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**Foodways, Film, and Culture**



Editor: Cynthia Baron

Associate Editor: Rosalind Sibielski

Special Issue Co-Editor: Mark Bernard

Essay Contributors: Leslie H. Abramson, Fabio Parasecoli, Julie Tharp, and Cynthia Baron

**Foodways:  
A Critical Lens that Provides New Insights into Film and Culture**



**Cynthia Baron**

I would thank editorial board member Mark Bernard for co-editing this issue of *The Projector*; the time and expertise contributed are sincerely appreciated. I also want to thank the many scholars who responded to our call for papers on food, film, and media/consumer culture; additional essays concerning food and film will appear in subsequent issues.

The substantial number of rigorous submissions signals scholars' growing interest and investment in research at the intersection of food, film, media, and culture studies. This situation reflects a larger development, namely, the incredibly rapid expansion of the food studies field since the early 1980s. That burgeoning area of study parallels an increase in food journals, the appearance of food films, the rise of food documentaries, and the emergence of food movements that aim to foster sustainable agriculture and the view that healthy food and clean water are basic human rights. Work in the food studies field examines research questions that concern *foodways*, a term that designates the range and collection of social customs, personal choices, naturalized beliefs, behaviors, values, systems, and activities that surround the production, extraction, distribution, preparation, presentation, consumption, cleanup, and disposal of food and drink.

This issue of *The Projector* opens with an essay by Leslie H. Abramson entitled “Knife Skills: Women and the Cut in Hitchcock Films.” By exploring materials, spaces, and characters associated with domestic meal preparation – knives, kitchens, and women – Abramson adds new insights to the extensive collection of auteur and feminist studies of Hitchcock films. Revisiting well-known scenes from *Blackmail* (1929), *Sabotage* (1936), *Psycho* (1960), and *Torn Curtain* (1966), Abramson not only illustrates that female knifing is a motif in Hitchcock’s films, but also that these striking scenes of knife wielding women are among the most spectacular and inventive instances of cutting/editing in Hitchcock’s body of work. The final segment of Abramson’s essay takes a material-feminist angle that considers women’s work as cutters/editors in the silent era. That interesting line of research leads her to propose that, “Informed by the conditions of early film production and authorship, in reflexive displays of superlative women’s knife skills through cutting edge sequences, the director’s films pointedly speak in the lexicon of a vital female voice – significantly, when the most is at stake cinematically.”

In the next essay, “When a Weirdo Stirs the Pot: Food and Masculinity in *Ratatouille*,” Fabio Parasecoli looks at the representation of food as a means of self-expression in the animated film *Ratatouille* (Brad Bird and Jan Pinkava, 2007). Parasecoli locates the film within cinema history and commercial film/media practices, and notes that the film banks on “the widespread interest in kitchen and the cultures that sustain them.” Focusing on its representation of food preparation and consumption, Parasecoli examines the film’s ideological perspectives on class and masculinity. He points out, for example, that “In the world of *Ratatouille*, successful males define their primacy against the background of lower status males, just like celebrity chefs establish their position by asserting their preeminence over line cooks and armies of busboys and dishwashers.” Analyzing the film’s closing scenes to illustrate another instance when “taste and

food-related behaviors [are] markers of class distinction,” Parasecoli offers the insight that with the rats as kitchen laborers, the film naturalizes the image of “the quiet, omnipresent immigrant workers who allow the American restaurant industry to thrive.” Parasecoli also shows that the film’s conclusion naturalizes the view that “Remy and the model of masculinity he embodies manage to be accounted as socially acceptable through paternal approval.”

The peer-reviewed research articles by Abramson and Parasecoli are followed by two invited essays that focus on food, film, and pedagogy. The first of these, by Julie Tharp, is titled “Food, Film, and Friendship.” The essay provides an overview of a course she has been teaching for ten years that is designed for “adult students as part of a non-credit community outreach program.” Tharp draws on her catering experience, film studies background, and interest in ethnic food to lead the course, which focuses “primarily on foreign films in an effort to broaden community members’ understanding of global issues, aesthetics, and foodways.” Class meetings are held in her home and Tharp prepares meals designed to complement each film. For example, to accompany “*Raise the Red Lantern* (Yimou Zhang, 1991), a film about a young woman forced to become the third bride to a wealthy Chinese nobleman, [Tharp] provided a Chinese wedding meal and explained the symbolism of the foods.” Tharp prepares discussion questions for the paired and larger group discussions that follow the screening and meal; she has also created a website with recipes and filmographies. She concludes: the course is “about broadening students’ perspectives, increasing tolerance and compassion, and teaching visual literacy and critical thinking. I think it’s also about pleasure. The classes provide opportunities to find pleasure in a community of learners, trying on new tastes, sounds, and ideas.”

The second pedagogical essay is titled “Food in Film and Media: Opportunities for Engaged Learning.” In this essay, I outline three assignments for textual studies of food in film

and media, and four assignments for ethnographic studies of food, movie-going and media viewing. They are based on research started in 2001; findings from that research appear in *Appetites and Anxieties: Food, Film, and the Politics of Representation* (Wayne State UP, 2014), co-authored with Diane Carson and Mark Bernard. The essay offers the following conclusion:

“Connecting the study of food to the study film and media helps students appreciate the meaningfulness of food choices and behaviors – when represented on screen or in daily life . . . Media can influence people’s food habits and the rhythms of daily life. It can also supply a rich source of material for inquiries into the choices that people make about food, film, and media consumption.”

## **Knife Skills: Women and the Cut in Hitchcock's Cinema**



**Leslie H. Abramson**

For all the food preparation and consumption that take place in the films of the single director whose epicurean proclivities are nearly as famed as his cinematic ones, appetizing displays of the culinary arts are rarely produced by women in domiciliary settings. Among the myriad meals served throughout Hitchcock's oeuvre—the slices of roast beef, quiche, sautéed haddock, fried eggs, baked stuffed lobster, sauced pig's feet, roasted chicken, and cold sandwiches—not only the generally more palatable but least disconcerting and pernicious dining experiences tend to involve restaurant fare. Considerably more problematic is domestic, gastronomy-affiliated women's work, which seldom provides comforting sustenance but more often is a challenge to the palate, the olfactory senses, ocular pleasure, psychic contentment, or the integrity of the male body. To be served food by a woman, or to encounter a woman wielding cooking implements in Hitchcock's films, is oftentimes to risk everything from indigestion and menace at the family table to gruesome displays of butchery and death.

More than culinary prowess, what Hitchcock's women have picked up in the kitchen are knife skills, which constitute an absolute threat to masculinity. From Alice White, who stabs her would-be rapist to death with a bread knife in *Blackmail* (1929); to Mrs. Verloc, who fatally lacerates her husband with the carving knife used for a roast in *Sabotage* (1936); to Mrs. Bates, who lethally slashes a showering motel guest and a detective with a chef's knife in *Psycho* (1960)—acts that truncate her own son's existence; to the farmer's wife, who plunges a kitchen knife into an East German agent's chest before sending him to his Holocaustian death via gas oven in *Torn Curtain* (1966), women are allied with the literal and figurative execution of the cut.<sup>1</sup> In Hitchcock's comestible-laden filmic corpus, this facile bladework is often identified with something more than domestically-situated gender horrors. The masterful cutlery skills of these women constitute not only an absolute grave danger to individual men, but a formidable display of the power of cinema itself. In critical scenes of houseknivery punctuating *Blackmail*, *Sabotage*, *Psycho*, and *Torn Curtain*, women's artful terminal cutting functions as a menace to the male that, via its affiliation with innovative editing sequences, resonates as a challenge to classical stylistic practices and ultimately constitutes a celebrated contribution to cinema aesthetics.<sup>2</sup>

Female bladework on screen has often been associated with the phallic woman, a threat to masculinity emergent as a typology during the mid-1910s in the figure of the sexually predatory vamp, an image that spawned generations of specularized lethal femininity.<sup>3</sup> Among the subsequent lineage of menacing women in cinema, those who bear long-handled cutting equipment—as well as others who wield firearms, wear jacked-up high heels, and pronouncedly draw on cigarettes—are not unfamiliar, nor is their interpretation as a castrative presence in analyses of such figures as the femme fatale in film noir and neo-noir, as well as murderous

women in thrillers and action films.<sup>4</sup> Situated within this genealogy, Hitchcock produced the most extended oeuvre to incorporate female knife-wielding as a repeated motif, stretching from his first half-decade of filmmaking, in the latter 1920s, through one of his final releases, in the mid-1960s. Moreover, as opposed to such early film images of notoriously dangerous women endowed with elongated instruments of power as the cigarette holder-brandishing vamp, or the continual resurgence of those who unexpectedly flourish concealed bladed or barreled weaponry, Hitchcock's work scrupulously naturalizes women's knife skills.<sup>5</sup> As he explained to Andy Warhol regarding the importance of drawing narrative components from settings, "Well, you say to yourself [in the case of such films as *Secret Agent* (1936)], 'This film is laid in Switzerland. What have they got in Switzerland? They've got Alps, chocolate factories, they've got lakes, and cuckoo clocks,' and I'm always a believer in working into the film some of the elements" of the environment (Warhol 199).<sup>6</sup> In an interview at the American Film Institute, he more specifically identified such elements as those that are "indigenous" to the character (Hitchcock, *Dialogue* 85).<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, throughout Hitchcock's work, displays of the woman's authoritative cut foreground the locus of origins—origins that are both conventionally domestic and distinctly self-reflexive insofar as they are pointedly allied with the artistry of editing.

The first display of formidable female knife skills in Hitchcock's oeuvre emerged in a work that was renowned as Great Britain's inaugural full-length sound film, *Blackmail*. Released in 1929, a time when international film culture expressed a great deal of concern regarding the impact of sound on the aesthetics of cinema—generally thought to have reached its peak of refinement as a silent medium—*Blackmail* was celebrated for its artistry, hinging in significant part on incisive editing directly allied with the knife-wielding woman. In the film, a tobacconist's daughter, Alice, anxious to experience the world of sophistication, forsakes her



stalwart boyfriend (a Scotland Yard detective) for a date with a painter in the wake of an argument at a crowded restaurant. After abandoning the security of the restaurant, the naïve Alice falls for the oldest trick in the masculine book, accepting an invitation up to the artist's studio. Once there, she agrees to another of his propositions by changing into a tutu, an act that eventually arouses him into forcibly pulling Alice onto his curtained bed and attempting rape. The sounds of Alice's protests accompany a shot of the jostling curtain, denoting the exertions occurring behind the scrim. Within seconds, Alice's flailing hand emerges from the curtain and eventually settles on the handle of a long-bladed knife lying on a plate beside a loaf of bread on a bedside table. Grabbing the knife and quickly pulling it behind the curtain, Alice is soon able to end the struggle, emerging from behind the curtain, blade in hand. At this conjunctive site of bed and bread—the locus of two consuming appetites—Alice much prefers to handle the equipment of the latter.

Alice's terminal cut is followed by an eruption of diegetic and extradiegetic incisions—all motivated from her perspective—that challenge the conventional use of male apparatus and established masculine aesthetics, and are ultimately extolled as innovative film artistry. The stabbing of the artist with his own bread knife is succeeded by a gesture in which Alice literally rips traditional representational art by tearing a hole in his painting of a classical jester. The scene is followed by a subjective visual montage sequence psychically motivated by Alice, in which she wanders the streets of London in a daze, suturing the sights with images of the knife in motion and the artist's immobile arm. This unconventionally cut, expressionistic visual sequence is soon accompanied by the film's most widely-lauded passage: a scene at the family table the next morning—again, executed from Alice's point of view—orchestrating subjective and nonsubjective sound, image, and editing, all literally and figuratively associated with bladework.

In the celebrated “knife scene,” as Alice and her parents consume their breakfast, a gossiping female customer stands in the doorway to the parlor, incessantly chattering about the newly-discovered murder: “I mean it’s one thing to buy chocolates out of hours, but it’s quite another to stick a knife into a gentleman . . . . A good, clean, honest whack over the head with a brick is one thing. There’s something British about that. But knives, nope, knives is not right. I must say, that’s what I think and that’s what I feel. Whatever the provocation, I could never use a knife. Now mind you, a knife is a difficult thing to handle. I mean any knife . . .” As the camera pans to the still-dazed Alice, followed by a cut to a medium close-up emphasizing her subjectivity, the offscreen jabber fades in and out from her aural point of view such that the only audibly recognizable word, repeatedly enunciated, is “knife.” In response to her father’s request to cut the loaf on the table, Alice reaches for the bread knife on this second occasion and, after deliberately turning it in her hand, is startled amidst the muffled drone of the customer’s patter, by the suddenly exaggerated volume and accentuated intonation of the iterated word, registering as “*KNIFE!*” In alarmed response, her hand jolts upward with a staccato slicing of the air, she lets the knife loose, and it pitches onto the floor, motivating both a film cut and her father’s ironically cautionary advice: “You know you ought to be more careful. Might have cut somebody with that.” In this pioneering use of expressionistic sound and editing foregrounding Alice’s overarching perspective, not only has the knife returned to its domestic origins, once again situated beside a loaf of bread, but the cuts emanate from women’s oral and physical knife usage, as well as from the feminine reinterpreted “imaginary.” Further, the female cut is recognized as culturally antiestablishment by a woman—the customer—who has noted that the use of a knife for the executional laceration is not “British.”

*Blackmail* has been widely recognized for its innovative film artistry as well as for its incisive examination of the cultural and cinematic position of women. Discussing early critical responses to the film, Tom Ryall notes, “The ‘knife’ sequence, with its expressionist manipulation of the soundtrack, seemed to demonstrate the possibilities of a departure from the ‘photographs of people talking’ that dialogue films seemed to invite” (52). Feminist readings by Deborah Linderman, Tania Modleski, and others have focused on the film as a commentary on woman’s status in the regime of masculine authority. Linderman points out that after the murder, Alice “hold[s] the knife in groin position perpendicular to the floor. There is no way, after all to represent woman as potent except by representing her as symbolically empowered” (26). Yet, Linderman resists acknowledging Alice’s prowess, arguing that she lacks masculine “signifying privilege” and the knife symbolizes her “unintelligibility” (ibid). Modleski examines the film’s alliance with the woman’s point of view, foregrounding its emphasis on “the problems of *woman’s* speaking” (21) and “the extent to which the film undermines patriarchal law and creates sympathy for and an identification with the female outlaw” (30). Such illuminative feminist analyses nonetheless overlook how *Blackmail’s* repetition of knife images emphasizes Alice’s pointedly lethal power through the cut, as well as how the film carefully identifies the source and nature of this potency (including the implement’s extensive accessibility to women) by twice locating her bladework at the site of its conventionally domestic indigenous origins.

In *Sabotage*, Hitchcock again returns to culinary work to foreground women’s imposing cutting skills as both a danger to the male and a display of innovative editing techniques. During this 1936 film, Mr. Verloc, owner of a cinema and a covert anarchist, sends his wife’s brother to deliver a bomb, concealed in a film can, to Piccadilly Circus. The literally incendiary film explodes in transit, killing the brother—a catastrophe of which Mrs. Verloc, unaware of her

husband's anarchist activities, is apprised close to dinnertime. After Mr. Verloc confesses his role in her brother's death, the stunned Mrs. Verloc passes from their apartment into the movie theater, where she momentarily experiences the palliative and distractive power of cinema upon watching a portion of the Disney cartoon, *Who Killed Cock Robin?* She laughs with the audience until she witnesses the songbird's murder, whereupon she is inspired to return to her apartment behind the movie theater and begin her own series of cuts, slicing a roast for her waiting husband with grave consequences.<sup>8</sup> In a sequence of approximately twenty separate shots comprising a 1 ½ minute montage sequence, images of Mrs. Verloc wielding the carving knife to plate the evening's dinner, turning the utensil while deep in thought, her visage displaying an emotional struggle, and her hands releasing and grabbing the knife, are intercut with shots of Verloc casually and callously discussing dinner, noticing the knife, recognizing its implications, and approaching his wife, whereupon she fatally stabs him.

In the wake of *Sabotage*'s release, as was the case with *Blackmail*, women's potent bladework was again associated with the pinnacle of cinema artistry. Off screen, Hitchcock repeatedly pointed to the dinner scene as an example of particularly adroit—one might say *cutting edge*—editing, in which “the screen . . . speak[s] its own language, freshly coined . . . [by] treat[ing] an acted scene as a piece of raw material which must be broken up, taken to bits, before it can be woven into an expressive visual pattern” (Hitchcock, *Direction* 256).<sup>9</sup> Hitchcock explained to Francois Truffaut that the scene's editing strategy was motivated by the female point of view:

You see, to maintain the public's sympathy for Sylvia Sidney [Mrs. Verloc], her husband's death had to be accidental. And to bring this off, it was absolutely essential that the audience identify itself with Sylvia Sidney. . . . the knife acts as

a magnet; it's almost as if her hand, against her will, is compelled to grab it. The camera frames her hand, then her eyes, moving back and forth between the two until suddenly her look makes it clear that she's become aware of the potential meaning of that knife. At that moment the camera moves back to Verloc . . . . Then . . . back to the hand and the knife. . . . As a film director I must try to convey this woman's frame of mind to the audience by purely cinematic means. (Truffaut 110-111)

Paradoxically, albeit identified with not only the woman's perspective but her essential moral innocence, the editing sequence clearly establishes her menacing innate incisive potency. Further, whereas the male displays other hungers, the woman discovers—again to her surprise—that she has a powerful appetite for the exertion of the penetrating cut. Considered in terms of classical Hollywood cinema's constitution of woman as subject of the gaze (as theorized by Laura Mulvey and interrogated by innumerable others), via innovative sequences motivated by the bladework of Mrs. Verloc and her knife-wielding feminine cohorts in Hitchcock's films, these individuals become formidable figures of the conventional masculine look's *reconstruction* through the female-activated, reconceived cut.

*Blackmail* and *Sabotage* emphasize the instinctual nature of female knifework and women's awe of their own lacerative agency and its consequences, suggestively allied with the feminine imaginary.<sup>10</sup> Further, these early films thematize the transference of guilt from a predatory male to a woman who uses culinary knifework as a corrective to misguided masculine dominance. However, Hitchcock's later work harbors no such female reservations. As Sidney Gottlieb points out, the dinner scene in *Sabotage* constitutes "Hitchcock's major *tour de force* of

montage until the shower scene in *Psycho*” and, in the latter masterful display of cutting via kitchen implement and cinema editing—and its successor, *Torn Curtain*—women wield their knives authoritatively (236).

The shower scene in *Psycho*, released in 1960, is the most analyzed display of female houseknivery in Hitchcock’s work. Myriad scholars have examined its intricate orchestration of shots synchronized with the slashing motion of Mrs. Bates’ knife and the cutting tones of composer Bernard Herrmann’s metallic “screeching violins.” However, what has gone unnoticed is that the diegetic source of Hitchcock’s crowning editing achievement—the pinnacle of his cutting-edge displays of knife skills puncturing the classical Hollywood screen—is a woman’s kitchen.

In *Psycho*, Marion, a secretary, absconds with \$40,000 from her office and drives hours to reach her debt-ridden boyfriend, stopping for the night at the Bates Motel. There, she is greeted by the proprietor, Norman, who, after determining that she does not plan on driving to a diner for supper (as we now know, a much safer choice), brings her food from his invalid mother’s kitchen. Marion subsequently takes a shower, at which time Mrs. Bates stabs her to death with a kitchen knife. Later, Mrs. Bates murders a detective by repeated stabbing. Eventually, the murderer is revealed to be Norman; under the control of his long-dead mother’s identity and in her guise, he has become a serial killer. In this case of schizophrenia, Norman is ultimately consumed by Mother’s personality.

Among other psychoanalytic diagnoses, the blade-wielding Mrs. Bates has been characterized as a phallic mother, most notably in the work of Raymond Bellour. In “Psychosis, Neurosis, Perversion,” Bellour situates Mrs. Bates within her son’s reflexive “chain in which the excessiveness of the psychotic-perverse desire of the [voyeuristic] male subject can be

structured—from the man to the camera, his true measure . . . The chain may be written phallus-bird-fetish-mother-eye-knife-camera” (250). *Psycho* invites readings of the abnormal mother-son relationship foregrounding the masculine subject insofar as Freudianism is introduced into the film by a psychiatrist who analyzes the case (albeit inadequately) in the penultimate scene. Yet, to unsheathe Mother from Norman’s body, in terms of the film’s alternate order of diagnostics, *Psycho* matches issues of psychic inherency with the domestically indigenous nature of Mrs. Bates’ potent knifework. When Norman returns to the house to prepare Marion’s dinner, “mother” asserts her dominance by emphasizing her ascendancy over home cookery, ranting, “She’ll not be appeasing her ugly appetite with my food or my son.” As a result, Marion’s final meal principally consists of a platter of sliced bread. If, as Modleski points out rather tongue-in-cheek with regard to power relations between devourer and devoured, “You are . . . what you eat” (107), then, under the authority of Mrs. Bates, Marion is something cleaved into pieces.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the film locates the origins of the knife sequence in the woman’s kitchen; just prior to the shower assault, Norman sits distractedly at the kitchen table.

As opposed to *Blackmail*, *Sabotage*, and *Torn Curtain* (to be discussed shortly), the knife-bearing “woman” in *Psycho* initially poses a deadly menace to another female (Mrs. Bates subsequently stabs a predatory male, the detective Arbogast). However, the shock of the shower scene ultimately gives way to a more disturbing consequence, one visited upon the male and his self-constructed masculine order. Even more fundamentally troubling than Marion’s death is the ultimate narrative result of Mrs. Bates’ superior cutlery skills: the vital ligature between Norman and his mother becomes terminally riven and the son’s identity no longer exists. In *Psycho*, the lethal woman’s emergence as both knife- and child-bearer registers as Hitchcock’s most haunting figure of feminine production through the apparatus of the cut.

The single laudatory aspect of Mrs. Bates' knifework is, of course, its artistry. The shower scene, an approximately 2 ½ -minute montage composed of more than 70 shots, is the most widely-extolled exhibition of intricate, innovative editing in all of Hitchcock's work. The montage cuts together shots of Mrs. Bates' upraised, kitchen knife-bearing arm, the blade slashing downward, segments of Marion's dripping head and screaming mouth, the knife juxtaposed to her torso, and shreds of blood raining into the bathtub, among numerous other images. As Susan Smith notes, the knife's "wounding power is conveyed here as much aurally as visually, the bird-like shrieks of the violin serving to punctuate the soundtrack in ways that mirror the stabbing action of the knife itself" (97).<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Bates' superlative slicing not only violates classical Hollywood cinema by excising the protagonist approximately halfway through the film via a cutting-edge montage, but further contravenes patriarchal order by censoring Norman's "normal" masculine desire for a male-female relationship and by stabbing to death a figure of masculine law, the detective. With regard to the former, Hitchcock stated that the film was "probably one of the most cinematic pictures I've ever made" (Hitchcock, *On Style* 288).<sup>13</sup> Peter Bogdanovich observed that, in *Psycho*, Hitchcock's "ideas about montage reach . . . a culmination" (7). As Bogdanovich's 1963 comment implies, *Psycho* activated a domestic critical reassessment of Hitchcock, specifically with regard to the director's aestheticism. In his inaugural *Village Voice* review, critic Andrew Sarris wrote, "A close inspection of PSYCHO (*sic*) indicates . . . that Hitchcock is the most-daring avant-garde film-maker in America today," concluding that the film "stand[s] in the same creative rank as the great European films" ("The Movie Journal," n.p.).

The final exhibition of terminal female houseknivery in Hitchcock's work occurs in *Torn Curtain*, a 1966 release in which not only does the woman wield a blade with absolute authority



and conviction, but the execution of the cut bears an altogether different aesthetic approach to the feminine incision. In this film, an American scientist, Michael Armstrong, feigns defection to East Germany with the covert aim of obtaining a critical formula from an Iron Curtain scientist. He is followed by an East German agent, Gromek, who correctly suspects that the American scientist remains loyal to the West. In a key scene, Armstrong travels to a farmhouse to contact western sympathizers. There, the threatening agent is exterminated, a turning point enabled by the superior knifework of the farmer's wife.

In *Torn Curtain*, the fatal laceration from a carving knife occurs directly in the kitchen, as Hitchcock ultimately returns to culinary work's locus of origin to make an altogether different comment about the art of murder. Hitchcock explained to Truffaut, "In line with our old principle, the killing has to be carried out by means suggested by the locale and the characters. We are in a farmhouse and the farmer's wife is doing the killing. So we use household objects: the kettle full of soup, a carving knife . . . and, finally, the gas oven" (311). As Gromek begins to call the authorities from a phone in the kitchen, the farmer's wife throws a pot of soup at his head. Subsequently, she pointedly inserts herself into—and definitively transforms—the arduous physical struggle between Gromek and the insufficiently powerful Armstrong by grabbing a long-bladed kitchen knife from the drawer and plunging it into Gromek's chest, exhibiting her significantly expurgative agency. In this indigenous setting, the woman's incision produces a display of the ghastly, slow-cooked nature of actual homicide; after the stabbing, the German operative is dragged across her kitchen floor and retributively gassed in the oven. Hitchcock noted, "In doing that long killing scene [approximately 3 ½ minutes], my first thought . . . was to avoid the cliché. In every picture somebody gets killed and it goes very quickly. They are stabbed or shot, and the killer never even stops to look and see whether the victim is really dead

or not. And I thought it was time to show that it was very difficult, very painful, and it takes a very long time to kill a man” (ibid).<sup>14</sup>

Among Hitchcock’s female knife-wielders, not only is the woman most closely allied with domestic work—the apron-wearing farmer’s wife—the most notably self-composed in employing the implement. As her expression reveals just before she plunges the utensil into Gromek, the blade-bearing woman is ultimately divulged as an individual who displays a healthy appetite for the act of laceration. In this case, the ferocity of her initial cut, which breaks the knife in Gromek’s chest, results in the newly inventive sequence. Embedded in Gromek, the blade is a lasting mark of the female slice (and its apparatus), one that engenders a powerful, aesthetically innovative lacerative restraint in the composition of the scene.

In Hitchcock’s strikingly executed scenes of houseknivery displaying blade skills indigenous to spaces of consumable cultural production, the audience is transported not only back to the originary site of culinary work as a source of the female cut, but to the origins of cinema production. Specifically, the woman’s superlative bladework is a formidable exhibition of prowess rooted almost as solidly in the conditions of early filmmaking as in the kitchen. In cinema’s first decades—particularly in the fledgling British and American film industries of the 1910s and 1920s—women oftentimes held the position of film editor, an occupation then commonly known by the distinctive appellation “*cutter*” and associated with screen aesthetics. Nathalie Morris notes, “Commenting on the American industry, an article in *The Motion Picture Studio* in 1925 claimed that women were ‘among the greatest “cutters” and film editors.’ It suggested that they were ‘quick and resourceful . . . ingenious in their work [with ] a strong sense of what the public wants to see’” (4).<sup>15</sup>

In fact, during the 1920s, Hitchcock's wife, Alma Reville, was a highly regarded cutter in the British film industry, a professional distinctly committed to the aesthetics of editing.<sup>16</sup> In her 1923 article for *The Motion Picture News*, "Cutting and Continuity," Reville asserted (in reference to the title),

These two very important branches of the film business have been sadly neglected, and it seems incredible that such necessary items should be continually overlooked.

These two words will always go hand in hand, and until the art of both is thoroughly mastered we will still have to bear with 'that long-drawn-out film' . . .

If Mr. Producer would give just a little more forethought to the continuity and cutting of his production before commencing it—and keep these two words continually in his mind whilst he is building it up—how much worry and time he could save in the cutting room.

. . .

The art of cutting is Art indeed, with a capital A, and is of far greater importance than is generally acknowledged.

Reville concludes, "the art of cutting . . . until it is more thoroughly mastered, will prove a holdback to British pictures" (Reville 33-34).<sup>17</sup> At the time the article was written—two years before Hitchcock's directorial debut—Reville evinces a clear vision of editing as a method of achieving continuity, yet advocates for the importance of cutting as "an art and technique" of alchemizing a cinematic "drag" (one of "many pitfalls into which it is very easy to slip" when

editing) into a “snappy” film, indicating her interest in aesthetically unconventional blade work as well (Reville 32-33).<sup>18</sup>

Reville was Hitchcock’s closest creative advisor throughout his career, one whose consultation he deemed critical to his work.<sup>19</sup> Their collaboration was initiated through the function of cutting when, as an assistant director, Hitchcock hired Reville as an editor on *Woman to Woman* (1923). Her creative sensibilities with regard to editing led to a dispute on their next film together, Hitchcock’s first as a director, *The Pleasure Garden* (1925). According to Patricia Hitchcock O’Connell in her biography of Reville, “Following the end of filming, my parents had their first—and rare—disagreement. It had to do with the editing of the picture, which my mother supervised; my father said it was ‘flashy’! What I believe he meant was that the scenes were more edited than usual. With her editing skills, Alma had made the film more dynamic but might have overdone it a bit” (O’Connell and Bouzereau 42). A cutting-edge sensibility may have been natural to Reville; Morris notes that subsequent films on which she worked with other directors contained inventive visual sequences as well (20-22).<sup>20</sup> Although Hitchcock’s knife-wielding women are not figurations of Reville (who was also an accomplished home chef), her work and that of her female colleagues constitutes a significant historical basis for the alliance of innovative editing and the feminine in his films.

Through the site of indigenous cultural production, Hitchcock’s work both recognizes and opens up an aesthetic space for penetrating women, one not only acknowledged in the industry and experienced firsthand behind the scenes, but through his work manifestly inscribed on screen. Informed by the conditions of early film production and authorship, in reflexive displays of superlative women’s knife skills through cutting-edge sequences, the director’s films pointedly speak in the lexicon of a vital female voice—significantly, when the most is at stake

cinematically. Menacing as it may be to male narrative dominance and masculine Establishment conventions of domestic culture at home and in the cinema, female bladework bears the responsibility of cleaving apart the patriarchal order to advance screen artistry. Historically, in the film industry, women's original investment in the cut was foreclosed by men, who largely assumed the position of film editors in the sound era. However, in Hitchcock's work, women remain endowed with the incisive power of an aestheticism unavailable to men—except by plumbing the female imagination. In effect, women's artful knife skills etch a piercing, feminine inventiveness into Hitchcock's work, cooking up what the opposite gender cannot.

#### Endnotes

1. Other Hitchcock works containing culinary-affiliated perils and macabre exhibitions include *Shadow of a Doubt*, in which the evening meal becomes a locus of anxiety for Charles Oakley as his niece, in the course of clearing away and serving dishes, insinuates that she is aware of her uncle's hidden identity as a serial murderer; *Notorious*, in which Alicia unappetizingly hacks at a partly burned chicken that she has roasted for a romantic dinner with Devlin; and *Frenzy*, in which the cooking experiments of the Chief Inspector's wife result in visually and gastronomically unpalatable dishes for her husband.
2. Although not associated with the kitchen, domiciliary cutting equipment is employed by a woman to kill a masculine adversary in *Dial M for Murder* (1954), when Margot Wendice fatally stabs her would-be male strangler with a pair of scissors in her London flat. Wendice's bladework is doubly allied with innovative cinematic practices and female domesticity as well insofar as the visually climactic moment of this 3-D film (Hitchcock's sole foray into the then-new technology) occurs when Margot, lying on a desk with a stocking tightened around her throat, reaches straight back towards—and seemingly into—the audience to grab a pair of sewing shears, which she plunges into her attacker's back.
3. Though little of her work survives, evidence suggests that the archetypal vamp, Theda Bara, was associated to some degree with bladework and sharp edges. Some publicity stills (including Bara as the title character in *Cleopatra*) picture the actress poised with knives and emphasize her elongated, sharp fingernails. Further, Bara wields a knife in the few surviving seconds of *Cleopatra* (1917). Gertrud Koch notes that the vamp is “in some cases even stylized into a phallus. Tailored dresses were exceptionally well suited for this purpose. They enwrapped the body like a luminous second skin. In a similar style tight caps often adorned the head to emphasize the rod-like form.” “Why Women Go to the Movies,” *Jump Cut* 27 (July 1982) 51-53. <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC27folder/KochonWmSpectship.html>

4. See, for example, identifications of iconography associated with the femme fatale and other threatening women in the following: Janey Place, "Women in Film Noir," in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London: BFI Publishing, 1998) 54; Chris Straayer, "Femme Fatale or Lesbian Femme: *Bound in Sexual Différance*," in *Women in Film Noir* 155; and Krin Gabbard and Glen Gabbard, "Phallic Women in the Contemporary Cinema," *American Imago* 50:4 (Winter 1993) 421-439.

5. Needless to say, Hitchcock's work is rife with pop-Freudianism as well. With regard to weaponry, women bearing sharp instruments—indigenous and otherwise—are not, of course, otherwise absent in cinema (e.g., the title character in *Cleopatra* [1917] as noted above, the dagger-bearing Lady Macbeth in Orson Welles' *Macbeth* [1948], the kitchen knife-wielding femme fatale in *Fatal Attraction* [1987], and the hypodermic needle-equipped nurse in *Misery* [1990]). However, Hitchcock's oeuvre continuously and from an early date situates female bladework in a specifically naturalized setting.

6. This interview, conducted by Warhol and others, was originally published in *INTERVIEW* magazine, September 1974.

7. Hitchcock explained, ". . . in the picture *Rear Window*, James Stewart is a photographer, so naturally he fends off his attacker with the use of photographic material, such as a flash gun. That's only because it is indigenous to him. As much as I possibly can, I always insist on using those elements that belong to the character and involve them in the actions of the story." This interview, conducted in 1970, was originally published in *Dialogue on Film*, no. 5, American Film Institute: Center for Advanced Film Studies, 1972.

8. The sequence does not exhibit Mrs. Verloc slicing the meat, although this action is implied. When she lifts the cloche, the roast is in one piece and she picks up the carving knife and fork. The montage then cuts away to a shot of Mr. Verloc and, when it cuts back to Mrs. Verloc, the meat is carved.

9. This essay was originally published in *Footnotes to the Film*, ed., Charles Davy, in 1937.

10. The alliance of women's knifework with the deeply imaginary is manifest through the portrayal of Alice and Mrs. Verloc in trancelike states literally envisioning the knife (in the montage depicting Alice walking the streets of London) or considering its implications (as both Alice and Mrs. Verloc deliberate upon the knives in their hands at the family table).

11. In *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, Modleski points out how the "devouring, voracious mother" is a menace that repeatedly surfaces in Hitchcock's films, embodying the anxiety (identified by structural anthropologist Levi-Strauss) inspired by "the common cultural 'equation of male with devourer and female with devoured' [which] may be intended to reverse the situation man most fears": sexual absorption by the woman of the male's "vital force." In any case, Modleski argues, "the identification of male with devourer and female with devoured may not always have the psychic effect of negating the imagined ability of the female to absorb the male, since food is frequently endowed with the power to transform the eater into its likeness. You are, after all, what you eat." (106-107.)

12. Smith further points out how this dual visual and aural proclivity initially surfaces in *Blackmail* (97).

13. Hitchcock further explains with regard to his use of montage associated with the woman's cut, "We can have pieces of film that are put together to create an idea, or the pieces of film that are put together to create an emotion. Now the bathtub scene was an emotional putting together of film . . . an expression of extreme violence. Now also in *Psycho* you had a scene where the detective was coming up the stairs. Now the audience knew that there was a menace around. A monster. So he came up the stairs and when he got to the top of the stairs, I took the camera very high, extremely high. So that he was a small figure. And the figure of the woman came out, very small, dashed at him with a knife. And the knife went out, and we're still very high, and as the knife started to come down, I cut to a big head of the man. And the knife went right across the face. . . . Now that's juxtaposition of pieces of the film to create emotion." (Gottlieb 289.) This interview was originally published in *Cinema 1*, no. 5 (Aug.-Sept. 1963): 4-8, 34-35.

14. The entire scene is approximately 5 minutes in length; it takes approximately 3 ½ minutes to kill Gromek.

15. Despite the characterization of women editors in *The Motion Picture Studio* and in Reville's writings in the 1920s, during the previous decade, according to Morris, editing "was not seen as a creative job; the role of the editor was usually to physically cut and splice the film according to the . . . [director's] specifications, and this is perhaps one reason why so many women were able to find work in this capacity." (4)

16. Reville began working in the film industry in the mid-1910s.

17. This article was originally published in *The Motion Picture News* on January 1923 (10), three years before Reville married Hitchcock. Morris points out that the article's discussion of the necessity of the director working with "a continuity writer, who has an experienced knowledge of cutting" anticipates Reville's forthcoming association with Hitchcock (Morris, 9).

18. Nonetheless, Reville cautioned against editing that "results in a flashy picture" (33-34).

19. See, for example, Patricia Hitchcock O'Connell and Laurent Bouzereau, *Alma Hitchcock: The Woman Behind the Man* (New York: Berkley Books, 2003).

20. In the films of the 1920s cited by Morris in this particular regard—*The Constant Nymph* (1928), *The First Born* (1928), and *A Romance of Seville* (1929)—Reville was responsible for scriptwriting or continuity. Ironically, although Reville was not only a film editor but, among her other capacities in the early film industry and on Hitchcock's films, an assistant director and screenwriter, she is largely remembered for her credited "continuity" on Hitchcock's films of the 1930s, a public image of a woman subsuming the innovative into cohesive treatments satisfying the mandates of classical cinema.

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## When a Weirdo Stirs the Pot: Food and Masculinity in *Ratatouille*



**Fabio Parasecoli**

In the summer of 2007, an unusual new character joined the selected elite of celebrity chefs, making a sudden and remarkable appearance on the silver screen and in the imagination of audiences interested in food and cooking: the rat Remy, the protagonist of the smash hit *Ratatouille* (Brad Bird and Jan Pinkava). Within a two years period, four other feature-length animated movies hit theaters in the US and all over the world, apparently sharing a similar focus on eating and ingestion: *Bee Movie* (Steve Hickner and Simon J. Smith, 2007), *Kung Fu Panda* (Mark Osborne and John Stevenson, 2008), *The Tale of Desperaux* (Sam Fell and Robert Stevenhagen, 2008), and *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (Phil Lord and Chris Miller, 2009). Their plots develop around common themes of masculinity, coming of age, tensions between parents and children, and food as a tool of self-expression and personal assertion, unfurling against backgrounds and dynamics affected by not overtly addressed but nevertheless significant class issues. Through their focus on food preparation and consumption, these stories also deal with powerful and widely popular topics such as friendship, love, and community. These elements set them apart from other successful animated works from the same period, including the sequels and spin-offs of already established franchises like *Toy Story* and *Shrek*, the visually groundbreaking *Beowulf* (Robert Zemeckis, 2007), and the academy-award winning *Wall-E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008) and *Up* (Pete Docter and Bob Peterson, 2009). Furthermore, *Ratatouille* and the other food-

related animated movies introduced an original visual approach to products, dishes, and cooking, illustrated with extreme care and attention to detail that signals food's centrality in the plots and in the protagonists' personal growth. To a certain extent, these movies display the popular aesthetics referred to by some critics as "food porn," which favors extreme close ups, amplified sounds, and the attention to glistening and textured ingredients (McBride).

This article aims to unpack the connections that narrative and visual elements in *Ratatouille* establish between food, status, and different models of masculinity, and the ways the film engages viewers about what it means to grow into being a successful—and, more specifically, male—adult. Cooking and eating offer viewers untapped opportunities to reflect on the ideas and behaviors that constitute acceptable masculinities, also in terms of prestige and respect. What matters is not only the food that protagonists enjoy and ingest, but also the norms, values, and practices about eating they embody, especially in terms of gender and class identity.

It is in fact the reflection about what can be considered normal, and to what point society can deal with disruption and unique individuals, that constitutes the core of the movie. Food assumes important emotional values, allowing a weird character to express himself, but at the same time to participate in the advancement of his community. By dealing with an aspect of life—eating—that is often perceived as simply innate and motivated by biological needs, *Ratatouille* naturalizes cultural bias, social dynamics, and power hierarchies by turning the negotiations and the tensions that underpin them into entertaining adventures. This ideological move is particularly relevant as an important segment of the target audience is constituted by children, who might mimic some of the behaviors they see performed by their beloved characters.

## **A Spectacle for Foodies**

In *Ratatouille*, as in the other food-related animated movies of the same period, not all the protagonists are actually human. Far from being surprising for filmgoers, the presence of animals has been quite common in animated films since their inception, from Winsor McCay's charming Gertie the Dinosaur in 1914 and George Harriman's 1916 shorts featuring Krazy Kat (Bendazzi). Their appearance did not constitute a huge cultural break, as traditional children's fables and folk stories often feature talking and thinking animals (in particular rabbits, rats and mice) due to their familiarity and their enduring presence among humans. However, it wasn't until the arrival of Mickey Mouse, created by Walt Disney and Ub Iwerks in 1928, that a rodent acquired a definite personality and stole the scene. Over time, the mouse became the symbol of a whole media empire (Giroux and Pollock). While the Disney character presents heavily anthropomorphic traits, the rats in *Ratatouille* maintain their animal shape and movements. At the same time they are endowed with opposable thumbs and very expressive eyes and mouths that allow viewers to better understand their actions and feelings. By projecting conflicts and tensions onto sentient beings that are not human but are similar enough to allow identification, the movie maintains its dramatic energy and its emotional impact without forcing viewers to directly address uncomfortable issues.

The other defining element in *Ratatouille*, food, is also a mainstay of animated cartoons. It has been used not only to create funny situations and provide for unadulterated physical comedy, but also to push the plot ahead, outlining characters, and allowing emotional interactions among them. Eating is a truly universal activity, with enormous emotional and cultural power, and it is able to elicit visceral reactions and passionate opinions. The familiarity of food and the practices related to it facilitate the viewers' identification with the characters and events they see on the screen. In particular, children can immediately relate to food out of personal experience even when other topics and jokes—

directed to the adult viewers who take them to the movies and buy DVDs for them—might go over their heads.

To optimize the impact on younger consumers, cross marketing promotes popular cartoon characters through figurines in fast food meals, gadgets, food packaging, food advertising, and commercials.<sup>1</sup> An interactive website was dedicated to *Ratatouille*, which was also promoted through social media (Gutiérrez San Miguel, Aclé Vicente, and Herrero Gutiérrez). The toy company Mattel marketed a *Kitchen Chaos* playset including culinary instruments and accessories, and a less gastronomic *Sewer Splashdown* playset focused on Remy's adventures in the underbelly of Paris. LeapFrog® Leapster® released a *Ratatouille*-themed learning game aimed at helping children learn to “sort food by color and food group” and “learn recipes to help Linguini prepare a great meal,” while THQ issued *Ratatouille: Food Frenzy* for Nintendo DS and *Ratatouille* for the other game systems, to mediocre reviews. The well-planned transmediation, motivated by commercial interests, multiplies the interactions between children and the movie's character, potentially reinforcing the impact of the gender and class dynamics embedded and naturalized in the story.

*Ratatouille* was popular beyond children. Released by Pixar Animation Studios for Walt Disney, the movie became an immediate global hit, earning over 47 million dollars in its opening weekend in July 2007. Produced with an estimated budget of 150 million dollars, it grossed a total of almost 616 million dollars at box offices worldwide (IMDB), which suggests that adults—who ultimately pay for movie tickets—reacted positively to its content, narrative, and visual style. The movie does contain situations, puns, and double entendres that most children would not necessarily understand or find interesting, indicating the filmmakers' intention to connect also with grown-ups as important targets. We see similar adult-oriented material in most successful animated movies released in the past few years. In fact, in the last two decades adult audiences have shown growing interest in cartoons as a

visual medium, as the establishment of the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature category in 2001 and successful TV series such as *South Park*, *Family Guy*, and the Cartoon Network's *Adult Swim* programming demonstrate. This echoes the role of cartoons in the early days of cinema, when animated shorts were produced as adult entertainment and often used as accompaniment to the main feature movie.

At the same time, food—the main focus in *Ratatouille*—has enjoyed a renewed and sometimes novel interest across all media, reflected in the success of TV celebrity chefs—incidentally, mostly male.<sup>2</sup> Food is increasingly visible in contemporary Western popular culture, influencing the way we perceive and represent ourselves as individuals, as consumers, and as citizens. A growing literature is dedicated to explore how food frequently finds itself at the center of communication and of significant social interactions, functioning as a relevant marker of power, cultural capital, class, ethnicity, race, and gender.<sup>3</sup> Movies are not exempt from a growing presence of food, cooking, and eating, to the point of prompting discussions among critics, scholars, and moviegoers about the possible emergence of a “food film” genre.<sup>4</sup> *Ratatouille*'s narrative reflects the growing relevance of media in the culinary world by including a starred restaurant, a celebrity chef and his TV shows, a popular cookbook, and a powerful food critic.

The movie, besides generating innumerable reviews in newspapers, magazines, and websites, has been analyzed as reflecting the relevance of cooking in the civilizing process (Brandes and Anderson), as an instance of the complex relationship between haute cuisines in France and America (Simpkins), as an introduction to the historical dimension of French culinary culture (Lair), and even as an example of how movies have been dealing with business failure around the global financial crisis of 2008 (Bitetti). In this article, I will focus primarily on issues of gender, and in particular masculinity, as among 15 main characters in the movie, only one is a woman (Michael et al.). Furthermore, many of the emotional and

dramatic elements of the narrative hinge around father-son and male mentor-mentee relationships. I will also explore the movie's negotiation of cultural norms and class, particularly in relation to gender.

Women have been especially prominent in food movies since the mid-1980s, starting from the seminal *Tampopo* (Jûzô Itami, 1985), *Babette's Feast* (Gabriel Axel, 1987) and *Like Water for Chocolate* (Alfonso Arau, 1992). However, the connection between men and food has recently come to the foreground. Movies like *Big Night* (Campbell Scott and Stanley Tucci, 1996), *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* (Peter Greenaway, 1989), *Eat Drink Man Woman* (Ang Lee, 1994), *Vatel* (Roland Joffé, 2000) and *Dinner Rush* (Bob Giraldi, 2000) complicate the connotations of food preparation in both domestic and professional environments. Men prepare food in comedies (*Spanglish* [James L. Brooks, 2004]), gangster movies (*Goodfellas* [Martin Scorsese, 1990]), and romantic dramas (*Mostly Martha* [Sandra Nettelbeck, 2001] and its 2007 remake *No Reservations* [Scott Hicks, 2007]). They eat alone and with other men before a killing spree (*The Godfather* [Francis Ford Coppola, 1972]) and after multiple murders (*Pulp Fiction* [Quentin Tarantino, 1994]). In countless movies, adult and young men share the family table, destroy it, make it into a battlefield, or impose their rule over it. This trend is particularly interesting because, despite the traditional prevalence of men in high-end professional cuisines and the appeal of male celebrity chefs in TV shows, magazines, and books, cooking tasks connected with care work are still often perceived as a feminine and possibly emasculating.<sup>5</sup> Arguably with the exception of the occasional outdoor grilling or weekend breakfast, domestic food procurement and preparation tend to be considered as women's work.<sup>6</sup> In the case of *Ratatouille*, filmic representations of practices, norms, and values about food can establish, reinforce, reproduce, or question cultural assumptions about masculinity and gender relations.

## **There's a Rat in the Kitchen**

The movie manages to combine two elements that would appear otherwise mutually exclusive: rodents and haute cuisine. Country rat Remy is gifted with innate culinary good taste and uncanny cooking skills that put him at odds with the rest of his community, in particular his father, who prefers to steal and feed on garbage. Although he cannot speak to humans, Remy can understand them and read their writing. He is attracted to the humans' ability to approach eating in creative and refined ways, quite removed from simple appetites and instincts. He is especially fascinated by the motto "everybody can cook" from the late celebrity chef Gusteau, whose books and TV shows increase his love for food. When his colony has to abandon its lair because of his culinary mishaps, Remy gets lost in the sewers but ends up in Gusteau's restaurant in Paris. Here he befriends the clumsy Alfred Linguini, a young man devoid of any culinary flair who is content with working as a garbage boy and whose inept culinary attempts allow Remy to reveal his gift. Remy learns how to control Linguini's movements by hiding under his toque and yanking his unruly red hair. The young man can finally cook, although vicariously, and his (but actually Remy's) culinary creations manage to muster attention from both patrons and critics. The restaurant's current owner, chef Skinner, who is only interested in banking on Gusteau's name to launch mass-produced ethnic frozen products, discovers that Linguini is actually Gusteau's son, a fact that not even the youngster knows. Despite Skinner's attempts to hide this fact, the truth comes to light and Linguini becomes a media star, with help from Remy and the tough-but-honest Colette, the only female cook at Gusteau's. Unnerved by the challenging attitude of food critic Anton Ego, Linguini quarrels with Remy and is forced to reveal the existence of a secret animal helper to all the cooks in the restaurant. Everybody abandons him but Colette, while Remy tries to get back at him by allowing the rats from his colony into the restaurant pantry. Eventually, with the collaboration of his fellow rats, Remy saves the dinner service and

prepares a ratatouille for Ego. The simple but perfectly executed country dish reminds the food critic of his childhood, when his mother used to make it to comfort him. Despite Ego's glowing review, the health department shuts Gusteau's down due to the presence of rodents. In the end, the critic finances Colette and Linguini's new hip bistro, where Remy can finally express his talent and the rats can enjoy their own space, where they dine on good food rather than stolen garbage.

This brief plot outline reveals the relevance of food as well as its pervasiveness and visual impact. To ensure detailed representations of dishes and restaurant work, the producers made sure that all talent involved got a good grasp of the material aspects of cooking. As the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported, "For six years, members of Pixar Animation Studios took classes at Bay Area cooking schools and channeled the artistry of Thomas Keller, the chef/owner of Napa Valley's critically acclaimed French Laundry restaurant" (Finz, n.p.). Keller also created the film's modern version of the traditional ratatouille. Sub-surface light scattering, a technique that had been used on the characters' skin in *The Incredibles* makes the ingredients appear translucent, and new CG techniques render the food appetizing and realistic (Neumann). According to a promotional podcast, graphic simulations were conducted on pictures of actual dishes prepared in the studio so that artists could make food relax and drape on itself. Great attention was paid to the textural and optical qualities of steam, heat waves, and bubbling sauces (Ratatouille Podcast #7). *Ratatouille* also experiments with the visual representation of sensory experiences, such as when Remy and his brother Emile taste food and attempt to pair various ingredients. In this occurrence, the movie shifts from lifelike images towards more abstract, but still very accessible graphic renditions of personal perceptions of flavors and aromas.

The movie's worldwide success can be partly attributed to its reception by captive audiences who are fully attuned to the urban foodie culture thriving on media hype, the vast



popularity of star chefs, and food-related issues such as local sourcing, sustainability, and safety.<sup>7</sup> Critic Ego's explanation of the movie's motto "everybody can cook" confirms this connection, which also reflects the dreams of many food lovers to become professionals: "Not everyone can become a great artist, but a great artist can come from anywhere." Remy fully embodies this democratic approach to cuisine, represented in real life by many contemporary celebrity chefs who were not classically trained but use their creativity to explore new paths. The perspective clearly resonates with all those who, feeding on the media frenzy, fancy themselves advanced domestic cooks or want to turn their passion for food into a career (Ketchum). Banking on the widespread interest in kitchen and the cultures that sustain them, as indicated by the ever-growing numbers of TV shows, magazines, and websites dedicated to the topic, the film documents the functioning of a classic French restaurant, the structure of the kitchen brigade, and the role of each of its members with great detail. It pays attention to the intricacies of ingredients and preparations, both from visual and technical points of view. These representations appeal to audiences that have become familiar with these elements thanks to reality shows, books, and social media that erode the front- and backstage nature of the restaurant business, allowing the general public to see what happens inside professional kitchens, where patrons are usually not allowed (Fine). As Gwen Hyman successfully argues, this lack of boundaries empowers customers and food lovers, reducing the prestige that separates them from the stars of the culinary world (Hyman).

Beyond a seemingly democratic approach to food and cooking, the movie embraces French culinary traditions, both haute cuisine and cuisine de pays, as the epitome of good taste and refinement. Remy, despite being a rat, embodies these superior qualities: he is clean and refuses to walk on all fours to avoid soiling food with dirty front paws, a behavior that all well-behaved children should identify with. On the other hand, Remy's rat colony comes across as belonging to a working-class status. Besides being apparently all male, the rats live

in close quarters, near humans but hidden in abject places (under roofs, in the sewers), and proliferate in huge numbers, literally dwelling on top of each other. They are dirty and uncouth, as they feed on garbage, leftovers, and stolen food. They need to be steamed clean and purified before they are allowed to help Remy prepare food in the restaurant. While they understand humans, they are not able to speak to them. This silent and efficient—although unskilled—labor force can be taught repetitive and mindless tasks whose precise completion allows the civilized, creative chef to take on the role of guide and leader. Without a big stretch, one could see in the rat workers a reflection of the quiet, omnipresent immigrant workers who allow the American restaurant industry to thrive, but are often treated as foreign and inscrutable. The embedded message clearly points to taste and food-related behaviors as markers of class distinction.

### **Eat your Way to Masculinity**

In the movie, there is nothing domestic or ordinary about food. Even common dishes like soup and ratatouille allow the protagonist to assert himself as extraordinary in the public sphere of a professional kitchen, traditionally a male domain (Druckman 2010). Remy achieves legitimate and socially acceptable male adulthood by pushing the envelope of established norms. In mainstream popular culture, and in particular in Hollywood blockbusters, masculinity tends to be ideologically presented as an essential, immutable trait that certain individuals possess and others do not. As such, it can also be conquered or taken away from other men. Many movies embrace the narrative of the young man trying to succeed in his goal while proving his worthiness to be considered a “real” man. Scratching the surface of narratives and characters, it becomes immediately clear that masculinity is far from being a solid, unchangeable quality, but it is rather socially and culturally constructed

through negotiations that hinge—among other experiences—on food preparation, food provisioning, eating, and even the fear of being eaten (Parasecoli 2011).

Remy's father, who embodies the resistance to change and the attachment to the past, initially opposes his efforts. Viewers, including the younger ones, can identify with the trials and tribulations of the hero, a growing individual who feels to be different but believes that eventually he will show the world he was right. After all, negotiating one's identity between the ideas and perceptions about oneself and the world's expectations and judgments is an important part of personal development. *Ratatouille* embraces a narrative arc that is quite common in contemporary feature length animated movies, based on characters that achieve self-realization and personal growth outside social expectations. We can identify this trajectory from rejection to total acceptance and from pariah to hero also in animated movies that do not focus on food. For example, in *Happy Feet* (George Miller, Warren Coleman, and Judy Morris, 2006), where the little penguin Mumble cannot sing as he is expected to by the social norms of his colony but can dance really well, and ends up saving the day and, incidentally, conquering his romantic interest. Also in *The Lion King* (Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, 1994) a young lion, who chooses self-exile and congregates with herbivorous animals such as warthogs and meerkats, eventually claims what belongs to him, embracing "the circle of life" of Broadway fame. Interestingly, plots built around heroes asserting themselves as individuals and as males against social pressures often include food, even when it is not the main narrative motif. The ant Z in *Antz* (Eric Darnell and Tim Johnson, 1998) cannot accept his role as worker and guides his community to Insectopia, a place that many thought imaginary but which turns out to be a picnic place where humans leave great amounts of leftovers. Lenny, the vegetarian shark in *Shark Tale* (Bibo Bergeron, Vicky Jenson, and Rob Letterman, 2004), cannot force himself to eat shrimp and other sentient creatures, embarrassing his mobster father and his masculine, no-nonsense brother.

Remy the gourmet rat's passion for French food and his determination to become a chef reinforce the notion that those blessed with special talents have the moral obligation to fully develop them, even if this endeavor makes them go against the advice of their elders and turns them into the laughing stock of their communities. Individuals are presented as sole judges of their own uniqueness, and self-reliance as the core value that can ensure success. This ideal seems deeply embedded in American culture, to the point of being recently critiqued in a much discussed article in the *New York Times Magazine* as a "fetish for the authentically homespun and the American affliction of ignoring volumes of evidence in favor of the flashes that meet the eye, the hunches that seize the gut" (Anastas, n.p.).

### **The Food Adventures of a Social Misfit**

As expected in a story about a hero who asserts himself through a series of obstacles, not everybody appreciates Remy's gift. His father acknowledges his sensitivity for smells and aromas, but only as a way to avoid poison in the garbage and in the stolen foods the community eats. The movie cautions against the use of extraordinary faculties only as tools towards practical and convenient results, rather than as gifts meant to achieve creative and original results. Remy's brother Emile embodies a certain openness to both approaches to talent: he possesses an inkling of what his brother is talking about in terms of flavors and sensations, but at the same time is quite content with his lifestyle. "Food is fuel," Emile states. "If you get picky about what you put in your tank your engine is going to die." Remy has a different relationship with ingestion. We do not see him gorging himself, or simply giving up to appetite. When he first arrives in Paris and he is so hungry he is tempted to steal, the spirit of Chef Gusteau—in many ways, the voice of his own conscience—convinces him to stop. As a matter of fact, eating for Remy seems mostly connected to tasting rather than to

actual consumption: he is not moved by the need for fuel or by hunger, but by the desire to develop his creativity for creativity's sake.

Remy and his brother Emile are also visibly different in terms of their physical appearance. Emile's rotund body does not only suggest his excessive interest in food. In the animated movies that were released at around the same time as *Ratatouille*, including *Kung Fu Panda* and *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*, plumpness functions as a symbol of lack of backbone, reflecting insufficient will power and scarce investment in the advancement of one's community. Scholars have linked these negative associations between body image and moral character to modernist Western culture, which values efficiency and self-control.<sup>8</sup> Body obsessions among males are not a secret any longer, as a trim and well-defined body is increasingly perceived as marker of powerful masculinity and of success.<sup>9</sup> For Remy, girth is not an issue, as eating serves a higher end and conveys creativity and determination. In a way, the rat chef is the fantasy embodiment of the perfect consumer, who can ingest without suffering any consequence.

Chef Gusteau, whom we only see in a TV show and as a figment of Remy's imagination, is instead overweight, reflecting the popularity of portly culinary professionals like James Beard, Emeril Lagassi, and Mario Batali, now increasingly supplanted by a new generation of celebrity chefs who bank on their fit physical appearance to increase their sex appeal. Despite his softness and gentleness, Gusteau offers an acceptable model of masculinity. Besides having a child (although illegitimate), he was also a businessman who ran a successful restaurant, published cookbooks, and expanded his aura of celebrity through the media. On the opposite end of the body image spectrum, the skeletal appearance of the critic Anton Ego points to a more problematic relationship with food. While his professional authority would safely place his masculinity within the mainstream, his excessive preoccupation about ingestion evokes the eating disorders whose growing incidence is now

also acknowledged among men.<sup>10</sup> He angrily barks: “I don’t like food. I love it. If I don’t love it, I don’t swallow.” Allowing him to display intellectual acumen and social power, food is not about the pleasure of the table and social interaction. Only when Remy’s ratatouille breaks all his defenses, does he become a happier man who can finally enjoy eating. Ego eventually finances Linguini’s restaurant, and in the last scene the former critic enjoys the food prepared for him in the establishment he owns. His emotional transformation does not question his masculinity, ultimately confirmed by his new professional role as successful restaurant entrepreneur.

The theme of masculinity, although not immediately apparent, is woven into the movie’s plot, sending not-so-subliminal messages to the viewers. The main events do not take place in a domestic kitchen. Gusteau’s restaurant is not a nurturing place, but a well-oiled machine that produces high quality food for discerning clients. He declares to Remy: “Great cooking is not for the faint of heart. You must be imaginative, strong hearted. You must try things that might not work, and you must not let anybody define your limits because of where you come from. Your only limit is your soul. What I say it’s true, anyone can cook, but only the fearless can be great.” Thriving in a restaurant requires masculine attributes such as determination and nerve. Remy and the other chefs, who seem to hide mysterious past lives, do not express any supposedly feminine traits by using food to nourish others. They embrace professional cooking as the exclusive domain of trained experts, which historically constitutes the basis of the expansion and success of French cuisine.<sup>11</sup> Restaurant kitchens are a testosterone-driven world. As the only female chef at Gusteau’s, Colette angrily acknowledges that “haute cuisine is an antiquated hierarchy built upon rules written by stupid old men. Rules designed to make it impossible for women to enter this world.” Colette has been forced to adapt to these rules, as many female chefs do when they attempt to achieve success in a male-dominated environment (Druckman 2012). Her vehicle of choice is a

motorbike. When she rides it, she wears a black helmet and sleek leather gear, attire that reflects her toughness and differentiates her from women who feed families in domestic environments. When she is given the apparently nurturing task to train Linguini, Colette expresses her resentment. Being the only woman in the kitchen, she cannot commit errors or lose her focus by wasting time educating the young man. Despite his goofy attempts at charming her, Linguini is quickly castrated and put in his place as a loser. Colette feminizes him by comparing his cooking style—slow, confused, and without skills—to that of his mother:

You are wasting energy and time. Do you think cooking is a cute job, like Mommy in the kitchen? Well, Mommy never had to face the dinner rush when the orders come flooding in, and every dish is different, and none are simple, and all with different cooking times but must arrive on the customer's table at exactly the same time, hot and perfect. Every second counts and you cannot be Mommy!

The gender politics of this kitchen clearly privilege a tough, all male, and unforgiving approach to food.

The professional chef's masculinity, strong but refined, is not the only one presented to the movie audience. Within the kitchen, alpha males—whether executive chefs or line cooks—define themselves against weaker ones, in particular the hapless Linguini, who is not able to deal with the sudden transition from garbage boy to celebrity chef and eventually ends up in the more comfortable role of waiter. His being raised by a single mother indirectly suggests the absence of a solid male role model, a plausible explanation of his weakness and lack of professional drive, easily exploited by the evil Skinner, the short and wiry executive chef at Gusteau's. He embodies the stereotype of the French culinary professional, haughty, highly strung, and convinced of his cultural superiority—a cliché also reflected in the royal chef André in *The Tale of Despereaux*, one of the food-centered animated films released

around the same time as *Ratatouille*. Ridiculous and money-driven, Skinner is obsessed with status, a social trait that in the movie is closely related with acceptable models of masculinity.

Remy's contrast with his father, articulated around the fearless pursuit of creativity as opposed to the stubborn attachment to safe and stolid behaviors, is also built around food and class. Happy with garbage and stolen food, and clearly at ease with dirt, Remy's father is content with establishing colonies in hidden places. Remy would like instead to eat food in human kitchens, which his father considers dangerous. The difference between the two is not only a question of adherence to tradition, but once again suggests a class tension between the young rat, bent on achieving his lofty goals, and the older one, represented as unrefined, ignorant, and uninterested in improvement and change.

When finally meeting after a long period of separation, Remy's dad complains that he had lost a good poison checker, and he makes fun of his son, telling him he has lost weight either out of lack of food or excess of snobbery. The father attributes this change to his proximity to humans, who in his mind are not only different but also belong to a superior, although resented, social group. Eventually, Remy's openness carries the day. The whole rat tribe stops stealing food and accepts being steamed clean, undergoing a not-so-symbolic process of purification that allows them to follow the proper—and hygienic—way to relate to food. The rats are no longer starving proletarians feeding on the scraps of the better-off, but they become participants in the bourgeois project of French cuisine. Their scruffy, undisciplined, and underworld style is turned into a more urban, sophisticated masculinity (we are not introduced to any female rats). In fact, in the final scene of the movie, we see them sitting around proper tables eating proper food that has been properly prepared. In the end, Remy's father realizes the potential and value of his son's gift. The presence of the whole rat community in the new bistro displays complete acceptance and even respect for the rat chef and his newly acquired status. From this point of view, Remy and the model of



masculinity he embodies manage to be accounted as socially acceptable through paternal approval.

### **Future Meals to Come**

In the world of *Ratatouille*, successful males define their primacy against the background of lower status males, just like celebrity chefs establish their position by asserting his preeminence over line cooks and armies of busboys and dishwashers. The chef's initiative and creativity acquire visibility when contrasted with the repetitive tasks of kitchen staff. This allows for a seemingly domestic and manual occupation to achieve higher status and social respectability. Interactions around food suggest an alignment between higher social class and successful masculinity, based on prestige and professionalism. Eating and cooking allow unusual characters to express themselves as thriving males, while participating in the advancement of their communities.

The relationship between male characters and food in animated features is a rarely examined aspect within the realm of gender representations in American popular culture. However, it can offer unexpected insights into a dimension of material culture—the complex connections between food and masculinity—that has only recently begun to elicit the interest it deserves in academic circles. By discretely superposing ideological elements onto eating and cooking, movies can naturalize values, norms, and practices that are far from being neutral, simply innate, or motivated by biological needs. Entertaining narratives and catching visuals can disguise cultural bias, social dynamics, and power hierarchies, providing conservative undertones that are increasingly—and dangerously—common in food media and contemporary culinary discourses. Unpacking these dynamics in an important aspect of daily life that everybody experiences, constitutes a relevant theoretical and civic endeavor,

allowing a better understanding of behaviors and ideas informing material culture, and the influence that media can exert on them.

### End Notes

1. See, for example, Montgomery and Chester 2009; Harris, Schwartz, and Brownell 2010; Otten et al. 2012).
2. See Adema 2000; Julier and Lindenfeld 2005; Ray 2007; Swenson 2009; Rousseau 2012.
3. See Inness 2001a, b; LeBesco and Naccarato 2008; Parasecoli 2008; Cramer, Green, and Walters 2011.
4. See Lindenfeld 2003; Bower 2004; Baron 2006.
5. See Hollows 2003; Cairns, Johnston, and Baumann 2010; Scholes 2011.
6. See DeVault, 1991; Shapiro, 2001 and 2004; Avakian & Haber, 2005.
7. See Johnston and Baumann 2009; Lebesco and Naccarato 2012.
8. See Klein 1996; Stearns 1997.
9. See Pope, Harrison, and Olivardia 2000; Parasecoli 2005.
10. See Bordo 1999; Drummond 2002; Gough 2007; Gal and Wilkie 2010.
11. See Trubek 2000; Ferguson 2004.

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## Food, Film, and Friendship



**Julie Tharp**

“Dining with one’s friends and beloved family is certainly one of life’s primal and most innocent delights, one that is both soul-satisfying and eternal” — Julia Child

When my career took me to a small town in Central Wisconsin back in the nineties, I was faced with the task of making a place for myself, of making my work relevant to the people who live here. My area of specialty is multicultural literature, so I have always been inspired and excited by cultures around the world as well as here in the States. In Central Wisconsin, where the diversity runs the gamut from German to Polish, I have had two challenges: one, to sustain my own enthusiasm for and growth within cultural studies; and two, to share that with my largely homogeneous students and community.

My approach to teaching multicultural studies has always been to throw the best party I can, because students respond better to positive engagement than to negative chastisement. These parties must, of course, include food. In fact, food, in my experience, makes emotionally challenging subject matter easier to swallow. We can follow a piece of fry bread from its historical source as commodity surplus food (and consequent replacement of healthy, traditional foods) to its popularity at powwows and feasts, and on into its negative effects on contemporary

Native American health. Indulging in a piece of hot, fried, sugary dough brings the lesson home. It also creates a shared space in which to safely explore its significance. Margaret Visser, author of *The Rituals of Dinner* and other award-winning volumes of cultural history, writes that “We still remember that breaking bread and sharing it with friends ‘means’ friendship itself and also trust, pleasure, and gratitude in the sharing. Bread, as a particular symbol, and food in general, becomes, in its sharing, the actual bond which unites us” (3). When we are united in this implicit bond through the sharing of cuisine and conversation from around the world, we are able to extend our friendship beyond ourselves, beyond our small circle.

Moving beyond my small circle, I have, in addition to offering my regular coursework and organizing our community’s annual Cultural Fair, developed a new class on my campus. My Dinner and a Movie class has specifically targeted adult students as part of a non-credit community outreach program. I have been able to combine my catering experience from my years as a college student, my love of ethnic food and cooking of all kinds, and my film studies background. Further, I have focused my attention primarily on foreign films in an effort to broaden community members’ understanding of global issues, aesthetics, and foodways. The combination of new flavors, new cultures, and convivial discussion has been an enormous hit. My classes fill within the first day they are advertised and usually have double digit waiting lists. While food is an obvious draw for any class, I believe, now that I’ve been doing this for over a decade, that I have hit upon a successful process for engaging students through food and film in order to take them to a new level of understanding and appreciation. The course produces solid, and I might add reproducible, results.

The first decision I typically make when organizing my Dinner and a Movie class is the film. In the first few years, I consciously chose food films, like *Babette’s Feast* (Gabriel Axel,

1988), *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* (Ang Lee, 1994), *Tampopo* (Jûzô Itami, 1985), *Big Night* (Campbell Scott and Stanely Tucci, 1996), and *Like Water for Chocolate* (Alfonso Arau, 1992). These worked fine, but of course there are only so many foodie films in the world. Eventually I branched out to include others, but I had already found a formula of sorts in those first films that seemed to work best: the film must have some degree of complexity for discussion purposes; it must be well made; and it must be life-affirming. Most of my students are women, and they tend to dislike graphic violence and tragedy, not to mention that graphic violence does not whet one's appetite for food. While I love *Pan's Labyrinth* (Guillermo del Toro, 2006), I will never use it for the class, because the violence is too disturbing. A wonderful film like *Antonia's Line* (Marleen Gorris, 1995) ends with a death, but Antonia dies as an old woman, surrounded by the people she loves, the family of misfits she has created and nourished. Most high quality foreign films, furthermore, tend to be dramas which may incorporate family conflict or an isolated tragedy but have an overall positive intent. Because American independent films rarely come to my community theatre, I do show some of them as well, most recently *Winter's Bone* (Debra Granik, 2010) and *Midnight in Paris* (Woody Allen, 2011).

If the films I find have an obvious food tie-in, all the better. This might be a straightforward ethnic dining experience, like Belgian farmhouse food for *Antonia's Line* or Ozarks comfort food for *Winter's Bone*. For *Midnight in Paris* I made use of a cookbook I found years ago, *The Impressionists' Table: Recipes and Gastronomy from 19<sup>th</sup>-Century France* and even made a recipe created by Toulouse Lautrec. The menu stage of my class is possibly the most enjoyable, because I get to research the cooking trends of the region and try out recipes on my official guinea pigs. The latter are long-suffering souls who have eaten everything from a dreadful (and very expensive) chocolate soup recipe to a Ukrainian cake recipe they dubbed the



Battlecake Potemkin, which weighed in around 25 lbs. and could probably feed a Russian battalion. Last winter my family had to cope with four different shepherd's pies in a week, while I sought out the best combination for my *Sherlock* (Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat, 2010) dinner. Researching menus, cooking styles, dishes, and ingredients for films can be time-consuming. It also frequently puts me on the internet, looking for food vendors, or on the road in search of ethnic grocery stores.

When I first started offering this class, I focused less on the food and more on the films and discussions. What I have learned is that people truly desire the rituals of more formal dining and the time they have to converse with one another and ask about the food they are trying. Most of my students arrive for the class at least half an hour early, so that they can get a beverage and appetizer, greet other students, talk to me about the cuisine, and settle into the space. Because of this I have worked harder to create a welcoming atmosphere, often decorated in the themes of the culture we are examining. For instance, for my upcoming film, *Kahaani* (Sujoy Ghosh, 2012), students will be greeted by saris on the walls and tables, floating candles, beaded napkin rings, marigolds, pitchers of mango lassi, and bowls of hot cholar dal. Indian music will be playing softly. Background handouts and discussion questions for the film viewing will be on their dining tables. I try to make the class a multi-sensory event, to provide as holistic an experience as I can, because we do not only learn through our eyes, but also through taste, smell, touch and sound. If I am to open the world up to my students, I have to try to bring some of it to them.

Sometimes I create dining experiences of this sort that are not ethnically themed. When I offered a class on *Incendies* (Denis Villeneuve, 2010) last fall, I was hit with a challenge. The film is French Canadian but written by a Lebanon-born Canadian playwright and largely set in an unnamed country in the Middle East. Because I had recently done two other films from the

Middle East, I did not want to do another dinner from that region. I decided instead to focus on the film's title theme of fire. Our dinner was purified by fire, just like the characters in the film. I decorated the room in a flame theme and served Scorched Shrimp and Bruschetta on Baguette, Blackened Chicken with Fire-Roasted Red Pepper Sauce, Roasted Corn Pudding, Scorched Almond, Raspberry, and Spinach Salad, Roasted Vegetables, and Chocolate and Scorched Almond Torte. Much of our discussion focused on the role of fire as both destructive and cleansing. The scent and taste of the scorched dinner provided an immediate experience of that. Given that the film is emotionally devastating—one student was in fact pretty traumatized by it—the bold food was in some ways critical. It had to live up to the intensity of the film. It also provided a means to enter the thorny topic of religious zealotry which the film depicts as a source of much evil.

On a lighter note, when I presented *Big Fish* (Tim Burton, 2003) this past summer, I focused on the quirky nature of the film and sought out Alabama recipes with odd or colorful names, like Dirty Corn Dip, Pulled Pig, Junk Salad, Mean Butter Beans, and Lazyboy Peach Pie. These were all real recipes, many of them from *The AEC Collection: Favorite Recipes of Alabama Electric Cooperative Employees*. I wanted to create a menu and dinner that expressed the rural Southern Gothic tradition of responding creatively to ordinary life. Our discussion focused largely on storytelling—about the stories we tell ourselves, the stories we embroider for others' consumption, and even the stories we tell about our food through naming and presentation. For another example, when I have offered the film *Chocolat* (Lasse Hallstrom, 2000), I have provided a menu that includes chocolate in every course and a tray of homemade truffles on each table, just in case they need more chocolate. It definitely enhances discussion of the film's theme of indulgence. Similarly, I offered Minnesota cuisine with the film *New in Town*

(Jonas Elmer, 2009). We had meatloaf, green bean casserole, mashed potatoes, three kinds of jello salad, and the film's feature food, tapioca pudding. The film is about ordinary, blue collar workers in New Ulm, Minnesota, so I drew on my Minnesota past for a typical meal. It lent itself to a discussion of the role and type of food in low income families and our cultural attitudes towards that.

Once students are all present and settled in their places, I greet them and offer a toast in the language of the country or region we are studying that evening. I use my training as a foreign language instructor to teach them a new phrase or two. Then I provide background information on the film they are about to view and on the dinner they will be consuming. Last December I offered a class with the film *As it is in Heaven* (Kay Pollak, 2004), a Swedish film nominated for the best foreign language film Oscar in 2004. I wanted them to know about the film's immense popularity in Europe and how it really joined an anti-violence trend within global film. We talked about Swedish culture and the important role of vocal choirs in Scandinavia. I then provided them with background on the Swedish Julbord I was providing—meatballs with lingonberries, Christmas cabbage, Swedish rye bread, Swedish ham, pickled herring, beet and horseradish salad, almond tarts, Swedish apple cake and more—as well as information about typical Swedish ingredients and cooking methods. My students and I have learned over the years that you get to know a lot about a people by the types of food they eat. Indeed there are often foods that I cannot provide—like reindeer meat in this case—that reveal much about the geography and culture. While Swedish food may be fairly familiar to Minnesotans, it is not common fare elsewhere, unless there is an IKEA nearby. When I can, I try to challenge the food comfort zone of my students with at least one dish or ingredient, say Kim Chee or liverwurst. Just a taste is often enough.

Another opening question I typically ask is whether any of my students have travelled to the place where the film was made or if they have connections to it. This often provides surprising results. When I showed *The Lives of Others* (Florian Henckel Von Donnersmarck, 2006) a few years ago, a German film exploring the time just before and after the fall of the Berlin wall, one of the students in attendance shared that he had actually grown up in East Germany and had shocking memories of it that helped us understand the film in ways we never would have otherwise. When I hesitantly asked him if my German dinner came close, he said it tasted exactly like his mother's cooking. I had a similar and even teary reaction from a woman who said my Czech dinner tasted like her Czech grandmother's cooking. Obviously food can carry powerful familial and emotional connections. Some of my students are world travelers and love to share their experiences—food-related and otherwise—in these places. Food, however, seems to provide a universal entrance point into others' cultures and lives, whether we can travel there or not.

Once I have introduced the film and food, students go through a buffet line, find their seat, and settle in to watch the film. I have candles on the tables so they can see well enough to eat when I turn out the lights. I keep the serving tables candlelit so they can get second helpings and drink refills. I do have an intermission for coffee or tea and dessert, and then we watch to the end of the film. Afterwards, I find it helps to invite them to look at my discussion questions and talk at their small tables for a few minutes until everyone has moved out of the film's world and back into this one. Once the groups are lively, I pull them together and ask for questions or observations generated at the tables. Often the discussion goes off in directions that I could never have predicted or scripted. I often need to do very little to facilitate. I only redirect questions or push them further in their analysis.

Occasionally I have specific background information about the film that I would like them to know in order to develop another level of analysis. In my upcoming class on *Kahaani*, I will be withholding some background information until after the film because it could spoil the very surprising ending. *Kahaani* is set in Kolkata during the festival of Durga Puja. This is a five to nine-day festival in honor of the mother of all, the goddess Durga. It is marked by prayer, by fasting during the day and feasting at night, giving gifts to your relatives, and wearing new clothes. Durga is considered impossible to wholly comprehend, but she is notable for being a powerful destroyer of demons. If the world is out of balance, she will restore it by vanquishing evil. She is often depicted riding a tiger. Special foods are associated with Durga Puja, especially sweets, of which I will serve kheer payasam, gulab jamun, and soan papdi accompanied by chai. The role of Durga puts a very different spin on the character of Vidya Bagchi, the main protagonist in the film, played by Vidya Balan. The title name, “kahaani,” translates simply as “story,” putting more emphasis on the mythical backdrop of the film. Vidya’s travels through the festival-clogged streets also bring our attention back to the rituals of Durga Puja. Given that the main character is seven months pregnant, she is obviously an embodiment of Durga. The viewer thinks Vidya is searching for her missing husband, but the ending reveals otherwise. I suspect, like myself, students will want to watch the movie again with this new information in mind.

Another film that relies heavily on background information is *Chicken Rice Wars* (Chee Kong Cheah, 2000). As a Fulbright scholar in Singapore, I was fortunate to meet the Singaporeans who made this film and got to know one of the actors fairly well. More importantly, for understanding the film, I lived there during the Hungry Ghost Festival, the time of the year in which *Chicken Rice Wars* is set. Were I simply to provide a Singapore chicken rice dinner and show the film, I suspect my students would have limited appreciation. Giving them

background on the traditions of the Hungry Ghost Festival makes it a rich and funny film. The basic premise is a Romeo and Juliet plot, with our lovers coming from the families of rival Chicken Rice Hawker Stalls. Chicken Rice, my Singaporean students informed me, is big business. A family could make a very fine living out of one small hawker stall. Having the best chicken rice dish can be a vicious competition. Also, chicken rice is actually served cold in Singapore, a fact not appreciated unless living in the tropical heat there.

During Hungry Ghost month it is traditional for businesses to sponsor various events in honor of the ghosts who wander freely during the dark hours of the month. They create large outdoor altars that are daily stocked with fried chicken, oranges, and muffins, candles lit and incense burning. These tend to be feasts for the island's large population of feral cats, but no doubt a ghost or two is satisfied by the thought. Businesses stage open-air concerts around the island with prime seating in the front rows reserved for ghosts. In the film, one family takes a classic, traditional route of hiring a Chinese opera troupe to perform, while the other goes the contemporary route and hosts a rock band. The vastly different statements again put our protagonists' families at odds. Finally, each family sponsors a feast for their community, trying to outdo each other. The notion of competitive business is not foreign to Americans, but competitive feasting?

At other times, my background information focuses more specifically on the importance of the cuisine I chose. When I offered *Julie and Julia* (Nora Ephron, 2009), I provided a primer on French cooking and the alarming information that the dinner averaged one stick of butter per person. When I offered the film *Raise the Red Lantern* (Yimou Zhang, 1991), a film about a young woman forced to become the third bride to a wealthy Chinese nobleman, I provided a Chinese wedding meal and explained the symbolism of the foods. When I have provided films

based on Shakespeare's plays, like *Much Ado about Nothing* (Kenneth Branagh, 1993) or *Shakespeare in Love* (John Madden, 1998), I have created Renaissance dinners from Francine Segan's cookbook, *Shakespeare's Kitchen*, and taught them a bit about 17<sup>th</sup> century foods and their guest appearances in Shakespearean plays.

The most recent development in my Dinner and a Movie path is my website. Because so many people were requesting recipes and filmographies, I decided to simply create a website where I could provide the information to my students and anyone else interested. The food is definitely the biggest draw for the site, but I also wanted to help people with menus, since that's both one of my biggest challenges and joys. Whenever I encounter a cookbook or website with thoughtful menus, I am delighted, even if I change them up. They express a vision for the meal, even a narrative, and complementary flavors that provide balance and interest. They fit with my notion of dining as event, not just eating.

Ultimately of course, the class (and the website) is about broadening students' perspectives, increasing tolerance and compassion, and teaching visual literacy and critical thinking. I think it's also about pleasure. The classes provide opportunities to find pleasure in a community of learners, trying on new tastes, sounds, and ideas. I like to think that the positive element in their lives has community ripple effects. For instance, one woman who was very outspoken in a discussion on the topic of domestic violence I later recruited to sit on a domestic violence fundraiser committee that I chair. She's now in her second year with us. Two other students have joined the board of our local Cultural Fair to continue the work of celebrating diversity in our community. I know several of the teachers who attend have brought the films to their students. Mothers bring daughters, women bring spouses, and friends bring friends. I know it is not just the food that creates these positive results, but food is critical. I tried offering

community film courses in the past with no food, and only a handful of people came. Food brings us together, with pleasure, and helps us extend that love to others.

Jay Halfond, Dean of Metropolitan College and Extended Education at Boston University, writes in his article “From Kitchen to Classroom” that the explosion of food studies in universities is a reflection of how people are actively looking for ways to make their education more holistic. Food studies bring disciplines together, and they also unify peoples’ lives. Halfond argues, “. . . we have developed a broader public discourse on the nature of food and what this says about ourselves-from the perspective of health, culture, history and even the arts. Gastronomy is both hedonic and cerebral-both pleasurable and revealing about our well-being and social systems” (1). While my Dinner and a Movie classes are certainly humble examples of food studies, my passion for them and the loyalty of my students both lead back to this fulfilling mixture of hedonic and cerebral pleasure, of well-being and belonging.

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## **Food in Film and Media: Opportunities for Engaged Learning**



**Cynthia Baron**

A simple but remarkable fact is that exploring food symbolism and characters' food behaviors consistently enlivens and deepens people's engagement with and understanding of films, television programs, and media in other formats. That is because representations of food and food activities carry dense information about individual experiences, cultural context, and a narrative's underlying point of view. A teacher's attention to texts' representation of food and food behaviors can help students see how the film/media makers orchestrated elements in its audiovisual design to shape audience impressions and interpretations.

Faculty members who explore connections between food and film/media viewing can also enhance students' insights into society's and their own very individual choices about food and film/media consumption. This possibility arises because the many connections between the two types of consumption lead to a film seen in a theatre bearing "some resemblance to a meal served at a restaurant" (Hark 14). With "eating itself is an important corollary to movie-going," in the era before Netflix, the food-film connection was "so strong that most video stores [sold] popcorn (in the microwave format) and candy" (Hark 15).

In film, media, and cultural studies courses, assignments that ask students to describe a text's representation of food and eating allow them to focus on a delimited group of visual and

narrative details. Assignments that ask them to do informal self-studies of their movie-theatre food choices and their television food habits give them illuminating, concrete, and often amusing ways to reflect on their relationship to food, media, and mass culture. Textual studies of food in film/media and ethnographic studies of food behavior, movie-going, and television viewing can sharpen observational skills. As a result, food and film/media assignments can even contribute to courses in screenwriting, acting, directing, and other creative/fine art endeavors. Assignments that develop students' ability to do ethnographic work on food and movie-going practices and on activities surrounding food and television viewing facilitate research that contributes to reception studies and our understanding of film/media audiences.

Despite or because most people have seen hundreds of mainstream movies and spent thousands of hours watching broadcast and cable television, they sometimes cling to their belief that film and media images simply capture and reflect reality. Even if they come to see that film narratives and television programs are shaped by aesthetic decisions, political circumstances, and economic forces, it can be difficult for students to analyze the effect formulas and conventions have on film representations; it can be difficult to grapple with the impact television advertising has on viewers' choices in the marketplace. In addition, it is always possible to miss the fact that some areas of life and human activity are consistently not represented in film and television narratives. Thus, students can feel uncomfortable when presented with questions that ask: what does a particular moment in a film/media text tell us about its target audience; given its depictions, who is included and who is left out of the conversation; how does a certain film or television program lead audiences to care about some things and some characters but not others?

However, by focusing on the network of activities highlighted by the foodways paradigm, students can rather easily see how film/media representations of eating and drinking illuminate

“social interaction, identity construction, and the display and even imposition of power” (Long 143). Given that possibility, this essay outlines a few assignments that direct students’ attention to “the beliefs, aesthetics, economics, and politics involved in food behaviors” that are found in films and television programs (Long 144).

These assignments provide opportunities for students to examine food behaviors that range from procurement and preservation methods to rituals surrounding the preparation, presentation, consumption, and cleanup of meals. With foodways as the focus, the assignments offer tangible and accessible entry points for exploring film, media, and culture. That is significant. While students often define themselves by their film-media tastes, they might not reflect on their preferences and can be uncomfortable with assignments that ask them to examine their own choices and values. Yet assignments that ask students to analyze a film or television program by looking at characters’ interactions during meals help them see the benefit of studying symbolism and cinematic narration—even when they hold fast to the belief that movies and TV shows are just entertainment. Other assignments that invite students to describe their personal preferences when it comes to food and movie-going, or food and television viewing, give them an enjoyable and non-threatening way to approach self-studies of media consumption—perhaps especially when they are concerned that their professor will not understand or approve of their film and television viewing choices.

Film, media, and cultural studies faculty have discovered that the conceptual framework of foodways gives students a vocabulary for analyzing food on screen and off. In addition, when students use foodways as a touchstone in textual analyses, it facilitates coherent readings of individual films and increases students’ understanding of cinematic/media strategies and conventions. Integrating food and film/media studies offers students insights into specific

television programs and episodes. It also enhances their awareness of connections between advertising and programming in broadcast and cable television. When students explore foodways in ethnographic studies of film/television viewing, they increase their understanding of the movie-going experience and the place of film and television in contemporary domestic life.

### **Textual Studies of Food in Film and Television**

One way to introduce students to the study of food and film is to show excerpts of memorable moments in film. Scores of marvelous food scenes can be found in early comedies. There are humorous scenes in shorts such as Max Linder's *The Grass Widower* (1912), which shows the befuddled husband's increasingly disastrous attempts to shop, cook, and clean up on his own. In one scene in *The Gold Rush* (1925), Charlie Chaplin becomes an impromptu food-puppeteer when he casually sticks a fork into a dinner roll and another fork into a second roll, and then proceeds to create a table-top, soft-shuffle dance by transforming the forks and rolls into a dancer's legs and feet. In another scene, Charlie cooks and eats his shoe when trapped in a snowed-in cabin. In another, famished Big Jim McKay hallucinates and sees Charlie as a chicken. Laurel and Hardy's slapstick comedy *Battle of the Century* (1927) concludes with a spectacular pie fight. In Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934), the spoiled runaway heiress (Claudette Colbert) shows she is a good sport when she takes lessons in dunking donuts from the newspaperman (Clark Gable) and that she is becoming more down to earth when she capitulates and eats raw carrots, a food she had refused earlier in the film.<sup>1</sup>

The various aspects of foodways can be studied through lectures, reading assignments, directed discussions, and written reflections on personal food choices and behaviors. Initial presentations and assignments can be followed by group discussions, mock quiz shows, and

individual projects. To illustrate the varied ways that foodways are woven into narratives, one can show excerpts from utopian food films like *Tampopo* (Jûzô Itami, 1985), where characters' interactions surrounding food create community, and dystopian food films such as *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* (Peter Greenaway, 1989), which use characters' troubling food behaviors to represent the disturbed nature of the society and its inhabitants. To explore questions of gender and culture, instructors can contrast scenes from films such as *Tess* (Roman Polanski, 1979) and *Bagdad Cafe* (Percy Adlon, 1987). *Tess* uses food imagery to naturalize Alec's thoughtless and arrogant taking of Tess's virginity, whereas *Bagdad Cafe* uses food imagery to convey Jasmin's evolving sense of selfhood.

Students can also explore the rich variety of films that fall into the gray area between food films (where food preparation, presentation, consumption, and so on are integral to the story), and films that use tangential food images and behaviors simply as "realistic" details and background elements. They can examine ways that food and food activities contribute to a range of genres and subgenres, from gangster and horror films to rom-coms, science fiction, and film noir. Cross cultural studies of food and film/media are especially illuminating. Discussing a number of food-in-film examples helps students better understand the dense meanings conveyed by food behaviors. Examining distinctions between different films' use of food helps them see the belief systems implicit in specific characters' food behaviors. These studies also illustrate that film/media narratives are designed in specific ways and that audience impressions are shaped by: the order of scenes; the time given to individual characters and story elements; the number of times a story element is touched upon; the character who takes audiences through the story and provides the voice or literal point of view; and the characters or imagery that reveal the

narrative's unresolved ethical dilemma, its figurative point of view, and its underlying mood (See Genette 1980, 1988; Bal 1997).

Students can explore the differences between scenes where eating, drinking, and other types of consumption carry symbolic meaning and scenes where they have little more than a decorative role. Students can consider moments when symbolism involves structured parallels and oppositions. For example, in John Woo's film *The Killer* (1989), audiences learn that there are real connections between the killer and the detective because the film intercuts scenes of the two men smoking a cigarette in the same contemplative way. Sometimes, food and drink are used to convey general impressions of wealth or poverty. On other occasions, food behaviors provide insight into a character's psychological or emotional state. In other instances, characters' food selections give audiences information about their social circumstances and ethnic, regional, or national identities (Barthes 1974, 1977).

Students develop a better understanding of foodways and film/media aesthetics when they consider how food and food behaviors figure into a text's audiovisual design. To locate the meaning conveyed when a specific food item or behavior is presented, students will want to recognize that framing choices and camera movements affect viewers' interpretations – a slow track-in to a close-up of a sumptuous piece of chocolate cake creates a very different impression than a shot where that same piece of cake is a dot in the background of the frame. Editing choices shape interpretations of food and food behaviors—Nicolas Roeg's *Walkabout* (1970) establishes an integral connection between “civilized” and “uncivilized” people by intercutting shots of a white Australian butcher chopping up a rack of lamb ribs with shots of an Aboriginal youth chopping off the leg of a kangaroo he has just speared. *Mise-en-scène* elements (color design, lighting design, set design, costumes, props, makeup, actors' appearances, performance

styles) also play a crucial role in interpretations of food and food behaviors. Dialogue, music, and sound design are equally important (See Corrigan and White 2004). As students develop a better understanding of film/media, they will analyze representations of food more effectively. Their analyses will also become more nuanced as they become more experienced discussing cuisine choices, food etiquette, recipe design, eating protocols, shopping strategies, cleanup policies, and more.

**Assignment I:** Ask students to locate a couple of food-in-film examples and then determine if food is integral or tangential to the scene/story. Ask them to consider the effect of the narrative design (its order of scenes, etc.). Have students decide if food has symbolic meaning or simply serves a decorative or commercial function in their examples. Ask them to describe what kind of cultural knowledge is required to notice and understand the food symbolism. Ask students to discuss how food and foodways are presented in a particular scene or sequence. Have them describe how choices of framing, editing, lighting, sound effects, and so on shape audience interpretations of specific food items and food behaviors.

It is very productive to have students share and discuss their clips with classmates. Asking students to write descriptions is also useful. Sharing findings with classmates, through clips or verbal descriptions, allows students to see patterns in film/media narratives and in representations of food behavior and food symbolism. Discussions about what people have found also allow the instructor to ask students to reflect on the aspects of foodways that tend to be the focus versus the aspects of foodways that are rarely shown.

**Assignment II:** Ask students to locate one or more examples of food in television. They can share clips of television programs or write descriptions of their findings. Here again, it is useful for students to compare what they have found with their colleagues. Instructors can help

students examine connections or contradictions between representations of food and drink within a program and the representation of food in the commercials shown before, during, and after the program. Cooking shows provide useful material to study, as do commercials for fast food and weight loss products.

**Assignment III:** Ask students to synthesize the information about food in film and television that has been generated by the class as a whole. Students should be able to build on class discussions to describe connections between representations of food and cultural norms. Teachers can ask students to explain how film/media representations depict relationships between food, identity, and community. Students can discuss patterns in film/television representations that link specific food items or behaviors with characters defined by their economic status, cultural background, gender, sexuality, age, regional affiliation, and so on.

### **Ethnographic Studies of Food, Movie-Going, and TV Viewing**

Students' self-studies of media activities indicate that there are significant connections between movie-going, television viewing, food behaviors, and individuals' experience of "nourishment." Undergraduates' media logs reveal that students' decisions about the films they view at a movie theatre are directly related to the size and timing of a film's television ad campaign. Students' media logs also indicate that watching certain television programs is a necessary part of their day. If they miss certain staples of their viewing day, they feel a sense of loss, discomfort, and undernourishment. Their logs also suggest that the food students choose to eat, and the time they choose to eat, is sometimes determined by television programming. Some people select food that can be easily consumed while watching television or sitting at a



computer, and many feel most satisfied when they eat meals, alone or with roommates, while consuming media.

One way to introduce students to the ethnographic study of food and film/media is to show an excerpt from a film such as *After Sunset: The Life and Times of the Drive-in Theater* (Bokenkamp, 1996). One of the drive-in theatres featured in the film is the Skyview in La Mesa, Texas. The film's segment on the Skyview drive-in shows children enjoying the playground and adults visiting with each other as they wait for sunset and the movie. However, as the interviews reveal, many of patrons are regular customers because of the drive-in's signature sandwich that has chili, cabbage, and pimento cheese-spread sandwiched between two fried corn tortillas. In addition to showing scenes that highlight topics like dinner and a movie, faculty might also review ideas and questions surrounding foodways as student begin to reflect on their own food behavior at movie theaters.

**Assignment I:** Ask students to write about and/or keep a log of their visits to movie theaters during a selected period of time and have them note the part that food played in their movie-going experience. To help students explore the aesthetic, economic, social, and/or political logic for their food choices, ask them to explain their food selections and consider ways that food figured into the meaningfulness of their movie-going experience. Ask them if or how specific food choices were influenced by the other people attending the movie. It could be useful for them to describe their favorite movie food when they went to the movies as a child and to compare that choice with their current preferences. Ask them to write about what they do or do not eat when they go to the movies with roommates, casual friends, boyfriends/girlfriends, or a new date.

It could be useful for students to discuss if or how changes in their financial situation affect their movie food choices; if or how the type of film they are seeing affects their choices; if or how the type of theatre determines their food and drink selection. Class discussion of students' observations can be extremely valuable. When students share their experiences, it becomes possible for them to see that food is an integral component of the movie-going experience and that their individual food and movie choices are often part of larger patterns in movie-going and food behavior.

**Assignment II:** Ask students to write about or keep a log of their domestic food and media habits. Ask students to examine ways that food has been integrated into their media viewing choices, and ways that media viewing has figured into their food choices and experiences. Students should attempt to articulate the logic for their food choices and the connections between meals and media choices. It is useful for students to reflect on their behavior. Are there differences in their food-media behaviors when they are with family, close friends, casual friends, roommates, or steady boyfriends/girlfriends? Instructors can ask students to describe other factors that influence their food-media viewing practices. Here again, it is useful and always amusing for student to share their accounts with the class.

**Assignment III:** Given the prevalence of home theatre technology, it can be useful to have students write about or keep a log of their home theatre experiences and the way food is integrated into those more and less formal events. Ask students to describe their media collections, media systems, and patterns in viewing habits. Building on that information, students can explore relationships between food and home theatre viewing. Ask students to consider ways in which their food and home theatre practices are affected by other viewers. What is different about their food and home theatre choices when they are alone, with roommates, close friends,

boyfriends/girlfriends, classmates, a new date, or at their parent's home? What are the factors that determine food and viewing choices when they view films at home? Comparing accounts of these experiences illuminates ways that people interact with food, media, and mass culture.

**Assignment IV:** Ask students to write about contrasts and connections between food behavior in the context of movie-going, television/media viewing, and home theatre experiences. It might be useful for students to look back at their essays on food in film and television to see if there are points of contact between media representations of food and individuals' food and/or viewing behaviors. Instructors can vary the assignment's length, degree of sophistication, and level of research according to the type of course they are teaching.

### **Concluding Observations**

Connecting the study of food to the study film and media helps students appreciate the meaningfulness of food choices and behaviors – when represented on screen or in daily life. In addition, by using foodways as an entry point to explorations of film and media, instructors facilitate students' understanding of media representations, cultural conventions, and aesthetic formulas. Integrating food, film, and media studies enhances students' awareness of the many factors that shape food and viewing choices. Course activities that prompt students to use representations of food as a starting point for studies of films and media programs give them something tangible and personal to work with. Activities that lead students to use films and media texts to gain insights into people's food choices, behaviors, and activities make those cultural studies fun and engaging. Course work at the intersection of food, film, and media studies helps students at all levels reflect on the cultural and personal dimensions of food and media consumption. Media can influence people's food habits and the rhythms of daily life. It

can also supply a rich source of material for inquiries into the choices that people make about food, film, and media consumption – and thus provide great opportunities for engaged learning.

### Endnotes

1. Students will have many food examples from contemporary film and television programs. To broaden the discussion by using less familiar illustrations, instructors can turn to material from different eras and national cinemas. *Portrait of a Rarebit Fiend* (1906) shows the hallucinatory effects of drinking and over eating. *A Corner in Wheat* (1909) highlights the contrast in food consumption by the rich and the poor. In *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), an early scene shows that maggots in the ship's food cause the crew to mutiny. In *Freaks* (1932), there is a pivotal dinner celebration. *Citizen Kane* (1941) uses a montage sequence of Charles and Emily at breakfast to show the deterioration of their marriage. In *Tom Jones* (1963), eating serves as foreplay to sexual adventure. *The Graduate* (1967) opens with telling scenes of Ben at a cocktail party. In *Women in Love* (1969), Rupert's pronouncements on fig eating inflicts pain on Hermione. In *M.A.S.H.* (1970), Trapper John and Hawkeye reenact the Last Supper. In *Phantom of Liberty* (1974), there is a surreal scene of bourgeois couples at a dining room table seated on toilets. In *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), the sequence of the girls at a picnic establishes their delicate state. *Jeanne Dielman* (1975) shows scenes of cooking and housework in agonizing real time. *King of Comedy* (1983) features a dinner date between Sandra Bernhard and kidnapped Jerry Lewis. In *Life is Sweet* (1990), a bulimic girl makes her boyfriend cover her with chocolate during sex. In *Bedeevil* (1993), a faux cooking show sequence mixes Aboriginal bush cuisine and European high culture to comment on colonial influence. In *Pulp Fiction* (1994), food scenes throughout the film reveal the characters' quirky sensibilities.

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