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Blank Food

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Abstract

Eating is not merely a means of survival, it is tied to the mechanisms, with all the rules and underlying connotations, in establishing social relations: in other words, sociality shaped through shared meals. In this perspective, food presentation plays a fundamental role, acquiring in its appearance an aesthetic virtue. In today’s social imaginary, we ask ourselves: what is the new frontier of food aesthetics? Moreover, assuming aesthetics clearly shows a specific social outlook, what does this suggest on a value basis? The growing ostentation of food and, above all, creative cooking, serve dishes hard to define as ingredients intend to decorate. A culinary experience thus turns into a social ritual of deliberately abrogating the role and logic of nutrition.

Keywords: social imaginary, eating, hunger.

«La bonne compagnie, honteuse d’avoir cédé à un mouvement naturel,
reprit la froideur aristocratique de ses manières polies.»
(Honoré de Balzac, *La peau de chagrin*)

Eating is not merely a means of survival, it is tied to the mechanisms, with all the rules and underlying connotations, of establishing and reproducing social relations, in other words sociality shaped through shared meals. In this perspective, food presentation plays a fundamental role, acquiring in its¹ appearance an aesthetic virtue.

In today’s social imaginary, we ask ourselves: what is the new frontier of food aesthetics? Moreover, assuming aesthetics clearly shows a specific social outlook, what does this suggest on a value basis?

Our argument lies on the knowledge that we are witnessing a radical discrepancy on the concept of man as a social being, if not on his very nature. The consequences this has had on food note a singularity, whereas the causes lie in the furrows Western man has dug in the natural world.

The growing ostentation of food and, above all, creative cooking, serve dishes hard to define: the ingredients merely intend to decorate².

Moreover, the dynamics appear to be in line with some post modern orientations, whereby the makings of history has highlighted a disjunction and a repositioning of the individual who has radically changed his daily habits.

¹ There is a certain reference to the religious procedures in food preparation.

² Just as in the culinary movement *nouvelle cuisine*, developed in France in the 70s, which had the aim of simulating each of the 5 senses, in particular sight, of a new coverage clientele made up of businesspeople. Food portions and the number of courses were dramatically reduced so as to cater for the social needs of the time, and especially for women (http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nouvelle_cuisine). The acknowledged demand was not to eat.

No better suggested in such a course of events are the effects on food with all the implied social implications³. Consumption should not be only limited to its materialistic denotation but also to its symbolical connotations⁴. Therefore, all the more to food consumption.

Firstly, the development of social individualities seems to incline towards an inedited physical subjectivity/objectivity of mankind.

The mainstream in considering the body aesthetically results as a reconstituting mechanism of the social individual affected by a process of fluctuation/fragmentation of personal identity⁵. Thus, the recordable dominance of aesthetics and the centrality of deriving procedures of extreme aesthetics are read as a solution when confronted with the loss (of value) of substances⁶ and ideological breakdowns. New social aggregations are moving towards the aesthetic-hedonistic⁷ where the *sign* seems to display more and more autonomous relevance.

In addition, the body must not only be viewed as a social subject/object, an indispensable piece in the anxious redefinition of the being, but a certain bivalence (the presence of “active and passive forces”) can also be extended to everything that concerns the body itself.

In particular, as we will point out, eating considered as one of the first acts man has accomplished can be viewed, just as the body, aesthetically.

Similar processes have developed in the world of art too. Hebermas⁸ maintained that in post modernity, thematic depth (utopistic revolutionary readings) once conveyed in artistic avantgarde is reduced to a pure esthetic expression (with a marked prevalence of formal over thematic values), so too has post modern food been deprived of its content.

Ultimately, in the social framework in which the (virtual) dissolution of corporeity is inscribed and consumed in cyberspace⁹, we cannot ignore the apparent dissolution¹⁰ in the fuel of the body.

The aesthetic food model of appearing without being¹¹, therefore, is entirely in line with the social image¹² of emptying man of his substance. A parallel can be drawn in the “an explosion of the image” detected by Maffesoli in contemporary everyday life¹³.

As already mentioned, if postmodern society planning is no longer based on a drawing of an overall renewal but is limited to the individual, then hedonism becomes the main force of social interaction. The tendency seems to be pushing borders to their extremes, such as placing pleasure gratification to lead to the triumph of the principle on the criterion of need. Pleasure was once in the service of need, but now it has become a need in itself. It is easy to realize how each one of these considerations is perfectly in line with extreme aesthetics and food enjoyment.

All of this proves how culture codifies the primordial need of eating.

Basically, this persistent estrangement in presenting food conventionally makes dishes and ingredients unrecognizable as such, and even more in the constant procedure of draining the nutritive count¹⁴.

A culinary experience thus turns into a social ritual of deliberately abrogating the role and logic of nutrition. In fact, what else do those wonderful artworks, from Kandinskij to Mirò¹⁵, expose? What do those algid waiters serve up in chic restaurants?

³ To recall Baudrillard, who considered allergies and food problems as disturbances deriving from a neurosis caused by the contemporary age (in J. Baudrillard, 1995, *Le crime parfait*, Gallimard, Paris).

⁴ See D. Secondulfo (2012), *Sociologia del consumo e della cultura materiale*, Franco Angeli, Milan, 2012. On “things in social life”.

⁵ See B. Guidiotti (2007), *Corporeità e salute*, in C. Cipolla, *Manuale di sociologia della salute*, Franco Angeli, Milan, pg. 214.

⁶ Almost a substitution of an aesoskeleton with an original skeleton.

⁷ See M. L. Maniscalco (1989), *Il discorso sociologico sul postmoderno, Introduzione ad un dibattito*, in M. L. Maniscalco – C. Mongardini (edited by), *Moderno e postmoderno. Crisi di identità di una cultura e ruolo della sociologia*, Bulzoni, Rome, pg. 16.

⁸ See J. Habermas (1981), *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp.

⁹ See M. Featherstone, R. Burrows (edited by), 1996, *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, Sage, London.

¹⁰ Complete curtailment.

¹¹ In a way of being without appearing.

¹² Obviously in the light of numerous trends in the social imaginary in the study. Cfr. E. Goffman (1959), *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Doubleday Anchor Books, Garden City.

¹³ See M. Maffesoli (2005), *Note sulla postmodernità*, Lupetti, Milan, pg. 75 (orig. ed.: *Notes sur la postmodernité*, Édition du Félin, Paris). In post modernness there should have been an imaginary world, or a way of being and thinking deriving from an image, from the imaginary, the symbols and the immaterial (ivi, pg. 104).

¹⁴ There is the presence of food but it is not seen in the quantity.

From an aesthetic point of view, food which we are presented with nowadays is undoubtedly something else and from a visual-symbolic angle, so too are the implications.

Even the small portions denoting the new culinary arts (serving, along the lines, “big plates, little food”) bear witness to the flaw in the classical/natural functionality of food, one of which lack is whetting the appetite.

Hence, intentionally expensive food¹⁶ deliberately does not feed the hungry nor does it resemble conventional foods. It must not look like food nor must it serve its traditional purpose.

A dish aims to become a pure work of art: just as there is a commercialization in art (think of Andy Warhol & Co.'s pop art¹⁷) there corresponds a commercialization of food¹⁸ in our so-called society of appearances.

We should not be surprised at the *persistent* interpretation of food as a work of art, which seduces all aspects of our social life, thus becoming cultural¹⁹. If, as a result of the progressive inclination towards a subjectivity in action and communication, daily life can be seen as 'art', there is no need or sense in defining a clear separation between relevant areas.

Before the detected loss of the post modern individual, devoid of constant standing points and won over by underlying forces, the new words of order linked to a culinary-cultural manifest announce the insecurities and the difficulties of living. Furthermore, it translates the concerning acts in 'unspoilt' (and, as such, potentially eternal²⁰) artistic shape, which appear to provide a remedy for the pathological aspects of our entities and tracks their expansion²¹. From this angle, the phenomenon must also be considered as an adaptive response of the opposing forces of society (eat and feel good/abstain from food and be desirable): an oxymoronic “you eat but do not eat”.

Food must not have the guise nor the character of what we are accustomed to. If we highlight its ephemeral essence, the cultural presentation of food can be perceived as sensorial experience (exotic, unconventional, unexpected, and so forth), which alters natural taste. It is sufficient to recall the trends in cooking; exploration in contrasting flavours and ventured original combinations of aliments blend into obscure undefined flavours that jar the traditional, all of which detach nourishment from life supporting needs. The pleasure of eating, once a push button²² in tempting the palate, has become an end to itself²³.

Food is savoured as *sommeliers* taste wine, (noteworthy to point out, wine is spat out in spittoons during the practice of wine tasting).

Additionally, the obsessive attention given to cutlery and pottery design (unconventional forms of cutlery are brought to mind²⁴) suggest the fulfilment of an optical appreciation. Those rapid glances at cooking magazines, gastronomic columns published in newspapers and weekly inserts (just as in those

¹⁵ This is aesthetically in line with the breakdown of the classical representation of the world seen in artistic movements from the 1900s onwards although, in art history, every artist has always searched for his/her own style (and has thus re-elaborated reality as seen by his/her own eyes). Changes are traced in the deconstruction of traditional iconographic forms and in the research of interpreting new formal balances. It is due to this new artistic sensitiveness that, today, cooking is for impact, so cold cuts, *salami* and meat cooked with fruit or vegetables are no longer prepared.

¹⁶ To confirm and re-enforce the *status quo*.

¹⁷ It becomes highly rated with a formal artistic criteria (sharing the same destiny of Dadaism and other anti artistic cultural movements)!

¹⁸ Referring to pervading commodification, in regards to transforming art into products.

¹⁹ See F Jameson (2007), *Il postmoderno, o la logica culturale del tardo Capitalismo*, Fazi, Rome, pg. 87 (orig. Ed.: Id., 1991, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, Durham). This does not imply a total reject, it has been consumed by high and mass culture. The aesthetic art of hiding food, already widespread among aristocratic behavior.

²⁰ As in museums.

²¹ As civilisation becomes more refined, sense perception decreases while feelings of pleasure and displeasure increase. Modern man, who reacts partly sensually and partly aesthetically, cannot empathise with the traditional and one has to consider personal taste: G. Simmel (1989), *Sociologia*, Edizioni di Comunità, Rome, pg. 557; orig. ed.: Id., 1908, *Soziologie*, Duncker & Humblot, Leipzig.

²² It is through food that experimentation for pleasure and novelty are carried out. Taste is essential in food, therefore *ab origine* finalized for survival; an edibility indicator.

²³ «As to eating, pleasure mingles with need, it is not essential to know what is asked for nor what gives pleasure» (Gregorio Magno motto, cited in N. Perullo, 2006, *Per un'estetica del cibo*, Publicicula, Palermo pg. 7, also in <http://unipa.it/%7Estetica/download/Perullo.pdf>).

²⁴ To recall: square and rhombus shake plates, etc.

pages updating culinary trends) all illustrate stunning recipes or restaurant reviews and emphasise a sensorial visual experience²⁵.

Not by chance, those glossy colourful food adverts promote the beneficial properties of food rather than the nutritive. The nourishing contribution of these dishes is surely related to a medical-cosmetic-aesthetic conceptualization of food and not to the traditionally biological one. The vulgarity of food²⁶ is an axiom, perceived as innate primordial²⁷ behaviour controlled by adequate repression. This is in line with anorectic subliminal tendencies in contemporary Western society, where providing for food is no longer a problem. No better evidence is the meticulous calory counting and the display of calories on food packages. Therefore, we must not feel nor show hunger²⁸, so too, in the same degree, we must not feel cold or hot²⁹.

Bourdieu points out that food classifies, classifying the classifiers themselves³⁰. The singular aspect of the aesthetic of food³¹ is a sign or indication of a 'social aristocracy', a symbol placed within elements of communication and individual uses to reveal his/her identity and social position. It should not show nor include the need of food³². This exclusiveness offers consistent defense towards hypothetical criticism on the unacceptability of "unnaturalness" of the option. Moreover, the use of such a form of food qualifies as lifestyle and consumption (aimed at the construction of their image in reference to current models and the related financial resources), being certainly definable as well as fashion and, as such, exempt from any scrutiny in matters of convenience and rationality³³.

In other words, "civilised" man is not sleepy³⁴ or hungry, nor does he sweat. To take it further, sexual excitement is permitted in fitting surroundings and circumstances according to a unique role determined as politically correct³⁵. This is discriminating on human diversities and self-negating, besides hindering the channels towards biological needs and instincts.

The precise diet³⁶ that comes out of this model can also be evaluated as another aspect of a culture-control practice according to Foucault³⁷, so it is always strictly regulated by what the body wants and

²⁵ Referring to traditional and celebration table laying. As regards to ornamental cooking in the 1700s, see R. Barthes (1957), *Mythologies*, Les Lettres nouvelles, Paris.

²⁶ «A true gentleman is not hungry, he engages in a culinary experience». Compare with the Italian expression «il boccone della creanza», meaning a mouthful of food left in your plate to show you have eaten sufficiently and are no longer hungry. See Idelfonso Neri (1891-1894), *Cento racconti popolari Lucchesi*, Raffello Giusti, Livorno, for «Il boccon della creanza (dicono anche: della vergogna) è quel molto o poco o pochissimo che si lascia nel piatto, quand'uno è a mangiare a casa degli altri, perché non è creanza finir tutto. Colla fame piuttosto bisogna rimanere, ma il boccone della creanza va lasciato! Se no, uno parrebbe troppo lupo, che non avesse mai visto grazia di Dio; o piuttosto parrebbe che non avessero fatto roba assai per tutti, e sarebbe uno scorno per la famiglia» and Theodor Adorno (1951), *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*, Suhrkamp, Berlin, for «... at the table you must not swallow the last mouthful or empty your glass. Otherwise you are suspected of being poor».

²⁷ Referring to a proletarian. The impoverishment of a dish goes hand in hand with the enrichment of the beneficiary.

²⁸ Referring to those drugs used to appease hunger.

²⁹ With regards to Western countries, it is custom to witness women underdressed in winter and men overdressed in summer. The former hold back their discomfort and embarrassment by abusing alcohol, the latter by switching on the air conditioning.

³⁰ See P. Bourdieu (1979), *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement*, Édition de Minuit, Paris.

³¹ See H. R. Jauß (1979), *Rezeptionsästhetik und literarische kommunikation*, in *Auf den Weg gebracht: Idee und Wirklichkeit der Gründung der Universität Konstanz*, Univ.-Verl., Konstanz.

³² Signals give a number of opportunities to send particular messages. If food is treated as a signal, then the message it sends in codes is to be found in social relations. The message is about the various included and excluded hierarchy levels, boarder lines and crossing boundaries. As with sex, food consumption has a social factor as well as a biological one. See M. Douglas (1985), *Antropologia e simbolismo. Religione, cibo e denaro nella vita sociale*, Il Mulino, Bologna, pg. 165; orig. ed.: Id. (1975), *Implicit Meanings. Essays in Anthropology*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London; Id. (1982), *In the Active Voice*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

³³ See G. Simmel (1898), *Zur Psychologie der Mode. Sociologische Studie*, in *Die Zeit. Wiener Wochenschrift für Politik, Volkswirtschaft, Wissenschaft und Kunst*, Band 5, nr. 54, pg. 22 ss.

³⁴ Due to drinking coffee and other stimulating legal substances.

³⁵ Practicing policies of the politically correct often leads to a number of prohibitions rather than to a multitude of liberties. Moreover, it arbitrarily states the negative, explicitly or implicitly, of what one wants to linguistically hide.

³⁶ As regards food models, see M. Douglas (in *Structures of Gastronomy*, in *Report 1976-77 of the Russel Sage Foundation* and in Id., 1966, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London), who accordingly considers food and cooking as being cultural: the individual formed out of culture has access to a predefined sensorial universe.

³⁷ See M. Foucault (1976), *Histoire de la sexualité, 1: la volonte de savoir*, Gallimard, Paris.

likes. What is more 'intimate' and part of daily living than eating?³⁸ Therefore, we are witnessing another form of the social body. Undoubtedly, control cannot be taken into account solely in respect to a political end, but it should also be deciphered in a consumer-related perspective³⁹.

Along these lines, there transpires a *de-bodying process*: depriving the body of its identity. This was already under way before the computerised informational decline of our identity and redefined male and female styles avoiding dominant primate characteristics⁴⁰.

Retreatment from nature also mirrors a diachronic change in some stereotypes: for instance, the androgynous give us the freedom to model the boundaries of male or female features to our likings. Even their eternal childhood look conveys a voluntary repudiation of age. Actually, we are disengaged by the flow of time since when we overcame rural culture and crossed over to an industrial-urban society⁴¹.

Noteworthy, retrieving biological factors advances process of culturally improving the species, is an umpteenth wedge in the post enlightenment civilization process. In this logic, the alteration and abrogation in the classification and classical function of food provokes a conflict from an anthropological point of view, more than what appears in *prima facie*. The contrast with "good old food" would be part of the everlasting struggle "rebel man"⁴² has engaged against nature (opposing God the creator) and against nature's inescapable aftermath⁴³, all of which end in breaking down against him.

The mind-set of having difficulty in recognising foods⁴⁴ in the dishes we are presented with and which have been purposely deconstructed⁴⁵ is related to the theme of "the sterile society". Aliments are increasingly leaving no trace that they were once "alive": in the frame of thought of an unnatural civilisation, fruit and vegetables automatically materialise on shop shelves. Foods of animal origin are a key factor to psychological suppression – the killing of an animal is no longer considered within the lines of physiological dynamics of nourishing chain webs, where death and pain are not conceived as reprobating, but judged as cruel and consequently squeamishly hidden⁴⁶ (ideally disclaimed and systematically removed).

Drawn between genial creativity and grim arrogance, (aesthetic⁴⁷) food manipulation conveys a deeper fracture in traditional evaluations of our needs and how we go about in fulfilling them. On the other hand, from a different point of view, conventional food looks "obsolete"⁴⁸ and at the most it is considered a medium to restrain a troublesome daily necessity⁴⁹, in concordance with the little time, and deadlines our society impose.

If food is considered as in the senses, the speed it is consumed becomes a sensorial speed itself. This corresponds to the inclination towards speed in conceived in post modern times, which could not have brought consequences on the ritual of food in everyday life.

³⁸ Goes beyond sexuality.

³⁹ See M. Featherstone (1991), *Consumer culture and postmodernism*, Sage Publications, London and Id. (1982), *The Body in Consumer Culture in Theory, Culture & Society*, 1982. See also B. S. Turner (1996), *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory*, Sage, London.

⁴⁰ Suggesting the aesthetics of removing manly virile characteristics, shaving and eliminating unwanted hair. In this play-game, age is ambiguous, the aesthetics in women is non-functional: think of high heels and long fingernails, which are inappropriate in daily chores.

⁴¹ According to Weber's interpretation in his essays on *Sociology of religion* (M. Weber, 1920-21, *Zwischenbetrachtung*, in Id., *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Band II, Mohr, Tübingen), modern man endures the meaningless of death, seen as an invincible obstacle, in his cultural quest of perfection. Only the rural man – like Abraham – may die full of years and satiated of life, in harmony with life cycles and apart from unnatural transcendent tensions.

⁴² A. Camus (1951), *L'homme révolté*, Gallimar, Paris.

⁴³ M. Pascoli (2010), *L'assessualità*, Giappichelli, Turin.

⁴⁴ Food unrecognizability would be in contrast with the theory maintaining that form and color factors indicate body parts to which it would be beneficial, e.g. walnuts for the brain, tomatoes for the heart, milk for bones and wine for blood, etc.

⁴⁵ Referring to "Astronaut pills", these are essentially nutritive.

⁴⁶ Considering death as a prohibited argument in conversation. Just as taking care of the dead during burial rites is no longer part of community practice (even within families), with the exception of professionals.

⁴⁷ In other cases and in other aspects, instead, it is substantial.

⁴⁸ In the same way, walking has become outdated: especially in the advanced world, where jogging is the vogue, legs are not used for commuting but the car.

⁴⁹ Widely circulated frozen and instant food are to fulfill such moments.

Food in everyday life is placed, then, as an ephemeral background⁵⁰ (similar to when the television is always switched on, and only glimpsed at casually⁵¹). The image and consumption of food are seen as forms of “entertainment” (just as television images are meant to entertain, and keep us distracted from contemporary affairs, regardless of our choices however sensible they may be). Even this suggests that eating no longer has its social importance.

Little food consumed in a short time. More precisely, when a small amount of time is dedicated to it, on exceptional occasions or moments of our worldliness, it is not given to food itself but to what surrounds it.

Furthermore, it is coherent, when considering our consumer society, that with the excess food at our disposal⁵² – on the basis of the data increasing as resources become scarcer – you decide to consume less in substance, but more in the form (those that consumer markets propose and impose).

In the light of the considerations discussed so far, we have insight on how the classic portrait of the fleshy woman in the “First World” lost her connotations of being an object of desire gratification and wealth-well wishing and so vice versa, how the trimmed woman (“chiseled” to use the term adopted by Renaissance humanist Leon Battista Alberti in his essay *De Statua* in 1400), esthetically resembling the statues of the 20th century Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti, emerged.

To reinforce our discourse regarding the themes of de-humanization and biological deconstruction, our considerations advance on shifting food consumption from trivial needs (reversing the precious material) to meaningless fun and the “mundane”, along the lines of philosopher George Bataille’s (sacral) conceptions⁵³.

Nevertheless, without doubt the accent on taste peculiarities and eating behaviours are direct signs of group identities⁵⁴ and is a social binding agent⁵⁵; it is within this context, conservative and innovative aspects of food are to be read⁵⁶. Socially, shared meals acquire a specific importance⁵⁷: times of eating, the order in which plates are served, who serves, the speed in which serving must occur, eating manners during meals and so forth.

If we were to weaken food appearance, inevitably this would produce effects even there where it is backed.

Akin to food disappearance, the dining table is increasingly being abandoned and replaced by counter stools, benches, pedestal tables and cooking islands. Kitchenettes replace whole kitchens, having become the heart of the home around which daily activities evolve. The dining-room table is no longer the place of “getting together” and “talking” *par excellence*, and this is analogous to the crumbling of the traditional family⁵⁸.

However, it is relevant to mention that working hours, especially those of temporary workers, along with new modalities in organized intellectual work⁵⁹, are not compatible with (long afternoon) lunch breaks⁶⁰. Customary, down to earth, *real* food does not bond anymore.

However, what should be kept in mind is that the process indicated cannot be interpreted only as a result of the reorganization of the apparatus of society, but is also readable as predilection (however widely and socially constrained) of the individual.

Meals in vogue today must be far from the “canteen food” (the one served in factories, offices, schools and hospitals, or linked to the unique individual, included in specific institutional roles, that in

⁵⁰ To consider: food for television, that is food conceived to be eaten while lying down on the sofa and television. A custom widely practiced in North America.

⁵¹ Has been replaced by the radio.

⁵² On food waste in Italy, see A. Segrè, L. Falasconi (edited by), 2011, *Il libro nero dello spreco in Italia: il cibo*, Edizioni Ambiente, Milan.

⁵³ G. Bataille (1967), *La part mandite*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris.

⁵⁴ On the subject, see Steven Pinker. In the field of anthropology, food prohibition is practiced in rival tribes.

⁵⁵ Food prohibition in religion is considered functional, having a means to an end.

⁵⁶ For further reference on food taboos, see the blog: <http://bizzarrobazar.com/tag/cibo/>.

⁵⁷ Symbolically, referring to religious food in rituals.

⁵⁸ In contrast is the Neapolitan Sunday, when the extended family gather and remain at the table, willingly. The changes in the traditional Mediterranean family have inevitably produced their due effects.

⁵⁹ Related to middle class families and newly hired office white collar workers or intellectual professionals.

⁶⁰ The number of Canteens have been reduced due to the general withdrawal of trade union activities.

other times would have been called, in the words of Goffman⁶¹, “total”). Likewise, if we were to decide to cut the umbilical cord that binds us to our origin, and which so indispensably feeds, it would free us from food as “family”⁶².

Food, real food no longer unites⁶³. New social rituals are to be found in drinking, widely alcohol (and hard liquor, according to a North American pharmacological society, in which alcohol is used as therapeutic sweetener to overcome daily inconveniences⁶⁴ in addition to instantly⁶⁵ reinforcing social and relational competences), during daily occurrences which do not aid biological needs (but abide consumer demands⁶⁶). On these occasions, gulping down finger food is as practical as drinking alcohol; primarily not to nourish. To a certain extent, it suggests a “collateral effect”: it is not refused nor requested.

Therefore, it is in the *lounge bar* and no longer in the tavern that in drinking, eating, fighting out hearty entertainment⁶⁷ (participating in the same psychological and physical experiences⁶⁸) and satisfying the senses we show our submission to life’s *diktats*.

In board and lodgings, there is the ready-made meal: usually Oriental⁶⁹, especially Japanese (which has different functions⁷⁰ in Japan, and can be compared to other cultural traditions⁷¹). You can consume it without accommodating and, lastly, it is quick.

Briefly, food does not appeal autonomously to the appetite nor appears to be healthy, in the way still life (inferred within the context⁷² of wellness⁷³) emerges in art.

Furthermore, on balance, there is a complementary contradiction between the poles of philosophy: on one side privation (negation generates affirmation), on the other hedonism, an end in itself (all is indifferent except for what is personally pleasurable).

Our final considerations on “the aesthetics of blank food” bring into light a blow to the world’s population in need of food: the negation of absent food or hidden (blank) food culturally superfluous for a minority but not culturally for the others. Food is purposely deprived, absent, hidden or plainly blank: in some way, we can manipulate food and snob its intrinsic use and value due to the fact that others cannot. We can conceal it because we do not suffer from its compelled absence⁷⁴. Besides, our concept of ethic-state civilised man, historically founded on (post) colonial exploitation. In conclusion,

⁶¹ In immaterial society is it the same institutional dystopic society?

⁶² Referring no longer to country/rural food but to city urban foods. However, the presence of farmhouse restaurants and country house resorts gives evidence of some sort of nostalgia of the past.

⁶³ Better than tea? There is an involuntary reference of social class cultural choosing: between the refined tea of the upper classes and quick coffee of middle classes.

⁶⁴ In many 20th century North American plays showing a close relation between stress due to work and family ties, there is frequent alcohol abuse. In many American films, the main characters daily drink whiskey or scotch. However, there could be a reference or reaction to the Prohibition of alcohol.

⁶⁵ Effects are related to alcohol level and quantity of liquor drunk.

⁶⁶ In the widespread use of aperitifs, cocktails and appetizers, there are some of those consumer society characteristics, in particular pace of consumption, where the trend is “grab and run”, which is functional to consumption itself, superficial in relationality, and not social. There is usually loud music, food is eaten rapidly, has to be varied and abundant, so there is the passing from one bar, pub, or club to another. Secondly, there are low price products, which allow a wide consumption among the younger generations. Inexpensiveness, however, is only apparent, as consumption is hardly ever alone and the quality/price ratio is never actually beneficial to the consumer. Taking advantage of discounts and special offers relieves the burden of making one’s own meals (and deprives the pleasure of taking care of loved one).

⁶⁷ Referring to the origin of the word «companion», deriving from Latin *cum* and *panis*, meaning “sharing the same meal”.

⁶⁸ «Magnammo, amice mieje, e ppo vevimmo, nfino ca nce sta ll’uoglio a la lucerna: Chi sa’ si all’auto munno nce vedimmo! Chi sa’ si all’auto munno nc’è taverna!» (translated from Neapolitan to English: «Let’s eat my friends, and then let’s drink till there is still oil in the lamp... until we live... who knows if there is a tavern in the other world!»). It is anonymous and illustrated on tavern doors of “Taverna del Cerriglio”, a well known tavern in Naples in the XVII – XVIII, attended by artists including Caravaggio.

⁶⁹ See Finger Food.

⁷⁰ The absence of the table knife has brought food to be cut and diced especially on banquet tables.

⁷¹ It recalls the art of decorating and the techniques of transforming matter into pleasing objects or ornaments, e.g. Ikebana flowers, Origami linked to Shinto principles, which accept the destruction of supporting and reborn forms.

⁷² With regard to the content-narrative values and not to those aesthetic-formal in a creative piece of work.

⁷³ Meaning changes “meta-table”, leading us away from healthy food themes. See the recipe book: M.L. Della Stufa (1983), *La cucina nell’arte. Ricette ispirate dalla pittura di tutti i tempi*, Vallecchi, Florence.

⁷⁴ In contrast are those movements which acknowledge the importance of food and do research on the natural quality of food.

we should ask ourselves whether we are playing with food⁷⁵ as a satiated child splatters his soup. However, anorectic society is bluntly the other side of the coin of an obese society⁷⁶.

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⁷⁵ Referring to those media services which treat the catering activity as if it were a fun show, presenting bizarre sceneries and oddities in restaurant halls, eccentric service, and so forth.

⁷⁶ On the contrary, there is a (bulimic) overexposure in communications media. Note the large number of cooking television programmers: especially in a time of economical crisis, this is in line with a "maternal" attitude, one of reassurance, and is an outburst or vent for tension in gorging oneself.