some to Photorealism early on for its refusal to betray modernist formal rhetoric has remained a thorn for some, abetted by its close ties to two dealers (Meisel and Karp), although most "successful" art through history has depended on similar patronage and promotion. More to the point, it is true that Photorealism was never really news in light of the plethora of new media that emerged on the art scene of its heyday. It may perhaps best be positioned through Kuspit's dialectic of decadence—as a comfort zone and sustained counter-gesture to inaccessible new forms, which yields, nonetheless, much information about the visual zeitgeist upon which it draws, and not least, is best appreciated by succumbing to the intricacies of individual works.

Eddy was well-known as a Photorealist painter (cars, street scenes, objects) using airbrush almost exclusively (first in his father's car shop) by the time he began integrating shiny whole fruits and vegetables with toys, paint jars, candies, and other common items into dizzying still life set-ups on reflective shelves in the 1980s. More than Flack and Schonzeit, Eddy has long dealt abstractly with image translations, foregoing contours for pointillist-like circles of color application, which, however, end up similarly crystal-clearly delineated. Like Flack, he has used black and white photographs as references for paintings that he colors according to specific pictorial concerns rather than empirical reality. Perhaps related, his palette has also been criticized for being too bright—essentially, too broadly appealing. Very much a photographer, his surface in these paintings (and others) can evoke particular photo finishes and tints relative to various films and printing grounds. He typically starts with a ground of limited color schemes, building complex coloration in layers then punctuated with floating signifiers (not entirely unlike those in many of Rosenquist's paintings, mentioned above). Finally compressed to a densely pixilated-like surface, his process at the time anticipated the mechanics of Adobe Photoshop (released commercially in 1990)—which he now uses along with other digital imaging and graphics software. The increasing compositional complexity of his works since the 1970s belies the charge that Photorealism is its own dead end, as he has continued to draw from many of its recognized precepts and methods, thus expanding its purview exponentially.

Several of Eddy's still lifes from the late 1980s are distilled to, primarily, natural foodstuffs, including *Dreamreader's Table IV* (1989-90, fig. 4), the term, dreamreader, referring to his daughter.

Fig. 4: Don Eddy, *Dreamreader's Table IV*, 1988-89; acrylic on canvas, 40x60 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photography courtesy of Nancy Hoffman Gallery. Copyright Don Eddy.

Here Eddy's delicate pictorial arrangement of "immaculate" produce, eggs, and flowers appear on an impossibly tilted table top, each item casting shadows that imply materiality as well as skewed photographic chiaroscuro. That flatness, along with the all-over composition and lack of environmental context broach the non-narrative gestalt of abstraction. But again, each form is a highly readable sign first analogic to a photographic representation and also fairly straightforward in its symbolic themes of pristine nature and its cycle, reified at its peak. There is nearly a sacramental screen image haunted this idealized spread that evokes the both Salvador Dali's early Surrealist food paintings and the polished-peasant Baroque of, say Zubaran, but also a polished, minimal elegance of new gourmet food styling ever more attuned to emotional, social, and even spiritual triggers elicited from carefully constructed images of food.

Again, even those most skeptical of Photorealism in general would be hard-pressed to dismiss Eddy's work as less than "serious art," despite (as it were) the association. But what of a painter like the Italian, Benedicenti, who depicted "mouthwatering" foods, especially desserts, intermittently, for decades? In a characteristic example, *Nicchie* (2011, fig. 5), the artist obviously sets up a modernist, that is to say, geometric paradigm with the display niches that suggest also upscale home decor.

Fig. 5: Luigi Benedicenti, *Nicchie*, 2011, oil on panel 28.75 x 36.625in. Courtesy of Frank Bernarducci Gallery, New York.

His selected and self-photographed food subjects are limited mainly to Italian items and mostly from particular pasticcerias—overlaying a mantle of cultural, if not nationalistic, identity to his creations, in some ways, portrait-like, reinforced by simple backdrops. However, engagement with his dessert paintings depends almost wholly on whether and how one responds to the items depicted visually and viscerally; even the photographic engagement is veiled though signified through hold-your-breath detail.

In fact, unlike those artists discussed so far, Benedicenti, in his words, aimed "to convey the same feelings that the observer could experience only by 'living' or 'touching' the things I represent"—in the same way as advertisers attempt to establish sensory bonds with viewers.[34]

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[34] In Alison Kjeldgaard, "Mouthwatering Art: A Short Conversation with Luigi Benedicento," *Global Art Laid Out*, December 1, 2011. Accessed June 25, 2018. http://www.galomagazine.com/artdesign/mouthwatering-art-a-short-conversation-with-artist-luigi-benedicenti/#.WzzlQPZFxjq.

And his emphasis on drops of glisten and moisture are heavy on the implicit sexual innuendoes—perhaps more so if aware of Benedicenti's nudes—sometimes the two subjects appear in a single work. But he is known for his desserts—forbidden fruit for the artist, who suffered from diabetes, so that his rendition is a mnemonic idealization despite grounding in careful visual study. Again, the notion of the fetish is apt, and his obsessive return to such a populist punning subject has a therapeutic resonance. However, consciously, Benedicenti sought simply to draw on the time-worn visual pleasure of convincing illusionism, which elicited a devoted following, if narrow in scope.

Among the best known "food painters" internationally working today is Dutch artist Sparnaay. Interested in art from a young age, he is entirely self-taught (no art school), unlike all the artists discussed above, devoting himself seriously to painting after establishing a career as a physical education teacher. His first exposure as a postcard artist instilled a marketing sense for grabbing diverse viewers, which he has exploited, after a period of experimentation, in signature large-scale paintings of mainly generic international foods like eggs, salads, fries, and burgers that he enjoys, such as *Big Burger* (2015; fig. 6).

Fig. 6: Tjalf Sparnaay, *Big Burger*, 2015, oil on canvas, 47x71 in., 2015, Seven Bridges Foundation, Greenwich, CT. Copyright Tjalf Sparnaay.

Working with a brush and mahlstick-type tool to steady his hand across large canvases, he is inspired by and links his practice to his Dutch Golden

Age predecessors, but also concedes learning from first-generation American Photorealists as he tinkered with photography, photographic projection and Photoshop to come up with his "Megarealist" (his term) macrophotographic sensibility. As in the Dutch traditional work he admires, there is often indication of a tipping point between ripeness and spoilage that gives his monolithic subjects a theme, if not a narrative, circulating internally.

In a Youtube video, one can view Sparnaay frying and trimming an egg to his liking and making a sloppy club sandwich which he stylizes in a photoshoot, to become the subjects of paintings.[35] There is a kind of wide-eyed innocence about his procedure that may seem almost ludicrous in terms of consequential contemporary art that would perhaps have been of more interest served—in reality, as food itself has become a prevalent medium in sculpture and performance art especially since the new millennium, further challenging the relevance of and interest in contemporary painted representations.

Sparnaay's surfaces close up appear highly abstracted—so much so that areas of the canvas sometimes suggest specific abstract painters self-consciously. Still, to call him an abstract painter, as some have suggested, is disingenuous. His unabashed goal is eye-popping illusionism—"You are a magician, really, with paint," he states (as subtitled in the referenced video), recalling Benjamin's analogy. It is perhaps a bit too neatly didactic to provide real food for art thought; yet, like a tabloid in a library of leather-bound tough reads, a Sparnaay titillates joyfully on a visual level. He himself has emphasized his composite style of picture-making and spoken of distancing source photographs from his desired results, rather, like Benedicenti, foregrounding considerations of his subject matter. This breaking way from photographic material is not surprising, as virtual reality is now ubiquitous; and the practices of Benedicenti and Sparnaay may represent a final phase of decadence for realist painting broadly. Yet it continues to proliferate and astound in very much the same way as its original practitioners once did and their results certainly do not veil the fact that photography the matrix of their respective oeuvre.

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[35] Hester Hagemeijer, "Getting Closer: A Documentary About Megarealist Painter Tjalf Sparnaay," video from 2014; posted on Youtube May 22, 2015. Accessed October 1, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQa4BmCCAu0.

Feeding the Eye

Just google "food paintings" with various terms like realism and photography and count the hits. Convincingly flavorful paintings of food are perhaps too overdetermined to turn away from the light of their sensory plays, pleasures, and inescapable, engrossing iconographic potential. In the early days of Photorealism, they were bolstered for artists and audiences by changes in mass media commercial advertising of food in various ways, and, as we have seen, actually infused with quite varied takes on the explosion of the metaphoric and visceral potential of that negotiation. Their explicit attention to photographic technologies is thoroughly "modern," while "decadently" eliding painting with photography in ways that crossed several entrenched aesthetic boundaries.

Painting that elicits sensory reaction from beyond the frame, climactic in Photorealist food paintings, has been positioned in postwar criticism mainly as transgressive, in both positive and negative senses. Alloway, the critical champion of Pop Art, was among the first to propose a reinvigorating dimension to the Photorealist tendency, what he called post-Pop, "which rehabilitates our sense of wonder by a complex kind of *trompe l'oeil*."[36] Harold Rosenberg, Greenberg's only peer rival at least commented but didn't buy in: "Once the illusion is dissolved, what is left is an object that is interesting not as a work of art but as a successful simulation of something that is not art. The major response to it is curiosity: 'How did he do it?'"; and denied the "art" in "treating paintings as photographic problems."[37] The sentiment is still echoed in some criticism three decades later: "Setting aside the wow factor of photorealist painting—admittedly a very big aside, this insanely popular art genre holds precious little of enduring significance."[38] Much positive criticism has dogmatized objectivity in relation to the photographic sources of Photorealist painting and minimized its extra-art indications, despite variance in personal and artistic ways among associated artists, not least in their interactions with photographic practice and transpositions. And despite increasingly interest evidenced by a number of international survey shows and hesitant acknowledgement of its influence on

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[36] Nigel Whiteley, "Photo-Realism," in idem, *Art and Pluralism: Lawrence Alloway's Cultural Criticism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 343-347, here 343.

[37] Harold Rosenberg, "Reality Again," (1972), in *Super Realism,* ed. Gregory Battcock, 135-142, here 138.

[38] For example, Benjamin Genocchio, in "Photorealism: Is That All There Is?" *New York Times,* January 30, 2005, M11.

subsequently high-profile art stars like Marilyn Minter (b. 1948), Jeff Koons (b. 1955), and Kehinde Wiley (b. 1977) since the new millennium, historical Photorealist paintings have not risen to the market heights of perceived avant-garde forms of the same era and are rarely seen in auctions of postwar art by major houses.[39] Yet, the magic factor and wide admiration for long hours at the proverbial easel has remained compelling for many, as even-more conceptual, hands-off, and factory-produced art have become di rigueur.[40]

The punning palette/palate of Photorealist paintings of food is inhered in the earliest tropes of Western art and sustained in the age of global food production, consumption, marketing ubiquity, and hi-res digital imaging. To my mind, Kuspit's dialectic of decadence offers a substantial way of teasing out the hidden complications of Photorealism, which balances visual beauty with the subversion of modernist aesthetics, and in its very terminology, evokes the death drive in a way that updates historical *vanitas* paintings and is relevant to the snapshot sensation of the Photorealist mirage—very serious art business indeed.

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[39] A few museum exhibitions featuring Photorealism since the new millennium are: "Facing Reality: The Seavest Collection of Contemporary Realism," Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY (2003-2004); "Still Life: 1970s Photorealism," Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT (2013-2014); and the major international exhibition, "Photorealism: Fifty Years of Hyperrealistic Painting," originated at the Kunsthalle Tübingen, Germany (2012) travelling (through 2017) to: Museo Thyssen Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain; Saarland Museum, Saarbrücken, Germany; Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, United Kingdom; Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, Spain; Kumu Art Museum of Estonia,Tallinn; Musée d'Ixelles, Brüssels; Belgium; Osthaus Museum, Hagen, Germany.

[40] For example, Ken Johnson, "Realism, Admittedly Slippery, Explores what Can and Can't be Seen," *New York Times*, December 19, 2003, E40 (a review of "Facing Reality," at the Neuberger Museum of Art, as above) noted that "the best Photo Realists ... not only add sensuous painterly flesh to the skeleton of the photographic source, but they suggest realities beyond those of strictly visual experience."

4.
Tiny Blades of Viral Glory
Miniature Food in Popular Culture

Matthew Tormey

A Japanese cultural sensation that quickly captivated audiences worldwide, creating tiny food or more accurately simply watching the creation of tiny food, is a viral trend that has infatuated hundreds of millions of people. Today's tiny food videos are colorful, upbeat and speedy, the visual of the miniature meal's preparation is often complemented by a light melodic tune. The original videos of the tiny food's modern viral trend were first posted to YouTube by Japanese accounts. Since being posted, the videos have quickly spread and were rapidly shared across various other forms of social media. Chefs' or perhaps more correct artists' miniature creations can be seen on feeds from Facebook to Instagram and Twitter to Reddit and on a variety of blogs and websites. Tiny food was no longer limited to Japanese creators and audiences, instead becoming truly a worldwide phenomenon uploaded by accounts based in places from America to France and in languages from Arabic to Turkish. Tiny food and the artistic talents of creating tiny food became a viral sensation and the epitome of the intersection between food and social media.

This viral subgenre of food content is not as recent as the average social media user might think. The art of miniature food creation began in Japan over a century ago, long before the high-resolution camera that is present and captures much of the production today could have even been imagined. Before today's instant viral videos, the 'tiny food' were inedible wax models, made available for sale by Japanese merchants. Emerging around the beginning of the twentieth century the first documented appearance of the wax models in 1917. In Japan, restaurants used food models as depictions of the dishes they had available to serve. Originally, these models were larger than the meal being represented leading customers to believe they had been deceived. These inedible models were composed of materials such as clay, resin, glue, needles, toothpicks, dyes, paints and stainers. Gradually the food began to shrink smaller and smaller into the form of tiny food recognized today. Wax miniature food became commercially available to the Japanese public when businessman Iwasaki Ryuzo dedicated an entire store to it 1932. Outside of restaurants, these wax models were being used as decoration, jewelry, trinkets, toys and began to be recognized as a collectible.

The subject of food has always been an appealing category to content creators and marketers alike. The sight of delicious meals and delectable desserts seem to be able to cross many cultural boundaries.

Seemingly endless and copyright free recipes allow immense amounts of content to be able to be produced cheaply and relatively quickly. Human beings have been cooking for tens of thousands of years so it would seem unlikely that new approaches to this age-old activity could be made. However, as many meals, particularly in America, have swelled in size it seems ironic that videos of miniature food would reach such popularity. Affirming this, tiny food has been dubbed by Time Magazine "the cutest culinary trend ever."[1] Tiny food has a much larger appeal than other food content but pinning down the exact emotion evoked which results in its popularity is hard to precisely determine. In an interview with The Atlantic on the subject of tiny food Boston University anthropology professor Merry White said she was not surprised the trend originated in Japan.[2] White's academic research focus is on Japanese culture and cuisine.

To the average American viewer seeing ordinary food replicated to an absurdly small yet still accurate and even more importantly edible level evokes a mesmerizing effect by a multitude of accounts. This reflects a representation of a cultural phenomenon in Japan known as otaku while concurrently being accompanied by another Japanese obsession, kawaii. In a word otaku translates to obsession, extreme obsession, sometimes to personal detriment. The pure utter focus and attention to detail required to the sculpt the perfect miniature food is exhaustive. Alongside otaku is the Japanese passion for kawaii, the quality of being cute also often associated with delicate. It is a truth universally that small versions of regular objects are cute.

One of the more obvious parallels between tiny food and its popularity seems to be the subconscious link to dollhouses. This subconscious link to dollhouses then triggers childhood memories and a nostalgic feeling for the past.[3] Some people who continue to appreciate dollhouse sized object are known as miniacs, a portmanteau of miniature and maniac. Creating tiny food is a hobby, it is to some degree an aspect

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[1] Regan, Helen, "See Why Kawaii Cooking Has Become The Hottest Food Trend," *Time* (February 24, 2015). Accessed January 30, 2019. http://time.com/3719905/food-trends-kawaii-cooking-miniature-meals/

[2] Jessica Lee Hester, "Big in Japan: Tiny Food," *The Atlantic* (January/February 2017). Accessed January 30, 2019. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/01/big-in-japan-tiny-food/508778/

[3] Madeleine Luckle, "Why Are So Many People Obsessed With Tiny Food," Vogue (June 8, 2017). Accessed January 30, 2019. https://www.vogue.com/article/tiny-food-why-are-people-obsessed

of play that adults can recognize as such. Other parallels include the kitschy way in which fake bowls of fruit are often used as decoration. Although largely inedible, there are some foods which are common in certain design styles. As well as its essence these videos are cooking shows, cooking shows for the aforementioned reasons have been a staple on American television for almost as long as television has existed.

With the rise in popularity of *all* things kawaii, another expert, Dr. Laura Miller suggests that it is not wholly surprising that not only was tiny food able to develop but to also enjoy the level of popularity which it has. Miller is a professor of Japanese Studies at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and she links the tiny food trend with a trend called dekoden. Dekoden is a Japanese fad which celebrated decorating a cell phone in a spate of tiny decorations.[4] These small cell phone decorations provided the kickstart to kawaii's renewed popularity. Among those decorations, food ornamentation reached a particularly high degree of popularity. Today, media of miniature items penetrate nearly all aspects of Japanese design. Japanese culture no longer limited to the back of cell phones. Miniature everyday items such as books, bicycles, houses, and even miniature bonsai trees, a tree already known for its minute size yet full-tree-profile are hallmarks of Japanese culture. The technical ability, tools and audience receptiveness may have been influenced by the dekoden trend which emerged just prior to the edible tiny food videos. An intrinsically "undeniable appeal arises when dealing with things shrunk to a fraction of their size" arises when interacting with objects like tiny food, mental health expert Kelly Kitely believes.[5] This trend of creating small but beautiful works is to many of the first Japanese creators, a more than worthwhile hobby.

At first, this might seem to the average American as a silly or even absurd hobby but there are mainstream and direct comparisons in American culture. Model trains, miniature wargaming (tiny toy soldier battlefield recreation) and the Warhammer 40k (miniature tabletop science fantasy) war game are hobbies enjoyed by millions of Westerners. Many

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[4] Leah Hyslop, "Mini Food Fad Sees Tiny but Edible Meals Cooked on Toy Hobs," *The Telegraph* (March 17, 2015). Accessed January 30, 2019. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/foodanddrinkvideo/11476953/Kawaii-food-trend-sees-amazing-tiny-meals-cooked-on-toy-ovens.html

[5] Johnny Waldman, "The Joy of Watching Miniature Japanese Foods Being Prepared," *Spoon & Tamango* (April 25, 2017). Accessed January 30, 2019. http://www.spoon-tamago.com/2017/04/25/the-joy-of-watching-miniature-japanese-meals-being-prepared/

model train hobbyists have massive, accurate and working countrysides and towns full of props in which their trains travel across. Miniature wargaming includes historically accurate equipment and rank size representations. As for Warhammer 40k, many players spend more time painting, creating and developing storylines for their figures than actually employing them in game. Just like Westerners, the Japanese enjoy their hobby because "it gives them the feeling that they are living out their own small, fantasy world."[6]

Another possible reason for tiny food's rise, it's ASMR aesthetic. Autonomous sensory meridian response, ASMR, found great popularity throughout the 2010s on YouTube as a wide variety of videos featuring curious yet pleasant sounds. ASMR is a genre which seemed to take over YouTube for a time, a genre focused on pleasing and soothing the body and mind via pleasing the listener's the sense of sound. Miniature Space videos do not feature background music but simply the noises naturally made over the dish's creation. For example, an egg yolk plopping into a glass to be mixed or the sound of utensils clanging against the cookware. In many ways watching tiny food be created and come together is simply put, satisfying. Although ASMR is known for pleasing the sense of sound, tiny food videos also often get points for being visual ASMR as well. The methodical and expert hand movement provides the visual ASMR and is present in nearly every tiny food video no matter the creator.

A level of absurd precision is present in most videos, cute and tiny utensils, pots, pans and in many cases minute (and cute) versions of the ingredients themselves. This absurd precision is a slightly humorous and intriguing juxtaposition adding to the genuine feeling of curiosity the unsuspecting viewer might feel in wondering the exact logistics behind pocket change sized chocolate raspberry eclairs. Cherry tomatoes, pearl onions, baby (immature) potatoes, shallots and florets of broccoli take the place of the regular-sized counterparts. Although the smallest sizes are employed sometimes that is still too large, in many cases. A 'tiny egg,' the tiny quail egg, is still at least the size of the mixing bowl in which it will be used. The largest recipes for foods like ravioli, pies, pizza and cake require at best only a single teaspoon of flour. Miniature paring knives, the smallest of coffee spoons and minute spatulas are used to prepare the meals before being placed on single square-inch of stove top to cook in equally diminutive pots and pans.

An interesting aspect of tiny food in relation to most other food content is that, although prized for its accuracy and ability to be consumed, a

[6] Hyslop, "Mini Food."

negligible amount of viewers would ever have envisioned themselves actually recreating these recipes. These videos are not how-to's, no quantity of ingredient or length of cook time is present across these viral videos. Looking at these viral videos through this lens, tiny food is simply an aesthetic to be enjoyed. Much of food porn consists of either food the person sharing dishes wants to consume or intends to create whereas many people who share tiny food videos did not create or intend to eat the posted meal.

The first YouTube channel to create tiny food content and gain a massive following was the Japanese channel AAAjoken whole later also added a separate channel Miniature Space just for the miniature food creations. In mid-2018, both channels hover around 2.4 million subscribers with the former channel having received across all of its videos 3.5 billion views. AAAjoken was created in October 2012 and is focused more on miniature toys than tiny food specifically. Miniature Space was created in November 2014 and has almost 4,000,000 views across all its videos. After three months and only two dozen videos Miniature Space had already begun to regularly receive tens of thousands of views per video.[7] By mid-2018 the channel is comprised of over 200 videos all of which feature the creation of a tiny food dish. Miniature Space was the first tiny food super channel, able to regularly reach millions of views.

AAAjoken and Miniature Space have a backdrop complete with miniature potted plants, two-burner range, cabinet, table and chairs. As well his cooking instruments and paraphernalia all scaled to a matching tiny level. The most important part, the ingredients, are miniature as well, single grains of ingredients, a single brussel sprout and the >6 cm Sakura shrimp in lieu of jumbo shrimp are all a part of the tiny recipe. AAAjoken has created everything from Japanese favorites such as tempura to the staple American corn dogs.

Predating AAAjoken by only a few months is the Dutch YouTube channel AkameruKawaii. The channel was started by a 21 year old named Celine, and it features all kinds of miniatures including food but there is an emphasis on dolls. The food is not edible but instead, like most of the creations, is composed of polymer clay. The channel's first three videos, starting in October of 2011, depict the creation of tiny food with the

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[7] Andy Cush, "I Can't Stop Watching These Miniature Japanese Food Cooking Videos," *Gawker Weird Internet* (February 17, 2015). Accessed January 29, 2019. http://internet.gawker.com/i-cant-stop-watching-these-miniature-japanese-food-cook-1686332846

main course being crepes. Each of those videos holds a five figure view count while the channel as a whole has over a hundred million views.

Another forefather of tiny food creation is Pocket Cooking a series done by Pocket Resort, among one of the oldest YouTube channels to produce edible tiny food content. The first tiny food video was posted on the channel in March 2015. The first four dishes were Japanese cuisine with the fifth being waffles. The channel has almost one hundred different dishes and videos with a combined total of over 17 million views. Like other tiny food channels, any given video shows the tiniest chops of meat sprinkled with seasoning from the tiniest of cutlery and cookware accompanied by a snappy tune. Unlike most other channels, a complete kitchen backdrop is not present but rather the given workplace or appliance is shown isolated against a clean white backdrop. Also in contrast to other channels, Pocket Resort does create special videos for a reasons besides purely entertainment. Multiple-video playlists entitled ASMR or how-to can be found on the accounts homepage, these qualifiers are lacking from most other tiny food content creator's channels.

In 2015 miniature food content had received over three million views from YouTube alone. Receiving a large chunk of those YouTube views was the channel Miniature Space. In the year 2015 Miniature Space alone received 50 million views. According to a December 2015 report done by the video intelligence firm Tubular Labs, a group dedicated to the analysis of the video industry and market research, prior to 2014 food content had never exceeded twenty million average daily views. As tiny food channels begin to emerge in 2014 and grew in popularity throughout the following years average daily food content video views doubled to forty million by the start of 2015 and doubled again to well north of eighty million by the start of 2016. Almost 90% of those views came from either YouTube or Facebook.

In 2015 still in its relative YouTube infancy, the miniature food category was a distant fourth largest by views category of YouTube food content. Miniature food content receiving 102 million views captured just three percent of food content's total views. Tiny food trailed cooking (30%), baking (20%) and recipe tutorials (11%). Of food content's total audience 71% was under the age of 25 and 61% are female. The United States produces and 'consumes' the most food content, the latter by a wide margin. Despite not leading production or consumption Tubular

Labs reports the category of miniature food also has a sizeable production and consumption from Japan.[8]

Japan's Miniature Space was the premier tiny food channel until an American challenger arose to battle for views. Tastemade is a global entertainment company with a full staff consisting of producers, coders, editors and of course the on-screen talent producing content in offices across continents and in seven languages. Tastemade's Los Angeles 'tech hub' is home to six specially stylized sets. A Tastemade video which does not receive eight digit view totals is considered "pitiful."[9] Tastemade is by every definition an expert in the creation of professional food video content. It too has jumped on the miniature food trend, the set for its series Tiny Kitchen features the hallmark fit-on-a-hand sized kitchen fully equipped with a functional oven and refrigerator with a working light. The finalized video is then posted and spread across a combination of platforms on which Tastemade has gathered an audience. YouTube and Facebook are the main sites but also to the channel's following on places like Snapchat and Instagram. Miniature video titles from Tastemade have been known to include the word kawaii as well as emojis. Three key elements to a successful video appear to be kawaii, color and speed. The Tastemade secret recipe has proven to work with Tiny Kitchen videos receiving 600 million views from 2016 into late 2017.

Tastemade the channel started out in 2012 while the Tiny Kitchen series debuted in 2015. Some of the first Tiny Kitchen meals include steak, french toast and vegetable tempura. Tiny Kitchen has received such success that their tiny food artist/chef/giant hand in videos is Hannah Aufmuth who now presents solely for the channel. Aufmuth compares the level of intricacy in work to that of a surgeon adding her centimeters long spatula is her scalpel.[10] Sometimes, Aufmuth needs to make her own scalpels. An example is a frying basket to create taco shells, the solution a very twisted paperclip. The stove used is powered by a tea light which,

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[8] Tubular Staff, "The Growth of Food Content on YouTube," *Tubular Labs* (December 2015). Accessed January 30, 2019. https://tubularlabs.com/research-guides/growth-food-content-youtube/

[9] Drew Harwell, "Those Food Videos that Take Over Your Facebook? Here's Where They're Made," *Washington Post* (August 15, 2016). Accessed January 30, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2016/08/15/those-food-videos-that-take-over-your-facebook-heres-where-theyre-made/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.e8fe8571bd19

[10] Hester, "Tiny Food: Big in Japan."

although unable to be regulated, does create plenty of heat for the creations. A Tiny Kitchen tiny studio is even modeled after one of the regular sized kitchen sets. For their tenth season, Tiny Kitchen debuted The On The Road series featuring regional favorites such as Philly Cheesesteaks, Georgie Peach Cobbler and Maine Lobster. Tastemade put a twist on their traditional dollhouse kitchen studio. These videos feature a retro camping theme with only a campfire grill to cook on. At the end of the day, the Tiny Kitchen creation is eaten.

A CBS News interview claims Tiny Kitchen was a organic and original conception of a since forgotten Tastemade employee. Tastemade executives called the idea of creating tiny food "almost a joke."[11] This joke started when Jay Holzer, head of development and programming, brought his daughter's old dollhouse into the office. After deciding there must be something to do with an old dollhouse the first tiny kitchen of Tiny Kitchen was established. A minute burger, heaping piles of spaghetti and stacks of pancakes were the first tiny meals made. Along with the addition of miniature knives imported from Japan, the Tastemade team was ready to make tiny food videos.

Conversely, a National Public Radio interview claims the idea for Tiny Kitchen came from one of Tastemade's Japanese partners.[12] Interestingly, the source for this claim is again made by Tastemade head of development and programming, Jay Holzer. The same article states that the dollhouse which is used as the set was specially ordered from a dollhouse maker in Germany. The most popular videos Tiny Kitchen videos are common recipes, among them pancakes and tacos. Holzer adds "It's something you or I know how to make a human-sized version of, so it's fun to watch it happen as a tiny thing."[13] Holzer also adds, "I may not make 'the fudge' but I'm inspired to make something."[14] Another Tastemade executive, head of programming Oren Katzeff, calls little food

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[11] CBS News Staff, "Creating the Bite Sized Food of 'Tiny Kitchen'," *CBS News* (November 19, 2017). Accessed January 30, 2019. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/creating-the-bite-sized-foods-of-tiny-kitchen/

[12] Tove Danovich, "'Tiny Kitchen' Videos Cook Up Real Food in Doll-Sized Portions," *National Public Radio* (May 3, 2016). Accessed January 30, 2019. https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/05/03/475783900/tiny-kitchen-videos-cook-up-real-food-in-doll-sized-portions?t=1549635533420

[13] Danovich, "'Tiny Kitchen'."

[14] CBS News Staff, "'Tiny Kitchen.'"

fascinating because of the sense of disbelief coupled with a little bit of mind-blowing and a little bit brain-tingling.[15]

For Tastemade and other creators there are three key ingredients for a tiny food video, kawaii, artsy aesthetic and speed. Being immersed in the atmosphere of a tiny kitchen where the only thing out of scale is a human hand evokes a sort of whimsy. In addition to an atmosphere of whimsy it is clear the videos have a degree of artistic playfulness. The color scale used is very visually pleasing. The music is upbeat and bouncy yet not distracting distractingly so. The videos are sped up, making multiple videos easy to consume quickly. The vast majority of views across all social sharing mediums as well as across the world were received by Tastemade. Tastemade's recipe for formulating tiny food videos is responsible for its meteoric rise and continued dominance of the genre.

In addition to the American Tastemade and Japanese Miniature Space another popular artist chef is Tom Brown of Miniature Kitchen. A self-made tiny chef, Brown started making his creations as a child and continues making them in public as a form of performance art. Over the years Brown has assembled all his own cooking implements and appliances such as a pasta press, French press, cheese grater as well as complete kitchen backdrop featuring a functional gas stove. Brown has made hundreds of dishes, half of which he has given away to help inspire and further the art of tiny food creation.

When reflecting upon the logistics of his craft Brown mentions two big differences in creating his tiny food. The time it takes food to dry and cook is a fraction of what the dish normally would need to cook for. Burgers, for example, would only take seconds to grill and scant more seconds to char then burn. Another change is of course the recipe, but in particular seasoning. There is a bit of irony that the hardest part of tiny food cooking is the smallest ingredient. However, Brown states that difficulties encountered and modifications made in order to recreate the actual flavor and texture are all part of the fun of cooking tiny food.

Unlike many others who make tiny food, Brown practices his craft in front of people, out among the public, as well as posting videos online. Additionally, all of his creations are vegetarian or vegan. Part of what draws Brown to continue his art is the reactions he receives when doing his art publicly. The same reactions that the original Japanese videos received from Western audiences, laughter quickly followed by a sense of wonderment. Brown says the viewing experience allows other to change their perception of how they see the world. Tiny food sparks a sense of

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[15] Ibid.

novelty in people, allowing people to alter their views and think differently than they normally would. Lastly, an interesting topic Browns touches upon is the place of the kitchen in society. “People are drawn to the space of the kitchen- hanging out and cooking at home is such a natural social space, and the miniature kitchen makes that space mobile.”[16]

Another person who emphasizes the art angle of tiny food is the Japanese creator Tomo Tanaka. Tanaka is an artist who recreates all types of items from swords to food in 1/12 or 1/24 scale.[17] Tanaka’s work is not edible, is not created with the help of tiny implements and uses slideshows and pictures in lieu of video. Melodious and tuneful music punctuates the video slideshow in lieu of upbeat music or the noise of his craft. As such Tanaka’s work is showcased moreso on Instagram (nunus_house) than Youtube. Tanaka practices his art and craft as a hobby and sometimes auctions his pieces and holds classes on creating miniature objects.

One of the original Instagram accounts to post tiny food, aptly and simply titled tiny food (tinyfoods) was created by a supporter who was enamored with the tiny food process. The first post dates from October 2014 which does predate the viral ascent of tiny food content, the account creator does firmly believe they are the first to post tiny food content on Instagram. This is because the account creator, a then-seventh-grader, was also an artist, a two-dimensional artist who found joy in drawing tiny food. The account creator was *drawn* to tiny food as an artist for many of the same reasons video creators and video watchers are, enjoying satisfaction in watching the everyday turned intricate details unfold with expertise and precision. For viewers, watching the tiny food creation process unfold can give a calming sensation, a sense of having a solid handle and control on the situation. As anyone with a hobby in the twenty-first century might do, the account creator turned to the internet to further delve into the hobby. This was in a time period before Tiny Kitchen and most others existed, the search results returned Japanese creators and a large portion of inedible tiny food trinkets, chief among them jewelry.

The account creator conceived the account and began to post, originally using pictures found of these model and inedible tiny foods. For

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[16] Stated in unpublished interview with this manuscript’s author, Matthew Tormey (June 25, 2018).

[17] Brian Ashcraft, “Japanese Miniature Art Dazzles All,” *Kotaku* (March 25, 2015). Accessed January 30, 2019. https://kotaku.com/japanese-miniature-art-dazzles-all-1693524456

a period, the creator's interest and activity in the account began to wane yet remarkably the not-so-active account continued to grow in popularity as tiny food began to engrain itself on social media timelines everywhere. Soon, the account had reached ten thousand followers, around the same time in March 2018 New York Magazine did an article on tiny food which almost instantly resulted in another ten thousand followers for the account. As of summer 2018 the account has over 100 picture and video posts, advertisement free, and is still building upon those twenty thousand followers. The account creator does believe that the fact that an industry titan such as Tastemade created consistent and quality tiny food content was an important factor in helping to transform the trend into the viral sensation that it became. Another factor in helping to increase the popularity of tiny food as well as the Instagram tinyfoods, is the simple and basic fact "that everyone loves food."[18]

The Cut, an off-shoot of New York Magazine had an article consisting of a series of interviews with people who are at different intersections of the miniatures hobby. Among them was 'The Instagrammer' Kate Unver, who runs the Instagram account dailymini. The account has over 100,000 followers and only a small fraction of its post include tiny food. The food that does make it on the account is not edible and the Instagram only posts photos of the finished product and not it's making. Unver states that vast amount of comments received on her posts amount to the visceral response of "squee!" or "eee!"[19] Another interviewee of the same article, 'The Collector' Barbara Davis, admitted she spent $4,000 on just a portrait of a miniature lobster roll.

Although the average viewer will not create tiny food, for those who have their magnifying glass at the ready, there are a multitude of recipes which have surfaced both online and in print. At least one cookbook has been dedicated entirely to the craft so far. Teri Lyn Fisher and Jenny Park's *Tiny Food Party* emphasizes small but perhaps not impractically tiny foods which grace our screens. For a June 4th, 2018 post Parade, a weekly magazine, published a series of recipes for a variety of cheese based meals entirely emulated on recreating Tiny Kitchen dishes. Tiny food how-to's seem to be a small, in comparison to those that do it for entertainment reasons, but growing field. The year of 2014 saw a four video series

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[18] All information in this section comes from unpublished interview with this manuscript's author, Matthew Tormey (June 11, 2018).

[19] Katy Schneider, "The Everything Guide to Mini Mania," *New York Magazine; The Cut* (September 21, 2017). Accessed January 30, 2019. https://www.thecut.com/2017/09/everything-guide-to-miniature-market.html

emerge of a hamster eating various tiny food from a birthday cake to Thanksgiving Feast. Each video received millions of views and was named the Washington Post's "Animal Meme of the Year."[20]

Tastemade has made quite a name for itself both from outside and within traditional food circles. A platform one would think would be the last place to find food content has even been infiltrated. Tiny Kitchen has become so ingrained into mainstream popular culture that apparently it's theme tune has warranted a trap remix (more aggressive subgenre hip hop). The aptly titled 'Tastemade - Tiny Kitchen song trap remix' which has been uploaded to the music sharing platform Soundcloud and has received hundreds of listens. Tastemade interacts very well with mainstream food culture, recreating Top Chef's fifteenth season finale dishes, spoonbread and "Manzo Di Colorado beef" beef ribeye with their tiny ingredients, implements and appliances. These Tiny Kitchen videos even made a cameo on the small screen, on the television network Bravo, in a format similar to the way behind-the-scenes footage is shown. As well, Tiny Kitchen launched an ultimately unsuccessful Kickstarter in early 2017. For the price of just $20 supporters would receive a tiny stove, a great savings in relation to its regular retail price.

If there is anything nearly as prevalent as cute animal tricks on the internet it is food content and more than likely that content originated with Tastemade. An aspect very worthy of note is the company's ease and familiarity with not just YouTube but also the social media applications Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. In fact, it is the Tastemade's de-emphasis of YouTube which has allowed it to focus more heavily on building audiences on other platforms. It is the company's successful online presence that perhaps some of tiny food's popularity is to thank for. Many millions of the views Tiny Kitchen has received are not from people subscribed to the channel on YouTube but instead people who are following (or whose friends are following and have shared) Tiny Kitchen on Facebook. In an age of cord-cutting the company is betting more people are looking at their phones than watching television. Tastemade CEO and co-founder Larry Fitzgibbon says a larger portion of Tastemade's audience comes from Snapchat and Facebook in place of YouTube. For quick and intriguing videos like those put out by Tiny

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[20] Caitlin Dewey, "How a 'Tiny Hamster' Video Gets Made," *Washington Post* (November 20, 2014). Accessed January 30, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/11/20/how-a-tiny-hamster-video-gets-made/?utm_term=.18b0d9e22676

Kitchen a discover Snapchat story channel does seem like an ideal place for it to reach and connect with viewers.[21]

Bandai, the world's third largest toy maker, creates a line of almost tiny kitchen implements marketed to children. Re-Ment is a Japanese company dedicated to everything tiny and kawaii from food to animals to characters. The Miniature Food Association of Japan was created to help potential aspiring artist chefs to create tiny food. The Mini Food Blog has thousands of followers who "love, make or collect" miniature food. The blog post pictures often coupled with links to Instagram, Facebook and Etsy pages. The DailyMini website, dedicated to all things miniature has interviews with over 30 different tiny food artists that make edible or inedible tiny food from all around the world.

The mark miniature food has left on the world is not a sizable legacy. In a time of viral sensations fads seem to fly by quicker than ever yet miniature food content has year-over-year popularity growth. Tiny food has reached an enormous and very receptive audience of viewers who want to watch more. From the use of tiny food as an art form to a source of hours of entertainment a wide variety of people are drawn to tiny food for an even wider variety of reasons. Kawaii, nostalgia, and curiosity all combine to entrance the viewer in a mesmerized state. The reasons for this appeal are almost as diverse as the miniature artists and chefs themselves. Tiny food was able to transcend food content and penetrate mainstream popular culture.

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[21] Kerry Flynn, "How Tastemade Has Eaten the Internet With Facebook and Snapchat," *Mashable* (August 2017). Accessed January 30, 2019. https://mashable.com/2017/08/02/tastemade-ceo-eating-the-internet-bizplease/#wCN8_P8.VSqh