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ON A CELLULOID PLATTER:
AN ANALYSIS OF
THE REPRESENTATIONS AND FUNCTIONS OF FOOD AND EATING IN THE CINEMA

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SUMMARY

This dissertation examines the representations and metaphoric functions of food and eating in a wide range of European and American films. It purports to present an original approach to film historiography and to the study of film aesthetics.

The first chapter, "Food and National Identity in the Cinema," addresses the specific case of food as a conveyor of national identity in French film. Analysis in this chapter is founded on recent critical debates on nationhood and national cinemas. The first part of the chapter examines French films of the pre-war period, when food and eating were especially used to convey consensus and harmony. The second part deals with the post-war period, when food started to clearly signify the deterioration of communal, familial and national structures and traditions.

The second chapter, "Film, Food and the Feminine," traces mainstream and avant-garde representations of women as both cooks and eaters from the pre-feminist (i.e. up to about 1969-1970) to the post-feminist periods. Analysis is based on feminist cultural criticism of the contradictory messages sent to women about food and eating. Depictions in the pre-feminist period contained eating and cooking women within very limited and stereotypical cinematic spaces. The post-feminist period has seen a diversification of the possible ways of presenting women together with food, especially in films made by female directors.

Chapter Three, "Alimentary Delinquency in the Cinema," deals with the distinctly post-classical phenomenon of films that feature acts of cannibalism, coprophagy and other aberrant eating practices. Based on theories of the "carnivalesque" in film, the first part of the chapter offers an analysis of the specific areas of film production in which alimentary delinquency is prominent: the low forms of the horror film, counter cinema, and contemporary art films. The final section examines alimentary delinquency as a form of corporal spectacle which has the capacity to provoke physical reactions in the spectator's own body.

The Conclusion considers recent international "food films" to see how they crystallise and amplify many of the issues raised in this study.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I will be considering how food and eating are used in and across a wide range of American and European films. Representations of food and eating in film have never been covered before by a study of this length and scope, and hardly any scholarly work of substance has been carried out in this precise area. However, in type and nature, this study does have precedents, and my "review of the literature" will consist of two parts: firstly, a review of books and articles that examine films from a range of issue-based perspectives, and then an examination of the few articles that have appeared that do deal with food and film.

*

One variety of book that commonly arises out of issue-based subjects are joke or gag books such as the truly humorous Cluck! The True History of Chickens in the Cinema,¹ which provides an alphabetical film-by-film account of the appearances of chickens in film, rating them on a scale of one-to-four chicken icons from "elementary incident" to "awesome consequence." Another strain of

¹. Jon-Stephen Fink, Cluck!: The True Story of Chickens in the Cinema (London: Virgin Books, 1981).

issue-based film books are picture-books such as Le Cinéma en fumée,² that presents highly stylised black-and-white images of cigarettes and smokers in cinema. Basically it is a celebratory "coffee table" book, comprised of stills and publicity shots of stars in various poses with cigarettes, and divided into two sizeable thematic chapters, "Le pouvoir en fumée" and "L'amour en fumée", with subchapters that present stills in which cigarettes and smokers signify, for example, moments of happiness, doubt, or indifference. Such books make no attempt to compare the films they deal with in terms of period, nationality or genre, nor do they investigate aspects of the "issue" under scrutiny. These two books and others like them represent a trend toward lightness, superficiality and humour in presentations of issue-based studies. The mention of the subject "food and film" has often elicited initial incredulity, and even ridicule, on the part of people with whom I have talked about my research. Making the subject matter credible not only as a pursuit in itself but also and especially as a "contribution to knowledge" has been a continuous struggle throughout the writing of this dissertation.

Perhaps a more "serious," research-oriented approach is reflected in Ivan Butler's Religion in the Cinema.³ Butler's book is archival in nature and amounts to a chronological survey of

². Philippe Reynaert & Philippe Elhem, Le Cinéma en fumée, (Paris: Contrejour, 1990).

³. Ivan Butler, Religion in the Cinema (New York & London: Barnes & Co., 1969).

Western films somehow related to Christianity. Each chapter examines a designated religious category such as priests, nuns, saints, Jesus, and Bible stories. Within these categories Butler adheres to a strict chronological ordering of the films he analyses. From the outset, he makes no claims of expertise in the area of religion and the "survey" nature of his study is stated explicitly: "Obviously in a book of this length on so large a subject, there is not room for extended analyses of particular films" (p. 7). Butler's technique consists in briefly describing a film's plot, citing the director's and any of the principal actors' names, and then giving anecdotes about the film's production or distribution. Beyond this, Butler's book is devoid of any commentary about, for example, the differences between the four versions of the Salomé story, Cecil B. DeMille's propensity for filming religious subjects, or the reasons why priest stories were popular during a certain period. As such, Butler's book is a survey that barely goes beyond the scope of a catalogue. In fact, Religion in the Cinema lacks the rigour and discipline of a catalogue, as the author admits to failing to include every possible film and does not account for the gaps in his selection of films. Much more preferable, from a research standpoint, would in fact be a catalogue or encyclopaedia that lists full credits and provides brief synopses, without the chatty and ironic commentary with which Butler fills out his text.⁴ Although they may be of

⁴. Another example of a study similar in nature and scope to Butler's is Ronald Bergan's Sports in the Movies (London & New York: Proteus Books, 1982).

cinephilic and encyclopaedic interest, I do not consider any of the studies mentioned so far as plausible models for scholarly research and I would now like to turn to some that are.

In her article "Fate and the Family Sedan," Meaghan Morris focuses on the significance of cars in Australian cinema.⁵ She talks about cars in road movies and how they function within prevailing Australian myths of space, distance and the ever-imminent apocalypse-by-tidal-wave. Similarly, in his article "Blood on the Nash Ambassador: Cars in American Films," Eric Mottram provides a thorough review of the possible ways of considering cars in terms and methods familiar to film and cultural studies.⁶ The philosophy behind Mottram's article is that in film cars have symbolic and metaphorical functions beyond their practical use in society. Although he does not go into too much depth on any one specific point, he does look at cars from an auteurist perspective when considering Hitchcock and from a genre perspective when he discusses crime films. He also briefly mentions the significance of the relationships between cars and film stars, citing as examples Jackie Coogan, James Dean and Steve McQueen. Mottram also gives a brief account of how automobiles are used in certain films for their nostalgic value as cultural artefacts in *American Graffiti* and *Bonnie and Clyde*. Mottram

⁵. Meaghan Morris, "Fate and the Family Sedan," East-West Film Journal 4:1 (December 1989), pp. 113-134.

⁶. In Philip Davies and Brian Neve, eds., Cinema, Politics and Society in America (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), pp. 221-249.

always keeps the "national cinema" bent of his article in focus and concludes by saying that ". . .the automobile is coterminous with Americanism" (p. 247). Both Morris' and Mottram's articles reflect a concern for exposing and explaining cars as components of the iconographies and topographies of Australian and American national cinemas.⁷

Images of Alcoholism is perhaps the study that is closest in type to the one that I have chosen and which, in method and scope, fits into the scheme that I have adopted.⁸ It is a collection of articles that in fact are the proceedings of a conference devoted to the subject. Its main concern is to ascertain how images of alcoholics and alcoholism influence people's perceptions and subsequent actions. The collection has an explicit social and moral goal and sees itself as extremely functional, and hopes to reach out to a wide public.

The volume takes the reader step-by-step through the processes of perception and stereotype creation. The first step involves both an examination of the role of filmic/media representation and the mechanism of film's influence on public perceptions, and a consideration of films as cultural artefacts, specimens that can reveal the nature and the workings of society. The next two parts go on to analyse images of alcoholism in film and television,

⁷ Other perspectives of cars in films are illustrated by two books examining cars in post-war French cinema: John Orr's Cinema and Modernity (1995) and Kristin Ross' Fast Cars, Clean Bodies (1995).

⁸. Jim Cook and Mike Lewington, eds., Images of Alcoholism (London: British Film Institute, 1979).

taking into consideration only those films whose explicit theme is alcoholism. The subject matter being less vast and general than a topic such as religion, cars, or food, these analyses are thus developed around a "canon" of about fifteen films.

Using Images of Alcoholism as a model, I would now like to sketch out briefly some of the traits and characteristics of this type of study:⁹

- an obvious concern for the mutual influence between film and the topic under scrutiny, with constant reference to and critical support from studies and experts in the "other" domain. Contributions to Images of Alcoholism are drawn equally from media specialists and alcoholologists.
- an even more pressing concern with the popular perceptions and beliefs about the subject, e.g. the reigning stereotypes, and film's control and influence over perceptions. Richard Dyer's article "On the Role of Stereotypes" in the first part of the book foregrounds this preoccupation: ". . . we surely only have to be told that we are going to see a film about an alcoholic to know that it will be a tale either of sordid decline or of inspiring redemption" (p. 18).
- a quantitative assessment and a need to catalogue and classify

⁹. Space does not allow me to review all of the possible types of issue-based studies, but Images of Alcoholism condenses some of the best elements of many of them. For further consultation of such studies, see, for example, Hélène Puiseux, L'Apocalypse nucléaire et son cinéma (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1988); Glen and Krin Gabbard, Psychiatry and Cinema (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1987); and Joseph Daniel, Guerre et cinéma (Paris: Armand Colin, 1972).

the films under scrutiny, developing a "canon" of sorts for the subject in question. Images of Alcoholism, as well as most other issue-based studies, feature appendices that give plot synopses and full credits for the films under consideration.

- finally, and most importantly, an analysis of the cinematic conventions and codes that have developed to characterise each theme, consisting of typologies, topographies, filmic cues and methods, including mention of how cinema uses instances of this topic as a function of plot development. Images of Alcoholism highlights a number of approaches, all nestled within the concern for popular perceptions of alcoholism. In his "Overview" Mike Lewington describes four models for the filmic treatment of alcoholism: moral, biological, psychological and sociological (pp. 26-27), explaining why different models have been more prevalent in certain periods than in others. In "The Alcoholic as Hero" Marcus Grant analyses various filmic images of the drinker: ". . . the way in which the hero is seen drinking will provide a positive indication of his moral worth" (p. 31). There is also a gender critique in "Women, Alcohol and the Screen" by Judith Harwin and Shirley Otto.

*

Like cars, chickens, cigarettes and drinks, food is evident in many films, yet more significant in some films than in others. Many journalistic articles on food and film are chatty and humorous

in nature. Akin in spirit to the above-mentioned Le Cinéma en fumée and Cluck!: The True Story of Chickens in the Cinema, they tend, "lightly" and always in a celebratory manner, to concentrate on scenes and films in which food is a metaphor for sex.¹⁰ Other articles will review the myriad gastronomic and visual delights in the "canon" of "food films." Articles of this nature often appear around the release of a "food film" such as *Babette's Feast* or *Like Water for Chocolate*.¹¹

Research-oriented and scholarly articles written on the subject of food and film, despite their limited number, provide a variety of auteurist, genre, national cinema and period approaches:

In his "Love and Death and Food: Woody Allen's Comic Use of Gastronomy," Ronald LeBlanc offers an auteurist perspective on food and film by concentrating on the specific use of food in one film by Woody Allen.¹² LeBlanc examines food in Allen's oeuvre as the locus of the classical binary opposition between physical need and the intellect. Allen uses food as a comic device to show the demands of the stomach having prominence over intellectual activity. LeBlanc refers to precedents in literature for Allen's comic approach to gastronomy, aligning Allen with Rabelais,

¹⁰. For a good example of this kind of article see Ed Sikov, "Naked Lunch," Premiere (U.K Edition), (December 1994), pp. 66-69.

¹¹ See, for example, Matthew Fort, "The Courses of True Love," The Guardian 30-9-93, pp. 4-5.

¹². Ronald LeBlanc, "Love and Death and Food: Woody Allen's Comic Use of Gastronomy," Film/Literature Quarterly 17:1 (1989), pp. 18-26.

Cervantes, Fielding and Sterne. LeBlanc contends that in Allen's comic films food does not so much function to condemn bourgeois values, as with Swift, Balzac or Flaubert, as it does to celebrate "the pure physical joy of life and its primitive sensual pleasures" (p. 18). Throughout his analysis, LeBlanc not only refers to eighteenth-century Russian literary models that inspired *Love and Death*, but also to other instances of similar food use in Allen's comic films.

In "A Consuming Passion: Food and *Film Noir*,"¹³ J.P. Telotte analyses the symbolic import, in terms of consumption and appetite, of eating and food in *film noir* vis-à-vis its most notorious icon, the *femme fatale*. More interestingly, Telotte also examines the prevalence of the diner as the preferred setting in many films of this genre: ". . . the diner and café provide more than a structural frame for *The Killers*; they also give iconic binding to a complex play of desires that powers this narrative and threatens to consume its characters" (p. 400). Telotte places the diner within the context of the genre in two ways. First, from a narrative point of view, it is a sign of mobility, uprootedness, poverty, and of the disintegration of the home and family. Secondly, from a visual perspective, it forms part of the expressionistically photographed, darkly-lit, claustrophobic spaces common to the genre.

Of the twenty articles and interviews of various length and

¹³. J.P. Telotte, "A Consuming Passion: Food and *Film Noir*," Georgia Review 39:2 (Summer 1985), pp. 397-410.

depth in the French film journal Vertigo devoted to eating and film,¹⁴ many cling too closely to the link between food and film, forcing the notion, albeit playfully, that eating and film-going are analogous activities that "naturally" go together. However, the collection of articles also provides a mix of auteurist approaches to Bunuel, Hitchcock, Greenaway and Truffaut, but focuses more on the analysis and description of scenes and moments from films as varied as *Le Rayon vert*, *Stagecoach*, *The Battleship Potemkin*, *Suddenly*, *Last Summer*, *The Leopard* and *Tokyo Story*. Daniel Serceau, in his piece on Renoir's *Le Caporal épinglé*, "Agapes, agapê" (pp. 89-93), perhaps best defines the aims and methods of undertaking a study of food and film: "A method has to be devised to classify meal scenes, or even the mere presence of food in the frame. Does food just sit before the protagonists' eyes or is it actually eaten? Is it liquid, solid or both? Is it raw or cooked? Is it linked to joy or pain? To birth or death? To abundance or lack? . . ." (p. 89).

In order to respond fully to Serceau's questions, it is necessary to examine food's role in society very closely, in a series of back and forth movements, schematised by Andrew Tudor in Image and Influence,¹⁵ between the micro and the macro, between the scene and the film, the film and its director, period, studio or genre, between the cinematic culture and general culture,

¹⁴. Vertigo 5 (1990), "Le Cinéma à table."

¹⁵. Andrew Tudor, Image and Influence (London: Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1974), Chapter 6, "Patterns of Culture."

between food and society, and, finally, between food and film. Binarisms have been a source of inspiration for much of the writing on food and film: Serceau's questions are based on classic binarisms; Claude Beylie, in his Vertigo article on Hitchcock (pp. 59-66), follows on Roger Leenhardt and talks about filmmaking practices in terms of "la tradition grasse" and "la tradition maigre;" Caroline Benjo ("Borborygmes," pp. 6-12) describes films as being "bien élevés" (well brought up) or "mal élevés" (badly brought up); LeBlanc bases his study of *Love and Death* on the differences between the needs of the stomach and those of the head.

The present dissertation is not devoid of certain binary structures either. It is divided into three chapters, that take as their point of departure issues important when considering food, moving from more normal, everyday occurrences of food in film to the more spectacular and outrageous in the following sequence: "Food and National Identity," "Food and the Feminine," and "Alimentary Delinquency." Each chapter has two main period divisions: the first chapter compares French cinema of the pre- and post-World War II periods; chapter II discusses films made before the Women's Movement of the late 1960s/early 1970s and films that came after that period; the third and last chapter talks about its films as distinctly classical or post-classical phenomena. It will be my contention in this thesis that food generally became more interesting and more self-consciously depicted in cinema in the "post" periods analysed in each chapter - post-war, post-feminist, post-classical. The guiding notion behind each chapter and the

shift on which it hinges are ideas put forth by Claude Fischler and other food sociologists and historians who maintain that eating practices in the West have recently undergone a complex transformation, due mainly to the evolution from agrarian to post-agrarian societal modes.¹⁶ The agrarian period was marked by what we now, often nostalgically, refer to as "traditional": meals were family-centred and prepared and taken at home, food came from the immediate locality and its availability depended on the seasons and the weather. According to Fischler we have now entered a post-agrarian period of irredeemable "gastro-anomy" and "bio-cultural crisis" which, for better or worse, is characterized by difficulties in accepting and defining ourselves by what and how we eat. As Deane Curtin puts it, "Driving through the fast food pick-up lane is something that we do; it would be frightening to think it defines who we are."¹⁷ Each chapter of this dissertation will

¹⁶. On the current "bio-cultural crisis," see Claude Fischler, L'Homnivore (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1990) and "Gastronomie et gastro-anomie: sagesse du corps et crise bioculturelle de l'alimentation moderne," Communications 31 (1979), pp. 189-210; On the travesty of contemporary Italian and European cookery, Piero Camporesi, The Magic Harvest: Food, Folklore and Society. Joan Krakover Hall, trans. (Oxford: Polity Press, 1993); and for critiques of fast food in Canada and the U.S. respectively, Ester Reiter, Making Fast Food (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991) and George Ritzer, The McDonaldization of Society (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 1993).

¹⁷. Deane W. Curtin, "Food/Body/Reason," in Deane W. Curtin and Lisa M. Heldke, eds., Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 13. Among other signals of the slippage of tradition, one can note the emphasis Hillary Clinton, in her child-raising guide It Takes a Village, places on the effort that she and her family make to have at least one daily "family"

delineate different manifestations of the shift described by Fischler and others, which amounts to a shift away from certain ideas of tradition, be they culinary or cinematic.

meal at the White House, "Bill, Chelsea and I try to sit down at least one meal a day together, usually dinner." (Quoted in Douglas Besharov's review, The Guardian Weekly 18-02-96, p. 18).

CHAPTER ONE

FOOD and NATIONAL IDENTITY in the CINEMA:

The Case of French Cinema

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Question of National Cinemas

In this chapter I will examine changes in the functions and representations of food and eating in French film from the pre-war to the post-war periods, but before going into the specific case of French cinema, it will be necessary to mention a number of points raised in recent critical debates on the question of national cinemas. Recent extra-cinematic studies on nations and national identity have prompted film critics in turn to reconsider notions of nationhood and the cinema.¹ There has been an exasperation among film critics at the seeming facility with which national labels are placed onto films, and all of the givens, meanings, and connotations (often stereotypical) that spontaneously flow from these appellations. Commonly held views on national cinemas are often based on national film "canons" that actually represent only

¹ See, for example, the influential Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism by Benedict Anderson (London & New York: Verso, 1990) and Nation and Narration edited by Homi K. Bhabha (London & New York: Routledge, 1990).

a fractional segment of the film culture within a particular nation-state. There is a need to provide a fuller, more complete definition of the national in the cinema.

According to Andrew Higson, a first step in defining the "national" in cinema is to note where and how coherence and unity are manifested. Higson has delineated four large areas through which it is possible to perceive the "nation" in films:

- economics and geography, i.e., where a film is produced and where the money comes from to finance it.
- film culture, as manifested via the exhibition and filmgoing tendencies and traditions of a nation's spectators. What films do they watch and what other films do they base their readings and pleasures on?
- narrative discourses and themes, especially via other conveyors of national culture such as language, literature, and other "national texts" such as historical moments, myths, folk history.
- in opposition to Hollywood, i.e., how is a national cinema legitimised vis-à-vis Hollywood, what is the counter-balancing role of art cinema and popular cinemas.²

Throughout these four areas one can see at work the hegemony that is required to impose the idea of unity and coherence that the concept "nation" implies. This hegemony itself expresses a generally accepted notion of nationhood and suggests how cinemas perpetuate and construct versions of dominant culture. In the first area mentioned above, hegemony arises from the blatant power

² Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinemas", Screen 30:4 (Autumn 1989), pp. 36-46.

of capital: who has money can make films and show them to film audiences. Stemming from this is a geographical hegemony wherein Hollywood and Paris are cinematic "centres" as opposed to Baltimore or Bordeaux. Hegemony thus gets reflected in the very fabric of films themselves, explaining how the Western seemed to develop so "effortlessly" as an American genre (if the U.S. film industry had settled in Florida, what other genre might have developed?), and, for example, why Paris is the preferred locale in French films. The geographic question is linked directly to the influence of capital: it has usually been cheaper to shoot a film in or close to centralised studios than on location.

Secondly, film culture is a factor of the availability of films and the film education that a specific national audience receives. States can be involved to a greater or lesser extent in the promotion of certain types of film culture through, for example, the institutionalisation of film archives, film museums, film schools, funding for filmmakers and national film theatres. In this case hegemony in film culture is a state hegemony that will most likely promote cinema as an art and treat filmmakers with the respect and veneration of other "national" artists. Bringing film into the pantheon of the "arts" imposes a class specificity and raises questions of accessibility and "readability." A nation's film culture also has a popular side that is not very visible from abroad and that in fact does not usually export well and is usually downplayed and/or ignored by state-sponsored institutions. Film criticism, film clubs and star systems are other possible

components of a nation's film culture.

In the third area, literature, language and history have been the traditional bearers and projectors of national identity through film. This has been at the expense of other "minor" aspects of the life of a nation such as clothing, manners, gender and class relations, as well as other facets of everyday life such as food which are just as present in films but far less glorious and not as readily celebrated.

In considering the fourth category mentioned above, it is not difficult to imagine how all national cinemas are affected by the hegemonising force of mainstream Hollywood film, so much so that to a certain extent all national cinemas are weighed up against Hollywood or Hollywood-style films. In this way all national cinemas are marginal to Hollywood.

However, within each domestic film context, hegemony will inevitably work to exclude potential marginal voices in favour of the one, national voice. This is the very hegemonising nature of the nation itself, which, instead of fostering a multiplicity of ways of being national, favours and tries to impose one singular idea of the nation. This extends to the filmmaking practices within a particular nation-state, where film studios and cinema schools, for example, impose specific practices and methods of conceiving and consuming films. The coherence and unity perceived in a nation and its cinema is the same that is imposed upon the nation as a whole.

Inward- and outward-looking views on a nation and its cinema

may diverge. For example, Ginette Vincendeau has pointed out the dichotomy in French and "foreign" perceptions of the *gascons* in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, whose connotations viewed in the French context ("a cliché vision of men from one area") and from the context outside of France ("simply a sign of Frenchness") vary considerably. In the former case the *gascons* are marginal and folkloric figures of the French nation-state, much as the Marseilles inhabitants of Pagnol's films, while from outside of France they become the very emblems of Frenchness.³ Films can thus be producers and constructors of certain aspects of national identity and national myths. Just as food "traditions" can be created and nostalgia produced seemingly out of nowhere, without any basis "in reality," so too can national myths be actively fabricated and perpetuated in films. Films are the result of the choices made about what details to show and what details not to show, and reflect "certain ideas" of societies.

In the following discussion on food and French national cinema, I will remain mainly within the third category mentioned above. It is in this category that "cinema inserts itself alongside other cultural practices"⁴ and where myths of the nation are likely to be mobilised. Here I will try to adopt an approach that sets food in French films against existing discourses on cultural identity and traditions. Within this category I will be

³ Ginette Vincendeau, "Gérard Depardieu: The Axiom of Contemporary French Cinema," *Screen* 34:4 (Winter 1993), p. 361.

⁴ Andrew Higson, op. cit., p. 43.

paying close attention to how cultural identity is transmitted and constructed and how film interacts with other indicators of nation-ness such as language, literature, and, in this case, food. As we will see in the next section on food, the same issues of capital, geography, education, culture and hegemony are essential factors in understanding food's role in society.

B. Food As Conveyor of French National Identity

The "nation" would have people from the same state sharing common attitudes, habits, customs and food. Benedict Anderson has shown how artificial and constructed modern nation-states are. Nonetheless, nations persist and food has its role in the construction and perpetuation of the imagined communities that make up the geo-politico-cultural map. Food can certainly have the same role allotted by Anderson to the printed press and newspapers, which are read simultaneously across a broad geographic space.⁵ According to Anderson, the moment of reading the newspaper forms a link between people who might otherwise have nothing in common. The newspaper gives them not only a common language, but also a specific idiom in that language, a common sense of the important events of the "imagined community," and the common ritual of taking in the news at the same moment as others in the nation. Food, at least in its traditional, agrarian role, can have this same mediating and bonding role in a community, as people eat products

⁵ Benedict Anderson, op. cit., p.74.

that come from the same farms and markets, use similar preparation methods, and take their meals at the same time. This is more apparent during periods of national holidays and festivals, when menus and rituals are more likely to be prescribed by both familial and societal traditions. Food can thus be a certain measure of nation-ness and can be used as a testing ground for communal rituals as well as the depth and potential of harmony in the family.

In contemporary France, more than in other Western countries, food is an important link in a larger undertaking that promotes continuity and permanence in "French" cookery and eating habits, thus creating a strong filiation between the French nation and its food. Despite the many changes in food culture in France since the Renaissance, each successive culinary wave has claimed to be guided by the same principles of harmony, simplicity and tradition.⁶ A nation's food culture can be considered under the same light as its film culture, and Higson's criteria for gauging the national in film can also be applied as a barometer when it comes to food. Coherence and unity in France's food culture can be found in a number of distinct areas.

First of all, simply in terms of what is eaten and how it is cooked. Sources of heat, cooking fats, as well as prestige and staple foods have long distinguished cultures from one another. Although modernisation and rationalisation have eroded many

⁶. Stephen Mennell, "Food and Wine," in Malcolm Cook, ed., French Culture Since 1945 (New York & London: Longman, 1993), p. 182.

particularities, many still remain firmly anchored in French habits and lifestyles. For example, despite the currently widespread use of seed oils, France can still be broken down geographically according to the preferred cooking fats of each region, revealing a France of goose fat in the Southwest, a France of lard in the East, a France of butter in the Northwest, and a France of olive oil in the South. Holidays, vacations and other periods of celebration and commemoration in which food has a significant role reveal national traditions and traits, and, in the words of Barthes, "(b)y way of a thousand detours, food permits him (the Frenchman) to insert himself daily into his own past and to believe in a certain culinary "being" of France."⁷

Secondly, one could look at how information about food is circulated in French society. Eating and cooking in contemporary France has been re-inforced by an industry of gastronomy that buttresses the ambitions and pretensions of *haute cuisine*. This industry is composed of: 1) a tradition of gastronomic literature, related to travel literature, with treatises on eating and *la bonne chère*, as well as accounts of memorable meals, by such authors as Brillat-Savarin, Grimod de la Reynière, and Curnonsky; 2) an active and popular gastronomic press, consisting of guides, and articles in both general and specialised magazines; 3) an ever-increasing range of cookbooks and cooking implements; and 4) a veritable star

⁷. Roland Barthes, "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption," in Elborg Forster & Robert Forster, eds., European Diet from Pre-Industrial to Modern Times (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 55.

system - consisting of cooks such as Paul Bocuse and Joël Robuchon, restaurant critics and guide publishers Michelin and Gault & Millau, and restaurants themselves such as the Parisian restaurant *Le Train bleu*, which has been classified as a historical monument.

Finally, Higson states that national cinemas can be considered in opposition to Hollywood. This trope can equally be applied to a nation's foodmaking practices if we substitute a term such as "McDonaldization" in place of Hollywood. "McDonaldization" is a term coined by George Ritzer to designate trends, incarnated by the working methods of *McDonald's* restaurants, in which the capitalist concept of rationalization is taken to its logical conclusion, resulting in the dehumanised "iron cage" effect envisaged by Weber in his critique of bureaucracy. Ritzer uses the fast food restaurant as a model, but he sees McDonaldization as a trend developing in other aspects of Western society - education, work, leisure, and travel.⁸ *McDonald's* and fast food have indeed become a symbol of America to the eyes of much of the world. As more and more people in the West (as well as in the entire world) eat regularly in fast food-type restaurants,⁹ fast food becomes a referent against which other "national" foods are measured. Higson's "opposition to Hollywood" barometer is applicable especially if we take Hollywood and *McDonald's* both as mainstream

⁸ George Ritzer, The McDonaldization of Society (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 1993), *passim*.

⁹ See George Ritzer, *op. cit.*, p. xiii; and Claude Fischler on the increase of the number of "food contacts" per day and the decrease of the number and length of meals taken with members of the family in "Gastronomie et gastro-anomie," *op. cit.*, p. 203.

U.S.-inspired hegemonic models. If being unlike Hollywood evokes particular connotations when considering a film (in terms of narrative construction, use of time and space, rhythm, marketing), being unlike *McDonald's* is also accompanied by a series of automatically ensuing assumptions. In critiquing or countering Hollywood's influence, national specificities are set against the hegemony of film styles and narratives perpetrated by Hollywood and other subsequent mainstream film industries. National specificities in foodmaking customs and habits are also brought forth as arguments against McDonaldization, and also as ways of seeing and appreciating a nation's foodmaking practices.

In critiquing or countering fast-food restaurants, arguments try to make indigenous foodmaking practices stand out by romanticising the past as a non-rationalised period when people took the time to prepare and eat home-cooked meals together, when restaurant dinners were lengthy and elaborate, and food itself was more "natural" and of high quality. In the aura of such romanticism, the drawbacks of the hardships and hard work of acquiring food and keeping it fresh in the past have been overlooked. In films that do show eating in the past, conservation and supply problems are non-existent, as past eating is often presented in upper class environments of finery, elegance and abundance, as in, for example, *The Age of Innocence* (Martin Scorsese, 1993) or *Un Dimanche à la campagne* (Bertrand Tavernier, 1984).

The concept of gastronomy has long been connected to tourism

and the upper-classes, and many eating habits and customs in France today (especially table manners) have trickled down from aristocratic and bourgeois dining rooms over the years since the Revolution. The commemorative function of gastronomy is thus imbued on the one hand with nobility and finesse. On the other hand, travel and tourism inevitably led to an awareness and an appreciation of regional culinary differences, which were incorporated into the "French" gastronomic canon - e.g., cassoulet, ratatouille, crêpes, choucroute. These "country" and "peasant" foods, however, do not clash with the above ideas of gastronomy, which also commemorate home-cooked dishes, proudly known as *la cuisine du terroir*.

In the traditional Western philosophical discourses of mind/body separation, foodmaking and eating are physical, non-intellectual activities. Eating and cooking are not enlightening and do not give access to Knowledge. This perception has in turn resulted in the devalorised position of foodmaking and eating. Cooking is an activity performed by women and/or servants. It is considered more respectfully only when men become "chefs" and cooking is something that is studied, and involves a process of creation.

While most French people are not full-time *gastronomes*, gastronomy is pervasive and influential, and its resonances and mythologies are felt wherever food is present. However, the food system in France is far from hermetic, and traditional notions of cuisine are constantly threatened, attacked and inspired from the

outside, by other cuisines of the world. This has had an impact on the French restaurant scene, as well as on the menus of domestic cooks. If they can somehow conform to existing ideas of tradition in French cooking, these other cuisines, like the regional cuisines of France, are not perceived negatively. The sharpest criticism has been brought against industrial food processing methods, fast food and frozen food. These show neglect for cooking methods and fresh ingredients and engender informality and individualism in eating habits. These techniques/influences are labelled variously as modernisation, industrialisation, and Americanisation, in short, as coming from elsewhere.

C. Food in French Cinema

In the upcoming sections, I will first take a look at representations of food and eating in pre-war French cinema. In the pre-war period, France was still mainly agrarian in its outlook on food and eating. Eating was yet to be troubled by modernisation, and the slippage of traditions, and acquiring and eating food was very much a communal activity. However, before focusing on the pre-war period, I would like to make some general comments about eating and food in French film and about the most durable icon associated with eating and food, the table.

In "Deciphering a Meal," Mary Douglas has demonstrated how every meal incorporates and repeats the same patterns and structures of other meals, based on each society's conception of a

"real meal."¹⁰ This echoing principle between meals holds true in depictions of meal scenes in film as well, for where there is one meal scene, there is often another following very closely, thus allowing the different meals to play off and echo each other. For instance, the presence of a second meal may serve to show routine or ritual, as in the brief family dinner sequences that punctuate *Trop belle pour toi* (Bertrand Blier, 1989), or the *paupiettes* that are repeatedly offered to the protagonist of *Tatie Danielle* (Etienne Chatiliez, 1990). The second meal may also illustrate the deterioration or togetherness of relationships as in *A nos amours* (Maurice Pialat, 1983) or *Touchez pas au grisbi* (Jacques Becker, 1954), or the social and/or psychological differences between two eating groups, such as the two picnicking groups in *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (Jean Renoir, 1959) or the Groseille and Le Quesnoy families in *La Vie est un long fleuve tranquille* (Etienne Chatiliez, 1988). The "other" meal might not be presented at all but may only be talked about or suggested, such as the dried fruit and mineral water diet that the uptight judge played by Michel Simon in *Circonstances atténuantes* (Jean Boyer, 1939) evokes while eating a garlic omelet and rabbit stew, or the "missed" meals of the villagers in *La femme du boulanger* (Marcel Pagnol, 1938) who, because of the village baker's chagrin over his wife's infidelity, are deprived of bread and are thus in constant anguish about not being able to have what they consider "proper" meals.

¹⁰. Mary Douglas, Implicit Meanings (London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 250.

C.1. The Table

Different expressions such as poetic realism, psychological realism, and formalist realism, for example, have all been coined by critics to describe the various epochs of French cinema, and although these terms refer to evolving trends and styles in French film, the recurring element observed for each period has been realism. Representations of food and eating in French film confirm this preoccupation with realism. In French film food is more often than not firmly inscribed within elaborately developed social schemas that are recognizable in French social hierarchy. Whether in or out of films, food requires *mise-en-scène*, and the details in many meal scenes add not only to psychological portraits and characterisations but also extend to broader social issues as well. Throughout all meal scenes in French film the table setting is the most common icon. The table literally grounds meal scenes in reality and allows for identification with and recognition of familiar surroundings. In French film, the table becomes the coherent frame around which a meal is structured and made understandable, making it a specifically French place in French cinema, as opposed, for example, to the presence of the fast food or diner counter in U.S. cinema or what "eating on one's knees" or in a fish and chip shop might signify in British films.

As such a familiar aspect of everyday life, the table can offer the narrative and dramatic advantage of establishing social milieus and relationships rather economically. Taking as an example the opening first communion banquet scene of Marcel Carné's

1938 *Hôtel du nord*, Michel Marie has described the "classical" set-up of a typical table scene:

- an establishing shot that allows the spectator to situate each character's position at the table;
- subsequent shot choices that are controlled, organised and motivated by the dialogue;
- dialogue that is choreographed so that offscreen dialogue is rare, words are clearly understood, no one is interrupted and the conversation flows without break or pause. Dialogue rarely overlaps, each character is given his/her turn to speak. Each line of dialogue is clearly attributed to a character and clearly directed to other diners. This is confirmed by shot/reverse shot patterns and/or the direction of characters' looks;
- unobtrusive ambient sounds.

Marie points out that the mise-en-scène and editing of this opening scene are characterised by causally motivated dialogue, narrative clarity, coherent imagery, continuity editing, and invisibility of the enunciative apparatus - all qualities inherent in cinematic classicism.¹¹ What is most interesting and important to note is how these rules of classicism are aligned with the "classical" rules of table etiquette. In a way, the films during these scenes do not stare, do not fidget, and do not interrupt people when they are speaking.

¹¹. Michel Marie, "De la première communion au mariage," in Aumont, J. & J. L. Leutrat, Théorie du film (Paris: Editions Albatros, 1980), p. 184. Marie bases his definition of cinematic classicism on the notions of André Bazin.

A further example from *L'Auberge rouge* (Claude Autant-Lara, 1954) illustrates this classicism at the table. The meal scene that takes place between the different travellers who have stopped at the inn was apparently filmed with two cameras - one at each end of the long rectangular table on each side of which the six characters are symmetrically seated. Many shot permutations are possible from these two positions: shots straight down the length of the table that encompass all the characters on both sides of the table; the cameras also pivot diagonally and track in or out in different combinations of one-, two-, or three-shots. From these camera dispositions the table is completely, unobtrusively and discreetly "covered," and a limited number of framing options can be adopted according to the dramatic needs of the scene. In all cases the choice of shots is dictated by the dialogue and the scene is centred around the actions and reactions of the monk played by Fernandel, and most of the reverse shots return to him. The editing does not jump from one position to another without either following or anticipating the dialogue.

Although the classical models described above are predominant in the filming of table scenes, other films will diverge from this classical norm. I would like to go back to what Mary Douglas has said about how, when eating a meal, we are reminded of other meals, based especially on what we deem the proper or "classical" model of a meal. Just as different meals are judged and assessed according to how much they conform to or diverge from the classical model, which is in fact simply a set of norms that can be followed,

rearranged or discarded, meal scenes in French film also vary from each other in a similar way, based on the standard described above.

II SCENARIOS OF CONFIRMATION: THE PRE-WAR PERIOD

A. The Table as Popular Space

I would first like to describe a certain model of the public eating space that was established in French cinema during the 1930s. In these cases we will find that the table is clearly constructed as a "popular" space. Although it would be far too simplistic to equate this period of French cinema with depictions of the community's confirmation, the number of French films that reveal eating communities as harmonious and collectively-oriented is weighted heavily in the 1930s. Such depictions are in line with other French films of the 1930s, often referred to as the cinema of the Popular Front, the name of the governing left coalition in France from 1936 to 1938. During this period, and the 1930s in general, there was a clear trend which favoured the confirmation of the eating community. Critics have analysed the frequency of depictions of leisure activities in popular French films of the 1930s, with their preponderance of settings in cafés, dance halls and music halls, and activities such as drinking, singing, playing cards and other games.¹² Eating in films of the 1930s can be inscribed within the context of these other leisure activities,

¹². Ginette Vincendeau, "From the Bal Populaire to the Casino: Class and Leisure in French Films of the 1930s," Nottingham French Studies 31:2 (Autumn 1992), pp. 52-69, passim.

their main functions being not only to show a group of people enjoying themselves and participating in the same communal activity, but also to bind the film audience together through the representations of these collective rituals. Although their frequency is reduced in comparison with other types of leisure activities, meal scenes in the 1930s are similarly developed around large communities and groups. Consequently, one important aspect of the iconography of eating in French film is that it is generally and usually depicted as a communal activity and people are not frequently portrayed eating alone. Meals are not "performed" by individuals, but are used as expressions of a group of eaters, just as musical numbers in French films of this period rarely consisted of individual performances, preferring by far multi-participant song numbers (consider the song number in *Circonstances atténuantes*, in which each member of the restaurant/bistro community joins in to sing a stanza of the song, "Comme de bien entendu"). Like singing, eating is not a solitary activity, but presents an occasion for people to express togetherness.

Characters are mainly shown eating in public places, which, in these circumstances, are far less likely to be restaurants *per se* than multi-functional cafés or bistros, such as the *Aux Bons Vivants* café in *Circonstances atténuantes*, the collectively-operated riverside *guinguette* in *La Belle équipe* (Julien Duvivier, 1936), the impromptu café-turned-reception hall in *Hôtel du nord*, or the countryside *auberge* in *Une Partie de campagne* (Jean Renoir, 1936). All of these public spaces allow characters to participate

in a variety of leisure activities other than eating. The milieu that allows for the participation in so many diverse activities is a working-class one, and demonstrates eating and playing as areas in France in which the dominated classes can distinguish themselves from the dominant ones. Whereas before their food the upper classes strive for a restraint and sobriety that distances them from food and the physicality of the act of eating, the lower and working classes do not refrain from eating heartily and maintain an ethic of "convivial indulgence,"¹³ which is translated in these films not only by the lower-class and petit-bourgeois environments in which eating takes place, but also by character physiognomy, their physical approach to food and, notably, in the foods that they eat. The food has qualities and a "life" of its own, and dishes are straightforwardly presented without titles and frills, they are what they say they are, with neither luxury nor prestige. The tarragon omelet and fish fry of *Une partie de campagne*, the black pudding and various other sausages proudly on display in *La Belle équipe*, the community-binding bread of *La femme du boulanger*, and the garlic omelet, rabbit stew and red wine of *Circonstances atténuantes* are all common and simple foods that attest to the spirit of conviviality, simplicity, and the very goodness of the eaters.

An important, and omnipresent, figure in this type of convivial atmosphere is the *bon vivant*, whom Bourdieu describes as

¹³. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, Richard Nice, trans., (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 179.

"not just someone who is capable of eating and drinking: he is someone capable of entering into the generous and the familiar relationship that is encouraged and symbolised by eating and drinking together, in a conviviality which sweeps away restraints and reticence."¹⁴ The *bon vivant* described by Bourdieu is incarnated in the persona of Jean Renoir.

B. Case Study - Jean Renoir: *La Sagesse du corps*

"... Renoir is a fat Frenchman who loves to surround himself with a team of solid eaters and drinkers, merry people full of flesh. ."¹⁵

Having delineated some of the major trends of depictions of food and eating in pre-war French film, I would now like to focus on the work of Jean Renoir, who, although he was very much of an

¹⁴. Pierre Bourdieu, op. cit., p. 179.

¹⁵. Roger Leenhardt, Chroniques de cinéma (Paris: Editions de l'Etoile, 1986); quoted in Dudley Andrew, Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 299.

independent force in French cinema, can also easily serve "to illuminate the national cinema he contributed to."¹⁶ Jean Renoir cultivated the figure of the *bon vivant* described above by Bourdieu, willingly exuding a spirit imbued with gregariousness, generosity and joviality. In the films of Jean Renoir, food readily takes on its complete symbolic status and the table setting becomes a reflection of the social universe that shows the co-existence of, exchange and confrontation between different eating worlds. Renoir's eaters are of two types: those who eat foods that are out of touch with the times and the customs, who invariably choose the wrong foods at the wrong moments, and those who seem to naturally and innately choose the right foods, foods that are good for them not only physically but also morally.

Generally speaking, meals in Renoir's films are rarely depicted as everyday occurrences and usually take place in exceptional situations and places that tend to position the diners on common social ground, such as the prison camps of *La Grande illusion* (1937) and *Le Caporal épinglé* (1962), the picnics of *Partie de campagne* (1936) and *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1959), or the railmen's canteen of *La Bête humaine* (1938). On the surface at least, meals in such situations erase social differences between diners. In a prison camp everyone must eat the same food at the same time. Likewise, at a picnic, eating on the ground brings everyone to the same level and in many ways reverses normal eating etiquette. Nevertheless, Renoir often uses these opportunities

¹⁶. Dudley Andrew, op. cit., p. 275.

precisely to highlight social and psychological divisions. He will therefore frequently juxtapose two or more different meals for comparison between different types of eaters whose tastes reflect a certain world view. In their mealtime conversation about their eating habits at home, the upper-class officers of *La Grande illusion* find affinities with each other by speaking English and talking about posh cafés, restaurants and night spots such as Maxim's and Fouquet's, and the lower/working-class soldiers eat at the local bistro or at home. While the day-tripping Dufours in *Partie de campagne* have a *friture de Seine*, considered as tourist food, the two boatmen happily eat a simple tarragon omelet. Similarly, in the "upstairs/downstairs" schema of *La Règle du jeu*, the servants, literally downstairs, eat the same food as their masters, but in entirely different circumstances and complain about having to eat the over-abundant game from their masters' bloody shooting parties, while next door in the kitchen the cooks grudgingly prepare the evening's banquet for the masters. The professor and his picnic party in *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* attempt to have a ridiculously formal picnic with tables, cutlery and butlers, while the students eat with their hands by the river bank on blankets. In *Le Caporal épinglé* food ultimately ends up separating the "resistors" working on a farm from the "collaborators" with their tinned goods and soft jobs.

Despite the fact that eating is a common human necessity, each of the mealtime moments in these films establishes fundamental social and psychological differences within the eating communities.

However, whether the divisions exist between young and old, aristocrat and working class, servant and master, French and German, or Northerners and Southerners, difference is ultimately expressed as the classic Platonic dualism between nature on the one hand, and culture on the other. Although practically all of Renoir's eaters take great pleasure in eating, his protagonists are those characters who are more "natural" and who exude simplicity in their food tastes and habits. Although as such Renoir's "good eaters" are more often than not lower- or working-class characters, they are not always on the same side of the ideological fence, if we consider the lusty appetite of the upper-class lay-about Octave (played by Renoir himself) in *La Règle du jeu*, or the *nouveau riche* Rosenthal in *La Grande illusion*. What comes across as being of the utmost importance to Renoir the humanist is not so much the class allegiance of his protagonists, but their sense of vitality, compassion and solidarity, which are translated in their food tastes.

It would seem that certain Renoirian characters possess what Claude Fischler has termed a *sagesse du corps*, a natural, built-in ability to choose foods that provide a nutritionally balanced diet and to avoid those foods that would do them harm.¹⁷ Fischler applies this notion to modern nutrition and eating habits, but here I extend it to the moral and psychological state of the eater. Fischler's contention is that, due to industrialisation and

¹⁷ Claude Fischler, "Gastronomie et gastro-anomie: sagesse du corps et crise bioculturelle," *Communications* 31 (1979), pp. 189-210.

modernisation, Western eaters are losing their *sagesse du corps*. However, Renoir's protagonists choose those foods that are not only presumably nutritionally appropriate for their bodies, but also well-suited to their moral and psychological states. I will now examine this Renoirian *sagesse du corps* as a two-fold phenomenon: on the one hand, food arouses a *joie de vivre* that is linked to healthy sexuality as in, for example, the characters of Octave and Marceau in *La Règle du jeu*, the students in *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, or the cook Père Poulain and the dining boatmen in *Partie de campagne*. On the other hand, another type of social vitality linked to society and (male) camaraderie is evident through the representations of food in, for instance, *La Grande illusion* and *Le Caporal épinglé*. Renoir is an auteur whose work has spanned over the pre- and post-war periods. For the sake of the unity of their subject matter, and for the fact that each pair contains a film from the pre- and post-war periods, I will concentrate mainly on the two "picnic" films, *Partie de campagne* and *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, and two prison camp films, *La Grande illusion* and *Le Caporal épinglé*.

B.1. Picnics on the Grass: Food and the Sexual Body

When characters eat in Renoir's films, they are often making a statement about their sexuality. A robust appetite for food is positively likened to a healthy sexual appetite. Characters, many of whom are Renoir's protagonists, such as Octave and Marceau (Carette) of *La Règle du jeu*, the eponymous Boudu (Michel Simon) of

Boudu sauvé des eaux, the boatmen René (Georges Darnoux) and Rodolphe (Jacques Brunius) in *Partie de campagne*, and the group of Southern students of *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, all reveal a highly structured system that links sexual desire with the "popular" type of eating as described above in the "scenarios of confirmation." The above characters eat simple foods - omelets, fried eggs and ham, sausages - without frills and often with their hands, and their desire for sex is as "natural" as the foods they eat and the way they eat them. Renoir highlights the lusty nature of these mainly male characters by pairing them off with others, who, whether depicted as eating or not, have opposite natures - far less spontaneous and instinctive.

The servants' meal scene in *La Règle du jeu* proves to be part of the careful and systematic detailing of behaviour between the servants and their masters, the de la Chesnayses. During this scene, Marceau, the poacher who has just been hired into the de la Chesnaye household, arrives toward the end of the meal. A place is made for him at the table beside Lisette, the head housekeeper and wife of Schumacher, the gamekeeper. Marceau is immediately and overtly taken with Lisette, and a close-up focuses on him at the table as he hungrily eyes her while ardently eating slices of dried sausage with his hands. His activity as a poacher places him in direct contrast to Schumacher, whose job involves regulating and patrolling the hunting grounds. Although both have predatory occupations, Marceau works illegally with a trap, while Schumacher works legitimately with a gun. Of the two Marceau is the only one

to be shown avidly eating, and when Schumacher arrives to eat his lunch, the scene changes. Schumacher is part of the "establishment" while Marceau is an outsider who works against the world as it is ordered on the de la Chesnaye estate. Marceau's desire for the legally married Lisette is a continuation of his poaching activity, directed once again at Schumacher and his "property."

It is no surprise that at the end of the film Marceau is banished together with Octave, with whom he shares the same type of appetite. Octave expresses his hunger for food on different occasions throughout the film, and in the same breath, he will often make a lusty grab or comment towards one of the female housekeepers. At one point when he claims that he is not hungry, the others take this immediately as a sign that he is not feeling well. Like Marceau, Octave is also a sort of trespasser or poacher in the way that he desires women from both the downstairs group of servants and the upstairs group of masters. At the end of the film both Octave and Marceau are "set free" from the "suffocating structure"¹⁸ which cannot quite contain them and in which spontaneity is impossible.

Food more overtly denotes character sexuality and takes on more symbolic significance in *Partie de campagne* in which, once again, Renoir himself plays the role of the *bon vivant* Père Poulain, innkeeper/chef at the riverside inn where the Dufour family stop on their day-trip from Paris to spend the afternoon. A contrast is

¹⁸. Dudley Andrew, op. cit., p. 281.

set up between the Dufours, who have their lunch on the lawn, and two boatmen, René and Rodolphe, who also stop at the inn, but who take their meal inside. From their window-side table, they have a clear view of the picnicking Parisians. As already mentioned, the Parisians eat a *friture de Seine* (a fish fry) and rabbit, while René and Rodolphe are served a tarragon omelet brought to their table by Père Poulain himself. The fish fry denotes the Parisians as tourists. This is what Parisians eat when they come to the country and it is apparently a meal that Poulain routinely prepares for city folk looking for riverside exoticism. As such, it represents an institutionalised and controlled way of going from culture (the city) to nature (the country). This tourist version of nature is "domesticated," without surprises. On the other hand, the tarragon omelet, in all its simplicity, is an expression of Père Poulain's/Renoir's individuality. Although it is a fairly routine dish, it is prepared and served by Poulain with flair and verve. Père Poulain is obviously much happier to be able to make his omelet for the boatmen than he is to prepare the fish fry and rabbit stew for the Dufours, which he does grudgingly. As the two boatmen eat and gaze at the women, they have a conversation about the significance and moral consequences of amorous adventures. Serving the omelet himself with good humour directly from the pan, Poulain too gives his opinion of the women on the lawn, saying that he prefers the older, more experienced one, whom he calls a "nice piece" ("*un vrai morceau*"). Despite Henri's existential doubts, the two boatmen decide to "make a go" for the women after lunch.

In his dual role as chef and *metteur-en-scène*, Père Poulain/Renoir sets the scene for the subsequent "action" of the film. He does this literally and figuratively in one gesture, as it is Père Poulain who opens the window that allows the two men to look upon the two women joyously riding swings in the garden. The men at the table and the women on swings in the garden are all included in a single depth-of-field shot, emphasising the table setting as a stage of sorts. This is made further evident by a cut to a closer "under the skirts" shot of the women swinging. Rebecca Pauly reminds us that these latter voyeuristic images are no doubt inspired by stage shows in dance halls such as the *Folies Bergères* and the numerous turn-of-the-century paintings of the dance hall milieu.¹⁹ After the Parisians have finished their picnic, we see the two men among them happily snoozing away while the two women are lying about languorously alert, dreamily looking up at the clouds. With his food and drink, Renoir/Père Poulain has primed the women for their amorous afternoon adventures. While the meal puts the men to sleep, it invigorates, excites and energises the women, confirming Renoir in his role of "enabler."

Picnicking is also featured in Renoir's later *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* in which the contrasts between the southern students from the country and the northern urban professor encapsulates many of the classical (and stereotypical) dichotomies of French society: city vs. country, intellectual vs. worker, north vs. south, etc,

¹⁹ Rebecca Pauly, The Transparent Illusion (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), p. 145.

which can all be reduced to the basic mind/body dichotomy. In every one of the professor's actions at the beginning of the film, he comes across as a "mind" type - urban, elitist, intellectual, aloof, clumsy. In his eating practices he is distant and detached from his food. This is developed in the parallel picnic scenes in which the professor and his party set up tables and chairs with tablecloths and silverware whereas the students by the river eat with their hands from blankets on the ground. The professor is thus depicted as being dryly intellectual, incapable of physicality and unable to enjoy himself. A strong windstorm breaks up both picnics and whereas the professor and his party are completely disoriented and confused by the storm, the students take it as a cue to become amorous and pair off into couples. In his work as a scientist the professor tries to harness nature and control the uncontrollable. He even unsuccessfully tries to do this at his picnic with the chaotic results described above. This picnic scene shows that the professor is clearly not a "good eater" and through the course of the film, his character will go through a reversal.

It is in fact the characters who follow their instincts and who are less stringent as to rules and conventions who are the ones who have the most vitality and vigour in Renoir's films. Meals that inspire sexual desire are of the utmost simplicity - omelets, sausages, picnics. Picnicking is an inherently more sensual experience than regular dining at a table. People eat close to the ground in a horizontal position with the lower parts of their bodies, normally hidden by the table, exposed to the open air.

They are also close to their food in that they eat with their hands. The picnic is also more exciting because there is the possibility of unexpected, uncontrollable occurrences: e.g., insects and changes in the weather.

Although it shares many of the same themes as *Partie de campagne*, especially those that deal with nature and the arousal of sexual desire, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* is different in the way that it deploys its themes. Although both films overtly deal with the binarisms that traditionally shape ideas about French society, the later film creates oppositions that are seemingly irreconcilable, while the structures of *Partie de campagne* are less rigid and permit reversals. For example, the city folk are naive and rustic, while the country men are urbane and charming. The same is also true for *La Règle du jeu*, which is replete with role switching, misunderstandings and many cases of mistaken identity.

B.2. Eating and the Social Body

In this section I would like to take up the question of food and the social body and how, in certain films, Renoir forges links between eating and camaraderie. In his pre-war films Renoir has a tendency, as in other French films of this period, to create a sense of class solidarity within the eating group, as in the canteen scene of *La Bête humaine*, the breakfast scene among the quarry workers in *Toni*, or, although there is no eating of food *per se*, the worker's celebration in *Le Crime de M Lange*. However,

unlike many French films of the pre-war period, Renoir will also use meals to show differences, mainly class differences, within the eating group. Eating thus has a contradictory role but, in the end, Renoir still draws a line between "good" and "bad" eaters. I will first examine this contradictory situation as it appears in *La Grande illusion*.

There are, in all, nineteen "alimentary instances" in *La Grande illusion*,²⁰ ranging from entire sequences devoted to meals to very brief passing references to food. In a film dealing with prisoners of war, i.e. men who are deprived of the comforts of home, references to food are indeed likely to recur, if only to point to its shortage or absence. This is surely one of the basic functions of these instances in *La Grande illusion*. However, most of these scenes, sequences, or bits of dialogue related to food go beyond identifying this lack and mesh in with the film's larger themes.

The meal scene that I will concentrate on here is a central sequence of the film. It takes place shortly after the arrival of Maréchal (Jean Gabin) and de Boeldieu (Pierre Fresnay) in the prisoners' camp where they have been transferred. The French prisoners are all housed in the same barracks and organise a dinner to welcome the newcomers. Before the actual meal, a brief scene serves to portray the men as a cohesive group. We learn that the group of men includes an aristocrat, a *nouveau riche* business man,

²⁰ My source here is an illustrated copy of the script, Gérard Vaugeois, ed., Jean Renoir: La Grande Illusion (Paris: Balland, 1974).

a mechanic, a teacher, an engineer, and an actor. They thus represent a fairly composite, though entirely male, microcosm of French society. There is much emphasis on the portrayal of little routines and rituals to show the solidarity of the group. The war itself seems to be of relatively minor importance for the men here, and in the barracks an almost leisurely, country-club atmosphere prevails. Rosenthal (Marcel Dalio) receives generously stocked "care packages" from his family that allow the men to feast on a "sumptuous" menu of cognac, tinned sardines and peas, pâté with truffles, and chicken. Even though it is not actually the freshest of meals, it does manage to give them an all-important taste of home. While enduring the supposedly dire conditions of war, the prisoners do not miss any part of the "syntax" of the standard French meal.

The filming of this scene contrasts with a previous meal scene in the German officers' club, which is cut short by the arrival of a commemorative bouquet of flowers for a downed French airman. By contrast, later on in their own quarters the Frenchmen literally draw the blinds and are among themselves, eating their own food in their own way. The camera celebrates this rite, dancing playfully around the table, framing the men in different combinations and from varied angles. If the men are framed in many different combinations (even though there is a tendency to favour the two-shot of Maréchal and the school teacher), Renoir never fails to remind us of the group, explaining later in his memoirs that "the camera moves over the details of the scene without ceasing to link

up the whole until the sequence is ended."²¹

One of the oft-stated themes of the film is the commonality of all humans. In Renoir's own terms, *La Grande illusion* is about "the bringing together of men through their callings and common interests. . . ." ²² Indeed, the film depicts many occasions where men of different nationalities share things and help and encourage one another. However, neither the pleasure and playfulness of this scene nor the foodstuffs which the Frenchmen receive are shared with other prisoners. These rites are reserved exclusively for the French prisoners. This is further emphasised in an earlier scene in which German guards are bitterly sipping rations of watery cabbage soup and complaining that the prisoners, and notably the French prisoners, eat much better than they do. The alimentary practices of each nationality are thus strictly segregated.

This central meal sequence would confirm Pierre Sorlin's view that the film, although praised by critics of the left, can be interpreted as being nationalist and isolationist.²³ The meal scene is similar in structure and function to the later tunnel-digging scene that Sorlin discusses. Both scenes begin by panning from man to man, each involved in a specific activity, which is later revealed to be for the same common purpose. These visual

²¹. Jean Renoir, My Life and My Films, Norman Denny, trans. (New York: Atheneum, 1974), p.157.

²². Jean Renoir, My Life and My Films, op. cit., p. 280.

²³ Pierre Sorlin, Film in History (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), pp. 153-155.

images of togetherness and a unified France are images of isolation as well. In the meal scene, the French prisoners have separated themselves from the world around them, creating a "French" space for themselves despite the real and significant differences in the group. They participate in a culture-specific ritual that is recognisable and familiar to them all - that includes the setting of the table and the syntax of the meal. The other nationalities around them serve to "enhance the originality"²⁴ of the French. Sorlin claims that the film relies on stereotypical images of, notably, the Germans as disciplined, orderly and inhuman in order to better portray the French as clever individualists who are "capable of preserving their freedom even in prison."²⁵ Following Sorlin's argument, the French prisoners in this scene clearly distinguish themselves from the other nationalities that are nonetheless overtly presented throughout the film. However, during the meal, which is clearly appreciated by all the Frenchmen, the conversation turns to the places where they eat at home. At this point, as at every other significant moment in the film, social differences between the men are made explicit. Two different "camps" of eaters emerge: on the one hand, de Boeldieu and Rosenthal, who frequent the ultra-chic Maxim's and Fouquet's and, on the other, Maréchal and the provincial school teacher, the former preferring the local bistro, while the latter eats at his brother-in-law's when in Paris.

²⁴ Pierre Sorlin, Film in History, op. cit., p. 153.

²⁵ Pierre Sorlin, op. cit., p. 153.

In one instance the scene projects a unified image of the group as its members eat the same meal and willfully and gladly participate in the same ritual. At the same time, the group is shown as truly fractioned and divided by their tastes. Sorlin explains that, as the film manages to be isolationist/nationalist and universalist at the same time, it has been praised and appropriated by critics on both ends of the political spectrum. The Right commended its defense of the French nation against other European nations; on the other hand, *La Grande illusion* is, in the words of Dudley Andrew, "true to many Popular Front themes"²⁶ and the Left praised the film's exaltation of universalist themes. While embracing the myths of France and food's ability to unify the French nation, Renoir also shows food as drawing lines and creating divisions between French people, showing eating as ultimately contradictory. As Keith Reader notes, ". . . the film as it stands provides sufficient evidence of the disunities and contradictions within French society to make its universal humanist aspirations appear highly precarious."²⁷

In Renoir's later prison camp film, *Le Caporal épinglé*, the lines drawn between different eaters are more distinct and eating is far less contradictory. In this film it is World War II that is a moment of exception that brings together French prisoners of war in labour camps in Germany. Although by the time of the film's

²⁶. Dudley Andrew, op. cit., p. 292.

²⁷ Keith Reader, Cultures on Celluloid (London, Quartet Books, 1981), p. 133.

production the prison camp film had become a sub-genre of the war film (such as *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (David Lean, 1957), *Stalag 17* (Billy Wilder, 1953), *The Great Escape* (John Sturges, 1963), *Le Caporal épinglé* cannot help but invite comparisons with Renoir's earlier prison camp film *La Grande illusion*. Among the French prisoners, food, as in *La Grande illusion*, has the necessary function of uniting them. However, it is not until the prisoners move from hard labour camps to softer administrative jobs that they start to barter with the guards for much-prized tinned goods and liquor. As opposed to *La Grande illusion*, where fraternisation with the guards was glamourised to show the rusefulness of the French prisoners, in *Le Caporal épinglé* the "ruse" quickly becomes perceived as a sign of collaboration with the enemy. The Corporal (Jean-Pierre Cassel) sees the increasing luxuriousness of his friend Ballochet (Claude Rich)'s acquisitions as a sign of accepting the German occupation of France, of collaborating with the occupant. In depicting the Second World War, Renoir could no longer show prison camp politics as he had done in *La Grande illusion*, and although one officer does cooperate with the camp administrators, in a scene where the German and French officers warmly trade stories about how various infractions are punished in their respective armies, this is not at all viewed positively by the other prisoners.

After the Corporal returns from his first punishment for trying to escape, he finds his old friend Ballochet, who immediately sends a guard to fetch a bottle of *schnaps*. In the

next scene, Ballochot is warming up a casserole of tinned cassoulet (a hearty popular dish from the southwest of France traditionally made from baked beans and goose) for the Corporal. While stirring the steaming cassoulet, Ballochot explains why he has stopped trying to escape, claiming that he has "retired from the fray" and has become openly opportunistic. He says that he has more freedom in the labour camp than in France where he is a "slave of his habits." He invites the Corporal to join him in his separate world until the war ends. The Corporal, still exhausted from his stay in the punishment camp, allows Ballochot to spoon-feed him the cassoulet, and can only state that it is good and warm. Some time later, once the Corporal regains his strength, he realises that Ballochot's resignation is a form of collaboration, and storms into Ballochot's quarters to confront him. Ballochot offers to open a tin of goose liver with champagne. The Corporal, enraged, sweeps Ballochot's tins off of the shelf. The separate and isolated world of the French that was so celebrated in the First World War in *La Grande illusion* is condemned here as collaboration in the Second World War.

These scenes are illustrative of an elaborate system in which food is on the front lines of a moral battle. It is clearly the goose liver and champagne that disgust the corporal, whereas he allowed himself to be comforted and warmed by the cassoulet. The difference between goose liver and cassoulet is a difference that is firmly inscribed in French gastronomic hierarchy and mythology. Cassoulet is a slowly-stewed bean-based preparation made from

available ingredients (there exist high-class versions with goose or duck meat and lower-class versions with lard). However, beans make cassoulet what it is and they give cassoulet its popular, hearty, peasant appeal. Cassoulet is the perfect example of *cuisine du terroir*, a distinctly regional dish from the Southwest of France that has worked its way to menus of three-star restaurants as well as in various up-market and down-market tinned versions on supermarket shelves. It is a "frank" food, clearly of peasant origins. In its tinned version, it offers a frugal yet nourishing meal that still harks back to grandmothers slowly stirring pots simmering over hearths. On the other hand, the mythology of goose liver is completely antithetical to that of cassoulet. From the same southwestern region as cassoulet, *foie gras* is a highly "unnatural" product. It is produced by force-feeding geese with grains in order to fatten their livers. The liver thus attained is a luxury product (equivalent in status to truffles or caviar, for example), consumed by a limited number of people and usually only on special occasions. Incidentally, one must wonder to what extent Renoir is projecting a 1962 view of *foie gras* onto the wartime period. Claude Fischler reminds us that *foie gras* did not really gain prominence and prestige until long after the war, when its name started appearing on restaurant menus. Although it was used commonly by chefs before the war, it was never mentioned on menus as such, because it was used sparingly as a condiment to enhance flavour or add texture to a dish.²⁸ Even

²⁸ Claude Fischler, *L'Homnivore*, op. cit., pp. 248-249.

among those who have access to it, *foie gras* is not eaten alone, but usually by a group or a couple, in situations of celebration or seduction. The leap from cassoulet to *foie gras* is astronomical and it would be difficult to imagine the Corporal getting angry with Ballochet if he were offered cassoulet and it would be equally as difficult to imagine Ballochet consoling and comforting the Corporal with *foie gras*.

Goose liver is thus symbolic of the extent of Ballochet's decadence, resignation and "collaboration." Both *foie gras* and cassoulet are goose dishes that originate from the same region of France. Contrary to World War I and the gastronomic oneness of the French prisoners depicted in *La Grande illusion*, during World War II there are ways of being French that are preferred over others. Ballochet's nonchalant eating of goose liver is an abuse of a dish that is often associated with celebration and festivity. The Corporal's refusal of Ballochet's *foie gras* is a climax in the film's food drama. This refusal is a sign of the Corporal's vitality. Immediately after rejecting Ballochet, the Corporal asks to be transferred to a farming brigade, where geese appear once again, but this time they are clearly visible running freely in the frame. From *foie gras* to cassoulet on to free-running geese, the Corporal's leap from culture to nature is confirmed.

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Among the reflections of critics and filmmakers in a recent

issue of *Cahiers du cinéma* devoted to the entirety of Renoir's oeuvre, there was a general enthusiasm for Renoir's pre-war work, while his post-war films inspired various degrees of disappointment. The notion behind their impressions was that Renoir had somehow changed from an extraordinary pre-war director to quite an ordinary post-war one.²⁹ The reasons for this shift may be discerned from the differences drawn out in the pre- and post-war films discussed above. In the earlier films good eaters and bad eaters share the same space and perhaps some of the same views. In their eating practices characters such as Octave, de Boeldieu, and Rosenthal embody contradictions. The later films are more Manichean in that the distinctions between good and bad eaters are clear.

Nonetheless, throughout his films, Renoir fully embraces French mythology, and does not shy away from the meanings and connotations that food produces within his culture. Meals become the settings where national food dramas are played out. In his food system, food that is good is healthy, not only physically, but especially morally. The good eater in Renoir's films is -in all of the above cases- a man who has simple tastes and who partakes in uncomplicated pleasures. His *sagesse du corps* is operating optimally and he knows instinctively what foods are right. Meals are used to establish societal divisions and affinities. There is

²⁹ *Cahiers du cinéma* 482 (July/August 1994), *passim*. The same sentiments are also expressed by Barthélemy Amengual, "Renoir réaliste: la co-naissance par la ressemblance" *Positif* 257/258 (July/August 1982), pp. 28-34.

a cleavage in Renoir's oeuvre between those who eat simple, "down-to-earth" foods and those who eat foods that require complexity and "culture." Refinery in eating is associated with collaboration, loftiness, selfishness, inhibition, restraint, and an inability to enjoy oneself. It is in fact this division between nature and culture that pervades much of Renoir's work. This *sagesse du corps* extends beyond the individual body to the national body and shows that Renoir is capable of using food to encapsulate and transmit not only the spirit of a situation, but also the spirit of a nation. Although his films are often based on contradictions in French society, Renoir obviously favours foods which have a mythic ability to bind communities together.

C. Scenarios of Confirmation in the Post-War Period: Men and the Art of Eating

One important aspect of public eateries in films of the 1930s is that they were largely inhabited by males. In these films men, usually working bachelors, adopt the restaurant as a home where they have their habits, rituals and customs. Family relations are often recreated within the group and the eatery itself becomes a familiar space with little separation between the different zones of the restaurant. The multi-purpose café/bistro where eating mainly took place in French films of the pre-war period has evolved into a post-war "restaurant," i.e. a rationalised place of business where customers come expressly to eat and where restrictions

control certain types of behaviour and activities such as singing, playing games, dancing, or even shouting. However, in the move from the pre-war to the post-war period of French cinema, some restaurants have nonetheless retained their function as convivial centres of communities.

One of the main eating groups that has remained confirmed over the years has been the community of restaurant-going male eaters. This has been due in part to the fact that the restaurant is a public eating space and as such has been the privileged place for men to take their meals together. Whether from the perspective of the diners or the staff, restaurants have consistently remained a site of male presence and power - as the site of business deals, as the backdrop for romantic heterosexual encounters, as a workplace for proprietors, waiters, and cooks, and also as a place dominated by male diners, who, very much like 1930s diners, employ the restaurant space to get together and commune. In the latter case the restaurant in post-war French cinema becomes a defined and defining locale that is an appendage to the group's identity, and one particularly nostalgic current of post-war French film continues to depict groups of men who adopt a restaurant as a home where they have their habits, rituals and customs. I would now like to look at how the spirit of the 1930s eating communities is perpetuated through the exclusively male eating groups in *Touchez pas au grisbi* (Jacques Becker, 1954, English title *Honour Among Thieves*), *L'Horloger de Saint-Paul* (Bertrand Tavernier, 1973) and *Garçon!* (Claude Sautet, 1983).

It is first worthwhile to examine the male-oriented food system in *Touchez pas au grisbi* (Hereafter referred to as *Grisbi*). Although on the surface *Grisbi* is a gangster film, it takes place after the gold heist that would typically be the driving narrative force behind a film of U.S.-inspired mainstream forms of the genre. Except in its final scenes, the film does not feature the typical action and confrontational sequences of the gangster film. What it offers instead are many scenes of Max (Jean Gabin) at leisure with his friends, eating at *Chez Bouche*, watching a show at a nightclub, having lunch at his girlfriend's, or enjoying a midnight snack in his apartment. During many of these moments, food allows Max to play what can be described as a maternal role, mothering over the other members of his gang. In the opening sequence, *Chez Bouche* is established as Max's gang's territory. However, it is not the typical gangster lair. It possesses all of the attributes of a simple and unpretentious restaurant, presided over by the aptly named "Mme Bouche" (the French word for "mouth"), who turns away "real" customers so that the gang can have the place to themselves. What is curious is that, although they have free rein to do as they please there, the gang maintain the decorum, etiquette and rituals of a proper restaurant and otherwise behave as paying customers would.

Max has chosen a restaurant as a hangout and not a nightclub, which would be more typical for a gangster, because *Chez Bouche* allows Max to display a certain type of maternal power as "feeder" of the members of his gang. Although it is Bouche who does the

cooking, it is Max who figuratively feeds her through his exclusive patronage of her restaurant. In this sequence he first offers his cake to the penniless younger gangster Marco. He then pays off Marco's tab and at the same time extends his line of credit with Bouche, thereby providing for Marco's past, present and future meals. Later in his apartment, Max's role as feeder also extends to his friend Riton (René Dary), to whom he will offer not only pâté and toast with wine, but also pyjamas, a toothbrush, shaving gear and sheets for his bed. Much screen time is spent showing the details of eating, brushing teeth, shaving, and making the bed, far exceeding their narrative importance. Although Max has something important to say to Riton concerning gangster "business," he takes the time to set out a tray, spread the pâté on the toast, eat his snack and drink some wine, before actually getting to the point. This is in keeping with the director Jacques Becker's proclaimed desire to concentrate on characterisation, making a mere pretext of the narrative.³⁰

The restaurant and eating scenes of *Grisbi* show that in this film the environment in which people eat significantly is a male one. This has further relevance within the context of men consuming food together when compared to another scene in which Max has lunch with a female friend. The scene begins at the table, opening with a high-angle close-up of the corner of a table on which empty plates and a glass of cognac can be seen, signifying

³⁰. François Truffaut, "Les Truands sont fatigués," Cahiers du Cinéma 6:34 (April 1954), p. 55.

the end of a meal. The woman who has invited Max appears to lead him to the bedroom, followed by a dissolve to indicate their lovemaking. Although Max presumably has sex with her, this scene is not "consummated" in the same way as the other food scenes are in that no eating is actually depicted. By the time the scene begins the meal is already finished and Max is not availed the opportunity of exhibiting his maternal power through food. Once Max is shown emerging from the bedroom, his voiceover indicates that all this time he has only been worrying about his friend Riton.

Chez Bouche is the place around which this male-oriented eating world revolves and Bouche is the only woman with whom Max has a trusting relationship. Here, Max can freely walk into the kitchen, look under the lids and taste the dishes. The usual restaurant divisions between the front public regions and the back staff regions are dissolved here. Max knows that Bouche's kitchen is one place where he can have complete privacy and it is here where he confides in her about his future plans. As in the bistros in the films of the 1930s, boundaries are less rigid and the complicity between Max and Bouche allows him to cross the lines between the back and front regions. Although he and his gang wear nice suits and seem to be relatively well off, their honesty and integrity is conveyed by the lower-class masculinity encoded in their demeanour, their language, and their physical approach to food. Although the restaurant is commonly associated with romance and is often topographically arranged for sexual and financial

conquests, nothing of the sort happens at *Chez Bouche*, a place where neither women nor money interfere with the harmony of the male group.

Max's behaviour in this restaurant is interesting in terms of Jean Gabin's other roles as a restaurant professional in *La Belle équipe* (Julien Duvivier, 1936) and *Voici le temps des assassins* (Julien Duvivier, 1956). In the former film the restaurant/café/dance hall *Chez Nous* is a typical 1930s type of leisure centre known as a *guinguette* where it is possible to eat, drink, sing, play games and dance. As a chef in a reputed restaurant in the Parisian *Halles* marketplace in the latter film, the Jean Gabin character maintains a restaurant without any clear physical divisions between the work and dining areas. The kitchen and cooks at work are entirely visible from the dining room and, when moving from one zone to the next, Jean Gabin does not change his countenance nor his attitude. The largely male clientele of his restaurant ranges democratically from a lottery-winning *clochard* to politicians and film producers. In all three instances a space is created for Gabin the actor to be at ease in a variety of situations and to radiate the simplicity and generosity of his star persona. Whether he is a customer or a cook, drinking champagne or eating pâté, Gabin is able to circulate freely between different social milieus, all the while retaining the "popular" nature of his image, mainly through his language and physical characteristics. Whether in pre-war or post-war films, and whether they are feeders or eaters, characters played by Jean Gabin

maintain a stance before food that can be described as a working-class, populist one. Whether as a working-class figure in such films as *La Grande illusion*, *Quai des brumes* or as a more well-off figure as in *Touchez pas au grisbi*, *Voici le temps des assassins*, or *Le baron de l'écluse*, Vincendeau has noted how all of Gabin's characters generally exhibit the same naturalness, heartiness, and simplicity, and this is also true when before the food they are eating or preparing.³¹ In the films this becomes characterised by big mouthfuls, open appreciation of the food (grunts, comments), and willingness to share. This straightforward, no-nonsense attitude toward food is extended to his off-screen persona as well. For example, he is quoted as saying about his childhood: "While the other children snacked on bread and chocolate, my mother would feed me a thick pork chop with a glass of red wine."³²

In the films of the 1930s the presence of males in restaurants was often complemented by the rest of the community. Although men were predominant in such restaurant scenes, the presence of an entire community was signified as being important to the group of men, as if the men could not exist without the presence and support of this community, even if it only seems to loom in the background. Moving into the post-war period it is clear that there is a desire to preserve this sense of community around eating and restaurants. The two male communities in *L'Horloger de Saint-Paul* and *Garçon!*

³¹. Ginette Vincendeau, *Jean Gabin: Anatomie d'un mythe*, op. cit., pp. 149-157.

³². Quoted in Claude Gauthier and Ginette Vincendeau, *Jean Gabin: Anatomie d'un mythe*, op. cit., p. 109.

are both centred around restaurants. The opening sequence of *L'Horloger* focuses on a group of male friends (among whom is the watchmaker of the title, played by Philippe Noiret) who meet for dinner in a neighbourhood café/restaurant. They eat, chatter, joke, sing, and converse warmly with the proprietor, who is obviously a friend. Although it is the introductory scene to a detective film, this moment is not glossed over and presented as a mere brief establishing sequence. On the contrary, time is taken to elaborate the scene although it is of little narrative significance. The principal function of this scene is to show the group as cohesive and unified, as sharing the same views of the world and the same conceptions of the space around them. This scene also casts a nostalgic glance at ways and places of eating and communing during a specific historical period - the late 1960s, i.e., a time of societal crisis and change in France. Much of the film, in terms of visuals and settings, is inspired by Tavernier's attachment to his native city, Lyon. In that respect, it is interesting that he later used many extracts from *L'Horloger*, among them the opening restaurant scene, as "illustrations" in his *Lyon: Le Regard intérieur*, a 1988 made-for-television documentary about his father and his father's impressions of Lyon. There is also a similar restaurant scene in his other fiction film set in Lyon, *Une Semaine de vacances* (1980).

In the opening scene of *L'Horloger de Saint-Paul*, table manners are not at all restrictive as to body movements and gestures; the zones of the restaurant are not strictly defined

(Noiret is first seen in the kitchen beside the cooks over their stove, repairing the clock on the wall); diners can shout and interrupt each other: plates and dishes are passed around in no specific order; people can arrive and leave as they please (Noiret arrives late and is not bothered by the fact that the others have already started eating). There is an overall sense of abundance, well-being and generosity. This topography is present not only in *L'Horloger* but also in *Garçon!*.

Although these attitudes toward food and ways of eating may be lower-class in origin, there is a general belief that this is the way that food should be enjoyed - without the pretence of etiquette and manners, and it is thus something that all French people are able to lay claim to. In its universal Frenchness, it is a way of avoiding or sidestepping class distinctions. Thus on the campaign trail, Jacques Chirac earns points as a populist by showing how handy he is with a fork as he drinks beer and eats *choucroute*. This positively-inflected eating easily takes on national and nationalist overtones. Consequently, in her memoirs, Henriette Marelllo, a veteran cook in travelling film crew canteens, can praise Jean Gabin the actor for the down-to-earth way that he eats and appreciates food and then express her shock at the sheer "barbarism" of English film crews. Gérard Depardieu's experience of working in America has been encapsulated as follows: ". . . what disturbed him most . . . was that the American cast and crew did not sit down together for a proper lunch. The Americans ate

sandwiches or salad or yogurt, quickly and often alone."³³

However, the manner of eating as described here is not as pan-French as it seems. Max's physical approach to food is not only class specific, it is also a masculine one. Eating in these scenarios is thus highly gender-coded; it is straightforward, with big mouthfuls. Further, the popular aspects of the food - simple, hearty, eminently shareable and "elastic" dishes - also contribute to the creation of a specifically masculine environment of goodwill and generosity. It could also be argued that men are encouraged to eat in this way. Keith Reader has described the growth of certain restaurants in Lyon that catered to the burgeoning population of bachelors who began flocking to urban centres in search of work in the nineteenth century. During this period, a certain type of bachelorhood started to become normalised and certain types of restaurants began catering to this new clientele with specific needs, for bachelors living alone in rooming houses not only needed a place to eat, but also a place to meet and commune with others. Thus a tradition of male eating was born, in which women were very much on the periphery, their traditional domestic roles being filled by a myriad of female "professionals" - cooks, housecleaners, and launderesses.³⁴

With these eating practices, not only are the group's

³³. Henriette Marello, with Sylvie Renoir, La Cantinière du cinéma: Belmondo, Delon et les autres... (Paris, Editions Ramsay, 1994), pp. 159-163 & 103-113. Paul Chutkow, Depardieu: A Biography (London: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 25.

³⁴. Keith Reader, "Les Mères de Lyon: Representations of Women and Cookery in France", Inaugural Lecture, *passim*.

stability and solidarity reinforced, but the very moral strength of the group is affirmed. However, in many ways the eating groups in these post-war films are depicted as outmoded: *L'Horloger* distinctly opposes the lifestyle of the watchmaker and his friends to the society in turbulence around them. *Grisbi* is especially about the aging of the gangster and the passing of a way of life. *Garçon!* too is about an ex-music hall performer (Yves Montand) and his attempts at finding the lost magic of the stage. Vincendeau has suggested that already in the 1930s the frequent representations of leisure activities were part of a nostalgic yearning for a way of life that was disappearing with the advent of the rationalisation of the entertainment industry.³⁵ Eating as presented in the films discussed in this section is also tinged with a backward glance at ways of eating that were starting to fade with the passing of agrarian ways. Nostalgia is very much part of the fabric of these films, and will continue to be more self-consciously expressed in other films of the 1980s and 1990s.

III. SCENARIOS OF AMBIGUITY: THE POST-WAR PERIOD

My aim in this section will be to use the "scenarios of confirmation" to measure the extent of the changes that have occurred in eating scenarios in the post-war period. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s in France the number of automobiles,

³⁵. Ginette Vincendeau, "From the Bal Populaire to the Casino: Class and Leisure in French Films of the 1930s," op. cit., p. 69.

refridgerators and supermarkets grew at a steady and unrelenting rate, fundamentally changing the lifestyles of many in France, so that by the 1960s it was clear that France had gradually but definitively undergone a shift from a mainly agrarian society to a more industrialised and urban one. As in other aspects of French socio-cultural life, change became discernible in attitudes toward food, cooking and eating. What, where and how to eat suddenly became questions that French people could and did ask themselves, as they no longer depended on the space and time restrictions of the four seasons and local marketplaces to make these decisions for them. Although from socio-political and cultural viewpoints changes occurred very rapidly in post-war France, as far as food is concerned France strove and managed to maintain its "difference" in relation to changes coming from outside the country. In the larger cultural arena cooking and eating practices *have often* been used to unify the French nation, but during the time of these shifts, eating traditions and rituals in some French films increasingly become backdrops for the deterioration of communal relationships. Nevertheless, throughout the post-war period in French film, the classical style has retained its prominence and there has been an overall maintenance and continuity of realism and naturalism in depictions of eating and cooking. Eating in many post-war French films is presented within a coherent and easily identifiable framework (non-realist French films that present non-standard forms of eating are dealt with in the last chapter). Realism is maintained through the use of recognisable and familiar locations,

spaces, eating habits, customs and foods, with the continued presence of the table as the central setting for meal scenes.

In 1930s films, banquet scenes often served not only to show a group of people participating in the same activity and sharing a moment of pleasure, but also, through the portrayal of easily recognisable and identifiable pleasures such as singing, eating and drinking, to create a link with the audience and bind them to that mythical community. These types of gatherings were evident, for example, in *La Kermesse héroïque* (Jacques Feyder, 1935), *Le Crime de Mr Lange* (Jean Renoir, 1936) and *Hôtel du nord* (Marcel Carné, 1938). This type of intra- and extra-filmic "solidarity" begins to erode in films of the post-war period. Films as varied as *La ferme du pendu* (Jean Dréville, 1945), *Gervaise* (René Clément, 1956), *Le Boucher* (Claude Chabrol, 1969), *Souvenirs d'en France* (André Téchiné, 1975), and *Loulou* (Maurice Pialat, 1980) have markedly different agendas, addressing different audiences, using different narrative methods and having different origins. Narrative development may be more central in classical films such as *La Ferme du pendu* or *Gervaise*, and the creation of moods and ambiances more important in auteur films such as *Le Boucher*, *Souvenirs d'en France* and *Loulou*. However, they all take the time to display the rituals of a banquet, and in the end show these very rituals and traditions as being ineffectual and unable to bind communities together.

In the following sections I will consider the differing scenarios of food's role in communal disintegration in post-war French film in representations of nostalgic mealtimes, family

dinners and the public space of the restaurant. I will then conclude this chapter with a case study of Eric Rohmer.

A. Mealtime Nostalgia

Food has the ability to evoke memories of moments when certain types of foods were eaten. This has been exploited in French film, as well as in French literature (cf. Proust's *madeleine*), to create nostalgic ambiances that hark back to past days of imagined harmonious eating. This has already been highlighted as being part of the strategies involved in representations of cafés, bistros, and leisure activities in French films of the 1930s. Such places and activities were gradually disappearing from the social arena in France and being replaced by more rationalised and institutionalised forms of recreation. Food-related nostalgic tendencies have continued into the post-war period and have taken a number of different turns. In this section I will analyse the ways in which nostalgia is presented in more recent post-war films, concentrating on *Un Dimanche à la campagne* (Bertrand Tavernier, 1984), *Milou en mai* (*Milou in May*, Louis Malle, 1989) and *Au petit Marguery* (Laurent Bénégui, 1995).

We can now look again at the opening restaurant scene in *L'Horloger de Saint-Paul* not only in terms of the gathering of a group of men, but also and equally in terms of a sincerely nostalgic evocation of "past" eating habits. Part of the film's presentation of the conflict between father and son involves

placing the father in the old cobblestoned quarters of a timeless Lyon, in his dusty watchmaker's shop and at his nightly meetings with his male friends at a favourite café/restaurant for dinner. The father is not only presented as old-fashioned but his profession signals him as someone who is living and working in the past, continuing a way of life that is perceived as rapidly disappearing. A later Tavernier film, *Un Dimanche à la campagne*, goes much further by overtly using nostalgia to evoke past eating practices and eaters as somehow not being able to endure the forces of change.

The image of the country as an idyllic place where people live and eat is a strong one in French mythology. Roland Barthes has remarked upon its pervasiveness in French society and has noted the tendency to exploit and perpetuate rustic imagery in advertising, especially food advertising.³⁶ The romantic image of French country cooking was first constructed by the food critic Curnonsky during his travels through the regions of France during the 1930s. Professional cuisine had until then been a primarily urban phenomenon and Curnonsky created a first wave of interest in France's regional cuisines.³⁷ The belief in good, wholesome, countryside cooking has remained a potent one in France that has

³⁶ Roland Barthes, "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption," op. cit., p. 55.

³⁷ Stephen Mennell, "Food and Wine," op. cit., p. 182. However, as Mennell has noted, Curnonsky's chronicles were based mainly on dishes prepared for special feasts, holidays and celebrations - not the ordinary run-of-the-mill peasant fare - and overlooked the dietary realities of country living.

motivated not only much food advertising, but also one that remains ingrained in the collective consciousness as truth, and is very much part of an image of France as it would like to be seen.

Un Dimanche à la campagne is set at the turn of the century and shows a family that is regretfully unable to withstand the changes brought on by progress and modernisation, personified in the character of the daughter Irène (Sabine Azéma). In comparison with the other family members Irène does not resist modernisation, but fully accepts it. She drives a car, is unmarried and has a lover, runs her own shop in Paris, uses the telephone and prefers to play with her nephews while the "adults" have their tart and tea. Compared to the others, she is a literal whirlwind who has refused to conform to the models her family offers. She notably arrives late for lunch and leaves before dinner, and never sits down at the table with the rest of the family. Food is thus equated with stultified tradition and timelessness that are burdensome, even though comforting for the others. *Un Dimanche à la campagne* uses the setting of the countryside as a contrastive backdrop to family break-up. Its food imagery portrays an idyllic countryside lifestyle - notably displaying warm, rustic, homemade dishes. The Sunday dinner is visually signalled as a special moment and screen time is taken to show the dishes being slowly and patiently prepared by the household maid, Mercedes. Despite the overt display of warm, bucolic imagery, the film proceeds to portray family relations and values as in a state of deterioration. Irène does not eat but ends up running off with valuable pieces of

her mother's clothing that one is supposed to patiently inherit. Her appetites are selfish and predatory.

Louis Malle's *Milou in May* uses the same sort of nostalgic imagery, but for much more ironic effect. Although it takes place in the more recent period of May 1968, *Milou in May* is steeped in nostalgia as well. In this film, the death of the family matriarch brings together her disparate inheritors for her funeral and, especially, the reading of her will. The film is set in an old country mansion in the Gers region of France and all visual signs of the period are absent: characters listen to the radio, go fishing, ride bicycles, use old utensils to cook in a very rustic kitchen, and at one point a fuse blows, forcing them to eat dinner by candlelight. All this activity is accompanied by Stéphane Grapelli's violin music, played in a jazzy *valse musette* (fast waltz) style, reminiscent of popular 1930s French music. What is most incongruous and anachronistic is that television, the medium through which most French people lived through the "events" of May 1968, is entirely absent. The characters keep informed by the radio, which intermittently blurts out news reports and speeches by President DeGaulle.

In the many meal scenes that punctuate the family gathering, an effort is made to try to recreate the old, but obviously archaic, family ambience in order to give things the appearance of former times. Even eating utensils such as forks and knives are absent - all the dishes in the three meals are eaten by hand. Milou's daughter Camille (Miou-Miou), with the help of the maid,

prepares an *os à la moelle* (the marrow of large beef bones), Milou (Michel Picolli) takes a dip in the local stream to catch the evening meal's crayfish on his fingertips, which are in turn peeled by the fingertips of the diners, and finally there is a picnic in which they savour ham and fruit. All of the originality and authenticity in their eating practices is undermined by the fact that the family has reunited for what probably is the last time, and that the main purpose of their assembly is to divide up the family estate and possessions. The images here and in *Dimanche à la campagne* communicate what Barthes' termed "notions of representing the flavourful survival of an old rural society that is itself highly idealized."³⁸

Another post-war French film that features food-linked nostalgia as an integral part of its imagery and narrative structure is Laurent Bénégui's *Au petit Marguery* (1995). The film takes place on the eve of the definitive closing of *Le petit Marguery*, a small family-run Parisian restaurant, which will be taken over by a large Parisian bank. It is closing because the chef-proprietor Hippolyte (Michel Aumont) has lost his sense of smell and is no longer able to continue cooking. A group of about a dozen friends, all acquaintances of Hippolyte, have gathered to commemorate the restaurant's last evening.

By assembling a group of people for a "last supper," *Au petit Marguery* shares many of the nostalgic aspects of *Un Dimanche à la*

³⁸. Roland Barthes, "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption," op. cit., p. 55.

campagne and *Milou in May*. Whether the eating group is portrayed as cohesive or not, meal scenes in these films are always lovingly presented and food, in a fully commemorative function, is displayed with great affection and care for visual detail. For example, in *Dimanche à la campagne*, the Sunday capon is shown slowly turning over an open fire, and other images feature the maid Mercedes affectionately showing the young granddaughter how to roll out pastry dough for the afternoon tart. In *Milou in May*, Miou-Miou is seen cooking in the spacious sun-lit kitchen with the maid, preparing the afternoon dinner. In *Au petit Marguery*, Hippolyte silently prepares an elaborate, multi-layered cake for dessert, looked upon with awe and veneration by his kitchen workers. At another moment in this film, the camera pans down the length of the table for individual reaction shots of diners who have just been served their starters, and who taste their dishes in rapt silence. The presence of Stéphane Audran as Joséphine, Hippolyte's wife also adds to the nostalgic food capital of *Au petit Marguery*, as she is still closely associated with her role as the protagonist in *Babette's Feast*, food film *par excellence*.

Each of these films is very personal: *Au petit Marguery* is based on the director's autobiographical novel, and the nostalgic viewpoint, especially in flashback sequences, of the character who represents Bénégui is favoured throughout the film. Louis Malle filmed *Milou en mai* in the Gers region of France, where he had taken up residence since the 1960s. In interviews he admitted to being very attached to the region, and part of his project was to

show a way of life that was disappearing and "to describe the end of a way of culture."³⁹ In his description of the region, Malle gives a portrait of Milou himself: "(i)n the southwest of France, you used to be able to live well on your small vineyard, even if the grapes weren't good and you were lazy. That world has been swept away."⁴⁰ Tavernier stirred up the past in *Un Dimanche à la campagne*, whose screenplay is based on a novella by Pierre Bost, who, together with Jean Aurenche, were premier screenwriters in France during the 1950s, working principally with director Claude Autant-Lara on many popular films that were hallmarks of the French quality tradition. Aurenche and Bost were both personally vilified by François Truffaut in his now notorious 1954 *Cahiers du cinéma* diatribe against the stultification of filmmaking practices and scenarios. Since the appearance of Truffaut's article, the names of Aurenche and Bost became unjustly synonymous with stiff, uninteresting, literary, assembly-line scenarios. It has clearly been Tavernier's project to reinstate Aurenche and Bost. He worked with them on his first film, *L'Horloger de Saint-Paul*, and continued to work with Aurenche in many of his subsequent films. By fostering the classic goals of French quality cinema, *Un Dimanche à la campagne* paid tribute to the deceased (1975) Pierre Bost. Tavernier makes nostalgia part of the extra-cinematic fabric of *Un Dimanche à la campagne* by trying to find or revive lost or

³⁹. Iain Johnstone, "The Mellowing of a Maverick Talent," The Sunday Times, 2-09-90, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Louis Malle, interview with Joan Dupont, International Herald Tribune, 24-01-90, n.p.

forgotten filmmaking practices. The strong authorial presence in each film assures that the nostalgia in each case is truly heartfelt, and not the result of an insensitive film industry pulling on heart strings for the best financial result.

B. Family Dinners

Surrounding food imagery in nostalgia in recent French film can be seen as a reaction to the waning of agrarian ways, in which communities found physical and moral nourishment in their foodmaking and eating practices. The family is at the centre of nostalgia in *Un Dimanche à la campagne*, *Milou in May*, and *Au petit Marguery*. All three films communicate the notion that the family was better off in the past, during a simpler, unspoiled time when relations were solid, meals were convivial and food was authentic and unvitiated. Although *Milou in May* and *Au petit Marguery* take place in recent times, we have seen how the imagery in both films strives to recreate an agrarian-era ambience and to position the family within this context. I would now like to look at other contemporary French films that are far less conciliatory and that place the family in entirely different contexts vis-à-vis food and eating. In films such as *A nos amours* (Maurice Pialat, 1983), *Poulet au vinaigre* (Claude Chabrol, 1984), *La Vie est un long fleuve tranquille* (Etienne Chatiliez, 1988), *Trop belle pour toi* (Bertrand Blier, 1989), *Romuald et Juliette* (Coline Serreau, 1989), *Tatie Danielle* (Etienne Chatiliez, 1990), *Les Nuits fauves* (Cyril Collard, 1992), and *La Crise* (Coline Serreau, 1994), family meals

are particularly fragile and tense moments and, as Piero Camporesi aptly puts it, "(t)he daily ritual at the dinner table has lost its function as regulator of familial tensions, rewarder of pleasures and restorer of domestic equilibrium."⁴¹

The failure of French families to commune, not only through eating, but also in any other way, is a typical representational pattern in contemporary French cinema. Both Bill Marshall and Jill Forbes have confirmed this view by arguing that contemporary French cinema rarely offers comforting views of the French family.⁴² The image of the family eating at the table is a powerful symbol of togetherness and harmony, but in the above French films the table has become the preferred site of open dispute and/or silent rancour. One method of showing this is through the repetition of meal scenes that gradually show the decline in family relations. Such incidents occur, for example, in *Tatie Danielle*, a comedy about a spiteful, malicious and manipulative elderly woman who moves in with her niece's family. *Tatie Danielle* (Tsilla Chelton) is repeatedly offered *paupiettes* (thin slices of meat, usually veal, that are rolled and stuffed) throughout the film. *Paupiettes* are representative of traditional *cuisine bourgeoise*, and *Tatie Danielle*, who only seems to like sweets and pastries, is repeatedly

⁴¹ Piero Camporesi, *The Magic Harvest*, op. cit., p. 195.

⁴² See Bill Marshall, "Carnival, Consumption and Identity in *La Vie est un long fleuve tranquille*," and Jill Forbes, "Design for Living: The Family in Recent French Cinema," both in Rosemary Chapman & Nicholas Hewitt, eds., Popular Culture and Mass Communication in Twentieth-Century France. (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), pp. 126-141 and 114-125, respectively.

shown rejecting them or trying to get rid of them, by feeding them to the dog, for example. A series of repeated meals is also shown in *Trop belle pour toi*, in which Bernard (Gérard Dépardieu) and his family are at the table for the evening meal. The first scenes show the family together around the table in medium shots with the mother serving the food, the children talking about their day at school and Bernard unwinding from a busy day at his car dealership. As Bernard becomes estranged from his wife and family, subsequent repetitions of this scene are briefer, without dialogue and the camera takes a greater distance from the dinner table. The final meal scene between Bernard and his family is shot from the other side of the adjacent salon.

Young people defying and refusing the food of their parents is a recurrent image in contemporary French film. For example, a meal takes place between a mother (Stéphane Audran) and her son Louis (Lucas Belvaux) in *Poulet au vinaigre* to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the handicapped mother's failed marriage. The mother, who lives in the hope that her husband will some day return to her, has prepared all of his favourite dishes - *tomates antiboises* and *poulet sauce mornay* - which are thrown out of the window by the son whenever the mother wheels into the kitchen to fetch the next course. Unbeknownst to the mother, her son has a restaurant date later in the evening and he does not wish to spoil his appetite. In *La Crise*, a meal consisting of *foie gras* and a roast with champagne is thrown into the garbage by vegetarian-ecologically conscious children, who let forth a tirade against

their Socialist parents' hypocritical eating and foodmaking practices, and demand that everyone eat brown rice. *Les Nuits fauves* also depicts a silent and morose Sunday dinner between HIV-positive Jean (Cyril Collard) and his parents.

In all of these scenes the food and situations that are rejected by children are traditional moments of communal eating. They are often classic foods of French *cuisine bourgeoise* that are known by their titles: the *paupiettes* rejected by Tatie Danielle, the *tomates antiboises* and *poulet sauce mornay* tossed away in *Poulet au vinaigre*, the morose Sunday *gigot* of *Les Nuits fauves*, and the trash-bound *foie gras* and roast rib of beef in *La Crise*. These dishes and the way of eating them have become an organic part of French culture, yet, by rejecting them, or showing them as not being tasty, the meals are stripped of any warmth and value.

However, other meals are valued in these films and it is made clear that it is not food *per se*, but food in the familial context that brings the children against their parents. Instead of showing the degradation of family relations through repeated depictions of the same family dinner table, many of these films juxtapose French family dinners with the meals of other groups, who, by race, age or class, are socio-culturally different from the "average," white, middle-to-upper class representative French families of many of these films. For example, the young people who are shown rejecting their parents' food are often later seen enjoying a meal with people of their own age, in situations entirely different from family contexts. In *Les Nuits fauves* Jean is shown eating a number

of other meals throughout the film - pizza with friends, dinner with his girlfriend Laura (Romane Bohringer) at a chic restaurant to celebrate her birthday, breakfasts with her in the morning and, notably, an extended scene in a Japanese restaurant where Jean and a group of six friends are relaxed and joking. The scene that immediately follows the family dinner in *Poulet au vinaigre* takes place in a chic restaurant where Louis dines with his girlfriend (Pauline Laffont). A *Nos amours* depicts episodes in the life of a Jewish family in the rag trade milieu from the viewpoint of the emerging adolescent daughter Suzanne (Sandrine Bonnaire). Her mother and father (played by Maurice Pialat himself) quarrel violently and are going through a divorce. Her brother is assuming the absent father's role both at work and in the family. A brief meal scene at the beginning of the film, when the whole family is still living under the same roof, describes the state of family relations. The scene begins while Suzanne and her father are having a dispute about her going out that evening. In the background her mother looks on while setting the table for the evening meal. Having finally moved to the table, the father makes a remark about Suzanne's make-up, and Suzanne storms away from the table. At this point the mother exclaims, "I cook, but nobody eats." This particularly negative and violent scene of a family meal which never takes place contrasts with a later scene in which Suzanne is at a party with her friends eating spaghetti. In its insolence toward the traditional family meal, this spaghetti dinner belittles her family's moral and physical authority over her.

Close-ups show Suzanne and her friends eating with their hands while standing up, disregarding the traditional physical restraints that the table and cutlery impose upon the eater. Suzanne at one point is even offered a plate to eat her spaghetti but she refuses. The meal is apparently enjoyed immensely by Suzanne and her friends, and they laugh and shout during the meal. Although common throughout France, spaghetti is not a food that is taken seriously, as it was long associated with poor Italian migrant labourers and thus considered as foreign. Slippery strands of spaghetti need control, and it is a meal that, if not eaten with the proper amount of restraint, can easily become disorderly. Eating spaghetti standing up and without proper utensils is thus antithetical to French standards of food and table etiquette, and the scene justly portrays Suzanne's defiance of her family and their food.

The contrasting meal scenes in these films confirm Jill Forbes' statement that ". . . the contemporary French cinema offers a thoroughgoing and systematic subversion of the family to which it substitutes a more attractive social, economic and filmic organisation."⁴³ The more attractive eating model does not only come from youths who reject their parents' food but also from immigrant families, whose eating practices are similar to those described for French eating groups in the "scenarios of confirmation" section of this chapter. For instance, another meal that Jean has in *Les Nuits fauves* takes place at his friend Sami's

⁴³ Jill Forbes, "Design for Living: The Family in Recent French Cinema," op. cit., p. 115.

home, where Sami's mother, a Spanish immigrant, has made a very convivial paëlla. *Un, deux, trois soleil* (Bertrand Blier, 1993) is punctuated by scenes of a perpetually drunken father (Marcello Mastroiani) getting lost in the labyrinthine *HLM* on his way home and inevitably walking into the wrong apartment where on more than one occasion he nonetheless sits down and joins an African immigrant family at the dinner table. On each occasion the family unblinkingly welcome him, set him a place at the table and share their meal with this oblivious guest. These scenes are accompanied by another fantasy sequence in which all of the neighbourhood children flock around him calling him "father" and he in turn accepting them all as his children. *Romuald et Juliette* also contrasts the stiff eating practices of the white, upper-class family of Romuald (Daniel Auteuil) with the one-pot convivial meals that Juliette (Firmine Richard), who works as a night cleaning woman in Romuald's yogurt company, offers her family in the cramped kitchen of her small apartment.

Representations of the meals of immigrant "others" feature a high number of people at the table, which is usually completely surrounded by the family/community, cramming the frame with movement and the soundtrack with chatter, both of which are aspects notably absent from bourgeois dinner tables. The topography of these alternative families is very similar to Bourdieu's description of the "plain eating, plain speaking" lower- and working-class milieu.⁴⁴ Although Bourdieu's research focused

⁴⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, op. cit., p. 194.

specifically on French subjects, the definitions he provides could be used to describe the eating practices of these other non-French households, which now occupy the same status in terms of economic and cultural capital as the French ones. Such films thus offer a critique of the French for having lost some of the spontaneity and conviviality that marked eating in the popular cinema of the 1930s, for example. Food in French film is used not only to criticise the family and family relations, but it has also become the element around which "new" more unconventional families can be constructed. All of these films, whether they feature youth or immigrants, offer a critique of eating in a very specific French socio-cultural context. While conviviality, warmth and generosity remain constants of positively-inflected eating in French film, food and the structure of meals are used to level criticism against the convention and conformism of bourgeois eating values.

C. The Decline of the Bistro and the Advent of the Restaurant

One important characteristic of the places where people ate in French films in the 1930s and other later films in which the scenarios of confirmation were perpetuated is that eating spots were not labelled as "restaurants" per se. People ate in what can generically be called cafés/bistros, and these were the same places where they drank, played cards, and sang songs. In these "elastic" places they were able to participate in a whole range of leisure activities of their choice, among which eating had its part. It has already been observed here that these were quintessential

popular spaces in which all sorts of boundaries were dropped and where the users of these spaces seemingly shaped them according to their own needs and fancies. Colin Crisp describes filmmaking practices in France in the 1930s as being characterised by unregulated, anarchic, and artisanal tendencies and further argues that, with the imposition of German technology and production methods as of the Occupation in 1940, the post-war French film industry became progressively more regulated, monitored, state-subsidised, unionised and professionalised.⁴⁵ In a parallel fashion, the formal, structured and professionalised restaurant, as opposed to the anarchic and artisanal eateries in films of the pre-war period, also began appearing in films at this time and coincides with the French film industry's adoption of more rigid filmmaking practices. Although the restaurant, i.e. a public place exclusively designated for eating a proper meal, has existed in its more or less current form in France since the periods of the Directory and the first Empire (1795-1814)⁴⁶, it did not really begin appearing regularly in films as such until the post-World War II period. The restaurant was introduced as an eating place that imposed boundaries on eaters - boundaries between waiters and cooks, diners and staff, chic restaurants and popular restaurants. Eateries in films that confirm communities were far less restrictive, and the divisions and classifications of what I would

⁴⁵. C. G. Crisp, The Classic French Cinema: 1930-1960 (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 46.

⁴⁶. Stephen Mennell, "Food and Wine", op. cit., p. 178.

call this "modern" type of restaurant create many occasions for dispute, resentment and alienation - all occasions which were increasingly exploited in post-war films.

Another factor that may explain the advent of a negative attitude toward public eating as of the 1950s has been put forward by food historian Alberto Capatti: war-time souvenirs of the duress of ration tickets and the black market food trade made food just as easily liable to invoke distrust and suspicion as much as comfort and tradition. According to Cappati, immediately after the war, food professionals were eyed with distrust, as it was often assumed that during the Occupation they somehow had to "collaborate" in order to acquire their goods. Capatti claims that this attitude toward food is betrayed by the appearance in the 1950s of cookery books with fear-inducing titles such as Courtine's *L'Assassin à votre table*, which warned food consumers to beware of foodmaking practices in restaurants and shops.⁴⁷ Depictions of restaurants in the 1950s begin to be shaded with misgivings and doubts that reveal a dual, theatrical side of the restaurant, as a place of distinct zones and regions.

This transformation from "café/bistro" to "restaurant" is exemplified in a meal sequence in Claude Autant-Lara's *La Traversée de Paris* (1956), in which the very neighbourhood café of the 1930s becomes something quite different, a place more like a restaurant. The film takes place during the German Occupation of Paris. The

⁴⁷. Alberto Capatti, "L'Avenir archaïque de la gastronomie," *Autrement* 138: *Le Mangeur* (June 1993), p. 162.

plot centres around the clandestine nighttime crossing of Paris by two men, Marcel Martin (Bourvil) and Grandgil (Jean Gabin), who are trying to deliver two satchels of black market pork to the other side of town. At the beginning of their journey the two protagonists stop in a restaurant to eat pork kidneys, taken as "wages" from the packs of meat they are delivering. Raphaëlle Moine has described how the first shots of this scene establish the two men in the social context of the restaurant and especially identify them as being privileged for having meat.⁴⁸ In proper classical form, the scene begins with an establishing shot showing the relative positions of all the diners in the restaurant, and then breaks down to medium shots of each table as the other diners comment on the appearance of Martin and Grandgil and especially their kidneys. The presence of meat elicits a series of comments from the surrounding diners, who express nostalgia, regret, and envy over the kidneys the two men are about to enjoy. In their own conversation the two men guiltily try to justify themselves by equating participating in the black market with participating in the Resistance (a view that was also advanced in Renoir's *La Grande illusion* (1937), but later foresworn as collaboration in his 1962 *Le Caporal épinglé*). This scene documents the fact that during the Occupation any type of meat was a luxury and people spent much energy and took great risks trying to procure meat (This is also echoed in the elaborate purchase of the ham in *Le Dernier métro*

⁴⁸. Raphaëlle Moine, "Scènes de table", *Focales* 2 (1993), pp. 10-12.

(François Truffaut, 1980) and the meatless Occupation-coded world of *Delicatessen* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet & Marc Caro, 1991) or, for a post-war English version of the same theme, in the very black *A Private Function* (Malcolm Mowbry, 1984).

As the shots move around from table to table, Martin and Grandgil, despite their self-proclaimed "heroism," become literally surrounded and isolated within the confines of the restaurant. Those who can eat in this restaurant are privileged outsiders who remind the other diners of the scarcity of food during the Occupation. Although it contains all of the elements of a typical 1930s bistro such as warm wood floors and pannelling, a rotund waiter, and the spatial arrangement of the bar, tables and chairs, there is an absence of the other elements that typified this kind of space in the 1930s. There is no background chatter, no clatter of utensils and dishes, no music. Customers seated at their tables are immobile and mute. There is no sense of solidarity and sharing that such a space would have conveyed in the pre-war days. At one point Grandgil finds the atmosphere in this bistro so suffocating that he bursts into a tirade against the softness ("*mollesse*"), passivity and self-satisfied airs of the others around him. Grandgil is in fact lamenting the fact that bistros are no longer places of communion and conviviality. Although until the war eating in public had generally implied sharing and participating in a communal activity, the restaurant table here serves as an element of exclusion rather than inclusion, and will continue to accumulate negative qualities in other French films.

The "restaurant" was thus a place that was "new" to French cinema, and consisted of a series of regulations, codes and rituals that were not at all natural and which in fact had to be learned. This is evident in the brief recurring restaurant scenes of *Les Vacances de M Hulot* (Jacques Tati, 1953), in which Hulot (Jacques Tati) is in a constant state of confusion because of the signal bells, the waiters' expectations, and the restaurant protocol, which for Hulot amount to a baffling series of alienating codes and rituals. The meals in *Les Vacances de M Hulot* are ritualistic in their punctuality and repetitiveness, as are all the "leisure" aspects of life at the seaside resort such as morning walks, tennis matches, and dances. In this context leisure has become conventionalised and more rigourously scheduled than office hours.⁴⁹

What Mr Hulot encounters at his seaside restaurant are the "staging devices" referred to by Goffman that are placed between food and the eater.⁵⁰ Such staging devices are not foregrounded in films of the 1930s, but become increasingly prominent in films of the post-war period and are often used, as in the case of *Hulot* and *La Traversée de Paris*, to show the restaurant as a site of exclusion, and often for satiric or ironic effect. Staging devices mark boundaries that follow traditional class distinctions. This can be seen in Jacqueline Audry's 1956 Colette adaptation *Mitsou* in

⁴⁹. Raphaëlle Moine, op. cit., p. 15.

⁵⁰. Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 120.

a scene in which Mitsou (Danièle Delorme)'s lower-class status is revealed when dining out in a chic restaurant with an officer who is courting her. When Mitsou jubilantly orders *homard à l'indienne* with mayonnaise on the side and *poulet aux morilles* accompanied by a salad, the waiter promptly corrects her notions of how each dish should be eaten, firmly suggesting that mayonnaise and salad are not the appropriate accompaniments. This scene attests once more to the ongoing devalorisation of the neighbourhood bistro insofar as the codes, conventions and rituals that Mitsou is abiding by clash with the upper-class restaurant in which she is actually dining. If we look back to *Circonstances atténuantes* and the café proprietor's reaction to Michel Simon's refusal of the wine he suggests would best go with the meal, we can note the same sort of indignant reaction. However, the waiter in *Mitsou* is obviously speaking down to Mitsou and is not really interested in her pleasure. On the other hand, the café proprietor in *Circonstances atténuantes* is sincerely concerned that his rabbit stew will not be enjoyed unless accompanied by a good bottle of red wine. In the scene in *Mitsou* everything from the titles of the dishes to the waiter's demeanour to the looks of the other diners becomes an obstacle to the simple enjoyment of the food.

Here I would like to introduce the thesis developed by Joanne Finkelstein in her book *Dining Out*. Finkelstein's rather extreme argument states that dining out is a "constraint on our moral development" and is thus a "rich source of incivility." According to Finkelstein, the way that behaviour is prescribed in the

restaurant relieves diners of the obligation to shape the world around them. Going to a restaurant would thus be a way of surrendering, of giving in to society's norms and standards and by accepting the restaurant's mores and habits, individuality and inventiveness suffer.⁵¹ Finkelstein's argument is perhaps valid if diners sheepishly accept and conform to the "law" of each restaurant. This is the case neither with Hulot nor with Mitsou, who both mount a certain degree of resistance to their respective restaurants and do not entirely accept the microcosms the restaurants propose.

Claude Chabrol features lower-class diners disturbing the world as it is ordered by the restaurant in his 1984 *Poulet au vinaigre* (English title: *Cop au Vin*). At one point in this film a young couple steal money from the till at the post office where they work and have a night out at *Château Gerbeau*, the local chic restaurant, in which they are extremely conspicuous. They order foie gras, veal sweetbreads, and champagne. The couple in this scene cannot hide their class status and their posture before their food is "lower class": they "dig in" to their meal, laugh abrasively, get food on their faces and generally lack the finesse, discretion and sobriety that such a place usually demands of its customers. Like Mitsou and Hulot, they go against the grain of the restaurant, revealing their class status by exposing the staging

⁵¹. Joanne Finkelstein, Dining Out: A Sociology of Modern Manners (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989), p. 5.

devices that "distinguish middle-class from lower-class living"⁵² and that are largely symbolic of class divisions.

Although Chabrol shows the restaurant here as a place of conflict and division, it is also a place where people can and do enjoy themselves. Much of the spectatorial pleasure of this scene is derived from the fact that the couple get away with being themselves and do not give in completely to the restaurant's "law". This contrast is all the more clear considering the way Chabrol films the restaurant. Revelling in the hushed atmosphere of the dining room, Chabrol maintains a respect for the restaurant that is betrayed by the distance he keeps from the diners and the careful dosing of ambience sounds. His treatment of the restaurant is thus ambiguous and contradictory, for although his films can be seen as ongoing attacks against the bourgeoisie and its excesses, there is nothing disturbing nor distasteful in his presentation of the restaurant itself. It is simply the young couple who, through their age, clothing, laughter and demeanour, strike a corrosive contrast with their surroundings. As is the case with Mitsou and Hulot, the film falls in favour of those characters who stand out and refuse to accept the microcosm of the restaurant, or who try to shape the restaurant space to suit their own desires and who thus retain their natural attitude toward food. This in many ways is based on the same concept involved in films of the 1930s with the important difference that, instead of placing people naturally in the restaurant and having them form an organic whole with their

⁵². Erving Goffman, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

environment, characters' class status is exposed by placing them in an environment in which they do not "belong," in this case by placing lower-class people in an upper-class restaurant. This kind of scenario illustrates how the restaurant can thus become a place of division and conflict rather than unicity and harmony.

While films such as *Mitsou* and *Poulet au vinaigre* are part of a tradition in French narrative arts of using food as an indicator of societal class conflicts and differences,⁵³ the staging devices of the restaurant can be used to illustrate other types of contradictions in French society, and other restaurant representations reveal it as a site of cultural confusion and alienation. According to Claude Fischler, contemporary Western eaters are plagued by a "biocultural" crisis which has arisen from the fact that eating is no longer principally motivated by nature or instinct. Technology and industry have succeeded in short-circuiting nature, and the virtual elimination of the threat of starvation in the West has transmuted the very biology of alimentary need. Codes and representations are constantly switching and floating, and eating is now a matter of individual choice and no longer depends on the collectivity, the seasons or tradition. Whether at home or in restaurants, diners are finding it increasingly difficult to know exactly what they are eating and exactly where their food comes from. This lack of references and

⁵³. For examples of how food has been used to convey class relations in French literature, see James W. Brown, Fictional Meals and Their Function in the French Novel: 1789-1848 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

sources when it comes to food and eating has been labelled by Fischler as "gastro-anomy".⁵⁴ Gastro-anomy has engendered a societal context in which it is very difficult to behave "naturally" toward food and eating, over and beyond (the still relevant) questions of class. Although contemporary French films reflect a myriad of attitudes and responses to this situation,⁵⁵ I would now like to look more closely at two very different films - Jean Eustache's *La Maman et la putain* (1973) and Luc Besson's *Nikita* (1989) - and their use of one restaurant - *Le train bleu* - and relate these films to the troubled condition of the (post-) modern French eater.

Jean Eustache's *La Maman et la putain* (*The Mother and the Whore*, 1973) is an avant-garde narrative film that deals explicitly with the discourses of May 1968 and its aftermath. One scene of this very talkative film takes place in *Le Train bleu*, a reputed Parisian restaurant located within the *Gare de Lyon* train station. Classified as a French historical monument, it is as recognised for the quality of its cooking as it is for its decor, comprised of huge murals depicting train scenes and an ornate, notoriously

⁵⁴. Claude Fischler, "Gastronomie et gastro-anomie", op. cit., p. 206.

⁵⁵. For a brief conjugation of the variety of restaurant dissonances in recent French films: the restaurant becomes the site of broken families who have no home to go to in *Un homme et une femme* (Claude Lelouch, 1966) and *Diabolo Menthe* (Diane Kurys, 1979, English title: *Peppermint Soda*), or of parent-child conflict in *Romuald et Juliette* (Coline Serreau, 1989) and *Les Nuits fauves* (Cyril Collard, 1992); the restaurant is also a site of violence in *37°2 Le Matin* (Jean-Jacques Beineix, 1986) and *Nikita* (Luc Besson, 1989); or of desperate pre-suicidal oyster gorging for Jeanne Moreau in *Les Valseuses* (Bertrand Blier, 1974).

kitsch and baroque golden ceiling. In *La Maman et la putain* the scene in question consists of a meal between two of the film's protagonists, the idle dandy Alexandre (Jean-Pierre Léaud) and the émigré nurse Veronika (Françoise Lebrun), who are sitting side by side facing the camera at a cluttered dining table, upon which bits of bread, plates, glasses and a wine bottle are visible. The scene is basically made up of a running dialogue on eating by Alexandre that concludes with the throw-away pronouncement that the only worthwhile things to eat are soft, mushy and lukewarm, since hot, cold or crispy foods in the end taste only hot, cold or crispy.

This scene takes place during the film's first half, when other such semi-comic diatribes of Alexandre's dominate the film's discourse. This is one of other instances in the film in which Alexandre snidely denigrates French cultural monuments, notably lashing out on another occasion at French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre while at the *Le Flore* café, Sartre's very haunt. Alexandre thus poses as a cynical and confused ex-68 figure, and it is mainly through him that the film proffers what Keith Reader has termed a "montage of different May or post-May discourses, none privileged over the other as truth."⁵⁶ For example, Alexandre can not take a clear stance vis-à-vis *Le Train bleu*. As a would-be participant in the events of May 1968, he should not be found in such a site of conservative traditional Frenchness, and one can legitimately wonder what Alexandre is doing there. In keeping with the tone and

⁵⁶. Keith Reader, "Pratiquement plus rien d'intéressant ne se passe," Nottingham French Studies 32:1 (Spring 1993), p. 95.

style of the rest of the film, this scene is very bare and flat in visual terms and it is difficult to determine exactly where Alexandre and Veronika are from the visual information provided. The dining room is hardly visible in the background and, if Alexandre had not mentioned that the restaurant was located in a train station, it would be very difficult for the uninitiated to identify it as *Le Train bleu*.

Eustache thus amplifies the sense of confusion by completely ignoring the restaurant's notoriously flamboyant decor. Indeed, throughout the film, ideas, ideologies and cultural monuments such as *Le Train bleu* and *Le Flore* are omnipresent, yet Eustache refuses to indulge in their potential for spectacle even though, as is the case with *Le Train bleu*, it is constantly looming just beyond the frame. Thus *Le Train bleu* literally gets lost in a "polymorphous flourishing of a host of different discourses,"⁵⁷ and for this reason, according to Reader, *La Maman et la putain* presages but does not itself succumb to the trendy postmodernism of directors such as Jean-Jacques Beineix and Luc Besson.⁵⁸ Reader goes on to

⁵⁷. Keith Reader, op. cit., p. 91.

⁵⁸. Described respectively by René Prédal as purveyors of "action-shock effects" and "punk-dishwasher chic" ("L'amour du cinéma français" *Cinémaction* 66 (1993), pp. 63-64), their brand of cinema has been labelled in France as the *cinéma du look* and, like *nouvelle cuisine*, has been seen as emanating from the "society of the spectacle." A number of analogies have been drawn between the two phenomena: Paul Schrader speaks of a "cuisinart cinema", (in interview, *Sight and Sound*, Jan 95, p. 27); Hayward (*French National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 294) compares the "beautifully constructed images" of films of the 80s with *nouvelle cuisine*; Denat & Guingamp ("Le cinéma commercial français," *Cinémaction* 66 (1993) p. 91) talk of "light cinema," referring to dietary and cinematic fads of the 1980s.

state that if Eustache's film were made in the 1990s, producers would insist that Alexandre's other girlfriend's (played by Bernadette Lafont) clothing boutique be set in the fashionable youth-oriented *Halles* shopping centre in Paris. On the same grounds, I would maintain that if *La Maman et la putain* were made today, producers would also insist that *Le Train bleu* be filmed in much the same way in which it in fact appears in Luc Besson's 1989 *Nikita*, the only other French film in which a scene is set in *Le Train bleu*.⁵⁹

Part of an entirely different cinematic spectrum, *Nikita* exploits *Le Train bleu* for all of its spectacular potential. *Nikita* (Anne Parillaud), the socio-pathic drug addict-turned-government assassin, has been invited by her trainer to *Le Train bleu*, for what she thinks is a dinner celebrating the end of her training period. Before they even begin their meal, the trainer gives her a gift-wrapped gun and tells her that she is on her first mission and must assassinate one of the other diners in the restaurant. The scene begins with a shot of the restaurant's golden ceiling that tilts down in a sweeping motion to reveal the dining room in all its grandeur. The style is diametrically opposed to that of Eustache: it is flashy, violent, fluid and colourful. These few minutes of film time encapsulate all of the stylistic and thematic differences not only between Eustache and Besson but also between a filmmaker of the early 1970s and a

⁵⁹ Recent correspondence with the current managers of *Le Train bleu* has confirmed this.

filmmaker of the 1990s.

The appearance of *Le Train bleu* in these two films comes at a time when eating out is no longer a simple matter. *Le Train bleu* is certainly a point of reference in French cooking and in French culture and it is without a doubt uniquely French to classify a restaurant as a historical monument, making it a national treasure and part of France's cultural heritage. However, this very gesture implies that a certain way of eating is somehow threatened with extinction, and indeed has become a sort of relic, a vestige of the past. Both films indicate this in their own way, Eustache losing sight of and interest in *Le Train bleu*, while Besson rediscovers it with a vengeance. Eustache's film conveys a sense of existential purposelessness and nihilism, using the display of a variety of discourses to show the insufficiency and the emptiness of all ideologies, while for Besson the different discourses represent a grab-bag from which he can indiscriminately pick and choose to serve the spectacle. Both are manifest of the post-modern inability to grasp the distinctions between discourses and ideologies, and point to the fact that *Le Train bleu* is much more than just a restaurant, it is a symbol of an evolving food culture.

E Case Study - Eric Rohmer: *Vive l'impasse!*

Nothing is more annoying for a director in the shooting of a café scene than the need, for the sake of realism, to have the actors served specific drinks, imbued with connotations that

have no real consequence.⁶⁰

At first glance, food would seem to have a decidedly unimportant role in Rohmer's films. Alimentary details would thus be of little significance for Rohmer, and if Jean Renoir could be considered in a "fat" tradition of artists and filmmakers along with Rabelais, Balzac, Chabrol, Fellini and Hitchcock, Rohmer is in the "lean" tradition, alongside Diderot, Valéry, Truffaut, and Bresson.⁶¹ Mealtimes are not moments when things are acted upon, accomplished or demonstrated; they rather offer occasions for reflection, observation, and confession. Michel Marie and Francis Vanoye have remarked upon the practical impossibility, especially in film dialogue and precisely in the case of Rohmer's *Ma Nuit chez Maud* (1969), of talking and eating at the same time, talking with one's mouth full not only being impolite, but also making it difficult to deliver and understand the dialogue.⁶² Overall, Rohmer has preferred to have his characters talk about eating rather than have them actually eat. His films are anti-dramatic and anti-mythological and have also been termed "literary" because

⁶⁰ Eric Rohmer, quoted in Frédérique Moreau, "Rohmer, avec parcimonie." *Vertigo* 5 (1990), p. 31.

⁶¹. A number of the articles in the issue of *Vertigo* devoted to "Le Cinéma à table" base their analyses on this notion. See, for example, Claude Beylie, "Alfred Hitchcock et la tradition grasse," pp. 59-66; Carole Le Berre on the significance of the absence of food in Truffaut's films in "J'ai horreur qu'on me parle de nourriture," pp. 23-30; as well as the aforesaid "Rohmer, avec parcimonie" by Frédérique Moreau.

⁶². Michel Marie & Francis Vanoye. "Comment parler la bouche pleine?" *Communications*. 38 (1983), pp. 51-77.

of Rohmer's proclaimed admiration for and inspiration by eighteenth-century literature. Dialogue, even though it is more often than not very banal, prevails in his films and words are more emphasised than action. However, despite Rohmer's characters' seeming detachment from food and eating, they do frequently sit at tables and participate in meals. In this section I would like to analyse exactly what "happens" at Rohmer's dinner tables and determine whether eating is as inconsequential and superfluous as one would believe.

Throughout the three main cycles of Rohmer's films - *Les Contes moraux*, *Comédies et proverbes* and *Contes des quatre saisons* - his protagonists, both male and female, consistently find themselves or place themselves at what can be called an "impasse" and subsequently must make a choice in order to extract themselves from that predicament. The impasse often takes the form of a romantic dilemma with "moral" repercussions, typically involving a choice between two diametrically opposed partners. Rohmer's protagonists have been labelled "repressed" precisely because they do not seem to be able to make a clear decision about what to do. Rohmer's work has invited facile analyses by critics, based on the classic Platonic dualisms that are contained in his films such as mind vs. body, desire vs. need, words vs. action.⁶³ My aim in this

⁶³ For example, Colin Crisp in Eric Rohmer: Realist and Moralist (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988) describes a tension in Rohmer's films "between the calm textual surface of the films, underlined by the reflective intellection of the protagonists, and the obsessive fetishism to which the repression gives rise" (p. 107).

section will be to show that while such binarisms are relevant to Rohmer's oeuvre, Rohmer is more concerned with the gaps between the dualisms, gaps that are precisely foregrounded by protagonists who are grappling with the binary system. To illustrate this, I have chosen one film from each of the Rohmerian cycles and the following discussion will revolve around the meal scenes and food systems as they appear in *Ma Nuit chez Maud* (*My Night with Maud*, 1969, hereafter referred to as *Maud*), *Le Rayon vert* (*The Green Ray*, 1986), and *Conte de printemps* (*A Tale of Springtime*, 1989, hereafter known as *Springtime*). Meals in these films do not have the unifying/cohesive function they were predominantly used for in the classical period. With Rohmer, meals serve two basic narrative functions: 1) as a structuring anchor that obliges otherwise highly mobile characters to stay in place for a while, and 2) for the sake of characterisation, to give the protagonists an opportunity to explain their views on life, their moral postures, their philosophy, against which their later acts can be judged.

One reason why an anchor is required is that the three protagonists of these films - Jean-Louis (Jean-Louis Trintignant), Delphine (Marie Rivière) and Jeanne (Anne Teyssedre), like other Rohmerian protagonists, are extremely mobile throughout the course of their respective films. They are constantly on the move and do not stay in the same place for very long. In *Springtime* Jeanne cannot decide where to settle down for the week, not knowing whether to stay at her own or her boyfriend's apartment, and even after she meets and decides to stay with Natacha, she moves back

and forth between Natacha's (father's) Parisian apartment and his country house in Fontainebleau. We learn that Jean-Louis in *Maud* has moved around quite a bit (from South America to France) before his present situation and, in the opening sequences of the film, we see him wandering through a variety of places in Clermont-Ferrand. His job at the Michelin tyre factory creates further associations with wandering, transience and travel, as well as eating. Delphine of *The Green Ray* is perhaps the most emblematic wanderer of Rohmer's films. During the few days over which the film unfolds, Delphine covers more than 2,000 kilometres, travelling from Paris to Cherbourg back to Paris, then on to a mountain resort for a very brief afternoon walk and back to Paris again before heading for Biarritz and then to St Jean de Luz. At a certain moment at the beginning of *Springtime*, Jeanne tells Natacha, "If someone could have observed my behaviour this afternoon, it would have seemed totally meaningless." All of this movement is the result not only of the characters' isolation and solitude, but also of their inability to make up their minds. All three individuals are "perpetually, essentially displaced"⁶⁴ and cannot find a niche in the world. This is all the more surprising in the case of Jean-Louis and Jeanne, who are from the educated class of professionals, normally considered as the most goal-oriented in Western society, and yet whom Rohmer portrays as being indecisive and unsure of

⁶⁴. Bérénice Reynaud, "Representing the Sexual Impasse: Eric Rohmer's *Les Nuits de la pleine lune*," in Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau, eds., French Cinema: Texts and Contexts (London: Routledge, 1990) p. 274.

themselves. Pascal Bonitzer has stated that Rohmer's is not a world for heroes but rather for those who waver and vacillate.⁶⁵

Extended meal scenes in the three films take place at conventional, if not mythical, moments of relaxation and celebration. As with Renoir, Rohmer's meals are not everyday, and occur at societal moments of exception, i.e. during holiday periods and/or in places of leisure: Jean-Louis has been invited to Maud's for Christmas dinner; Delphine is on holiday, free from work and family/relational obligations; Jeanne, a high school philosophy teacher, does not have traditional working hours, and as her boyfriend is away for the week, she can make free time to spend with Natacha, with some work interludes. Christmas time, the holiday period of August, weekends in the country - these are all highly-charged moments in France's mythological topography, with prescribed and structured ways of spending time, being with the family and enjoying oneself.

However, Rohmer refrains from dwelling on images typically associated with Christmas, holidays or the country, playing against spectator presumptions and expectations. We would have completely forgotten about Christmas if Maud's daughter had not woken up to ask to see the Christmas tree lit up, at which point the scene quickly changes. If the holiday spots of Cherbourg, Biarritz, and Bayonne were not repeatedly identified by name in *The Green Ray*, they would be difficult to recognise. With all of her

⁶⁵ Pascal Bonitzer, Eric Rohmer (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1991), p. 7.

vacillations, Delphine in fact makes a mockery of the notion of "holiday" so sacred to the French. Here we can begin to see Rohmer's sense of irony, in which on the one hand he insists on repeated, obsessive geographic authentication, yet denies on the other hand all visual signals that would provoke recognition or identification. Rohmer thus goes against the grain of French mythologising tendencies, and his "food system" is also part of that strategy. The Christmas dinner at Maud's is oddly absent of any festivity and ritual, and is in no way distinctive. Maud and her guests do not revel in their food. Here and elsewhere at Rohmer's tables there is no pleasure, prestige, romance, nor sense of gastronomic tradition. The ritual of taking the meal is performed mechanically and while the diners talk, even when they are talking about food, they do not let their conversation get distracted by the food. The meals are in fact very tense moments because in each case the protagonist is in a defensive position vis-à-vis the other diners, who interrogate and challenge the protagonists about their viewpoints.

Just as the food itself offers no real pleasure or recreation for Rohmer's protagonists, the social construction of the table setting offers neither a comforting nor a relaxing atmosphere for Jean-Louis, Delphine and Jeanne. It has already been mentioned that amidst all of their mobility the meal scenes serve as anchors that keep them in place. However, the three protagonists are also in a sense "cornered" at the table. Manners and social convention require participation in mealtime conversation. Sitting silently

at the table during a public meal is considered impolite and asocial: ". . . at table there is nowhere to hide and the rule against silence means that there is no refuge from having to perform."⁶⁶ Jean-Louis, Delphine and Jeanne are in a situation where they must answer questions and "perform" by giving an exposition of their beliefs/ideals.

The mise-en-scène confirms this sense of entrapment. In *Maud*, Jean-Louis is framed alone through much of the meal and shown as sitting across from, in opposition to, his interrogators Maud and Vidal. The challenging tone is set when Maud says to Vidal, "Let him defend himself" before Jean-Louis goes into a monologue-like explanation of why he does not appreciate Blaise Pascal, the Jansenist French philosopher and mathematician. This monologue is interspersed with brief cut-away reaction shots of Maud and Vidal listening intently and rivetting Jean-Louis with their collective gaze. What adds to the tension are not so much these cut-away shots, but the off-screen questions and comments from Vidal. Not prompted by reverse shots, Vidal's disembodied off-screen barbs are unexpected and make Jean-Louis seem all the more harassed and isolated. Very similarly, in *The Green Ray* Delphine is called upon to defend her vegetarianism against the entire assembly circled around the table. The same technique is used: Delphine is often isolated in the frame with brief cut aways to the other diners, most questions come from different directions off screen, from

⁶⁶ Margaret Visser, The Rituals of Dinner (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1992), p. 266.

disembodied voices that are never identified. Like Jean-Louis, she is very much alone to defend herself and she is aware that all eyes are upon her, even those of children who are happily eating their meat. The confrontational atmosphere of the meal scene in *Springtime* is "set up" by Natacha in order to provoke the jealousy of Eve, Igor's (Natacha's father, played by Hughes Quester) girlfriend and to spark Igor's interest in Jeanne. She is similarly surrounded at the table, hemmed in by the wall behind her, and quizzed aggressively about her teaching methods by Eve. Neither of the three protagonists are entirely comfortable or relaxed at the table. It is clear from the discussions at these tables that Rohmer's characters are obsessed with meaning, interpretation and reflection. However, there is seldom agreement or compromise, and each party stubbornly retains his/her positions. Bonitzer points out that Rohmer's protagonists can often seem irritating because they refuse to accept the points of view of others.⁶⁷

In each case the characters' relation to food adds insight and counterpoint to the philosophical beliefs that they espouse during the dinnertime conversation. During Jean-Louis' monologue, he explains that he has little tolerance for Pascal's philosophy because Pascal was not able to enjoy the good things in life. According to Jean-Louis, Pascal was not able to savour the present moment, not able to say "This is good" ("Voilà qui est bon"). Jean-Louis claims that he, unlike Pascal, can say "This is good."

⁶⁷ Pascal Bonitzer, Eric Rohmer, op. cit., p. 12.

However, during the entire minute and a half of his monologue, Jean-Louis gesticulates with a piece of cake suspended at the end of his fork and never once does he bring the cake to his mouth. Despite his pronouncements, Jean-Louis himself is incapable of proving his point by seizing the present moment and eating his cake. This is not the only occasion where Jean-Louis is "caught out" contradicting himself. Later, after Vidal has left, Maud openly invites Jean-Louis to sleep with her. Like the cake suspended on the fork, Maud lies languorously in her bed waiting for Jean-Louis to seize the moment, to say "This is good." In the end Jean-Louis cannot bring himself to say yes or no, and ends up (ridiculously) sleeping beside Maud on the bed fully-clothed. At another moment in the beginning of the film, Jean-Louis tells Vidal that he usually makes his dinner at home and does not often eat out. Later, in his apartment with Françoise, he comments that his kitchen is small but that he does not use it that much anyway. This is yet another occasion when we cannot really see where Jean-Louis stands.

Pascal Bonitzer claims that Rohmer is one of the rare filmmakers who uses dialogue in a truly interesting fashion in that it is possible for words to have significations beyond what seems to be apparent.⁶⁸ Although he could easily be accused of insincerity and hypocrisy, Jean-Louis' spuriousness could also be seen as realistic in that people, like Rohmer's protagonists, do not always say what they mean, express themselves adequately, or

⁶⁸ Pascal Bonitzer, op. cit., p. 19.

act upon their words, all things which mainstream cinema has trained spectators to expect from the protagonists of narrative films. As Norman King has pointed out, *Maud* is a film that undermines many of the discourses it contains: there is a meal, but no one eats; Jean-Louis hates Pascal for his asceticism, yet cannot bring himself to indulge; he has a kitchen, but he cannot say if he uses it or not. King has remarked that Jean-Louis has managed to find "a response to the actual that is always relevant, but only as a statement of inadequacy . . . (Rohmer) signals a gap which moral pretensions and pious thoughts can never fit."⁶⁹ Jean-Louis describes things in a way that suits him, perhaps to spare suffering and to protect himself from the truth.

Delphine, on the other hand, is all the more courageous because she does not have the intellectual capacity or the will to express herself satisfactorily or, at least, she cannot express herself in the binary terms of her interlocutors. She knows that her food philosophy separates and distinguishes her from the others. Her denial of meat perplexes those around her, just as her refusal to meet a man or have a holiday like everyone else. It must be pointed out that being a vegetarian in France is still considered as eccentric, and rejecting society's food is certainly a radical position not only in gastronomic terms but also in social, political and sexual terms. By denying the "carnal," Delphine seems to lack the vitality and the *joie de vivre* of those

⁶⁹. Norman King, "Eye for Irony: Eric Rohmer's *Ma nuit chez Maud*," in Susan Hayward & Ginette Vincendeau, eds, French Cinema: Texts and Contexts, op. cit., p. 239.

around her. She also refuses "flesh" of a sexual nature. Her position is the most radical and is the one that is the most cruelly repressed. Rohmer participates in this to a great extent, not only via the framing and disembodied interrogation of Delphine at the table but also by repeating this same table setting three times in different contexts. In an earlier scene, having tea with her friends in the garden, Delphine undergoes the same type of interrogation at the table. This time she is questioned about why she does not have and cannot keep a boyfriend. Just as in the later meal scene, Delphine's friends do not understand her and do not support her. Much later in the film, in Biarritz, Delphine befriends a *bon vivant* Swedish woman who is also vacationing. At a café table the Swedish woman attracts the attention of two men, clearly with the intention of "picking them up." Delphine is dumbfounded by the Swedish woman's effrontery and remains mute throughout the scene. As the conversation turns to the nearby town of Bayonne and its well-known ham, Delphine's vegetarian sensibility is awakened and she storms away from the table. Delphine's anguish and difference are always felt more acutely at the table, where she is cornered and attacked by others. Instead of constructing her world with words, as do other Rohmerian protagonists, she has exiled herself from the language of others, be it alimentary, romantic or social. Her refusal to consider meat as edible is portrayed as symptomatic of her social unease and coincides with her inability to fit into established patterns and to consider traditional relationships and traditional mores and

rituals (e.g. holidays) as viable and enjoyable.

As a teacher of philosophy, people expect Jeanne, of *Springtime* to be cerebral and aloof, which she is. However, Natacha is pleasantly surprised to find that she is also able to water the plants and help with the cooking. During the meal scene, Jeanne explains that her philosophy is not based on any particular school of thought and is what she calls "real philosophy," based on pure thought. Food is very visible in *Springtime* and during this dinner scene the four people at the table actively eat their sausage during the conversation. A roast is brought out for the main course and, as Igor starts to carve it, the scene cuts to the after-dinner coffee. Western philosophy has consistently devalued actions and the physical and, in terms of Western philosophical hierarchy, eating has long been regarded as a minor activity that interrupts the pursuit of knowledge.⁷⁰ However, Jeanne's intellectual background does not stop her from participating in the practical details of her own daily life, and like Delphine, she rebels against what others expect of her.

The three protagonists, Jean-Louis, Delphine and Jeanne find themselves in a world governed by binarisms. They are perceived as repressed because they cannot bring themselves to act within the logic of the binary system. Western society has been regulated by

⁷⁰ Plato believed that our intestines were longer than those of other mammals so that we could spend less time worrying about food and eating. See Deane W. Curtin, "Food/Body/Person," in Deane W. Curtin & Lisa M. Heldke, eds., Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 6.

oppositions that stem from the basic Platonic soul/body separation, which has hierarchised ways of being in the West. This dualistic conception places the mind, soul and thought on a higher level than the body and physical activity and labour. Rohmer's protagonists have difficulty coming to terms with the classic hierarchical oppositions (self/other, words/action, theory/practice, etc) that are openly set forth and very present in his films, reinforced by the evocations of Pascal and Western philosophy. Jean-Louis, Delphine and Jeanne therefore experience difficulties coping with other people, or are misunderstood by those around them, who have seemingly found some sort of equilibrium in the system. Placed in a world hierarchised by dualisms, Rohmer's protagonists, with varying degrees of success, try to forge a lifestyle in between, on the side, or away from the fatality of oppositions. This would account for their multiple displacements, their indecision and their seeming insincerity, contradictions, and self-deception.

Delphine and Jeanne are far more heroic than Jean-Louis in their confrontation with the "impasse" created by binarisms. Instead of trying to navigate a devious course around choices, the two women attempt to forge an alternative lifestyle outside of the Western philosophical framework of binarisms upon which social prejudices are justified, defended and given logic, based primarily on a "denigration of the practical" within the theory/practice dichotomy.⁷¹ Through their food practices, they try to elevate

⁷¹ Lisa M. Heldke, "Foodmaking as Thoughtful Practice," in Deane W. Curtin & Lisa M. Heldke, eds., op. cit., p. 212.

food to a "knowing" activity, smashing the predominance of dualistic thought. This would seemingly place Rohmer's films in line with a feminist agenda, but it must be emphasised that Delphine's, Jeanne's and Rohmer's agendas are far from political, even though much has been made of the completely female crew that worked with Rohmer on *Le Rayon vert*. Their attitude toward food reveals the interconnectedness between self and other, but does not overtly extend to feminist issues.

However, we cannot help but think that Rohmer's protagonists are somehow deluding themselves. His heroes are rarely "nice" in the conventional sense and many critics have commented on their irritating tendencies. Confronted with their impasses, Jean-Louis, Delphine, and Jeanne are so confused, tense and blocked that they all ultimately choose not to choose. Indeed, they let fate decide for them: Jean-Louis decides to stay with Françoise only if he sees her by chance at a certain square at a certain time; Delphine leaves her destiny in the hands of the "green ray" whose appearance or not will decide whether she will stay with the man she has just met; Jeanne rejects Igor's advances simply because she would only grant him three wishes and, as asking for a kiss was the third thing that Igor asked of her, she would allow him to go no further. In each case the protagonists defend themselves as being natural, which remains a praiseworthy quality in the modern period of French film. However, these characters are ultimately "losers," their systems do not work: they do not find happiness and fulfillment and in the end they seem to be deluding themselves. Rohmer himself has

stated that his characters are the first ones to be duped by their own stories.⁷² Following one's instincts does not lead anywhere. Rohmer's films ultimately point to the impossibility of behaving naturally toward food. Culture is always in the way.

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The post-agrarian shift has brought on a crisis between nature and culture which is visible in French films from the pre- to the post-war periods. This chapter has dwelled on some, but not all, of the ramifications of that shift, in which food in film becomes a malleable icon of societal relations within the specific national context of France. I will now turn to another shift that similarly represents a turn away from tradition, in films of the pre- and post-feminist periods.

⁷² Pascal Bonitzer, Eric Rohmer, op. cit., p. 42.

CHAPTER TWO

FILM, FOOD and the FEMININE

I. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will consider the issues raised by mainstream and avant-garde films that address, consciously or unconsciously, the special relationship between women and food in Western society. The story of women and food in film can be structured around a matrix of three major binary oppositions. Firstly, the principal opposition running through this chapter will involve looking at women in the dual roles of cooks and eaters. Secondly, this chapter is organised historically in two major parts which deal with films of the pre-feminist period (up to about 1969-1970), and then films which have appeared since the advent of the women's movement to the present. The changeover from the pre- to the post-feminist era comprises the second set of oppositions and coincides with a shift from predominant depictions of women as providers of food, as mothers, cooks and housewives, to more prominent depictions of women as consumers of food, as daughters, girlfriends, and lovers. This shift in imaging since the women's liberation movement has occurred in part because of the demands of the women's movement itself, as "traces of women's challenge to

dominant culture,"¹ but also because of changes that were happening in the mainstream film industries at the same time. Finally, the third opposition that will complete this chapter's framework is the emergence, since the 1970s, of women filmmakers and a feminist filmmaking practice whose aim has been to address and express women's concerns. In this chapter I will first mainly be concerned with dominant images and representations up to the feminist period, and I then intend to gauge the degree and type of influence that the women's movement may have had on these mainstream images, as well as those in the avant-garde.

A. Popular Images of Women and Food

There is no denying that in Western societies, and in most societies worldwide, it has traditionally been the task of women to cook and serve food. This "arrangement" points to deep inequalities in the partition of labour and, as Rosalind Coward rightly puts it, ". . . how food is consumed and prepared has crucial implications for women in this society, because it expresses deeply held ideologies of provision and dependency."² A major problem is the common belief that this role is natural for women to hold and the danger is that the link with women, food and

¹ E. Ann Kaplan, Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama. (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 60.

² Rosalind Coward, Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today (London: Paladin, 1984), p. 109. Hereafter referred to in the text as Coward.

the kitchen has become a stereotypical one in society's powerful image systems. In fact, much will be made in this chapter of these images, and especially about who controls them and to what use they are put. On a certain level, images of women and images of food are very similar: "The way images of food are made and circulated is not just an innocent catering for pleasures. They also meddle in people's sense of themselves and their self-worth. In a sexually-divided and hierarchical society, these pleasures are tied to positions of power and subordination" (Coward, p. 106). The two predominant images of women and food represent women as cooks on the one hand and women as eaters on the other. I would first like to explain some of the distinctions between images of women as cooks and as eaters.

A.1. As Cooks

Popular imagery dictates mothers and housewives as being the ones who nourish and feed us. Women are expected to perform these duties without question and without protest. This, we are told, is their natural role. In order to deconstruct the apparent determinism of this role, I would like to look in detail at a typical conveyor of imagery that closely associates women and food: the televised cookery programme. I will especially be pointing out visual details that will be crucial in the later filmic analyses.

Delia Smith is a television cook of wide popular appeal in Great Britain. Aside from her televised cookery courses, her name and photograph figure prominently on the shelves of the cooking

sections in bookshops, and she regularly authors recipes and food articles in women's magazines. She has also of late been working closely in a mutual promotion campaign with a big supermarket chain. She is thus a recognised food "authority" in Great Britain and has become an industry all to herself. Hers is more than literally a household name. As an example of how a Delia Smith programme is presented, I have selected a programme broadcast in January of 1994 about the various ways of preparing chicken. I will limit my comments here to certain elements of the *mise-en-scène* - decor, costume and language - that all converge to confirm the singular gendered address of this and most, but by no means all, television cookery programmes.

I will first begin with the decor. Delia Smith's work space is obviously a TV studio kitchen, sparsely decorated yet efficiently equipped, with work counters and stove top in the foreground, ovens to the right, and a back counter and wall with a vase of flowers and a spice rack. Her set has the appearance of a very ordinary kitchen, a place that we have learned to expect to see, not only in such programmes, but also in actual homes. Yet at the same time, it is an extraordinary kitchen - extraordinarily clean and well-equipped with machines and utensils. It is a discreet kitchen, an ideal yet pleasant workplace, but trimmed of any excess.³

³ It must be mentioned that Delia Smith's programme is renewed every season, and that the decor changes every year. After the series under discussion here, she used a trendily ecological conservatory setting, with her kitchen nestled among green plants with window frames in the background.

Delia Smith's costume in this particular segment consists of an extremely colourful and flowery apron, which she seems to wear naturally. Her hair is cut short in a bob around her face and neck. The apron is a potent symbol, showing that Delia Smith is not only addressing cooks, but also housewives in general, for it is a sort of housecoat that can be worn for a number of different household tasks. The gaudy floral pattern assures that it is exclusively feminine attire. It, along with the haircut and barely made up face, succeeds in desexualising her in conventional terms, by literally draping her lower body and concealing its form and protuberances, i.e. breasts, hips, buttocks.

Finally, the language that she uses, although simple and straightforward, includes a number of terms that she does not bother to explain: "parson's nose", "baste", "whisk", "serrated knife". These words would, like any technical jargon, be out of someone's vocabulary range if they do not actively cook. Her language thus further serves to focus her address on housewives and domestic cooks, for these are terms that, through their training and experience in the kitchen, domestic cooks understand and employ. Furthermore, Delia Smith intersperses her recipes with tips on how to get on with the butcher and other time-saving tips for the working woman/cook.

The female ideal constructed by this type of programme is a woman who is largely defined by her domestic role as housewife and cook, and who is most fulfilled when feeding, nourishing, and meeting the needs of others. Cooking is a meaningful activity that

gives purpose to women's lives and is an area that can make women feel competent and valued. However, as Rosalind Coward points out, ". . . women's labour is at the same time represented as inessential, of less significance than men's. . . Men's labour is seen as value-producing, integral to the life of society; women's as peripheral to productive relations" (Coward, p. 90). Delia Smith's and other women-oriented cooking programmes, although very popular, are also peripheral in terms of television broadcasting, programmed in non-prime-time slots during the daytime, when housewives are most likely to be at home and alone.

A.2. As Eaters

Images of the cooking woman encompass but one facet of what Susan Bordo terms the "cultural requirements of the construction of femininity,"⁴ to which women are to varying degrees vulnerable. In her book Unbearable Weight, Bordo has provided a thoroughly documented analysis of what eating entails for the twentieth century Western woman. Images of women and eating are indelibly linked to their bodies and their appearance. Western culture has trained women to be constantly on guard about their bodies, and eating has become one of the principal axes around which control over the female body is exerted. According to Bordo, the underlying reason for today's body obsession is a (male, patriarchal) fear of women's appetites. Indeed Western culture is

⁴ Susan Bordo, Unbearable Weight (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1993), p. 47. Hereafter referred to in the text as Bordo.

permeated by a negative, and even at times harshly cruel and repressive, view of female eating and female appetites. There is a taboo, dating from the Victorian era, against representations of women eating with abandon and surrender. Unbridled female hunger is depicted as dangerous and threatening, "permeated with terror and loathing" (Bordo, p. 116). Consequently, most of the images on offer that link women eaters and food, found mainly in advertising, show female eating as furtive and an activity that requires restraint and surveillance.

The following analysis of two segments of an issue of You magazine, the Sunday supplement to The Daily Mail,⁵ will provide an example of the pervasiveness of the above attitudes toward the eating woman. The issue in question offers two recipe sections. The first is entirely devoted to olive recipes. Each recipe is accompanied by a sumptuous photograph of the prepared dish in fine rustic-style dinnerware. Before the text of each recipe, a chatty paragraph gives tips about the presentation of each dish or where to locate hard-to-find ingredients. Other comments are warmly evocative and even nostalgic of Mediterranean cultures and lifestyles, and it would seem that the recipes are trying to recapture some lost or past eating ambience.⁶ The entire segment obviously addresses its implied women readers as cooks and

⁵ May 16, 1993.

⁶ A sample of typical comments from the olive article: "Delicious with drinks before dinner." "Sun-dried tomatoes can be bought in delicatessens." "I like to offer guests a really good extra virgin olive oil, so they can dress their salad to their liking, like the Italians do."

entertainers, not as eaters.

Further on in the same issue there is an article entitled "Shape Up for Summer," which is a two-week day-to-day "exclusive diet and fitness plan." The recipes in this section are simple and straightforward. There is no appeal to prestige with obscure or expensive ingredients, nor any regard for presentation. The ingredients listed for each recipe are all common and easily available, there is no chat about how best to serve the dishes, and there are no photographs showing the completed recipes. Although there are no pictures of food, the article is illustrated with photographs of a tanned and svelte woman modelling various bathing suits. To complete the array of contradictory lures in the small space of this article, it also includes an illustrated exercise guide, with a series of aerobic exercises that are part of the fitness plan. Each day of the two-week plan is introduced by a paragraph giving details about how to plan a holiday, what clothes to buy, what accessories might be needed. It is also full of words of encouragement to those dieters who might be losing their willpower during the dieting period.⁷ The address of this article is obviously to women not only as eaters but also to women who have succumbed to the "tyranny of slenderness" (Bordo, p. 141) and

⁷ A sample of the comments: "You are now on the seven-day countdown to your holiday so there will be lots to do and plenty of jobs to keep your mind off food." "The winning post is almost in sight, so don't even consider wavering from the diet or exercise programme." "Before you pack your swimsuit, pop it on and see how different you look in the mirror."

"lipophobia"⁸ that pervade Western societies. Such a woman has to be ever-vigilant about her appearance, and especially about her weight, and is overly aware of the dangers and consequences of letting her appetite go. This would include the vast majority of women, according to surveys published about women and their body image.

A comparison between the olive recipe and "Shape Up for Summer" articles shows that, on the one hand, nourishing others is one form of desire that is appropriate for women to have. Wanting to eat, on the other hand, is fraught with embarrassment and danger. When a woman is depicted as indulging her appetite for food, it is almost always likened to a sexual appetite. The voracious woman devouring food with abandon is thus construed as a "man-eater." In this case eating is not just a metaphor for sex, but inversely, as Bordo points out, "the sexual act, when initiated and desired by a woman, is imagined as an act of eating, of incorporation and destruction of the object of desire" (Bordo, p. 117).

Culture has not only trained women to be overly concerned about their bodies, but has at the same time equally engaged in training both women and men how to look at and evaluate women and their bodies. I would now like to focus on these "educated gazes" as they are produced and perpetuated in mainstream prefeminist films. The boundaries between images of women cooking and images of women eating are very well-guarded and, as will be confirmed by

⁸ Claude Fischler, L'Homnivore, op. cit., pp. 297-320.

the film analyses that follow, women who cook are not themselves eaters, and, inversely, women who eat do not do the cooking.

II. PRE-FEMINIST REPRESENTATIONS

A. Overview

In order to provide the context that surrounds images of women and food in film, I would like to provide a brief overview of general filmic representations of women in the pre-feminist period. It will quickly be noticed that the cook/eater dichotomy outlined above corresponds to the traditional polar roles of madonna and sex object that have comprised the limits of women's representations in mainstream film.⁹ Thanks to the work of feminist critics beginning with Molly Haskell and Marjorie Rosen, it has by now become fairly commonplace to locate mainstream cinematic representations of women within patriarchy's larger, wider domination and influence over gender roles and representations in society. Women's roles in film have predominantly been confined to those roles imposed upon them in a system that has constantly endeavoured to contain them within prescribed limits. Representations of women in mainstream film have therefore generally been structured around the domestic or the

⁹ A full spectrum of the representations of women in mainstream film is provided in Molly Haskell's seminal panorama From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies (Baltimore: Penguin, 1974), as well as Marjorie Rosen's Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream (New York: Avon, 1973).

theatrical/spectacular spheres of operation.¹⁰ When they appear in the domestic sphere, women rarely occupy an important position, neither at the micro-level of the individual frame - where they are often placed in the background, off-centre or out of focus, nor at a "higher" narrative level in terms of a film's plot development. In this homely position, they are plain, virtually invisible and often self-sacrificing, figured into the film more as part of the ambience and decor, and "used" to give a certain flavour or atmosphere to a scene or setting. When women appear out of the domestic sphere, they can be counted upon for a higher comic or dramatic effect, often symbolising and embodying immorality and (male) corruption. Outside of the home, female characters are more readily sexualised and, in terms of individual frames and shots, these more spectacular women will often appear in close-up or occupy a central position in the frame. Narratives are likely either to see these women disappear, killed off, or otherwise punished for their transgressions, or they will be pushed onto the path to the ultimate goal of wife and mother.

One current of feminist film criticism, spearheaded by the early work of Laura Mulvey and followed up notably by Mary Ann Doane¹¹, has argued that mainstream films of this period are guided

¹⁰ Lucy Fischer, Shot/Countershot: Film Tradition and Women's Cinema. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 24. Thorough research and cataloguing in this area have been carried out by Carolyn Galerstein, Working Women on the Hollywood Screen (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1989).

¹¹ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Bill Nichols, ed., Movies and Methods, Vol II (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), pp.303-315; Mary

exclusively by male subjectivity and only given signification from male positioning. As such, both poles of this crude female representational spectrum have been criticised for not allowing enough room for constructive identification for female spectators. According to Doane, ". . . feminist film criticism has consistently shown that, in the classical Hollywood cinema, the woman is deprived of a gaze, deprived of subjectivity and repeatedly transformed into the object of masculine scopophilic desire."¹² Such characterisations would thus encourage both male and female spectator alike to participate in the derision, transience, and devaluation of many of women's roles in film. In her article "Film and the Masquerade," Doane has analysed the possibilities that mainstream representations of women offer for female spectators.¹³ According to Doane, the housewife, madonna and, I would add, cook end of the spectrum excludes women from narrative involvement, making them so much akin to something like window dressing that the only possible way for a female spectator to identify with such portrayals is from a masochistic viewpoint, i.e., by tacitly accepting this downtrodden, subordinate positioning. The opposite end of the spectrum, according to Doane, implicates women so much

Ann Doane "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," in Patricia Erens, ed., Issues in Feminist Film Criticism (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990) pp. 41-57.

¹² Mary Ann Doane, The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 2.

¹³ Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," op. cit., passim.

in a form of spectacle where they are pushed out of the narrative that the possibilities for identification are stifled by the image's proximity to the viewing subject. Both types of representations leave no non-masochistic alternative but to identify once again with the desiring male enunciative and diegetic perspective. In both circumstances Doane sees the female spectator at an impasse, as having no non-masochistic choice but to assume and sanction this masculine perspective: ". . . it is understandable that women want to be men, for everyone wants to be elsewhere than in the feminine position."¹⁴

While this mother/sex object dichotomy is seemingly irredeemable for critics such as Mulvey and Doane, other critics have allowed for some constructive resistance in mainstream patriarchal texts and have tried to find ways, in the terms of Jackie Stacey, to get out of the impasse of "masculinisation, masochism or marginality."¹⁵ Various critics have thus either discovered "niches" in which women have been more in control of films and female representations than originally thought, or have "revised" classical patriarchal texts to find areas where women are presented in a more positive light or appear as disturbances and transgressors. For example, Silvia Harvey has suggested that the anti-family and highly sexualised positioning of the *femme fatale* figure in *film noir* creates disturbances that attack and

¹⁴ Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade," op. cit., p. 48.

¹⁵ Jackie Stacey, "Desperately Seeking Difference," in Patricia Erens, ed., Issues in Feminist Film Criticism (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 369.

criticise the fundamental value systems of society, allowing for " . . . the production of seeds of counter-ideologies."¹⁶ These *femmes fatales*, if only briefly, defy the standard patriarchal gender positioning and taint the madonna/whore dichotomy with some shades of grey.

Another area of classical pre-feminist cinema that, according to critics, offers some outlet for criticism of patriarchy is melodrama. According to E. Ann Kaplan, melodramas, as films that address a specifically female audience, have traditionally been the space allotted within mainstream cinema for the representation and playing out of anxieties and frustrations that women have experienced due to the injustices of patriarchy. Kaplan has developed a theory of complicit and resisting maternal melodramas.¹⁷ The former category comprises texts that, although they may show a concern for women's problems and a certain sensitivity to women's issues, ultimately end by sending the mother back to the domestic sphere or by punishing or ridiculing a sexually desirous woman for her transgressions. This interpretation corresponds closely to the impasse described by Mulvey and Doane. On the other hand, the resisting text, according to Kaplan, allows greater room for the expression of a feminine

¹⁶ Sylvia Harvey, "Woman's Place: The Absence of Family in Film Noir," in E. Ann Kaplan, ed., Women in Film Noir. (London: British Film Institute, 1980), p. 33. See also in the same volume, Janey Place, "Women in Film Noir," pp. 35-67.

¹⁷ E. Ann Kaplan, Motherhood and Representation, op. cit., passim.

subjectivity. Kaplan's theory shows that different ways of representing women can provoke different critical responses that do not necessarily contradict each other. It must be re-iterated, however, that in either complicit or resisting texts, women are usually in the end punished for any transgressions they commit.

B. Traditional Cooking Iconography and Topography

B.1. "Mise-en-Cuisine"

Following the critical itinerary set by feminist film critics, I would first like to look at films in which women are immobilised and "fixed" in their kitchens, films which do not offer women any room beyond the kitchen space, and in which women are firmly entrenched in the housewife end of the housewife-to-sex object spectrum. I will then look at other mainstream pre-feminist texts that contain elements of "resistance" to mainstream patriarchal representations, and that attempt to break with the classical and the traditional models. Being mainstream films, however, they always revert in the end to the punishment or "return home" of the transgressive female figure.

A comparison between a range of pre-feminist films and the 1994 Delia Smith programme shows that little has changed as far as the iconography and topography of kitchen-bound women are concerned. In fact, the model implicit in Delia Smith's discourse of a self-effacing, self-sacrificing, other-oriented woman has existed in popular representations of women since the industrial

revolution (Bordo, p. 119) and is predominant in pre-feminist mainstream films. Rosalind Coward has remarked upon the perennality of this female kitchen positioning: "In the division of labour, women are coerced into being those who provide and nourish. Women prepare the food, cook it and serve it - all seen by a sexist society as an inevitable aspect of femininity" (Coward, p. 89). While women, as those who traditionally meet the needs of others, are made to feel that their role is crucial, indispensable and natural, images of women in the kitchen, whether considered by themselves or within narrative structures, clearly and unequivocally render women's kitchen appearances as non-appearances and as non-events. Identifying with this role, as Doane has posited, can amount to nothing more than self-effacement.

Some of the traits of images of women at work in the kitchen can be broken down according to what surrounds them in the image, various elements of the *mise-en-scène*, and the objects they are frequently associated with. By analysing the iconography of women in the kitchen we come to realise that films construct a certain type of feminine ideal around this room of the house and the functions that are performed there. The methods employed in filming kitchens have been fairly "realistic," restricted by the nature of the kitchen itself and the objects that one "customarily" finds in it. The predominant images of domesticity and home life in the pre-feminist period are in "the middle-class home, filled

with objects."¹⁸ Regardless of the economic class of a film's characters or setting, there is a tendency towards homogenisation and standardisation when it comes to the objects in the kitchen. From the working-class kitchen at the beginning of *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937) to the eponymous Mildred Pierce's middle-class kitchen to Aunt Fanny's lavishly-stocked kitchen in *The Magnificent Ambersons* (Orson Welles, 1942) to even the frontier kitchens in many of John Ford's westerns, we see women among the same array of pots, pans, dishes, ovens, tables and ladels. This standardisation of representations of the kitchen may be due to turn-of-the-century efforts in America to bring up the standards of kitchens for purposes of safety and hygiene, as well as homogenising consumer needs.¹⁹ Just as Joan Crawford modelled various dresses and suits which were copied and marketed for mass-consumption after the release of her films,²⁰ her kitchen in *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945), replete with the latest mixers and gas stoves, can

¹⁸ Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury," in Christine Gledhill, ed., Home Is Where the Heart Is (London: British Film Institute, 1987), p. 61.

¹⁹ These efforts were part of the intensive experiments which were carried out (and usually failed) to raise the standard of living and combat malnutrition, and even a feminist drive to save women time and energy. For example, at the turn of the century in Eastern American cities plans and tests were run to abolish domestic kitchens entirely and have community-sponsored public restaurants where everyone would eat. See Harvey Levenstein, Revolution at the Table (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 40-60.

²⁰ Charlotte Cornelia Herzog and Jane Marie Gaines, "Puffed sleeves before tea-time: Joan Crawford, Adrian and women audience," in Christine Gledhill, ed., Stardom: Industry of Desire (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 74-91.

be seen not only as a sign of her imminent social ascension but also as a consumer showcase.

A recurring method of framing women in the kitchen captures them among these various props that denote the kitchen, consisting mainly of pots and pans hanging on walls behind her or steaming on stove tops, along with other kitchen utensils, and usually a series of counters and cupboards. The woman is usually depicted as being totally surrounded if not engulfed by this room of the house and the objects in it. A characteristic example of this image appears in *Stella Dallas*, in two brief scenes at the beginning of the film. In the cramped kitchen of their working-class home, Stella (Barbara Stanwyck) is preparing her brother's lunch at a kitchen counter in the foreground on the right side of the frame. Her mother (played by Majorie Main who, curiously, later played Ma Kettle in the *Ma and Pa Kettle* series of films) is behind her, hidden in the corner of the kitchen hovering over the sink with two huge steaming kettles on the stove behind her. Literally "cornered" in her kitchen, the mother appears as a shadowy figure draped in a dark, flat-falling housedress. "Prematurely aged," in the terms of E. Ann Kaplan,²¹ she is nothing more than a begrudged and submissive servant, who is only allowed enough mobility to move from her post at the stove and sink to the kitchen table which occupies the middle of the room and back again. Completely effaced, it is difficult for a woman in this working-class milieu to erase the

²¹ E. Ann Kaplan, Motherhood and Representation, op. cit., p. 5.

traces of her labour, as women are so often more able to do in bourgeois households by, for example, eating in a dining room from where the kitchen and its signs of women's labour are not visible. This is exemplified by the shot in the kitchen where, in the foreground, the table is laid out for breakfast with bread, eggs, milk, etc., while in the background - in the same deep focal plane - the stovetop, kitchen counter, and sinks are all in view, as well as the mother. Not having the luxury of a dining room, the kitchen here must serve both as the place where the men eat and as the place where the women cook and clean up. The topography of the kitchen in *Stella Dallas* offers justification for Stella's subsequent flight from the kitchen and her complete denial of any traditional domestic activity.

In John Ford's *Fort Apache* (1948), a very brief medium shot using a woman and a few pots and pans places her firmly in the domestic sphere, and more specifically the kitchen, defining her as a domestic creature and servant. The scene occurs in the homecoming scene of a cavalryman after a long absence. After being warmly greeted by the father, Sgt. O'Rourke, the latter turns to the back of the house and solemnly calls for the "woman of the house" to greet her son. There is then a cut to a wall covered with hanging pots and pans and Mrs O'Rourke, the woman in question, walks into this frame so that she is completely surrounded by these kitchen implements. She is wearing a white apron and wrings her hands together tightly while she looks at her son in wide-eyed wonder. This shot not only intimately associates her with the

kitchen, but also the mythic title of "woman of the house" does not even give her the function of wife or mother. Mrs O'Rourke will later instruct Philadelphia Thursday, the daughter of the fort's new commander, on how to set up her new home and train her in the art of maintaining it and entertaining guests.

A scene from Orson Welles' *The Magnificent Ambersons* between George and his aunt Fanny (Agnes Morehead) also shows the woman as a prisoner of her kitchen. The film's luxurious mise-en-scène fills the frame here from the extreme foreground to the far background with kitchen utensils. Aunt Fanny and her nephew are completely surrounded by these objects. The acts that she performs in this space are hardly appreciated and completely covered over by the immediate and gluttonous pleasure that George is getting from eating his aunt's strawberry shortcake. Little does he know or care that his nonchalant gluttony is amplifying his aunt's anguish, which can only be detected in the tension in her voice. As noted by André Bazin,²² two actions occur during this scene, the real one, which consists of the aunt's indirect questions to George concerning the whereabouts of the man she is in love with, and the pretext action, George's eating of the cake, which serves as a cover for the real action. This pretext action is not as "purposefully insignificant" as Bazin would have us believe, because the failure in Aunt Fanny's romantic life here is associated with her "success" in the kitchen. Her home life has

²² André Bazin, Orson Welles (Paris: Editions Ramsay, 1985), pp. 58-61.

ruined any possibility of a romantic life, and both the real and the pretext actions converge to convey this.

The women in these scenes are indelibly associated with their kitchens and, by extension, with their roles as servants, providers, and cooks. Little effort is made to give the women any psychological traits that are not associated with this condition. The pots and pans that define these women define them not only as women not to be desired, but also as women who are not allowed to have desires themselves. The sterility of these figures is further implied in their costumes which typically comprise a long apron, thoroughly covering the lower parts of their bodies, reinforcing the denial of them as sexual, desiring or desirable beings. Their docility and immobility are brought out through the framing of such scenes, where the woman is photographed in a fixed, immobile medium shot.

If these "images" are more or less inconsequential in terms of the films' plot structures, some associations between women and the kitchen are used aesthetically, stylistically and often melodramatically to advance the narrative. Empty dishes on the table have been used in a great many films to signify not only the absence of a man or child, but also the anguish of the waiting housewife, whose life's activities are somehow in suspense as long as the spouse or child is not at the table, as if her existence had no further justification and as if her life were somehow incomplete without the presence of these others. F. W. Murnau's *Sunrise* (1927) uses the empty soup plates that the wife has just set on the

table as a visual signifier for the husband who is not only absent, but is also going to meet another woman. The soup plates are referred to repeatedly to emphasise the housewife's rejection and solitude, with cross-cutting between the empty plates at the table and the husband walking towards his nocturnal rendez-vous.

Cross-cutting between the empty place at the table and other places associated with the person who should be seated there is also exploited by Fritz Lang at the beginning of his *M* (1930) during the early "Elsie Beckman" sequence. In anticipation of her daughter's return from school, Mrs Beckman has set the table for lunch. Cutting between the ticking clock, the plates on the table, and the worried face of Mrs Beckman points to the absence of the daughter and Mrs Beckman's growing anguish, augmented by shots outside of the apartment of Elsie with the stranger who will soon murder her. In these scenes, elements of the *mise-en-scène* (the empty dishes) are used to announce things (the imminent absence, lack) that have not yet been explicitly articulated by the narrative. Jean Renoir also uses this technique with a shot of a lone child at a large empty table in *La Grande Illusion* (1937) to signify the "manlessness" of the woman (Dita Parlo) whom the escaped prisoners, Maréchal and Rosenthal (Jean Gabin and Marcel Dalio), encounter and stay with in the last part of the film. Her rustic home is sad and empty without the men of the family who have been killed off by the war. Although the two French escapees fill this void temporarily, there is once again a shot of the unoccupied place settings after their departure, indicating that the house is

once again forlorn and empty and foreshadowing the fact that Maréchal will not return after the war despite his promises to do so.

Domestic women are thus characterised by passivity, docility, and waiting. Women's lives in John Ford's westerns (for example, *Fort Apache*, *The Searchers*) are regulated by the comings and goings of their men. In *M*, the camera is allowed to leave the kitchen to look for Elsie Beckman while the mother must stay in the kitchen and can only scream from the window. In *La Grande Illusion* as well, it would seem that the woman is waiting for the men to come to her house, and the film promptly abandons her once the men decide it is time to move on. Both *Sunrise* and *M* use the empty dishes not only to convey the anguish of waiting and absence, but also to create a link with the world outside of the kitchen, since the woman herself cannot leave this space. The empty dishes compel the spectator to ask the question where? In so doing, *Sunrise* thus creates an opposition between the rejected indoor woman -the drab apron-clad housewife- and the desired outdoor "city woman" -the mysterious moonlight lover on the marshes. All of this is articulated around a man's desire, the two women representing the opposite figures of traditional patriarchal desire. The camerawork further emphasises the contrast between the two figures. The housewife is filmed in a conventional kitchen shot, framed from a diegetically "neutral" point-of-view in her entirety within the kitchen surrounded by cooking implements and utensils in a fixed shot. The woman on the marshes, by contrast, is followed by the

camera, and briefly by the eyes of her neighbours, as she walks down the street and through the marshes. She is associated with movement, the moonlight, the mist, and the night; the housewife with domesticity, inertia, waiting, desperation, prudishness.

Sunrise, M and *La Grande illusion* have the merit of remaining at home with the domestic women, if only briefly, showing them alone in front of their stoves and empty plates in their sad kitchens. One of the archetypal figures of *film noir* is a similar "good woman," often the wife or fiancée of the male protagonist. However, such "good women" are rarely shown alone in their kitchens and their appearances are also completely regulated by the comings and goings of the male protagonists. These figures appear in such *films noirs* as *Fallen Angel* (Otto Preminger, 1947), *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947), *The Killers* (Robert Siodmak, 1946), *Panic in the Streets* (Elia Kazan, 1950), and *The Big Heat* (Fritz Lang, 1953). *The Big Heat* presents a typical example of how the "good woman" and cook are treated. In an early scene Katie (Jocelyn Brando) cooks and serves a steak and baked potato for her husband, Detective Bannon (Glenn Ford). In this and other scenes in the film, she perfectly conforms to the woman-in-the-kitchen model: she is apron-clad, framed behind her kitchen counter. The couple chat warmly and flirtatiously, giving off a very homely and comforting atmosphere. These domestic scenes always take place at night and the interior of the house is always brightly lit, making it seem all the more like a fragile sanctuary in comparison with the dark and dangerous world outside. Katie's plainness, homeliness and

simplicity serve to contrast with the *femme fatale*'s (played by Gloria Grahame) spectacular, alluring and threatening sensuality. The domestic woman is un-interesting in visual terms while the other desirable woman is overly fetishised. Furthermore, within seconds of stepping out of the house for the first and only time, Katie is killed by a car bomb that was intended for her husband, making clear the dangers facing women who try to step out of the bounds of the domestic sphere.

Giving women the role of cooks is denying them any role as active participants in the public sphere, for not only must they cook, they must do so inside. The *mise-en-scène* works to confine women to this space and they are depicted as waiting for things to happen from the outside. Women in these films are not only linked with waiting, but more specifically with waiting to feed others. As Rosalind Coward puts it, "(w)omen are often rendered invisible by men, confined to the home, silenced by male dominance or just not heard when they speak in public. In short, women's domestic role does put them in danger of being devoured or destroyed, of disappearing altogether. In giving out comfort and support within conventional structures, women do run the risk of becoming invisible in society" (Coward, p. 89).

B.2. Transgressive Cooks

The mainstream films analysed thus far seemingly offer very little space for domestic women. Women who stay docilely and passively at home and who perform domestic duties are often endowed

with sacrosanct, nurturing qualities that are at the same time revered yet belittled, admired yet insignificant. As mentioned in Part A of this section, other feminist film critics have found areas within mainstream film production that go against the grain of patriarchal value systems. For example, many of the women in John Ford's films, although they are, as we have seen, firmly implanted within traditional representational structures, are nonetheless imparted with a positive "civilising" role. It must be noted that Ford's westerns are set in a pre-industrialised period, before the mass mechanisation of many of the traditional areas of female labour and production, a period when domestic labour was extremely productive in terms of societal and family economy. From this viewpoint women have an active and constructive function in the classical structuralist framework evoked in analyses of Ford's films.²³ In the mythic Fordian West, women are the bearers of culture and civilisation to the wild and savage frontier. Melodramas are another area in which women are especially addressed as spectators. According to E. Ann Kaplan, "Women's melodrama articulates women's deepest unconscious fears and fantasies about their lives in patriarchy."²⁴ I would now like to focus on one such melodrama that portrays a woman's ambitions and desires that arise from her activities in the kitchen space, but that allow her

²³ See for example the Cahiers du cinéma analysis of *Young Mr Lincoln* translated in Mike Nichols, ed., Movies and Methods (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

²⁴ E. Ann Kaplan, "Mothering, Feminism, Representation," in Christine Gledhill, ed., Home Is Where the Heart Is, op. cit., p. 117.

to break away from the hierarchy of the kitchen space.

Michael Curtiz' *Mildred Pierce* (1945), while showing the risks for women who transgress the physical boundaries of the home and kitchen set up in the patriarchal order, also points to the possibilities for women of transcending the kitchen space and shaping their own lives. Mildred's complete mobility in the kitchen and house during the opening flashback scene is a sign of her imminent move out of the house and her future mobility in the outside business world. The interior domestic world cannot contain her energy and ambitions, and the mise-en-scène and camerawork in this scene announce the film's outcome. In this scene Mildred is constantly in motion and is the focal point of the mise-en-scène. Although we do see an establishing kitchen shot -a medium shot of Mildred centred in her kitchen busily moving amidst bowls, pans and cupboards, the intensity of her work does not allow the camera to stay still for long, as she reaches for ingredients in the cupboard, goes to the refrigerator, stops to mix a bowl, and turns to stir a pot on the stove. She performs all of these perfectly synchronised activities while arguing with her husband, Bert, who is relegated to the background in this scene. Bert is constantly following Mildred around and never takes any initiative in the house, neither to answer the door nor the telephone. The camera readily leaves him behind (e.g. to focus on a photograph of the children on the piano) or continues on without him (to follow Mildred upstairs while he continues whining at Mildred downstairs). When he does appear in the frame, he is often horizontal (lying on

the couch) or, especially in the kitchen, in the background, and in all cases he is upstaged by the mobile Mildred.

The repetitive familiarising aspects of other kitchen scenes and shots in other films are absent in *Mildred Pierce*, and although in later scenes the film does take us into the same kitchen, we never see it filmed in the same way from the same angles. When we next return to the kitchen, the children enter from the back door, and quite an effort is required to realise that it is the same room. Later, when Mildred is baking pies with her maid, Lotte, the kitchen is viewed from yet another angle, giving the impression each time of being a different place, removing the feeling of monotony usually associated with kitchens, and coinciding with Mildred's changing position with regards to the "kitchen" as the film goes along.

This scene portrays Bert as an ineffectual husband and father, who can neither support his family financially (he is unemployed and the family have to depend on the sales of Mildred's pies and cakes to the neighbours) nor can he show any authority over his wife and daughters. One premonitory signal of Mildred's imminent departure from the domestic kitchen towards the public sphere of the restaurant is the fact that she is not cooking food for her husband and family, therefore not occupying the conventional role of nurturing mother. She will later pay for daring to leave her allotted space by being propelled back into her husband's arms by the film's end, re-establishing the domestic kitchen, albeit altered, as the truly proper place for her. Ultimately, as Kaplan

has stated, "(t)he work of the film is to reinscribe the Mother in the position patriarchy desires for her and, in so doing, teach the female audience the dangers of stepping out of the given position."²⁵

C. "Mise-en-Bouche": Woman as Eater in Pre-Feminist Film

Given the submissive, docile, and *banal nature of their roles*, women as providers were not created to draw undue attention to their characters in films. Representations are so "seamless" and transparent that it somehow is not odd that, although they "naturally" assume their designated roles by procuring, cooking and serving food, domestic women are rarely shown doing the only thing with food that is in fact natural with food, i.e. eating it. Their lives are scheduled and programmed around the meals of others, yet they are never allowed to enjoy the fruits of their own labours, nor do they ever have the chance of being served in turn by others. Shots of women framed in their kitchens from a diegetically neutral point of view further serve to relegate them to the background. In a table scene in the beginning of John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), shortly after Ethan Edwards' return home, the women and girls, seated at the table with the men, are only shown busily serving the men - passing them dishes, putting food on their plates, pouring them coffee. During all this time

²⁵ E. Ann Kaplan, "The Case of the Missing Mother," in Patricia Erens, Issues in Feminist Film Criticism, op. cit., p. 128.

the men heartily eat, but the women are never seen taking a mouthful. In this section I will demonstrate that eating is an activity reserved for an entirely different kind of woman. In the overview above it has been discussed how a boundary is drawn between the two female archetypes of housewife and sex object, each encompassing an ideal that serves male desire in its own way, and each occupying a different topography.

As explained in the introduction, eating women are in many ways automatically considered as transgressors. We will see that there is often a need or a desire either to hide or to render female eating as unnatural and abnormal, something that has to be hidden, ridiculed or punished. Women are shown as varyingly piteous and ridiculous in their excessive cravings for sweets in the characters, for example, of Vincent Price's crazed pastry-eating wife in *Dragonwyck* (Joseph Manckiewicz, 1946), the murderess who cannot control her urges for chocolate bars in *Adam's Rib* (George Cukor, 1949), or the sweet-craving alcoholics in *Too Much, Too Soon* (Art Napoleon, 1958) and *Days of Wine and Roses* (Blake Edwards, 1962).

Shots of women as consumers are primarily diegetically subjective and indicate the position of someone, a male, watching the woman eat, thus raising the element of spectacle surrounding their images in films. This type of shot is often a medium shot or close-up. This proximity is linked not only to the shot's point of view, which is that of a male gaze, but also because much more attention is paid to the action of eating than to that of cooking

or cleaning up. While domestic activities are taken for granted and incidental to the plot and thus allotted to the background, the eating women's presence, on the other hand, is allowed a share of significance in the plot structure. However, eating women are generally not allowed to remain in the film for too long once they have served their purpose. For example, in *Strangers on a Train* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1951) the murderer (played by Robert Walker) watches a girl at a fairground licking an ice cream cone, the image of this consuming woman sets off sexual desire/murderous rage and she is then immediately strangled. All of the elements of the mise-en-scene - the fairground lighting, the age of the woman, what she is eating, how she is eating, where she is eating - work to emphasise the spectacular aspects, whereas a woman in the kitchen, as we have seen, would be de-emphasised, banalised, and taken for granted.

Eating women are rarely depicted as domestic creatures, and in fact their eating must take place away from the home. Usually, as might be expected, it takes place in a restaurant, at the expense and under the gaze of a man, or in some more exciting and stimulating atmosphere, such as the fairground in *Strangers*. As opposed to the daytime kitchen activities, these meals often occur in the evening. These women can thus in no way be mistaken for housewives, preserving the dichotomy reserved for women. The place most often chosen for women eaters is the restaurant, a place intimately linked with male/female domination and sexual politics. A restaurant's layout and design reinforce the traditional power

relations based on gender. Of course, people go to restaurants to eat, but not just in any way, and many restaurants, as places devoted to pleasure and the senses, are designed especially to accommodate heterosexual couples. Restaurants thus make the association between food and sex a logical and inevitable one.

One would think that, whatever the setting may be, the food itself would be of crucial significance. However, attempts to photograph food in an appealing and seductive way in black and white have not been very successful, and this may be one of the reasons why this type of representation is not predominant in black and white films. Therefore, black and white films do not readily focus on the food that is being eaten. Hitchcock did successfully manage in *Strangers* to contrast the darkness of the women's lips and mouth with the milky whiteness of the ice cream in the fairground scene. The association between food and sex and women and sex is thus difficult to render if the food is not as well-presented as the woman is. What completed these associations are developments in colour technology that permitted food to be photographed in a recognisably enticing way. This same technology also facilitated the development and growth of pornographic photography. The professional photography of food, especially for advertisements and recipes in women's magazines, is as "touched up" as pornographic representations of the female body and sexuality. The same methods used for concealing hairs or wrinkles on a human body are used to make meat appear "juicy" and fruit look fresh. Rosalind Coward has coined the term "food pornography", and when

defining it she refers to the fundamentals of "standard" pornography: "...Women are made to look into the camera in the same way, their bodies are arranged in the same way, the same glossy photographic techniques are used, there is the same fragmentation of women's bodies, and a concomittant fetishistic concentration on bits of the body." She sees both (or all) types of pornography as "creating and indulging "pleasures" which confirm or trap men and women in their respective positions of power and subordination" (Coward, p. 102). These methods for camouflaging defects and making food and women appear appealing are united in certain scenes of seduction that take place over a meal. The effectiveness of this type of scene did not reach its acme until the convergence of sophisticated colour technology, which allowed food to look recognisably appetizing, and the decline of the classical period, which entailed an increase in explicit sexuality. The prototypical scene of this type is from Tony Richardson's *Tom Jones* (1963).

In this scene Tom (Albert Finney), the protagonist, is seated at a table in a tavern across from Mrs. Waters (Joyce Redman), a woman he has just saved from an attempted rape. As they proceed to eat - from soup to lobster to chicken to oysters to fruit - it is clear from the way they are eating that they are mutually seducing one another. This "seduction effect" is of course constructed by the film's editing, mise-en-scène, and lighting, which all join together to create and concentrate on the spectacle of the woman eating. The scene is presented as a mutual seduction scene through

a series of shot/reverse shots - alternating between Tom's and Mrs. Waters' bites/mouthfuls. However, upon closer inspection, the "mutual" nature of this scene is questionable. As the series of shot/reverse shots develops, the camera lingers on Tom only at the beginning (during the voice over which introduces the scene - 10", and for comic effect while he struggles with a lobster shell - 13"). These shots occur notably when Tom is not devouring, when he is not actually putting food into his mouth. On the other hand, the shots pause at length on Mrs. Waters while she slowly slides flesh out of a lobster shell with her teeth (10"), picks meat from a wishbone (10" - which she offers to break with Tom), licks and picks meat from a drumstick (9"), and slurps down an oyster (12").

It is plain that Mrs. Waters makes a performance out of her eating for Tom. The oyster-eating shots best illustrate this. These shots are set apart from the rest. The lighting on Mrs Waters has changed to a softer, more diffuse light, her hair has been tousled, and her dress has also been tousled and pulled down to reveal more *décolletage*. To eat the oyster she turns to the side to be seen downing it from a profile. She then pauses and turns to Tom/the camera to expose the oyster in her mouth before swallowing it. Whereas the lengthy shots of Tom show him grappling with his food, trying to control it and master it, these shots of him eating all serve for comic effect. In contrast, the more lengthy shots of Mrs. Waters serve to eroticize her and her eating. In response to her increasing effrontery, Tom can only look at her

in wide-eyed amazement. Tom is somehow positioned so that his mouth and the lower part of his face are always covered by his hands holding food in front of his face. He is always looking out from behind his food, which renders him more voyeuristic. On the other hand, Mrs. Waters always maintains her hands at a level below her face so that her face, and especially the food going into her mouth, are always in full view.

Indeed, the focal point of this consuming spectacle is Mrs Water's mouth, for this is the orifice that is used to suggest both the sexual nature of eating and the voracious aspects of sex, with its real and imagined connotations of absorption, penetration and ingestion. To quote Susan Bordo once again, "(t)he sexual act, when initiated and desired by a woman, is imagined as an act of eating, of incorporation and destruction of the object of desire" (Bordo, pp. 116-117). These scenes from *Tom Jones* and *Strangers on a Train* demonstrate the extreme reactions, in the form of violent or sexual urges, that the eating woman elicits in the men who watch them.

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Having outlined some of the major questions raised by pre-feminist images of women as cooks and eaters, I would now like to turn to the post-feminist period and analyse what changes have occurred in representations since then.

III. POST-FEMINIST REPRESENTATIONS

A. Introduction

Three major developments have challenged films and filmmakers since the advent of the women's movement of the late 60s/early 70s: 1) changes in audience awareness - women became more aware of "types" and how images are manipulated *and exploited in films*, television, and advertising; 2) changes in representations of women - making it more problematic in some cases to make strict classifications between sex object and housewife representations, because some of the stereotyping has lost its hard edges or has become embedded in other discourses; and 3) an increase in the number of women filmmakers and producers, both in the avant-garde as well as in the mainstream. These developments are so thoroughly intertwined that it is difficult to discuss causes and effects among them. Out of these changes we can discern three broad categories of films that deal with women as consumers and providers of food and show three broad types of responses to the challenge of feminism.

Firstly, in the popular mainstream the traditional topography and iconography remain intact, thus maintaining the two idealised images associating women with either sexuality or the family. The standard method of opposing a good cooking wife/mother against an evil consuming harlot has been repeated over and over again and recently the poles have been pushed even farther apart, to the point of

creating what I have termed, following on Rosalind Coward, "pornographies" of cooking and eating. What has changed since the pre-feminist period, perhaps due as much (or more) to the post-classical increase in sexual explicitness and violence, is 1) the violence with which the home is both offended and defended and 2) the amplification of the "eroticism" of the eating women. These types of representations reflect the film industry's conservatism, which is arguably an extreme reaction, a "backlash," in response to the demands of the women's movement.

In the second category, traditional images are slightly transformed in mainstream films without threatening the stability and domination of the status quo. What we can begin to witness here is the diversity and subtlety with which the film industry has brought various parts of the discourse of the women's movement into wider circulation, especially from the mid-1970s onwards, in what can be called the "new Hollywood women's films" as defined by Annette Kuhn.²⁶ Women's films and other female-centred narrative films express women's alienation and anger when faced with household tasks. Women-as-cooks in these films often do violence to the domestic space and then move away from the home and its constraints to pursue careers. Films that present women's lives in such a way go to the heart of concerns central to feminism by exposing the tension between the domestic and the professional. Women as eaters are liberated every now and then from the automatic

²⁶ Annette Kuhn, "Hollywood and New Women's Cinema," in Charlotte Brunsdon, ed., Films for Women (London: British Film Institute, 1986), pp. 125-130.

sexualisation of their behaviour in scenes that depict, for example, lunches between protagonists and their female friends, or they are released from the objectifying male gaze in food seduction scenes exclusively between women. Eating women are also shown expressing dissatisfaction with food, notably in representations of eating disorders. Nonetheless, the discourses contained in these mainstream narrative films are highly contradictory, and their dominant strains are at times regressive and paternalistic.

Finally, in the last category, avant-garde feminist filmmakers vent sharper criticism against the assumed roles of women in the kitchen and the dining room with a parallel heightening of the displeasure that accompanies domestic tasks. Although in the previous category the displeasure of women before their domestic tasks is shrouded in the mainstream pleasure of movie-going, here there is no attempt to gratify the spectator with narrative comprehensibility and logic.

B. Pornographies of Cooking and Eating

It has been stated in the introductory section to this chapter (Part I.A.) that cooking, along with other domestic tasks, comprises one of the few areas of a housewife's existence in which she is not only allowed but also expected to express passion. A housewife's desire is channelled directly into her housework. Any desire that brings her out of the home or links her in any way with the public sphere is summarily dampened and "domesticated" by the ambient patriarchal power. I would like to use the analogy of

pornography throughout this section to analyse how both cooking and eating women are defined in filmic and extra-filmic texts.

Pornography has a dual function. Firstly, it conditions the spectator/consumer, traditionally male, as a desiring voyeur. Its goal being to arouse sensual/sexual desire, it promises fulfillment and plenitude through its evocation of fantasy-like imagery. Secondly and inversely, it constructs the objects of its imagery, traditionally female, precisely as objects of sexual desire. In this section I would like to look at how the cooking and eating female ideals have engendered the creation of two types of elaborate "food pornographies." One constructs housewives and cooks in their consumption of women's magazines and recipes as desirous passionate voyeurs, while the other, in a more traditional sense, constructs eating women, mainly by suggestively presenting the oral ingestion of food, as the objects of male sexual desire.

B.1. Traditional Representations of Cooks, Cont'd

Because of the confluence of diverse mass media images, the image of the mother/wife working away in the kitchen, lovingly preparing a hot meal for husband and family has remained largely unchanged by feminism, and is probably by now one of the most deeply embedded in the popular imagery of women. The segment of mainstream film under scrutiny in this section has cultivated the distinction maintained in pre-feminist film between women as cooks and as eaters. In this section I will consider the mainstream ideology of maintaining women in traditional kitchen roles in such

diverse contemporary films such as *Ironweed* (Hector Babenco, 1988), *The Natural* (Barry Levinson, 1987) *Someone to Watch Over Me* (Ridley Scott, 1988), *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1988), *The Untouchables* (Brian de Palma, 1987), *Falling Down* (Joel Schumacher, 1993), *JFK* (Oliver Stone, 1991), and *Malcolm X* (Spike Lee, 1991). In these films, which are a representative but by no means an exhaustive sample, women in their kitchens represent the domestic ideal of femininity.²⁷ As can be seen from the variety of films listed, this is a prevailing image no matter what generic form the films themselves take.

Many of the above films take place at specific moments in the past, allowing for a simple regression to traditional kitchen positions. *Ironweed*, *The Natural*, *The Untouchables*, *Malcolm X* and *JFK* all place themselves firmly within pre-feminist U.S. history. While the male protagonists of, for example, *The Natural*, *JFK* and *The Untouchables* are allowed to leave the home and become typical Hollywood heroes, their wives remain steadfastly in their kitchens, and do not have a real role in the "history" that the films rely on and create.²⁸ The heterosexual family unit is presented as the natural form of social organisation. Within this framework, female cooks have a positive function as the "backbones" to their men and

²⁷ This representational mode is very constant and the possible films to add to the list is ever-increasing. At the time that this thesis goes to press, one could also add the wives in *Apollo XIII* (Ron Howard, 1995) and *Se7en* (David Fincher, 1995).

²⁸ This may be all the more surprising in *JFK*, not only given the film's leftist "revisioning" of history, but also Sissy Spacek's (who plays Mrs. Garrison) reputation as a tough-minded and independent actress.

families. All of these wives are given "good" roles, and not once are they nor their positions in the kitchen criticised. These housewives are given no other significant role within the narrative structures of their films and appear clearly as presences, as appendages to their husband's personalities. They are only shown in connection with their husbands, whose goodness and purity they reinforce and symbolise.

In an early sequence of *The Untouchables*, before we even see "Ness' wife", (the only name she is given in the credits, played by Patricia Clarkson), the camera pans lovingly over various details of a kitchen decor - a kitchen calendar, an icebox, a set of cupboards -to finally settle on feminine hands writing a note beside a small pile of chopped carrots. The feminine hands, the chopped carrots, and other hints of the kitchen decor, accompanied by the overly sentimental violin music, all concur to offer a microscopic view of the standard mise-en-cuisine. Instead of a long shot revealing a woman filmed among her kitchen utensils, this image focuses on a small detail which, given the history of women-in-the-kitchen imagery, suffices to communicate the entire image. The camera pulls back to reveal an apron-clad woman, enclosed in a kitchen surrounding, smiling angelically while packing the carrots in a lunch bag, thus repeating and emphasising the information already conveyed in the first image. Ness (Kevin Costner) will be repeatedly associated with and reminded of his wife and home throughout his war on crime. The Manicheism which poses Ness, his home and his crusading police officers against the crime underworld

and Al Capone (who lives in a hotel - the opposite of "home") is in fact over-inflated throughout the film. Variations on the statement - "It's good to be married" - are repeated at least three times, and there are recurring images of children, and mothers pushing infants in baby carriages. Ness' battlecry - "We must be pure" - goes well with his diet of raw carrots and at one point in the midst of a stake-out he mawkishly expresses his amazement that his wife "still cares what color the kitchen is."

Even in the more contemporary kitchens of *Falling Down*, *Fatal Attraction*, or *Someone to Watch Over Me*, neither women's position in them nor their relation to their husbands and families diverges much from the traditional model already outlined. Food itself is of little importance, it is the image of the woman in the kitchen that is most important. Both *Fatal Attraction* and *Someone to Watch Over Me* oppose their good housewives to other women, in one case to the sociopathic Alex (Glenn Close), and in the other to the sophisticated upper-class Claire (Mimi Rogers) whom police officer Mike Keegan (Tom Berenger) is assigned to protect. The wives of the male protagonists in these two films, may appear to be "modern" in the sense that they are active, they work, and they are even somewhat sexual, though much plainer and down-to-earth than their *femme fatale* counterparts.²⁹ Despite their slight departures from traditional roles, they are still placed within and associated with

²⁹ Compare Ellie Keegan (played by Lorraine Bracco) with a broad New York accent living in Queens vs. the sophisticated uptown Claire in *Someone to Watch Over Me*; and the blissfully suburban Beth (Ann Archer) vs. the seething Alex, who literally lives above a meat market/slaughterhouse in *Fatal Attraction*.

the kitchen space in the same manner, with the same consequences and with many of the same attributes of more traditional kitchen-bound women. What has perhaps changed in such cinematic representations of women in the kitchen is the violence with which this idealised home life is defended. The home-defending violence which concludes both of these films is so acute that it assures a stricter control over women, representing both a physical as well as an emotional commitment to preserve at all costs the structures of the dominant system. The resolution of the family's ordeal provides such a catharsis that it makes the women want and need the security and comfort of the traditional home. Both *Fatal Attraction* and *Someone to Watch Over Me* close with an image of the families in a warm embrace. The "moral victory" thus always falls in favour of the righteous housewife and these films, in their steadfast and uncompromising support of traditional family and gender roles, reflect the film industry's conservatism, which is arguably an extreme reaction to the women's movement.

How could such images be considered pornographic? According to Rosalind Coward, one way that food pornography operates is by seducing women into wanting to cook, thereby perpetuating their subjugation in the kitchen. Coward describes a woman lying in bed in the evening after a long day's housework, pouring over recipes and furtively fantasising about future meals that she will prepare. Women consume cookbooks and women's magazines, says Coward, much in the same spirit that men consume pornographic images: ". . . these pornographies are creating and indulging "pleasures" which confirm

or trap men and women in their respective positions of power and subordination" (Coward, p. 102). Food pornography thus functions like standard pornography by enticing and rousing appetites and desires in those who consume trumped up images of food. Presented as they are, the housewives of these films are the ideal happy homemakers who would be the typical consumers of women's magazines and the typical consumers of food pornography in the form of glossily-presented recipes and food advertisements. This type of food pornography, likened to classic pornography that is geared toward masculine pleasures, finds appeal in women by offering them other types of pleasures and placing them in a position of willing, servile and docile provider. The cookbook, the televised cookery programme, and the good roles of women in the above films, all participate in "pornographic strategies"³⁰ and concur to confirm women in these roles. These films not only affirm the traditional position of the woman in the kitchen, they do so with violence and extremism.

B.2. Eaters and Sex

In an effort to maintain the two idealised images associating women with sexuality on the one hand or the family on the other, the traditional topographies and iconographies outlined for the pre-feminist period have remained intact in many popular mainstream films. As in films of the pre-feminist period, the distinction

³⁰ Lizbeth Goodman, "The Pornography Problem," in Frances Bonner et al., eds., Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 275.

between the two types of women is strictly maintained and, especially in films of the 1980s, the eating and cooking poles have been pushed even further apart, by making even greater distinctions between the two types of women. In many cases, just as in *The Big Heat*, food is used to establish this distinction within the same film. *Fatal Attraction*, *The Natural*, *Ironweed*, and *Someone to Watch Over Me* all feature faithful, caring, hard-working housewives who must rival another woman depicted as a libidinous consumer/man-eater. The argument has been made elsewhere (p.125) that *film noir's* "all-consuming" *femmes fatales*, as projections of male fears of women who occupied "male" positions in the workforce during wartime, represented forms of subversion and transgression against patriarchal domination. However, very rarely in these 1980s films do eating women, who in characterisation and iconography closely resemble classic *femmes fatales*, serve to critique the gender roles and the unbalanced partition of tasks within the family structure. On the contrary, this other, eating, consuming woman, is used more often than not contrapunctally to reinforce the goodness and respectability of traditional family life. At the same time, she is used in order to pathologise women's excessive appetites. It is not surprising then to see eating women portrayed as perverse and monstrous. This can be seen by examining the evolution of *Fatal Attraction* from script to film as documented by Susan Faludi in *Backlash*.³¹ According to Faludi's interviews with the film's

³¹ Susan Faludi, *Backlash : The Undeclared War Against Women*. (London: Vintage, 1992), Chapter 5.

screenwriter and producers, the original script was much more sympathetic to Alex (played by Glenn Close) and understanding of her alienated position as a single working woman in New York city. Once in production, there seemed to be a consensus among the director, Adrian Lyne, various studio bosses and producers, and the film's stars themselves, Michael Douglas and Glenn Close, to transform the character into the monstrous psychopath of the film. What potential there might have been for Alex to represent a critique of the traditional heterosexual bourgeois husband and wife was completely, and deliberately, eliminated through the course of the film's production.

Alex's association with food recurs throughout the film. At the film's beginning she has two romantic meals with Dan Gallagher (Michael Douglas) during the illicit week-end encounter that sets off the film's plot. These depictions of food, "classical" in their association of the eating woman with *sex and romance*, take on more perverse and violent overtones as Alex sheds all semblance of "normality." Her apartment is located next to a slaughterhouse and, although not much is made of this fact towards the film's beginning, changes of scene to her apartment are increasingly preceded by shots of men slowly carrying recently-slaughtered carcasses in front of her building's entrance, creating uneasy associations between Alex, consumption, violence, meat, blood, and death. In other scenes Alex directly affronts the kitchen and home - the first time she makes love to Dan is over her own kitchen sink and counter, and later she will kill his child's pet rabbit by

placing it in a pot of boiling water on his own suburban kitchen stove. If there is any possibility for audience sympathy for Alex at the film's beginning, her acts are so hideous and heinous that any such possibilities are excluded by the film's end. Dan also participates in these food-related injuries against the house and his wife when, in an effort to cover up from his wife the fact that he did not spend the week-end at home, he feeds the dog the spaghetti dinner that she left for him (it was precisely a spaghetti dinner that he had with Alex the night before). None of these affronts against the home expose hypocrisies or contradictions in the bourgeois suburban household itself. They only serve to show that Alex's appetite is excessive, misdirected, uncontrollable, and insatiable, and that the good wife and mother has been insulted and wronged. Unlike the *femmes fatales* of film noir, Alex can only with difficulty be redeemed by a feminist discourse.

*

Another role for the eating women in popular mainstream cinema is a more passive one and corresponds more closely to the pre-feminist model of the eating woman. A predominant figure in films such as *9 1/2 Weeks* (Adrian Lyne, 1984), and Roman Polanski's *Tess* (1979) and *Bitter Moon* (1992), or *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990) is the woman who is passively being fed and/or looked upon by a man while eating. As active eaters, women's attempts at pursuing

their own desires are depicted as lacking control and as excessive but, in the case of the passive eater, she is under the controlling gaze of a man, and is allowed to exist as a sexual being only on male terms and within the limitations set by male authority. Such depictions are less accusatory, and more likely to eroticise the female eater. The women are in an "erotic" space defined by the male gazer. Although in a celebratory mode during food seduction scenes, the narratives of these films conclude with the suppression of their overtly erotic aspects by either punishing, eliminating or somehow correcting the women responsible for them: for example, the eponymous Tess (played by Nastassja Kinski) is condemned and punished; in *9 1/2 Weeks*, Elisabeth (Kim Basinger) renounces her relationship with John (Mickey Rourke); and in *Pretty Woman* Vivian Ward (Julia Roberts) is converted from gum-snapping prostitute to upper-class wife. In each case the female protagonists are limited by male dependency and provision, and it is men who obstruct or release women's access to pleasure.

The food seduction scene of *Tom Jones* now appears as rather tame and polite if one considers Adrian Lyne's *9 1/2 Weeks* (1986). The food seduction scene of this film has the female protagonist, Elisabeth, lying blindfolded on a kitchen floor being hand-fed by her lover John, who introduces various seductive, erotic, and enticing foods into her mouth. This scene is backlit by the light of the open refrigerator in front of which the couple are sitting. In fact, all of the sex scenes in this film include the same backlighting "naturally" integrated as part of the decor, e.g. in

an onanistic scene after Elisabeth's first encounter with John, she is lit by a slide projector that is operating behind her; another lovemaking scene occurs just inside a dark subway entrance and the couple is lit from the streetlight coming through the entrance from behind them; John's apartment seems to have been expressly designed for this lighting effect, with its enormous windows which allow sunlight or streetlight to flood through, according to the desired effect.

In this scene, each type of food's suggestiveness is enhanced by a separate "introductory" shot of the food in question, clearly taken outside of the scene's diegetic context, in a different setting with different lighting. These introductory shots are separate in order to show to optimal erotic effect the strawberries, jello, honey, milk, etc., and are identical to shots of food found in magazine and television advertisements. (Strawberries appear as erotic food *par excellence*. They are also featured in food seduction scenes in *Tess* and *Pretty Woman*.) There is hardly any actual "eating", i.e. chewing and swallowing, in this scene, and what is repeatedly emphasised is the introduction of each morsel into Kim Basinger's mouth. These shots are all filmed from profile (as in the oyster-eating shots of *Tom Jones*), once again for maximum erotic appeal, allowing for a better view of the oral penetration of the food, with lips and tongue explicitly prominent against the back-lighting. After each biteful, there is the all-important reverse shot of the approving lover. After over twenty years, the basic elements of the food seduction scene

analysed above for *Tom Jones* remain absolutely intact - the woman as performer, the giggles and groans, the shot/reverse shot pattern, the male gaze - and, apart from the amplification of explicitness, not much has been modified. In fact, at the time of its release in 1963, *Tom Jones* enjoyed a reputation for daring and notoriety very similar to that of *9 1/2 Weeks* in 1984. Despite the latter film's reputation as being "torrid" and daring, there is nothing in this film that one would not see in perusing a high-class women's magazine such as Vogue or Cosmopolitan. Food here is clearly used as a not-so-subtle substitute for sex. Sexual acts are suggested by presenting the act of eating in an eroticised manner, reminiscent of classic pornography in that it caters especially to male desires and pleasures.

C. New Women's Films : Simmering Pleasures and Unpleasures

I would now like to look at another area of post-feminist mainstream cinema which can be seen as a more direct consequence of the women's movement and that reflects attempts to break away from the traditional representational schemas outlined so far. In films of this type the initial traditional situation of the housewife appears as unfulfilling and frustrating. Most of the films that will be discussed in this section are direct inheritors of the "new Hollywood women's film," which is linked generically to the women's films of the 1940s and which emerged in its "new" form in the late 1970s. New women's films can be seen as representing the film

industry's attempts at accommodating demands that were being articulated by the women's movement of the late 60s/early 70s. They did not really take form until the late 1970s, when the film industry could be sure that the issues raised by feminists during the women's movement had been largely de-radicalised and properly channelled, for example, into government proposals. Such issues as equal labour rights, abortion, control over sexuality, and everyday sexism were then seen as potentially "marketable," not likely to offend or turn away audiences, but rather likely to attract a niche in the market, the female spectator. These films attempted to break with traditional ways of representing women and, like their predecessors in the 1940s, sought to attract a predominantly female audience. According to Annette Kuhn, "(in) these films the central characters are women, and often women who are not attractive or glamorous in the conventional sense. Narratives, moreover, are frequently organised around the process of a woman's self-discovery and growing independence."³²

C.1. The Joys of Cooking

Women's films thus raise questions that are central to the women's movement, especially with regards to gender roles in the home and the workplace. Most of the films that will be discussed in this section raise the issue of women and the home, and they

³² Annette Kuhn, "Hollywood and New Women's Cinema", op. cit., p. 125.

tend to have a strikingly similar narrative pattern: a housewife expresses her dissatisfaction and frustration with the typical domestic arrangement. Finding such a life unfulfilling, she rejects the home environment and goes off in search of a better life. The films thus expose the tension between public and domestic life that is close to if not at the heart of many of the questions raised by feminism. Although they clearly provide spectatorial and narrative pleasures, as mainstream films, new women's films also maintain and perpetuate a certain dominant discourse. There is always a tension in women's films between the pleasure of identifying with the female heroine and her narrative trajectory, and the textual and institutional operations of a dominant cinema that ultimately works to position female protagonists in a "safe" place where they will remain harmless and non-threatening. In other words, as Julia Lesage has remarked, ". . . you'll see deliberate ambiguities structured into almost every film to come out about strong women."³³ I would now like to examine the nature of these ambiguities with regards to domestic cooks who try to forge a different existence for themselves beyond the walls of their kitchens.

I would first like to examine the different scenarios in which women leave the kitchen space in the hopes of finding a more rewarding life. In original "new Hollywood women's films" such as *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (Martin Scorsese, 1977) and *Norma*

³³ Julia Lesage, New German Critique 13 (1978), p. 91, quoted in Kuhn, op. cit., p. 129.

Rae (Martin Ritt, 1978), but also in an entire range of subsequent women's films such as *Fried Green Tomatoes* (Jon Avnet, 1992, hereafter referred to as *Tomatoes*), *Desperately Seeking Susan* (Susan Seidelman, 1986), *Baby Boom* (Charles Shyer, 1988), and *Shirley Valentine* (Lewis Gilbert, 1989), for example, food, cooking and eating are shown as areas of the female protagonists' lives that are particularly empty and lacking. In these films cooking for and nurturing the family are not fulfilling and satisfying activities, but are revealed rather as boring and time-consuming. Husbands and families are also shown as unappreciative of the woman's efforts. Women's departures from their homes are often preceded by the depiction of domestic tension or an outright domestic dispute, which is often centred specifically around food, cooking or housework. The kitchen and dining room, as the traditional places of female subjugation, clearly become the locus/focus of resentment and frustration. In *Norma Rae*, an outburst of rage takes Norma (Sally Field) through the kitchen to defile the trilogy of cooking, cleaning and ironing. In *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (hereafter referred to as *Alice*), Alice (Ellen Burstyn) must abandon her hopes of moving to Monterey and becoming a singer to take a job as a waitress in an Arizona diner. Before leaving home, she is shown carefully planning and fretting over a lamb dinner to please her irascible husband Tom. The meal scene itself does not focus on Tom's eating, but rather on the tense Alice, who is anxiously looking at Tom's face for signs of appreciation. The meal ends in a furious dispute between Tom and

their son Tommy, which Alice cannot control. She is left alone screaming in her dining room, her dinner a complete failure.

In Susan Seidelman's more recent *She Devil*, much of the focus at the beginning of the film is on Ruth (Roseanne Barr) and her attempts to save her marriage via the care and attention she pays to cooking and housework. In one scene, she frantically prepares a dinner where everything goes wrong - food burns, machines overflow, counters are cluttered. Food is used throughout the film to comment on her mental state - upon Bob's return from a night at Ruth's glamorous rival Mary Fisher's (played by Meryl Streep), Ruth drops an angry egg into sizzling butter; at another point there is a cut from a love scene between Bob and Mary to Ruth violently chopping a huge phallic courgette; and there is another cut from urine being poured from a hospital bedpan to soup being poured into a tureen. Like the kitchen and dining room rebellions in the films mentioned above, these are expressions of anger and irony against the oppressive domestic situation of the housewife.³⁴ This is part of a strategy that involves taking the everyday and the banal, i.e. housework, and making it work significantly within a narrative. It is also part of the film's project of reversal, which reveals truth in a way that conventional depictions do not. In a scene similar to the one in *Norma Rae*, we later see Ruth set off all of the household appliances at the same time in order to destroy the

³⁴ Ruth's "carnavalesque" housewife is interesting in light of Roseanne Barr's offscreen persona as "domestic goddess." See Kathleen K. Rowe, "Roseanne: Unruly Woman as Domestic Goddess", *Screen*. 31:4 (Winter 1990), pp. 408-419.

house. Her willful misuse of these "tools of her trade," which we have seen her using "correctly" in the film up to now, is one of the film's reversals. In so doing Ruth turns these implements of subordination and enslavement - signs of her oppression as a housewife - into tools of her "liberation" and empowerment to change her condition. Perhaps because *She Devil* is a female-authored film, one can more easily read with the text to find more explicit feminist-critical discourses on the role of the cook.

Once women decide to leave the home, one predominant scenario takes them into the public space of the diner, restaurant or food business where they find work, female camaraderie and self-fulfillment. *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, *Fried Green Tomatoes* (Hereafter referred to as *Tomatoes*), *Bagdad Café* (Percy Adlon, 1988), *Trouble in Mind* (Alan Rudolph, 1985) all feature women who move from troubled homes to diners. Diners have allowed women to move away from domestic spaces and into alternative, unconventional kitchens and eating spaces. Diners have often been tainted with nostalgia in contemporary U.S. cinema, but there has been an evident move from the male-oriented nostalgia around diners in films such as *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1973) and *Diner* (Barry Levinson, 1983) towards a female-oriented utopia that is created in many women's-diner films. These films retain much of the positive nostalgia-tainted imagery and aura associated with diners. However, in a shift from nostalgia, the diner has become a utopic space of popular culture and plenitude where seemingly anything and everything is possible for female protagonists.

Nostalgia has been criticised by postmodern critics for confusing contemporary culture, mainly because nostalgic versions of the past become accepted as substitutes for history. This is most conspicuous in *Tomatoes*, whose historical context is particularly vague and fluid, and whose nostalgia is not directed towards any specific period. Although the Whistle Stop Café is opened sometime after what appears to be the depression of the 1930s, none of the film's events are ever placed in time and we are never certain if Idgy's narration follows any chronological order. Nonetheless in her recounting of the past, Idgy creates a utopic world in which money is never exchanged; food is abundant and sumptuous; black characters, white characters, men, women, and children live and work together harmoniously; the Klu Klux Klan is fought and defeated; police are friendly and scrupulous; and justice is delivered against men who beat their wives. Although this could be construed as utopic and unreal, and ultimately deceptive and illusory, the film offers space and voice to those usually unspoken for. Inasmuch as nostalgia confuses certain historical issues, it also rewrites history, and by so doing can grant a history to groups that might not have been included in official histories. As Timothy Corrigan puts it, "(t)his brand of nostalgia within contemporary film . . . imagines a position that is vacated of subjectivity and is thus truly without bounds; it is a longing of the present for another time before historical definition, when a narcissistic wonder seems, in all its emptiness, to have the power to re-invent history and historical formations

outside the dominant ones (including those of gender, class and so forth) that have since been put in place."³⁵

Through their depictions of and in diners, the films thus offer space and voice to groups that have been little before acknowledged in film as well. The principal benefactors of this tendency are women, the traditional labourers of the everyday, whose work and activities are usually first in line to be devalorised and trivialised. Post-feminist diner films posit women's activities as important, meaningful and productive. All are *Bildungsfilms* about a woman's self-discovery. The films create a direct comparison between the failures of home life and the success of alternative non-traditional communities that are nurtured in diners. Each female protagonist's entry into the diner is preceded by a domestic argument between the woman and her husband. Thus traditional home life is directly blamed for the women's problems. In diners the women, after initial tribulations, find a supportive atmosphere where they are appreciated and valued. They encounter a strong female character who befriends them and serves as a their guide. This type of female friendship has been notably absent from most mainstream Hollywood cinema, but is well-represented in these women's films. The celebration in diners is mainly a celebration of this female friendship and independence.

The diner has traditionally in, for example, *American Graffiti* and *Diner*, been a place of attractions in post-classical U.S. film.

³⁵ Timothy Corrigan, A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture After Vietnam (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 38.

The camera is generally mobile and moves freely around the dining room with the waitresses. The camera readily adopts the point of view of the diner staff, who, unlike in the two above-mentioned films, are the protagonists of these films. There is a diversification of dishes on offer and everything has taken a "home-made" turn: the homemade pie, cakes and fried green tomatoes already mentioned in *Tomatoes*, eggs, breakfasts, special sandwiches. There is also a fascination with the workings of the diner itself and much emphasis is placed on the diner "system" and the waitresses' work habits and gestures, as well as on their interactions, and the camaraderie that develops among them. As presented in film, the waitress community in diners would in fact constitute a "subculture of women in public spaces,"³⁶ that is indeed empowering and rewarding.

In these films, the restaurant and food business is directly associated with the maternal instincts of the waitresses. Through the ultimate maternal gesture, i.e. feeding, women become the nurturers of entire communities. The women who seek consolation in diner communities are all actual mothers and children are very much part of the diner mise-en-scène. The diner becomes the place of the child's education and upbringing: there are shots of children studying their lessons at diner tables in *Tomatoes*, *Alice*, and *Bagdad Café*, and other images of women breastfeeding infants appear in the diners of *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Bagdad Cafe* and *Trouble in*

³⁶ Christine Gledhill, "Pleasurable Negotiations," in Francis Bonner et al., eds., *Imagining Women*, op. cit., p. 206.

Mind. This family presence makes the diner a utopic space where women can both work and be mothers, fusing the private space of the home with the public space of social relations. I would now like to look in further detail at *Baby Boom* and *Tomatoes* to see how they address the issue of food, feeding, work, motherhood and nostalgia.

The two protagonists of these films are initially placed in modern kitchens that do not have the warmth of traditional kitchens and the passing of traditional ways is often blamed for the housewives' unhappiness. Both *Fried Green Tomatoes* and *Baby Boom* first present a satire of contemporary urban and suburban lifestyles and eating habits.

In *Baby Boom*, J.C. Wiatt (Diane Keaton), a successful and upwardly mobile fast-track advertising executive, "inherits" a baby. Unable to juggle her new duties as a "parent" and keep up with her demanding job, she abandons her career and moves with the baby to a home in the country. Quickly bored with country life, she begins making and selling apple sauce in local shops, using a picture of the baby on the label. Her business expands to such a point that she finds herself once again in the board room making deals with her ex-employers. She proudly turns down their take-over offer and returns triumphantly to the country to her baby and her newly-acquired veterinarian boyfriend. At the film's beginning, J.C. is repeatedly shown in her tiny New York apartment, in which her cold kitchenette is a mere appendage to the living space. Her lifestyle leaves her little time to think about cooking and she is seen either eating take away food in bed or on two other

occasions at business lunches in sparsely furnished "contemporary" restaurants that offer dishes with complex titles recited by blasé waiters. These scenes serve as sharp contrasts with later scenes that take place in the country, once J.C. moves from New York with her baby to a rural Vermont town.

A further example is *Fried Green Tomatoes*, a "90s women's film" that has all the generic requirements of a women's film, and is limited by the same contradictions and ambiguities as its predecessors. Evelyn Couch (Kathy Bates) initially appears as a bad nourisher of herself and her husband. The film features a recurring set of dinner scenes, first showing bland dinners whisked off the table by Ed, her husband, to be eaten in front of the television, thus establishing that the couple is not "communicating." These brief dinner scenes are paralleled by the candy bars and other junk food that Evelyn avidly eats as snacks while listening to Idgie's (*Jessica Tandy*) tales, whose protagonist, Ninny, fights all sorts of injustices. As she gets inspired by Idgie's stories of Ninny's heroism,³⁷ which are told in flashbacks and take place in rural Alabama in the 1930s and 1940s, Evelyn's dinners take a radical and more natural turn - she starts to serve fish and fresh steamed vegetables to the bewilderment of Ed and brings raw vegetables to snack on during her visits with Idgie. She also starts at this point voicing a "feminist"

³⁷ Although it is strongly hinted in the course of the film, it is revealed only at the film's end that Idgie and Ninny are the same person, and that Idgie is in fact telling stories about herself.

discourse about "bombing Playboy" and "banning models." The film then works toward toning down this discourse to a much more moderate and "acceptable" level. Evelyn's dinners in the end become less severe - romantic candlelit dinners that finally succeed in getting Ed to sit at the table - and she even prepares Ninny's own recipe for fried green tomatoes as snacks. Despite its "feminist" content and its obvious address to a female audience, *Tomatoes* could be seen as the taming or the education of a cook (and the eater). The initial marital problem is depicted as Evelyn's problem, no fault is placed on her husband nor on her condition or position. It is up to Evelyn to learn how to treat her man. She does this by getting inspired by tales that comprise a nostalgic return to old spacious country kitchens, where Ninny was not only the generous provider of her family, but also of the whole community.

The same kind of nostalgic return to a spacious country kitchen is part of *Baby Boom*'s strategy of seeming to liberate the working woman, while returning her to the confines of the kitchen. In both *Baby Boom* and *Fried Green Tomatoes* the modern, city sequences are juxtaposed with the warm, sunny, open kitchen spaces and natural foods of the countryside. In both cases initial indifference toward food is equated with other shortcomings in J.C.'s and Evelyn's lifestyles. When the films move to the country, they both become much more luxurious in visual terms and the look and type of food changes also, establishing the country as

a wholesome alternative to the city and suburbia.³⁸ The notion that J.C. and Evelyn become better feeders, better nurturers is primarily conveyed through the new types of food that they learn to cook and serve. The foods are quite "maternal": the "Country Baby" apple sauce, which is in fact baby food, and the pies, stews, and fried green tomatoes themselves that are served by Ninny (and later even by Evelyn at home too) at the Whistle Stop Café.

Both films could be criticised for favouring the return of women to the confines of traditional kitchens with a lot of sentimental self-fulfillment. The return to the country and its spacious kitchens is presented as a truly "liberating" alternative for women who are "oppressed" by the pressures of modern living. However, while offering no major break with existing stereotypes, these two films do expose the tension between the traditionally irreconcilable realms of the domestic and the professional and provide narratives in which women do manage to combine a fulfilling professional life with motherhood. Nevertheless, such a feminist reading is not overt and must be "negotiated" by the spectator out of such films.³⁹ Although the spectator is offered the same types of pleasures experienced in the women's films of the 70s, the same types of ambiguities and contradictions are present as well. There

³⁸ Judith Williamson has made this remark about the change in the visual quality of *Baby Boom*, but it holds true for both films. See her "'Up Where You Belong': Hollywood Images of Big Business in the 1980s" in John Corner & Sylvia Harvey, eds., Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture. (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 158.

³⁹ On the concept of negotiation, see Christine Gledhill, "Pleasurable Negotiations," op. cit., pp. 193-209.

is clearly the possibility of invoking feminism, but one is not explicitly directed to do so by these films. The women's plights could be interpreted as being personal struggles, since the protagonists do not question the nature of their roles, they only seem to have the wrong men.

Most of the films dealt with so far in this section openly address issues related to the conflict between motherhood and work. Speaking of films of the 1980s and 1990s with female-centred narratives, E. Ann Kaplan calls them nothing more than "fantasies"⁴⁰ in that the women who abandon their roles as wives and mothers to fend for themselves are often re-instated back into a traditional type of situation in which the (patriarchal) order of things has not fundamentally changed. This has been what women's films are "traditionally" criticised for, and this scenario gets played out in women's films such as *Alice, An Unmarried Woman* and *Norma Rae*, but also in later women's films such as *Trouble in Mind* (Alan Rudolph, 1985), *Bagdad Café* and *Baby Boom*, for example. Kaplan particularly accuses *Baby Boom*, comparing it with *Kramer vs. Kramer*, a film that deals with a man successfully learning how to become a single parent. For Kaplan, a film like *Baby Boom* is "nothing but a fantasy," while *Kramer vs. Kramer* is a "serious drama" that addresses "the conflict between work and parenting" (*Motherhood*, p. 195). Kaplan further criticises *Baby Boom* by saying that once the baby arrives in J.C.'s life, "the film shows

⁴⁰ E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation*, op. cit. (Hereafter referred to in text as *Motherhood*), p. 196.

Keaton quickly altering her personality and life-style; indeed the focus of her life changes completely to absorption in the baby and neglect of her work, until she is fired" (*Motherhood*, p. 147). Kaplan fails to note that the exact same things happen to the father played by Dustin Hoffman in *Kramer vs. Kramer*. In fact, J.C. does later, also just like Dustin Hoffman, learn to accommodate both the child and working, in the end becoming an efficient working mother on her own terms. This may indeed be a fantasy, but so in the same light would *Kramer vs. Kramer*, or *Three Men and a Baby*, another film that Kaplan takes to task for the same reasons.

Kaplan critiques 1980s Hollywood cinema saying that "(n)o longer is combining career and motherhood imaged as desirable; nor is choosing career over mothering seen positively (indeed, the possibility has been rarely shown, nor have there been regular images of the mother-woman's satisfaction in work or her needs for self-fulfillment through work)" (*Motherhood*, p. 199). This is not entirely true. Women are, for example, shown getting satisfaction from work as activists in *Julia* (Fred Zinneman, 1977), *Norma Rae* and *Silkwood* (Mike Nichols, 1983), or as businesswomen in *Baby Boom* and *Working Girl*, as a spaceship commander in (the admittedly fantastic) *Alien* and its sequels, or as waitresses and/or restaurant owners in *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Mystic Pizza*, *Trouble in Mind*, and *Bagdad Café*. The problematic aspect of these scenarios is that the professions shown to be available to women in diner films rarely do more than aggrandize domestic activities. If women

are shown getting any satisfaction from work, it is usually work that involves feeding and nurturing others,⁴¹ in the traditional role as need-meeter, whose own needs are only ever and truly met when feeding others. *Baby Boom's* and *Fried Green Tomatoes'* strategies involve elaborate means to liberate the working woman, while returning her to the confines of the traditional kitchen with a lot of sentimental self-fulfillment. In *Baby Boom*, J.C. gets revenge and succeeds, but at the cost of being placed in a very traditional set up that does not promise any real change. Although these films clearly offer the possibility of invoking feminism, the spectator is not explicitly directed to do so by the films, or at least a feminist discourse is not privileged over more reactionary ones. However, I would argue that these films do have the merit of addressing and articulating issues relating to and giving a positive view of both work and motherhood.

C.2. The Joys and Dangers of Eating

In this section I would first like to look at depictions of the eating woman in which images break with the traditional representations that have so far been discussed. In films such as Paul Mazursky's *An Unmarried Woman* (1977), Woody Allen's *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986) and Rob Reiner's *When Harry Met Sally* (1989) there are recurring meal scenes between the female protagonists and

⁴¹ See once again the compilation by Carolyn Galerstein, Working Women on the Hollywood Screen, op. cit., passim.

their female friends. The meals in these scenes typically, though not exclusively, comprise a lunch in a brightly-lit restaurant, where the women have got together to commiserate, usually, about the lack of men in their lives or about problems at work. These lunches occur repeatedly and serve as a type of punctuation in the narrative and as "interludes" from the "real action" of the film, i.e. the heterosexual romance in which the female protagonist is involved.

These scenes "work" in a way different from that of romantic heterosexual dinners: the women are seeking consolation, camaraderie and comfort in an environment free from the pressure and interference of "romance." For example, in *An Unmarried Woman* such meetings between Erica (Jill Clayburgh) and her friends, although not always around a table, contrast notably with a lunch she has with her husband in a crowded snack bar where he tells her he would like to separate, and with a later meal that takes place after the separation. In the latter meal, a friend has arranged a date for Erica in a Chinese restaurant. The classic romantic set-up is absent here, the restaurant is crowded and noisy, and Erica breaks up the dinner by storming out when she is reminded of her failed marriage.

Such meals also avail women the rare opportunity to talk about their careers and their career aspirations. In *Hannah and Her Sisters*, the meal is presented in a slightly altered fashion. It takes place in a darkly-lit restaurant and is rendered morose and foreboding by the lighting effects which surround the table in

semi-darkness. This is complemented by a continuous tracking shot that slowly circles the table. The women are discussing the decision of one of the sisters' to become a writer, and the discussion breaks down into a family dispute because the most traditional and bourgeois sister disapproves of the idea. Although there is no constructive sense of camaraderie, the women do have the "liberty" of openly discussing their careers and other personal problems that lie outside of the typical limits of female conversation in film. Both scenes create a feminine space in the restaurant that allows women to discuss their own problems on their own terms.

What is most surprising about such scenes is their apparent banality and "ordinariness," considering the way in which they break with the stereotypical imagery associated with the eating woman discussed earlier. Although Western culture bombards women with images that show female eating as furtive and as an activity that requires restriction and restraint, the women are here shown as uninhibited and they eat as freely as they talk. It is also the case that these women are not shown surrendering with abandon to rich and erotically coded foods such as oysters or chocolate. In fact, the emphasis is clearly not on the food which, if ever seen at all, usually comprises prosaic salads. Shots frame the women at the table from the waist up and rarely focus on what is on the plate or on the action of eating. The sexual implications that a male/female tête-à-tête would necessarily evince are absent due to the lack of stress on the food and the women-as-eaters. Eating

here is clearly not the result of heterosexual, male-serving hunger. Female appetites are shown as normal and everyday: the women are not ashamed of what or how they eat and their eating in public is not constructed as problematic for them and is used, rather, to signify a convivial all-female space.

These "flights of freedom," however, are typically imbricated in narratives which work to reinstate the woman in an acceptable heterosexual romance. By posing the problem in these terms, the films dismiss much of their potential to address issues concerning the position of women in society on a political level. Robin Wood has noted that women's struggles in seemingly sympathetic female-centred Hollywood narratives are always reduced to the personal plights of individuals, thus overshadowing and limiting any political repercussions these films may have for a group of people and thereby repressing the idea of a "women's movement." According to Wood, in women's films "there are only individual women who feel personally constrained."⁴² We are once again confronted with the dilemma of the women's film and the ambiguities and contradictions that accompany mainstream depictions of independent women. Although these scenes may be transgressive in that they deliberately exclude men, the absence of men is nonetheless designated as a problem for the women. Even while physically absent, the male presence is felt very strongly. Despite its overt critique of marriage and dating, *Erica of An Unmarried Woman*

⁴² Robin Wood, "Images and Women," in Patricia Erens, ed., Issues in Feminist Film Criticism, op. cit., p. 337.

in the end returns to a somewhat altered form of the domestic space and is seen splashing eggs in a pan to make an omelet for her artist friend (Alan Bates) while he splashes paint on a canvas. The film implies that Erica was simply with the wrong man, undermining the feminist potential of the film to construct strong female friendships, or to present Erica as choosing between career and romance.

Such scenes represent fleeting ". . . moments from the subculture of women in social spaces where they meet and talk, made publically recognizable through the cultural forms of the women's movement which are increasingly brought into wider circulation in the mainstream media."⁴³ Although scenes of women eating together have the merit of showing women who eat simply and without hang-ups, especially given the context in which women are constantly reminded of how problematic it is for them to manage their hungers and desires, such mainstream depictions of women eating unself-consciously are rare.

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Another type of meal changes the terms of the familiar territory of the food seduction scene as we have seen in *Tom Jones* or *9 1/2 Weeks*. In *Fried Green Tomatoes* and *She Devil*, for example, eating becomes a symbol and a substitute for eroticism and

⁴³ Christine Gledhill, "Pleasurable Negotiations," in Francis Bonner et al., eds., Imagining Women, op.cit., p. 206.

sex, but is neither confined, nor necessarily linked to, the heterosexual couple. While the above-mentioned lunch scenes can represent a transgressive, although subdued, pleasure shared between women, the *tête-à-têtes* of *She Devil* and *Fried Green Tomatoes* go much further by eroticising intimate encounters between two women. The meals here are face-to-face, personal encounters, structured upon the male/female food seduction scene, yet clearly of a homoerotic nature. In these scenes female hunger is sexualised, but it is neither heterosexual nor male-serving.

In both films the food seduction scenes unfold very "classically." In *She Devil* Ruth, posing as a nursing home assistant, is trying to win the sympathy of her rigid colleague, Cooper (Linda Hunt), in order to be able to approach her rival, Mary Fisher's, mother, a patient at the home. During lunch, in the kitchen of the nursing home, Ruth takes out a box of pastries, which she begins to eat with intentional abandon before Cooper's incredulous eyes. Ruth offers Cooper a pastry, and upon accepting, Cooper is immediately won over. The shot/reverse shot pattern so essential to creating the ambiance of "seduction" in *Tom Jones* and *9 1/2 Weeks* is also employed by Seidelman in this scene. The seduction effect is thus developed by creating tension not only between food and eater, but also between eater and observer. This cross-cutting is a part of food pornography, the one likened to classic male oriented pornography, which includes glistening close-ups of the food and of the food going into mouths, and back to the reaction of the observer.

In one of the first flashback sequences of *Fried Green Tomatoes*, Idgie, who has the power to charm bees, braves a beehive and removes honey to bring back as a prize to her friend Ruth. The honey, with all of its sensual connotations, is central to the ensuing picnic the two women share. However, a further and perhaps more explicit food seduction scene takes place later, when the two women are cooking in the kitchen of their Whistle Stop Café. At one point Idgie turns to Ruth to ask her to taste the fried green tomatoes she is preparing. When Ruth gives a negative opinion, the two women become engaged in a food fight, each in turn taking spoonfuls and handfuls of chocolate, flour, batter, and berries, throwing and smearing them over each other. This food fight takes place in a joyous atmosphere in which the two women are constantly giggling and end up wrestling with each other on the floor. At this point, when the homoerotic implications are at their highest, a policeman, a regular customer at the café, walks in to break up the fight.

These food seduction scenes "sublimate" sex scenes that actually take place between the characters in the female-authored novels upon which both films are based.⁴⁴ On this basis, both films would qualify as what Tania Modleski has termed "hysterical texts," "in which the repressed sexual content of a film, banished from the film's narrative, returns to manifest itself in various

⁴⁴ Fay Weldon, *The Life and Loves of a She Devil* (Sevenoaks, Kent: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992). In the Fanny Flagg novel upon which *Fried Green Tomatoes* is based the homosexual relationship between Idgie and Ruth is also an explicit part of the narrative.

ways in the mise-en-scène and through textual coherences."⁴⁵ For women, sweet foods such as honey and pastries, more than any other foods, have highly-charged discourses attached to them. They are foods with histories, linked to popular conceptions of taboo sweets, aphrodisiacs, and other "forbidden fruits". Sugar and chocolate are associated with pleasure and gratification, but also, especially for women, with the danger of physical and moral corruption. There is a morality of transgression implied in these foods, which are often depicted in the public arena in a "pornographic" style. As Rosalind Coward has noted, food photographed in such a manner is illicit and "naughty," and is meant for the eyes only (Coward, p. 102). Such sugary pleasures, when actually shared between women guiltlessly and passionately, are empowering pleasures. However, the films are too mainstream to depict a woman-to-woman relationship explicitly and both films settle for scenes that imply a complicity and understanding between the two women that is sensual but nonetheless empowering, bringing them far away from standard eating topographies.

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Before going on to depictions of actual eating disorders, some remarks are in order about the societal context in which eating disorders take place and how they are perceived. It would first be

⁴⁵ Tania Modleski, Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age. (New York & London: Routledge, 1991), p. 137.

helpful to make the link between eating disorders, the contradictions of the women's film, and other contradictory messages that the media send to women about their bodies. On the one hand, via one type of food pornography, women, and also men, are encouraged by provocative and sensuous imagery, to desire and enjoy their food. While on the other hand, women, much more than men, are constantly sermoned on the physical, moral and, especially, romantic dangers of overeating and obesity. Lucy Fischer maintains that mainstream cinema portrays women as "love junkies" who consistently place "a higher value on amorous relationships than men do."⁴⁶ This centrality of romance in women's lives is crucial, through mass media representations, to the high priority that women are encouraged to give their appearance. One important aspect of this appearance-obsessed discourse is the fact that women are continually made frightfully aware of the connection between the food they eat and their bodies. As the examples from You magazine discussed earlier show, it is difficult to find an issue of a women's magazine today that does not have a permanent section devoted to dieting and slimming. This section usually includes a battery of exercises, some low-calorie recipes, as well as a few beauty tips.

It is possible to consider that "get fit" measures might be objectively beneficial and that they are being promoted for the

⁴⁶ Lucy Fischer, Shot/Countershot: Film Tradition and Women's Cinema, op. cit., p. 93.

well-being of all, but the health food and fitness crazes, especially as they have been recuperated by the multinational food conglomerates,⁴⁷ must be seen in the same light in which feminism has been recuperated by Hollywood. To quote Noëlle Châtelet, " . . . it seems indispensable to distinguish between what in the health food craze corresponds to a laudable quest and exploration of the body, allowing us to better understand its mechanisms, from mere fads that society uses to impose its own value system, as well as its own criteria of beauty, goodness, and normality"⁴⁸ Coupled with the enticing and omnipresent images of food and the ready availability and abundance of food itself in the Western world, fitness and dieting movements generate, especially for women, contradictory and powerful messages that are capable in turn of generating many neuroses.

Although it may be far-fetched to denounce this as being criminal, it is a fact that an enormous proportion of women (polls taken over the past fifteen years in Europe and America reveal upwards of 50% and 75%) consider themselves overweight and are dissatisfied with their bodies.⁴⁹ Many of these women are struggling ferociously to conform to a bodily ideal (flat tummies, shapely but firm buttocks, etc.) that is simply physically

⁴⁷ For example, the Weight Watchers chain of world-wide dieting centres is controlled by ketchup manufacturer and food multi-national Heinz. Heinz keeps women eating, while Weight Watchers keeps them dieting.

⁴⁸ Noëlle Châtelet, Le corps à corps culinaire. (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978), p. 124.

⁴⁹ Claude Fischler, L'Homnivore. op. cit., pp. 297 & 341.

impossible for them to attain. Women's magazines seldom mention that only 5% of all women have the body types that conform to those of models used in fashion and other advertisements.⁵⁰ It can only be difficult and frustrating for women to find the just measures in a society "which promotes an abundance of food, but applauds a scarcity of flesh,"⁵¹ and it is hardly surprising that for women, eating can be fraught with anxiety. At their extremes these anxieties take the form of eating disorders, notably anorexia, bulimia, and obesity. Until very recently, such anxieties relating women and food, have rarely been represented in the cinema.

The star system and actresses themselves play quite a prominent role in the "tyranny of slenderness." Film stars and their bodies (often retouched in photographs) have been used since the silent era as models of perfection and female stars have been long sought after for tips on dieting, exercise and beauty. A growing trend in the post-1960s/post-feminist environment has been the publication of women's "confessions," in the form of biographies, autobiographies or magazine interviews, about their eating disorders. This has been especially true in the case of female film stars who, as they are under intense pressure to control their bodies and hence their appetites, are in fact perfectly situated to become sufferers of eating disorders. As opposed to male stars, female stars can only with difficulty

⁵⁰ Claude Fischler, op. cit., p. 341.

⁵¹ Troy Cooper, "Anorexia and Bulimia: The Political and the Personal," in Margaret Lawrence, ed., Fed Up and Hungry: Women, Oppression and Food (London: The Women's Press, 1987), p. 181.

achieve the status of romantic or sexual ideal without the appropriate body. Jane Fonda, Judy Garland, Joan Crawford, French actress Andréa Férréol, Shelley Winters and even, in another sphere, the Princess of Wales have all had their struggles with eating anxieties and disorders made public. Kenneth Branagh's *Peter's Friends* (1993) features an actress with eating and body image problems, and Henry Jaglom cast his film *Eating* (1991) entirely with actresses with eating disorders and at the end of the published script of the film there are 28 "confessions" written by the members of the cast about their past and present eating and weight control problems.⁵²

The scenes featuring post-feminist eating women discussed so far show women attempting to take control of their own eating topographies in a series of new Hollywood women's films that range from the late 1970s to the present. Eating has been shown to give women empowerment, but it can also be a source of anxiety and distress, and has also been used to show women as victims of their eating habits. Other scenes in *Fried Green Tomatoes* show Evelyn, in the "present-day" sequences of the film, repeatedly gorging herself on candy bars, doughnuts, potato chips and other high-calorie junk foods, explicitly linking these "bad" eating habits to her failure as a married woman. And indeed, from the beginning, with shots of Evelyn abjectly and sourly eating a candy bar, the film places the blame for Evelyn's floundering marriage on her and

⁵² Henry Jaglom, *Eating: A Very Serious Comedy About Women and Food* (Hollywood: Rainbow Filmbooks, 1990).

not on her "fat and lazy" husband. The film thus places the burden of saving the marriage on Evelyn, depicting not only Evelyn's indoctrination as a good cook and provider, but also her indoctrination as a good eater. She swings from the chocolate bars and other junk food she brings during her visits to Ninny to eating raw carrot sticks - both types of food are frowned upon by Ninny. Her quest to find the right food is paralleled by a similar swing from the various women's "self-help" classes she attends to the "radical feminist" stance she temporarily adopts. Ninny's moderating influence convinces Evelyn in the end to opt for aerobic classes and a job selling cosmetics door-to-door, which indeed help her to balance her life and begin to rehabilitate her marriage.

Before Ruth's transformation into the eponymous "she devil", she is seen in bed with a box of doughnuts avidly reading one of Mary Fisher's romance novels. Overweight people have been exploited for comic effect throughout cinema's history. "Roseanne (Barr) is defined by excess and looseness - counter to traditional definitions/prescriptions of the feminine."⁵³ Much of Ruth's excessiveness and unruliness in *She Devil* is inscribed in her (i.e. Roseanne's) physiognomy, which goes beyond the bounds of "normality." Her excessive weight is used for visual and comic effect when she is seen trying to get into a tight dress or stepping onto a scale that goes over the 200-pound mark. She constantly refers to her rival Mary Fisher as pretty and thin.

⁵³ Kathleen, K. Rowe, "Roseanne: Unruly Woman As Domestic Goddess," op. cit., p. 413.

These gags are part of the self-deprecating material in Barr's other work in television comedy where she "derides the values which tell that she ought to be thin in order to be successful."⁵⁴ As Ruth moves away from the kitchen and household, she not only sheds her role as mother and housewife, she also stops ridiculing herself and becoming the target of visual gags. A mole that appeared prominently on her chin disappears and she stops wearing her thick and bulky glasses. Just as she was able to turn her condition as housewife around, she also changed her position as an eater, as we have seen in the food seduction scene with Cooper. From bingeing doughnuts alone in her bed to using pastries to win over Cooper, eating does not have to imply a loss of control for women, but on the contrary can signal empowerment. The main problem is that Ruth can only perform these transgressions as a "she devil", i.e., as excessive and raging, therefore allowing for the risk of continued derision. As Janet Wolff contends, ". . . the transgressions of the carnivalesque and of the grotesque body can in many cases operate in reactionary ways, particularly with regard to gender."⁵⁵

Both sets of images indicate that neither Evelyn nor Ruth are "good" eaters, yet eating in such a way simply embodies the contradictions of a society that encourages the consumption of food, yet demands that women restrain themselves. Overweight women

⁵⁴ Lizbeth Goodman, "Gender and Humour", in Frances Bonner et al., eds., Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender, op.cit., p. 290.

⁵⁵ Janet Wolff, Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 126.

such as Evelyn and Ruth must carry the evidence of their eating disorder with them, and they are more visible victims of the moral discourse within the slimming doctrine. Being "in shape" and "thin" in our societies has become equivalent with self-discipline, success, happiness, fulfillment, and social acceptance, whereas being overweight, or simply perceiving oneself as overweight, now translates into low self-esteem, exclusion and failure. The obese woman incites pity and disgust as a "failure", and ridicule as a physical anomaly. In the end fitness and health discourses are more concerned with normalisation and conformity than with health and well-being.

It is precisely a fear of fat that drives both anorexics and bulimics in their behaviour towards food.⁵⁶ The desire to lose weight is so widespread among Western women that anorexic-type behaviour is practically accepted and even encouraged in our societies. In many ways it is "the logical culmination of our cultural beliefs about, and attitudes toward the female body."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Familial, psychological and perhaps biological factors interact in varying combinations to produce Anorexia nervosa, which can be described as an abnormal fear of eating and fat, leading to dangerous loss of weight. 90% of anorexics are middle-to-upper class adolescent girls. Bulimia stems from the same fear of eating and fat, but instead of almost complete abstinence from food, the bulimic will combine abstinence with binges of enormous amounts of food and then attempt to evacuate it from her body, either by inducing vomiting or by taking inordinate amounts of laxatives. The bulimic woman usually maintains a stable body weight and appearance. In some cases an anorexic will go through bouts of bulimia, and bingeing is common to all eating disorders

⁵⁷ Troy Cooper, "Anorexia and Bulimia: The Political and the Personal." in Margaret Lawrence, ed., Fed Up and Hungry: Women, Oppression and Food. (London: The Women's Press, 1987), p. 181.

I would now like to turn to three films that deal explicitly with anorexia and bulimia: *Life Is Sweet* (G.B., Mike Leigh, 1990), *Eating* (U.S., Henry Jaglom, 1991), and *Peter's Friends* (G.B., Kenneth Branagh, 1993), and analyse the mise-en-scène of the bingeing episodes featured in each film in terms of setting, food and spectacle.

Life Is Sweet is centred on the relationships within a working class English family where the father is a cook, the mother works in a children's clothing store, one of the twin daughters is a plumber's assistant, and the other unemployed twin is anorexic/agoraphobic.

Eating's "plot" consists of a birthday party given for three women, whose female friends have gathered for the occasion. During the party a French guest is filming a video documentary on "women and food" and the film goes back and forth between the videotaped interviews of women's "confessions" about their eating problems and the birthday party itself, where the women have a hard time bringing themselves to eat the cake.

Peter's Friends also revolves around a party thrown by Peter to hold a reunion with some old university friends. In the course of the weekend, old antagonisms flare up and old friendships are rekindled. In the end Peter reveals that he is HIV positive, and despite their disagreements, everyone rallies around him and warmly pledges him their support and friendship.

Setting: Although the three films contextualise their eating-disordered women differently, they present their bingeing episodes

in very similar contexts. In *Life Is Sweet* the bingeing/purging scene takes place at night behind the closed doors of Nicola's (Jane Horrocks) bedroom. In *Peter's Friends* the American television actress Carol (Rita Rudner) sneaks into the kitchen at night and raids the refrigerator. She removes and eats the leftovers from the evening's dinner, which she refused to eat with the others at the dinner table. In *Eating*, on different occasions, both Jennifer (Daphna Kastner) and Sophie (Gwen Weller) take refuge from the party in the bathroom to binge, in the case of Jennifer, and to purge, in Sophie's case. In each instance bingeing is done in hiding, furtively and illicitly, away from the critical eyes of others. This is underscored by the fact that in each scene the women's secret eating is discovered. The scene of Nicola's noisy bingeing and purging is intercut with shots of her twin sister in the bedroom next door, while the sounds of Nicola vomiting are still audible. In *Peter's Friends*, while Carol is on the kitchen floor doing post-binge "donkey kicks," i.e. exercises to work off what she has just eaten, another of Peter's guests walks into the kitchen. The two women then proceed to have a heart-to-heart conversation while defiantly finishing the leftover ice cream. On the two occasions when Jennifer and Sophie take refuge in the bathroom in *Eating*, other guests walk into the bathroom looking for and finding them. These scenes take place in rooms or at times that are not associated with eating, emphasizing once again the illicit nature and the guilt that accompanies all eating for women who suffer from eating disorders. These are in fact the preferred

places for eating-disordered women to eat. "I don't like to eat in public. I feel uncomfortable swallowing it . . . It's more comfortable here," says Jennifer, seated on the edge of the bathtub.

These women are too ashamed to eat in public and each bingeing scene is contrasted with another public eating scene. Much is made for comic effect in *Peter's Friends* of Carol's refusal to eat dinner at the table with the other guests: she is seen sipping water from her soup plate instead of the "high calorie" cream of mushroom soup, and squeezing and wiping the grease from her roast before shamefacedly putting it in her mouth. All of this is intercut with close-up shots of the other guests heartily eating the good English food and enjoying themselves immensely. Nicola in *Life Is Sweet* refuses to sit at the table with her family for the Sunday lamb dinner and prefers smoking a cigarette in the living room while the others are shown eating heartily, helping themselves to second portions and poking fun at Nicola. Most of the women gathered for the birthday party in *Eating* experience some sort of eating anxiety and at one point a slice of birthday cake is passed around the room and no one takes it. All of the eating in this film, even the public eating, is furtive and illicit.

Food: The foods women choose to binge on are, in the words of Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makinen, ". . . dangerous and alluring to women living up to the ideal of femininity."⁵⁸ Sweets are the

⁵⁸ Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makinen, Female Fetishism: A New Look (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1994), p. 124.

staple of the bingers in all of these scenes, just as in scenes depicting obese women overeating. They are the most forbidden of foods because of both calorie content and pleasure associated with sweet foods. Sugar and chocolate are associated with pleasure and gratification, but also with the danger of physical and moral corruption. Another type of food preferred by bingers has been described as maternal. They are soft, milky foods that, despite the fact that some bingers say they have chosen them because they can be vomitted back more easily, are nonetheless linked to maternal comfort and sensual pleasure. During the binges, these foods are not photographed in a particular "pornographic" manner and are not made to look attractive and are more likely to evoke disgust.

Spectacle: Much fun is made of Carol and her eating habits in *Peter's Friends*. For the other guests her eating problems are linked to the fact that she is American. Carol's Americanness is emphasised and ridiculed throughout the film, and for the other guests she embodies the "ugly American": she speaks loudly, dresses garishly, insists on having a television in her room, and tips the other guests, whom she mistakes for house servants. She is incapable, unlike the others around her, of maintaining a relaxed and healthy attitude toward good food and being nonchalant about her body image.

The "climax" of *Eating* is a "purging" scene where Sophie is huddled over a toilet bowl with her fingers down her throat. Sophie has been previously characterised as a "bitch" because she

has been spreading gossip behind people's backs during the party. Kate, wronged by Sophie's gossip and furious with her for this, walks in and discovers Sophie over the toilet. Showing Sophie vomiting under the eyes of the self-righteous Kate echoes society's stereotypical view of bulimics as affirming, in the words of Troy Cooper, "all that is degrading and uncontrollable in women's physicality and their appetites."⁵⁹ Sophie's jealousy of Kate who, through anorexic behaviour, has managed to stay "pretty and thin", posits the bulimic as a "failed" anorexic. The high angle shot looking down upon Sophie and the toilet bowl emphasises her monstrousness and lowliness.

Life Is Sweet offers the spectacle, from a slightly high-angled fixed medium shot, of Nicola on her knees bingeing on chocolate cakes and candies and then inducing vomiting with a spoon. Coupled with this scene are the daytime visits of her boyfriend, with whom she can only make love if he smears chocolate paste over her body. Nicola's bulimia is highly ritualised, she is shown kneeling and listening to loud music through headphones, she keeps her sweets and cakes locked in a special suitcase under her bed, and she induces vomiting with a wooden spoon that is also removed from the suitcase. In each case bingeing is pathologised and portrayed as an act of "perversion" that allows little room for sympathy for the suffering anorexic-bulimic woman and contributes to negative popular beliefs about bulimia. According to Troy Cooper, bulimia is commonly perceived as a ". . . descent into the

⁵⁹ Troy Cooper, op. cit., p. 186.

flesh. It is the apparent indulgence of the flesh, followed by its manipulation and self-abuse."⁶⁰ Nicola's "descent into the flesh" seems all the more incomprehensible, selfish and disgusting, because her family is depicted as quite normal and open, rather than problematic. *Life Is Sweet* fails to offer an analysis of what is recognised as a typical cause of the anorexic's condition, i.e. a family in which the mother is usually a model of "womanhood," who instills in her daughter submissiveness, self-sacrifice, dependence, and consideration of others before self. Such families are characteristically "child-centred and conservative (where) rigidity not only enforces the status quo but also produces a fear of growing up and encourages infantile forms of self-assertion. . . the "anorexic family" might represent a microcosm of patriarchal society."⁶¹

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Life Is Sweet, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Eating*, and *Peter's Friends* all point to a failure in mainstream cinema to deal sympathetically with eating disorders. They insist on blaming the woman for her problem and refuse to look beyond the spectacular aspects of bingeing. Women afflicted with eating disorders are put on display much like the "fasting women" who were put in cages in

⁶⁰ Troy Cooper, op. cit., p. 181.

⁶¹ Gill Edwards, "Anorexia and the Family." in Margaret Lawrence, ed., Fed Up and Hungry: Women, Oppression and Food, op. cit., p. 65.

public squares during the Middle Ages.⁶² While choosing to show certain aspects of eating disorders and not others, such films avoid explaining the cause of the problem in favour of focusing on the visual spectacle of obesity, vomiting and bingeing, thus underscoring the stereotypical impression that hunger makes women emotional, irrational and utterly powerless to contain their impulses in a socially acceptable manner. Like the obese women of films past, eating disordered women provide a sometimes comic, sometimes tragic spectacle, whose moralising tone does not clearly sympathise with their suffering. It must be pointed out that these films are all directed by males, whereas a female-directed mainstream film such as *She Devil*, with its portrayal of Ruth as corrosive and empowering, clearly shows a different sensibility. I will now analyse some avant-garde representations that go further not only in exposing and denouncing women's traditional roles in patriarchy, but also in offering alternative topographies for women and food.

D. Deconstructing Topographies: Avant-Garde Views of Cooking and Eating Women

⁶² Claude Fischler contends that, although anorexia as we know it is a post-war phenomenon, evidence suggests that anorexic types have long existed, notably in the case of "fasting women", and other cases that may have been explained at the time as withcraft or heresy. See Claude Fischler, *L'Homnivore*, op. cit., p. 361.

Avant-garde feminist representations of women and food differ markedly from those in mainstream women's films. Instead of trying to rework existing structures, feminist filmmakers have tried to create new ones, breaking away from dominant discourses. Although in the previous section the displeasure of women before their domestic tasks is couched in the mainstream pleasure of movie-going, here there is no attempt to gratify the spectator with narrative comprehensibility and logic. The avant-garde feminist agenda has included the deconstruction and denunciation of male-centred texts by exposing the gaps and contradictions within them. This has been accompanied by a desire to invent a new film language and aesthetics through which women filmmakers and spectators alike can formulate new conditions and new positions of representations, breaking notably with voyeurism, conventional spectator identification, and a certain conception of narrative, in order ultimately to redefine the spaces that women inhabit in films. Taking this distance from the mainstream and convention has involved developing another set of concerns and much avant-garde feminist cinema has set itself the task of reflecting on the practice of women's everyday life. This is important for a feminist agenda because gender is in part constructed by these very practices that have long been overlooked, distorted, covered up, and dismissed by dominant cinema. If "feminism begins at home,"⁶³

⁶³ Teresa de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p.26.

then the domestic space should hold a privileged position as a setting of avant-garde feminist films. The home has been obliquely and directly confronted in films by Yvonne Rainer, Marleen Gorris, Margaret Raspe, Susan Stein, Martha Roster, Chantal Akerman and Jayne Parker. In this section, I will be looking in detail at films by the latter two directors.

D.1. Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*

The early films of Belgian director Chantal Akerman go back to the sites/spaces of the origin of the myths of the cooking and eating woman and try to transform and re-interpret, in light of feminist concerns, not only those very spaces, kitchens and restaurants, but also our ways of looking at them. In her seminal *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975, hereafter referred to as *Jeanne Dielman*), Akerman has chosen to focus on the daily routines of a lower middle-class housewife, Jeanne Dielman (Delphine Seyrig) over a period of three days. In this almost four-hour long film many of the scenes are filmed in real time and most of them concentrate on the "performance" of household tasks - cooking, washing, scrubbing, dusting, and shopping. There are three meal preparation scenes in the film that depict Jeanne preparing each day's evening meal for herself and her son. In discussing these scenes I would like to return once again to the televised cookery programme (see pp. 114-121) and focus on

how *Jeanne Dielman* deconstructs and critiques the idealised and idealising images of such programmes.

I will take as an example the preparation of the second day's meal. The scene that I wish to concentrate on is a three-minute sequence that consists of a continuous medium shot of Jeanne standing at her kitchen table preparing a meat loaf. We see all the steps of the preparation: the mixture and blending of the eggs, breadcrumbs, and spices. Jeanne clearly spends more time than necessary kneading the mixture, and continues, as if in a reverie, to do so long after the preparation is thoroughly mixed. The set-up of this scene echoes that of a cookery programme, all the ingredients that will be used have been magically laid out on the table beforehand and we witness the step-by-step process of preparation. This scene could in fact be followed as a recipe for meat loaf, without the gloss, ellipsis and banter of a cooking programme. However, unlike cooking programmes, no effort has been made to "dress up" the food for the camera and no close-ups are used to show off the results. The sounds of the meat and egg squishing through Jeanne's fingers are ever-, and almost over-, present here and would be elided in a cookery programme or a more commercial film, where they would be considered as excessive, and possibly repulsive.

In a way, Akerman conforms to the traditional methods of framing women in the kitchen - the fixed, immobile shot of a woman framed in her entirety in her apron among her kitchen utensils - that have already been observed in both pre- and post-feminist

films such as *Stella Dallas*, *Fort Apache*, *La Grande Illusion*, *M*, *The Big Heat*, *Fatal Attraction*, and *The Untouchables*. In these latter films only fleeting glances of women in the kitchen are offered, brief enough just to be noticed, but not remarked upon. The traditional strategy involves looking, but not long enough to notice the contradictions or injustices of the arrangement. However, Akerman overturns the ideological project of such traditional representations - the ultimate invisibility of the woman - to, precisely, make her visible with a vengeance. Akerman's shots remain steadfastly fixed. Her camera lingers, allowing us to see more than we normally would, especially including the "images which are between the images,"⁶⁴ that would be elided in a mainstream production.

If *Jeanne Dielman* were indeed a conventional film, the narrative would concentrate on the more "spectacular" aspects of Jeanne as a murderess or prostitute. However, to quote the film's cinematographer Babette Mangolte, *Jeanne Dielman* is "a Forties story shot by a Seventies camera,"⁶⁵ and Jeanne's daily prostitution and the murder of her third customer are not shown in any way approaching the same degree of detail as the preparation of veal cutlets or the brewing of the day's coffee. There is a

⁶⁴ Marie-Claude Treilhou, interview with Chantal Akerman, *Cinema 76*, no. 206 (Feb 1976), pp. 90-92, quoted in Angela Martin, "Chantal Akerman's Films: Notes on the Issues Raised for Feminism," in Charlotte Brundson, ed., *Films for Women* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), p. 68.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Patricia Patterson and Manny Farber, "Kitchen Without Kitsch," *Film Comment*. 13:6 (Nov/Dec 1977), p. 48.

difference in the intensity of treatment which goes against standard spectator expectations, indeed a reversal of the traditional attentions of mainstream film. "It is the housework that sticks in one's mind after the film is over and the housework that provides Jeanne's identity. The work is close to ritual, rigidly scheduled and repeated daily with slight variations and maximum efficiency."⁶⁶ As it is the day-to-day activities that are entirely foregrounded in this film, the subtle changes in these activities come to assume a significant narrative function. When the menu changes from meat loaf one day to breaded pork cutlets the next, or when she forgets to turn off a light, these things "happen" in the film just as much as the comings and goings of characters that motivate narrative development in classical films.

It is obvious that Jeanne has repeated these gestures many times before in her life. The little differences from day to day compensate in a way for the lack of traditional montage effects in the film. They underscore the importance of such everyday details in Jeanne's life and prompt the spectator to dwell on them. Without the "help" of a reverse shot or change of camera angle, our attention is drawn to her activities and concerns of the moment. The film does not dictate the viewer's attention with a close-up of the burning potatoes or a light left on inadvertently. It is rather the result of our own scanning of the frame, and allowed by the sustained shots. The viewer is thus in the process of

⁶⁶ Jayne Loader, "*Jeanne Dielman: Death in Installments*," in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods*, Vol. II (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986), p. 229.

reframing and editing within the fixed frame itself, doing the work of a traditional film or cookery programme.

The exactitude and precision with which Jeanne carries out her household tasks is on a par with the joylessness and sterility that seem to be the hallmarks of her life. She prepares dinner much as she would polish her son's shoes, make his bed, or wash the dishes. She does not cook to make her food desired and she does not expect nor does she receive any praise for her day-long efforts. Her food is not imbued with any especially life-affirming qualities and is in fact more exciting when it is unstable and in its raw state. In the veal cutlet as well as the meat loaf scene, the viscosity of the raw meat and eggs, with their yellow and red colours, suggesting the attraction/repulsion of mucous bodily fluids and the "harmony of soft and life-giving substances,"⁶⁷ evoke uneasy emotional states linked to desire, violence and sexuality. Jeanne visibly gets carried away while squishing her fingers through the raw meat loaf. The red and yellow glare of the meat and eggs fits into the film's colour scheme as described by Mary Jo Lakeland: ". . . the occasional appearance of red or pink in the shots creates a low-level dissonance. These accents of red throughout the film can be seen as a prefiguring of the trace of blood on Jeanne Dielman's hand in the final shot of the film."⁶⁸ Cooking in fact

⁶⁷ Roland Barthes, "Steak and Chips," in Mythologies, Annette Lavers trans., (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), p. 62.

⁶⁸ Mary Jo Lakeland, "The Color of *Jeanne Dielman*," Camera Obscura 3/4 (1979), p. 217.

involves the taming and the domestication of food, and in her cooking practices Jeanne transforms and subdues the unstable, glutinous, colourful, and disturbing qualities of the raw eggs and meat, so that they become dry, monochrome meals, conceived without spices and served without sauces or gravies. Once cooked, all of her dishes lack colour, and she literally "domesticates" them so that they conform to the brownish colour scheme of some of the film's interiors.

What can be noticed from these scenes is a distinct lack of pleasure, especially any emotional or physical pleasure related to the senses. In fact, Jeanne's approach to housework and cooking involves the repression of sensory stimuli in her household. These efforts at sterilising her surroundings become increasingly difficult for her to sustain and control, resulting in much of the film's "drama." As the film unwinds into the second and third days, Jeanne is obliged more and more to respond to the world around her, and the "events" leading up to the film's climax are in fact a series of incidents which jolt her senses. When the milk in her coffee has gone off on the third day, it is probably the first time she has reacted to a taste for a long time. When a client stays too long on the second day, we see her nose flare up from the smell of the burning potatoes that are usually timed to cook during her bedroom sessions. On the third day, we have seen how she spends much more time than necessary kneading the meat loaf, responding to tactile sensations. Earlier that day, she must also listen to the incessantly sharp and piercing wailing of the

neighbour's baby, whom she is watching over for the morning. The final jolt comes in her bedroom on the third day when she responds sexually with her client. All of these events constitute a progressive and literal awakening of the senses for Jeanne. This physical ascent/descent into the world of sensation coincides with an awakening of her consciousness, urging her that she must do something about her plight, and leading to the final outburst of an at last passionate act.

D.2. Jayne Parker's *Rx Recipe* and *I Dish*

Other feminist films that show women in the kitchen differently from classical norms are Margaret Raspe's *Schweineschnitzel* (1971), depicting aggression in the kitchen through the preparation of a breaded pork cutlet; Martha Roster's *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975); and Susan Stein's *She Said* (1982), a reflection on women's work in the home. Two of British filmmaker Jayne Parker's short films, *Rx Recipe* (1980) and *I Dish* (1982), also feature unpleasant sensations related to the kitchen and food preparation. *Rx Recipe* obliquely alludes to housewives, or rather the female readership of magazines and cookbooks, through the use of a recipe that is whispered over the soundtrack. Although what we hear sounds like a straightforward recipe for stuffed eel, we see a pair of women's hands patiently and serenely following the steps of the recipe with a three-foot long eel in a bathtub.

The fact of preparing food in the bathroom, at first perhaps shocking, is not altogether incongruous. Both the bathroom and the

kitchen are rooms of the house devoted to the body and, to paraphrase N  lle Ch  telet, the link between the bathroom and the kitchen is as organic as that between the stomach and the rectum. There is no kitchen, therefore, that does not irremediably recall its counterpart, the water closet.⁶⁹ *Rx Recipe* thus brings the hygienic kitchen scene of the cookery programme "logically" into the bathroom. Parker made the same taboo association in her *I Dish*, showing dishes being washed in the same water where a man has been obsessively washing his genitals. This organic association between the two rooms is often avoided and circumvented in the mainstream, where the kitchen is considered a clean room, while the bathroom is regarded as a place where unmentionable and "dirty" things take place. This association is also made in *Jeanne Dielman* through the similar pale green tiles in the kitchen and bathroom of her apartment.

This association between the two rooms of the house is rarely perceived as perfectly "natural" and "organic", and in so doing Parker manages to create a sense of corporeal unease that pervades all of her films. The sterility of the title *Rx Recipe* and the medical bandage that is used to wrap the eel conjure other uneasy associations that link cooking and pharmacology.⁷⁰ The recipe that

⁶⁹ N  lle Ch  telet, op. cit., pp. 31-32.

⁷⁰ In view of the measures, instruments, utensils, and techniques the two fields share, it has been documented by Piero Camporesi how pharmacology most likely originated in the kitchens of the Dark Ages. See Piero Camporesi, The Incorruptible Flesh : Bodily Mutation and Mortification in Religion & Folklore. Tania Croft-Murry, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 171.

is recited in this film is whispered at a barely audible level, an irritating effect that renders the familiar, gendered jargon of the recipe alienating. Like the squishing sounds of the meat and eggs in *Jeanne Dielman*, these sounds would be unwelcome in a cookery programme. Other unpleasant associations linking cooking and housework are densely evoked in *I Dish* between images of a man's genitalia, his confession on the soundtrack about having anal sex, the bathwater in which he obsessively washes his penis as well as the dishes, an eel eaten by hand, and the dark mud from which the eel has been fished out. *Rx Recipe* is a parody of a recipe that reveals contradictions in recipes' addresses to women. The recipe and cookbook, because of their gendered address, may constitute yet another form of "feminine subculture," where women address women within a discourse that excludes men. However, it is still but a discourse belittled and "allowed" by patriarchy. Like the mainstream women's film, it may offer pleasures, but is divested of much of its subversive potential. So recipes can also be a form of control and discipline for women. Like diets, recipes dictate a way towards a certain feminine ideal. Just as women can get frustrated trying to make their bodies conform to a certain "model," which is dictated in large part by imagery in women's fashion magazines, another similar ideal for cooks can result in the same type of frustration, dissatisfaction and disappointment for women. "Like women's flawed bodies, the family home demands constant work by woman, a cleanliness resembling Freud's description of the repetitions of the obsessional neurotic, a

fastidiousness gained only by hundreds of products for each differentiated wipe of the cloth."⁷¹

D.3. Chantal Akerman's *Je tu il elle*

Parker's films have been analysed in light of French feminist theorists Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous and the notion of "writing the body" (*l'écriture féminine*).⁷² Both theorists are interested in promoting the specificity of a woman's language, analogous to the female body. Janet Wolff explains: "*L'écriture féminine* is writing grounded in women's experience of the body and sexuality, an experience which is not mediated by men or patriarchy."⁷³ This definition could characterise Jayne Parker's films as well as Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* and *Je tu il elle* (1974). I would now like to investigate *Je tu il elle* as an avant-garde exploration of the eating woman and her body.

In the first of the film's three sequences, Chantal (played by Chantal Akerman herself), trying to recover from a separation with a lover, repeatedly eats sugar from the packet with a spoon. This is not only something that is shown repeatedly, but it is also repeatedly announced by Chantal's disembodied voice-over, which

⁷¹ Patricia Mellencamp, "Domestic Scenes," East-West Film Journal 4:1 (Dec 1989), p. 138.

⁷² See Tracy Louise Rovier, "(R)eel Hooks: The Films of Jayne Parker; The Body & the Voice," Manuscript, M.A. dissertation, Dept. of Film Studies, Derbyshire College of Higher Education, U.K., September 1991.

⁷³ Janet Wolff, Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture, op. cit., p. 132.

would seem to be the text of what she is writing throughout the sequence. At the beginning of this sequence Chantal is sitting at a table in a banal, furnished room. She proceeds to modify this environment by rearranging all of the furniture in the room, until there is nothing left but a bare mattress. She thus removes all traces of conventionality, comfort and pleasure, shedding her clothes as well. Through the manipulation of this space Chantal has brought about a "re-ordering of the relations of power and difference."⁷⁴ Like the blank pages upon which she writes, Chantal makes a *tabula rasa* of the room and her body, from the exterior - by removing her clothes, as well as from the interior - by eating only powdered white sugar. Her world is inundated with whiteness and blankness - on the bare walls, the sheets of paper, her white skin, the sugar, the snow outside. Chantal's voice-over contributes to this effect by recounting what happened on day 1, day 2, etc., as if they were steps in a genesis. Without tables, chairs, food or clothing, she has removed all systems and hierarchy implicit in domestic and corporeal spaces. She eats the sugar much in the same way that she writes or sleeps or moves the furniture around the room, eating the sugar being always associated with writing. This moment of stasis and inertia has been described by Françoise Audé in terms of anorexia. Chantal leaves the room after 28 days, precisely, as Audé points out, the time of the period she

⁷⁴ Constance Penley, The Future of an Illusion. (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 54.

missed due to the amenorrhea that often accompanies anorexia.⁷⁵ However, to label Chantal an anorexic is simplistic and does not help to elucidate the conclusions that Audé arrives at about the film's third segment. Chantal is putting herself through this period of obsessive eating, writing and agoraphobic confinement. Whether she is anorexic or not, the sequence remains non-accusatory, unlike, for example, the bulimia sequences in *Eating or Life Is Sweet*, which makes a pitiful and abject figure out of Nicola.

Having thus recreated an interior space for herself, Chantal moves on in the second sequence to the traditional exterior masculine spaces of trucks and truckstops. This part consists of her nighttime encounter with a truckdriver. At one point they stop for a meal in a roadside café. Facing the camera and seated side-by-side at a table, the couple is filmed slightly off-centre from a long shot. They both look up at a television which is loudly airing an adventure film in a corner of the café. Due to the distance and the lighting, it is difficult to distinguish what they are eating, although they are probably having something traditional like a *steak-frites*. The truckdriver is obviously more interested in the television than both the food and Chantal. He does eat much more heartily than she does however, and later in another café, she hardly drinks her beer while he swallows his in one go. Although there is a semblance of a "sex scene" immediately following this

⁷⁵ Françoise Audé, "Le cinéma de Chantal Akerman, la nourriture, le narcissisme, l'exil" in Jacqueline Aubenas, ed., Chantal Akerman (Bruxelles: Atelier des Arts, 1982), n. p.

meal, the food seduction topography is completely broken down here. Their eating is not a performance, neither for themselves nor for the spectator, thus denying pleasure within the film and, more importantly, the traditional pleasure the spectator would experience watching a food seduction scene. No causal relation is constructed between eating and sex. The male position of domination and as "bearer of the look" is thus supplanted here. During his monologue in the truck, we see the truckdriver, but the foreground is occupied by Chantal's face which never stops looking at him. The truckdriver in this sequence is constantly hemmed in on one side by some sort of glass - the truck windshield and windows in the truck, a mirror in the bathroom, a fish tank in a café, the television, all of these surfaces give some sort of illusory and frozen mobility, because although one can see beyond or into them, one cannot actually go through them.

Up to now we have seen Chantal "obsessively" eat sugar alone, and then have a meal in a café with a truckdriver where she does not eat very enthusiastically. In the film's third sequence Chantal goes to the apartment of a woman, presumably the lover to whom she was writing in the first sequence. Once inside, she demands to be fed, and voraciously eats the simple bread and jam sandwich her friend makes for her. Upon finishing the sandwich Chantal demands more and her friend immediately goes to the kitchen and brings back more bread and jam. This is perhaps the meal that Chantal has been hungering for throughout the film. The nourishing role is not only one that her friend, after a moment's hesitation

in the hallway, willingly assumes, but also one that Chantal allows her friend to have for her. All of Chantal's eating has been shot face on from across the table, with her friend seated to the side. After the second sandwich, there is a cut to a shot of her friend adopting Chantal's point of view from over her shoulder. Chantal then reaches out to touch her friend's (maternal) breast. On the voiceover Chantal comments, "She said I could only spend one night", and then the scene changes to the final three-shot sequence of the two women making love on a bed.

Critics have been concerned with relating the film's three sequences to each other in terms of a journey, quest or cycle, trying to give the film some sort of comprehensible narrative structure or system. The other principal critical, and mainly feminist, concern has been measuring the final sequence against pornographic representations. I will attempt to address these issues with some comments about the eating woman and her body. Teresa de Lauretis has argued that "the feminist critique of representation might have intended to destroy, or to deflect, the lures and pleasures of narrative closure and identification, but it has also meant, and realized, a shifting of the ground of intelligibility and pleasure."⁷⁶ In all three sequences Akerman investigates the potential of the female body beyond the traditional configurations. She first of all breaks with the classical/grotesque body dichotomy that has dominated Western

⁷⁶ Teresa de Lauretis, "Guerilla in the Midst: Women's Cinema in the 80s," Screen 31:1 (Spring 1990), p. 12.

patriarchal representations of the female body.⁷⁷ Akerman's is neither the classical body, which in today's terms would be the docile body of modern medicine or advertising, nor the grotesque body, emphasising genitalia, the orifices, and excrement. Akerman has side-stepped these dominant ideals while still equating woman with her body. In each of the three sequences she asserts the specificity and experience of the female body: 1) by showing it unashamedly, but in an entirely de-eroticized, un-grotesque way; 2) by denying it to a male; and 3) by offering it openly to a woman, notably not using lesbian love-making as gratification of male fantasy. In the same way Chantal has unproblematised and de-dramatised bingeing. In her eating of sugar she is not pathological, but granting herself pleasure. Throughout the three sequences of the film, Chantal Akerman indicates that, in terms of sexuality and eating disorders, "abnormality" is created by others.

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In this chapter, I have been concerned with food's capacity to expose tensions in gender relations. Because of its ideological conformity, the pre-feminist period lent itself to a "simple" analysis of predominant depictions of women and food in terms of providers and consumers. In the post-feminist period, there has indeed been a continuation of traditional representations in

⁷⁷ Wolff, op. cit., p. 125.

mainstream film. More significantly, there has also been a diversification of the possible types and ways of presenting women and food. This is exemplified in the proliferation of women's films that try to create a positive balance between change and stability. Women directors have gone much further not only in engaging with the contradictory discourses addressing women about food, but also in providing different and alternative views of women as both cooks and eaters.

CHAPTER THREE

ALIMENTARY DELINQUENCY IN THE CINEMA

"Since time immemorial, people have craved spectacles permitting them vicariously to experience the fury of conflagrations, the excesses of cruelty and suffering, and unspeakable lusts".¹

I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines a number of films that depict a certain type of alimentary behaviour which for the typical contemporary Western eater and filmgoer would be considered extremely aberrant and in no uncertain terms "gross." Alimentary delinquency is the term I will use to characterise behaviour toward food which goes beyond "normal" need and "normal" desire and into the realm of the shocking and the nightmarish. Taboo is a word that will recur throughout this chapter, taboo in its dual and ambivalent function of representing both repulsion and attraction, desire and fear; but also taboo as the locus and socialised expression of both societal and individual conflicts. As one society's taboo may be another's custom, I will focus on films from America and Europe, where the range of alimentary rituals, codes and attitudes is not too divergent. I will be examining the forms and functions of the systems of excess and exaggeration in this cinema of the

¹ Sigfried Kracauer, Theory of Film, quoted in Gerald Mast, Film Cinema, Movie: A Theory of Experience (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.40.

outrageous, which far prefers the impulses of the body over those of the mind.

Alimentary delinquency in the cinema is contained within a limited body of films that by and large fall under the following three categories: 1) the mainly American horror/exploitation film including, for example, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1972) and its sequel (1986), *Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero, 1968) and its sequels, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and *Day of the Dead* (1985), and *The Hills Have Eyes* (Wes Craven, 1977), as well as the imposing number of Italian zombie and cannibal exploitation films of the late 1970s/early 1980s such as *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1979), *Mondo cannibale* (*Cannibals*, Jesus Franco, 1979), *Il Cannibal* (Franco Prosperi, 1979), *Cannibal Ferox* (Umberto Lenzi, 1980); 2) the counter-cinema of the 1960s and early 1970s, including not only European films such as *Weekend* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967), *Porcile* (*Pigsty*, Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1969), *Themroc* (Claude Farraldo, 1973) and *La Grande Bouffe* (Marco Ferreri, 1972), but also some elements of "liberation cinema" such as Nelson Pereira dos Santos' *Como Era Gostoso O Meu Frances* (*How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman*, 1974) or Dusan Makavejev's 1974 *Sweet Movie* and John Waters' *Pink Flamingos* (1972); and 3) the contemporary, and mainly European, art film of the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s including, among others, *Salo o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1975), *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (Peter Greenaway, 1989), *La Carne* (*Flesh*, Marco Ferreri, 1990), the Belgian short *Adoration* (Olivier Smolders, 1990), and *Delicatessen*

(Jean-Pierre Jeunet & Marc Caro, 1991).

This cluster of films represents an opening up to all of the possible things that people can put in their mouths. As such they exist as excesses to the filmic system. It is primarily for the provocativeness of their imagery that they are considered so extreme and outrageous. They are for the most part viscerally disturbing films that seek to show and exhibit, emphasising display and presentation. Blatant images of aberrant foodmaking and eating practices not only challenge the modern eater, who prefers less and less to be confronted with the reality of his/her food, but also the modern filmgoer, who is faced with the symbolic possibilities of these predominantly non-classical images of coprophagy, gorging, cannibalism and the spectacle of human flesh turned into meat. However, despite certain thematic similarities, the three series of films under scrutiny in this chapter represent distinct moments in cinema, and each film contains the particularities of the periods and trends from which it has sprung.

A. Background

The notion of alimentary delinquency and its representations in visual and narrative arts are not recent phenomena. A two-fold representational tradition exists. On the one hand, one can find alimentary delinquency present in the literary works of, for example, Seneca, Rabelais, Sade, and the Jacobean revenge dramas, which generically ended in some sort of cannibalistic feast. In painting, scenes of alimentary delinquency are notable in the works

of Hieronymous Bosch, Goya, Gustave Moreau, or even on the murals of Pompeii. These non-realist works are replete with acts of voracious cannibalism, coprophagy, acute gorging, and other fantasies of eating what is normally considered inedible. If the above, despite the imagery they evoke, have traditionally been considered as "art," then, on the other hand, there has also been a more popular tradition involving alimentary delinquency, itself more realist, in that it mainly consists of real people committing outrageous acts with food, in the form of, for example, itinerant public eaters (see, for example, the chapter on eating in the Guinness Book of World Records), as well as public fasters, such as the "fasting women" of medieval times, the likely precursors to what we now call anorexics, who would be exposed in cages for days and weeks without eating.²

The transgression of alimentary taboos in the cinema has likewise followed a two-fold tradition. The above-mentioned films will be considered in this chapter in light of these larger tendencies in terms of art cinema on the one hand, comprising the counter-cinema and postmodern art films, and popular cinema on the other, reflected in the horror and exploitation films.

All of the films listed above and indeed the overwhelming majority of films that feature alimentary delinquency come out of the post-1960 period. Before this period, alimentary delinquency was notably abundant in the early "cinema of attractions." Films such as *The Big Swallow* (J. Williamson, 1901), *A la conquête du*

² Claude Fischler, L'Homnivore, op. cit., p. 160.

pôle (G. Méliès, 1912), *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* (Edison, 1906), or *Rêve d'un marmotton* (Pathé, 1906) abound with man-eating monsters, camera/spectator-eating men, and wild dreams provoked by excesses of food. However, with the advent of narrative forms, alimentary delinquency subsided in film until the 1960s and the beginnings of what is known as the post-classical period. Alimentary delinquency in film has been limited to forms that favour spectacle, performance and exhibition. As Tom Gunning has noted, ". . . the cinema of attractions does not disappear with the dominance of narrative, but rather it goes underground, both into certain avant-garde practices and as components of narrative films, more evident in some genres (e.g. the musical) than in others."³ This chapter differs from chapters One and Two in that they outlined a clear shift from the pre-war to the post-war period, and the pre-feminist to the post-feminist period, respectively. Indeed, I hold that alimentary delinquency developed as a distinctly post-classical phenomenon.

Changes in post-war film industry economics provide some of the reasons for the upsurge of films that feature alimentary delinquency. After World War II, three intertwining phenomena not only contributed to the destabilisation of the U.S. film industry, but also eventually had ramifications in international film

³ Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8:3-4 (Fall 1986), p. 64.

markets.⁴ Firstly, the Paramount anti-trust decree of 1948 effectively dismantled the vertically integrated system whereby a film's production, distribution and exhibition were all under singular studio control. The decree divorced film exhibition from production and distribution, thus allowing exhibitors a degree of independence to decide what films to show and how long to show them for. The major studios no longer monopolised the playing time in theatres and films were no longer imposed upon exhibitors. This situation favoured independent productions and, notably, allowed for the introduction in U.S. theatres of foreign films, revealing new dimensions of theme and style and favouring the emergence of international auteurs. Special venues - "art houses" - opened in urban areas and university towns to accommodate the new films and their specialised audiences. Secondly, a Supreme Court decision in 1952 brought films under the first, "free speech," constitutional amendment, thereby releasing them from the Production Code Administration's watchful censorship and paving the way for looser restrictions as to image and narrative content, especially regarding sex, violence, language, and the depiction of immoral and/or criminal acts. This not only allowed for the introduction of even more foreign films, with their provocative themes and risqué subjects, but also incited American film producers to include such themes and subjects in their own films.

⁴ The following resumé of the post-war film industry situation is condensed from Tino Balio, "Retrenchment, Reappraisal and Reorganization: 1948 -," in Tino Balio, ed., The American Film Industry (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), pp. 315-331.

Finally, a third factor contributing to the upheaval of the studio system was the demographic profile of the mass audience of film-goers, which shifted considerably after the war. Returning veterans and their families moved *en masse* away from urban areas, where most film theatres were located, to settle in newly-created suburbs, and the acquisition of houses, cars and home appliances became pressing consumer priorities. At the same time, television was becoming firmly cradled in a majority of US homes and gradually cornered the "family entertainment" market that used to be cinema's mainstay. These changes brought on a different conception of leisure time. Film-goers now lived further away from movie theatres and they were no longer inclined to go out to see something they could just as well see at home on television. People started going less and less to the cinema, and box office returns declined steadily as of 1947 until the mid-1970s.

In order to put a stop to the downward curve, the film industry, which had initially ignored television in the belief, or hope, that it was just a passing fad, eventually adopted a competitive attitude vis-à-vis television. Although traditionally conservative, Hollywood began taking risks by implementing strategies devised to differentiate its product from television and lure the homebound audience back to the cinemas. Films tried to provide extraordinary experiences, images and themes that television could not or would not dare show. From marketing and merchandising schemes to the use of special effects such as colour, 3-dimensional film, and widescreen, all tried to heighten the

sensory experience of film-going.

The change in audience demographics, the newly-granted independence of exhibitors and the loosening of censorship restrictions resulted in the abandonment of the theoretical single potential mass audience and in the subsequent compartmentalisation of the film-going public. Films started becoming increasingly specialised and tried to vie for the attention of newly identified sectors of the potential audience. Potential film viewers began to be considered demographically in terms of age group, income bracket, region, and level of education. Thus began the phenomenon of films which support and are supported by what Andrew Tudor has called "subcultures of taste,"⁵ allowing for the very particular forms of visibility that horror films and art films enjoy.

B. Audience Compartmentalisation

Genre films were ready-made for this type of compartmentalisation and, almost in unison, westerns, such as *The Wild Bunch* (Sam Peckinpah, 1969), crime films, such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967), science fiction films, such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) and even melodramas, such as *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Mike Nichols, 1966) started becoming more explicit and more spectacular, including more violence, more sex and cruder language. The categories of film that are the subject of this chapter all belong to, and have

⁵ Andrew Tudor, Image and Influence (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1974), p. 90.

generated, their own subcultures of taste. For example, the horror film lent itself naturally to repeated bloodletting, violence and other outrages against the integrity of the body, as well as the exposition of naked bodies, all which could now be used to attract audiences. An early example of the exploitation of a subculture of taste can be seen in the films of Herschell Gordon Lewis, the pioneer of the "gore" film, now a sub-genre of the horror film. Lewis saw the potential profitability in both increased explicitness and audience compartmentalisation and made his early low-budget gore films specifically for a Southern, rural drive-in audience.⁶ *Night of the Living Dead* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* can be seen not only as Lewis' inheritors, building upon the corpse-strewn ground that he paved, but the wide commercial success and scandal of the latter two films also made them the trendsetters of the ever more sophisticated and realistic gore effects that all horror films now frequently include.

Another subculture of taste that developed out of this period was the art film audience. In the post-war years, European films became increasingly more visible in Anglo-American markets. The reputation that they already enjoyed for being explicit and open in sexual matters lent them greater market potential with the advent of looser restrictions throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Aided also by the emergence of the auteur theory, these films were allowed to make claims of superiority as serious Art. The art film audience

⁶ David Hogan, Dark Romance: Sex and Death in the Horror Film (Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: Equation, 1986), pp. 235-259.

quickly became a specialised and highly self-conscious audience, with their own exhibition venues located exclusively in urban centres, accompanied by different critical treatment in newspapers and magazines. The art house audience sees itself as preferring films that are made with a sensibility that has nothing to do with the "crass Hollywood product." This audience has a correct perception of itself as an exclusive niche, as a recent study revealed that audiences of sub-titled films comprise only 2.5% of the film-going public.⁷

If the art film audience sees itself as set apart from spectators of mainstream commercial films, the spectators of horror/exploitation films, especially in their lower forms (i.e. low budget productions, low production values, non-professional actors) are also set apart from the "norm" as far as the filmgoing public is concerned. Both audiences are trained in the variously complex rules of reading their respective genres and both audiences have cultivated extra-cinematic critical material - the art audience in the form of sophisticated film criticism, and the horror film audience in the form of fanzines and clubs. It is interesting to note that cannibalism and alimentary delinquency have been relegated not only to two specific "genre" forms, but to the genre forms of both the lowest and highest statures in terms of cultural esteem. I will now try to define the characteristics of each group of film - the "fast food," low-budget audience of the

⁷ Ginette Vincendeau, "France 1945-1965 & Hollywood: The Policier as Inter-national Text," Screen 33:1 (Spring 1992), p.53.

horror film and the "gourmet" art film audience.

II. THE GENRES OF ALIMENTARY DELINQUENCY

Before talking about the cross-generic aspects of taboo, spectacle, the body and its materiality and the libidinous creatures that people all of the films discussed in this chapter, I would first like to consider alimentary delinquency within the confines of the specific generic spaces of the horror film, counter cinema, and the contemporary art cinema.

A. Low Horror, Paranoid Horror

Although the horror film has always enjoyed a reputation for being excessively and gratuitously violent and graphic, the general loosening of censorship practices as of the 1960s led to an increase in bloodletting and sexuality in this genre. Post-war cannibalism started appearing in the exploitation films of H.G. Lewis such as *Blood Feast* (1964), *2000 Maniacs* (1965) and *The Gore-Gore Girls* (1967), which, apart from cannibalism, included an entire array of graphic slaughter, severed limbs and naked bodies. Alimentary delinquency has remained especially prominent in the contemporary, and mainly American, horror film. Cannibalism is by far the most common form of alimentary delinquency in films of this category, and the main thrust of this section will examine the contexts that have given rise to cannibalism in and around these films, which include, among others, *Night of the Living Dead*

(George Romero, 1969), *Cannibal Girls* (Ivan Reitman, 1972), *Death Line* (U.K., Gary Sherman, 1972), *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), *Deranged* (Jeff Gillen, 1974), *Frightmare/Raw Meat* (U.K., Peter Walker, 1974), *The Hills Have Eyes* (Wes Craven, 1977), *Zombies: Dawn of the Dead* (George Romero, 1978), *Motel Hell* (Kevin Connor, 1980), *Microwave Massacre* (1983), *Day of the Dead* (George Romero, 1985), as well as the series of Italian zombie and cannibal exploitation films of the late 1970s and early 1980s, such as *Ultimo Mondo Cannibal* (Ruggero Deodato, 1976), *Montagna del Dio Cannibal* (Sergio Martino, 1978), *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1979), *Mondo cannibale (Cannibals)* (Jesus Franco, 1979), *Il Cannibal* (Franco Prosperi, 1979), and *Cannibal Ferox* (Umberto Lenzi, 1980). The horror film has already been briefly described as a genre and I would now like to examine how these films fit into or diverge from their generic category, with specific, though not exclusive, focus on three films, *Night of the Living Dead*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and *The Hills Have Eyes*.

Cannibalism is far from being the only outrageous act committed in these films and is accompanied by other atrocious acts of frontally-filmed violence and blood-letting: in *Night of the Living Dead* and especially in its full-colour sequels, zombies as well as their victims are repeatedly dismembered, decapitated, and disemboweled; although the cannibalism of an infant is only talked about in *The Hills Have Eyes*, other murders are carried out with various sharp and blunt weapons; and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* features bodies on meat hooks and in refridgerators as well as

series of suggestive chain saw murders.

In terms of horror film "hierarchy," these films belong to the "low" form of the genre which, in Peter Boss' terms, "relies upon the promise of delivering the most disreputable and lurid elements of the genre."⁸ Being "low" not only means being excessively violent and gory but also implies a series of other characteristics:

Firstly comes their marginality in relation to mainstream film industries, especially in terms of production values, financial backing, and distribution patterns. On one level, this can be simply determined by the real distance from Hollywood of, for example, the productions of *Night of the Living Dead* and *Chainsaw*. The former film was shot in and around Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, while the latter was filmed in Texas, both very far away from the West Coast filmmaking "centre." Both productions were also distant from the traditional sources of financial backing, working on shoestring budgets with limited resources and often with borrowed equipment and settings. Another factor of a film's "lowliness" in the 1990s is the brevity of its theatre run and the consequent likelihood of it passing quickly to the video circuit.

Secondly, these films present narratives and, especially, images, that break with the "norms" and standards of mainstream cinema. This can first of all be perceived as a direct reflection of the stringent production conditions in which these films are

⁸. Peter Boss, Death, Disintegration of the Body and Subjectivity in the Contemporary Horror Film Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Warwick, U.K., 1989, p. 28.

made. *Night of the Living Dead* was filmed in black and white with non-professional actors, on locations that were lent to the director. These conditions not only kept expenses low, they also lent the film many of its qualities. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* has also been similarly made with a low budget and with cost-cutting filmmaking practices. In fact, the low form of the horror genre lies largely outside of the rules and conventions of mainstream aesthetic systems and, as Dickstein has put it, is the film category "most likely to be betrayed by artistic treatment and lavish production values."⁹ Lying at the margins, although fraught with financial and technical constraints, has also allowed the filmmakers a degree of freedom and daring that they surely would not have had working in the centre of the film industry. It has also been one of the reasons that over time the films have been considered as works of integrity and ultimately as "art." Many critics have expressed dismay and disappointment about Hooper's, Cravens', and to a lesser extent, Romero's subsequent work in the genre, labelling it as "tainted" and co-opted by working within the industry centre with bigger budgets and higher production values.

A third and final way that lowliness shapes these films is through the cultivation of a separate, specialised audience of aficionados and "fans" who readily attend such films, avidly consume them in "videoland," and who are "trained" in reading them. The films as such have by and large remained within a very limited

⁹. Morris Dickstein, "The Aesthetics of Fright," in B.K. Grant, ed., Planks of Reason (Metuchen, NJ & London: The Scarecrow Press, 1984), p. 67.

sector of film distribution and the audience they attract embodies a very specific subculture of taste, often of great sophistication.¹⁰ An entire paracinematic mini-industry of magazines and clubs has developed around horror/gore/trash films and their fans.

The political climate of the 1960s engendered what has been dubbed by Andrew Tudor the "paranoid horror film" which has since been the dominant strain in the genre through the 1980s. Contrary to the classical form of the "*secure horror film*," the monstrous threat which is the axis of all horror films moved closer to home, "deep within the commonplace. . . turning apparently ordered and secure environments into settings for total social collapse."¹¹ Cannibalism takes place close to home in the contemporary horror film and is thus anchored in "reality." Such films are generally set in the "present," with protagonists and, for the most part, monsters who are or were "ordinary" people living in common houses. Cannibalism, like many other atrocities committed in low and paranoid horror, takes place in familiar, everyday surroundings. Foreboding Victorian mansions and otherly Gothic structures, the preferred settings of classical horror, have been subsumed in this contemporary brand of horror by banal American homes, which

¹⁰. For a description of the politics and practices of "trash" film fans, see Jeffery Sconce, "Trashing the Academy: Taste, Excess and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style," *Screen* 36:4 (Winter 1995), pp. 371-393.

¹¹ Andrew Tudor, Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 215-216.

nonetheless fulfill the "forbidden interior" function of their classical predecessors. The contemporary horror film has taken up residence in common dwellings, the settings, notably, in *Chain Saw*, and *Night of the Living Dead*.

In *Night of the Living Dead*, for example, the house is so typical that from the moment he enters the house, the hero, Ben (Duane Jones), circulates throughout its rooms freely and surely. It is the house's very familiarity that allows Ben to find everything that he needs - tools, wood, food, a rifle, the location of rooms and windows - to barricade the house against the zombies. Common, pre-technological household objects such as hammers, knives, boards, chairs, bottles, garden tools become implements of destruction and weapons. Unlike many classical horror productions, these films do not offer fantasy visions of other worlds and other times, nor do they count on the supernatural or the occult to explain strange phenomena or bizarre behaviour. In the "paranoid" horror film traditional sources of authority and security - law, government, police, scientists, the military - are absent or incompetent, and traditional sources of safety and comfort - the home and family and traditional foodmaking and eating practices - are ridiculed and destroyed. As Andrew Tudor sums it up, paranoid horror films contain "graphic portrayal of violence; insanity conceived as a routine expectation of everyday life; declining efficacy of experts, whether coercive or psychiatric; little or no explanation for psychiatric behaviour; violent misogyny as a central element in psychosis; and a narrative structure dominated

by the tension requirements of the terrorizing narrative."¹²

A.1. Cannibal Families

The "typical" houses of low and paranoid horror films are by and large inhabited by "typical" families, or parodies thereof. The image of the family that pervades the paranoid horror film is nihilistic, and families are incapable of offering any comfort or security. While like many contemporary horror films, they deal with moral chaos and the disruption of the presumed natural order of things, horror films that feature alimentary delinquency concentrate even more especially on the display of the home and the family under the threat of disintegration and destruction. In fact, families in these films are mocked, satirised, butchered and eaten. For example, *Night of the Living Dead* features three families at different stages: the middle-aged couple who emerge out of the cellar with their sick child are constantly bickering and have obviously not been getting along for a long time. Their child soon dies and, as a zombie, turns on her parents: she eats her father's arm, and kills her mother with a garden trowel and then eats her. Johnnie, the brother of Barbara, who both appear in the film's opening cemetery sequence, is the first character to fall victim to the zombies and he in turn will later show up to feast on his sister. The other young, soon-to-be-married couple, who would

¹². Andrew Tudor, Monsters and Mad Scientists, op. cit., p. 197.

normally have a prominent role as the romantic interest and survivors in a classical horror film, also perish and are graphically devoured during a botched attempt to escape from the house. These three groups provide dire perspectives for, respectively, the past, present and future of American families. In societies where cannibalism is supposed to exist, the incest taboo prevails regarding cannibalism, i.e., members of the same family are not allowed to eat each other.¹³ *Night of the Living Dead* is in fact so nihilistic as to break this taboo.

In *The Hills Have Eyes* and *Chainsaw*, entire families are cannibals who prey on passers-by from their homes. These cannibal families are parodies of real families. Mocking traditional bourgeois family values is a way of critiquing the passing of agrarian ways. In *Chainsaw*, for example, a traditional family ambience is created around the family at home and at the table. The final table scene best encapsulates this atmosphere. Having killed her friends and her brother, the cannibal family have captured Sally and invited her as "guest" to dinner, which features human sausages from the family-operated barbecue stand. In this scene the cannibal family can be observed as traditionally structured and as having normal everyday concerns. For example, they look after and maintain respect for their elders, especially their feeble and wrinkled patriarch, "Grandpa," for whom they reserve a special place at the table, and who, out of respect, is

¹³. W. Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.147.

allowed to take the first hammer blow at Sally when they decide to kill her. During the dinner scene, Leatherface, in wig and apron, busily moves between kitchen and dining room, tending to the details of the dinner. The kitchen and dining room are Leatherface's domains in the house and it is surprising that in a film where so many things go out of control, the housework is one thing that always gets done, and dinner is always on the table. For instance, after a particularly gruesome scene of slaughter in the kitchen, a subsequent shot resumes on an impeccably orderly and spotless kitchen. The final dinner scene has many aspects of a traditional family gathering, the table is set with cutlery, plates and glasses. However, alongside these everyday objects appear such ghoulish objects as bones and feathers, while Sally is gagged and bound to a literal "armchair." In the midst of committing atrocious acts, the older brother also makes disproportionately banal comments such as "Look what your brother did to that door" or "Got to turn out the lights. The cost of electricity could put a man out of business."

Although this final dinner scene is a complete mockery of a traditional family meal, and the parodic aspects of the cannibal family, here and in *The Hills Have Eyes*, are very clear, it can also be argued that the family is striving to maintain traditions and practices that modern-day families no longer adhere to: they have a small family-run business that involves craftsmanship, they prefer home-made food, using "traditional" slaughtering methods, and they gather every evening at the table for a family dinner.

Although cannibalism is traditionally a sign of savagery and primitiveness, here it is accompanied by the highly coded rituals and conventions of a "normal" family meal. As such the film's cannibalism, in the words of Christopher Sharrett, is "representative of a process of inverting all values, myths and symbols of a culture."¹⁴

A.2. Vengeful Appetites

The cannibalism of the "monsters" in these films is just as revealing of their victims, and the reasons they resort to cannibalism can be found in the behaviour and lifestyle of the non-cannibals. In the absence of the occult and the supernatural, the explanations for cannibalism in these films become all the more horrifying in their simplicity. The "accident" that turns the dead into flesh-eating zombies in *Night of the Living Dead* is due to the incompetence on the part of "authorities" and "science." A TV newscast within the film explains that an explosion on the sun caused by a probe sent by the U.S. government to the planet Venus is at the origin of the phenomenon. In *Chain Saw*, it is suggested that the family resorts to cannibalism "simply" because they have been laid off of their jobs at the local slaughterhouse owing to the introduction of modern slaughtering techniques. In the absence of work at the slaughterhouse, they have "logically" taken to

¹⁴ Christopher Sharrett, "The Idea of Apocalypse in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre," in Barry K. Grant, ed., Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film (Metuchen, N.J. & London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1984), p. 270.

slaughtering and eating humans. In *The Hills Have Eyes* the feral family lives in caves near nuclear testing sites in the southwest American desert. The family's poverty is clearly posited as the reason for their cannibalism. In an early sequence of the film, a young female member of the feral family begs for food in a grocery store and is coldly turned away. The cannibal families in these latter two films can be considered as "economic cannibals" who are part of a hungry and unemployed underclass striving to survive. Presenting the families' dilemmas as such not only explains their cannibalism, but also justifies and rationalises it.

The films create many distinct parallels between victims and monsters, making it difficult at times to distinguish between them. *The Hills Have Eyes* consists of a mortal confrontation between two families in the desert. Both families are similarly structured and are alternately shown in their respective living spaces. Ben, the "hero" of *Night of the Living Dead*, is mistaken for a zombie and coldly shot at the end of the film. Richard Dyer has remarked upon the similarity between shots of zombies walking through a field and subsequent shots of the men hunting them: "Living and dead whites are indistinguishable, and the zombies' sole *raison d'être*, to attack and eat the living, has resonances with the behaviour of the living whites."¹⁵ This is pushed even further in the sequels to *Night of the Living Dead*: in *Dawn of the Dead* the zombies inhabit a shopping mall and parodically go through the everyday motions of their previous lives and in *Day of the Dead* the

¹⁵ Richard Dyer, "White," *Screen* 29:4 (Autumn 1988), p. 60.

roles are completely reversed - the zombies are clearly the victims of the cruel and brutal military cleansing squads that try to keep them at bay. In *Chainsaw* there are many similarities traced between Franklyn, Sally's handicapped brother, and Leatherface, the chainsaw killer, especially in terms of physiognomy and level of "monstrousness." Franklyn becomes particularly animated when talking about the old slaughterhouse and old slaughtering techniques and, in fact, Franklyn, at one point chewing suspiciously on a sausage he has bought from the barbecue stand, is actually the only person who is shown eating human meat in the film, thus making him an unwitting cannibal.

While many contemporary horror films that feature cannibalism go to great lengths to draw parallels between monstrous cannibals and their victims, they go to even greater lengths to emphasise their differences. Cannibalism is very much part of people's imaginations and it is usually a phenomenon that is projected onto others. Anthropologists, in search of cannibal tribes in areas of Africa and South America where cannibalism supposedly existed, have been directed by each succeeding village to the neighbouring village to find the cannibals. Contemporary horror films go through much the same process of "othering" when it comes to their cannibals. Although the cannibals may resemble "us" in many ways, the films make sure that the cannibals are indeed "others." The cannibal, like many monstrous threats in modern horror, is usually located in the country, while their victims are usually travelling through the

cannibals' "territory," often on holiday.¹⁶ This is the scenario in *Chainsaw* and its sequel, *The Hills Have Eyes*, *Motel Hell*, and *Hunter's Blood* (Robert C. Hughes, 1986). Carol Clover has noted that "going from the city to the country . . . is very much like going from village to deep, dark forest in traditional fairy tales."¹⁷ Cannibals live in lawless and state-less rural locales where the rules and codes of "civilisation" no longer apply. This is immediately discernable in terms of their appearance. If they are not altogether odd-looking, such as the grinning, rotten-toothed bald patriarch of *The Hills Have Eyes*, or Leatherface in his mask presumably made from human skin, other characters from the country are filthy, unshaven, shabbily-dressed and inarticulate. People from the country do not observe the same standards of manners and hygiene. As Clover succinctly puts it, "(i)n horror, the man who does not take care of his teeth is obviously a man who can, and will, rape, plunder, murder, beat his wife and children, kill within his kin, commit incest, and/or eat human flesh (or dogmeat, horsemeat, or insects)."¹⁸ Horror film cannibals are certainly coded as bad and evil, but in a very recognizable, culture-specific way.

Cannibalism aside, the monsters in these films appear as

¹⁶ Kim Newman has remarked that the first two murders of Jerry and Pam in *Chainsaw* would hardly be considered illegal under longstanding Texan trespassing laws. *Nightmare Movies* (London: Bloomsburg, 1988), p. 53.

¹⁷ Carol Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), p. 124.

¹⁸ Carol Clover, op. cit., p. 125.

little more than stereotypical "rednecks" - poor, ignorant country folk who are clannish and uncivilized, very close in fact to popular notions of primitive tribal cannibals.¹⁹ If the monsters represent everything that city folk fear about the country, their victims represent everything that country folk hate about the city, and cannibalism in these films can be seen as a form of revenge of the country against the city. Apocalyptic revenge, be it of the country over the city or the underclass over the middle class, has often been evoked in political readings of the paranoid horror film in general. For example, Robin Wood has remarked that paranoid horror films are "centered on the specific notion of present and future (younger generation) being devoured by the past. Cannibalism represents the ultimate in possessiveness, hence the logical end of human relations under capitalism."²⁰ Cannibalism here could be considered symbolically to "represent. . . the ultimate revenge on a foe or his progeny by devouring his strength and redressing a long-term historical debate,"²¹ and has also been read as a form of class revenge. Pseudo-documentary Italian jungle adventure films situate tribal cannibalism in South America, The

¹⁹ It is interesting to note, in light of these filmic depictions of rural cannibals, that actual, "real life" cannibalism is a distinctly urban phenomenon. Consider the Jeffery Dahmer case of multiple murder and cannibalism in Milwaukee; the Japanese cannibal, Issei Sagawa, convicted of killing and eating a Dutch woman in Paris; and the sixty-year-old Barbara Mortenson, who tried to eat her own eighty-seven-year-old mother alive in San Francisco.

²⁰ Robin Wood, Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 91.

²¹ Christopher Sharrett, "The Idea of Apocalypse in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre," op. cit., 265.

Philippines or New Guinea in terms of a colonial discourse. By having metropolitan scientists and industrialists discover hideous cannibals in mysterious dark forests, exploitation films such as *Ultimo Mondo Cannibal* (Ruggero Deodato, 1976) and *Montagna del Dio Cannibal* (Sergio Martino, 1978) echo the margin vs. centre, us vs. them dichotomies of American horror films that feature cannibalism. Cannibalism in these films is indeed "bottom up" cannibalism, i.e., enacted by poorer characters upon those who are better off. Carol Clover points out that the Cleveland family in *The Hills Have Eyes* "are folks with all the usual signs of affluence, whereas the feral family is literally starving and in fact attacks the city people in the first instance to get food."²² The revenge carried out by the lower-class, pre-technological, country cannibals is thus not only explained, but also in a way championed.

The monstrousness and cannibalism contained in these films are invariably explained by a remark or a reference to a development project (*Hunter's Blood*), a nuclear accident (*Night of the Living Dead*, *The Hills Have Eyes*), or an old factory closing down (*Texas Chainsaw Massacre*). Carol Clover has traced this persistent environmentalist discourse in low horror films back to *Deliverance* (John Boorman, 1972) in which the rape of one of the four city men on a canoeing holiday is retribution for the "rape of the land" caused by the construction of a dam designed to generate electricity for the city of Atlanta.²³ Cannibals, degenerates and

²² Carol Clover, op. cit., p. 126.

²³ Carol Clover, op. cit., pp. 126-132.

sodomites are "out there", just beyond the reach of urban areas, reminding city folk of the price they have to pay for going on holiday or having electricity. In this way the films express a collective guilt about modernisation, industrialisation and the passing of agrarian ways, unleashing punishment against those who exploit and allowing those who are exploited the most cathartic forms of revenge. As Dana Polan has remarked, "(w)ith a nostalgia that in some films can fuel a conservatism, many of the new films suggest that in our devotion to the now, to the modern, we have created an antagonistic and agonistic culture of narcissism and have lost something that held us together, something that gave our lives a sustaining cohesion and value."²⁴ Perhaps the ultimate and most ironic (and postmodern) form of revenge of country cannibals can be found in the highly successful meat companies the cannibal families operate in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre II* and *III* and *Hunter's Blood*, which supply human meat products to unknowing city-dwellers.

B. Counter Cinema

In the films that could be considered as part of the counter cinema movement of the 1960s and 1970s, alimentary delinquency takes on many forms. Acts of alimentary delinquency include, for example, the chocolate and sugar baths of *Sweet Movie* (Dusan

²⁴ Dana Polan, "Eros and Syphilisation: The Contemporary Horror Film," in Barry K. Grant, ed., Planks of Reason, op. cit., p. 204.

Makavejev, 1974), the incessant gorging of *La Grande Bouffe* (Marco Ferreri, 1972), the coprophagy and manic egg-eating of *Pink Flamingos* (John Waters, 1972), the real slaughter of animals in *Weekend* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967) and the cannibalism of *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1974), *Porcile* (*Pigsty*, Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1969), *Pink Flamingos*, *Themroc* (Claude Farraldo, 1973) and *Weekend*. Acts of alimentary delinquency are part of organic systems of excess that define and structure the entire films. Alimentary delinquency thus accompanies other types of excess that are usually of a sexual nature as in *Sweet Movie*, *Pink Flamingos*, *Themroc*, *La Grande Bouffe*, but that can also be formal in nature. In almost every way these films come from the margins of cinema and part of the intention of each film is to strike a blow against the "system," as it is embodied by mainstream Hollywood.

In many of the above films, alimentary delinquency is performed by the protagonists and is thus justified, in a way similar to the horror film, in the name of liberation or revenge against the "bourgeoisie." In taking the defense of cannibals, the films constitute an elegy not only to primitivism and bare instinct, but also, in this counter cinema context, to rule- and taboo-breaking. Cannibals and other alimentary delinquents, although deviant, are not necessarily depicted as bad. On the contrary, their atrocious acts of excess represent, on the one hand, liberating displays of pure pleasure and hedonism or on the other, a more "responsible" politics of revenge and punishment, in

an attempt to redress and correct injustices.

"Counter cinema" as a category is firmly imbricated in the larger category of the "art film," and, as such, shares a number of characteristics with art films. One important component of the art film is the notion of the auteur as the controlling creative presence behind a film. All of the above-mentioned art films are closely associated with their directors' names. For instance, Marco Ferreri, director of *La Grande bouffe*, has a history, a system, a reputation. His presence will raise a film's status, giving it an aura of art. Like a label of quality, his presence will offer the spectator a number of implicit guarantees, so much so that critics who reviewed Ferreri's later 1991 film, *La Carne*, could afford to be quite blasé and simply provide a list of "Ferrerian" themes, declaring that they can all be found in the film.²⁵ The art film audience is one that will especially seek out extra-cinematic information in the form of reviews and interviews in more or less specialised publications. Part of the author's role thus lies in giving interviews in which the issues raised by his/her film are addressed. Unlike directors of more mainstream, commercial films, interviews with auteurs are less likely to be anecdotal, and will more likely focus on philosophical, aesthetic or political issues raised by a film. For example, in interviews at the time of *La Grande bouffe*'s release, Marco Ferreri denounced the "bourgeoisie" and spoke of his film in terms of "the

²⁵. This recurred in the Francophone press, for an example see Edouard Waintrop, "Y'a pas que l'amour y'a que la chair," Libération, 21 August 1991, n.p.

revolution."²⁶

Implicit in the designation "counter cinema" is the idea of being opposed to the mainstream of film industry, especially as it is embodied by commercial Hollywood film. Counter cinema arose from the notion that mainstream American films exercised too much hegemonic and worldwide control over how films were conceived, made, distributed and watched. Counter cinema thus first and foremost offers films that differ from the "norm" in terms of production values and narrative execution and that often stand outside of traditional distribution systems. The group of films in which alimentary delinquency is prominent are what could be termed "aggressive" films that direct attacks against the conventional comforts and pleasures associated with film-going. Their primary aim is not to provide entertainment but to disturb and to jolt viewers out of the passivity of the film-watching act. The idea of wanting to upset the spectator, even physically, if possible, is clearly part of these films' agendas. For example, John Waters has said that "(i)f someone vomits during one of my films, I would consider that as a standing ovation."²⁷ Words such as "attack," "destructive," "anarchist," "chaos," and "repulsive" recur in reviews of all these films, whether the reviews are positive or negative. In fact, interestingly enough, the films are often praised and condemned for the very same reasons. In praise of *La*

²⁶ Jean A. Gili, "La grande bouffe: entretien avec Marco Ferreri," *Ecran* 17 (Jul/Aug 1973), pp. 61-63.

²⁷. Quoted in interview in the press book of *Pink Flamingos*.

Grande bouffe, one critic called it "...a profoundly nihilist and despairing work, its beauty is not decadent but destructive," while another critic, denouncing the film, said "it is one of the most obscene and revolting films it has been my sad privilege to watch."²⁸

In their views on food and eating, counter cinema films combine many of the characteristics that Robert Stam, following on Mikhail Bakhtin, describes as "carnavalesque." According to Stam, the "carnavalesque principle" eliminates hierarchy, brings all social classes to the same level, and frees people from the the weight of conventions and restrictions. These films fit into Stam's Bakhtinian definition of the carnivalesque, especially in the way that what is usually excluded and marginalised "takes over the center in a liberating explosion of otherness."²⁹ Stam holds that the carnivalesque implies a breaking away from cinematic norms and standards. However, the carnivalesque is not merely different, but different in some very specific ways and I now purport to examine these counter cinema films vis-à-vis their cultivation of scandal, their formal audacity, and their grotesque heroes.

B.1. Scandal and Formal Audacity

The international film festival circuit is important to art

²⁸. Respectively, Guy Braucourt, "La Grande bouffe," Ecran 17 (July/August 1973), p 62; "The Big Feed," Newsweek (11 June 1973), p. 57.

²⁹. Robert Stam, Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism & Film (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989) p. 86. Hereafter referred to in the text as Stam.

and counter cinema films and, in the case of many alimentary delinquency films, the outbreak of scandal at such festivals has not been uncommon. *Sweet Movie*, *Pink Flamingos* and *La Grande Bouffe* have all caused varying degrees of scandal, mostly centred on the objectionable nature of their images, which has inevitably raised arguments about censorship. A particularly tortuous and complicated scandal broke out shortly after *Sweet Movie*'s 1974 release. Actress Carol Laure, who plays Miss World in the film, brought a law suit against the film's producers claiming that some of the nude images of her appeared without her consent. Virtually daily updates on the law suit appeared in the French press, as well as debates about the film's morals and whether it should be banned or not.³⁰

La Grande bouffe represented France at the 1973 Cannes film festival. An uproar subsequently ensued over the worthiness of the film to be in the French selection. The debate enlarged to a nationwide polemic in France, basically dividing critics of the traditional right and left wing press organs. The former thought that the film was gratuitous, meaningless and morally reprehensible while the latter praised the film as daring, timely, clever and articulate, and at the very least defended its right to be seen.³¹ Such scandal creates a carnivalesque atmosphere, because it tends

³⁰. See, for example, the film sections of Le Monde and Libération throughout May and June of 1974.

³¹. For a resumé of the mini-uproar caused by the film, see Le Monde of 8 June 1973, p. 17, and Pascal Bonitzer, "L'expérience en intérieur," Cahiers du cinéma 247 (Jul/Aug 1973), pp. 33-36.

to break down into a peripatetic free-for-all that loses sight of the original point of debate. Such scandals not only lend films and their directors notoriety, but they also become part of a film's "history" and bring a marginal film to the centre of mass debate and contention.

The fact that these films raise scandals is linked in part to their formal audacity, which could be described as another defining characteristic of the "carnavalesque" in film. Typical of counter cinema is a formal excess that goes a long way in distinguishing itself from mainstream cinema by attacking audience complacency and breaking usual spectator expectations based primarily on narrative causality. In many ways the narrative framework is overshadowed by, and ultimately fails to account for, the systems of excess that are developed in such films and which, in fact, are central to them. Moments of formal excess include, for example, the excessively long tracking shots in the traffic jam and piano concert sequences in *Weekend*, as well as the lengthy Marxist monologues of the African and Algerian workers; the total lack of dialogue in *Themroc*, which is replaced entirely by grunts, and Tati-esque jibberish; the raw, jumpy, "anti-grammatical" quality of *Sweet Movie*, especially in the apparently incongruous insertion of World War II documentary footage; and the equally "raw" and undisciplined quality, especially of the sound track in *Pink Flamingos*. Against the myriad formal excesses in other alimentary delinquency films, counter cinema films such as *La Grande bouffe* can also be technically staid and classical, and carry out their

excesses on another plane.

B.2. Grotesque and Responsible Alimentary Delinquents

Cannibalism and alimentary delinquency in counter cinema is presented in very much the same type of scenario, which depicts a person or persons who undergo a conversion of sorts, rejecting their lifestyles and adopting a communal life, quite unlike, and in fact diametrically opposed to their former life. For example, *Porcile* and *Themroc* both feature protagonists (played, respectively, by Pierre Clementi and Michel Piccoli) who reject society and turn to cannibalism. They then become charismatic figures who in turn convert and create entire alternative communities that, among other things, practice cannibalism. *Themroc* particularly shows the details of the construction of this new community. The nameless and language-less protagonist (the film's "dialogue" consists entirely of grunts and screams), an alienated worker who has unjustly lost his job, literally walls himself off from the rest of his family and knocks down the exterior walls to his living quarters, thus creating a sort of "cave." He then empties his cave of furniture and other trappings of domestic life, and takes his sister as his "mate." As if under his spell, the neighbours start imitating him. The film closes on a shot of a high-rise apartment building, indicating that the "revolt" initiated by the protagonist will next spread there. Cannibalism in *Themroc* and *Porcile* is depicted as salutary.

Pasolini has confirmed this: "It would be wrong to consider the character played by Pierre Clementi as a vulgar bandit: he is a Nietzschean intellectual who is aspiring to sainthood."³² The pseudo-saint of this film has no regrets. He utters the only words of this sequence of the film before his execution: "I have killed my father. I have have eaten human flesh and I am trembling with joy."

Even the victim of cannibals in *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* goes through a similar type of conversion. In documentary fashion, the film recounts the colonisation of Brazil from the viewpoint of the Tupinamba Indians, the now extinct South American tribe that practised ritual cannibalism. A Frenchman, mistaken for a Portugese soldier, is captured by a group of warring Tupinambas and learns that he will be cannibalised. He then goes through the preparatory phases of ritual cannibalism, which involve living, working and eating with his captors, becoming part of the group before actually being eaten. He learns their language, adopts their hairstyle and wears their dress. In a lengthy scene at the end of the film the woman who has been assigned to accompany him and show him the ways of the village explains to him the details of the final cannibalist ritual, images of which appear in flash-forward during her monologue. The Frenchman has been "indoctrinated" to such a point that he calmly accepts his fate, even though it seems that he could quite easily escape. In *Weekend*

³² Pier Paolo Pasolini, press book for *Porcile* distributed in Belgium.

the protagonist Corinne (Mireille Darc), previously depicted as hopelessly bourgeois and materialist, undergoes a similar conversion once she has been captured by a band of hippy *guerilleros*. During an exchange of prisoners, perhaps in an opportunistic gesture, she runs back to join her captors. The next scene, the film's last, shows her ravenously eating her own husband, barbecued "with leftover bits of the English tourists." *Sweet Movie* also presents the indoctrination of an alimentary delinquent, a frigid Miss World (Carole Laure), who, in a series of sexual encounters, gradually becomes sexually liberated. Protagonists in these films destroy their former lives in "closed," "self-sufficient" and "deaf" cultures (Stam, p. 122) and become alimentary delinquents in order to create better, alternative counter cultures.

The purpose and intentions of the alimentary delinquents in counter cinema films can be divided into two different categories:

First of all, there are those whose alimentary delinquency directly attacks what, to use a term contemporary to the films themselves, could be described generally as the "establishment", be it in the form of the bourgeoisie, the "system", capitalism, or consumerism. Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Farraldo, Marco Ferreri and P.P. Pasolini, for example, have all spoken about their work in Marxist terms of exploitation, materialism, and alienation. They thus see themselves and their films as having a responsibility to communicate a message. The most common type of alimentary delinquent in their films is a cannibal whose victims embody the

"system", the enemy. This can be seen clearly in the victims who are eaten. In the cannibalistic feasts of *Themroc* and *Pink Flamingos*, policemen are, in the former film, "hunted" at night and subsequently skewered and barbecued, and, in the latter film, ripped apart and eaten raw. Soldiers are eaten in *Porcile* and *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchmen*. Not only are soldiers and policemen representatives of the power structure, they are also the instruments of force and violence used to maintain the status quo.

A second type of alimentary delinquent that appears in counter cinema is of a more libidinous sort, who freely participates in "liberating" acts of taboo-breaking. *Pink Flamingos* and *Sweet Movie* best depict this type of alimentary delinquent. Eaters in these two films do not hesitate to put anything in their mouths, and their eating practices are more likely to be juxtaposed somehow with their sexuality. In Horowitz's words, "(t)he desire to incorporate is ambivalent: erotic and destructive."³³ This type of film is perhaps the most corrosive, and more likely to be condemned and banned than the films that contain more "responsible" alimentary delinquents.

Alimentary delinquency and cannibalism take place in secluded surroundings - the villa of *La Grande bouffe*, the out-of-town caravan encampment of *Pink Flamingos*, the Milky Way commune in *Sweet Movie*, or the entirely separate cannibal societies in *Porcile*, *Themroc*, and *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman*.

³³ Gad Horowitz, Repression (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 57.

Cannibalism thus conserves the aspect of taking place among "others" even more so than in the horror film. These "others" can be seen as a collection of the wretched and oppressed of the West - women, "workers," sexual deviants, making their difference all the more acute. Whereas the cannibalism of horror films is apocalyptic and un-regenerative, cannibalism is here undertaken in order to create hope for the future. It is not only an act of revenge, but also a way of gaining strength. One explanation for the cannibalist metaphor in this cluster of films may lie in the rise in "third worldism" in the West throughout the 1960s and 1970s, following on the independence of many Western-held colonies. Just as the Surrealists, Dadaists and other avant-garde groups of the 1920s became interested in cannibalism and primitive art and cultures,³⁴ these marginal and in many cases avant-garde filmmakers of the 1960s and 1970s also sought inspiration in the aesthetic and political potential of far-away cannibalist and carnivalesque cultures. One could not protest against Western society more effectively than by suggesting, like Montaigne in Des Cannibales, that the behaviour of "civilised" societies is no less savage and cruel than in so-called primitive ones. As Stam puts it, "(i)n the Western tradition, cannibalism has often been the "name of the other," the ultimate marker of difference in a coded opposition of

³⁴ Robert Stam (p. 125) notes that a Dadaist publication was entitled Cannibale and that in 1920 Francis Picabia wrote the "Manifeste Cannibale Dada." Stam also talks about the numerous trips many avant-garde figures of the 1920s made to Latin America, land "of cannibals and carnivals," notably Antonin Artaud's extended journey to Mexico.

light/dark, rational/irrational, civilised/savage" (Stam, p. 125).

Cannibalism in counter cinema, as in the horror film, holds up a critical mirror to Western lifestyles. The cannibals are depicted as having something - a sense of community and solidarity, a simplicity unclouded by language, instinctive appetites for food and sex uncluttered by taboo and culture - that is perceived as disappearing from Western cultures. In their elevation of cannibal societies, counter cinema films put forth a critique of consumerism, industrialisation and alienation.

C. Contemporary Art Cinema

I would now like to address a series of contemporary films of the 1980s and 1990s in which alimentary delinquency is prevalent, yet defies easy categorisation. These films include *Salo, o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (Italy, Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1974, hereafter referred to as *Salo*), *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (U.K., Peter Greenaway, 1989, hereafter referred to as *The Cook*); *La Carne (Flesh)* (Italy, Marco Ferreri, 1990); *Delicatessen* (Jeunet et Carot, France, 1991); and the short *Adoration* (Olivier Smolders, Belgium, 1989). I would also include in this category, for reasons I will later explain, a later American horror film such as *Parents* (Bob Balaban, 1988). Cannibalism is once again the main form that alimentary delinquency takes in these films, but there are also scenes of enforced coprophagy in *Salo* and the enforced feeding not

only of excrement, but also buttons and pages from a book in *The Cook*.

The nature of other outrageous acts does not differ much from the films of the previous two categories. They include, apart from coprophagy and cannibalism, other horrific moments, e.g. shredded hands in sink waste disposals that are imagined by the boy in *Parents*, tongues cut off in *Salo*; naked bodies in refridgerators full of rotting meat and fish in *The Cook*; the female protagonist who has placed a spell on her lover, leaving him utterly immobile with a permanent erection in *La Carne*. Like the other two categories of alimentary delinquency films, these films are defined in many ways against mainstream Hollywood, mainly in terms of image and narrative content. However, instead of immediately placing these films under an umbrella category, I will first try to define them in terms of how they differ from the preceding generic categories of horror and counter cinema films.

C.1. Contemptible Cannibals

Cannibalism in these films regains its stereotypical qualities of being negative, savage and uncivilised. We are clearly directed to find the cannibals and other alimentary delinquents in these films as heinous and contemptible, the unambiguous embodiments of evil. Cannibalism becomes an act in which ". . . eating human flesh implies an animal nature which would be accompanied by the absence of other traits of "real" human beings who have a monopoly

on culture."³⁵ As in horror and counter cinema films, alimentary delinquents are constructed as such in a very specific way. Consider Albert (Michael Gambon) of *The Cook*, a brutal thug who terrorises those in his entourage and who notably stuffs excrement and buttons into the mouths of his victims. In the end, he is forced by his wife to eat the dead cooked body of her lover, whom Albert has killed by stuffing the pages of a book down his throat. The cold, cruel figures of the Duke (Paolo Bonacelli), the bishop (Giorgio Cataldi), the judge (Umberto Paolo Quintevale) and the banker (Aldo Valetti) in *Salò* incarnate Nazi-Fascist repression and the "anarchy of power."³⁶ The characterisation and physiognomy of these figures, as well as the monstrous knife-sharpening butcher Clapet (Jean-Claude Dreyfus) in *Delicatessen* and the silent Asian cannibal in *Adoration*, render alimentary delinquents as either corpulent "ogres" or weasel-like sadists. In each case, they are male figures of power and authority who would in fact be the preferred victims of cannibals in the horror and counter cinema films analysed in the two previous sections. Cannibalism and alimentary delinquency in these art films is "bottom down," i.e. carried out by those who wield power against those who are submitted to their power. Instead of being a metaphor for a society in revolt or a society that has lost its moral bearings, cannibalism here is a metaphor for patriarchy in crisis. It is not

³⁵ W. Arens, op. cit., p. 25.

³⁶ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Salò* press book, distributed in Belgium.

a form of revenge or retribution, as in the horror films, and it is certainly not regenerative, as in the counter cinema films. Alimentary delinquency is rather an implement of terror for confused, and often risible, males.

In fairy tales, the figure of the ogre is often opposed to a child and the child's overcoming of the ogre has been read as a symbol of the passage from childhood to adulthood. The ogre's victims in these films, if not in fact children, such as the adolescent boys and girls of *Salo*, are characterised as children in that they are innocent, weak, sensitive and delicate. They are also often depicted as outrightly artistic: the poetry-reading woman in *Adoration*, the couple formed by the frail violinist and the clown/performance artist in *Delicatessen*, or the pensive book-reading lover of *The Cook*.

Indeed, there is a reversal of the class situation as detailed in the counter cinema and horror films. Through his gestures, language and behaviour Albert in *The Cook* is undeniably lower-class. No matter how hard Albert tries, he cannot escape his lower-class upbringing and tastes, and lacks the refinery and discretion of both the soft-spoken librarian Michael and Richard the French chef. The same type of dichotomy is played out in *Delicatessen*, where the butcher has a lower- and working-class profile. Both films make villains out of these lower-class characters who nonetheless are in positions of power, and in the end it is the refined, sensitive individuals who in each case are victorious over the meat-eating slobs. These films play on the

opposition between art on the one hand, embodied by the victims, and, on the other hand, the crass, insensitive consumerism and devilish appetites of the butcher in *Delicatessen*, of the cold Japanese cannibal in *Adoration*, the four representatives of the ruling class in *Salo*, and Albert in *The Cook*.

Traditional gender and power relations - between parents and children in *Parents* and *Delicatessen*, men and women in *La Carne*, *The Cook* and *Adoration*, rulers and their subjects in *Salo* - serve as the backdrops here for alimentary delinquency. Although in horror and counter cinema films conversions and resemblances between victims and monsters are entirely possible, contemporary art films tell stories of irredeemably Manichean struggles. Cannibalism is not motivated by revenge but is a despotic and authoritarian gesture on the part of patriarchs who are losing control over their underlings. Being a cannibal or forcing someone else to eat human flesh or excrement is presented here as the ultimate form of control and terror. Such alimentary delinquents are apocalyptically punished in *The Cook*, *Parents* and *Delicatessen*, and we know, historically, of the downfall of the Fascists of *Salo*. To paraphrase Catherine Russell, the films are thus revindicated by a discourse of true love, romance and innocence in which the purity of childlike figures and young couples is opposed to the monstrosousness of the ogre.³⁷

³⁷. Catherine Russell, "Decadence, Violence and the Decay of History: Notes on the Spectacular Representation of Death in Narrative Film, 1965-1990," in Christopher Sharrett, ed., Crisis Cinema: The Apocalyptic Idea in Postmodern Narrative Film (Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1993), p. 187.

C.2. A Postmodern Cinema?

It is possible to consider these films as postmodern phenomena, which would enable us not only to talk about art films, but also to place them alongside other films such as *Parents* (Bob Balaban, 1989), which constructs a similar discourse around its cannibal (played by Randy Quaid), who is clearly depicted as an ogre that a child must strive to overcome. *Parents*, *The Cook*, *Salo*, and *Delicatessen* can be discussed in light of postmodern concerns of pastiche and the enfeeblement of political ideology.

Although it is in no way a necessity for a film to be explicitly ideologically bent in one way or another, the makers of European art cinema in the 1980s and 1990s have inherited a legacy that includes the highly politicised counter-cinema films analysed in the above section. One manifestation of postmodernism has been the enfeeblement of ideology in an age of multiple instabilities. Already in 1974, Pasolini attached a political sense and message to his film *Salo* by framing it within the last days of Italy's Fascist republic. However, in interviews, Pasolini's justifications for this choice ring false, as he often immediately deflects the discussion about fascism to talk about sex and power relations, placing the brutality and cruelty of the images of his film on a different plane. On a purely emotional level, the imagery and the exhibitionism of Pasolini's film far surpass and largely overshadow any of its potential political content. The fascist framework becomes a way of making his images acceptable to the film's

producers and spectators, for Pasolini could not possibly have introduced such horrific images gratuitously, with the unflinching libertinism of Sade in the original 120 Days of Sodom. I would argue that anti-fascist convictions are but footnotes to the brutality and cruelty of Pasolini's images. Filmmakers of the 1980s and 1990s have been operating in an era when political ideologies are ineffectual and no longer guide people's lives. Yet, the legacy remains to put pressure on filmmakers such as Peter Greenaway, for example, to explain his films in political terms. The Jacobean revenge drama that structures *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, for example, is thus explained by Greenaway, on one level, in terms of politics in Great Britain, in which the thug Albert represents a ruthless Thatcherite hooligan.³⁸ Perhaps Marco Ferreri has been the most forthright about this situation. In interviews following *La Carne* he has stated that films such as *L'Ultima donna* and *Rêve de singe* were made in a period when ideology was important, but now that there is no longer any ideology to believe in, the only possible story to tell deals with problems between men and women.³⁹ The decline in ideology thus signals the adherence of the contemporary art film to postmodernism.

Likewise, the notion of pastiche is a key concern in postmodernism. Pastiche refers to a postmodern work's capacity to

³⁸. Peter Greenaway, interviewed by Gavin Smith, "Food for Thought," Film Comment 26:3 (May/June 1990), p. 55.

³⁹. Marco Ferreri in interview with Edouard Waintrop, Libération 21-8-91.

imbibe references and sources from previous works and form different media and periods. For this reason postmodern works have been accused of lacking originality and some of postmodernism's detractors would argue that if postmodernism can claim any originality at all it lies in the way that things have been combined and re-arranged. Although Pasolini faithfully reconstructed Sade's text, he also included quotes from Roland Barthes and Maurice Blanchot and a "select bibliography" appears in the credits, including works by Barthes, Blanchot and Pierre Klossowitz. Among the icons that lend an aura of art and interpretability to *The Cook*, are the high-profile names of Parisian fashion designer Jean-Paul Gaultier, who did the costumes for the film, and Sacha Vierny, the fetish cameraman of Alain Resnais.

The sources and references in many films would remain enigmas for most if it were not for interviews given by the films' directors. Greenaway has customarily provided the extra-cinematic "footnotes" that give added insights into the images of his films. For example, the book of *Prospero's Books* is replete with explanations and references to the artwork that inspired Greenaway's *mise-en-scène*.⁴⁰ Similarly, in reviews and interviews, Jean-Pierre Jeunet has not only invited comparisons with Greenaway but has also listed the diverse sources of inspirations that are at play in *Delicatessen's* imagery: Rube Goldberg, Hergé, and Robert

⁴⁰. Peter Greenaway, Prospero's Books: A Film of Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'. London: Chatto & Windus, 1991.

Doisneau plus filmmakers Marcel L'Herbier and Martin Scorsese.⁴¹

Postmodernism, an impulse that has particularly inhabited post-1960s Western cinema, has been only hesitantly designated by any specific watershed date, and has at times been denied the dimensions of a "movement" *per se*. Spoken of more in terms of how it "permeates," postmodernism has been defined generally in art and popular culture as operating a cultural break, restructuring and giving different priorities to elements already inherent in modernism. E. Ann Kaplan, in her introduction to Postmodernism and Its Discontents, defines two different trends in postmodernism, a "utopian" and a "commercial or co-opted postmodernism."⁴² The above films that feature alimentary delinquency are of the latter variety in that, especially when compared to horror and counter cinema films, they are not guided by any oppositional thrust.

III. LIBIDINOUS CREATURES

Having delineated some of the major distinctions among the three groups of films, I would now like to consider them in terms of what they all have in common - the spectacular representation of acts of alimentary delinquency.

⁴¹. See interview in Libération 17-4-91, pp. 42-43. Also, in her review for The Times (2-1-92), Stephanie Billen, who compared Jeunet and Greenaway, said, "You could play "spot the influence" until next Christmas."

⁴². E. Ann Kaplan, "Introduction," in E. Ann Kaplan, ed., Postmodernism and Its Discontents (London & New York: Verso, 1988), p. 4.

It has already been noted in the introductory section to this chapter that, historically, alimentary delinquency thrives in forms that favour spectacle and exhibition. Beyond their generic particularities, alimentary delinquency in each film is rendered as a show-stopping "performance." Like any other outrageous act in the horror film, cannibalism is presented graphically and frontally, in ways that bring victims and monsters physically close to one another. Peter Boss notes that in contemporary horror, people rarely die offscreen,⁴³ and I would add that they rarely die of natural causes and never in a long shot. The same statement applies to the display of gluttony that these films present. What matters in these films is display. Spectacles of libidinous creatures point to classical cinema's inability to deal with them, perhaps because of the unnarrative non-linear nature of the spectacle they provide. If one looks at the plot outlines of the films under scrutiny, much of what is attractive, compelling, and interesting would be excluded. I concur with Barbara Creed when she argues that, "(i)n contrast to the conventional viewing structures working within other variants of the classic text, the horror film does not constantly work to suture the spectator into the viewing processes. Instead, an unusual phenomenon arises whereby the suturing processes are momentarily undone while the horrific image on the screen challenges the viewer to run the risk

⁴³. Peter Boss, "Vile Bodies and Bad Medecine," Screen 27:1 (Jan/Feb 1986), p. 16.

of continuing to look."⁴⁴ Even films of fairly straightforward narrative and stylistic structure such as *La Grande bouffe*, *Parents*, or *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* are constantly pushing their narratives aside, making way for the display of outrageous acts.

A. The Body and Its Materiality

Whether formally excessive or not, these films emphatically focus on bodily excess and on images of bodies revelling in the jetsam and flotsam of food, blood, feces, urine, human flesh and vomit. Despite each film's adherence to a specific genre form, I believe that they could all be generally included in the "body genre" of films that display bodies in the throes of physical or emotional extremes.⁴⁵ Consider, for example, the joyously-flaunted obesity, accentuated by tight-fitting costumes, of Babs Johnson (played by the transvestite Divine) and her mother Edie (Edith Massey) in *Pink Flamingos*; the orgiastic scenes of sex, eating, urination, and defecation in the Milky Way commune sequence of *Sweet Movie*; the food, farts, vomit and excrement flowing in and out of the five protagonists' bodies in *La Grande bouffe*; or the discovery of bodies in unusual places, for example grilling on barbecues in *Parents*, *Chainsaw*, and *Weekend*, or lying in

⁴⁴. Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," Screen 27:1 (Jan/Feb 1986), p. 64.

⁴⁵. See Peter Boss, "Vile Bodies and Bad Medecine," op. cit, pp. 14-24; and also Linda Willams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," Film Quarterly 44:4 (Summer 1991), pp. 2-13.

refridgerators in *Chainsaw*, *La Carne*, *The Cook*, and *La Grande Bouffe*.

The orifices of the body comprise a set of boundaries and frontiers. In all of the above-mentioned cases these boundaries are repeatedly and orgiastically trespassed in a Rabelaisian celebration of the body and all of its functions. The types of foods that are favoured in these exchanges between the body and the external world are generally considered repulsive in Western cultures.⁴⁶ Foods in many scenes are "zoophagic" foods, i.e., those foods that retain the form and shape of the original foodstuff, such as the whole, live insects and snakes eaten in *Porcile* before the young man (Pierre Clementi) takes to cannibalism; the human kidneys fried with onions in *Parents*, and various intestine-like body organs in *Night of the Living Dead* and its sequels. The other type of food favoured by eaters in these films are soft, unstable foods of a viscous nature, that in fact closely resemble bodily excretions. Viscous foods are among the most disturbing foods and, like zoophagic foods, among those most likely to be rejected by Westerners. The viscous, as Mary Douglas reminds us, "is a state halfway between the solid and the liquid. It is like a cross-section in a process of change. It is unstable, but it does not flow. It is soft yielding and compressible. . . it

⁴⁶. Claude Fischler has done surveys and analyses of what foods are most often rejected, which generally tend to have strong tastes or odours or to resemble animal parts such as brains or other offal. See Fischler, *L'Homnivore*, op. cit., pp. 106-109.

attacks the boundary between myself and it."⁴⁷ Eggs best exemplify the viscous state and are preferred by certain eaters in these films. In *Weekend*, eggs are ceremoniously cracked over corpses by a chef, presumably before they are cooked and eaten by the band of *guerilleros*. In *Pink Flamingos*, eggs are constantly demanded by the infantile Edie and they are subsequently the subject of much of the film's dialogue.

While the mouth is the privileged orifice in these films, repeatedly shown gaping, being stuffed, chewing and swallowing or rejecting food, the other organs and functions of the digestive tract are not far behind. Many of the foods eaten, if not excrement itself, as in *Sweet Movie* and *Pink Flamingos*, are scatological in form or texture. In *La Grande Bouffe* there is a progression away from the zoophagic foods eaten at the beginning of the film - i.e., foods that readily take on the form of the animal they are made of, such as oysters, bone marrow and drumsticks - to the exclusive consumption, by the end of the film, of more "sarcophagic" preparations, i.e., amorphous concoctions such as puddings, purées, and patés that disguise the "animality" and the essence of what is being eaten. The dishes that the men eat become softer, mushier, and more viscous and the food gradually resembles baby food. The emphasis thus changes from the animality of the food itself to the machine-like animality of the eaters. In the words of Angela Carter, referring to Sade's original 120 Days of

⁴⁷ Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 38.

Sodom, upon which *La Grande bouffe* is also based, "(t)ransgression becomes regression and, like a baby, they (i.e. the four main characters) play with their own excrement."⁴⁸

B. Reaching Out

Viscous and zoophagic foods, more than other types of food, attack and break down the boundaries between on-screen eaters and their bodies. Linda Williams describes films of the "body genre" not only as films that display bodies in the throes of emotional and physical extremes, but also as those films that are capable of provoking real physical reactions from their spectators. Out-of-control moments in films are capable of making members of the audience lose control of themselves. According to Williams, horror films inspire screams, shudders and faster heartbeats, pornography brings on erections, and melodramas cause tears (hence the name "weepie").⁴⁹ Possible physical consequences of alimentary delinquency in films are audible groans, and the onset of upset stomachs. At the same moment that barriers are broken down during the on-screen incorporation of food, the barrier between screen and audience disappears as well, conflating the on-screen and off-screen spectacles. Barbara Creed notes that viewing horror films

⁴⁸ Angela Carter. The Sadeian Woman. (London: Virago, 1979), p. 147.

⁴⁹ Linda Williams, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

"signifies a desire not only for pleasure (confronting sickening horrific images, being filled with terror/desire for the undifferentiated) but also a desire, having taken pleasure in perversity, to throw up, to throw out, eject the abject (from the safety of the spectator's seat)."⁵⁰ John Waters' quote about the spectators of *Pink Flamingos* vomiting should definitely be considered in this light.

Horror and counter cinema films have traditionally provoked more virulent attacks in the press than contemporary art films. I would say that this is partly in reaction to the physical effects that these films are capable of perpetrating against spectators' bodies. Indeed, one of the most immediate differences between films such as *Weekend*, *Sweet Movie*, *Chainsaw* and *Pink Flamingos*, and other films such as *The Cook*, *Parents* and *Delicatessen* is that the alimentary delinquency of the former films is directed at the spectator, whereas in the latter films it remains within the films and is directed against another character. For example, both *Parents* and *The Cook* feature the same type of significant and climactic moment where a forkful of human meat lingers in front of a mouth. In both instances there is a lot of cutting and glances between the eyes, the meat and the mouth. Both scenes thus create tension around an act of eating that may or may not take place, retaining that barrier between the interior and the exterior until the last possible second. This kind of titillation does not exist in the horror and counter cinema films. The best example of this

⁵⁰ Barbara Creed, op. cit., p. 48.

is Divine's "spatio-temporal" ingurgitation of dog excrement in *Pink Flamingos*, which occurs after the film's narrative *per se* has concluded. When Divine sticks out his/her tongue to expose the contents of his/her mouth, s/he does so facing the camera, making this an exclusive stomach-turning experience for the spectators and no-one else.

*

Despite differences in degrees of outrageousness, the marginal nature of the films discussed in this chapter allows us to see them as products of cinema's libido, as coming from the bowels of cinema. They conspire to form a vision from below and from the inside. In contrast to a "classical" vision of things where beauty, harmony, symmetry, and geometry may reign, the world seen from below "appears uncertain, flawed, ambiguous, unbalanced and unhomogenous."⁵¹ As Pascal Bonitzer rightly surmises, "(o)ne of the questions that these films ask is what today gives shit, menstrual flow and vomit dignity, or better yet a poetic value, since it is rather clear that it is for their poetic modernity that these "objects" are used, spoken of, and shown in these films."⁵²

⁵¹. Piero Camporesi, *The Incorruptible Flesh*, op. cit., p. 79.

⁵². Pascal Bonitzer, "L'expérience en intérieur." *Cahiers du cinéma*. No. 247 (Jul/Aug 1973), p. 34. Bonitzer is referring in this review to *La Grande Bouffe*, *La Maman et la Putain*, and *Last Tango in Paris*.

CONCLUSION

As a closing note on the manifestations in film of the post-agrarian shift that this dissertation has been hinged upon, I would like to address the growing series of films that are usually the first to be mentioned when I bring up the subject of food and film. *Tampopo* (1987, Japan, Juzo Itami), *Babettes Gaestbud* (*Babette's Feast*, 1987, Denmark, Gabriel Axel); *Como Agua Para Chocolate* (*Like Water for Chocolate*, 1993, Mexico, Alfonso Arau), *Storia di ragazzi e ragazze* (1989, Italy, Pupi Avati); *Belle Epoque* (1993, Spain, Fernando Truebu) and *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1995, Taiwan, Ang Lee) together comprise what can be called an "international food cinema". Eating, and especially cooking, are here entirely foregrounded and are the motivating factors that define and occupy character concerns and ambitions. They all focus insistently on the past and could also be characterised as "heritage" films, in that they combine a celebration of past traditions and by-gone rituals with some of the formal qualities as well as production and consumption conditions of art films to produce a highly commercial brand of "quality" cinema. Because of the omnipresence of food in these films, they, more than the other films dealt with in this dissertation, present multiple metaphoric possibilities of food in face of the change from agrarian to post-agrarian societal models. In the form of a conclusion, I intend to concentrate mainly, though not exclusively, on how *Babette's Feast*, *Tampopo* and *Like Water for Chocolate* combine, crystallise and amplify the issues that have

been the subject of this dissertation.

I. Food and National Identity

Heritage films are firmly linked to national cinemas. For example, *Babette's Feast* and *Like Water for Chocolate* both take place in a specific national context in the agrarian, pre-industrial past. Food is evoked alongside other myths of the nation and has a highly commemorative function. These two films, along with *Tampopo*, are explicitly centred around protagonists' and/or narrators' memories, but also around collective, national memories. *Tampopo* is about the characters' obsession with finding the perfect noodle, but it is full of homages to old movies and features the appearance of a string of familiar Japanese film stars in cameo roles. *Babette's Feast* takes place in the nineteenth century and is presented as a flashback in which memory and commemoration are omnipresent - from the celebration of the parson's birthday to the general's remembrances about his meal at the *Café Anglais* in Paris. It also features, apart from the French actress Stéphane Audran, classic Scandinavian film stars Bibi Anderson and Brigitte Federspiel. *Like Water for Chocolate* takes place in turn-of-the-century Mexico and is told in a flashback by the great-niece of Tita, the protagonist. In the film's epilogue, the great-niece is seated in her kitchen with the ghostly figures of Tita and Esperanza (Tita's niece) looking down over her. Also, in the role of Pedro, the film features Marco Leonardi, who played the young projectionist in *Cinema Paradiso*, the nostalgia film par

excellence.

All three films celebrate and glorify the daily acts of cooking and eating within specific national contexts, which are foregrounded at various moments. "Great moments" of French and Mexican national history are in fact of crucial importance to the fictions of *Babette's Feast* and *Like Water for Chocolate*. Details of Babette's past are given sketchily but we are led to assume that she has fled some personal or political tragedy linked to the Commune Uprising of 1871 in Paris. *Like Water for Chocolate* depicts the Mexican Revolution, which serves as the backdrop to the film, as the victory of Mexican creoles over their colonial masters, while the Indians remain the servants and low-rung labourers from whom, incidentally, Tita learns her magical cooking secrets.

Whether about "great moments" or quotidian details, images of the past on offer in these films are reassuring. National pasts are placed safely within the confines of standard narratives, rendering them not only understandable and logical, but also desirable. The past is idealised and the films, even those films that take place "in the present," express a longing to re-experience past, forgotten times. Food on the table is also reassuring too - prestige Mexican, French and Japanese national dishes abound in comfortable, bourgeois environments. An extremely high level of human, and especially female, intervention is shown in the preparation of dishes. Food is shown as requiring work, ingenuity and talent and is thus positively presented as an aspect

of a nation's culture and art. Food becomes a hegemonic national text. Eating and cooking become ways of conveying national consensus. Like French films of "scenarios of confirmation" (Chapter One, Section II) in their celebratory and commemorative presentations of food, international food films present images of nations much as they would like to be seen.

II. Women's Films

Andrew Higson has criticised heritage films for their sanitisation of the past and for using history merely for its capacity to generate images. According to Higson, heritage films do not adopt a critical attitude toward history.¹ Although their views on history may on the one hand be considered hegemonic and conservative, both *Babette's Feast* and *Like Water for Chocolate* create historical roles for women, even at the expense of revising official history. Women in many food films are first of all strong and independent. Tampopo is a single working mother who runs a restaurant by herself. Babette was a chef in a Parisian restaurant and alone has fled her life in France for the far reaches of northern Denmark to settle with two sisters who live alone. The sisters, for their part, are the moral and spiritual leaders of the village. *Like Water for Chocolate* and *Belle époque* both deal with families of dominant women in which men are either sex objects or

¹ Andrew Higson, "Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film," in Lester Friedman, ed., Fires Were Started: British Cinema & Thatcherism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 112.

domesticated as cooks. However, the women are also very accomplished in historical terms. For instance, Babette was supposedly the chef at the prestigious *Café Anglais* before coming to Denmark. Although this is not possible "historically" (Adolphe Dugléré presided in the kitchens of the *Café Anglais* from 1867 to his death in 1884²), it valorises the women silently cooking in their kitchens for centuries without credit. In *Like Water for Chocolate*, Tita's sister, Gertrudis (Claudette Maille), runs off to fight in the Mexican Revolution and returns some years later as a general in the army. Official history has been deliberately displaced in order to highlight women's public and private stories.

Women in these films not only reclaim historical roles, but their traditional areas of competence are also shown as particularly rewarding and empowering, if not magical. Through their cooking, women are able to bring about positive changes in their lives and in the lives of those who eat their food. Tita is able to work charms and cast spells with her food. Babette's food also casts a spell of sorts on its eaters, who change from hard-core Lutherans to warm, rosy-cheeked revelers. These films have strong affinities with the women's films analysed in Chapter Two (Section III.C.) that show women fleeing the constraints of domesticity to find better lives working in diners or restaurants. However, like *Fried Green Tomatoes* and *Baby Boom*, which are in fact contemporaneous with these international food films, the films

² Edmond Neirinck & Jean-Pierre Poulain, Histoire de la cuisine et des cuisiniers (Malakoff: Editions Jacques Lanore, 1988), p. 74.

elevate women's status and power by placing them in the agrarian past before the industrialisation of many areas of women's traditional labour, especially clothes- and food-making, hinting that these days are past and perhaps irretrievable.

III The Alter-Ego of Alimentary Delinquency

Inasmuch as alimentary delinquency films are about presenting shocking and repulsive images of food, international food films are about creating desire for food, and the two groups of films can be seen as different sides of the same coin. Alimentary delinquency films, as part of the "body genre" of films, expressly try to provoke physical reactions of disgust and repugnance with their food imagery. International food films can also be included in the body genre, in that they try to provoke appetites and salivation. This has been the wish expressed by many of the cinematographers and directors of these films. Both types of films feature "food designers" and chefs in their credits.

Babette's Feast, *Tampopo* and *Like Water for Chocolate* are often mentioned together in the same reviews. This cross-referentiality among the three films does not simply derive from the fact that they are about food, for they are not the only films about food. What links them are common approaches, styles and attitudes toward food. Their high production values place heavy emphasis on the visual aspects of settings, costumes and food. The credits of *Tampopo*, *Babette's Feast*, as well as *Eat Drink Man Woman* feature "food designers" who were involved in the conception and

design of dishes used in the films, and who worked closely with the cinematographers in order to make the food look appealing to the camera. Images of dishes in these films are often constructed as "still lives" that try to bring out not only the enticing and seductive qualities of the food but also its rustic, agrarian and home-made aspects. Consider, for example, shots of Babette (Stéphane Audran) at work in her kitchen preparing her "French dinner." At one point Babette skins, splits and stuffs tiny quails. Shots linger on the various details of the image in which the food is centred and there is little or no movement within the frame. Throughout the sequence there are no brusque movements, no fast chopping. All of her gestures, accompanied by a gentle bubbling on the sound track, are slow, poised and deliberate. Close-ups are used to show food in the step-by-step details of its preparation, although we may not know in advance what Babette is making. At another point, she is shaping and cutting pastry dough, which is only later revealed to be the *sarcophages* (literally, coffins, i.e., pastry shells) for her *cailles en sarcophages* (quails in "coffin-shaped" pastry shells).

The close-ups thus serve to add elements of anticipation about what is being prepared, enhancing the surprise and pleasure at the discovery of the dish as it is presented to the diners. Part of the emotional impact of these shots of food in preparation are the accompanying reverse shots that reveal the sweaty faces of the female cooks concentrating intently on their work. The close-up shots of food in international food cinema are not entirely

dissimilar to shots of food and other things that are eaten in alimentary delinquency films. About the close-up, Pascal Bonitzer has commented: "The close-up designates the limit, the precarious point of equilibrium between the minimum distance from which an object, e.g. a face, appears as photogenic and in all its splendour, and the slightly closer distance from which everything - pores, hairs, pimples - is visible. This is the point at which seduction can turn into repulsion and horror."³

The technical problems of making food look attractive for the camera are the same as those experienced in photographing food for advertising. It is at times difficult to distinguish the "still lives" of food in film from advertising images. Criticism has been levelled against international food films for being overly glossy, and other critics have expressed suspicion about the intentions of the overt celebrations of food in these films. John Kraniauskas has criticised *Like Water For Chocolate* for "the cleanliness of its images," and Andrew Sarris has suggested that *Babette's Feast* was "reportedly designed for the food-obsessed American magazine marketplace."⁴ Charles Tesson has suggested that certain themes have become the privileged visual domain of advertising and that filmmakers who venture to film the "desert," for example, now have to contend with all of the advertising images - for cars, drinks,

³ Pascal Bonitzer, Décadrages: peinture et cinéma (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma/ Editions de l'Etoile, 1985), p. 90.

⁴ John Kraniauskas, "Como Agua Para Chocolate", Sight & Sound, 10:1991, p. 46; Andrew Sarris, "Babette's Feast", Village Voice, 15/3/88, p. 59.

shirts, etc. - that have informed people's notions of the desert.⁵ The same holds true for kitchens and food, whose significance has been submerged, absorbed and modified by the many advertising images circulating in Western societies, especially, as Sarris indicates above, in women's magazines, cookbooks and cookery programmes.

International food films, like alimentary delinquency films, are primarily Western phenomena. Just as alimentary delinquency in film is designed to turn Western stomachs, the lavish display of sumptuous dishes is for Western eyes and Western palates. Reviewers often express some sort of gratitude for the heightened visual emphasis on food in such films, as if seeing the dishes being prepared and eaten were somehow equivalent to eating them. The comments typical of the praise the films have received - "a feast for the eye," "voyeur's picnic," "lyrical cooking," "great-looking feasts"⁶ - all refer to the sensual pleasure of discovering and watching the dishes being prepared and consumed. Academy Awards for Best Foreign Film for *Babette's Feast* in 1988 and *Belle Epoque* in 1993 as well as a nomination for *Like Water for Chocolate* in 1992 also attest to their immense popularity in the West. The

⁵ Charles Tesson, "La nouvelle frontière", Cahiers du cinéma, No. 440 (Feb 1991), pp. 44-47.

⁶ In order of the quotes: Bob Driscoll, "Babette's Feast," Western Mail, 2/4/88, p. 9; Adam Mars-Jones, "The Joy of Eggs," Independent, 5/5/88, p. 19; Alexander Walker, "Voyeur's Picnic," Evening Standard, 5/5/88, p. 30; Georgia Brown, "The Mamas and the Papas," Village Voice, 23/2/93, p. 51.

lives of these films are extended in "lifestyle" magazines,⁷ and are akin to the current circulation in the West of global, cultural products -music, food, fashion. The "world music" trend, the proliferation of ethnic restaurants, the growth of international food sections in supermarkets and various Third World fashion styles are all part of this multi-faceted globalisation. Being a Western consumer of such products shows an "openness" towards other cultures, an openness that is cultivated in the West in specific socio-cultural circles, consisting of people "who keep in touch via global cultural flows and who are not only at home in other cultures, but seek out and adopt reflexive, metacultural or aesthetic stances to divergent cultural experiences."⁸

Finally, like depictions of alimentary delinquency, international food films find their inspiration in other cultures. Just as cannibals and alimentary delinquents are constructed as "others," i.e., not "us," the people who prepare and eat food are also "others" from far away cultures and/or from the increasingly distant past. "We" do not or cannot eat like this anymore, so we seek out experiences from elsewhere that give us the sensation of

⁷ A You Magazine (19-06-88, pp. 56-60) spread offered photos and recipes to "make Babette's feast at home," and a New York restaurant offered the menu of the film (at \$125 a head) during its post-Academy Award re-release. The film's distributor, Orion, distributed *Babette's Feast* handbooks with the film. *Like Water For Chocolate* also delivered recipes with its press book and the National Tourist Board of Mexico, which helped to finance the film, will no doubt take advantage of the film's marketing potential to "sell Mexico" to tourists.

⁸ Mike Featherstone, "Global Culture: An Introduction," Theory, Culture & Society 7:2-3 (June 1990), p. 9.

eating and cooking. The films discussed in this section all offer safe, unthreatening ways of having the impression of experiencing and knowing other cultures, where diversity is accepted and essential, and real difference is kept at a distance.

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While the value of food as a token of symbolic communication in the West may be withering, I hope to have shown in this dissertation that its metaphoric possibilities in film have been on the increase. Food has lost its ability to reveal the secret essence of things and it no longer organises and regulates our daily lives. The consequence in the West is that food has never been so much talked about. Representations and functions of food in films symbolise and incarnate the spread of social processes that have been chipping away at many long-held ideas of tradition related to food and eating. Post-agrarian lifestyles may be robbing food of its identity, and in front of our apparent inability to experience food the way we used to, we can at least vicariously look to film to retrieve symbolic and metaphoric traces of food's virtual flavour.

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