

Food and dining culture at the social-political turning points in history (a European story about food and dining)

- Why do we dine? I don't mean why do we eat – I mean why do we dine? Why do we surround the act of eating in etiquette and ritual? The Anthropologist, Marvin Harris, would say that all of our ritual is a function of genetic survival – we simply need to untangle the puzzle behind an act of culture in order to ascertain its biological imperative.

In contrast, anthropologist Mary Douglas, building on the ideas of Levi-Strauss, would say that our dining habits and rituals are part of a deeper expression of identity. The whole sequence of meals throughout a lifetime are a part of a narrative that tell the story of a life. Of social relations, of important moments; where each meal, each bite is a sentence, or the grammar of that story. These stories, culinary and actual, tell the story of humanity. The meal is a central organising feature of our social lives – it reveals who our friends and relations are, and what it is to be human.

Meal vs fodder, dine vs graze. The culture surrounding the way that we eat separates us from nature; but the biological vs social debate remains divisive. I believe that there is a constant negotiation between the two.

- How did we get from campfire to candlelight? At some point there was a reversal from danger to camaraderie (reasons for conflict: fire, direct eye contact, opening of the mouth and showing teeth, placing food between two people other than your children)
- Meal as a Time capsule:
 - Food may be contemporary/global but the course structure harkens back to the haute cuisine of renaissance aristocracy
 - Opening may begin with a grace or a toast that harkens back to the opening sacrifices to the gods
 - **Sacrifice of Isaac**, [Caravaggio](#) (1571- 1610)
 - The roasted joint may be carved by a leading male – a quotation that acknowledges the practices of our Palaeolithic hunting ancestors.
- If we examine the story of human civilisation, “the ascent of man”, as Bronowski eloquently detailed, we find that food symbolises the greatest ideas, is present at the greatest turning-points of development, and is used as a potent indicator social position.

It is both a tool of power and an intimate expression of relationship.

- We are unified in our need to eat and our human expressions of culture in our dining rituals; however, Jack Goody discusses how the way that we eat is important for illustrating our differences. Rich/poor, east/west, literate/illiterate, oppressor/oppressed, haute cuisine/basse cuisine. How

the sharing of food marks out the internal workings of social class & power.

- The Garden of Eden – Let's start at the beginning. The end of paradise, of direct communion with god, of the beginning of pain, suffering and evil, started with the bite of fruit. In western society the fruit is symbolised as an apple, a symbol that is still recognised today in Faery tales such as Snow White. Now, the apple remains iconic as the symbol of a technology that is married to culture – a digital prosthetic.

It is highly unlikely that if the Garden of Eden was in fact located between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers, that the fruit would have been an apple. I like to imagine it as a Mango or a papaya, which I feel is far more decent.

Adam and Eve was painted by Tiziano Vecellio (Titian) in 1550

- The Greek Symposium – the birthplace of modern western understanding – not only thought, but science, politics, culture. The symposium was an elaboration on dining rituals. It began with a meal – as a person could not be expected to think without first having eaten. After the meal, guests would move on to a symposium space where the master of ceremonies would guide the conversation and regulate the wine for the guests. The conversation would follow a theme and guests were invited for their ability to think as well as to converse. The master of the symposium would mix the wine with water to regulate alcohol consumption, unlike with the Romans, excess and drunkenness were frowned upon. Games would be played and sensual delights would accompany the conversation, but, this secure atmosphere of delights gave rise to some of the most potent ideas of in history, laying the bedrock of thought for mathematics, science, government, art, physiology, metaphysics and more.

Pietro Testa (1611–1650): The Drunken Alcibiades Interrupting the Symposium (1648). 'Drunken Alcibiades interrupting the Symposium'

- The last Supper – the idea of that our souls can be saved for eternity by becoming like God – and the way that this can be achieved is symbolised in food.

A social revolution that started with the teachings of Greek philosophers and culminated in a slave revolt that eventually collapsed one of the greatest Empires of human civilisation. Jesus was a revolutionary.

They chose food to represent these ideas...and not just any food...the greatest cultural recipes of mankind – bread and wine. These foods remain the symbol of eating well in the western world. These foods are not adaptations of nature, like most recipes, they are complex scientific transformations that are the result of human innovation.

- The Roman Empire – Heliogabalus 200AD
Heliogabalus exemplified the sort of bored cruelty that the opulence of Rome was known for. Like with the orgies of Nero, one of Heliogabalus' favourite expressions of this cruelty was the throwing of banquets.

Gave summer-banquets in various colours, one day a green banquet, another day an iridescent one, and next in order a blue one, varying them continually every day of the summer

When on the sea-coast he never ate fish, but in places most remote from the sea he regularly served all manner of sea-food

Air-pillows would be given to guests and they would slowly deflate so that the guests would slip closer to

His 'parasites' would often be served during dessert with food made of wax or wood or ivory, sometimes of earthenware, or at times even of marble or stone; 'realistic' replicas of the food that he was dining on.

In the most infamous example of Heliogabalus' feasts, after all of the guests were in attendance he allegedly locked the doors and filled up the room with rose pedals from a trap door in the ceiling – drowning his guests to death.

Heliogabalus became an icon in the Symbolist movement, for his sensory-emotional expressions. Some of the ideas of his feasts are still used today.

- Medieval feudalism – Peter Bruegel paints the land of Cockaigne – a representation of the struggle and resentment of peasants against their overlords.

Cockaigne is a medieval mythical land of plenty, an imaginary place of extreme luxury and ease where physical comforts and pleasures are always immediately at hand and where the harshness of medieval peasant life does not exist. It is a land of contraries, where all the restrictions of society are defied (abbots beaten by their monks), sexual liberty is open (nuns flipped over to show their bottoms), and food is plentiful (skies that rain cheeses). It represented both wish fulfilment and resentment at the strictures of asceticism and dearth.

- Cockaigne remains a relevant theme in art:
Vincent Desiderio
- Renaissance - Marie de Medici wedding to Henry IV, Florence (1600)

To celebrate the union of power and to demonstrate the strength of this bond to the public.

- The opulence of the aristocracy - 18th C Russia
 - Catherine the Great, in celebration of Grand Prince Constantine's wedding. As backdrop to Saint Petersburg's Palace Square, the Neva River was illuminated with brilliant fireworks.
 - on each step, lay roast geese, ducks, chickens, hams, and other meats
 - Stroganov - The most extravagant appetizers were the herring cheeks, for which more than one thousand herrings were required to compose a single plate. The second course included salmon lips, boiled bears' paws, and roast lynx
- Leading to The Social Revolution of France and Queen Marie Antoinette's supposed declaration - 'Let them eat brioche!'
(Rousseau's *Confessions* is the only recorded citation, written at a time when the Queen was only eight. It never cites her name)
 - Decline of the monarchy and aristocracy – rise of nationalism and democracy.
 - Built upon Enlightenment ideals (couched in that rhetoric) of the rejection of tradition and the rise of individual reason.
 - expensive wars and failed harvests led to food shortages – there was no bread to eat
- World War II – Yalta – the bartering table for the shape of post war Europe was a banquet table
 - Lemon tree story + Stalin trying to seduce Roosevelt and Churchill – but the food failed because 'there's no accounting for taste'.
- Stalin's Crabs
 - 22 pounds (10 kilograms) and measure 4.9 feet (1.5 meters) across—make it an extremely lucrative catch. In the United States the crab's meaty legs fetch around \$25 per pound. Norwegian scientists say the crab, which can live up to 30 years.
 - Russian and Norwegian fishermen have been licensed to kill more than three million crabs this year.
- Rejection of food – Ghandi leads a whole nation to reject the rule of the mightiest empire on the planet by refusing to eat.
- Marinetti – Rocked the western world with his manifesto which, most famously, called for a boycott of pasta – an act so disturbing for the public that people actually died in revolt. (statistics)

- Embraced the multi-sensory aesthetics of symbolism
 - Dislocation of eating from appetite – save food for art – yet disarticulated the taste, sight, sound and feel of food – the distinction of the senses is arbitrary.
 - Didn't want appetite to interfere with the aesthetics of eating – would sate themselves before dining, or taste without swallowing.
- The industrialised world with famous families as Rothschild – surreal banquet with Salvador Dali

On 12/12/1972 Marie-Hélène de Rothschild, member of the most powerful elite family in the world, held a Surrealist Ball at Château de Ferrières, one of the family's gigantic mansions.

- *The Dinner Party - Judy Chicago (1979)*
 - ***"End the on-going cycle of omission in which women were written out of the historical record." Placed women in the heroic role usually reserved for men.***
 - *Emily Dickinson (poet)*
 - *Sacajawea (guided the Lewis & Clark expedition)*
 - *Hatshepsut (Egyptian Pharaoh)*
- The diner, fast food and the modern food manufacturing industry – established because women were working while the men were at war – the contemporary western landscape is the result of suffrage and the empowerment of women.
- Globalisation - And here we are again – at a great turning point in history and food is again the marker of change. The first global cultural movement of freshly globalised world has been a food movement; traditional dress, dance and music has given way to food as the great cultural medium of international exchange.

For the first time in history we have a global, seasonless larder. We have access to the greatest compendium of food information, recipes and preparation techniques ever assembled. We are in the greatest period of food celebration in human history – it is planetary.

- El Cellars de Can Rocca slide - at this unique moment in time we've used this knowledge to transform food into art.
 - Show both artisan slow food and molecular gastronomy
- A global banquet – we are spinning around the cultural pillar of cuisine. The banquet table stretches the circumference of the planet – from

kaiseki to tapas to tasting menus. From slow food, to organic, fair trade, molecular gastronomy, modernist cuisine, flavour science. Seed banks, food aid, vertical gardening, biodiversity, bee colony collapse, permaculture, aquaculture, low-g, gluten free, food miles, GMO, cloning, fish farming, pharming, desalination, salt water intrusion, terraforming massive hydro-electric dams, monocropping, hybrid, malnutrition, coronary heart disease, chronic obesity, diabetes, hypothyroidism, proprietary rights of food,

- Show 2008 food price shock – we are teetering in the balance between cheap food, resource scarcity, ecological disaster and economic collapse – our global banquet of food is supercharged with politics and you are the actors in the theatre.